

Chapter 9

The Impact of COVID-19 on Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic affected people physically and mentally. Since 2019 it has spread globally, and millions of people lost their lives and suffered due to health issues. It brought many changes in social life. It has brought significant social and economic disruptions and devastating impacts on every country. People were confined in their homes. On the other hand, the medical staff and journalists were fighting against COVID-19 on forefront. Media houses were continuously monitoring and reporting the cases of corona virus on a daily basis. The reporters/journalists were engaged in the field to provide latest updates about the cases of COVID-19 and trying to educate people about the newly pandemic disease. Pakistan was among those countries that have limited health facilities, and people have suffered a lot due to the government's mistimed decisions regarding coronavirus disease. After the coronavirus outbreak in every city of Pakistan, it was quite hard to manage and provide health facilities in the hospitals. On the Sindh level, many reporters have covered the COVID-19 cases.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 was an unexpected pandemic disease for the world. The first case of coronavirus appeared in December 2019 in Wuhan China. From China it spread all over the world and it created a devastation all over the country. The initial outbreak of Covid-19 was considered to be case of pneumonia but later on the 11th March

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2020 Chinese authorities declared Covid-19 as pandemic when almost 143698 cases of 2019 coronavirus recorded out of which 85522 died with a case fatality rate (FCR) of 5.95.

The year 2020 was also miserable for people, as Covid-19 was spread throughout Pakistan and the first case of coronavirus was reported from Karachi in February 2020. Then it started spreading rapidly in different big cities of Pakistan. After such miserable conditions where cases were increasing day by day and there was not enough space in the hospitals and health units, the government had decided for lock down, and Pakistan had seen the first lockdown in the country due a pandemic.

It was very hard for the common man to survive in the corona pandemic, but the media houses were continuously reporting the cases at their own risk. The journalists from print and electronic media were busy covering all aspects of corona from every angle. Though it was very tough working conditions for them but they were reporting on a daily basis and some of the journalists suffered due to coronavirus, for the first time media houses asked their employees to work from home, as it was not suitable for them to work in office. Hyderabad city was jam packed with pandemic patients. The civil hospital was on high alert. It was a very risky assignment for the journalists, but they were performing their duties as per guidance. The reporting during pandemic days became unusual. Most of the journalists were reporting without any safety kits.

Remote Desk Work

Remote desk work was being practiced during Covid-19. Majority of the journalists were not attending the offices during the pandemic. The gatekeepers (Desk Workers) were working on news items and Ed-Op from their homes. Most of the journalists were not aware of remote desk working conditions. This was the first experience in their career. The media houses like Jang, Dawn, Express Tribune and Sindh Express applied the practice of remote desk for saving their workers from Covid -19.

However, the reporters were at risk as they were collecting data from health centers and reporting for their Papers and channels, so they were working in tough conditions. The news coverage from different sources was the prime duty for reporters but the most important thing for any news story is fact checking. During the coronavirus, the element of fact checking was also under discussion. While reporting on pandemics, if any media house was misleading or reporting fake news, such practice was deteriorating the public trust. People were not accepting Covid-19 as a disease and while getting information through media, they were feeling that the media was more ignorant than a common man. Most of the media houses were relying upon their daily routine reporters and who were facing difficulties in fact checking. Therefore the result could be calamitous.

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