The Impact of Covid on Journalism in Emerging Economies and the Global South
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LA TOUR

THOMSON REUTERS’ REPORT

The Impact of Covid on Journalism in Emerging Economies and the Global South

COVID-19 is a generation-defining pandemic, impacting every person on the planet. But how is it affecting those upon whom we depend for independent and accurate information about this global crisis? With nearly 40 years’ experience supporting independent media and training journalists around the world, the Thomson Reuters Foundation has released a report, on 14th of January, exploring the impact of the pandemic on journalism in emerging economies and the Global South. This story is told for the first time not only through the insights of industry leaders, advocates and media experts - but critically, through the voices of the journalists themselves - too often unheard or silenced. 55 alumni of training programmes run by the Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) shared their experiences about living – and working – in the COVID era. These insights, coupled with extensive desk research and analysis, inform the narrative of this new report. Together, these elements shine a spotlight on journalism outside of the Global North, in particular North America and Western Europe, to focus on areas where coverage of the journalism industry tends to be less well told or understood.

“Doing good journalism in the era of COVID-19 has been likened to war reporting. Journalists have been risking their lives to document the frontlines of a battle against an invisible enemy. They placed themselves at the epicentre of the disease to bring us the information we needed in order to protect ourselves”, says Antonio Zappulla, Chief Executive Officer of the Thomson Reuters Foundation in the Foreword.

However, he adds, the threat is not only in the form of a deadly virus. The pandemic is also being used by malign forces as an opportunity to disrupt, sabotage and hamper the free flow of trusted, independent information. The pandemic has been weaponised to kill free speech. COVID-19 has provided a convenient excuse to usher in a range of reporting restrictions on a sliding scale of severity – from limiting access to data, right through to punitive legislation and even threats to life. In addition, the relentless onslaught of misinformation and disinformation riddling social media platforms has created real obstacles to truth-telling.

New limits to media freedom

There are concerns that the COVID crisis is being used to curb media freedoms around the world. This is taking numerous forms, including limiting access to information, attacks on journalists, government closures of news media and new laws that limit press freedom.

Amnesty (and others) have commented on how these measures can jeopardise lives, by limiting reporting – as well as important debate and discussion – about the approaches being taken to tackle the pandemic. “There is no hope of containing this virus if people can’t access accurate information,” said Ashfaq Khalfan, Amnesty International’s Director of Law and Policy. “It is truly alarming to see how many governments are more interested in protecting their own reputations than in saving lives.”

Governments have deployed a range of techniques designed to control the pandemic narrative. The Austria-based International
Press Institute (IPJ) has identified 17 countries that have passed ‘fake news’ regulations since the COVID-19 outbreak began, giving them broad-ranging powers that can reduce the ability to cover the crisis.

“The on the one hand,” IPI observes, “while many of these laws stem from an understandable desire to combat falsehoods, their vague definition and broad scope means that they can be easily manipulated to deny critical reporting.”

RSF (Reporters Without Borders) argues these types of COVID-triggered “emergency laws spell disaster for press freedom”, noting how “weapons of repression against individual journalists as well as news organisations have been greatly strengthened in many countries” and adding that “the arsenal of sanctions has been hugely expanded”. Aside from the need to push back on these efforts, a major risk to journalism is that this pandemic-era landscape becomes the norm.

Reporting challenges and restrictions

These considerations are not new to COVID, but the crisis may have encouraged some regimes to double down on efforts to control the news agenda. The Center for Media Data and Society at the Central European University has shared how independent media have been banned from attending government news conferences in countries such as Nicaragua and the Philippines.

As countries went into lockdown, many nations implemented curfews and travel restrictions. Although, while working, some journalists might be able to bypass these constraints, this has not always been the case.

“In the Philippines,” Meera Selva at the Reuters Institute recounts, “the President’s office banned all journalists from travelling to areas in lockdown without a specific identification card issued by his communications office.”

