

CONFERENCE REVIEW

# Digital Disruptions in the Networked World

(A Compilation of the conversations in the Round

Table 1 held as part of

International Seminar held on March 16 & 17,  
2023 at Mar Ivanios College ( Autonomous),  
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India)

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The panel discussion on the theme ‘Digital Disruptions in the Networked World,’ which took place during the two-day international seminar, ‘Media and Communication in the Networked World: New Perspectives on History, Culture, and Development’ was an engaging event which featured eminent media personalities and academicians. The two-day international seminar was organized by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram, in collaboration with The Kerala State Higher Education Council, Kerala Media Academy, and Don Bosco Arts & Science College, Angadikkadavu.

Under the expert guidance of Dr. Muhammadali N., Chairman of the Board of Studies at Mar Ivanios College, the distinguished panel members brought their wealth of knowledge and experience to the discussion. The esteemed panel included Mr. Johny Lukose, Director of Manorama News; Mr. Manoj K. Das, Managing Editor of Asianet News; Mr. S Biju, Executive Editor of Asianet News; Mr. Damodar Prasad, Director of EMMRC, University of Calicut; and Dr. M.S. Harikumar, Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Kerala. Together, they explored the multifaceted impact of digital disruptions in the interconnected world, shedding light on the challenges, opportunities, and evolving landscape of media and communication.

The general theme of the conversation was “Media and Communication in a Networked Society”. Muhammadali, in his introductory remark, said that media and communication has been evolving for centuries but now in the

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networked world the transformation it has undergone (and is undergoing) has been (and is) unpredictable.

### **Disrupting the World of Media: How digital experiences reshape communities?**

“During a case about media freedom at the Indian Supreme Court, the senior lawyers and the judges opined about media as the "rule of noise" and in another case relating to hate speech, several advocates argued simultaneous, akin to what Rajdeep Sardesai once said ‘Ravana school of journalism’; reflect the disruptive nature of digital experiences,” said Mr. Johny Lukose.

- **Fragmentation and Binary Discourse**

Digital disruptions have led to the fragmentation of society into isolated echo chambers and ideological silos. The rise of social media platforms and opinionated journalism has created a situation where individuals are exposed only to content that aligns with their existing beliefs. Consequently, public discourse has been reduced to a series of "like or dislike" and "follow or unfollow" interactions, devoid of nuanced middle ground. The absence of a balanced exchange of ideas impedes the development of a diverse and inclusive democratic society.

- **Impartiality versus Insensitivity**

In the current media landscape, impartiality is often mistaken for insensitivity. The proliferation of sensationalized content and click bait headlines has compelled media outlets to prioritize engagement over ethical reporting. The pressure to capture attention has overshadowed the importance of presenting unbiased information, hindering the formation of an informed electorate capable of making well-rounded decisions.

- **The Decline of Deliberative Democracy**

In a functioning democracy, open dialogue and constructive debates are crucial for policy-making and societal progress. However, digital disruptions have shifted the focus from deliberative democracy to confrontational democracy. Instead of engaging in meaningful discussions, individuals and media outlets often resort to heated arguments and counter-arguments, contributing to a polarized environment. This erosion of deliberative democracy jeopardizes the quality of governance and the pursuit of common goals.

- **The Survival of the Shameless**

In the digital age, personal validation and attention-seeking behavior have become prevalent. The constant demand for likes, shares, and followers has created an environment where individuals strive for attention rather than mutual respect. This phenomenon, often described as the "survival of the shameless," incentivizes sensationalism and provocative content, further eroding the integrity of media and public discourse.

- **Mainstream Media: "Enemy No.1."**

Social media platforms have identified mainstream media as "Enemy No.1." The influence of traditional media outlets has been challenged by the rise of citizen journalism and the democratization of information dissemination. Mainstream media organizations are grappling with retribalization, as their authority and credibility are being questioned by a digitally empowered audience seeking alternative sources of news and information.

### **Navigating the Media Landscape: The Elusive Search for Truth**

Mr. Manoj K. Das commented, "In today's media landscape, searching for truth can feel akin to looking for a needle in a haystack." The current media landscape makes it challenging to find truth amidst the overwhelming noise and biased narratives. News is now confined to echo chambers catering to specific audiences, resulting in the discrediting of news beyond these chambers and the trivialization of news due to distortions. There is a significant loss of relevance in political discourse and staying grounded in facts is very much needed.

