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

Peya Mowar, Meghna Gupta, Mohit Jain Microsoft Research India



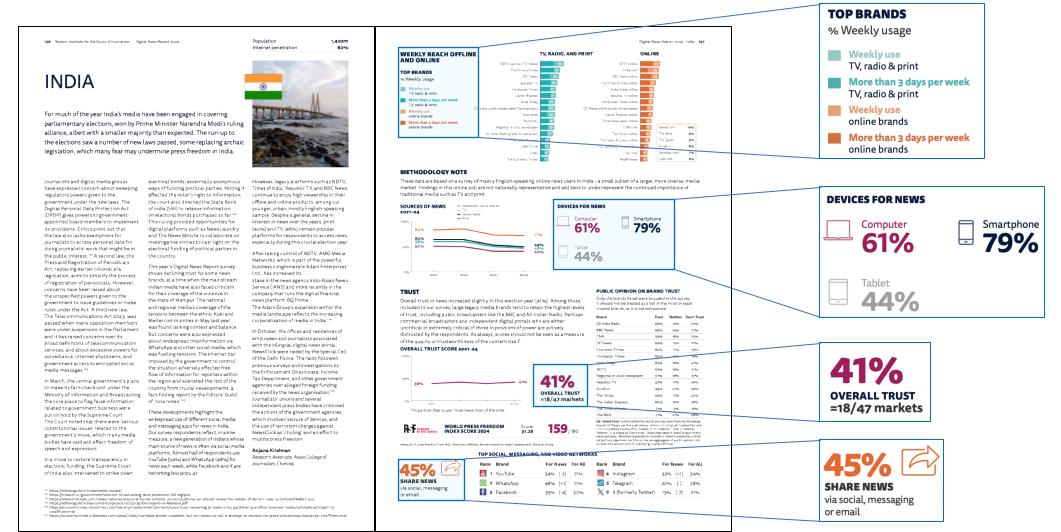








Motivation



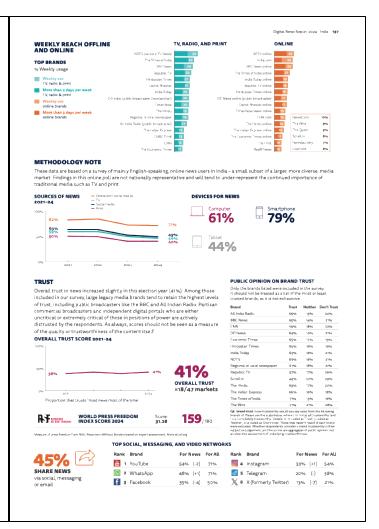




Motivation

INDIA 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 electoral bonds, essentially anonymous Times of India, Republic TV, and BBC News have expressed concern about sweeping ways of funding political parties. Noting it affected the voter's right to information, regulatory powers given to the continue to enjoy high viewership in their the court also directed the State Bank offline and online products, among our government under the new laws. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act of India (SBI) to release information ounger, urban, mostly English-speaking (DPDP) gives powers to governmenton electoral bonds purchased so far.2 sample. Despite a general decline in appointed board members to implemen This ruling provided opportunities for interest in news over the years, print (40%) and TV (46%) remain popular its provisions. Critics point out that digital platforms such as NewsLaundry the law also lacks exemptions for and The News Minute to collaborate on platforms for respondents to access news investigative stories to cast light on the journalists to access personal data for especially during this crucial election year electoral funding of political parties in doing journalistic work that might be in After taking control of NDTV AMG Media the public interest 101 A second law, the Networks, which is part of the powerful Press and Registration of Periodicals This year's Digital News Report survey business conglomerate Adani Enterprise Act, replacing earlier colonial era shows declining trust for some news Ltd., has increased its legislation, aims to simplify the process brands, at a time when the mainstream stake in the news agency Indo-Asian News of registration of periodicals. However Indian media have also faced criticism. Service (IANS) and more recently in the concerns have been raised about company that runs the digital financial for their coverage of the violence in the unspecified powers given to the the state of Manipur. The national government to issue guidelines or make and regional media's coverage of the The Adami Group's expansion within the rules under the Act. A third new law, ons between the ethnic Kuki and media landscape reflects the increasing The Telecommunications Act 2023, was Meitei communities in May last year corporatisation of media in India 11 nassed when many opposition members was found lacking context and balance were under suspension in the Parliamen and it has raised concerns over its But concerns were also expressed employees and journalists associated about widespread misinformation via with the bilingual digital news portal WhatsApp and other social media, which services, and about excessive powers for NewsClick were raided by the Special Cell was fuelling tensions. The internet ban surveillance, internet shutdowns, and of the Delhi Police. The raids followed imposed by the government to control government access to encrypted social previous surveys and investigations by the situation adversely affected free media messages. low of information for reporters withi Tax Department and other government the region and alienated the rest of the In March, the central government's plans agencies over alleged foreign funding to make its fact-check unit under the country from crucial developments, a received by the news organisation. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting fact-finding report by the Editors' Guild Journalists' unions and several the core place to flag false information ndependent press bodies have criticises related to government business were the actions of the government agencies. These developments highlight the put on hold by the Supreme Court widespread use of different social media which involved seizure of devices, and The Court noted that there were 'serious and messaging apps for news in India. the use of terrorism charges against constitutional issues' related to the Our survey respondents reflect, in some NewsClick as 'chilling' and an effort to government's move, which many media neasure, a new generation of Indians whose muzzle press freedor bodies have said will affect freedom of main source of news is often via social media platforms. Almost half of respondents use Research Associate, Asian College o In a move to restore transparency in YouTube (44%) and WhatsApp (48%) for Journalism Chennal electoral funding, the Supreme Court news each week, while Facebook and X are