“Several media organisations did apply, but the system was unable to cope with all the applications so only a few passed have been issued and apply only to individual reporters,” she noted. And if those designated reporters “get sick or have to self-quarantine, a colleague will not be able to take their place”.

Elsewhere, there are concerns about access to data, and that coronavirus deaths have been underreported. As The Economist explains, official statistics may “exclude victims who did not test positive for coronavirus before dying – which can be a substantial majority in places with little capacity for testing.”

Misinformation and the ‘Infodemic’

Discussions about these complexities can be further exacerbated by misinformation and a lack of agreement about what constitutes ‘facts’ and ‘truth’. In China, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has documented efforts by the Chinese government to encourage news outlets to remove articles and reports featuring ‘negative facts’. At the same time, there is a hunger for information about this new virus among members of the public.

However, especially in the early days, there has also been a great deal of confusion about the nature of this novel coronavirus and the best ways to respond to it.

Journalists continue to face a number of challenges in combating the 'infodemic', including the speed with which misinformation travels, propagation by public officials and figures, and having the skills to discern fact from fiction.

Obfuscation and obfuscation on the part of public bodies can also make a journalist’s job harder and, in this vacuum, misinformation can flourish. In many cases, that activity takes place on social networks and private messaging services, like WhatsApp.

In August, Reuters reported that Facebook had removed more than seven million pieces of content with false claims about the virus. However, these are only posts deemed to risk imminent harm. Conspiracy theories, hoaxes and false information may be identified on the social network yet remain in place.

Each major platform (YouTube, Twitter et al.) has its own policies in terms of how this content is flagged, fact-checked, or potentially taken down, which can sow further confusion among users.

Negative economics

COVID-19 has accelerated long-term financial trends that have beset journalism, in particular newspapers, for some time. Reduced revenues, particularly advertising income, have contributed to the closing of news outlets, as well as major job losses, pay cuts and furloughs.

There’s an irony here in that this financial free fall comes at a time when — in the early stages of the pandemic at least — many news outlets and media platforms have been enjoying record traffic. This consumption, however, was not enough to offset declines in revenue primarily caused by a sudden advertising downturn.

Some commentators initially predicted that the pandemic could create an “extinction-level event” for the media industry around the world. These fears now look somewhat overblown. But, whatever the outcome, it’s clear the news industry that emerges on the other side of this crisis will look very different from the one that went into it.

Although few journalists have been immune from these impacts, freelancers may be among the hardest hit. Reduced opportunities, a broader freelance pool (due to lockdown), lost work from legacy properties, and the erosion of trust in journalism, to fake news. The sweeping devastation of the global pandemic has exacerbated existing issues that had already caused fissures in the industry to a level where it is hard to see a clear path to recovery.

2021 will be a defining moment for the news business

“For journalists who have remained employed, the physical closure of newsrooms has presented a series of unexpected difficulties. This includes access to reliable broadband connections, high data costs, unsuitable equipment, power outages and having to negotiate new ways of working. That many journalists are also having to do this on reduced pay — and often with increased costs as a result of high data charges — has merely added to their stresses.

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Digital dependency

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A legacy of renewed unease and uncertainty

COVID-19 has had a twin impact on journalism: not only has it presented a unique set of challenges for journalists, but it has also accentuated and accelerated several major structural issues that predate the pandemic. These issues include: reductions in on press freedom, the news industry’s faltering business model, the erosion of trust in journalism and combating fake news.

Laws banning ‘fake news’ can be used as instruments to support government crackdowns on media freedom and on reporting with which political elites disagree. The pandemic has offered a justification for more countries to introduce these types of laws, to tighten current restrictions or suspend existing ones.

Even if these developments are rolled back, journalism and the news industry is unlikely to return to its pre-pandemic state. Many of the jobs and outlets that have been lost will never reappear, and those that do may look very different to the way they were.

We do not know what the long-term impact of the coronavirus will be on journalism, the news industry or our world as a whole.

However, we do know that the impact of the coronavirus will be significant. Even with vaccination programmes on the horizon, COVID-19 will continue to play a major role in our lives, as well as in the work that journalists do — and how they do it — for a long time to come.

