

# Breaking the News Barrier: Towards Understanding News Consumption Practices among BVI Individuals in India

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# Motivation

136 Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism | Digital News Report 2024

## INDIA

Population 1,402m  
Internet penetration 60%



For much of the year India's media have been engaged in covering parliamentary elections, won by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling alliance, albeit with a smaller majority than expected. The run-up to the elections saw a number of new laws passed, some replacing archaic legislation, which many fear may undermine press freedom in India.

Journalists and digital media groups have expressed concern about sweeping regulatory powers given to the government under the new laws. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP) gives powers to government-appointed board members to implement its provisions. Critics point out that the law also lacks exemptions for journalists to access personal data for doing journalistic work that might be in the public interest.<sup>136</sup> A second law, the Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, replacing earlier colonial era legislation, aims to simplify the process of registration of periodicals. However, concerns have been raised about the unspecified powers given to the government to issue guidelines or make rules under the Act. A third new law, the Telecommunications Act 2023, was passed when many opposition members were under suspension in the Parliament and it has raised concerns over its broad definitions of telecommunication services, and about excessive powers for surveillance, internet shutdowns, and government access to encrypted social media messages.<sup>137</sup>

In March, the central government's plans to make its fact-check unit under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting the core place to flag false information related to government business were put on hold by the Supreme Court. The Court noted that there were serious constitutional issues related to the government's move, which many media bodies have said will affect freedom of speech and expression.

In a move to restore transparency in electoral funding, the Supreme Court of India also intervened to strike down

electoral bonds, essentially anonymous ways of funding political parties. Noting it affected the voter's right to information, the court also directed the State Bank of India (SBI) to release information on electoral bonds purchased so far.<sup>138</sup> This ruling provided opportunities for digital platforms such as NewsLaundry and The News Minute to collaborate on investigative stories to cast light on the electoral funding of political parties in the country.

This year's Digital News Report survey shows declining trust for some news brands, at a time when the mainstream Indian media have also faced criticism for their coverage of the violence in the state of Manipur. The national and regional media's coverage of the tensions between the ethnic Kuki and Meitei communities in May last year was found lacking in context and balance. But concerns were also expressed about widespread misinformation via WhatsApp and other social media, which was fuelling tensions. The internet ban imposed by the government to control the situation adversely affected free flow of information for reporters within the region and alienated the rest of the country from crucial developments, a fact-finding report by the Editors' Guild of India noted.<sup>139</sup>

These developments highlight the widespread use of different social media and messaging apps for news in India. Our survey respondents reflect, in some measure, a new generation of Indians whose main source of news is often via social media platforms. Almost half of respondents use YouTube (54%) and WhatsApp (48%) for news each week, while Facebook and X are becoming less popular.

However, legacy platforms such as NDTV, Times of India, Republic TV, and BBC News continue to enjoy high viewership in their offline and online products, among our younger, urban, mostly English-speaking sample. Despite a general decline in interest in news over the years, print (60%) and TV (46%) remain popular platforms for respondents to access news, especially during this crucial election year.

After taking control of NDTV, AMG Media Networks, which is part of the powerful business conglomerate Adani Enterprises Ltd., has increased its stake in the news agency Indo-Asian News Service (ANS) and more recently in the company that runs the digital financial news platform IQ Prime. The Adani Group's expansion within the media landscape reflects the increasing corporatisation of media in India.<sup>140</sup>

In October, the offices and residences of journalists and journalists associated with the bilingual digital news portal NewsClick were raided by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police. The raids followed previous surveys and investigations by the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax Department, and other government agencies over alleged foreign funding received by the news organisation.<sup>141</sup> Journalists' unions and several independent press bodies have criticised the actions of the government agencies, which involved seizure of devices, and the use of terrorism charges against NewsClick as 'chilling' and an effort to muzzle press freedom.