#### **1. Echo-Chamber Effect and Cacophony**

In the age of personalized algorithms and social media, news consumption has become increasingly tailored to individual preferences. This has resulted in the formation of echo chambers, where individuals only follow and engage with news that aligns with their existing beliefs. Unfortunately, this confined environment limits exposure to diverse perspectives and fosters an echo-chamber effect. Beyond these chambers, a cacophony of voices discredits news, often alleging ulterior motives and further muddying the search for truth.

#### **2. Confusion and the Trivialization of News**

The disruptive nature of the digital era has introduced new challenges for the media industry. In the quest for higher ratings and engagement, media outlets

resort to using adjacent content and sensationalized techniques to capture viewership, often sacrificing the depth and accuracy of news reporting. Additionally, the use of AI tools like Chat GPT in news writing blurs the line between human-generated content and automated narratives, leading to concerns about authenticity and reliability. As a result, news is trivialized, losing its credibility and importance in society.

### **3. Distorted Truth in Political Discourses**

Political discourses, once the cornerstone of democracy, have suffered a loss of relevance in the face of disruptive media forces. The distortion of truth and manipulation of facts have become pervasive, fueled by partisan agendas and a race for attention. The pursuit of sensationalism and the bending of facts to fit predetermined narratives undermine the essence of objective reporting and hinder informed decision-making within the electorate.

### **4. Staying Grounded in Facts**

Amidst the chaos and noise, it is essential for media organizations to remain steadfast in their commitment to truth and factual reporting. Distorting facts to fit a particular agenda only serves to undermine the credibility of the media and erode public trust. Journalists and news outlets must embrace their responsibility as truth-seekers, providing accurate information and analysis without succumbing to sensationalism or manipulation.

## **Nodal Points and Disruptions: Unraveling the Dynamics of the Networked World**

Mr. Damodar Prasad pointed out that in the networked world individuals have emerged as nodal points, driving disruptions in content creation, narrative styles, and distribution. This phenomenon presents a significant challenge to mainstream media, as the traditional power dynamics are being reshaped.

### **1. Challenging the Narrative: Newspeak and Post-Truth Era**

The networked world has given rise to a proliferation of newspeak and post-truth narratives, where lies are disseminated under the guise of truth. In this era, distinguishing between fact and fiction has become increasingly challenging, as misinformation and propaganda are readily circulated through digital channels. The prevalence of post-truth discourse poses a significant threat to the integrity of public discourse and democratic decision-making processes.

## **2. Mainstream Media's Responsibility**

Amidst the noise and distortions, mainstream media outlets bear the responsibility of maintaining reliability and upholding journalistic ethics. They must act as trusted sources of information, diligently fact-checking and verifying claims before dissemination. By adhering to journalistic standards and promoting transparency, mainstream media can counteract the spread of post-factual information and provide a reliable foundation for public understanding.

## **3. A Critical Post-Humanistic Perspective**

When examining technological advancements, it is crucial to adopt a critical post-humanistic perspective. Rather than using terms like "digital disruption," which can imply a sense of upheaval, we should consider the concept of "digital transformation." This mindset allows us to evaluate the impact of technology holistically, considering both the benefits and potential risks. By critically engaging with technology, we can harness its potential for positive change while mitigating the negative consequences.

## **4. Digital Platforms and the Younger Generation**

Digital platforms have become invaluable tools for the younger generation, providing a platform for self-expression, creativity, and information-sharing. Social media, online communities, and digital content creation have democratized access to information, giving rise to new voices and perspectives. However, it is essential to foster digital literacy among young users, enabling them to navigate the vast digital landscape critically.

## **5. Evolving Landscape of Conventional Media Platforms**

Conventional media platforms have been significantly impacted by the rise of digital transformation. Many have been compelled to adapt and shift their operations to digital platforms to remain relevant. Dr. M.S. Harikumar opined that this transition has affected various domains, including academia, where program structures have undergone changes to incorporate new technological developments. However, there remains a need for closer interaction between academia and industry, particularly in post-graduate departments, to ensure the alignment of educational programs with real-world demands.

