

The Evolving Landscape of Print Journalism in India: Opportunities and Challenges in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

Print journalism worldwide is facing unprecedented pressure due to rapid digital transformation and the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in content production, distribution and audience engagement. In most other global markets, print circulation has been declining but India's print sector has been relatively more resilient, even as digital media emerges as the primary channel to access news. This study examines the opportunities and challenges facing Indian print media as AI-driven transformation reshape the wider news ecosystem. This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach. The evidence was drawn from three categories of secondary sources: (i) national industry and regulatory data – the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the FICCI-EY India Media & Entertainment Report and the Press Registrar General of India (PRGI); (ii) international comparative survey data – the Reuters Institute Digital News Report and Pew Research Center's reporting on youth news habits; and (iii) peer-reviewed and published scholarship on digital and AI-driven journalism.

India's internet subscriber base crossed 1.03 billion by December 2025 (TRAI) and digital advertising makes up about two-thirds of total media ad spend. Yet print advertising revenue in India grew by a modest ~2% in 2025, even as subscription and circulation revenue continued a slow decline of roughly 1% (FICCI-EY, 2026). This pattern, modest but resilient, not the "tremendous growth" sometimes claimed in trade commentary, and not collapse either; sits in contrast to sharper print declines recorded internationally. The resilience of Indian print media, which is an anomaly in the global context, seems linked to the relatively lower cost of newsprint as a proportion of household income, a voracious readership in regional languages and the credibility of print vis-à-vis digital and social media.

Keywords: *print journalism; artificial intelligence; Indian media; digital transformation; news consumption*

INTRODUCTION

Print journalism began with the Acta Diurna and Acta Senatus of the Roman Empire which were public notice boards for political and social events (Saragih & Harahap, 2020). Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the medium by making it possible to print text in mass quantities, eventually giving rise to newspapers, tabloids and magazines as we know them today. What had started as a purely technical exercise in the reproduction of text on a large scale gradually became a genuine social and political revolution. The content of printed material became more secular and practical, and popular pamphlets and political or religious tracts written in the vernacular lay at the heart of the wider transformation of public life in the medieval and early modern periods.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is warming the news media industry. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are automating the whole news production process, from content creation to audience engagement and dissemination (Ashfaq et al., 2022). These tools allow news organizations to produce more content, more quickly, distribute it more effectively and engage with viewers in new ways. Automated content generation is one of the most common uses. AI systems may produce news articles, social media postings, and other content formats from structured data by utilizing machine learning and natural language processing. For example, they can automatically produce articles about weather updates, corporate earnings reports, and sports scores (Ashfaq et al., 2022). This paper examines how this AI-driven transformation interacts with India's distinctive print media landscape, and what it implies for the sector's medium-term viability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Rise of Digital Media

A sizable and expanding portion of the population now primarily gets news and entertainment from digital media due to the increasing use of smartphones and internet connectivity. As on December 2025, India had about 1,028.61 million internet users, TRAI said. The graph depicts the impact of digital technology on Indian media consumption and it shows that almost everyone has access to the internet (TRAI, 2026).

The change also affected who was allowed to practice journalism. The public at large is able to create and distribute information alongside, and often in competition with, professional journalists and established media outlets via digital platforms. The appearance of the "prosumer", a person who produces and consumes information, blurring a distinction that was clear during the industrial era, was predicted by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* (Toffler, 1980). In the present Indian news landscape, professional reporting coexists with citizen journalism, blogging, and social media commentary as recognized (though not necessarily reliable) news sources.

Print Media Under Pressure : the Global Pattern

Dedicated readers are increasingly using internet media as their main source of information because print media is under threat. Philip Meyer predicted in his 2004 book *The Vanishing Newspaper* that the last regular newspaper reader will vanish around 2040 if the pace of decline in American newspaper readership at the time remained constant (Meyer, 2004). Despite this pressure, print has the distinctive characteristics: depth, duration, and comprehensiveness of coverage: that have tied it to public life for centuries (Saragih & Harahap, 2020). International studies provide evidence for the broader decline: the Reuters Institute's 2025 Digital News Report states that social and video platforms are gaining ground globally versus traditional media like television, print, and news websites. For the first time, more Americans are currently getting their news from social media and video platforms than from television or news websites (Newman et al., 2025).

