

Reuters Institute India Digital News Report

Zeenab Aneez, Tabereh Ahmed Neyazi,
Antonis Kalogeropoulos, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen



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Foreword

Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RIS)

Given how important and interesting it is, India has always been conspicuously absent from the Reuters Institute annual *Digital News Report*. I am therefore very glad that support from a wide range of different Indian sponsors has now enabled us to produce this, the first stand-alone pilot *India Digital News Report*, in time to inform discussions of news and media in India in advance of the 2019 elections.

We publish this study at a time of dramatic change in the Indian media, some of it promising, some of it troubling. The past few years have seen explosive growth in especially mobile internet access, and even though broadcast media and printed newspapers are still doing better in India than in many other markets, the rapid move to digital media will have profound implications for the practice of journalism, the business of news, media institutions, and thus by extension political and public life in India. We have seen rapid growth in online audiences across websites, social media, and more, but also mounting challenges to the business of news as advertising moves to digital media. This shift coincides with a changing political environment where activists, parties, and politicians are enthusiastically embracing digital media, sometimes circumventing editorial gatekeepers, sometimes attacking them directly, attacks that contribute to wider concerns over media freedom in India.

We are glad to be able to offer this report as a snapshot of this development and how the rise of mobile media, social media platforms, and messaging applications is in the process of changing how Indians access news and engage with it, including low trust in much news and rising concerns about various kinds of disinformation. We hope our analysis will help inform decision-making among Indian journalists and publishers, as well as among policy makers and among the large US-based technology companies that play an increasingly important role in the Indian media environment.

The report is a pilot study in the sense that it deals exclusively with a small (but important) subset of the Indian media market, namely English-language news users with internet access. We hope to be able to do more work in the future to shed more empirical light on news and media habits among Hindi and vernacular language users across the country, perhaps with time including a more comprehensive study to cover the hundreds of millions of Indians who still do not have internet access. For the time being, it is important to stress that the results reported here and our wider analysis is exclusively focused on English-language Indian internet users, and should not be taken to be representative of India more widely.

Our work here builds on the ongoing, annual Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*, which in 2018 covered 37 markets across the globe, and in 2019 will for the first time include Africa too, with the addition of South Africa. We are hugely grateful to our sponsors who have now enabled us to do similar work in India, namely, the Hindu Media Group, The Quint, the *Indian Express*, and the Press Trust of India. We are also grateful to our polling company YouGov, who did everything possible to help us expand our research into India for the first time and helped our research team to analyse and contextualise the data.

Methodology

This study has been commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism as our first step towards a better understanding of how digital news is being used in India. Research was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire in early January 2019. The methodology is similar to the Reuters Institute 2018 Digital News Report survey with some important limitations.

The sample is reflective of the English-speaking population in India that has access to the internet. As a result, it is skewed towards male, affluent, and educated respondents. As an online survey, the results will further under-represent the consumption habits of people who are not online (typically older, less affluent, and with limited formal education). Where relevant, we have tried to make these two limitations (around language and internet access) clear within the text.

- The data were weighted to targets based on the online population of India on age and region. The targets are set by YouGov and are based on data from the Internet and Mobile Association of India.
- As this survey deals with news consumption, we filtered out anyone who said that they had not consumed any news in the past month, in order to ensure that irrelevant responses didn't adversely affect data quality. This category was lower than 2.9% in India, similar to the average of the 37 countries examined at the 2018 *Digital News Report*. Overall, we surveyed 1013 individuals.
- A comprehensive online English-language questionnaire based on the 2018 *Digital News Report* was designed to capture different aspects of news consumption.

The survey was conducted using the established English-speaking online panels run by our polling company YouGov. The main purpose is to track activities and changes within the digital space – as well as gaining understanding about how offline media and online media are used together.

In a few instances within the text we compare the results for India with the results of other large and complex markets like Brazil, Turkey, or the United States. These numbers are taken from the 2018 Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey undertaken in early 2018. More information about the methodology and the samples for these countries can be found on the Digital News Report website.¹

¹ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/survey-methodology-2018/>

About the Authors



Zeenab Aneez is an independent researcher in the field of digital media and culture. She has a background in journalism and was previously a reporter for *The Hindu*. She has an undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of Madras and an MA in Digital Media and Culture at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick, United Kingdom.



Taberez Ahmed Neyazi is Assistant Professor of New Media and Political Communication at the National University of Singapore. His research focuses on political communication and public opinion, computational social science, digital, mobile, and social media. He serves as co-Principal Investigator of India Election Studies (IES) and the country coordinator for this project on media, campaigning, and influence in India's national and state-level elections.



Antonis Kalogeropoulos is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. He is a co-author of the *Digital News Report*, an annual survey of news consumption patterns across the world. He has also published a range of academic articles more widely on online and social media participation and online news video consumption patterns in a comparative perspective.



Rasmus Kleis Nielsen is Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Professor of Political Communication at the University of Oxford. His work focuses on changes in the news media, on political communication, and the role of digital technologies in both. He has done extensive research on journalism, news media, campaign communication, and various forms of activism across the world.

Acknowledgements

This report has been made possible by support from The Hindu Media Group, the *Indian Express*, The Quint, and the Press Trust of India. We are very grateful for their support. The data collection, analysis, and presentation has been conducted independently by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Our work on this report has benefited from the advice, experience, and input of the wider Reuters Institute research team, in particular Nic Newman and Richard Fletcher, two of the authors of the main annual Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*.

Executive Summary

In this report we show that English-language Indian news users with internet access are embracing a mobile-first, platform-dominated media environment with search engines, social media, and messaging applications playing a key role in how people access and use news in a setting characterised by low trust in many news media, high concerns over the possible implications of expressing political views, and widespread worries about different kinds of disinformation.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE

