

Social Media Responsibility in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The Corona pandemic posed a challenge to the classical and modern Yemeni media, as the latter was not prepared to work during crises. In fact, the media was and still at the present time a formidable force for its cultural, economic, political, ideological and religious hegemony that imposes itself and its place in our daily life, especially the new media, the digital, which infiltrated our homes without warning, and became crucial, as it breached temporal and spatial limits, and became a technological imperative that imposes itself in our daily life, especially in light of the Corona virus crisis management.

There is no doubt that the media, whether traditional (television - radio - newspapers and magazines - books - advertisement) or modern (Internet - social networking sites - apps and media - information and communication technology) have many value-related, ethical, cultural, religious, political and ideological orientations that may be aligned with our customs and traditions or inconsistent with them, which has great positive and negative impacts on family awareness to confront the Corona virus. So this paper was done for this purpose and it will be discussed through the following paragraphs.

✓ Social Responsibility of the Media

The responsibility of media institutions has increased with the increasing interest of the citizens that are subject to quarantine in their homes, to follow the development of the Corona pandemic in the homeland and around the world. Besides traditional media, social media and especially during the period of crisis, is attracting a large audience and is characterized by these digital platforms in terms of interactivity and open spaces for the transmission of real-time information, and also the “false information” that was used to be called “fake news”. This fake news “feeds the rumor, establishing a state of indiscretion, taking certain risks to the social fabric, national solidarity, and the solidarity effort that Yemen makes in a turbulent global setting.”

Apart from the role of social media in achieving an interactive-complementary approach to crises communication, the communication openness has turned into a “parallel media” that affects the treatment of crises that occur in society and the way they are managed.

At the international level, the media had a profound and deep influence on the broad public, who appeared to panic and fear due to the tremendous media momentum more than the pandemic itself. We may understand these behaviors on the social level, in light of the rapid spread of the pandemic. But this hysterical phenomenon took on other dimensions, so the Corona pandemic turned into political and media havoc to which Western regimes contributed, spreading destructive media viruses through media platforms that are no less dangerous than the Covid-19 virus. This is, after their countries have become epicenters of the pandemic, and their systems have failed to contain the crisis with their health system and global media, which leads us to ask: Can ailing media turn into alternative medicine to address the Corona crisis? ¹

This question leads us to say: What about Yemen, which is in war? How have the classic and modern Yemeni media dealt with the Covid-19 crisis?

We find that with the beginning of the pandemic spread in Yemen, the media published conflicting figures about the number of Corona victims and cases of infection with the Covid-19 virus, and it turned into a scoop in which many newspapers, private TV channels and news sites compete, and the citizen became a captive of those means in his access to real information.

With the discrepancies in the real statistical information and with the multiplicity of media sources among the Yemeni public, the Yemeni citizen has remained a captive of the Arab and Western media according to the nature of the viewing. Yemen is not far from the coordinates and repercussions that have afflicted the Arab region, so most Yemeni media workers have directed towards modern media and followed-up the course of events on the Arab and international levels, although social networking sites presented themselves as a main source of information, but there is a disregard for the information that was published, and most of the communication sites placed instructions and advice for journalists while obtaining news.

Use of Social Media Platforms

¹ Available on the following link: : <https://www.entv.dz> – Visit date: Tuesday 30th March 2021 AD

A good journalist can resort to huge data analysis networks, use social media listening programs, or resort to social media listening tools, including the famous program Talkwalker, to find out what is going on in social networks and rely on them for monitoring, as online platforms and forums can give an indication of the presence of danger that foretells of a pandemic.

Considering that social media has a positive impact as well, it has facilitated awareness and communication between officials and specialists, and among the public on the one hand, which has contributed to the dissemination of information about the pandemic and ways to prevent it. On the other hand, it contributed to pressuring officials to seriously deal with the issue. As well as it “facilitated the process of communication and enabled the implementation of decisions related to working from home, and it also helped the media in particular to find alternatives to get in direct contact with guests, and co-workers, and made them earn a lot of unprecedented information on any pandemic”.²

One of the studies conducted on the case study of the MENA countries, prepared by the researcher Buthaina Al-Jurmazi, Head of the Digital Technology Sector at the World Bank, under the title “Digital Transformation in the Time of Corona: A Case Study of the Countries of the Middle East and North Africa”, confirmed that the governments in the region of the Middle East and North Africa are rapidly improving broadband networks, and the promotion of Internet services. (Photo credit: Vizilla / Shutterstock)

In the time of the Coronavirus (Covid-19), the communications sector is no longer limited to traditional communication and the search for information, but it rather became the backbone for the use of data, content and digital applications by individuals, governments and companies to ensure the continuity of economic and social activity in light of social distancing and complete closure in most countries of the world. The demand in the MENA region for broadband services and data increased significantly during the outbreak.

