

Imran Ghazali

Director General,
Digital Media Wing,
Ministry of
Information and
Broadcasting,
Government of
Pakistan.



You are heading the recently formed Digital Media Wing of Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. Why did the government realize the need for a digital media wing and what exactly is the role of this team?

According to the latest statistics that were published by PTA around 97% of people have internet access, either through 3G, 4G, or broadband connections available. A recent report that was published by via social has also mentioned that around 45 million people in Pakistan have access to social media and use it on daily basis. Keeping both of these statistics in mind, we cannot deny how important the internet has become in the lives of people. Digital media can be a valuable tool for the dissemination of information for the government. Up till now, there was not a proper department that was working in this field. However, realizing its immense importance government has made a department in the Ministry of information. The primary objective of this department is to highlight the work and initiatives of the Federal

government, disseminating information through different digital channels. We also publish details regarding any important projects and initiatives of the prime minister. An important benefit of this department is that authenticated information is published after being verified through proper government channels, the problem of misinformation is handled this way. If we look at this from a global perspective, we know that nowadays there is a war going on based on different narratives among different countries.

Having a platform online that publishes details regarding the work of the government and Pakistan, in general, helps us to clear the image of Pakistan in international media.

With the increase in digital technology, there has been an increase in digital journalism as well. News journalists and reporters are present solely on digital platforms, how does the government see the rise of digital journalism in Pakistan?

With the increase in the digital platform, opportunities for people have also increased in multifold. Young journalists throughout Pakistan use YouTube, some journalists who work on TV have their independent channels on YouTube. One of the significant changes that we have noticed after digital platforms are used by journalists is that people have stopped watching prime time talk-shows on Television. People prefer independent YouTube broadcasting more, the number of views on a single video is above 35k views. This is a wonderful opportunity for content creators in Pakistan. These content creators come up with innovative ideas that

are different from the current affairs portrayed on television. Economically, these people are also able to generate revenues out of these platforms. Now, the government is also coming up with the Digital media advertisement policy, through this government will be able to advertise and communicate with people through digital platforms. This platform will be used for the promotion of young content creators in Pakistan. Digital journalism has many positive aspects, young content creators are highlighting positive aspects of journalism which would be good for the image of Pakistan.

Young people are preferring Digital journalism; some senior journalists are also pursuing digital journalism. The reason behind opting for this mode of journalism as explained by senior journalists is that media houses impose certain restrictions and there are organizations like PEMRA which have their regulations as well. They claim that digital media is an open field they can publish anything. Is this true?

My perspective on this matter is that there are not any comprehensive restrictions on television shows as such. One of the issues that

I think should be tackled by digital media is the spread of Fake news. If checks and balances are issued by PEMRA to make sure that fake news

is not broadcasted, I do not think there is any harm in such restrictions. A recent incident that circulated media was the fake tweet posted on behalf of Shafqat Mehmood regarding the opening of schools during COVID. This caused a lot of problems. Many news anchors in Pakistan also broadcast fake news on their

YouTube channels, unfortunately, there is not any accountability in this regard. Freedom of expression in my opinion is important for people working in this field, however, disinformation should not be promoted and there should be strict checks and balance to deal with this issue.

Sir do you believe that electronic media is more difficult to regulate as compared to print media?

Yes, I do believe that electronic media is more difficult to regulate as compared to print media. People spread false news and have fake identities on digital media, so it becomes difficult to identify who the person is. FIA cyber-wing is responsible for handling this, but I believe that they lack the proper mechanism, human resources, and lastly, they do not have the proper skillset required to detect the behavior and patterns of the person who is

being investigated. The digital media wing of Pakistan is trying to enhance the presence of the government in digital media platforms. We have made sure that the accounts of government officials are verified on every platform so that the problem of fake news can be tackled. Apart from this, we are trying to make sure that this process is followed by every ministry within the federal government. We are trying to come up with a proper mechanism to regulate this.

Sir you talked about reporting that is done through YouTube and you highlighted some of its incredibly positive aspects. Why is the reason behind this positive viewpoint? What according to you are the differences between digital reporting and electronic reporting, and which one do you prefer?

The recent interview of Imran Khan by the digital journalists was initiated by the digital wing PTI and we are also working to make sure that several other federal ministries are also interviewed by digital journalists. The main purpose behind this is to reduce the information gap that exists and to highlight the work that the government is doing. Certain senior journalists working in Television feel threatened that they

are losing this control due to the emergence of young digital journalists. In my opinion, digital media is a great platform for people working in the field of media and journalism. People who are resisting this platform should encourage young minds in this field. These people can help in changing the narrative of the state and create a positive outlook of Pakistan internationally.