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<sup>136</sup> <https://editorialguidelines.in/statements/issued/>  
<sup>137</sup> <https://www.prs.org.in/government/2024/03/20240320-digital-personal-data-protection-bill-digpdp>  
<sup>138</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sbi-court-bonds-scheme-until-2024-03-20/article67848212.ece>  
<sup>139</sup> <https://editorialguidelines.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IGI-report-on-Manipur.pdf>  
<sup>140</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/news/press-remaining-p-state-in-by-publisher-questions-business-media/articleshow/64687112.cms?from=mdr>  
<sup>141</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/journalist-bodies-condemn-raid-on-news-click-its-attempt-to-muzzle-the-press/articleshow/64643732.cms?from=mdr>

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### WEEKLY REACH OFFLINE AND ONLINE

**TV, RADIO, AND PRINT**

NDTV (see also TV News)	39
The Times of India	37
BBC News	32
Republic TV	31
Hindustan Times	31
Ujala Shikhar	27
India Today	27
DO India (public broadcaster)	25
Times Now	25
The Hindu	19
Regional or local newspaper	18
All India Radio (public broadcaster)	17
The Indian Express	17
CNN TV	15
LNH	15
The Economic Times	15

**ONLINE**

NDTV online	27
Hindustan Times online	25
BBC News online	23
The Times of India online	22
India Today online	19
Republic TV online	19
Hindustan Times online	18
DO News online (public broadcaster)	17
Ujala Shikhar online	15
Times Now News online	15
CNN.com	15
The Hindu online	14
The Indian Express online	14
The Economic Times online	13
The Hind	12
Headlines	12
NewsClick	10%
The Wire	9%
The Quint	9%
Scroll.in	8%
NewsLok	7%
Livemint	6%

**METHODOLOGY NOTE**  
These data are based on a survey of mainly English-speaking, online news users in India - a small subset of a larger, more diverse, media market. Findings in this online poll are not nationally representative and will tend to under-represent the continued importance of traditional media such as TV and print.

**SOURCES OF NEWS 2021-24**

Desktop (incl. serial mail)	82%
TV	71%
Social media	49%
Print	40%

**DEVICES FOR NEWS**

Computer	61%
Smartphone	79%
Tablet	44%

**TRUST**  
Overall trust in news increased slightly in this election year (41%). Among those included in our survey, large legacy media brands tend to retain the highest levels of trust, including public broadcasters like the BBC and All India Radio. Partisan commercial broadcasters and independent digital portals who are either uncritical or extremely critical of those in positions of power are actively distrusted by the respondents. As always, scores should not be seen as a measure of the quality or trustworthiness of the content itself.

**OVERALL TRUST SCORE 2021-24**

2021	38%
2024	41%

**41% OVERALL TRUST = 18/47 markets**

**PUBLIC OPINION ON BRAND TRUST**  
Only the brands listed were included in the survey. It should not be treated as a list of the most or least trusted brands, as it is not exhaustive.

Brand	Trust	Don't Trust	Don't Know
All India Radio	69%	19%	20%
BBC News	69%	14%	21%
CNN	59%	18%	20%
DO News	64%	15%	21%
Economic Times	65%	17%	19%
Hindustan Times	65%	16%	19%
India Today	63%	16%	21%
NDTV	63%	16%	21%
Regional or local newspaper	61%	18%	21%
Republic TV	57%	17%	26%
Scroll.in	49%	22%	29%
The Hindu	65%	17%	20%
The Indian Express	66%	16%	18%
The Times of India	57%	15%	16%
The Wire	57%	21%	22%

**WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX SCORE 2024**  
Score: 31.28 / 100  
**159** / 180

**TOP SOCIAL, MESSAGING, AND VIDEO NETWORKS**

Rank	Brand	For News	For All
1	YouTube	54% (-2)	71%
2	WhatsApp	48% (+1)	71%
3	Facebook	35% (-4)	50%
Rank	Brand	For News	For All
4	Instagram	33% (+1)	54%
5	Telegram	20% (-)	38%
6	X (formerly Twitter)	13% (-7)	21%

**45% SHARE NEWS** via social, messaging or email

“Being able to read text, find out information and know about the latest news has always been a challenge for those who cannot access the printed version, such as the visually-impaired.”