Countries unprepared for high demand experienced network congestion, low average internet speed and deteriorating service quality even in relatively mature markets. Inequality in access to high-quality communication may endanger stability as well as increase social inequality between those who can

continue with minimal social and economic activities without exposing themselves to the risk of contracting the virus. However, refugees are one of those groups that do not have access to the Internet and adapt to the new normal. ³

1. Heavy use of the network during the day in residential areas (which networks are not designed to serve at peak times), which leads to congestion of "the last mile" networks that provide access to the user.
2. The increasing demand for video and other high-bandwidth entertainment services
3. The increasing demand for videoconferencing applications and cloud services
4. Distance learning by students of all age groups
5. Insufficient capacity for the consumer through the international access network, which is the point at which the Internet enters the country

Network congestion during the COVID-19 outbreak has been a major concern for many countries. Five main reasons of the Internet congested:

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2. Increasing the demand for video and other high-bandwidth entertainment services.
3. Increasing the demand for videoconferencing applications and cloud services.
4. Distance learning by students of all age groups.
5. Insufficient capacity for the consumer through the international access network, which is when the Internet enters the country.

Actions Taken by MENA Governments to Improve the Network and Enhance the Use of Broadband Services

³ The media vacillates between objective reporting or causing panic about Corona, available at the following link
<https://ijnet.org/ar>

Governments in the MENA region responded quickly by improving broadband networks and enhancing Internet services. For example, some governments and telecommunication companies have reduced the burden of purchasing recharge cards for prepaid users, allowing them to pay after consumption (Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine). They have also increased the size and speed of Internet packages for users without additional costs (Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain), and cover the cost, add-ons to increase the monthly quotas for subscribers (Egypt), and to unblock VoIP applications (UAE and Oman), providing more spectrum for telecommunications companies (Jordan and Saudi Arabia), and securing cloud applications for free for companies (Vodafone in Egypt). In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government has been able to secure continuity of access to various e-government services thanks to its continuous investment in modern digital infrastructure and digital government platforms over the past two decades.

E-learning

E-learning platforms have been developed in many countries of the region. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the national education portal “Ain” has become the main educational channel for more than six million users, and the digital education platform has been updated to provide 30,000 devices to needy students, in addition to providing more than 100,000 interactive digital educational hours for university students. The Egyptian, Saudi and Palestinian governments also provided free internet to university professors and free SIM cards for students to access learning platforms via their devices. In Tunisia, Morocco, and Bahrain, operators have provided free access to online education platforms. In Jordan, new platforms have been developed to host teaching materials such as “Darsak”, “Idrak”, “Jo Academy” and “Abwab”.

It should be noted that the weakness of networks and the inability of users to access broadband services in some countries, such as Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, prompted their governments to broadcast lessons on television as well.

New Risks and Vulnerabilities in Digital Infrastructure

However, despite these government solutions and initiatives, some risks and weaknesses related to digital infrastructure in the Middle East and North Africa have emerged, such as:

1. The inability of many telecom operators to continue their work, which requires the presence of their employees at work sites, due to lockdown procedures.
2. Disruption of global trade, especially with countries exporting electronic equipment, which affected the availability of devices and equipment for broadband networks and services.
3. Increasing cases of theft and sabotage of communication equipment.
4. The increase in cyber-attacks, fake news and digital fraud cases that exploit the public panic and confusion surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. Threatening self-privacy through the use of personal data for mobile communications by some governments to track and prevent the spread of Covid-19.

MENA Region Priorities to Benefit from Digital Solutions for Recovery

With the transition to the recovery phase and countries moving at a slow and cautious pace towards relaunching their economy, the countries in the region should work to increase the capacity of broadband communication lines, manage network congestion, ensure the continuity of vital public services, and enhance financial technologies because the demand for electronic services such as health care and payment systems through mobile phones, food delivery services, and e-commerce are likely to rise significantly.

In this context, the Marrakech Goals calling for digital inclusion, access to affordable, high-quality broadband internet and the development of electronic financial services are gaining unprecedented importance. The governments of the Middle East and North Africa should strengthen their efforts to achieve the following goals:

- The first objective: increasing capacities and reducing network congestion to prevent the Internet from being interrupted and to ensure its sustainability.
- The second objective: ensuring the continuity of public services to enable citizens to take advantage of digital technology for the completion of their transactions.
- The third objective: Developing electronic financial services such as digital payments and cash transfers from governments to individuals to support companies and the poorest and most

vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on the importance of providing beneficiaries with proof of identity to ensure their access to services.

- The Fourth Objective: Promoting e-learning initiatives to ensure the continuity of education.