- A mobile-first market: 68% of our respondents identify smartphones as their main device for online news, 31% say they only use mobile devices for accessing online news. These figures are markedly higher than in other markets, including developing markets like Brazil and Turkey.
- A platform-dominated market: an overwhelming majority of respondents identify various forms of distributed discovery as their main way of accessing news online. Search (32%) and various kinds of social media (24%) are particularly important. Only 18% consider direct access their main way of getting news online.
- Facebook and WhatsApp are particularly widely used, with 75% of respondents using Facebook (and 52% saying they get news there), and 82% using WhatsApp (with 52% getting news there). Other social media widely used for news include Instagram (26%), Twitter (18%), and Facebook Messenger (16%).
- Online news generally (56%), and social media specifically (28%), have outpaced print (16%) as the main source of news among respondents under 35, whereas respondents over 35 still mix online and offline media to a greater extent.
- Many of our respondents say that they share (50%) and/or comment (33%) on online news, with particularly high levels of engagement on Facebook and WhatsApp, but many also express concerns that openly expressing their political views online could make their friends of family think differently of them (49%), make work colleagues or other acquaintances think differently of them (50%) or, perhaps most worryingly, fear it could get them into trouble with authorities (55%).
- The most widely used online news sources (beyond platforms) are generally the websites of leading legacy media including broadcasters and newspapers, but some digital-born news media have significant reach, including some alternative and partisan sites who despite limited name recognition have built relatively large audiences.
- Our respondents have low trust in news overall (36%) and even the news they personally use (39%), but interestingly express higher levels of trust in news in search (45%) and social media (34%) than respondents in many other countries. Partisans at both ends of the political spectrum have similar levels of trust in the news, whereas non-partisans have lower levels.
- 57% of our respondents are worried whether online news they come across is real or fake, and when asked about different kinds of potential disinformation, many of our respondents express concern over hyperpartisan content (51%) and poor journalism (51%) as well as false news (50%).
- Looking to the future, significant numbers of respondents express an appetite for more personalised mobile news alerts, more online news video, for donating to support news organisations, and to pay for news in the future, with 31% of those who do not currently pay for online news saying they are 'somewhat likely' to pay, and 9% saying they are 'very likely' to.

The report is based on data from a survey of English-speaking, online news users in India – a small (but important) subset of a larger, more diverse, and very complex Indian media market. Our respondents are generally more affluent, have higher levels of formal education, skews male, and are more likely to live in cities than the wider Indian population and our findings only concern our sample, and thus cannot be taken to be more broadly representative.

1. Digital News in India

1.1 THE MOVE TO DIGITAL MEDIA

Indian publishers have offered online news and invested in their websites since the 1990s, even though internet access initially grew only slowly in India. In recent years, the explosive expansion of especially mobile web access and signs of stagnation or even decline in print readership and advertising have led to increased investment in better websites, the recruitment of digital journalists and developers, new social media and mobile strategies, the creation and launch of apps, and experimentation with new and emerging technologies.² Publishers are also diversifying their content and building new brands and products to engage the needs of their growing digital audience, and a number of digital-born news media have been launched in one of the world's most competitive media markets.³

This move is in response to rapidly evolving audience behaviour. While it took 15 years from 1995 to 2010 before 100 million Indians (8% of the population) had internet access, growth has greatly accelerated since, surpassing an estimated 500 million users by June 2018, more than 30% of the population, driven primarily by tremendous growth in mobile internet access.⁴

In this report we focus only on English news publishers which are primarily read by higher socio-economic classes of urban people, who use smartphones and have access to the internet.⁵ By some estimates, those who speak English as a primary language make up only about 10% of India's population.⁶ The surveyed sample reflects this, and is hence not representative of the wider population of Indian digital media users, especially given that current industry trends are characterised by a surge in rural users and increasing consumption of regional language content.⁷

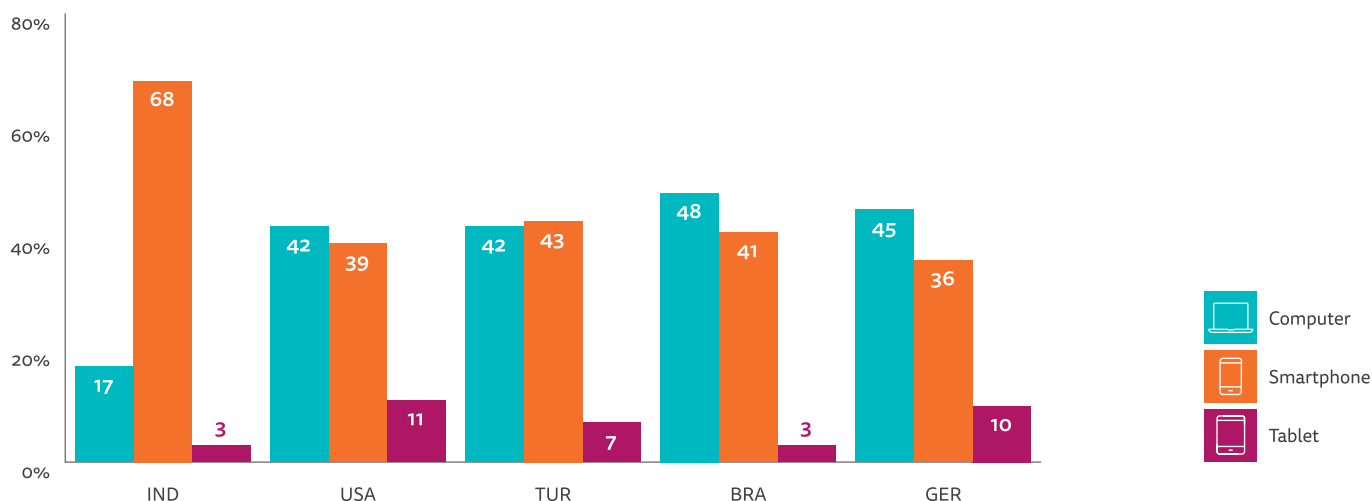
We show that English-language Indian news users with internet access are embracing a mobile-first, platform-dominated media environment with search engines, social media, and messaging applications playing an absolutely key role in how people access and use news in a setting characterised by low trust in many news media, high concerns over the possible implications of expressing political views, and widespread worries about different kinds of disinformation.

1.2 A MOBILE-FIRST MARKET

India is emerging as an overwhelmingly mobile-first, and for many mobile-only, media market for internet use broadly, and for online news use specifically. Of our respondents, 68% identify smartphones as their main device for online news. Preference for smartphones for news access was significantly higher than that for desktop computers and tablets, preferred by 17% and 3% respectively; 31% of our respondents say they *only* use mobile devices for accessing online news. (A 2017 report by Omidyar Network said Indian users spend about three hours a day on their mobile phones, though only 2% of this time is spent accessing news.)

This marks India as a much more mobile-first online news environment than even other developing markets like Brazil and Turkey, let alone markets like the United States or those found in Europe such as Germany.

MAIN DEVICE USED FOR NEWS – SELECTED MARKETS



UK8b6_5. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your MAIN way of accessing online news? Base: Those who use any devices for news. India = 912; USA = 2008; Turkey = 1877; Brazil = 1932; Germany = 1660

² Aneez et al. 2016.

³ See e.g. Aneez et al. 2017; Sen and Nielsen 2016.

⁴ IAMAI-Kantar IMRB 2018.