For the US, this shift's generational component is widely documented. According to the Pew Research Center's most recent study on young adults and news, younger Americans are now significantly less likely than older age groups to get their news from television or radio. Instead, the vast majority rely on digital devices, particularly social media. A sizable portion of people under 30 say they trust information from social media about as much as they trust national news organizations (Forman-Katz et al., 2025). Although this data comes from a U.S. poll rather than an Indian one, it shows a generational trend that Indian publishers are also starting to face, as will be covered in more detail in Section 4.

Economic Pressures on Print Media

The pressure on print media's reliance on advertising revenue is increasing as advertisers move their spending to digital platforms, which provide more accurate audience targeting and measurable engagement than print circulation data. Overall, the dynamic has made it difficult to sustain traditional single-channel subscription and advertising models, and many newspapers around the world have shifted to hybrid digital-print arrangements (Newman et al., 2025). This is when considering India's own advertising revenue data (Section 4).

METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative method based on literature (desk-research) because this research aims to synthesize and analyze existing information instead of the authors collecting new data from surveys or interviews. Three types of sources were used. To start, data specific to India on internet penetration, advertising revenues and the size of the registered print sector were gathered from national statistical and regulatory sources such as the TRAI telecom subscription reports, the FICCI-EY India Media & Entertainment Report, and the publication records of the Press Registrar General of India (PRGI). Second, foreign comparative survey studies, especially Pew Center's youth-news study and Reuters Institute Digital News Report were used to place Indian patterns within a global pattern. Third, a survey of the existing academic and trade scholarship on AI in journalism and the economics of print media laid out the ways AI is changing news production and consumption.

Considering the rapid pace of AI capabilities and digital consumption patterns, the sources were ranked based on their recentness (data from 2023-2026, where available) and their immediate relevance to print media in the Indian context in particular. This is a methodological safeguard but also a limitation: the paper's evidentiary base is only as complete and current as the publicly available reports upon which it draws, and a few claims frequently made in industry discussions of Indian print media (such as newsprint import tariffs) could not be independently verified in time for this analysis and were therefore excluded.

THE INDIAN PRINT LANDSCAPE

Historical Foundations

India's press has a long and distinctive history when compared to many other national markets. In 1780, the British established Hicky's Bengal Gazette, the country's first newspaper. This led to a wave of subsequent publications that addressed both local and colonial issues. The Bombay

Samachar, started in 1822, is said to be the oldest newspaper in the country to be published continuously. The growth of Indian print media was largely driven by increasing literacy rates and consistent investment in regional-language publications, with the Hindi-language Dainik Jagran the most widely-read daily in the country. According to the latest round of the Indian Readership Survey (suspended in 2019 over methodology issues) available to the public, The Times of India was the most widely read in the Indian readership of English. Some of the titles that ruled the English-language reading audience had been smaller in number.

Current Scale and Trends

In contrast to many other nations where newspaper circulation has been dropping for over a decade, India's print business has retained a prominent role in the country's overall media mix, alongside television and digital media. According to the most recent consolidated data from the Press Registrar General of India, the body currently in charge of periodical registration under the Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023, which replaced the previous Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) framework, India's registered press consists of approximately 17,573 registered newspapers and approximately 100,666 registered periodicals, for a total of approximately 118,000 registered titles (Press Registrar General of India, 2026).

The financial picture is one of gradual resilience rather than rapid growth or fall. In 2025, digital advertising grew by 26% to ₹947 billion, making up 63% of all advertising income in India's media and entertainment sector, which grew by roughly 9% to ₹2.78 trillion. Print advertising revenue rose by a pitiful ~2% in the same year, while print subscription and circulation revenue fell by almost 1% (FICCI & EY, 2026). This is a very different image from the dramatic decline that print media has seen in many Western countries, but it is also a more modest and precarious situation than generalizations about print "booming" in India would imply. This study takes this discrepancy as analytically significant.

Particularly in India, comparative foreign survey data supports a gradual rather than abrupt move away from print. In India, the proportion of respondents who relied on print media (magazines and newspapers) as a source of news declined from 50% in 2021 to 39% in 2025 (with intermediate readings of 49% in 2022 and 40% in 2023 and 2024) (Reuters Institute, 2025 Digital News Report). In contrast, the percentage of people who used any internet source to get their news increased from 71% in 2025 (Newman et al., 2025). This shows that, even in regions where its advertising revenue has been consistent thus far, the audience base of Indian print media is steadily shrinking when compared to the FICCI-EY revenue data. This pattern will continue if the underlying audience trend continues.

