**When the Media Dynamics Change but the Media….**

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From physical to virtual. From home delivery to a click on the phone. From paper to online. These are just the basics of the revolution that the media has gone through. The way news is made, spread, and delivered, is a change many in the world, more particularly, in Pakistan, have not understood and adapted to. The traditional set-up of news reporters spread all over the country sending in reports and then printing them on paper is obsolete. Print media is suffering from a younger generation that is so updated with news that by the time the newspapers are delivered at home, the news has lost its currency.

Similarly, electronic media has become subservient to digital media. The breaking news, instant news, or news alerts that the electronic media get through well-placed spies is now mostly superseded by the top trends on Twitter. Any topic that is tweeted or retweeted in thousands with hashtags becomes breaking news. That means electronic media is no longer leading but following digital media. The reach and coverage of digital media are so huge that print media etc are just no match. Just imagine that digital media platforms, such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Twitch, accounted for viewership rates of 27.9 billion hours in 2020. In Pakistan, though media houses have switched to the online versions of their newspapers, they are still struggling to adjust to this media revolution. Many of them have failed to accept this change and use the traditional tools of government support to run their businesses. The main dynamics that need to be adjusted to are:

The viewers want and have a choice but traditional media was, and is, just one way. The TV shows, the radio speaks and the newspaper prints. There is no two-way communication. The viewer and younger audience of today want to speak, tell and interact with news and entertainment givers. They are will switch off if their choices are unmet and their questions and feedback are not responded to, and that too instantly. So the letters to the editor style of people writing and the newspaper publishing a week later are obsolete. That is why on all social media, Youtube channels and Twitter spaces, the comments columns are long and unending. An average youngster now spends close to five or six hours daily on social media. In Pakistan, this hunger for choice has recently been demonstrated.

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While the government banned ARY on Cable TV, people switched to Youtube. The latest figures are published for the 13th August viewership on YouTube. Shahbaz Sharif’s speech to the nation was watched by only 130000 people on YouTube across 24 channels. Imran Khan’s speech was watched by over 8 million people across 24 channels on YouTube. The days when either only PTV was dominated by the ruling government or private channels were dictated on what to show and what not to show are over. YouTube and Facebook live streams are not controllable and cater to viewers’ demands better.

The audience craves interactivity. This is generation Z (Zoomers). This generation is more vocal, more aware and more demanding. They just do not want to be told but want to ask and tell. They will comment, give statuses, post, criticize and appreciate at will. Their comments can become catchy and when a certain number retweets and repeats, they become hashtag trends. Sometimes these hashtag trends become so powerful that they become movements. Two examples of this power of audience were the #blacklifesmatter hashtag during the corona times that became a movement and the latest #importedhakoomatnamanzoor” in Pakistan. Twitter recognized it as a record breaker as it was tweeted ten million times. This has set the tone for a very impactful PTI movement that made them win Punjab by-elections.

The public themselves are content creators- This generation born on smartphones is very smart. The advent of Tik Tok has created household producers, directors etc of videos. Every member of the house has the chance of making videos on everything. Though there is a lot of junk and banned stuff, it has liberated voice and talent right down to the grass root level. Many anchor persons have become their own Youtube content creators. Many amateurs have started their channels and go around taking opinions from the public that become viral. Since Youtube is monetized, it has just made millionaires of many popular anchors who were targeted by the government and had to leave the electronic media.

Customized to each individual-the advantage of the social media is not that it is a general purpose one for all and sundry but an adapted and customized offering. The data analytics capability of Facebook and other platforms sends the type of news, sales offerings, and products that user wants. It has made the product selling more accurate and advertising more effective. Tik Tok has made video-making according to social class, background, and humour types. This participation in creating messages has increased the ownership and stake of viewers and audiences.

The post-fake world- Social media created opportunities that provided space for fake news. The deep fake technology is so good that videos are almost real. This resulted in character assassination and undue panic in the world. So the term “post-truth world” came up. This revealed that an almost equal number of fake news as genuine feed was circulating on social media. But like all media, the survival of a media is dependent on sifting truth from false. As consumers become smart and technology becomes more accurate the post-fake world is also gathering momentum. Previously anchors could come on TV, or politicians could claim anything and there was no means of verification. Presently before an interview finishes the false claims of any interviewer are collected by consumers themselves and posted on all platforms.

The media in Pakistan is still resistant to this revolution in its dynamics. They are still heavily dependent on government Ad spending without realizing how unsustainable it is. The government and the establishment also have not come to terms with the changing information world. They are still either using boring long government Ads or strong-arm tactics to tame media. But they cannot tame the monster of social media.

They cannot subdue the people’s expertise with Tiktok. They cannot hide the truth behind the false. This realization has not hit our institutions. Propaganda rules have changed. Wars are now fought in cyberspace. News is now produced by the audience. Money is now spun through monetized Instagrams and Youtube channels. The audience has transformed, but the institutions and people have not. Like products, those that fail to change are changed into rubble. As they say, the head of traditional media is the Managing Director, but, the head of Social Media is the Managing Viewer.

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