

Global News Coverage of the Pandemic: Towards an Ethical Framework for Media Professionalism

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Abstract : This paper analyzes the current media practices dominant in global journalistic practices within the framework of world press theories of Libertarian, Authoritarian, Communist, and Social Responsibility to evaluate their efficacy in addressing their role in the coverage of the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. The global media flows, determinants of news coverage, and international awareness and the Western view of the world will be critically analyzed within the context of the prevalent news values that underpin free press and media coverage of the world. While evaluating the global discourse paramount to a sustained and dispassionate understanding of world events, this paper proposes an ethical framework that brings clarity devoid of sensationalism, partisanship, right-wing and left-wing interpretations to a breaking and dangerous development of a pandemic. As the world struggles to contain the coronavirus pandemic with death climbing close to 6,000 from late January to mid-March, 2020, the populations of the developed as well as the developing nations are beset with news media renditions of the crisis that are contradictory, confusing and evoking anxiety, fear and hysteria. How are we to understand differing news standards and news values? What lessons do we as journalism and mass media educators, researchers, and academics learn in order to construct a better news model and structure of media practice that addresses science, health, and media literacy among media practitioners, journalists, and news consumers? As traditional media struggles to cover the pandemic to its audience and consumers, social media from which an increasing number of consumers get their news have exerted their influence both in a positive way and in a negative manner. Even as the world struggles to grasp the full significance of the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been feverishly battling an additional challenge related to the pandemic in what it termed an 'infodemic'—'an overabundance of information, some accurate and some not, that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.' There is, indeed, a need for journalism and news coverage in times of pandemics that reflect social responsibility and ethos of public service journalism. Social media and high-tech information corporations, collectively termed GAMAFA—Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Facebook - can team up with reliable traditional media—newspapers, magazines, book publishers, radio and television corporates—to ease public emotions and be helpful in times of a pandemic outbreak. GAMAFA can, conceivably, weed out sensational and non-credible sources of coronavirus information, exotic cures offered for sale on a quick fix, and demonetize videos that exploit peoples' vulnerabilities at the lowest ebb. Credible news of utility delivered in a sustained, calm, and reliable manner serves people in a meaningful and helpful way. The world's consumers of news and information, indeed, deserve a healthy and trustworthy news media - at least in the time of pandemic COVID-19. Towards this end, the paper will propose a practical model for news media and journalistic coverage during times of a pandemic.

Keywords : COVID-19, international news flow, social media, social responsibility

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