

Lockdown and supply of essentials

The two are interlinked and entwined to a larger extent. While it becomes the top priority of the Government and the administrative apparatus to enforce very strictly the lockdown in order to fight and stop the spread of the corona virus, especially when the number of persons testing positive was increasing in Jammu and Kashmir, it equally is their responsibility to ensure that regular supply chain of essential commodities did not get affected. It is not an ordinary curfew like situation where it is entirely a different scenario both by its nature and tenor, it is a minimum of 21 days sitting indoors and venturing out only under extremely compelling circumstances, that also taking utmost precautions of social distancing and wearing protective masks etc. There are conflicting reports about the position of stocks of essential commodities in Jammu city. While it is believed that the present stocks would suffice only for a week as the exhausted ones were not being replenished by fresh supplies, on the other hand, Government claimed that on an average 300 trucks were arriving with the fresh supplies every day in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

It has to be borne in mind that when normal equations are sought to be disturbed even for a great cause, care needs to be taken that any type of lackadaisical or casual approach, though innocently taking place, could invite more problems. There are ten districts in Jammu region where supply chain should never be disturbed but if the views, rather apprehensions of the Jammu wholesale traders are to be believed, in informing that trucks with grocery items and other essential goods from Delhi, Rajasthan and Haryana have been stopped at various places in Punjab, then that rebuts the claims of the Government about uninterrupted supplies and regular arrival of trucks. At least, about the prevailing position, there should regularly be not only proper monitoring by the administration but informing the public about all the necessary steps, the administration was taking on almost daily basis. In this most important area, much needed to be done about up-dating of information and awareness about various steps taken by the administration and facilities arranged to be provided.

It is a matter of satisfaction that only after the Divisional Commissioner Jammu spoke to traffic authorities in Punjab, the held up trucks were allowed to proceed towards this end but what is needed is arranging things not on piecemeal basis. We are constantly getting calls from the residents even from Poonch, Rajouri, Udhampur, Doda, Kathua and several places about most of the items having been reported to be not available in the market especially mustard oil, dry milk powder, butter, tea leaves of branded companies and other numerous items. It is a natural corollary that one tries at different shops which otherwise too are only few to find things needed but they in the process, face police harassment. Whatever is available from the Warehouse, is not even accessible to most of the shopkeepers as they cannot lift the supplies nor are in most of the cases, the vehicles allowed to ferry supplies from there to retail outlets. It may be noted that most of the supplies of essential items to Kashmir division too are made from here.

At least, availability of milk, milk products, fresh vegetables and fruit etc must be arranged to be made available through more channels to discourage frequent venturing out of homes by the desirous and needy people. Even potatoes, fruit etc are not available easily but prices are being charged on the higher side. Issuing of passes for moving around is not known on which basis and with what ease and where being arranged by the administration as in the absence thereof, people face difficulties and harassment. Seizing of private vehicles by the police, if one moved about under extremely compelling circumstances, was another problem faced by the people. An ailing person for having some pathological tests conducted cannot, under normal circumstances, reach the concerned lab and have the report there from obtained easily, is reflective of half baked arrangements by the administration. Most of such labs are not opened and the District Administration should ensure services from and at such labs without disruptions since ailments are not subordinate to any regulations and restrictions. We, therefore urge the Government to look into these vital aspects on priority basis so that regular supplies of essential goods and medicines were not subjected to any type of disruptions. Now that orders have been issued by the Central Government even for allowing movement of non-essential goods, overall position must now vastly improve.

The other most important aspect of the current scare about the virus of corona is the timely appeal of the Chief Secretary to people not to panic nor nurse any worries looking to the number of suspected cases in the Union Territory. His claims about an aggressive testing campaign having been launched to detect the positive cases in time and that the preparedness and medical response and other mechanism in the UT were far better than many states in the country, would be known by the results on the ground in due course. He, however, assured the public of the resolve of the administration in overcoming the crisis very soon and hence the need to remaining calm and composed. We assure citizens of our commitment to regularly monitoring of the situation.

