

Journalism combating against Corona Pandemic – A Reality in Time of Crisis

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Abstract: *As the world copes with the pressure of controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to provide accurate information has grown exponentially. During crisis like the Covid pandemic, newspapers, radio, televisions, internet and social media are the primary source of crosschecked information, considered opinions and critical analyses. In such a situation, journalism has a great role to play as it has been ideally visualized as a platform for objective information and making of opinion. Thus, the health of journalism in a country can be examined in the times of a crisis. The Paper has tried to analyze the key trends on how the corona pandemic is impacting journalism and media worldwide. Journalists are on the frontline in the fight against the distortion of truth. In light of their essential role, their safety must be guaranteed. In support of the news industry, media organizations should be offered support by all the stakeholders. Guaranteeing of editorial independence and a plurality of media must be part of the package. Research co-operation should be reinforced in all regions of the world in order to more fully track the impact of COVID-19 responses on global journalism and media.*

Keywords: *Journalism, Combating, Corona, Pandemic, Reality, Crisis*

Introduction

As the world copes with the pressure of controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to provide accurate information has grown exponentially. The novel corona virus has infected more than two million people and has claimed the lives of over 2 lakh people globally. As the

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pandemic shows no sign of slowing down, keeping people informed about the spread of the disease, official government measures taken to control its spread and dispelling misinformation about COVID-19 has become essential. Writing and reporting about the incidents of corona virus across the globe and keeping people informed about government measures have made journalists confronting a situation that most of them prepare themselves throughout their careers ensuring that information that reaches people is accurate. During crisis like the Covid pandemic, newspapers, radio, televisions, internet and social media are the primary source of crosschecked information, considered opinions and critical analyses. In such a situation, journalism has a great role to play in a democracy, as it has been ideally visualized as a platform for objective information and making of opinion. Thus, the health of journalism in a country can be examined in the times of a crisis.

Aims and Objectives

The Paper has tried to analyze the key trends on how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting journalism and media worldwide.

Methodology

This Paper has followed the Method of Observation and Analysis.

During this crisis situation, it has appeared more difficult to collect and get news and information for the reporters, correspondents and journalists since field work has become risky. More than 30 reporters in Chennai have been infected (A. Ram, 2020). Reporters now venturing out have to guard themselves against not just the virus but misinformation too. Naturally, it becomes essential for the reporter to crosscheck information with multiple, mutually unconnected sources.

Disaster reporting guidelines advise journalists to use the right terminology and not lose sight of the context in which things are said and done. A section of Critics, News Analysts and Media Experts say that reporters in several cases in many countries run the risk of crossing the line that separates journalism and activism.

Newsweek quoted Summer Lopez, a Senior Director of “PEN America”: “Now more than ever, truth-tellers play a vital role in maintaining free expression and free societies ... Journalism has never been more vital and has never been more at risk.” (A. Ram, 2020)

Problems faced by Media

Reporting aside, the lockdown is also having an adverse economic impact on news media outlets. Many of the media houses have gone on a

“digital-only” version of their newspapers and magazines, effectively killing off whatever revenues that were generated from advertisements.

The most-circulated newspapers in various countries have reduced the number of issues printed as circulation outside the state capital has stopped. Circulation Managers of various Newspapers have commented people have stopped taking newspapers fearing that the virus could spread from them. After a while, even the hawkers stopped taking them. Since the lockdown, advertisement revenues have already dropped. Newspaper Owners and Managements feel that this period is forcing them to re-evaluate what path the newspaper takes from here onwards to sustain it.

It has been found that the print copies of newspapers could not be distributed and subscription fees could not be collected.

Economic impact of COVID-19 may pose an existential threat to journalism. The threats to press freedom and the safety of journalists come at a time when the economic stress of the crisis is pushing many media organizations to the brink of extinction, at exactly the moment they are most needed. The economic fallout from the pandemic has led the International Monetary Fund to predict that 2020 will see the worst economic recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. The International Labour Organization expects the loss of the equivalent of 195 million full-time jobs. In this context, media organizations have been hit hard. Despite record audience growth, the health of the news media industry is at risk. Advertising revenue has dropped suddenly. The Global Forum on Media Development has reported that some of its members have seen 70% declines in advertising revenue, a trend observed globally, most dramatically for local and regional media, as well as in emerging markets. The losses in revenue at many media companies have led to layoffs, pay cuts and furloughs in media organizations around the world. The current moment has been described as a “media extinction event”. In some cases, media organizations have folded operations and some organizations, especially local may not survive. In the U.K., *The Guardian* reported that the national community radio association warns that 1/3rd of community radio stations risk closure, a situation even more fragile in countries with local media with even fewer resources. The media organizations that fold may never come back – creating news deserts for the public. In the absence of verified information, disinformation fills the gap. Of those who do survive, the fall in revenue from private advertising may jeopardize their ability to provide independent coverage. Some have fallen victim to “media barons” who use their acquisitions for political influence at the expense of coverage in public interest. The current crisis could worsen these trends.