⁵ EY-India 2018.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20500312>

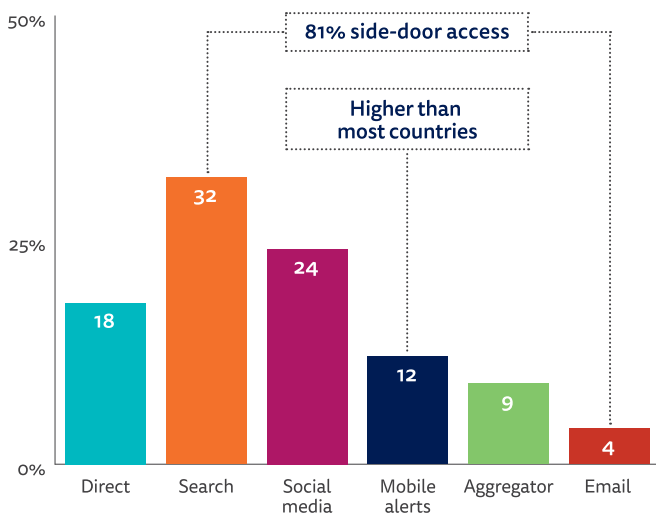
⁷ Neyazi 2019.

1.3 DISTRIBUTED DISCOVERY DOMINATED BY PLATFORMS

India has emerged as a large market for social media giants like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter, and our survey demonstrates how these digital intermediaries have become absolutely central to online news distribution, providing publishers with competition for attention and advertising, but also new opportunities to reach wider online audiences.

Among our respondents, direct discovery of news (where users go directly to a news organisation’s website or app) is seen as far less important than various forms of distributed discovery (where users discover and access news through a variety of digital platforms). Search is an important gateway for many users, and as audiences have embraced social media like Facebook and Twitter, publishers have begun sharing breaking news and features on these platforms. At the same time, messaging apps like WhatsApp are now being used by millions to get online news, and by publishers sending news directly to subscribers.

PROPORTION THAT SAY EACH IS THEIR MAIN GATEWAY TO NEWS – INDIA



Q10a. Which of these was the MAIN way in which you came across news in the last week?
Base: India. All who used news last week = 957

In our sample of English-speaking online news users, just 35% say they go directly to news websites or apps, and only 18% consider direct access their main way of accessing news online (compared to 26% in the US and 35% in Brazil). An overwhelming majority of the respondents identify various forms of distributed discovery as their main way of accessing news online. Search (32%) and various kinds of social media (24%) are particularly important. Such side-door access through various intermediaries over which news publishers themselves have limited control is far more important among our Indian respondents than it is for online news users in a market like the US. In fact, a higher proportion of Indian respondents rely on distributed discovery as the main gateway to news than is the case among respondents in other developing markets like Brazil and Turkey.

The rise of distributed discovery presents new, convenient, and often engaging ways of accessing and using news, but also means that the flow of information is increasingly influenced by algorithmic selection. Judging from our data, there is at this stage limited awareness of this fact, with just 26% of our respondents recognising that algorithms make decisions on what news stories to show on Facebook (with 18% believing these decisions are made by editors and journalists working for the social media company).

Faced with the rise of distributed discovery, many publishers are investing in search engine optimisation, social media distribution, and the like, and developing forms of side-door access over which they have more control, like mobile alerts or notifications – identified by 12% of our respondents as their main source of online news.



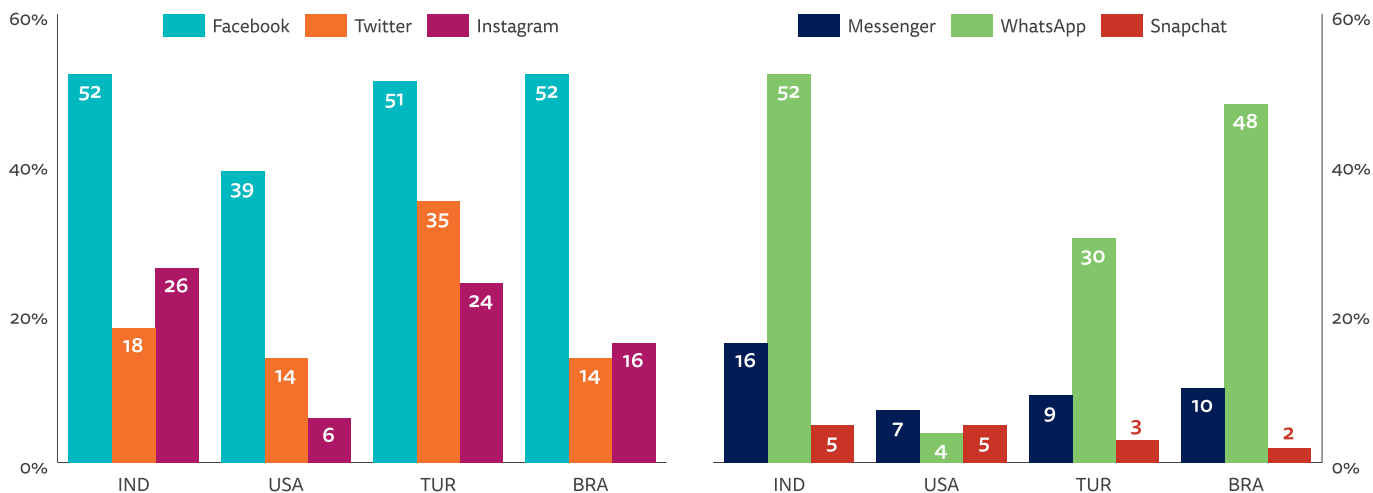
1.4 SOCIAL MEDIA AS GATEWAYS TO NEWS

More than half of our Indian respondents report getting news from social media, and a quarter identify social media as their main source of online news.

Asked about individual platforms, Facebook’s main eponymous social media platform (75%) and the company’s messaging application WhatsApp (82%) are the most widely used in India (90% of users surveyed use at least one Facebook product weekly, for any purpose). Facebook and WhatsApp are also the most widely used for news – 52% of our respondents say they get news via Facebook, and 52% say they get news via WhatsApp, similar figures to those seen in a market like Brazil.

Other social media widely used for news (or where users are often exposed to news while using the platform for other purposes) include Instagram (26%), Twitter (18%), and Facebook’s Messenger (16%) – whereas, for example, Snapchat is much less widely used (5%).