Sir you talked about reporting that is done through YouTube and you highlighted some of its incredibly positive aspects. Why is the reason behind this positive viewpoint? What according to you are the differences between digital reporting and electronic reporting, and which one do you prefer?

The recent interview of Imran Khan by the digital journalists was initiated by the digital wing PTI and we are also working to make sure that several other federal ministries are also interviewed by digital journalists. The main purpose behind this is to reduce the information gap that exists and to highlight the work that the government is doing. Certain senior journalists working in Television feel threatened that they

are losing this control due to the emergence of young digital journalists. In my opinion, digital media is a great platform for people working in the field of media and journalism. People who are resisting this platform should encourage young minds in this field. These people can help in changing the narrative of the state and create a positive outlook of Pakistan internationally.

Sir as far as digital journalism is concerned; we have seen that digital journalists have an incredibly positive outlook about the government in general. Even if reporting is done from a critical perspective, it is portrayed positively. It has also been seen that this government had clashes with electronic media houses as well as print media. What do you think is the reason behind the difference in the government's attitude between digital media and press media?

I think that perception has been built regarding the clash between the present government and media houses. The government has been advertising on electronic as well as digital platforms. If the government is pinpointing or highlighting the spread of false news and the propaganda that is spread by certain media

houses, I do not think there is anything wrong with this. Many media houses internationally are also under constant scrutiny for the proper portrayal in news. If the same thing happens in Pakistan, people start to raise questions regarding the clash between media houses and the government.

You talked about the Digital media advertisement policy and stance of the present government to make sure that advertisement is not used as bribery. Do you believe that this policy cannot be misused in the future regardless of what party is in power, as it would be easier to bribe two or three independent journalists as compared to the whole media houses?

There are certain analytical tools available for people working in digital media which helps in collecting several views. So, we can decipher the number of views that a certain campaign has garnered. We can also track the views and properly verify them. I believe that Digital media is more transparent, and every campaign is more trackable. Secondly, important governmental messages must reach people. Recently during corona, essential information regarding SOPs

was advertised on television. However, the message was spread more instantly by digital platforms as the internet is widely used by people all around Pakistan. We are trying to come up with a digital mechanism/policy which will be based on global regulations. People who will qualify for this policy will be independently able to work on digital platforms. We will also make sure that no biases based on pro-government or anti-government are carried out.

Just like the digital media policy, the government tried to introduce the policy on print and electronic media. Due to several reasons, these policies were not implemented. Is the present government planning on improving the print and electronic media regulations?

PEMRA has an input and recommendations platform for journalists and publishers in the print and media industry. They keep a lookout for

any regulations or feedback. Unfortunately, this does not fall in my domain so I cannot answer this thoroughly.

Sir, you raised an excellent point regarding digital analytics and how they are always available in digital media, which creates transparency. However, in the case of electronic media public is not aware of the analytics. Do you think that this difference in electronic and digital media causes insecurities among the journalists of electronic media?

PEMRA has an input and recommendations platform for journalists and publishers in the print and media industry. They keep a lookout for

any regulations or feedback. Unfortunately, this does not fall in my domain so I cannot answer this thoroughly.

Sir, you raised an excellent point regarding digital analytics and how they are always available in digital media, which creates transparency. However, in the case of electronic media public is not aware of the analytics. Do you think that this difference in electronic and digital media causes insecurities among the journalists of electronic media?

Yes, this can be one of the reasons as well. A young Youtuber who has more than a million views on his video is going to make a senior journalist insecure who has been working throughout his life. Another aspect of this is that a person who was hosting a show on television

was not able to receive direct feedback on his show. Now, due to digital media platforms, it is easier to get reviews. Senior journalists however are not very keen on the freedom of expression of the public.

If we talk about the impact of media in general, it is believed that electronic media has more impact as compared to digital media and it would not change in recent years. What do you have to say about the difference in impact between both platforms?

The overall impact of social media is extraordinarily little. If we look at platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, we can notice that something which is trending in these platforms will be highlighted for a maximum of 24 hours and then some other news will take over. The life of a narrative in social media is very less. If we compare this with television, any news which is

highlighted over there is discussed in prime time talk shows as well apart from news coverage. So, the impact of television is unprecedentedly high. However, this trend is changing with time. If we look at various issues around us, any discussion on a topic is initiated by social media, which is then picked up by news channels.

Where do you see print, electronic and digital media in the next 10 years in Pakistan?

When I started working, the overall digital spends out of the total marketing spend was just 5%. Now the number has increased up to 30%, which is a huge improvement. Pakistan is

improving in terms of these trends. I believe that the impact of digital media will increase in the coming years.

When is Pakistan planning on introducing media platforms like Netflix etc.?

As far as I know the government is working on the policies and rules and regulations regarding

such platforms, and it is expected to be released by this year.