Problems faced by Journalists across the World

In various countries, some news media outlets with a national reach taking austerity measures such as layoffs and pay-cuts for their reporters, correspondents, sub-editors, desk persons and others have already been reported. But while bigger newspapers, television channels and digital outlets with corporate support may weather the storm, journalists in smaller outlets are facing even bigger challenges than just pay-cuts. Among the Community of Journalists many have said that it was “disheartening” to know that some of the colleagues were asked to leave the organization during the lockdown.

To keep the public informed, journalists are putting their own safety at risk. In many cases, it has been found that journalists and news crews across the world have faced risks where media houses have not been able to provide them with personal sanitizers. And while print media journalists are mostly working from home, those in television news channels and online portals have to take to the streets for visuals and sound bites.

In reporting, journalists risk their health through a lack of personal protective equipment, like gloves and masks. At least 16 journalists have died of COVID-19, reports the Poynter Institute, while officials in India stated that 53 journalists (out of a sample of 167) have tested positive for the corona virus in Mumbai (UNESCO, 2020a).

“Covering the virus is important from a public service point of view but as a journalist I feel that media outlets should interact with their reporters to put some sense of safety”, said Jun Taki who began his Vlog, *Arunachal Express* last year and works for another English-language newspaper, *Eastern Sentinel* advocating for counseling for journalists. “Journalists are also human beings and not immune to infection and family members will likely be concerned. This can be dispiriting for many”, he said (R. Dodum, 2020).

The Poynter Institute has recorded more than 300 people in 40 countries arrested and accused of spreading false information about COVID-19, with most arrests in the Asia-Pacific region. These included arrests of journalists among others. At least 38 journalists having been arrested and/or charged related to COVID-19 coverage according to the International Press Institute (UNESCO, 2020a).

Journalists face increased pressure, with extended hours and never-ending fact checking, fears over job security and trauma of reporting on severe illnesses. Increased surveillance and hacking have undermined journalists’ ability to ensure the confidentiality of their sources. Ongoing Internet and social network shutdowns have also hampered the ability of journalists to carry out reporting and to communicate.

Implications of the Pandemic for Journalism – A Study

The International Center for Journalists (I.C.F.J.) and Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism recently launched a Study on the "Implications of the Pandemic for Journalism" aimed at mapping the impact of the crisis on journalism and how journalists are responding to it.

"Along with the human toll of COVID-19, there is also a deadly blow to a growing number of news outlets", a message on its website by I.C.F.J.'s Global Director of Research, Julie Posetti, said. "If journalism is to survive the pandemic, we will need quality research to help inform the recovery", her message read (International Center for Journalists, 2020).

Survey by International Federation of Journalists (I.F.J.)

Two-thirds of staff and freelance journalists have also suffered pay cuts, lost revenue, job losses, cancelled commissions or worsening working conditions, according to the Survey carried out by the International Federation of Journalists (I.F.J.) between 26th – 28th April.

The IFJ is the world's largest organization of professional journalists representing 600.000 journalists in 146 countries.

The survey of 1308 journalists also revealed that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. Nearly every freelance journalist has lost revenue or work opportunities.
2. More than half of all journalists are suffering from stress and anxiety.
3. More than a quarter lack essential equipment to enable them to work safely from home, while one in four lacks any protective equipment to work in the field.
4. More than a third of journalists have shifted their focus to covering Covid-19 related stories.

Respondents also exposed the toll on journalists with many citing job losses, longer hours and fewer resources as obstacles to proper coverage of the pandemic. In many countries the lack of social protection networks and fair employment practices are driving journalists to desperation.

A Greek Women Journalist added: "I work more but earn less money and the newspaper owner I work for owes me and my colleague over 7 months pay but the government does nothing about this." (International Federation of Journalists, 2020)

Some worried that the total focus on Covid-related stories meant other important issues were being ignored.