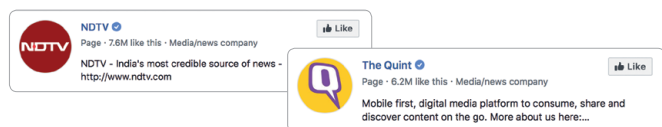
PROPORTION THAT USED EACH SOCIAL NETWORK FOR NEWS IN THE LAST WEEK – SELECTED MARKETS



Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Base: USA = 2401; Turkey = 2019; Brazil = 2007; India = 1013

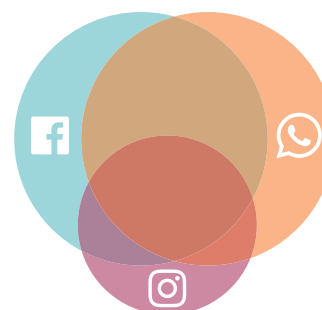
Many Indian publishers are investing in social media teams to reach online audiences through these intermediaries, which in turn simultaneously helps them increase their reach but leaves them exposed to sometimes dramatic changes to how ranking algorithms or other platform infrastructures work. In many online newsrooms journalists and editors try to ensure that their news content performs well on Facebook even as the platform's algorithms and wider strategy constantly evolve.⁸

Different forms of distributed discovery are not mutually exclusive. For example, 35% of our respondents use Facebook and WhatsApp for news, and a significant subset of these in turn also get news from social media like Instagram or Twitter.

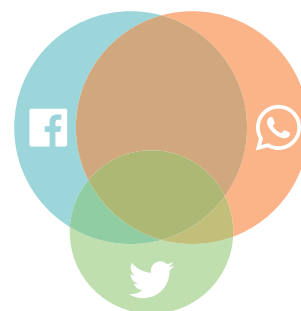


Facebook is identified as a site used for news by almost three times as many respondents as Twitter, but despite its much smaller user base and the fact that it generates less website traffic and engagement, Twitter is still an important platform for breaking news and a lively and often unruly and uncomfortable part of online public debate. In India, Twitter is seen by some as a toxic environment, especially for women⁹ and people belonging to the Dalit-Bahujan and Adivasi community and other gender and sexual minorities.¹⁰ However, Twitter has also served as an important platform for India's #MeToo movement, where a concerted effort by women journalists to identify sexual predators and serial harassers in the news industry began and gained momentum on Twitter. Several legacy and digital-born publishers have built wide Twitter followings.

OVERLAP IN USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MESSAGING APPS FOR NEWS – INDIA



Use WhatsApp and Facebook for news: **35%**
 Use Instagram and Facebook for news: **18%**
 Use Instagram and WhatsApp for news: **17%**
 Use Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp for news: **14%**



Use WhatsApp and Facebook for news: **35%**
 Use Twitter and Facebook for news: **13%**
 Use Twitter and WhatsApp for news: **12%**
 Use Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for news: **10%**



Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Base: India = 1013

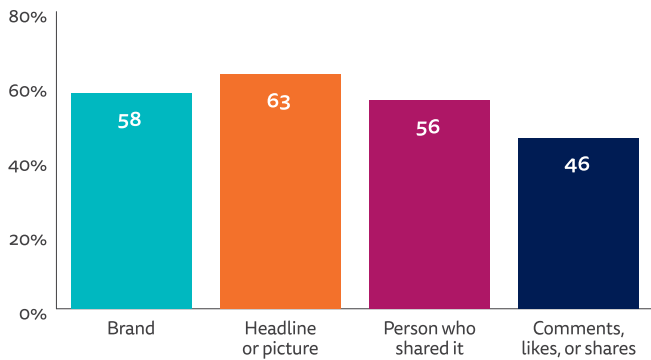
⁸ Aneez et al. 2017.
⁹ Bass 2018.
¹⁰ Soundararajan 2018.

1.5 NAVIGATING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Given the massive flow of information from various sources on these platforms, we asked respondents how they decide what to click on when navigating news on social media: 56% say they decide on the basis of who shared the post while for 63% the headline is very important and for 58% the brand.

Often these social cues and source cues are used in combination, and one does not preclude the other – but our research documents that the social cues (who shares a story) are more important in India than in many other markets. This is in line with findings in a BBC report on disinformation in India that also found that rather than questioning the source of the news, study participants relied on alternative markers like number of comments, images, and the sender of the messages.¹¹

PROPORTION THAT AGREE EACH ATTRIBUTE IS IMPORTANT WHEN DECIDING TO CLICK THROUGH TO A NEWS STORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA – INDIA



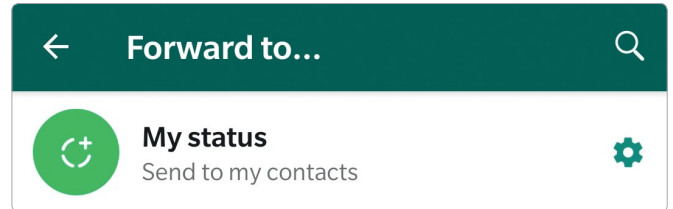
Q12C_2018. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements
Base: Those who have used a social media site for any purpose in last week = 977

1.6 WHATSAPP WIDELY USED FOR NEWS

WhatsApp is not only very widely used in India, but also widely used by our respondents for news. While search engines and social media are increasingly important gateways to online news across the world, the use of messaging applications like WhatsApp and their role in the discovery of news vary widely from country to country. Of our respondents, 82% use the messaging application, and 52% reported getting news on WhatsApp, far higher numbers than most markets in Europe and North America but comparable, for example, to Brazil.

The number of WhatsApp users in India has reportedly doubled from 2017 to 2018, and the ease of transferring multimedia content to large private groups makes WhatsApp unique among other social media platforms studied here.¹² The messaging application is increasingly ubiquitous not only among general users, but also in many India newsrooms where journalists use it to enable quick transfer of multimedia content and dissemination of content among editorial staff.¹³

Among our respondents, 40% of WhatsApp news users said they have forwarded a news story during the past week. This is certainly an important dynamic in the context of India, as news consumed over WhatsApp is more likely to be shared by like-minded individuals in a group. Large-scale group forwarding can disseminate legitimate news to wide audiences, but has in some instances also helped disinformation and rumours reach a very large number of users.¹⁴



As a result of its rising popularity as a way to share news, most often in closed groups, WhatsApp is thus increasingly seen as part of India’s growing online disinformation problems.

The platform was among one of the channels used to spread rumours that led to attacks on groups and individuals across the country.¹⁵ End-to-end encryption makes it difficult to identify the source and track the spread of messages on it. It also makes it difficult for news publishers (and others) to study reach and engagement of their content through the platform.

In late 2018, the Indian government formally asked WhatsApp to work towards altering features that allow the platform to be used to disseminate disinformation at scale and the company has since taken some measures to restrict the sharing of content on the platform, including limiting the number of times messages can be forwarded.

Disinformation problems and growing public scrutiny of WhatsApp has clearly not deterred news publishers, who are increasingly seeking to use the messaging application to reach readers. Both legacy publishers like *The Times of India* and digital-born publishers like Firstpost and The Quint, for example, now provide WhatsApp subscriptions to their publications.