As governments continue working on creating an enabling environment to increase network capacity, improve service quality, and develop innovative services that follow international best practices, it is important to emphasize a number of priority actions at the short, medium and long term, which includes:

- Removing obstacles to private sector investments and facilitating the entry of new operators into the telecommunication market by encouraging competition, reducing licensing fees and sharing revenue.
- Regulating sentence definitions.
- Establishing regional cooperation to create new submarine cable systems.
- Opening access to basic infrastructure.
- Adopting an open access policy to connect all operators to the communication infrastructure in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Sharing infrastructure among operators, including the transport, energy and telecommunication sectors.
- Allowing the use of globally popular services such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

In short, we must stop viewing digital development as a mere ICT sector. In fact, digital technologies are fundamentally transforming our economies and countries, affecting all sectors, such as agriculture, education, health, government and financial services. In other words, digital development is an integrated economy project that must be based on a comprehensive view concerned with infrastructure, platforms, digital skills and applications in vital areas, while striving for this digital economy to be based on respect for self-data, fair and comprehensive, so that the possibilities of digital transformation are available to all.

✓ **Crisis Media: Covid-19 as a Model**

In light of the escalation of crises in various aspects of political, economic, environmental, social, and health life, and at all levels, locally, regionally and internationally, in recent decades, in particular, the

issue of media and Covid-19 has emerged, and some have described the media as crisis media with all its traditional and new means, legalized and alternative, and the citizen media, with its various national, local, national, regional, and international levels directed towards the other, especially in the era of satellite media, media without borders, and Internet media as a fundamental pillar of confronting and containing the crisis.

The process of crisis management has become a media discipline with its own rules, theories, foundations, mechanisms and strategy. It is concerned with academic and research educational institutions, media, political and diplomatic institutions. In addition, the crisis media, "confrontation media," has received the attention of the higher leadership in most countries of the world.

Thus, the breadth and multiplicity of the fields of crisis media, "confrontation media and emergency information," is evident, which makes it so important to address it from different angles, and makes us focus in this seminar on the media's relationship with the Corona pandemic through the following points:

First: The Importance of the Media during Crises: Principles and Rules

In light of the tremendous development of the capabilities of the various traditional and modern media, the role of the media in dealing with crises in particular has grown, and it has become extremely important to adhere to and rely in media treatments of crises on the scientific rules and foundations to manage the crisis, regardless of its field, on the part of communicators (media professionals, politicians, diplomats or officials) and among these foundations and pillars, we mention:

- (1) The media, through its various means, has become a tool of interaction between the crisis and many of its parties and even those who are not a direct party to it, and it is no longer possible to obscure or silence any crises, regardless of their severity or extent. For instance, it was possible in the past for the authorities of any country not to publish information about any disaster or crisis that may occur in the vicinity of the country, for example, "The world did not know anything about the explosion of the Chernobyl reactor until several days after it took place". In our time, hiding or ignoring any crisis has become certainly very difficult. In fact, the degree of

public interest locally, regionally and internationally in any crisis varies from one crisis to another, but the media still has a major role in introducing it and interacting with its course.

- (2) Accurate preparation for crisis management, by assessing the magnitude, strength and impact of local or external counter-media, and the failure to single out crisis management without the involvement of the relevant authorities responsible for the nature of the crisis.

For example, in the context of consultations with the relevant ministries, bodies, institutions and experts, the internal media movement to contain an internal economic crisis happens through political discourse and diplomatic action at the external and international level.

- (3) Acknowledging the existence of a crisis, meaning not denying it and directing the correct media message related to it, including, for example, the media official or the official spokesperson specifying the expected questions and their appropriate answers prior the start any media interview, bearing in mind that the statement to the media of false information or statements, or the evasion or failure to answer certain questions is counterproductive and undesirable.

Hence, the search for an optimal solution or at least a better solution among the available alternatives is the basis for the proper settlement of the crisis.

- (4) Monitoring the lessons learned from the crisis before folding their file. Such lessons constitute an indispensable build-up of knowledge to address future crises before they break out, and the build-up of knowledge in turn serves as reference points for media professionals' training based on the experience gained.⁴

Second: The political Effects of the Media in Times of Crisis

In times of crisis, relations among nations, states, peoples, governments and citizens are reconfigured, and this has resulted in what is known as the political influence of the media, which many studies summarized as follows:

⁴ Mona El Hadidy, Media and Crisis Response is available at the following link: <https://www.arabmediasociety.com>, the date of the visit is Tuesday 30-3-2021 AD

1. The media's constant endeavor to attract the public and increase their numbers, by offering various forms of media templates, such as talk show programs and satire programs, some of which may appear without political content, although in fact they are not without political connotations and projections.
2. Recipient's confidence in the truthfulness of the information provided by the media (the credibility of the mean, the extent to which it is consistent with the recipient's preferences and political trends).
3. The huge number of media messages that the mass media provide daily makes the public (the simple ones) unable to grasp the reality of the situation, except through what those media present with the exception of people with knowledge and high political awareness, who are more able to understand, analyze and critique what those means provide them.