But respondents also praised journalists for risking their own safety to report on the pandemic and for trying to seek out independent sources and counter disinformation.

A Portuguese Journalist responded: "...We work more hours, a lot more hours, cell phones don't stop, we are confined, always working, it's bad for our health. Yet there's also a sense that we are going through extraordinary times and journalists are responding, there's more motivation to report. Like with doctors and health staff, this is also a time for journalism." (International Federation of Journalists, 2020)

The Survey's findings back up calls made by the I.F.J. and representatives of more than 200 million working people across the globe for urgent action to save jobs, protect independent media and fund quality journalism.

The Global Platform for Quality Journalism, a call by Journalists' Unions in 146 countries, demands urgent measures to protect and reinforce public interest journalism including:

1. A tax on the revenues of tech giants such as Face book and Google to create a global fund to support independent media.
2. The use of tax and fiscal policy to reduce the burden on journalists and media.
3. Health and public advertising campaigns to support local media.

Conflict of Interests

Journalism is considered to be an ethical communicative practice in a democratic structure but corporate ownership subverts the autonomy of journalism and freedom of the press. This conflict of interest has become a common characteristic of Indian journalism. However, even though a majority of Indian media is under corporate control, there are alternative media which have raised genuine issues of social concern during the crisis. The prevalence of international media on the internet and alternative media have played an important role in disseminating factual and more nuanced information, but these platforms do not have the vast reach that big corporate media platforms enjoy.

Projection of Migrant Labourers by Media

The poor and migrant labourers were the worst affected sections of the society during the period of lockdown. While a few in the media made visible their plight, a particular kind of media coverage and projection also led to the middle class blaming migrants for their "irresponsible behaviour" during the pandemic (B. Singh, 2020).

A section of Critics and Media Analysts is of opinion that most media organizations were compelled to cover the labourers' plight because of its sensational value but this coverage was inadequate. Only a handful of media upheld the struggle of the labourers from their commitments to the ethics.

Serious journalism survives because of a few courageous journalists in mainstream media and alternative media platforms.

Need for Greater Commitment and Responsibility

Since most of the people are at home during the lockdown period, it has been found a growth in media consumption. People have used various media platforms for COVID-19-related information but according to a section of Critics and Media Analysts in several cases what has been provided is far from factual. In several cases, the media has become a tool of sensationalism. The exceptions were some committed journalists and alternative media.

The viewers have seen that people came out on the streets in the evening of 22nd March and were busy in clapping, banging utensils and blowing conch shells completely bypassing the maintenance of social distancing when the “Janata Curfew” was announced. Unfortunately a section of media became a part of this irresponsible stance. Here, again a considerable portion of mainstream media especially television news channels have faced allegation of sensationalism. The trivialization of the crisis has dominated a section of the media.

The role of mainstream media as observed during the pandemic is not an overnight shift. The country has seen phenomenal growth of mass media during the last three decades and India has become one of the biggest media markets in the world. The neo-liberalism has also shaped it. Profit, crass commercialization and commoditization have become its main characteristic salient features.

What should be journalism and media in such a crisis? This is the time to introspect and examine the role of the media.

Observation of Media Personalities and Researchers

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, celebrated every year on 3 May, the UNESCO New Delhi Office organized an hour-long Talk Show with eminent media personalities and community media researchers. The online event aimed at addressing the issue of “Reporting in the Times of COVID 19”.

The online event began with opening remarks by Eric Falt, UNESCO New Delhi Director, and was attended by media experts from UNESCO’s Cluster countries – India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives. It was moderated by Pankaj Pachauri, Founder and Editor-in-chief of *GoNews*.

Journalists reporting professionally from the frontline of the global COVID-19 crisis represent the best of the press. We must come together and celebrate the courage of these journalists who are risking their lives in pursuit of facts and information. Because “More than ever we need facts. More than

ever, we need press freedom”, said Eric Falt, UNESCO New Delhi Director (UNESCO, 2020b).

The debate addressed issues related to the safety of media workers; a free and independent press, the role of professional journalists during a health crisis at a time of information overload on the online platforms. With a keen focus on the challenges faced by journalists as well as community media professionals, the conversation highlighted personal stories from the ground.