¹¹ Chakrabarti et al. 2018.
¹² Kumar and Kumar 2018.
¹³ Aneez et al. 2016.

¹⁴ Chakrabarti et al. 2018.
¹⁵ McLaughlin 2018.

2. News and Participation

2.1 ONLINE AND OFFLINE SOURCES OF NEWS

Even as the move to digital media has challenged newspapers and broadcasters in much of the world, the print and television news industry in India has continued to grow – though at a decreasing rate.¹⁶ With much of the population still offline, hundreds of millions of Indians still turn to newspapers, television and radio as their main sources of news.¹⁷ (How resilient offline media will be in the face of digital alternatives is an open question. In China, newspaper circulation peaked as recently as 2012, but newspaper advertising revenues declined by 75% from 2012 to 2016 as digital media grew rapidly.¹⁸)

Among our respondents, English-speaking Indians with access to the internet, offline sources remain important, but online sources dominate, especially among younger people. The number of internet users who identify online news as their main source of news is directly comparable to the proportion in a country like Brazil or the US. However, especially older Indian online news users still supplement online news with television and print to a higher extent than we see in other countries.

Among respondents over 35, online (38%) and television (34%) are about equally widely named as the main source of news, and print (27%) still more widely relied on than social media (19%). But among respondents under 35, online generally (56%) and social media specifically (28%) are named as the main source of news by many more than print (16%) and even television (26%).

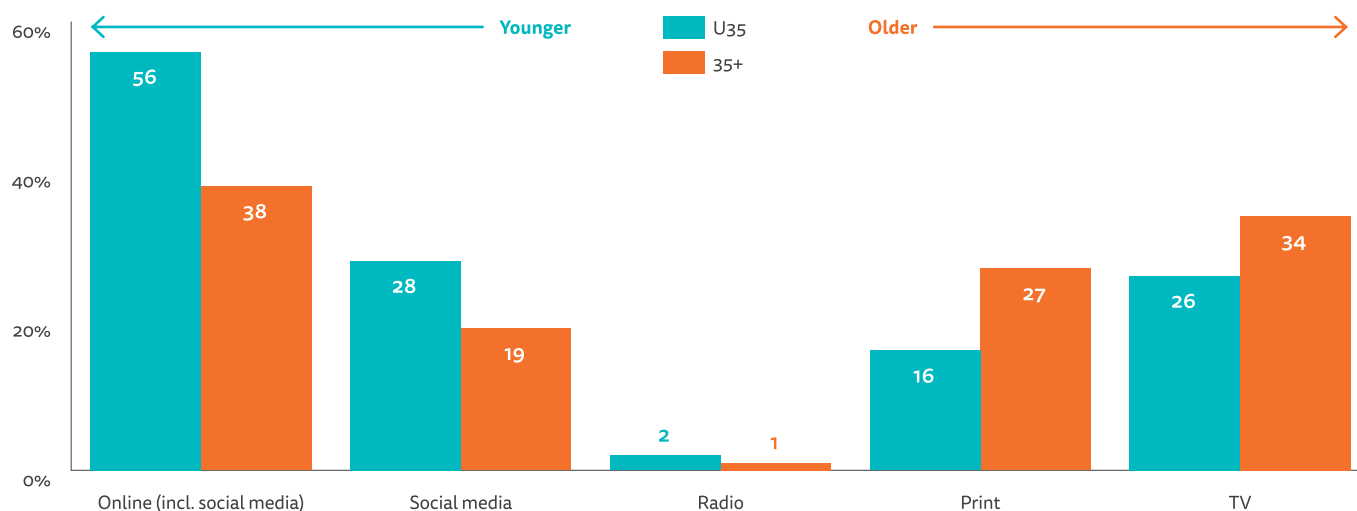
The fact that our survey covers only English speakers with internet access is key here; the number of people accessing news via print and television will be higher for regional language news consumers and most obviously for those without internet access, though as mobile web use spreads we expect to see this to change in the years ahead.

2.2 INEQUALITIES IN HOW PEOPLE ACCESS NEWS

English-language Indian internet users have access to a multitude of legacy and digital-born news sources, but given this access, how do their habits vary by interest and frequency of use? Roughly six in ten of our respondents say they have a high interest in news – about the same as in the United States but lower than those in Turkey or Brazil. Nine out of ten report accessing news at least once a day, showing how news routines can be regular even when interest is moderate.

Accessing news is far from equally distributed, even among internet users. By looking at level of interest and frequency of use, we can segment our respondents into news lovers, daily briefers, and casual users. News lovers (26%) have very high interest in news and access news more than five times a day. At the opposite end of our segmentation are casual users (36%), who typically show little or no interest in news and often access news less often than once a day. Daily briefers (38%) occupy a middle ground with at least some interest in news and access news at least daily.

MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE – INDIA



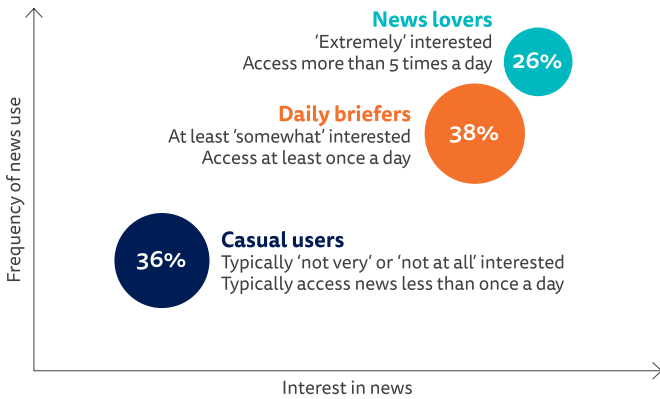
Q4. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? Base: Under 35 = 668; 35+ = 313

¹⁶ EY-India 2018.

¹⁷ Media Research Users Council 2017.

¹⁸ Wang and Sparks 2019.

GROUPS OF NEWS USERS BASED ON INTEREST AND ACCESS – INDIA



Q1b. NEW. Typically, how often do you access news? **Q1c.** How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? Base: Total sample India = 1013. Note: Respondents who said they used news less than once a month are excluded from most of the DNR survey, but were added in to the casual users category here.

All three groups use high numbers of different sources compared to their peers in other countries, perhaps indicative of a tradition among many Indians to read several papers regularly (enabled by low cover prices). News lovers on average say they've used 11.2 different sources in the past week, casual users 7.5, and daily briefers 5.7. The distribution across the three groups is broadly similar to what we have found in other countries, where news lovers consistently make up a minority, greatly outnumbered by daily briefers and casual users.¹⁹ But among our sample of English-language online news users, most respondents use more sources of news than their peers in other countries.

