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| RUNNING a red line through the news, silencing dissenting voices, enforcing media blackouts on television broadcasts, placing popular cable channels on the back end, eliminating certain anchors` programmes these are issues that journalism has long been facing. In the digital age, however, the greatest challenge for the press is the bid to survive. Now, a story rarely garners more than a few seconds of attention, the race to be the first to report has ended, and whether the news is breaking or not has ceased to hold any meaning. It is not the news itself that goes viral on digital media but its impact, the public`s reaction to the news. Today,`news`is classified as whatever incites a resounding and sustaining reaction from its audience, and maintains its presence for at least 24 hours in other words, whatever is trending.  Journalism today is undergoing a massive evolution. And, yet, the legacy media has remained deep in the slumber of our traditions, not batting an eyelash till the game was over. Herald, Newsline, Daily News and Wagt News are just some of the media operations that have shut down across Pakistan.  Over 5,000 media workers have lost their jobs and thousands more have had their paycheques slashed by anywhere between 15 to 35 per cent.  The root of this crisis is assigned to the withdrawal of government advertisements, but this disingenuous analysis largely ignores the global media catastrophe that mirrored similar media crises in countries across the globe. In the last 15 years, over 1,800 print media outlets have been shuttered in the US, and 245 in the UK. To mal(e the transition from traditional to digital media, the BBC indicated that they would shut down several of its programmes and lay off 450 employees.  E-business guide eBizMBA reveals that the most popular news websites in January 2020 are Yahoo News in first place, Google News second, HuffPost third, CNN fourth and The New York Times in fifth place. This means that Yahoo and Google have revenues of more than 95pc of all digital advertisements on news platforms; the remaining 5pc was distributed amongst traditional media houses. But our local media outlets are not ready to accept the reality that traditional modes of business have become obsolete. No longer do broadcasters dominate the airwaves, the world belongs to news consumers, and the only way to rise above this tide is to create audience-centric contentin user-friendly formats.  On the one hand, we witnessed experienced journalists being ejected from their positions, and on the other these posts were being filled by new interns. Though they have a penchant for tailoring news intosocial media posts, they have no training in the ethics of journalism, nor were there any experienced journalists left to mentor them. As a result, even credible media outlets began to churn out news in the shape of a question on social media.  For example, posting a woman`s photograph in which her face is blurred but the way that she is dressed signifies she is Pakistani, with a single question that acts as a headline: `What happened to this female politician that compelled her to break her silence?` The social media user`s interest now having been piqued, they will click on the headline and fall down a rabbit hole, searching in vain for the news promised by the title. This type of clickbait content might result in short-term success but will eventually destroy any media establishment`s integrity. There has been a noticeable increase in coverage of topics related to sexual issues, which is an artificial method to gain traffic, but this ultimately distances journalistic organisations from theirauthentic readers.  One of the greatest challenges facing journalism today is false news and disinformation, increasing the responsibility of newsrooms to ensure accurate reporting by beingable to discern between credible and counterfeit information. In this surreal present, if some institutions manage to stay steadfast in their endeavours to digitise their newsrooms, they will need to overcome the issue of revenue generation.  Worldwide, the media industry no longer relies on advertsforfunding butis pushing readers towards subscriptions and memberships. Consumers demanding a certain calibre of online news reporting with verified sources that are tailored to their preferences are now paying to access these platforms. The ideal example for this is The New York Times, which boasts a readership of four million subscribers, with The Guardian and The Times (London) now joining these ranks. India has unique and popular news websites such as The Quint and News Laundry, which are focused on establishing their reputation, audience and advanced business models. Alas, we in Pakistan are still prioritising reporting shoes and two-bit (boot aur dou takkap ki) news stories.  The writer is a broadcast journalist and founder of Media Baithak.  najiaasharali@gmail.com Twitter: @najiaashar |