Sharing her experiences as a reporter covering COVID crisis in India, Chinki Sinha, an independent journalist said that the people in media are key responders to the health crisis. She said, “We are vulnerable and scared and yet we want to write stories that can connect people in the times of physical distancing. I guess this is what we should take note of on World Press Freedom Day.” (UNESCO, 2020b)

Observations and Findings

Fueling the pandemic, a dangerous “disinfodemic” has arisen. Against acute demand for reliable and authentic information, independent media have risen to combat the crisis. Technology companies are taking action but more transparency is needed. To keep the public informed, journalists are putting their own safety at risk. The economic impact of COVID-19 has posed an existential threat to journalism. Besides the problems and crisis, there are new opportunities to stand up for journalism across the world. As the novel corona virus has registered its paw almost every country in the world, there has also been mass circulation of falsehoods that have spread as an accelerating pace as the virus itself. These misinformation, concocted stories have helped pave the path for the infection. Recognizing the danger, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres has warned that “our enemy is also the growing surge of misinformation”. The World Health Organization has described it as a ‘second disease’ accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic – an “infodemic”, which is “an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it” (UNESCO, 2020a). Journalism is key to supplying credible information within the wider “infodemic” and to combating the lies and falsehoods. Without it, false content can run rampant. Falsehoods in circulation can be categorized as both disinformation (produced and shared with malicious motivation) and misinformation, when these lies are spread without ill intentions. But in the context of COVID-19, the effects of both can be equally devastating. The quantity and pace of false information within the “infodemic” has indicated to the existence of a toxic disinfodemic ambience of disinformation and misinformation. While information empowers, the

disinfodemic disempowers. It endangers lives and leads to confusion, tension and anxiety.

Anxiety creating Statistics

Scarcity of the essential statistics has been noticed to track trends on the scope and spread of the disinfodemic. But some available figures are enough to increase the tension and anxiety of a sensible person.

1. Based on a machine learning analysis of 112 million public social media posts in 64 languages, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers at the Bruno Kessler Foundation found 40% of posts came from unreliable sources.
2. Another study using machine learning techniques, by the Foundation's COVID-19 Infodemic Observatory, found that almost 42% of over 178 million tweets related to COVID-19 were produced by bots and 40% were "unreliable".
3. Roughly 1/3rd of social media users have reported seeing false or misleading information about the corona virus, says a study by the Reuters Institute carried out in six countries.
4. Research by Pew suggests that people who receive their news primarily through social media are more likely to be exposed to false content. In March, about 40 million problematic posts related to COVID-19 on Facebook were identified (and had warnings placed next to them), according to the company. Hundreds of thousands of pieces of misinformation about the virus that could lead to imminent physical harm, were also removed, it added.
5. Approximately 19 million out of nearly 50 million (38%) tweets related to COVID-19 analyzed using artificial intelligence by Blackbird. AI was deemed to be "manipulated content".
6. Newsguard identified 191 websites in Europe and North America that have published false information about the virus.
7. The Corona Virus Facts Alliance has discovered and disproved – more than 3.500 false or misleading pieces of information, in more than 70 countries and in more than 40 languages.

The problem is not only the quantum of falsity but also its blending with emotional content and the fact that it is spread by influential actors.

In the absence of comprehensive statistics from the companies, it is hard to assess the real significance of the figures that they do release. First, the proportion of disinformation in relation to the total volumes of content and advertisements carried is not evident. Second, the extent of circulation of false content before being identified, and the role of "super spreaders" in the chain, is not made public. However, the online activist network *Avaaz* has found that

41% of misinformation which the organization identified and brought to the attention of Facebook remained up without warning labels. Of these posts, 65% of this figure had also been debunked by Facebook's own fact-checking partners. The Reuters Institute found in a sample of 225 pieces of misinformation, that on Twitter, 59% of posts rated as false by fact-checkers remained online. The figures on YouTube were that 27% remained. On Facebook, 24% remained up and without warning labels. They do not offset the losses in media organizations' advertising revenue, a downward trend that has preceded the current crisis.