(Barbara Leporini, 2011)

“People with disabilities have been among the earliest adopters of Artificial Intelligence (AI) through interactive tools that they use every day.”

(Jeffrey P. Bigham and Patrick Carrington, 2018)

# The Indian Context



Over 35 million BVI individuals in India



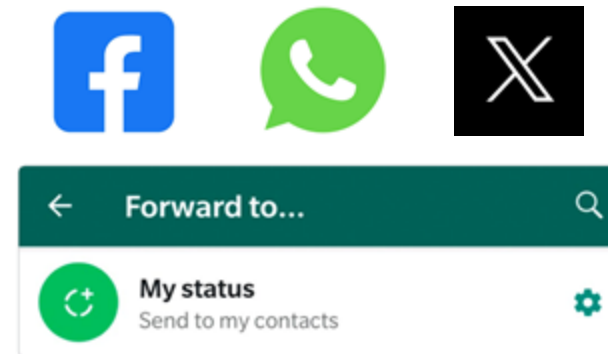
Non-compliance with accessibility laws



Youth & linguistic diversity



Mobile-first, platform dominated market



Active participation via social media



Widespread misinformation

# Research Questions

- 1 What drives news consumption preferences among BVI individuals in India?
- 2 What methods and infrastructure do BVI individuals currently use for interacting with news sources?
- 3 What are the primary barriers that they encounter in accessing (digital) news and their workarounds?



# Research Methods and Procedure

17 Participants, from 12 states of India

9

Urban

4

Semi-urban

4

Rural

- Average Age – 35.82 (SD: 12.41)
- 2 Female, 15 Male
- 13 congenitally blind, 4 acquired at different ages
- 10 Postgraduate Holders, 3 secondary or lower
- Languages: 7 (English, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, Sanskrit, Braj, Kannada)
- 11 participants consume news in >1 languages

1

Reached participants through Zoom, Microsoft Teams or normal call

2

Part 1: Screen shared walkthroughs of their news consumption using phone, laptop or tablet

3

Part 2: Semi-structured interviews around their news consumption practices

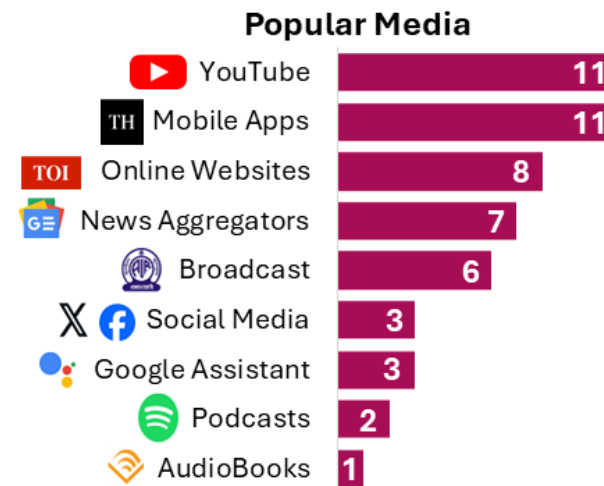
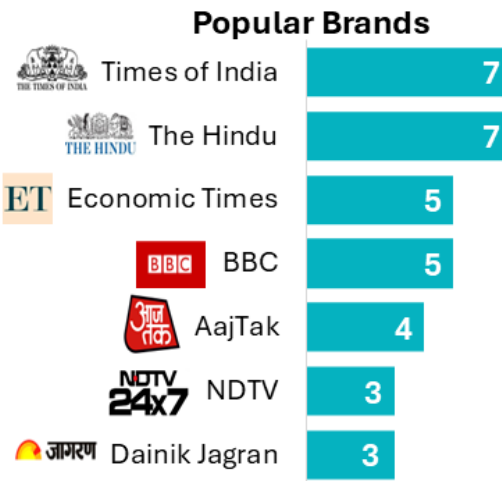
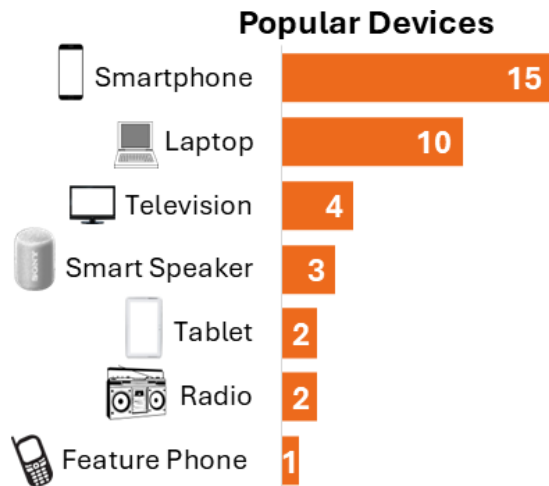
# Findings: Motivations and Preferences

