



Center for  
Research &  
Security  
Studies

*Rule of Law - Security - Governance*

# Working for Collective Peace and Development: How to Defeat Fake News



## Working for Collective Peace and Development:

### How to defeat fake news



The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) conducted a two-day collaborative workshop, titled, “Working for Collective Peace and Development: How to defeat fake news,” for young journalists from Balochistan. This session was held from August 7th to 8th, 2022, at CRSS office, Islamabad. The workshop included a panel of expert journalists/media professionals engaging in a critical discussion with the trainees on how to combat fake news, why it's vital to build journalist’s capacity to recognise false information and how to assess the credibility of news sources.

### **Mr. Zaigham Khan**





Mr Zaigham Khan, Political Analyst and Columnist, The News, was the first speaker of the day and the topic of his session was “Responsible Journalism: How to be objective and informative.” He began by highlighting the significance of the following crucial elements of journalism:

- I. *Objectivity* in journalism; a mechanism that separates truth from fact. While covering hard news, it’s important for reporters to not convey their own feelings, biases or prejudices in their stories.
- II. *Truthfulness*; a commitment to reporting only accurate and truthful information, without skewing any facts or details to improve the story or better align an issue with any certain agenda.
- III. *Neutrality*; stories be reported in an unbiased, even-handed and impartial manner.
- IV. *Detachment*; journalist must approach issues in an unbiased manner, with a dispassionate and emotionless attitude.

He further stated that qualities of a journalist are to be resourceful; access credible source of information, have a critical mindset; separate truth from propaganda and dogmas that may distort truth and conscientious; not supposed to use their influence in order to meet personal objectives and should be well aware of the consequences that may result from such actions.

He also emphasized that journalism is an ethical profession, it's critical to determine if a story is in the public interest or not. As journalists, we should never stray from our moral principles. Social media clips about personal matters, for instance, often surface, which is inappropriate whereas many cases are brought to light by insiders in government who leak information about corrupt cases; in that case, the information is released since it is in the public interest.

Furthermore, he explained implicit, explicit, and confirmation bias in journalism as well as ways to mitigate bias. He also engaged the participants in an activity by dividing them into two groups to discuss how objective journalism may be applied in each of their respective areas.

One of the participants shared his personal experience about the prevalence of bias reporting in his area. He explained how he submitted a news article mentioning two significant parties, but they completely censored the name of the other party and also withheld some crucial information. Hence, it is important to bring about a change by not being close-minded, prejudicial or unfair while disclosing news to the public.

Lastly, Mr Zaigham, cited Edward De Bono, the creator of the term "lateral thinking", and encouraged the participants to use this approach as a tool for creativity that fosters innovation in their daily lives. He also shared De Bono's concept of The Six Thinking Hats, which empower and motivate a group of people to think constructively in implementing change rather than debating over who is right and who is wrong.

## Mr. Iftikhar Shirazi



Mr Iftikhar Shirazi, Bureau Chief, Dawn TV, spoke on the topic of “Reducing space for fake news and motivated news: Write constructive articles for collective good.”

He began by highlighting how fake news is deliberately created to distort people's perception of reality or is politically motivated or linked to other hidden goals.

Social media is more widely used in Pakistan than it is in Saudi Arabia, China, or Iran, making it relatively easier to access information here. The spread of fake news on social media and other internet platforms like Facebook and Twitter has become a major concern in recent years as people are less likely to critically evaluate news that is shared by friends or that supports their preexisting beliefs. Pakistan must therefore regulate and verify information sources more than ever, especially since it continues to be a central focus of global news and international campaigns, he stated.

He quoted a popular example of 2016 on how Twitter played a decisive role in both the presidential election in the US and the UK’s Brexit referendum. Both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have argued that these factors were instrumental in the 2016 election outcome.

He also added that journalists frequently become overly impulsive and hyperactive while publishing news without proper checks and verification, thus it is important to exercise caution and patience when disseminating information.

Lastly, he stated how the youth of Pakistan are being targeted by Fifth-generation Warfare. Regarding the economic and security conditions in various regions of Pakistan, foreign powers have spread false information to polarize Pakistan's minority groups, religious sects, and ethnic communities. Hence it is crucial that social media be regulated to limit the spread of false information that undermines the sociopolitical fabric of the country.

## Mr. Sabookh Syed



Mr Sabookh Syed, President, Digital Media alliance of Pakistan, kicked off his session on the second day of the workshop on the topic of “Role of Journalism for promoting collective good, peace and development.”

He argued that Pakistan's mainstream media never covers content based on education, health, children, or films. Its sole objective is to cover politics, which has created polarisation in society. However, this is an opportunity for journalists to work together in promoting an environment that respects different viewpoints.

He emphasized that in being a successful journalist, you need more than just covering breaking events; one should be able to identify, observe and assess relevant information. Also, to report with empathy and compassion and do extensive study before disseminating it to the general audience.

Although it can be challenging for the media to strike a balance between putting an end to hate speech and upholding individual rights, this is where good journalism plays a crucial role. As journalists, it should be our duty to evaluate the situation critically before reporting on events.

He also encouraged the participants to continue with local journalism as it is the only way to get unbiased, accurate, timely news that is generated in a transparent manner with no room for false information or rumours.