Steps taken by Social Media and Messaging Companies

Large social media, messaging and search companies help billions of people across the globe to find and share information. These platforms have also become hotbeds for the disinfodemic. Their business models, aimed to capture and keep user attention and collect data for targeted advertising, have made them susceptible to the disinfodemic. In response, these companies have taken action, possibly even at a greater scale and speed than with other types of false content in the past. On 16th March 2020, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Reddify, Twitter and YouTube issued a joint statement on their commitment to fight corona virus related misinformation. Overall, social media, social networking sites and search engine companies have addressed the disinfodemic through:

1. Content Moderation – Removing, down ranking or labeling COVID-19 disinformation. 40 million posts related to COVID-19 received warnings placed next to them and hundreds of thousands of pieces of misinformation about the virus that could lead to imminent physical harm were also removed. This is increasingly through automated systems powered by artificial intelligence. These were already in place but are now more widely applied as human moderators are required to stay at home. 8 million corona virus scam emails are being blocked by Google on Gmail every day.
2. Donations to fact-checkers and journalists - \$25 million in local grants to North American media through the Facebook Journalism Project; \$1 million in grants to local news; \$1 million to fact-checking organizations. Directed 2 billion users to resources from WHO and other health authorities COVID-19 Information Centers on Facebook and Instagram, with 350 million click throughs. public health information. The Information Centers also feature a section 'Get the Facts' with information from professional fact checkers. \$6.5 million to Journalism Emergency Relief Fund in 130 countries and territories around the world. \$1 million has been donated to International

Women's Media Foundation and Committee to Protect Journalists. While the donations to fact-checking and media can help, the amounts are small in relation to the companies' earnings.

3. Directing users towards official health information, including through partnering with national public health and international organizations like the WHO, as well as through information centers that direct users to official information at the top of news feeds or in search results.
4. Advertising Policies – Companies have banned advertisements that include COVID-19 disinformation but still there are people online able to peddle falsehoods for profit. Telecommunications companies around the world have taken more than 190 measures to expand internet access, including to provide additional bandwidth, zero-rate access to wifi. Temporary suspension of ads with content related to corona virus in languages besides English has been made.

Companies can still take a strong and clear position against enabling the circulation of proven falsehoods – in their content, ads and search services, a point made by UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion, David Kaye (UNESCO, 2020a).

A section of Critics, News Analysts and Media Experts have raised questions like how many advertisements has been blocked or removed by You Tube that contained COVID-19 disinformation? How many of the 3.4 million accounts circulating false information has been closed by Twitter? How many were bots? How many tweets of false information on COVID-19 Twitter have removed? How many appeals have been considered by Twitter? What steps have been taken by Facebook to make credible journalism more visible and sharable on its platform? How many inauthentic “super spreader” accounts have been indentified from each country by WhatsApp each week?

New Opportunities for Journalism across the World

Against acute demand for true and authentic information, independent media have risen to the challenge. The crisis has brought to the forefront the importance of the media and of access to trusted and reliable information. Free and independent media serve as a key source of credible and lifesaving information and they help people by detecting and revealing the lies of the disinfodemic. Professional journalism including publishing verified facts and informed opinion has given people an alternative to disinformation and has helped to refute the lies. Many media online have dropped their “pay walls” and provided coverage of COVID-19 pandemic free of cost, for the sake of public interest. Professional journalism helps people to track the evolving science about the virus, and about prevention and treatment and the policy responses being adopted. For example, in countering the conspiracy theory that

5G cellular networks have helped spread the corona virus, news reporting has demolished this myth and dig into who is driving it. Independent media enables the public to hold public authorities to account, as well as helps to ensure evidence-based policy and transparent practical steps about the crisis. What does journalism do?

Confirming that the news media provide invaluable service to the public in the time the crisis, there has been a boost in their audiences.

1. According to International Media Support, among its members, there has been a 49% audience growth for pan-Arabic news site *DARAJ*.
2. 2.500.000 views on the Rappler's COVID-19 Facebook Live session.
3. 25% audience growth for Iraqi Newspaper *Al Menasa*.
4. Web traffic to major news organizations has also increased.
5. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have seen a 50 percent increase in one month.
6. Similarly, traffic to the *Financial Times* website grew 250% year-on-year in the month. The FT's corona virus tracker page, which charts the daily numbers of deaths resulting from COVID-19, has become the news website's most viewed article of all time.
7. The number of unique visitors to *The Guardian* website almost doubled from a record of 191 million in February, 2020 to 366 million in March, 2020. The increased visits went hand in hand with many more web pages being viewed. 2.17 billion page views in March, 2020; 750 million more than the Newspaper's previous record.
8. A Study by the Reuters Institute found that 60% of respondents in six countries said the news media had helped them make sense of the pandemic, with trust in new media rated significantly higher than information received on social media.