“I have an inferiority complex, like I am far behind the world.” (P5)

“My main intention is to prepare for civil services and other government exams. For that, current affairs is very important. And we get to know about current affairs mostly through newspapers.” (P10)

## Social Participation and Mobility (8 participants)

## Career Aspirations and Knowledge (9 participants)



# Findings: News Engagement and Selection

“I consume news in two ways, by **reading** newspaper online, and by **listening** to some [news] videos on YouTube..” (P12)

## Active Engagement

Text-based modalities: Legacy websites/apps,  
Social media platforms, aggregators

## Passive Engagement

Audio-based modalities: YouTube, TV, radio,  
podcasts, Google Assistant

Source accessibility, while important, did not emerge as the predominant consideration.

### 1 Trust

“Typically, I only go to a particular source.. only authentic sources” (P7)

### 2 Coverage

“Economic Times is the worst app, but I use it a lot for my work” (P2)

### 3 Neutrality

“Once you start consuming news on a daily basis, you understand which media house is not neutral.” (P4)

# Findings: Barriers and Workarounds

The image displays three examples of digital content with associated barriers and workarounds:

- Example 1:** A screenshot of a livestream featuring Narendra Modi. A box labeled "Livestreams" points to the video. A box labeled "Paywalls" points to a "YOUR VOTE MATTERS" banner that says "WHAT YOU READ MATTERS TOO! Get 25% OFF on our annual plans!".
- Example 2:** A screenshot of a news page titled "The Hindu Explains". A box labeled "Unintuitive and Cluttered Layouts" points to the top navigation and article grid. A box labeled "Inaccessible Multimedia" points to a video player with a "Shorts" label.
- Example 3:** A screenshot of a financial table for "Tata Motors Share Price". A box labeled "Interactive Tables and Charts" points to the table and a line chart. A box labeled "Floating ads" points to an advertisement for "THE GODFATHER OF ENTERTAINMENT" and "EPSON" overlaid on the table.

**1** Human Infrastructure:  
Volunteer-driven e-Papers via email,  
Narrations on WhatsApp

**2** Assists:  
Ad blockers, OCRs (Text Freedom),  
Navigational shortcuts, Virtual viewer

**3** Alternatives:  
LIRE Reader,  
Chatbots/Virtual Assistants



# Findings: Impact of Limited Access

“I'm not getting the right information in the right time.” (P4)

Lag in Information Access

“Small local events like if there is a seminar in school, it is covered only in (print) newspapers. I miss out on all these events that I want to go to.” (P17)

Missing Local Information

“So, because I am accessing these sources on daily basis, I hardly find any difficulties. However, when you access a new source, then you start finding some difficulty.” (P1)

Sticking to the same sources

“When I have to read a news of my interest and I come across a graphic, I only have to do OCR, they should also care about our visually impaired community.” (P14)

Onus is on the BVI user

# Summary


In this work, we studied the current digital news consumption patterns of BVI individuals in India and found that news consumption patterns in the BVI community diverged from broader trends, with current access to news being, at best, patchy.

More details and discussions in the paper.

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