becoming less popular.



"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)



of India also intervened to strike down

(Digital News Report, Reuters Institute, 2024)



The Indian Context



Over 35 million BVI individuals in India



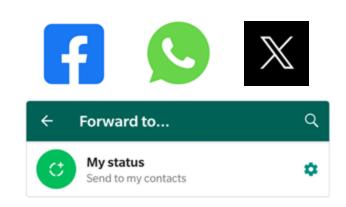
Non-compliance with accessibility laws



Youth & linguistic diversity



Mobile-first market



Distributed News Discovery



Low Media Credibility





Research Questions

- What drives news consumption preferences among BVI individuals in India?
- What methods and infrastructure do BVI individuals currently use for interacting with news sources?
- 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



- 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
- 7 Language Readers (English, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, Sanskrit, Braj, Kannada)
- 11 participants consume news in 2+ languages

- Reached participants through videoconferencing (Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- Part 1: Screen shared walkthroughs of their news consumption using phone, laptop or tablet
- Part 2: Semi-structured interviews around their news consumption practices





Findings

Current News Consumption Practices

- 1 Motivations for News Consumption
- News Engagement Strategies

3 News Selection Preferences

Accessibility in the Digital News Ecosystem

4 Barriers in News Access

5 Solutions, Stopgaps and Support

6 Impact of Limited Access





Findings

Current News Consumption Practices

- 1 Motivations for News Consumption
- 2 News Engagement Strategies

3 News Selection Preferences

Accessibility in the Digital News Ecosystem

4 Barriers in News Access

- 5 Solutions, Stopgaps and Support
- 6 Impact of Limited Access





Findings: News Engagement Strategies

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

Active Engagement

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

Passive Engagement

<u>Audio-based modalities:</u> YouTube, TV, radio, podcasts, Google Assistant

"I want to read it like a traditional newspaper, sit down and spend a good half an hour with it, rather than just popping in during the day. I just like the way I can hold an iPad and read. Somehow on the iPad apps feel less cluttered." (P2)

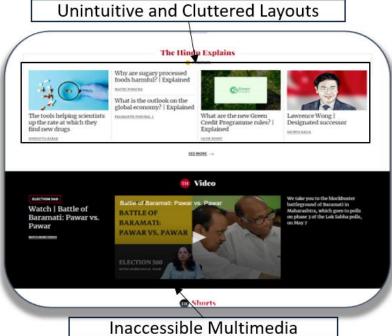
Preference for larger screen devices (12 participants)

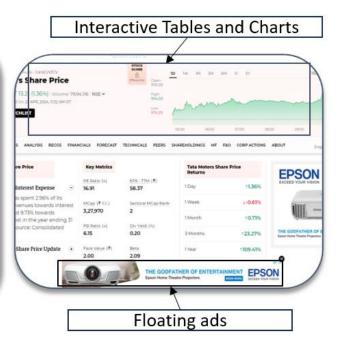




Findings: Barriers and Workarounds







- Human Infrastructure:
 Volunteer-driven ePapers via email,
 Narrations on WhatsApp
- Assists:
 Ad blockers, OCRs (Text
 Freedom), Navigational
 shortcuts, Virtual viewer
- Alternatives:
 LIRE Reader,
 Chatbots/Virtual Assistants





Findings: Impact of Limited Access

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

"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)

Lag in Information Access

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) "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)

Sticking to the same sources

Onus is on the BVI user





Implications:

- Unlike broader "news-finds-me" and distributed discovery trends, our participants actively sought out news
- Clutter and dynamic content posed unique challenges, need for skimming and "glancing" at content
- Tension between participants' desire for ad-free platforms and revenue models of media organizations





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.

Peya Mowar



http://cs.cmu.edu/~peyajm29



peyajm29@cmu.edu

