S A K S H I   B H A L L A

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Bio

PhD Student in Media and Communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Holds the Illinois Distinguished Fellowship, the most prestigious award given to an incoming graduate student. Studies political communication, media consumption and news audiences in the democratic contexts of India and the United States using statistical as well as qualitative approaches.

Education

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign   Urbana-Champaign, United States
Institute of Communications Research   Spring 2021
PhD Student, Media and Communications
Honors**:** *Phi Kappa Phi*   2022 onwards

Jawaharlal Nehru University   New Delhi, India
Master of Arts in Linguistics. GPA: 8.2/9.0   Aug 2018 to Jul 2020
JNU Entrance Test: All India Rank 1
Thesis: *Sociolinguistic Profile of Ahirani (a rare language of Maharashtra, India)*

Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi   New Delhi, India
Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Journalism. Aggregate: 72.4%   2012-2015

Awards and Fellowships

- *Illinois Distinguished Fellowship,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign   2021-25
- *SPARK Award,* American Political Science Association (Political Communication Section)   2024
- *Local Journalism Researchers Workshop Travel Grant,* Duke University   2024
- *National Center for Supercomputing Applications* (750,000 core hours)   2023
- *Institute of Communications Research Graduate Travel Grant*   2022, 2023
- *Prime Minister's Scholarship,* Government of India   2012

Research and Teaching Experience

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign   Jan 2021-present

Pre-doctoral Fellow

Teaching Assistant: Intro to popular TV and movies (MACS 100), Intro to Advertising (ADV 150)

Research Assistant: Examined approaches to media literacy used by high-school teachers in the state of Illinois through semi-structured interviews with the [IMEDIA](#) research group.

Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP)   2022-23

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Graduate Student Mentor

Guided undergraduate students new to research on new projects. Includes research mentorship training as well.

Open Markets Institute   Jun-Aug 2021

Centre for Liberty and Journalism

Student Researcher

Worked with the [PPLN-IL](#) (Illinois project) team and collected data for multiple research projects.

Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)   New Delhi, India

Research Analyst   Jan 2021-Apr 2021

Collection and analysis of online survey data to study online and on-ground protest networks in India. Findings have been published in *Communication, Culture & Critique.*

Indraprastha Institute of Information & Technology   New Delhi, India

Research Assistant   Summer 2019

Studied media parallelism and framing of policy discourse across news publications during the General Election of 2019 in India.

Professional affiliations

Member, International Communication Association

Member, American Political Science Association

Affiliate, Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP)

Publications

Bhalla, S., R. Ray & H. Taneja. (forthcoming). When news is entertainment: Explaining the persistence of misinformation through the information environment. *Information, Communication & Society.*

Bhalla, S., M. Nelson & M. Spikes. (forthcoming). Classroom Contexts: Teachers Talk Teaching Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.*

Khan, A., S. Natarajan, S. **Bhalla.** (2021). Climate Strikes in Millennial India: Social Capital and "On-Ground" Networks in Digital-First Movements. *Communication, Culture & Critique.* https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcab035

Works in Progress/Preparation

- **Fact checkers fail to overcome partisan divides** in two of the world's largest democracies: an examination of how social media users consume fact checking information in the US and Indian contexts.
  (with Harsh Taneja & Rik Ray)

Conferences

- **Bhalla, S.** & Harsh Taneja (2024). Dissecting Selectivity in a fragmented media environment: A novel approach. *APSA Political Communication Preconference.*
- **Bhalla, S.** & Harsh Taneja (2024). Entwined Realms: Media Contexts and Information Choice. *American Political Science Association.* [iPoster]
- **Bhalla, S.,** Rik Ray & Harsh Taneja (2024). When News is Entertainment. *International Communication Division: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).* Philadelphia, PA. [Poster]
- **Bhalla, S.** & Harsh Taneja (2024). Beyond Preferences: Contextual Influences on News Diets in High-Choice Environments. *Political Communication Division: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).* Philadelphia, PA. [Poster]
- **Bhalla, S.** & Harsh Taneja (2024). Entwined Realms: Examining Media Contexts and News Choice. *A Computational Turn in Journalism: Opportunities and Challenges in a Cross-Disciplinary Field: ICA 2024 Preconference.* Singapore/Virtual.
- **Bhalla, S.,** JungHwan Yang, Harsh Taneja, Pablo Barbera, Andy Guess & Simon Munzert. (2023). Measuring the consumption of political news: Patterns of selectivity and avoidance. *News avoidance,*

Bhalla 4

resistance, and related audience practices: definitions, predictors, and consequences: ICA 2023 Preconference. Toronto, Canada.

- **Bhalla, S.**, Michelle Nelson & Michael Spikes. (2023). Context Matters: Teachers Talk Media Literacy in the Classroom. *Mass Communication Division: International Communication Association*. Toronto, Canada. [Full paper]

- **Bhalla, S.,** Rik Ray & Harsh Taneja. (2022). Foregrounding contexts in disinformation studies: A study on the failure of fact-checking in India. *What Comes After Disinformation Studies? International Communication Association Preconference.* Paris, France.

