

SAKSHI BHALLA

Institute of Communications Research (ICR), University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Media & Communications University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Honors: <i>Phi Kappa Phi</i>	2021 onwards Champaign, IL
Master of Science in Statistics University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	2025 Champaign, IL
Master of Arts in Linguistics Jawaharlal Nehru University JNU Entrance Test: <i>All India Rank 1</i> Thesis: <i>Sociolinguistic Profile of Ahirani</i> (a previously-undocumented language spoken in Maharashtra, India)	2018-2020 New Delhi, India
Bachelor of Arts, with Honors in Journalism Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi	2012-2015 New Delhi, India

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-reviewed articles

1. **Bhalla, S.**, M. Nelson & M. Spikes. (2025). Classroom Contexts: Teachers Talk Teaching Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2025-17-2-3>
2. Ray, R., **S. Bhalla** & H. Taneja. (2025). Fact checkers are seldom used by news users on either side of the partisan divide. *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaf018>
3. **Bhalla, S.**, R. Ray & H. Taneja. (2024). When news is entertainment: Explaining the persistence of misinformation through the information environment. *Information, Communication & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2024.2406819>
4. 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>

Forthcoming

1. **Bhalla, S.** & H. Taneja. (2025). User-defined Repertoires. In Nai, A., Grömping, M., & Wirz, D. (Eds). *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Communication*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

IN PROGRESS

The Geography of Civic Information
In preparation

Following the News: Polarization and the Networked Structure of Attention
In preparation

Complements or competitors? Examining human-AI interactions on Sina Weibo
In preparation; with Maggie Zhang

AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

<i>Illinois Distinguished Fellowship</i> (\$75,000)	2021-25
Bart A. Cummings Grant (\$1,200)	2025
Political Networks Graduate Student Fellowship	2025
ICA Political Communication Section Travel Grant	2025
<i>Methodology Center Summer Institute Scholarship</i> (Full support), Purdue University/ National Institute on Drug Addiction	2025
SPARK Award for Promising Graduate Students, American Political Science Association (Political Communication Section)	2024
<i>Local Journalism Researchers Workshop Travel Grant</i> , Duke University	2024
National Center for Supercomputing Applications (750,000 core hours)	2023
<i>Institute of Communications Research Graduate Travel Grant</i>	2022-2025
<i>Prime Minister's Scholarship</i> , Government of India	2012

SELECTED CONFERENCE TALKS

Bhalla, S. (2025). Paper Trails: Place, proximity and spillovers in local news ecosystems. *Political Communication Section: American Political Science Association*. [Full Paper; not presented given travel restrictions]

Bhalla, S. & Maggie Zhang (2025). Competitors or Complements? Examining the Effect of Human-AI Interaction on Human-Human Interaction. *Human-Machine Communication Division: International Communication Association* [Full Paper]

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., 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. (2025). Following the News: Polarization and the Networked Structure of Attention. *PolNet & PaCSS*, 2025, Cambridge, CA.

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.

INVITED TALKS

Bhalla, S. (2025). Classroom contexts: Teachers talk teaching media literacy. *Media Education Lab*.

Bhalla, S. (2024). News and Information Consumption in the Contemporary Media Environment: Are Fact-Checkers Enough? *Jio Institute Masterclass*.

OTHER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Student Researcher Jun-Aug 2021

Open Markets Institute (Center for Liberty and Journalism)

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

Research Analyst Jan 2021-Apr 2021

Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

- Developed surveys and interview protocols, oversaw participant recruitment, and coordinated the project team. Findings on social networks in youth-led mobilization in two Indian cities have been published in [Communication, Culture & Critique](#).

Research Assistant 2019-20

Indraprastha Institute of Information & Technology (IIIT-New Delhi)

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

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Pre-doctoral Fellow

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

2021 - Present

Champaign, IL

- **Lead Teaching Assistant:** Foundations of Data Curation (CS/IS 598)
- **Instructor of Record:** Audience Analysis (ADV 483)
- **Teaching Assistant:** Data Management, Curation & Reproducibility (IS 477), 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.

Graduate Student Mentor

2022 onwards

Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program ([URAP](#)), University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

- Introduced undergraduate students to research on media, information and politics, guiding them on projects. Final project presented at Undergraduate Research Symposium.
- Jury member for the *Social Issues & Policy* and *Social Science & Human Behavior* panels for Undergraduate Research Symposium 2025.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Chicago School of Experimental Economics Summer Workshop	2025
Methodology Center at Purdue Summer Institute	2025
Computational Linguistics Bootcamp, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi	2019
Short-term course on Role of Media in Conflict and Peace	2014
Short-term course on Journalism as a Public Good	2014
Short-term course on Film Appreciation	2013

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Member, International Communication Association

Member, American Political Science Association

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

IN THE MEDIA

- Interview with Centre for Innovation & Sustainability in Local Media. [Q&A with media and politics researcher, Sakshi Bhalla](#)
Also syndicated by [Editor & Publisher](#)
- Report by University of Illinois News Bureau: [Mandatory media literacy education in Illinois schools impaired by digital divides](#)

DATA SCIENCE & TECH

Languages & Tools: R (proficient), Python (intermediate), HTML/CSS (intermediate), L^AT_EX, QGIS/ArcGIS

Statistical Modelling: Statistical inference, causal inference, network analysis and spatial econometrics, statistical learning

SERVICE TO THE DEPARTMENT

ICR Graduate Student Conference: **Organizing team & Reviewer**

2023

ICR Graduate Student Representative

2023-24

SERVICE TO THE DISCIPLINE

Reviewing for annual conferences:

International Communication Association (Political Communication, Computational Methods, Journalism Studies, and Human-Machine Communication divisions)

Reviewing for journals: *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications - Nature, Journalism Studies, New Media & Society*

NATURAL LANGUAGES

English (proficient), Hindi (proficient), Punjabi (intermediate), AHIRANI (beginner)

NON-ACADEMIC WORK EXPERIENCE

Campaign Communication (*Promoted to Senior*)

Thinkstr Consultancy Pvt. Ltd. Mar 2016-Jul 2018
Gurgaon, India

- Spearheaded strategic communication for NITI Aayog (Government of India), including the nationwide launch of digital payments in a 100 day campaign across 100 Indian cities. See impact [here](#) and [here](#).
- Longhand Awards shortlist.

Associate

D. E. Shaw & Co. Jun 2015-Feb 2016
Hyderabad, India

- Evaluated internal program processes and assisted with implementation strategies across multiple teams, supporting high-volume workflows.

INTERNSHIPS AND PROJECTS

Summer Intern

The Coca-Cola Company (India and Southwest Asia HQ) Summer 2014
Gurgaon, India

- Worked with the Public Affairs and Communication Department. Supported analysis and planning for corporate responsibility initiatives, coordinating with multiple cross-functional teams across Marketing and Public Affairs and Communications departments.

Associate Editor

Counter-talk (The annual journal of Department of Journalism,
Lady Shri Ram College) 2012-2014
New Delhi, India

REFERENCES

Available upon request.