Structural Challenges

Indian print publishers have a number of structural challenges. There is an underlying conflict between production costs and the historically low cover prices that have kept Indian newspapers widely accessible and affordable in comparison to many other national markets. Newsprint is still a major cost driver, and domestic newsprint producers face fierce competition from lower-cost imports. Even if print revenue has remained rather consistent overall thus far, an increasing number of publishers are adopting digital-first or hybrid strategies due to rising input costs of this kind and weakening circulation among younger and more urban readers. The main strategic issue facing the

business is how to develop long-lasting digital audiences and revenue streams without giving up on the print base that still supports the industry today, as younger Indians are increasingly consuming news on screens rather than in print.

AI'S IMPACT ON MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND PRACTICE

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has enabled digital platforms to spread content more accurately and in larger quantities than print media, using natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning systems. Instead of a one-size-fits-all printed newspaper model, recommendation systems take into account individual user preferences and behaviour to present articles, videos and adverts likely to engage a specific reader. This creates a fundamentally different competitive dynamic. Print publishers, who are unable to provide equivalent personalization within a physical product, are immediately challenged by this customized approach. Instead, they must compete on the basis of depth, trust, and completeness of reporting: the attributes listed in Section 2.2 as print's remaining competitive advantages.

AI is a two-edged sword for publishers. On the one hand, resource-constrained print newsrooms may generate more material more quickly and gain a more accurate understanding of their consumers with the use of AI-assisted solutions for content development, audience analytics, and dissemination (Ashfaq et al., 2022). However, the same technologies that make it possible to create content automatically in other parts of the media ecosystem have also reduced the cost of creating and disseminating false information, which has led to a wider decline in public confidence in the information environment. This risk ultimately affects both reputable print publishers and the dishonest actors who create false content because audience skepticism does not always distinguish between the two. Maintaining and visibly demonstrating editorial credibility is therefore likely to become a more, not less, important competitive differentiator for Indian print publishers as AI-generated content becomes more widespread across the wider information ecosystem.

DISCUSSION

When considered collectively, the evidence presented in this study suggests that India is not immune to the forces altering print media around the world, but rather exhibits a particular and relatively limited form of exceptionalism. In contrast to many Western countries, India's print industry has not collapsed, and its advertising revenue increased somewhat in 2025 instead of declining. However, the underlying audience trend: a falling percentage of Indians using print as a news source while the percentage using at least one online source keeps rising: moves in the same direction as seen elsewhere, albeit more slowly. This suggests that rather than being proof that Indian print media is structurally immune to the forces affecting the medium elsewhere, India's print resilience may be better understood as a lag effect, driven by newsprint affordability, strong regional-language readership, lower historical smartphone/data penetration outside major cities, and comparatively higher trust in print relative to digital and social sources.

This reading raises a significant counterargument, which this paper takes seriously rather than rejecting: it's possible that India's unique set of circumstances: a sizable and still expanding population of first-time news consumers; robust regional-language print ecosystems that lack a fully developed digital-native equivalent in many languages; and a newsprint-subsidy and low-cover-price tradition that has proven resilient for decades: could sustain print at a significantly higher

equilibrium level than in markets like the US or the UK, rather than just postponing a decline to comparable levels. It is noted here as a priority question for future India-specific longitudinal research, ideally combining audience survey data with publisher-level financial data over a multi-year horizon, because the secondary data reviewed in this paper cannot definitively distinguish between these two possibilities (a genuine higher equilibrium versus a slower path to the same eventual decline).

In theory , this pattern fits into a media ecology perspective , linked to Marshall McLuhan 's seminal work on new media forms reshaping rather than simply replacing older forms . This view maintains that new technologies alter the whole communications ecology, and that older media have to find a new and more restricted role to play rather than disappear (McLuhan, 1964). In such a scenario, the likely destiny of Indian print media is not extinction but a limited one: a smaller, more specialized medium that lives in a media ecology increasingly dominated by digital and AI-mediated distribution and that is prized especially for depth, regional-language service and credibility.

CONCLUSION

Indian print journalism is in a truly unique position within the global media environment. It is more resilient than its counterparts in many other markets, but is nonetheless subject to the audience and technical forces that are reshaping journalism globally. It will be less about resisting the changes AI is bringing and more about actively adapting to them. That means continuing to invest in the depth, regional-language service and editorial credibility that remain print's most defensible competitive advantages, while using AI tools to support content creation and audience engagement where they add real value. The question of whether the current resilience of the Indian print media will be enduring or just a temporary lag will depend significantly on diversifying revenue streams beyond a single advertising-and-circulation model and on treating trust as an actively maintained asset rather than an inherited one.

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