Lt. Gen Dushyant Singh

At the time of writing this report the global statistics of COVID 19 cases had crossed 460,000. Number of deaths recorded has gone over 22,000, recovered cases over 117,000, mild condition cases over 330,000 and serious over 17,710. In the case of India these figures are, total cases identified 593, active cases 19, cured cases 43 and deaths 13. Not surprisingly Pakistan is having more cases than India for obvious reasons of greater connectivity with China and porous borders with Iran, Afghanistan and China. Why have I quoted these figures? It is purely to emphasize firstly that we are dealing with an unprecedented pandemic and secondly in such a catastrophic situation, we must only believe on authentic sources for information. These figures are being updated every minute at WHO and Government of India Sites. Accordingly on issues related to symptoms, treatment and other COVID 19 related management practices, public must believe in the information provided by the official resources i.e., Ministry of Health at the Central and State Government or their appointed spokes persons. One can turn around and say but all this is known, so why repeat it. However, I wish to highlight that on

the ground, misinformation which is being spread in the unaware public domain through various traditional and social media channels either intentionally or unintentionally is going to lead to complex problems in tackling the pandemic being caused by COVID 19. For example, there are some people associated with government machinery endorsing treatment and method to deal with COVID 19 without any scientific basis.

We need to learn from the past experience of other countries as well so as to not repeat the same mistakes. Nigeria had faced tremendous problems in managing the Ebola crisis due to misinformation campaign in 2014. Even now despite only 39 cases, Nigerian Government is finding it ten times difficult to control misinformation related to COVID 19 than the Ebola crisis.

As per a Global Development Community Media (a well known media platform associated with reputed world development agencies) report written by William Worley and Vidya Krishnan, level of misinformation being spread about COVID is highest in India. It has highlighted a number of incidents of conflicting information coming out of official and non-official sources besides the social media which has in my view created a

lot of confusion. Some samples from their report are: 1) While, the health ministry is working closely with the World Health Organization including the Public Health Foundation of India to launch a coordinated response, another arm of the government -



AYUSH Ministry - has been at the center of a large-scale misinformation campaign that undermines the health ministry's response. This needs to be corrected. 2) Second incident is that of a politician who was proposing Gaumutra as a remedy for treatment of COVID-19 even while the scientists including those in India are battling to find a solution.

Similarly if we were to scan the social media, especially the YouTube, one can find solution

being rolled by all and sundry ranging from outright astrology to homemade remedies without any scientific backing. Information of some myths prevailing in the social media domain such as "longevity of Corona Virus", "non-survivability of the virus in

complications in treatment and more often than not panic.

However, the PM's call has to be backed by a focused mechanism to eradicate the menace of misinformation campaign. How can we do it? Some of the measures suggested are as follows. 1) Ministry of Health can setup a Task Force in consultation with Ministry of Information to scan the Social Media and put out the truth on regular basis in the form of press brief or press bulletins using all available media networks for countering or clarifying such messages and information. It is not that the Task Force should respond to every fake and silly news. However, it must put out clarification on any incorrect and fake news item that is likely to cause harm to human lives and national economy. If we do not curb the misinformation campaign in time, the 21 day lockdown may not be fully successful and as PM Modi had warned nation will have to pay a heavy price in terms of unprecedented loss of human lives and economic cost. 2) Second measure could be coopting the technical giants like Face Book, What Sapp, twitter and other technical firms to direct all searches related to COVID 19 either to Ministry of Health or Ministry Information or WHO sites only so that people are fed information related to COVID19 that are genuine and

authentic. As per the report mentioned above some of the Big Tech companies are already helping the WHO in this regard. There is a need for Indian Government to also see the feasibility of doing the same in our context. 3) While the government has launched an awareness campaign about COVID19 through caller tunes and advertisements, there is need for a focused nationwide program on important aspects dealing with COVID at a fixed time in the day with repeat broadcast by all TV and radio Channels. This slot must capture the highlights of the day and important procedures to be followed in managing COVID 19.

