

A control room with multiple monitors displaying various images and data. The room is dimly lit with blue and red ambient lighting. The monitors show different scenes, including a person's face and a person in a white shirt. The overall atmosphere is technical and focused.

# The Importance of Media Literacy in Pakistan

**Aisha Saeed**  
Independent Media and Foreign Policy Analyst

With the advent of technology, means of exchanging messages and sharing information changed drastically. Information is now at the human fingertips. The evolution of communication and information has broken all barriers with digital platforms and the rise of social media. Traditional or what is generally referred to as the mainstream media remains a prime source of information around the world and Pakistan is no exception. Mainstream media enables the spread of information to a larger segment of the public in a shorter duration as compared to any other medium of communication in the past.

The arrival of cable channels in Pakistan's early media landscape brought access to more information for the general public. This also started the expansion of the local media industry. Although Pakistan's media industry is relatively young as compared to the rest of the world, it has emerged as a vibrant and thriving industry for news and entertainment and became known as the "gatekeepers of knowledge" or the "watchdog" of the country.

These gatekeepers of knowledge are responsible for interpreting various messages, informing and educating the public, and spreading socio-cultural ideologies through entertainment. On the contrary, it can also be used as a tool to propagate a certain message or information. With the media's ability to change the perception of how people view things or form opinions, it has become an influential entity.

Given the vast accessibility and the profound impact of media in contemporary society, one must also understand the environment it operates in. The media in one country may not be similar to the media of another country. For instance, the media in Pakistan has developed an identity differentiating it from the media of the neighboring or the developed countries. But media in general (and in particular) the news media is expected to uphold the basic principles of the social responsibility that comes with being the gatekeepers in a society. And while these principles are taught and debated upon often, media literacy among the public is least discussed.

The conclusions drawn from various studies indicate a strong relationship between media and the public. While the media constantly feeds information, the public is constantly consuming information. The media uses the response it collects through TRPs to gauge the public's demand to help frame and time its content. This applies to both the news and the entertainment media.

Now, what media literacy is and why it is important among the public who is an informed viewer but not "media literate" needs to be addressed. "Media Literacy" is defined as one's ability to access the media and critically evaluate the various aspects of the media content to creating communication in different forms. A media literate person is not only able to receive the information disseminated by the media but is also able to access its impact and verify the information before responding to it. Recently, the Pakistani news media has been buzzing with words such as "misinformation" or "disinformation". The phenomenon of "fake news" has also become a reason for concern with the increased use of social media across the world. This highlighted the truancy of media literacy among the public.

In a country like Pakistan where the majority of the population is young but the general literacy rate is relatively low, media literacy is a challenging concept to promote but it is also not fully understood by the government. As the media faces strict regulations under government laws, the public is often faced with a dilemma of understanding the reasons behind those laws. The banning of a popular social media application had also received a public backlash but it was not the long-term solution to fighting the issue of media illiteracy prevalent in society. Similarly, many social issues can be addressed by promoting media literacy amongst the youth. The banning of content or social media applications obstructs the productive and positive aspects that come with these tools.


Pakistan recently exposed India's disinformation campaign to malign the country's international reputation. It also revealed the implications of the disinformation campaign and the extent of Indian intrusion in the country. This would have not been possible without India's understanding of

the concept of media literacy and its impact on individuals and the government.

Developed as a part of India's PSYOP and information warfare strategy against Pakistan, the years of "disinformation" campaign pointed to them being able to exploit the lack of media literacy in Pakistan to their benefit. Even though Pakistan has started to push back against the Indian schemes, it must consider introducing media literacy in the training of its officials.

Media literacy is now considered crucial to combating "mis(dis)information". It helps in stopping fake news from going viral and ensures that those responding to the information have a better understanding of how to respond to news or any other incident. A media literate public is then able to keep the content of media in check, making the exchange of information a two way process. For Pakistan to effectively tackle any future disinformation plot against the country, it should promote media literacy among the public alongside the media's own social responsibility. Academic institutions must ensure a course designed to enhance media literacy be taught as a subject to the students of all departments.

It is impossible to avoid the mainstream and social media in the 21st century. The tools necessary to reduce the power of misinformation are in our hands but it requires attention and only then we can win this intensifying and invisible war.

 **Nadeem Haque**  
@nadeemhaque

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