Lastly, he emphasised that while critical thinking is crucial to all quality reporting, it often goes too far in mainstream media, creating negative perceptions of society. Therefore, we should employ constructive journalism as it seeks to promote public discourse by debating not only around important problems, but also around possible solutions.

## Ms Fauzia Rana



Ms Fauzia Rana, Associate Producer, Aaj TV, spoke on “A War of Narratives: How Western media distorts and twists facts against rivals like China, Russia and Pakistan? She emphasized on how digital media is the biggest platform for disseminating false information with distorted facts. Deepening political polarization in Pakistan provides an ample space for twisting information, which could worsen Pakistan's internal and external vulnerabilities.

She then led the group discussion on what participants believed to be the reasons for western media's propaganda against China, Russia and Pakistan. Participants cited the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, claiming that people are hearing only one side of the story from Ukraine and have heard nothing new about Russia as western media only promotes information that serves its own interest.

She also cited the example of CPEC, when misinformation had been propagated by several local and international publications, claiming that Pakistan might become a colony or province of China, and that Pakistan is faced with a debt-trap as a result of Chinese loans. The ultimate goal here was to make CPEC more controversial and to represent a negative image of China around the world.

Another example is post 9/11 incident, stigmatizing every terrorist as a muslim, these negative stereotypes continue to jeopardize the security of Americans who are Muslim or are perceived as Muslim in the western world.

The activity continued with a debate on how crises are used by Western media to dramatise breaking news, but far too often they are just joint fabrications.

Ms Rana also elaborated on the crucial measures to combat fake news, which include media literacy, fact-checking, and the establishment of stringent laws. Journalists must apply these tools to produce better, more original reporting.

## Mr Imtiaz Gul-Closing Session



Mr Imtiaz Gul started his session by highlighting the role of western media and how it impacts and shapes our perception.

He gave the example of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine where US is portraying its image as a supportive ally in promoting human rights and freedom without mentioning how it has deep vested interests economically, case in point, it owns 170,000 hectares of land in Ukraine for its off-shore companies.

He also stated that how in today's geo-political world, power is not solely obtained through the gun but more through economic strength and interests. He quoted the example of how India annexed Kashmir as an integral part of India, giving non-Kashmiris local rights. This was blatant disregard for Kashmiri rights and freedom. However, on the international forum/media, the U.S. and Western nations chose to look the other way as they consider India to be their ally and a huge market for their exports.

He further emphasized how western media is very cautious in creating a soft image of US whereas the reality is far from it. He showed a clip to the participants of "Nicaragua's President, Daniel Ortega on U.S. provocation against China". In that video, the President has criticized the US for its aggressive policies in the past. He explained how China is investing billions in Asia, Africa and Latin America and helping the people economically whereas the US has normally invaded countries for its own economic benefit. Case in point of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The video underscored the difference of perceptions and how it plays out in the media and affects the public, in general.

Finally, he stressed the importance of critical thinking as one of the key factors to counter misinformation and fake news. Young journalists should develop and practice critical thinking on

how to truthfully report the information and question preconceived notions and narratives about media.

Journalists have a responsibility to improve the standard of discourse by providing reliable and accurate information. They should also focus on the context of the news and detach themselves from subjective emotions while reporting.

## **Feedback on Trainers**

### **Zaigham Khan**

- An informative session regarding the role of journalism and how to remain objective. It was quite interactive as we learned different kinds of biases and how it's very important to be neutral, without having any prejudice.
- The session was very fruitful as it helped develop our understanding on how to truthfully report in journalism and be free from fake propaganda.

### **Iftikhar Shirazi**

- The session offered an in-depth understanding of the authenticity of news in order to bring out the raw facts within journalism.
- The trainer went into great depth about how to exercise caution when it comes to the internet spread of false information as it is a big source of concern for all members of society, including the government, lawmakers, organisations, corporations, and citizens. Since false news can deliberately try to mislead viewers by pushing a specific viewpoint or position that may not be genuine, it is imperative for journalists to promote authentic news.

### **Sabook Syed**

- The session was productive as we learned that the primary objective while analyzing news is "to question." A good journalist is one who constantly asks questions.
- The trainer also emphasized on how ethical journalists need to treat sources, subjects, and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.

### **Fauzia Rana**

- The trainer gave an insight as to how the media, in particular, is crucial in shaping and propagating narratives, and that as journalists, we must always use fact-checking tools while reporting on certain stories.
- The session also helped us understand how extensively the western media distorts facts about countries like Pakistan and China while completely ignoring the local political realities that exist on the ground.

### **Imtiaz Gul**

- We learned how crucial it is to practise responsible journalism, which is to be as accurate, fair, and comprehensive as possible. Journalists should always uphold the highest standards of journalism and be truthful with their readers.



- Session also emphasized on how important it is for journalists to understand the context behind the news being reported in order to avoid introducing bias or personal beliefs in their reporting.
- The workshop stressed the need to think critically and independently rather than to blindly accept information in order to be a responsible journalist.

#### News Links

<https://propakistani.pk/2022/08/10/critical-thinking-must-for-objectivity-in-journalism-experts/>

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/981254-critical-thinking-must-for-objectivity-in-journalism>

<https://matrixmag.com/critical-thinking-must-for-objectivity-in-journalism/>