2021 will be a defining moment for the news business

“The media landscape is simply unrecognisable from a decade ago. Continually in flux, constantly buffeted by the next wave of change, the profession has faced unprecedented challenges - from upended business models, to the global erosion of trust in journalism, to fake news. The sweeping devastation of the global pandemic has exacerbated existing issues that had already caused fissures in the industry to a level where it is hard to see a clear path to recovery.

2021 will be a defining moment for the news business. The challenges faced by journalists as a result of COVID-19 must be understood and addressed in order to safeguard a diverse and healthy media ecosystem and freedom of speech. From user behaviour to news consumption, to the approach adopted by social media platforms, to the potential benefits to this situation, such as the growth of online output, development of digital skills and opportunities to engage in online-delivered training.

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UN Secretary-General António Guterres: “2021 will be critical in the fight against COVID-19 and climate change”

COP26 President Sharma said the global transition to clean power must move at least four times the current pace to achieve targets set out in Paris Agreement on climate change.
The Jobs of Tomorrow

The World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report 2020 comes at a crucial juncture for the world of work. The report, now in its third edition, maps the jobs and skills of the future, tracking the pace of change based on surveys of business leaders and human resource strategists from around the world. This year, we aim to shed light on the effect of pandemic-related disruptions placed in the broader context of longer-term technology trends. Here are the five things you need to know from our findings.

The workforce is automating faster than expected, displacing 85 million jobs in the next five years.

Automation, in tandem with the COVID-19 recession, is creating a “double-disruption” scenario for workers. Companies’ adoption of technology will transform tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025. Some 43 percent of businesses surveyed indicate that they are set to reduce their workforce because of technology integration, 41 percent plan to expand their use of contractors for task-specialized work, and 34 percent plan to expand their workforce as a result of technology integration. Five years from now, employers will divide work between humans and machines roughly equally.

The robot revolution will create 97 million new jobs.

As the economy and job markets evolve, new roles will emerge across the care economy in technology fields (such as artificial intelligence—AI) and in content creation careers (such as social media management and content writing). The emerging professions reflect the greater demand for green economy jobs; roles at the forefront of the data and AI economy; and new roles in engineering, cloud computing, and product development. The up-and-coming jobs highlight the continuing importance of human interaction in the new economy through roles in the care economy; in marketing, sales, and content production; and in roles that depend on the ability to work with different types of people from different backgrounds.

In 2025, analytical thinking, creativity, and flexibility will be among the most sought-after skills.

Employers see critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving as growing in importance in the coming years, although these have consistently been cited in previous editions of the survey. Newly emerging this year are skills in self-management, such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility. The data available through metrics partnerships with LinkedIn and Coursera allowed us to track with unprecedented granularity the types of specialized skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow.

The most competitive businesses will focus on upgrading their workers’ skills.

For workers set to remain in their roles over the next five years, nearly half will need retraining for their core skills. The survey also found that the public sector needs to provide stronger support for reskilling and upskilling of at-risk or displaced workers. Currently, only 21 percent of businesses report being able to make use of public funds to support their employees through retraining initiatives. The public sector must provide incentives for investment in the markets and jobs of tomorrow, offer stronger safety nets for displaced workers during job transitions, and tackle long-delayed improvements of education and training systems.

Remote work is here to stay. Some 84 percent of employers are set to rapidly digitalize work processes, including a significant expansion of remote working. Employers say there is the potential to move 44 percent of their workforce to operate remotely. However, 78 percent of business leaders expect some negative impact on worker productivity, and many businesses are taking steps to help their employees adapt.

Denmark’s Ambitious Green Vision

Denmark aspires to become one of the most climate-friendly countries in the world. In June, its Parliament overwhelmingly passed a new climate law that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, with net zero emissions targeted for 2050. While there is general agreement that carbon pricing should be the centrepiece of Denmark’s mitigation strategy, pricing needs to be effective, address equity and leakage concerns, and be reinforced by additional measures at the sectoral level. The strategy Denmark develops can be a good prototype for others to follow.

