

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND COVID-19

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The World has witnessed the evolution of Media from a piece of paper to wireless societies. With the development of technology, Media has transformed into multiple types. Furthermore, globalization has led to innovation and enhanced forms of media, ranging from the printing press to digital media. As important as it is, media has also been titled as the “fourth pillar of democracy” by the Victorian writer, Thomas Carlyle. It functions as a watchdog in the political operations of any democracy; this is what it has been doing in Pakistan.

More recently, media can be seen in the form of social media applications that have taken their place in the information society. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are among the more active applications in informing the masses about current affairs and daily social issues than the news channels themselves. The official hours leave less time to go through a newspaper; this is where social media floods in. Due to social media, we know how provincial governments are responding to the Covid-19 crises in the country. From the activities in the Parliament to the ebb and flow of the social sector of Pakistan, social media has covered it all for us. However, the openness of social media has its cons as well.

During the crises of Covid-19 in Pakistan, social media has been active in informing the digital citizens about positivity ratios and current positive cases. More recently, our national news agencies, such as DAWN and The News, have taken to social media to reach the masses. But with the positive role of social media during the pandemic, social media users have exploited cyberspace to spread disinformation regarding the efficacies and importance of vaccines. According to the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), social media became the largest platform for

anti-vaccine propagators with more than 59 million followers. But with the disease, social media also brings the remedy where global health organizations such as WHO counter such misconceptions about Covid-19 vaccines.

Other officials have also stressed the fact that social media has been badly used to spread conspiracies regarding vaccines. Secretary-General of Pakistan Medical Association, Dr. Qaiser Sajjad, also told during a talk that the masses were falling prey to the disinformation shared on social media regarding the vaccines. The founder of Media Matters for Democracy, Asad Beyg, opined that Pakistan is highly susceptible to such concerns, keeping in view our literacy rate.

The concerned officials appealed that the government devise strategies to counter such conspiracies, and make social media a safe haven for the country. However, the Federal Information Minister responded that a comprehensive communications strategy was being rolled out effectively. In a nutshell, social media is a democratic platform. Not only does it display the provider’s perspective, but it also keeps the platform open for the public’s comments and views on the matter. Hence, where it is capable of empowering the marginalized, it can also infect the masses with digitalized misinformation.

Social media is one of the most crucial elements of modern man’s life. It has the power to elevate even the remotest of people and bring them to the limelight within the blink of an eye. But at the same time, it is the duty of the people to make fruitful use of media and help the Government to counter cyber problems. Today with the help of social media or the “digital democracy”, we can join our hands in the global fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

