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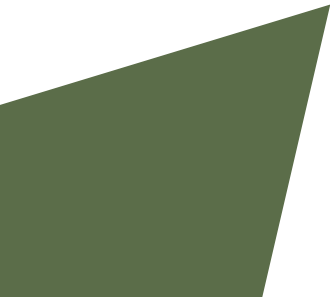
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## ABOUT US

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LexForti is a free open access peer-reviewed journal, which gives insight upon broad and dynamic legal issues. The very objective of the LexForti is to provide open and free access to knowledge to everyone. LexForti is highly committed to helping law students to get their research articles published and an avenue to the aspiring students, teachers and scholars to make a contribution in the legal sphere. LexForti revolves around the firmament of legal issues; consisting of corporate law, family law, contract law, taxation, alternative dispute resolution, IP Laws, Criminal Laws and various other Civil issues.



**Role of Media Houses during the Pandemic of Covid-19**

**Torsha Datta Choudhuri**

There have always been unwanted noises or inputs along with the noticeable ones around the world. We humans would become stagnant or simply our growth will succumb without knowing what is happening around the globe. In this era of technology, we do not have limited sources of information; rather we can go to any extent to find out about anything that is happening far away in some other side of the globe. We tend to believe what is being told to us or being shown to us. The most reliable source we tend to lean upon is the media houses. These may include the news channels, the newspapers, the renowned magazines, i.e. the press media. To be more deep and precise, we indirectly rely on the media persons. We tend to believe everything what is being or shown by them and react accordingly.

We are very well aware of the situation which we all are going through. We are not only concerned only with the condition of our country; the whole community is vulnerable to the disease. We are thoroughly keeping an eye with the things happening around the world. As Covid-19 spreads, so do the levels of anxiety around what we know and don't know, who and what to trust, and how to stay safe- physically and mentally- as journalists working in uncertain conditions. Where there has been a huge hassle in everyone's life and everyone is being locked up in their houses, the media persons are among the other Covid warriors who are constantly getting us the live update about the dreadful virus. Amidst the ongoing pandemic and we deliberately knowing that the right information about this totally unknown virus is important, we have pushed ourselves to believe everything being told by the new channel and the newspaper. Recognizing the danger, **United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** has warned that "our enemy is also the growing surge of misinformation". The **World Health Organization** has described – as a "second disease" accompanying the Covid-19 pandemic – an "**infodemic**" which is "an over-abundance of information- some accurate and some not- that makes it hard for the people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it". This is really scary to even think when misinformation can be very sensitive to the people receiving it. Statistics have shown some unimaginable figures:

- 📊 Based on a machine learning analysis of 112 million public social media posts, in 64 languages, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers at the **Bruno Kessler Foundation** found 40% of posts came from unreliable sources.
- 📊 Another study using machine learning techniques, by the Foundation's **COVID-19 Infodemic Observatory**, found that almost 42% of over 178 million tweets related to COVID-19 were produced by bots, and 40% were "unreliable".

- ✚ Roughly 1/3 of social media users have reported seeing false or misleading information about the corona virus, says a study by the **Reuters Institute** carried out in six countries. Research by Pew suggests that people who receive their news primarily through social media are more likely to be exposed to false content.
- ✚ In March, about 40 million problematic posts related to COVID-19 on Facebook were identified (and had warnings placed next to them), according to the company. “Hundreds of thousands of pieces of misinformation about the virus that could lead to imminent physical harm,” were also removed, it added.
- ✚ Approximately 19 million out of nearly 50 million (38%) tweets related to COVID-19 analyzed using artificial intelligence by **Blackbird.AI** were deemed to be “manipulated content”.
- ✚ **Newsguard** identified 191 websites in Europe and North America that have published false information about the virus.
- ✚ The **CoronaVirusFacts Alliance** has discovered - and disproved - more than 3,500 false or misleading pieces of information, in more than 70 countries and in more than 40 languages.<sup>1</sup>

This is miserable to see that people are being kept on dark regarding the valid information given by authentic sources. The scenario had been like this from decades. The media has been using its press freedoms and rights ever since the democracy and we, as responsible citizens have not anything against it. But when it comes to providing information which is not meant to be produced or can create trouble to the society, the rights are of no use. The Indian Constitution provides the right to freedom of speech and expression in Article 19(1) (a). However, the section does not expressly imply right to freedom of speech. Although, from the time being, it is now well settled that the words “speech and expression” in Article 19(1) includes freedom of speech. In **Indian Express Newspaper v. Union of India**<sup>2</sup>, it has been held that media plays a very significant role in the democratic machinery. The courts have duty to uphold the freedom of press and invalidate all laws and administrative actions that abridge that freedom. Freedom of Press has three essential elements:

1. Freedom of access to all sources of information,
2. Freedom of publication, and
3. Freedom of circulation

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco\\_covid\\_brief\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_covid_brief_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/223504>



There are obviously reasonable restrictions to the freedom of press and something which is called media ethics. It is very essential on the part of the people involved in the media community to be sensible to what they believe they should let us know. There should not be any misinformation communicated which could pave the path of people panicking every time. The core principle of ethical journalism includes truth, accuracy, fairness and impartiality, humanity, accountability and independence<sup>3</sup>. As society is build upon the pillars of trust and honesty, the people blindly trust the media reports and take actions accordingly.

I would take just a small example of a situation where I felt that a little amount of sensitivity could have been maintained by the media persons during the tough times. We all have been sticking to our televisions and newspapers ever since the outbreak of the horrifying virus to get the information about the latest updates of the same. We have been keen to know about the guidelines given the WHO and the United Nations unanimously to keep us safe and protected. The thing that was worth noticing was the news channels showing the increasing number of cases and the way virus was spreading throughout the globe. In these times of anxiety, the only relief was that we have been trying to follow the necessary guideline and the government taking utmost precaution and doing its best to stop the spread. It's been almost four months of the lockdown and the uncertain position we are in, I'm sure that most of us now when we look back to the initial days or even in the recent times, feel a bit of relief when we see the recoveries crossing the active cases with higher speed. This, in a way, reduces a lot of anxiety among the people. We have seen the journalists showing the empty roads, the silence that is prevailing in every sphere of the society and looking at all these things was scary. The list is long when I talk about the news channels showing the pictures or even the way or the expressions they are using to communicate are horrifying. Maybe everything they are telling are to a certain point correct or maybe sometime just over reacting to some news makes this even more dangerous.

There have been a whole lot of issues regarding the freedom of press and media even before the outburst of the virus, but the media needs to understand that when right to speech and expression is granted it comes with certain exception. The misinformation or the fake news spreading all over is again not at all related to right of press or media and that these are totally different dimensions altogether. The new disease “infodemic” that is spreading at even more higher rates is more dangerous than the virus. The media persons should understand their responsibilities towards the society in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/media-ethics-safety-and-mental-health-reporting-in-the-time-of-covid-19>

building a pure and trustworthy relationship with the citizens in delivering accurate and true information regarding any matter.