2.3 ENGAGING WITH ONLINE NEWS

Beyond consuming news, internet users have many other opportunities to engage with news online by commenting, sharing, and the like, whether via social media or older means like email. Among our Indian respondents, the levels of participation are higher than those seen, for example, in the United States and are comparable to those seen in countries like Brazil and Turkey.

Online news engagement among our English-language respondents is primarily driven by sharing. Our data suggest that Indian users share a little less on social media and email as compared to users in Brazil or Turkey, but they still share much more than users in the United States. Facebook, as the most widely used social media platform, and WhatsApp, as the most widely used messaging application, are central to how Indians engage with online news.

Looking at Facebook, our respondents are particularly engaged, with 69% saying they've looked at or clicked on news, 54% have posted or shared news, and 41% have taken part in a group or private discussion about news.

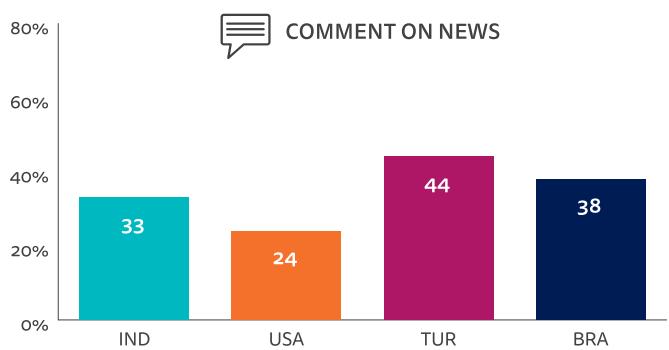
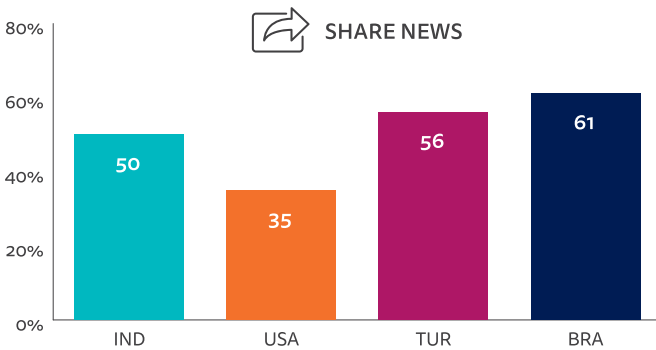
For WhatsApp, the numbers are similar, again, 60% have looked at or clicked on news, 46% posted or shared, and 39% taken part in group or private discussions. On both platforms, our Indian respondents are more engaged in group and private discussions than in most of the markets we compare them with here.

PROPORTION THAT USE WHATSAPP AND FACEBOOK FOR EACH ACTIVITY – INDIA

	Facebook (%)	WhatsApp (%)
Looked at news headlines/videos	45%	40%
Clicked on a link to get more information	49%	41%
Posted a news story	23%	23%
Shared or liked a news story	45%	36%
Taken part in a group set up to discuss a particular news topic	28%	27%
Taken part in a private discussion about a news story (one or more people)	25%	27%
Net: Looked at news headline/ clicked on link	69%	60%
Net: Posted or shared	54%	46%
Net: Taken part in group or private discussion	41%	39%

Q12_2018_FB. Thinking about the news you get via Facebook, which of the following have you done in the last week. Please select all that apply. Base: Those who use FB in last week for news = 525. **Q12_2018_WA.** Thinking about the news you get via WhatsApp, which of the following have you done in the last week. Please select all that apply. Base: Those who use WhatsApp in last week for news = 526

PROPORTION THAT SHARES AND COMMENTS ON NEWS – SELECTED MARKETS



Q13. During an average week in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? Please select all that apply. Showing codes for Share a story via a social network, via email and via an instant messenger, as well as comment on a news story on a social network, and on a news website. Base: USA = 2401; Turkey = 2019; Brazil = 2007; India = 1013

¹⁹ Newman et al. 2018.

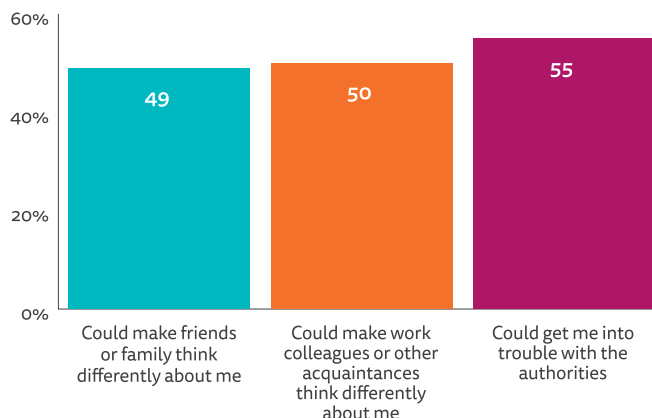
2.4 HIGH LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION, CAUTION AROUND POLITICAL EXPRESSION

The high levels of engagement with news on social media documented above are accompanied by high levels of concern about the possible consequences of expressing political views on the internet. Asked to consider the statements 'I tend to think carefully about expressing my political views openly on the internet because this could get me into trouble with the authorities', 'I tend to think carefully about expressing my political views openly on the internet because this could make friends or family think differently about me' and 'I tend to think carefully expressing my political views openly on the internet because this could make work colleagues or other acquaintances think differently about me', Indian respondents express significantly higher levels of concern in all three areas than respondents in the United States. The levels of concern are directly comparable to those found in Brazil and in Turkey.

These high levels of concern could be based in part on recent events in India. Since 2012 at least 17 people have been arrested for posting material that was considered offensive or threatening to a politician. Arrests have included people speaking out against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and more recently, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. As recently as December 2018, a journalist was jailed for criticising the BJP and Manipur Chief Minister.

To examine the possible link between political sympathies and concern over expressing views online, we analysed the responses by party preference. The only difference we found is that that non-partisans express less concern than do partisans of any persuasion.