- Ray, R., Sakshi **Bhalla** & Harsh Taneja. (2022). Fact checkers fail to overcome partisan divides in two of the world's largest democracies. *Political Communication Division: International Communication Association*. Paris, France. [Full Paper]

- **Bhalla, S.** (2021). Foregrounding Space and context: A discursive study of fact-checking in India. *South Asia Communication Association: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).* Virtual.

- Ray, R., Sakshi **Bhalla** & Harsh Taneja. (2021). Do fact-checkers overcome partisan divides: An investigation of Indian Twitter users. *International Communication Association*. Virtual. [Full paper]

- **Bhalla, S**. (2018). The Global in the Local: Inter-cultural Translation in the Backdrop of Global Advertising. *International Symposium on Linguistics Across Disciplines*. Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India. [Full paper]

Workshops

- **Bhalla, S.** (2024). Diffused News Cultures: Explaining news cultures through spatial relationships. *Local Journalism Researchers Workshop.* Chapel-Hill, NC.

Presentations

- **Bhalla, S.** (2024). Navigating Narratives: Selective Exposure to Indian Journalists. *Social Media and Society in India*. Ann Arbor, MI/Virtual.

- **Bhalla, S**. (2022). How politics and platforms skew media literacy instruction. *Institute of Communications Research* at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

- **Bhalla, S**. (2021). Ahirani: A Sociolinguistic Profile. *Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

- **Bhalla, S**. (2021). Foregrounding Space and context: A discursive study of fact-checking in India. *The Great Mediation* (University of Chicago).

- **Bhalla, S.** (2019). The Technological Mediation of Political Rhetoric on Twitter. Mediated Campaigns and Unmediated Politics in Millennial India. *Centre de Sciences Humaines*. New Delhi.

Relevant Coursework

- **University of Illinois**

  Theory: *States, Space and Informatization; Public Opinion & Public Sphere; Mass Media and the Individual; Public opinion & Public spheres; Political Campaigns Analysis; History, politics, and identity; Communication & Public Opinion; Political Communication*

  Method: *Network Analysis; Computational Political Communication; Postcolonial theory and Methods; Quantitative Research Methods; Statistics and Probability I & II; Statistical Modelling I; Spatial Econometrics and Causal Inference; Hierarchical Linear Modelling; Statistical Learning*

- **Jawaharlal Nehru University**

  Sociolinguistics; Semiotics and the Philosophy of Structures; Issues in Linguistic Theory; Forms of Media: Senses, Mediation and Perception; Field Methods; Media, Politics and Violence; Visual Histories; Media in India.

- **Lady Shri Ram College for Women**

  Media and Culture Studies; New Media Technologies; Indian State and Democratic Polity; International Politics; Advertising and Public Relations; Human Rights, Gender and Environment; Seminar on Urban Spatiality; Communication Research Methods.

Additional Qualifications/Certifications

- **Role of Media in Conflict and Peace**   2014

  Certification workshop offered by *Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace.*

- **Journalism as a Public Good**   2014

  Short term certificate course offered by *Lady Shri Ram College for Women.*

- **Film Appreciation**   2013

  Six-week certification offered by *Lady Shri Ram College for Women.*

Skills

Computational Methods: Network analysis, Text analysis | **Programming**: R programming, UCINET

Qualitative Methods: Semi-structured interviews, Case studies

Test Scores and Languages

- **GRE (2019): 329** (Verbal Reasoning: 164, Quantitative Reasoning: 165, AWA: 5.0)
- **TOEFL (2019): 112** (Reading: 26, Listening: 30, Speaking: 28, Writing: 28)
- Natural languages: English (proficient), Hindi (proficient), Punjabi (intermediate), Ahirani (beginner)

Non-academic Work Experience

Thinkstr Consultancy Pvt. Ltd.   Gurgaon, India

Junior Writer – Senior Writer   Mar 2016-Jul 2018

- Advertising and strategy for a battery of brands and organizations.
- *Longhand Awards* shortlist.

D. E. Shaw & Co.   Hyderabad, India

Associate   Jun 2015-Feb 2016

Internships and Projects

The Coca-Cola Company (India and Southwest Asia HQ)   Gurgaon, India

Summer Intern   Summer 2014

- Worked with the Public Affairs and Communication Department. Assisted with the strategy of the TCCC's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and outreach to customers.

The SaltList   New Delhi, India

Editor-in-Chief   2012-2015

- A news-based start-up to share news, views and opinion. Lead an all-women team of 30 writers and sub-editors.

Counter-talk (The annual journal of Department of Journalism, LSR)   New Delhi, India

Associate Editor   2012-2014

- Put together two editions, an online and a print, with a team of 17. Managed editorial responsibilities for both.

Other Achievements

- **Treasurer**, Department of Journalism, *Lady Shri Ram College for Women*.   2013-2014
- **Core Team Member**, Interface – The Academic Forum
  Lady Shri Ram College for Women.   2012-2015
- **Core Team Member**, Quiz Society, *Lady Shri Ram College for Women*.   2012-2015

- Invited to a round-table discussion on *Education and the Youth*, with US Undersecretary Sonenshine and 15 other youth leaders from across New Delhi.   2014
- 3rd place, *Bol* – The Dialogue, at Lady Shri Ram College's Academic Congress.   2014
- 1st place, *Annual Deloitte Quiz*.   2013
- 1st place, *Annual Freshers' Quiz*, Lady Shri Ram College.   2012