MEDIA INDEPENDENCE AND ITS REPORTING

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Media Independence is of utmost importance and must be diligently maintained, especially amidst the recent coronavirus pandemic. However, this has not been the case, as per various international reportings. There has been an increased control over the media on grounds of regulation of fake content, only to censor critical journalists. Various news outlets have been required to register with regulators and authorities that either have a politcial or commercial edge in society. Criticisms towards such influential and powerful figures in particular, have been targeted on grounds of "negatively affecting personal data and privacy." In addition to the aforementioned, as various economies around the world have suffered greatly, economic pressure on the media has increased. As priorities have shifted, public resources invested in independent media have also reduced. This only further proves that, in times of crises, various media outlets are used as propaganda channels for either political or commercial purposes, rather than for the public. Such abuse of media independence by individuals or groups in positions of power is termed as "media capture". Thus, this has led to growing public distrust in the media. In 2012, online media had temporarily regained public trust. However, it was later revealed that online media was also equally susceptible to outside influences. Major companies like Google, Facebook and Google news are known for using certain algorithmic patterns that remove professional editorial judgement, in favor of past consumption patterns by the individual user and his/her social network. However, in response to this, there have been certain digital companies that have used this as an opportunity to showcase their reliability in the face of misinformation. Many internet companies have also launched features that enable users to report certain accounts, posts, or other outlets that are pro- racist, pro- misogyny and otherwise violently extreme. Satellite delivered channels, which are delivered directly to the viewers undergo the risk of much unregulated programming. Various efforts have been made to regulate this platform by parts of Western Europe, North American, Arabian and the Asia and Pacific regions.

Self- regulated bodies are the preferred medium of transmitting information to the masses by many journalists, the public, and UNESCO along with many non – profit organisations. In Africa, the Arab States and the Asia- Pacific region, journalists have self-reported substantial increases of journalistic autonomy. Many journalists have taken to various media outlets, both in print and through digital mediums, to deliver news and their opinions on them, which include criticisms. However, certain regions such as parts of Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, still face obstacles due to increased legislations and ban on foreign funding to support the media.

Although there have been many instances of a lack in media independence in the recent times, intensified reactions from civil society, international organisations, internet companies and media industry has helped to mitigate the impact. There are many more ways in which media independence can be further ensured. To preserve the independence of media, we must first preserve the independence of the judiciary. All the legal rights of the media must be respected and maintained by the judiciary. Legal mechanisms should be in place to help the media to preserve it's autonomy from the influence of political or commercial powers. Laws that ensure fair and transparent allocation of government funding to the media should be in place. Regulations on ensuring the transparency of the algorithms and policies used to remove and add certain contents online must be made. Incentives on influencing the media and internet companies to work together in order to fight against misinformation must also be considered. International intergovernmental organisations such as the UNESCO, UN and so on must ensure that governments refrain from enforcing laws that curb the freedom of speech of journalists and restrict their independence. Future journalists must be trained to cope with media capture, negotiate with power and maintain the integrity of journalists.