PROPORTION CONCERNED ABOUT DIFFERENT CONSEQUENCES OF OPENLY EXPRESSING THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS ONLINE – INDIA



Q13a_2018_1-3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I tend to think carefully about expressing my political views openly on the internet because this could get me into trouble with the authorities/because this could make friends or family think differently about me/because this could make work colleagues or other acquaintances think differently about me. Base: India = 1013

3. Brands and Trust

3.1 LEGACY BRANDS POPULAR WITH ONLINE NEWS CONSUMERS

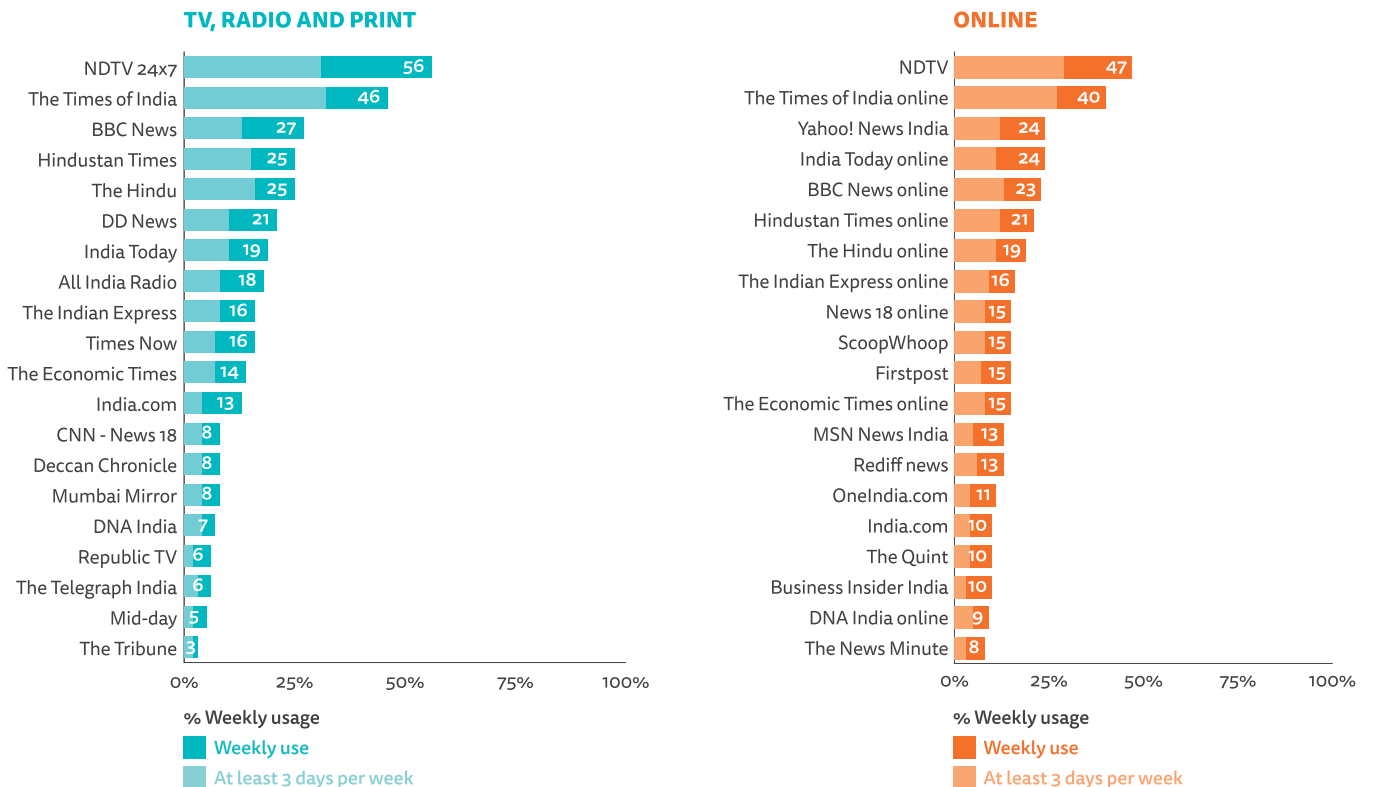
As Indian internet users increasingly turn to online sources of news, they often opt for the digital offerings of legacy brands. NDTV (56% offline, 47% online) and *The Times of India* (46% offline, 40% online) are far more widely used among our respondents than any other brands. The strong preference for just a couple of news organisations has similarities with Brazil – where Rede Globo’s television and digital offerings have very high reach – and is very different from a market like the United States, where no brands have comparable reach.

Beyond NDTV and *The Times of India*, other legacy brands like the *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, and the *Indian Express* are among the top ten news websites by reach. Aggregators like Yahoo!, Rediff and MSN are also widely used, and the BBC has significant reach across broadcast (27%) and online (23%) among our English-language respondents.

Online, new digital-born media such as Firstpost and Scoopwhoop are attracting a significant percentage of weekly users. Other new online entrants like the non-profit *The Wire* (7%) and the news site *Scroll* (5%) have smaller weekly audiences than the major legacy brands and the most widely used digital brands.

As a clear illustration of how digital and print still supplement rather than supplant each other for many users in India, a number of major English-language Indian newspapers have wider offline reach than online reach – a very different scenario from most other markets covered in the *Digital News Report* research, where newspapers tend to have far smaller offline reach than online reach.

NEWS BRANDS USED LAST WEEK – INDIA



Q5A. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Via TV, RADIO OR PRINT ONLY (Traditional platforms). **Q5ai.** Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply. **Q5B.** Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Via online platforms (web, mobile, tablet, e-reader). **Q5bi.** Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply. Base: All = 1013

3.2 ALTERNATIVE AND PARTISAN NEWS SITES EMBRACED BY SOME

Like other countries, India has seen a growing number of new alternative and partisan websites launched by entrepreneurs leveraging the lower barriers of entry that digital media provide, the potential for reaching a significant audience especially on social media, and the appetite in some parts of the public for new and sometimes highly ideologically charged angles on news and public affairs.²⁰

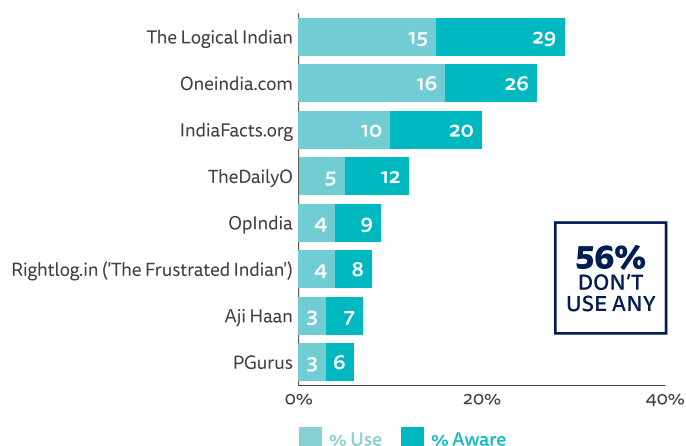
Our research shows that, despite their increased visibility and sometimes highly motivated and vocal audiences, most of these publishers have only a relatively limited and small audience. Few of our respondents are even aware of most of these sites, and even fewer say they have actually accessed them in the last week.