The importance of curbing misinformation can be best understood by the statement made by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. He had said recently that "Misinformation about COVID-19 is not limited to India. We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic." Therefore, in this period of infodemic, the safest advice is to stay home, wash hands, maintain social distancing, and if in doubt seek early medical assistance and help government help you in remaining SAFE.

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Social Media- A boon for journalists

Ravita Gupta

"We are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently. Highly networked individuals can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions." - William Dutton

Corona Virus, a name that went wild in the recent few days is now even known to someone as young as 4 or 5 years old who are under home arrest at present. A deadly virus that is costing almost all the professions severely is also posing a great threat to the profession of journalism. Looking at the recent trends and reports the crisis which is soon expected to explode in India is a testing times for journalism and journalists who are leading from the front in the line of duty to inform and update its citizens. Thanks to social media - which is emerging as the new 5th pillar of Democracy is now proving to be quite a boon for the new-age journalist to keep thriving in desperate times such as these.

There is change in the way information is flowing in the past decade, resulting in creating more social ways of doing journalism and being more inclusive of different voices. The focus is less on platforms more on content and networks. In given scenario when everyone is steering their way through the network via connections, journalists are no different.

Alejandro in 2010 said that there is no doubt that the revolution brought by new media in the human society has changed the way information is saved, shared, searched or consumed. Started in 1998, Google has now become an alternate to the word search and post this first wave of innovation another revolution is changing the societies, cultures and business in the form of social media. Social media was introduced in India in 2008 and it is interesting to study how social media has found an entry into newsrooms and gaining acceptance among journalists due to its influence as a communication and news-breaking tool.

On one hand, social media networks are opening new opportunities for news industry. On the other hand, they are changing the roles and functions of a traditional journalist and media organizations. A digital age journalist is essentially multi-tasking and submitting stories for multiple platforms. New posts like social media editors are also

being created for editors in the newsrooms. In the social media ecology, journalism is flourishing in participation and connections rather than a top-down approach. Unlike traditional media, social media allows many voices and participants, sites and streams. According to Lievrouw & Livingstone change can be promoted into a social system through a domino effect and it is the personal characteristics and interaction of innovative groups which enhances the domino effect. Considering the contemporary media trends, one can easily say that social media certainly upholds the potential to be creating the domino effect by challenging the system's view. An interesting shift is seen in the news industry from gatekeeping to gatewatching. Gatekeeping practice of journalism according to Burns in 2014 is now being replaced by gatewatching. It is done by bloggers and other online communities to curate content and evaluate news and other information provided by official sources. Role of journalists as gatekeepers of information is lost. In the present complex media environment, it is becoming difficult for media to drive public debate alone. Newspapers are shifting to online platforms and digital intervention is reshaping the work of newspaper journalists both as a source of news as well as medium of distribution. Effects of convergence on Indian newsrooms are finally visible now. There is a growing acceptance of web and social media by journalists as a reliable source of primary and secondary information. According to Aneez in 2016, workflow in a newsroom is managed by content management systems and multimedia approach is being used for presenting news stories in the present newsroom operations.

Growing social media presence

As per the recent report of India Digital News Report (2019), 68% people in India use their smartphones to access news online. This growing number is a clear indication of the future of news in India. Besides, another important change could be the potential of online activities to increase offline political participation.

According to a study on social media usage and beliefs of editors in Jammu & Kashmir, it is seen that 74% editors are learning social media skills and 91% are using social networking sites to post news stories. 66% have agreed that they use Social Networking Sites to beat competition and 74% editors agreed that presence and popularity of social

media mostly by political leaders can't be ruled out in present times. Editors accepted that it is imperative for them to check what's happening on social networking sites and in that sense it is also becoming the main source of news for journalists.

The study has also indicated that there is a change in the pattern of information being received by editors themselves. 26% editors are spending around 2-4 hours on a daily basis on social networking sites to follow political leaders. 43% editors like social media as it provides them more sources. 54% editors agreed that Twitter is becoming their news source and 49% use Social Networking Sites to disseminate news.

