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 **Atlantic Council**
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REPORT

Evolving News Media Landscapes in India and Pakistan: Implications for regional peace and stability

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‘Evolving News Media Landscapes In India and Pakistan: Implications for Regional Peace and Stability’

Report by Fatima Salman, Associate Director, South Asia Center, Atlantic Council

Academic discourse on Atlantic Council South Asia Center Report titled ‘Evolving News Media Landscapes in India and Pakistan: Implications for Regional Peace and Stability’ authored by Ms. Fatima Salman, Associate Director, South Asia Center, Atlantic Council.

Highlights from the Atlantic Council Report

1. Both India and Pakistan recognize the importance of the media and use them offensively in the larger information war.
2. Both have utilized all kinds of media to shape international perceptions and public opinion.
3. Both have used the media to whip up nationalist fervor
4. The anti-press climate in both countries have led to flawed media reports and the spread of incendiary misinformation.

Laws continue to privilege a narrow concept of national security. Tightening of laws, coupled with financial strangulation of local news channels, has reconfigured the media space, which is marked by distrust and a deepening gulf between the two countries.

Way-Forward

- Rethink cross-border reporting with a view to qualitatively improving coverage of regional issues.
- Media houses in both India and Pakistan should rejig business models so as to become more independent.

- Stop dehumanizing the other side, efforts must be made to reverse the dangerous trend.

Highlights from the Webinar

- Broad trends and changes over time in terms of technology and social media platforms as well as the internet affected India and Pakistan in terms of information campaigns.
- Manipulation of news media business models. Aggressive market practices and strict competition has grown in India and Pakistan as increased use of social media platforms has also affected diversification in the role of media as a government watchdog. These outlets fall prey to economic maneuvering and interest groups that use them for profiteering.
- Exacerbation of the use of social media is also a vast issue in terms of management and governance. Journalists have been divided into nationalists and loyalists.
- For Pakistan, the media and freedom of press enjoyed liberalization in the Musharraf era but now it is eroding due to lack of tolerance by state officials and institutions.
- What role do people play? General public sentiments and their utility in modernizing media outlets.
- What effect would journalist training do in terms of local journalism and modern trends?
- Can social media outlets assist in allowing a trend of learning and education for local journalist sectors?
- Media houses in South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, are largely operated by corporate elite which means that their commercial interests usually dominate journalistic ethics. For private enterprises operating media houses being linked through corporate advertising, use of information and sources as well as journalists is a key feature.

- The report deals with the Pulwama episode in 2019 but does not make a connection between the Indian media information maneuvering on the lines of it being overstated and exaggerated in India to facilitate electoral/political leverage.
- Labeling and Editorializing cross border occurrences and sentiments is a principal concern. The 'enemy' tag is one major factor that usually is employed by both Pakistan and India towards one another is also a major feature in determining how media outlets would maneuver information.
- Disinformation and misinformation campaigns are necessary to be dealt with due to the veracity through which they use social media platforms, print and electronic/broadcast media to devastating use.
- Stronger regulations and rules came about after media liberalization was introduced, which became a challenge to maintain as those who initiated liberalization saw this step as contrary to their own sustenance.
- Journalism in India and Pakistan has remained an extra risky scenario due to use of state apparatus to filter and maneuver information. Information campaign is also an important feature in setting narrative and goals for media outlets as Indian media did during and after the Kargil War.
- Indian and Pakistani media outlets and platforms are being controlled by large financial conglomerates which usually stir more misinformation and disinformation to the general public instead of creating a field of information.
- Indian media does more government watchdog role in terms of being pro-institution and serving the government's political needs/requirements.
- Most of the journalists interviewed for this research kept their identity confidential. Whistleblower tendency is taken over by fear and apprehensions. The trend of using force and cracking down on whistleblowing has dented whistleblowing tendency in India and Pakistan.
- There is a big difference in how one story or news is shared and/or crafted. There is care and caution in collaborating with Western media outlets due to loyalty issues which is felt and exercised by Indian and Pakistani journalists.

- Choosing what to report and what to caption is a big prerequisite on how government machinery would react to journalists in terms of choosing topics for media information flow.
- Social media platforms and outlets have less regulation and this is creating alternate realities which plays a detrimental role.
- Lack of narrative diversity and excessive information maneuvering is mostly because there is 'news fatigue' in terms of topics to report on. The idea of using media outlets and sentiments that were terraformed by institutions to be branded as being public sentiment is a big challenge.