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Populism, power and media in focus at MediaCon 2026



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Populism, power and the changing role of media were at the forefront at MediaCon 2026, hosted by St. Joseph's University, as filmmakers, journalists and academics examined how media shapes political discourse in an increasingly polarised world.

Film director Dibakar Banerjee, delivering the keynote address at the inaugural ceremony of the 10th edition of the MediaCon International Conference and the Association fests of the School of Communication and Media Studies (SCMS), urged students to prepare intellectually for what he described as a “big bad world”.

"Populism and authoritarianism will no longer be abstract political ideas. They will confront you through everyday decisions," Banerjee said, adding that time spent in "practising your dreams, flexing your brains, and figuring out what you want to do and what you don't want to do" would determine how well young people navigate emerging social and political complexities.

The inaugural ceremony, held on Friday, January 23, was presided over by Vice-Chancellor Rev. Dr Victor Lobo, Registrar Dr Wajeed Sayed, Dean of SCMS Dr Melwyn Pinto, Head of Department Dr Marudhu Pandiyan, and conference coordinators Shabin PK, Dr Rupa Peter, Ajay Chandran, Jenil George and Suhas Srinivas.

Addressing the gathering, Rev. Dr Lobo underscored the ethical responsibility of media professionals. "Media is power. Use it with care. What you create can divide or heal," he said, noting that creativity in cinema, advertising and animation carries social responsibility.

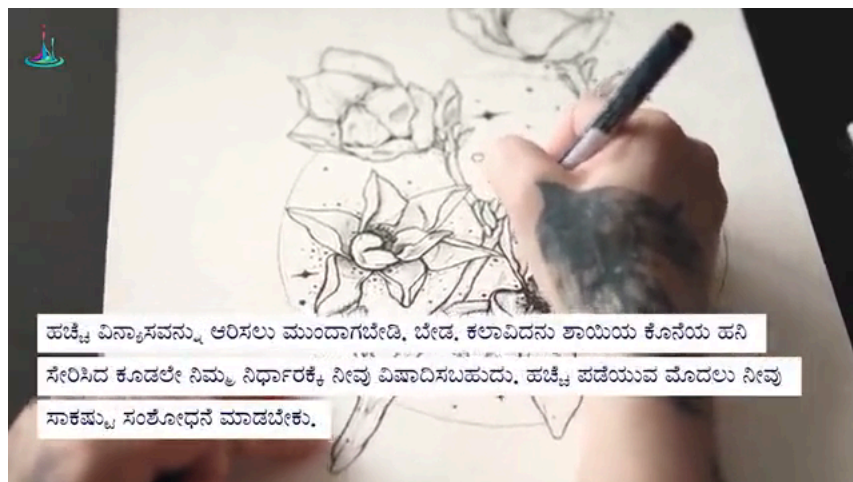
Themed Populism and Media, MediaCon 2026 examined how digital platforms, legacy media and alternative voices influence political narratives, public opinion and democratic participation. “We live in a world of populism today,” Dr Pinto said, adding that in many countries democracy has increasingly been “turned into a drama enacted by populist leaders”.

The inaugural session was followed by a panel discussion titled 'From Gatekeepers to Algorithms', moderated by Dr Naresh Rao of CHRIST (Deemed to be University). The panel featured Subash Rai, digital editor at The Hindu; journalist and author Ammu Joseph; and Pranav MB, communications lead at the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS).

The discussion focused on how algorithm-driven platforms have reshaped news dissemination. “The rise of right-wing populism is the problem,” Rai said, pointing to the shift from editorial gatekeeping to business models that reward outrage and amplification, thereby worsening the spread of divisive content.

The first day of MediaCon 2026 saw participation from students, academicians and media professionals, marking a strong opening to the conference.

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