As far as social media beliefs and usage of reporters in Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, the data reveals that almost 81% reporters are using social media to post news stories mainly to enhance their reach and increase their visibility, which was missing so far especially in the field of print journalism. 39% reporters are learning social media skills to post news stories and 84% use social media to generate story ideas. 53% reporters consider social media to be the main source of news for journalists and 49% responded positively when asked regarding the need for investigative reporting in the age of social media. When reporters from J&K were asked regarding the future of journalism in the age of social media, 86% reporters emphasized on the need for field work in the age of social journalism and 83% felt the need for verification even more crucial in present times especially when news is there everywhere.

Around 42% reporters find it easy to share news post using social networks and 29% reporters liked social media for the speed with which it disseminates news almost the real-time reporting. Finally, real-time reporting is also possible in print media with the help of social media platforms. As far as types of beats being covered by reporters using social media is concerned, 39% reporters claim they used it mainly to cover local politics, followed by education news 26% and crime news only 19%. However, the least covered beats by them in J&K remain economics, entertainment and health. In times of a crisis situation, around 35% reporters agreed using social media to break terror news stories while 30% used it to break other news stories. Interestingly, 42% reporters agreed that their work quality has improved by using social media.

The new news ecology & challenges

Pattern of new ecology of news production seems to be moving social and there is a change in the communication patterns of the present tech savvy generation too. Studies prove that today's youth often feels alienated in the real world. Social trend on one end is cementing public and mass communication but on the flip side it is also weakening interpersonal communication and thus impacts building reliable news sources. Building reliable sources online however could be a future challenge for reporters covering sensitive beats like crime. Another emerging problem for news content could be the user-generated content that leads to more plagiarism and creates a new challenge for Intellectual Property Rights.

Various problems faced by journalists in sourcing news online however remain verification of facts. Sites containing unreliable information, badly sourced information and lack of source credibility are some of the emerging problems being faced by journalists while sourcing online news content.

Conclusion

Social media seems to be having a strong influence on journalism and the traditional top-down model of journalism is also losing its relevance in online space. The interesting thing to observe however is that is social media going "back to the roots" of the internet's starting point when individuals ruled the roost instead of big corporations? Social media prospects for consumer use and business prospects are clearly determining the present as well as the future of journalism, which will have the presence of both virtual and real, besides evolving from over-sharing of information. Another question that also needs to be addressed is the need for journalism in the Internet era and need for press in democracies, especially redefining the relationship between journalism and democracy which so far was seen through news, centered on story-telling based on facts. Most relevant in Indian context, however, would be to note how new media is used by journalists to make the profession relevant in times of citizen journalism and "WhatsApp news".

(This is an excerpt from the study conducted by the author "Digital Journalism: An Analytical Study of social media usage by media professionals" published in Shodh Sarita- An International Multidisciplinary UGC CARE Journal, Vol 6, Issue 24; 2019.)
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Satwant Singh Rissam

With effect from 25th March a 21-day nationwide lockdown was imposed, to fight the corona virus outbreak in India, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Subsequently, all the essential services were exempted from this lockdown and restrictions were put only on the movement of the people during these 21 days to ensure containment of corona virus. In order to impose nationwide lockdown, cops of Jammu and Kashmir police in various ranks have been deployed on ground for enforcement of lockdown. Meanwhile, police has registered more than 200 FIRs against lockdown violators in Jammu and Kashmir for defying the orders issued by the government.

However, in past few days there had been many cases of publicly shaming violators during the implementation of lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir. Numerous videos and pictures have surfaced showing police making the violators crawl and making them do sit-ups. During the ongoing public shaming, police is also putting stamps reading 'corona lockdown violator' on hands and foreheads of the people. This stamping is done with

Ongoing public shaming

permanent ink that takes around 15 days to erase. In some cases, the policemen are also using 'lathi' as a means of deterrence. Under the Ministry of Home Affairs guidelines provisions to be invoked for the smooth implementation of the lockdown states that "any person violating these containment measures will be liable to be proceeded against as per the provisions of section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code." It appears that all these police personnel are not aware of the conditions set by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The section 188 of the Indian Penal Code does not authorize any police officer to publicly shame or inflict physical damage on any person found violating this lockdown. And as the news of the 21-day nationwide lockdown has been widely circulated, no one can raise the defense of ignorance during this period and can be very clearly booked under section 188.