The Danish Council on Climate Change has recommended a carbon price rising to $200-250 per ton by 2030 as the centre-piece of these efforts. It is difficult, however, to forecast the impact of this steep increase in carbon taxation and to gauge its acceptability.

Denmark has a highly ambitious goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 70 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. While this is an even more ambitious goal than the EU’s target to cut emissions by 55 percent over the same time period.

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MAURITIUS BUSINESS AWARDS 2020

Courts Mammouth consacrée “Best Business” de l’année

La cérémonie des Mauritius Business Awards 2020, qui a eu lieu au Angsana Balaclava le 30 décembre dernier, a vu la victoire de Courts Mammouth dans la catégorie principale, soit « Best Business of the Year »

Rhum : Equiano, une collaboration entre Maurice et les Caraïbes, part à l’assaut du marché américain

Une nouvelle marque de rhum haut de gamme, fruit d’une collaboration inédite entre producteurs mauriciens et caribéens, vient d’être lancée sur le marché international. Equiano est distillé et vieilli à Maurice par Grays, avant d’être acheminé à la Barbade au sein de la célèbre Four-square Distillery pour atteindre sa maturité aux côtés d’autres rhums prestigieux. Equiano est le fruit d’une réflexion conjointe de Ian Burrell, célèbre ambassadeur mondial du rhum, et de Richard Scale, maître de chais renommé de la distillerie Foursquare. Chez Grays, Equiano, un rhum à base de mélasses de canne à sucre, est vieilli au moins 10 ans dans des tonneaux de chênes français anciennement utilisés pour la production de cognac. Après avoir traversé les mers pour atteindre la Barbade, il est affiné et mûri par les soins de Richard Scale.

Les rhums de Grays font leur révolution virtuelle

De nos jours, il existe des applications pour tout… et même pour le rhum. En effet, le monde du rhum vit de nombreux changements en ce moment, notamment à travers la sortie prochaine de deux nouvelles applications qui recensent les meilleurs rhums de la planète. Le groupe Grays, leader mauricien dans le secteur de la production de rhum, fait partie du voyage, avec ses marques phares : New Grove, Lazy Dodo et le nouveau Mauricia. Avec plus de 6,500 références disponibles, l’application Rum Tasting Notes est une sorte de réseau social pour les amoureux de rhum. Les aficionados peuvent à travers elle, concevoir une collection de leurs marques favorites, prendre des notes sur les arômes et les saveurs des rhums qu’ils goûtent et partager avec les autres utili-

SALT of Palmar : Et si vous étiez le propriétaire de ce bijou de l’Est durant une nuit ?

Que ce soit pour un mariage, un anniversaire et autre événement important, il est possible de faire la fête jusqu’aux petites heures du matin et dormir à l’hôtel, sans avoir à s’inquiéter de préparer le petit déjeuner puisqu’il est inclus dans le forfait. Pour devenir proprio d’un hôtel pour un jour, il faut compter Rs 360 000 par nuit en bed & breakfast en week-end (vendredi et samedi), et moitié prix en jour de semaine, soit Rs 175 000 la nuit, petit déjeuner compris (de dimanche à jeudi). Ce forfait s’applique pour 60 invités. Il faut compter Rs 500 de plus pour chaque personne additionnelle par nuit (toujours en bed & breakfast) ; l’hôtel pouvant accommoder jusqu’à 118 personnes.

La marque Shell, présente sur le territoire mauricien depuis 115 ans à travers son distributeur exclusif Vivo Energy Mauritius, conserve sa position de leader sur les différents segments de son marché. Le dernier sondage indépendant réalisé par Kline & Company vient d’attribuer à la major pétrolière le titre de premier fournisseur mondial de lubrifiants pour la quatorzième année consécutive. Shell est la première entreprise la 14e année consécutive Lubrifiants : Shell, leader mondial pour la 14e année consécutive