

This Insert consists of 3 printed pages.

**Passage 1.** *An author considers the impact of the media on empathy and action.*

- 1 Our grandparents could afford a comforting distance from tragedy. Oceans and weeks separated them, allowing misfortune to remain a distant murmur, easily tuned out. But for today's generation, information floods our senses constantly – a child marriage in Chad, a drought in Delhi, a mine collapse in Mongolia ... Of course, this excess of information is often criticised for fuelling anxiety. Yet, it is the very spark that can ignite a global movement for positive change. 5
- 2 The internet has become the great equaliser for this generation. No longer is the power to inform solely in the hands of a privileged few. Social media platforms, with their algorithmic feeds and viral content, have made information more widely available to everyone. To give just one telling example, note how ferociously the Arab Spring swept through the Middle East in a series of revolutions. Information in the hands of the many is a powerful thing. The internet has levelled the playing field for ordinary youths in these countries, empowering them to transcend borders and coordinate protests, share grievances, and mobilise support through social media platforms – a feat unimaginable in the face of the information blackouts of previous generations. 10
- 3 What matters is that this newfound global consciousness fosters empathy that in turn, prompts collective action. The heart-wrenching image of a starving child in a war-torn nation, once confined to a blurry black and white photograph on a forgotten newsreel, now stares back at us from our smartphones in full, agonising colour, cultivating empathy worldwide. This sensitivity towards suffering enables us to channel our emotions to constructive acts such as donating to relief efforts or raising our voices in protest. 15
- 4 This multitude of information comes with challenges. In particular, we fall for misinformation more easily since fake news travels faster and more widely online than facts. But here too, awareness is the key in detecting misinformation. The internet has birthed a generation of fact-checkers and critical thinkers, essential players in a world saturated with information. By staying vigilant and knowledgeable about the means and methods of misinformation, individuals can better discern truth from falsehood. 20  
25
- 5 Our grandparents might have preferred to act like the proverbial ostriches who stuck their heads in the sand to avoid danger. But we are not them. We can no longer afford to turn the page or switch off the radio when the news does not suit us. What we are doing instead is dissecting the noise to do what is necessary. Who knows? The rest of us may be emboldened to take similar actions to benefit the world we are living in. 30



**Passage 2.** *An author writes about the power of the media to desensitise.*

- 1 The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception and attitudes, but it also has the capacity to desensitise audiences; gradually numbing them to violence, tragedy and suffering around them. This desensitisation occurs through the constant exposure to graphic images. The 24-hour news cycle repeatedly shows violent incidents, natural disasters, and human suffering, which can lead to viewers becoming indifferent to these events. As the shock value diminishes, the audience may start to view these occurrences as routine, thereby reducing the emotional impact and urgency that should accompany such news. This phenomenon is compounded by the media's tendency to prioritise sensationalism over sensitivity, often focussing on the most shocking aspects of a story to maintain viewer engagement and ratings. 5
- 2 The impact of media desensitisation extends beyond individual emotional responses; it influences societal attitudes and behaviours. When people become accustomed to seeing violence and suffering without a corresponding emotional response, there is a risk that they may become less empathetic and more apathetic towards real-life situations. This can lead to a decreased willingness to engage in social or political action aimed at addressing these issues. For instance, continuous exposure to reports of war or poverty may result in the public perceiving these issues as intractable and less worthy of their concern or intervention. Moreover, this desensitisation can lead to a society becoming more accepting of these conditions as part of the status quo. 10 15
- 3 Furthermore, media desensitisation has profound implications for mental health. Constant exposure to traumatic content can lead to a lack of emotional response. Over time, this desensitisation may make individuals more susceptible to experiencing psychological stress because they no longer have the same emotional barriers in place to protect themselves from the effects of traumatic content. Additionally, the constant barrage of negative news can create a sense of fear or helplessness, contributing to overall psychological distress. This is particularly alarming for children and adolescents, who are more impressionable and may not have the emotional maturity to process such information appropriately. The cumulative effect of desensitisation can also lead to a phenomenon known as 'compassion fatigue', where individuals become so overwhelmed by the volume of distressing information that they emotionally shut down, becoming less likely to help those in need. Therefore, while the media plays a critical role in informing the public, there is a pressing need for responsible reporting practices that balance the necessity of conveying important information with the potential psychological impact on the audience. 20 25 30

**Passage 3.** *A doctor provides his perspective on the impacts of the media on public health today.*

- 1 As a physician, I navigate a world of facts, statistics, and clinical trials. Yet, stepping outside the sterile walls of the hospital, I encounter a very different landscape of information from the ever-churning media machine. It is a world with a profound impact on public health, and one I find myself viewing with a mix of hope and trepidation.
- 2 On the optimistic side, the sheer volume and accessibility of health information has empowered patients in a way I would not have imagined even a decade ago. For instance, news stories on groundbreaking research findings can spark hope in patients battling chronic illnesses. Social media campaigns can raise awareness about neglected diseases and connect patients with support groups. A well-crafted documentary can illuminate the struggles of those navigating a complex healthcare system, fostering empathy and understanding. This democratisation of information allows individuals to take charge of their well-being, a shift that can dramatically improve health outcomes. 5 10
- 3 However, it is not always a clear picture. The relentless barrage of information, particularly graphic visuals and emotionally charged reports, can create a constant state of anxiety. News outlets compete for attention, often resorting to sensationalism. This can distort our perception of risk, leading to fear mongering and a warped understanding of health threats. Furthermore, the focus on extreme cases can overshadow the countless success stories in medicine. 15
- 4 The solution lies not in restricting information, but in cultivating media literacy. Doctors need to be better equipped to communicate complex medical topics clearly and concisely. Journalists, in turn, have a responsibility to fact-check information and provide context. Perhaps most importantly, we as individuals need to develop a critical eye, scrutinising information for its source and evidence base. 20