In the following we show each of:

(A) the political influences of traditional media (television as an example):

There are many aspects of the political effects that television treatments have to face the crisis, including:

- (1) The studied impact in the political process
- (2) Influencing political decision-making
- (3) Political apathy
- (4) Political marketing
- (5) The effect of talk shows on the system of political knowledge and the societal values of those who follow them intensively (high exposure), and in forming a negative mental image of individuals about themselves, their governments and their problems
- (6) An imbalance in dealing with negative and positive topics versus focusing on the negatives more than the positive ones.

(B) The negative effects of modern media (Facebook as an example):

It is summarized in:

- (1) Stirring up public opinion or reorienting public opinion
- (2) Dispersing public opinion
- (3) Electronic political distortion
- (4) Political Marketing
- (5) Supporting the "ego" of marginalized groups, enhancing the concept of virtual citizenship for them, strengthening social relations among them, and enhancing social capital among the members of these groups
- (6) Online political mobilization.⁵

Third: the credibility of the media (governmental and private) during crises:

Media credibility is especially important during crises, as these media outlets require performance of a special kind, professionally, ethically and nationally, based on some approaches and theories that are based on the social responsibility of the media, and its practice of the role of the patron (lawyer) for all groups without marginalizing or neglecting marginalized groups, in order to provide the right to comprehensive, complete and in-depth knowledge, as well as freely expressing oneself away from the policy of media silence towards the problems of some people or their reality, in addition to activating the relevant authorities to carry out their duties and responsibilities, and the ability to mediate the relationship between individuals and decision-makers, and activate the right to communicate with its comprehensive concept, as well as the right for everyone to know and to inform about himself freely.

In order for the media to achieve the desired roles by all parties in an optimal manner, the performance must be characterized by more credibility, through their commitment to a number of controls that govern their role in crisis management, including:

The immediate transmission of the crisis, the dissemination of it, the provision of detailed facts to the public, the depth and inclusiveness of the coverage of its various aspects, the restraint and objective

⁵ Mona El Hadidy, previously mentioned reference, same place

handling of the organs of public opinion, the recognition of mistakes that may occur during the coverage, and the return and reliance on genuine sources.

It is important to realize that achieving credibility with the masses in general and the elites in all their fields is not an easy matter, especially during crises of prolonged duration, and the existence of a law for information in order to obtain and exchange it is the main gateway to achieving a media that contributes to facing crises, and not a media that leads to the creation of crises or intimidation from some of them.

We conclude this approach by presenting ten rules for dealing with crises as defined by some concerned with crisis management:

- (1) Accept responsibility: This does not mean that you accept blame.
- (2) Distinguish between negative media and the real crisis, and define your action on this basis.
- (3) Use of scientific research methods and opinion polls to determine the method of confrontation.
- (4) Recruit a third party to speak on your behalf.
- (5) Treat the media outlets as partners and not enemies, but with caution.
- (6) Expect complaint and litigation.
- (7) Stay up to date, follow up closely and analyze what is published in the traditional and modern media.
- (8) Show empathy, interest, and interaction with the event and people.
- (9) Take the first 24 hours with the utmost seriousness and concern.
- (10) Start a crisis management program by building the foundations and basics of the institution's reputation, whereas, during a crisis, the reputation of the institution does not matter.

Let the goal of media coverage at all levels of any crisis be to help the society confront and overcome it, and to instill the values of resilience and spirit of hope and not frustration nor the division and fragmentation of society.⁶

⁶ Wissam Nasr, "The Credibility of the Egyptian Governmental and Private Media during Crises, a Case Study of the Swine Flu Pandemic Crisis", 2015.

Conclusion:

One of the milestones of the new reality, brought about by the Corona pandemic worldwide, was the powerful test of social media, which has become an obvious trait that no one in the modern world can deny.

To the extent that those new methods have contributed to alleviating the crisis of direct human contact, with fears of an outbreak of the virus, it seems from the point of view of many that they have failed the test of credibility.

And because the scourge of news is its narrators, the social media community bears a great deal of responsibility in the negative aspects that are being spoken of, and the use of such means during the crisis has resulted in the dissemination of blasphemous news, to the spread of rumors, to the pursuit of fear and panic among the people, who have been put into anxiety by the crisis, to cling to any information that may be unfounded.

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