## **Media vs. Platform: Navigating the Complexities of Digital Disruption**

In the digital age, the distinction between media and platform has become blurred. Mr. S. Biju said that he describes himself as an audio-visual journalist.

He then ventured to give a distinction between media and platform. While media traditionally referred to audio-visual content, platforms now encompass a wide range of mediums such as television, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

### **1. Feedback in Social Media: Differentiating Genuine from Orchestrated**

In the current scenario, feedback in social media holds significant relevance. However, it is important to differentiate between genuine feedback and organized attacks against mainstream media. Social media platforms often curate feedback, creating an echo chamber effect that amplifies certain perspectives. To combat the proliferation of misinformation, human agency plays a critical role in identifying and addressing fake news, leveraging a critical post-humanistic approach that combines technological advancements with human judgment.

### **2. The Influence of Digital Media on Global Discourse**

The emergence of digital media has led to a paradigm shift in the relationship between news consumers and media. Previously, print media engaged readers, while electronic media addressed engaged viewers. However, in the era of social media disruptions, readers and viewers have transformed into enraged individuals. Mr. Johny Lukose wittfully said, “Amartya Sen’s ‘Argumentative Indian’ is now an outraged Indian.” The global public discourse is significantly influenced by digital media, leading to polarized opinions and heightened outrage.

Connectivity offered by digital platforms presents a unique challenge in balancing freedom of speech with the responsibility of ensuring sensitive communication. Mr. Johny Lukose added that digital disruptions often override the critical markers of journalism, such as fairness, balance, and verification. To bridge this gap, mainstream media must find a balance with emerging technologies, leveraging human agency to preserve the integrity of news reporting and provide authentic information to the public.

### **3. Confirmation Bias and the Need for Authenticating Sources**

Despite the rise of social media, people still rely on mainstream media to authenticate the news they receive. Confirmation bias, however, remains a significant challenge as individuals often seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs. This reinforces the importance of responsible journalism, fact-checking, and providing a variety of perspectives to foster a more informed society.

#### **4. Regulating Technology and Preserving Human Agency**

As technology continues to evolve, it is crucial to consider possible global unemployment and the impact on human agency in the communication process. Regulating technology is essential to ensure its responsible and ethical use. While disruptions may be transient, human agency remains persistent, playing a vital role in navigating and harnessing the potential of emerging technologies.

#### **Conclusion**

The disruptive impact of digital experiences on the world of media is undeniable. From the fragmentation of society into ideological silos to the erosion of informed decision-making and the decline of deliberative democracy, these disruptions have far-reaching consequences.

Finding truth in the current media landscape is indeed challenging, with the proliferation of echo chambers, discrediting voices, disruptive influences, and trivialization of news. However, the quest for truth remains essential for a well-informed society and a robust democracy.

The digital disruption of media and platforms brings both opportunities and challenges. The networked world has granted individuals newfound agency as nodal points, disrupting traditional power structures in media content, style, and distribution. This disruptive landscape has given rise to newspeak, post-truth narratives, and challenges in distinguishing fact from falsehood. Mainstream media plays a crucial role in upholding reliability and countering post-factual information. A critical post-humanistic perspective allows for a comprehensive evaluation of technological developments. Digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for the younger generation, while conventional media platforms must adapt to the digital transformation. By navigating this evolving landscape thoughtfully, we can harness the potential of the networked world while ensuring the integrity and reliability of information in a post-factual society.

It is imperative to recognize the need for balanced and inclusive digital platforms that foster meaningful dialogue, promote impartiality, and prioritize the public interest. Only through a collective effort can we reclaim the essence of media as a medium of information, engagement, and responsible journalism in the digital era.

However, differentiating between genuine feedback and orchestrated attacks is very much needed of the hour. Mainstream media's role in authenticating news and countering confirmation bias remains crucial. As technology

advances, preserving human agency and regulating its use are vital for maintaining a responsible and informed society. By embracing these complexities and finding a harmonious balance, the media can adapt to the emerging technology landscape while upholding its core values and responsibilities to the public.

By recognizing the pitfalls of the echo-chamber effect, resisting the temptation of sensationalism, and prioritizing factual reporting, the media can reclaim its role as a reliable source of information. Only through a commitment to objective journalism can we pierce through the haystack of misinformation and uncover the needle of truth.