"I salute the journalists and others fact-checking the mountain of misleading stories and social media posts." – said, United Nations Secretary – General Antonio Guterres, on 14th April, 2020 (UNESCO, 2020a).

"Free, independent and pluralistic media play an indispensable role in informing the public during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Everyone has the right to comprehensible, accessible, timely and reliable information concerning the nature and level of the threat COVID-19 poses to their health, allowing them to follow evidence-based guidance on how to stay safe." said, Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO, the United Nations in New York and Geneva and the O.S.C.E. on 15th April, 2020 (UNESCO, 2020a).

On 30th March, 2020, the President of WAN-IFRA, Fernando de Yarza López-Madrado said, "Under these circumstances, our responsibility as publishers and journalists is more important than ever. It is probably the greatest challenge we have faced in the past 100 years. The citizens of all

countries now have a greater need for our journalistic work... Never have we been so necessary. Never has our role of social cohesion, of defending the democratic values, of stimulating solidarity and public awareness been so obvious. Never before has our desire to do the best journalism been so great. Never has our commitment to the truth been so laudable. It is an indispensable social and ethical duty.” (UNESCO, 2020a)

The remedy to the disinfodemic is to enhance citizens’ critical thinking and increase the availability of true and authentic information. A New Report by UN Special Rapporteur for Opinion and Expression David Kaye has highlighted that access to information, independent media and other free expression rights are critical to meeting the challenges of the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020a). These are keys for providing individuals and communities and individuals with life-saving information and helping to combat disinformation. The report, along with recent guidance on COVID-19 by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (O.H.C.H.R.), advises that relevant information about COVID-19 should reach all people. A policy brief by the UN Secretary-General found that the COVID-19 public health crisis has led to a “human rights crisis with impacts related a range of human rights, including the rights to free expression, access to information, and privacy” (UNESCO, 2020a).

For journalists to monitor the human rights situation connected to COVID-19, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has called for special protection to be provided for journalists and human rights defenders. The need to ensure the safety of journalists is also emphasized in a joint statement by the Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Paris. Reporting on COVID-19 spreads the risk to journalists’ safety across all dimensions. The Committee to Protect Journalists has put out a Safety Advisory for covering the corona virus outbreak that provides guidance to journalists.

The crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic may have long-term impact on access to information around the world. It could lead to more danger to journalists to impart information and the rights of people to seek and receive information. Yet, this moment also offers an opportunity to recognize journalism as an essential element of our lives and livelihoods and as a moment for strengthening news media now and in the years come. During these difficult times, concerned stakeholders can stand up for. Efforts to fight the disinfodemic should respect international standards for human rights, including the access to information and privacy. Actions by authorities in this area can include supporting journalism in many ways, as well as practicing transparency and respecting privacy in line with international standards. Access to internet connectivity should be opened up and extended. Closing digital gaps between

men and women, old and young, developed and developing countries has become increasingly urgent. The world needs more information as the foundation for knowledge. A premium should be put on promoting fact-based science and policies and on journalism's contribution to these. Outstanding reportage on the crisis can educate and inform, promote solutions and peace and stimulate citizen participation and governmental accountability. Media and information literacy, including at schools, colleges and universities, can provide individuals with the critical thinking needed against the disinfodemic. Transparency and statistics are needed by technology companies about their fight against the disinfodemic and their decisions on content should respect international human rights standards.

Conclusion

In countries around the world, journalism is being considered as an “essential service” and journalists as “essential workers”. This recognition of journalism's essential public service value has also been promoted by major newspaper and broadcast and telecast bodies. Public service media have appeared in performing its duty with professional ethics and social responsibility more than earlier. Journalists are on the frontline in the fight against the distortion of truth. In light of their essential role, their safety must be guaranteed.

In support of the news industry, media organizations should be offered support by technology companies through donations, sharing of advertising revenue; by governments through inclusion in economic rescue packages, tax relief, subsidies, donations or stimulus packages. Internet companies should align their codes of conduct and practice with international standards of human rights.

Guaranteeing of editorial independence and a plurality of media must be part of the package. Combining forces within and between countries is vital in the face of the pandemic and the disinfodemic. Fragmented efforts will not be enough. Research co-operation should be reinforced in all regions of the world in order to more fully track the impact of COVID-19 responses on global journalism and media.

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