**[Lesson plan](https://www.dawn.com/news/1809214/lesson-plan)**

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LAST year I felt a bit stumped when students in my news media literacy class told me they knew who Altaf Hussain was but didn’t really believe the stories about his rule in Karachi in the 1990s. Did he really order the city to shut down on a phone call, that too a rotary dial phone? How did that even work in a mobile-less, internet-less time? Did I ‘actually’ experience it?

You may be tempted to berate them for not knowing this but pause for a moment and ask: how would they know this if Altaf Hussain has been banned from screens most of their lives and, more importantly, where would they have learned this? A cursory look at how they’re taught history makes for a depressing read — it’s likely you were taught the same stories about Mohammad bin Qasim landing in Sindh or that Pakistan was made for Muslims, etc, etc. The denial of the country’s multi-religious and multicultural past has done irrevocable damage and created so much of the confusion around identity. I don’t think it’s possible to break the idea that ‘Pakistaniyat’ — even the one packaged as ‘naya’ — is firmly tied to one religion.

Instead of beating up young people for not knowing about history pre-internet or social media, or 2018, perhaps those doing the adulting can reflect on their role in creating a youth so disconnected or disinterested in knowing Pakistan before them. I’ll start: as a journalist, I didn’t think of young people as my audience and was rarely in positions to fight back when ordered to remove XYZ from mainstream media. As a journalism instructor, I didn’t work hard enough to contextualise and frame events from a historical perspective. I should have used a megaphone to say ‘this isn’t the first time this is happening’, etc.

Maybe, this is why I wasn’t so surprised to read the results of a survey Dawn online conducted earlier this month about the elections. The majority of the 5,500 respondents fell under the youth category of 18 to 40 years in age. While 65 per cent said they would vote, they were sceptical of the election process. (You’d be hard pressed to find someone who isn’t cynical about these polls.) Meanwhile, 62.69pc “felt their vote won’t make a difference” followed by 20.41pc “who feel disenchanted with all candidates”. A significant number of respondents said they had little to no faith in elected officials’ ability to address issues like unemployment or poverty. This may explain why 64pc want to see the inclusion of ‘None of the Above’ on the ballot.

News organisations should connect with younger audiences.

It is no surprise to read that the majority of respondents — 67.3pc — support PTI, though opinions about their rule from 2018 to 2022 are mixed with a majority saying it was “neither good or bad”.

The part that interests me the most is trust in media, which sadly, is low. Only 7pc have confidence in the media for unbiased coverage; 45.83pc expressed complete distrust; 30pc “only slightly trust” while 16.4pc have moderate trust in the media in providing accurate and unbiased coverage of the elections.

This should be a wake-up call for many in the media who have not been able to connect with younger audiences, most of whom consume news on platforms that speak to them like TikTok. Instead of berating youngsters for trusting influencers over anchors, perhaps news organisations should be adapting to these changes. And making an effort to connect with younger audiences, including children, who are absorbing the ‘news’ in their surroundings but don’t know who to ask questions from.

Everyone sho­uld be taught how the news is created, how to identify disinformation and differentiate bet­w­e­­en fact and opinion. Because once they understand why things happen the way they do, they may want to do something about it. Like vote. Like hold the powerful to account, something journalists commit to doing every day on the job, without bias or judgement but with courage and conviction.

In that same class last semester, one student shared a link of an interview with Altaf Hussain conducted by a YouTuber based abroad three months ago. It had nearly 750,000 views and I scrolled through the near 5,000 comments from viewers saying things like “we didn’t know this about MQM”.

This is what happens when the media isn’t allowed to do its job. Not every journalist can afford to move abroad and/ or start their own channel but media owners can afford to take a hard look at ground realities and vow to invest in the principles of journalism. Technological advancements may change the medium but the message of impartiality will remain the same.

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