So the alternate method adopted by the police reflects inhumane and insensitive dealing with

violators during the prevailing restrictions. We all agree that maintenance of law and order is duty of the police and these police personnel are at the risk of catching the virus themselves but overstepping statutes is also illegal. It also amounts to violation of human rights at the hands of police. Such lockdown is being instituted in many countries across globe but no such circumstances reflecting this kind of intention of the police has come in the limelight. In addition to it, the seriousness of the virus cannot justify the use of such methods against those who are out of their homes to get essential goods. Such misconduct by police even erodes the faith of many law abiding persons in the police system. Therefore, humiliating the citizens is completely unjustified.

Hence, in this difficult situation the administration should direct the police personnel to exercise maximum restraint, especially in cases of individuals who are moving out for essentials. All possible steps should be taken to sensitize the police personnel and warning should be issued to

them against taking the law into their hands. It should be made very clear that such shaming and punishment to violators won't be allowed because no society can tolerate such visuals and where ever needed, violators should be booked under the relevant law.

Besides, to control the fear about the uncertainty revolving around the term of the lockdown immediate steps should be taken to provide doorstep delivery of essential goods and services to people in all areas of Jammu. Only such step can restore confidence in people that they shouldn't start hoarding goods as everything will be delivered timely at home without going out.

Furthermore, continuous appeals should be made to the people to stay at home during the lockdown. People should be reassured that in case of emergency police and civil administration will reach them at their homes. At this time of medical emergency, the central and Jammu and Kashmir UT authorities are working in coordination for containment of corona virus and such behavior of the police can end up creating a panic. Moreover, public compliance cannot be obtained by shaming and insensitive dealing with violators in order to combat corona virus successfully.

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(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

Sense of responsibility

Sir,

People do not learn from others. Today morning I saw in one country possibly Ethiopia senior citizens have been allowed to come to mall from 4AM to 6AM and buy. There was big crowd there. No precaution whatsoever taken. They are risking all those senior citizens.

Today morning, when I went for buying veg. I took a packet of white cement and went to shop selling milk and vegetables in our Sector 23 mall. I told him why dont you mark circles so that customers maintain social distance and stand in queue. I was pleasantly surprised to hear from him, "Sir I wanted to do it but I am not getting anything to mark. You have brought it, I am very happy, we will do it." I marked circles on three lines and came back. Shopkeeper promised he will maintain social distance. Of course my wife does not know I did it, please do not tell her.

This sense of responsibility at that level gives me great hope. God will surely help us because we are helping ourselves

Sham Lal Langer
Retired VP L&T,
Dwarka, New Delhi

Jammu needs to be heard

Sir,

Apropos J.P. Singh's article 'A Retrograde Step' (D.E. 27 March), the most forceful reason for the bifurcation of the erstwhile J&K State has been the long ruthless discrimination of Jammu and Ladakh regions by the Srinagar administration. Despite continued protests for so many decades the redress of the grievances of Jammu region remained elusive.

Mr. J.P. Singh has rightly raised the question that the bifurcation has not brought any substantial change in the discrimination syndrome because it is the bureaucracy that runs the administration in the UT and the bureaucracy never had any soft corner for Jammu region. What concrete and tangible outcome do we find in the reorganization of the State

for the people of Jammu region? None. We understand that in the original proposal before the Union Cabinet there was the trifurcation plan for the state but then at the last moment the plan was changed.

The real demand of the people of Jammu region, therefore, does not end with the economic development of the region but with reviving the vibrant and impressive identity of the people of the region as the masters of their destiny. Jammu wants direct liaison with the Union Government and not through the Srinagar conduit. Jammu refuses to be asked to play the second fiddle to the majoritarian tyranny of the valley. The people are entitled both the options, viz. total autonomy or total integration.

K.N. Pandita

Readers Write