The main exceptions to the limited reach of most of these sites are brands like The Logical Indian (15%), OneIndia (16%), and IndiaFacts (10%), all of which are relatively widely known among our respondents and have built significant audiences – all have far wider reach among our English-language Indian respondents than major alternative and partisan news sites like Breitbart (7%) and Occupy Democrats (5%) have in the United States. (Among these three most accessed websites, The Logical Indian is seen by many as close to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), IndiaFacts is seen by many as right-leaning and close to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).)



Despite the evident success of some of these sites, it is worth highlighting that 56% of our respondents have not used any of these in the past week, and only IndiaFacts, OneIndia, and the Logical Indian have name recognition among 20% or more of our respondents. This is different from the United States, where many alternative and partisan news sites have far higher name recognition (though few loyal users).

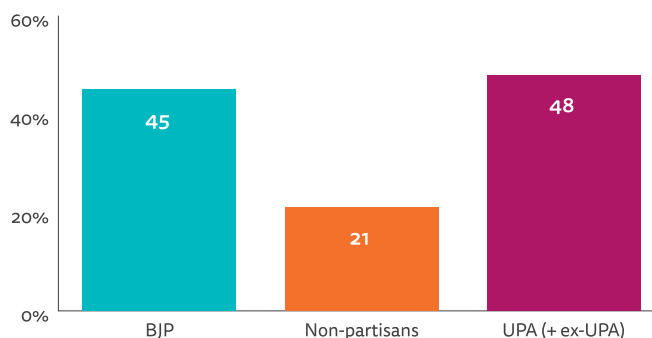
PROPORTION THAT ARE AWARE OF AND USED PARTISAN AND ALTERNATIVE NEWS WEBSITES IN THE PAST WEEK – INDIA



Q5c_2018_1. In recent years a number of online news sites have emerged with their content often distributed via social media. Which, if any, of the following have you heard of? Please select all that apply. **Q5c_2018_2.** Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week. Please select all that apply. Base: India = 1013

To learn more about the perception that these websites are aligned with one political party or other, we compared users of these websites with their preferred website with reported political affiliation but found no significant trends – though it was evident that users who aligned with any political party were more likely to use these sites in their daily news consumption.

PROPORTION THAT USES ANY ALTERNATIVE OR PARTISAN NEWS WEBSITE BY POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE – INDIA



Q5c_2018_2. Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week? Please select all that apply. Base: BJP = 501; UPA (+ ex-UPA) = 232; Non-partisans (don't know & won't vote) = 280

An open-ended survey question about what draws users to these websites generated some interesting responses. Some respondents say they feel mainstream media do not represent them and want news outlets that represent their views. Users find news on these sites to be 'genuine', 'to-the-point', and 'accessible'.

"I use them because they give the accurate picture of what is going on in our society in a clear and short way."
(Male, 35, user of Oneindia.com and The Logical Indian)

"It's not like that I am a permanent visitor of this news website but sometimes, especially when I am fact checking about some fake news, then I do use this website."

(Male, 29, user of Oneindia.com)

3.3 TRUST IN NEWS – MEDIA VERSUS PLATFORMS

As Indians increasingly use digital media to access and engage with news, their trust in various forms of news will evolve. Reuters Institute research in other countries has already documented how trust plays out differently as direct discovery of news via websites and apps is increasingly supplemented with distributed discovery via search engines and social media, and how social changes such as political polarisation can influence trust in news.²¹

Our survey of English-language internet users in India captures a very particular trust landscape characterised by low trust in news in general, combined with higher levels of trust in distributed channels like search and social.

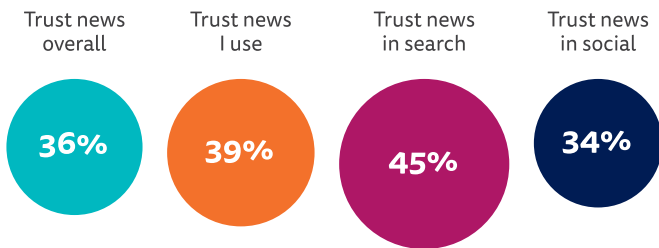
²⁰ We follow the definition in the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2018) of alternative and partisan news sites as websites or blogs that often have a political or ideological agenda and a user base that tends to share these often partisan views. Most were created relatively recently and are mainly distributed through social media. The motivation may not be purely political as there may also be a strong business opportunity in focusing on these topics. The narrowness of their focus also separates them from some established news sites, which may also have a reputation for partisan political coverage.

²¹ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/news-brand-attribution-distributed-environments-do-people-know-where-they-get-their>

Only 39% of our respondents say they trust the 'news they use' most of the time, and just 36% say they trust the 'news in general' most of the time. The low overall level of trust in news in general here is comparable to what we have found in both Turkey and the United States (but significantly lower than, for example, Brazil). Where India stands out is in the very small difference – just three percentage points – between trust in the news people actually use versus their trust in news in general. (In the United States, for comparison, the difference is 16 percentage points, and in Turkey five.)

Given these low levels of trust, it is striking that our respondents express greater confidence in the news they access via search engines (45%) and similar levels of trust in the news they access via social media (34%). In many other countries, trust in news accessed via distributed means of discovery is significantly lower than trust in news in general and especially the news people routinely use, but in India, respondents seem to find that algorithmic forms of selection enhance – or at least do not erode – trustworthiness.

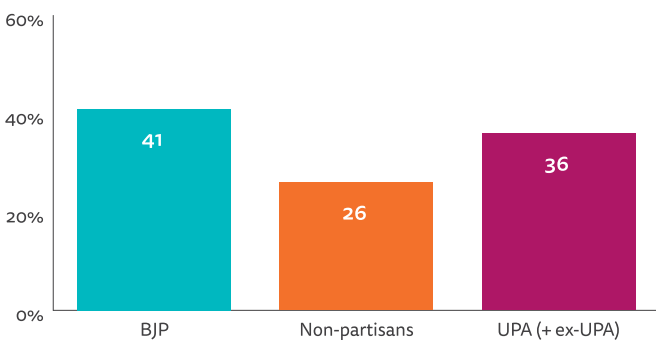
PROPORTION THAT SAY THEY TRUST NEWS FROM EACH SOURCE – INDIA



Q6_2018_1/2/3/4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I think you can trust 'most news/'news I consume/'news in social media/'news in search engines' most of the time. Base: Total sample = 1013.

Trust in news is deeply tied up with wider social and political issues, and in many countries, political partisanship is strongly correlated with trust in the news. India displays a different pattern, where trust among both those respondents who identify with the BJP and those who identify with parties currently or recently aligned with the UPA generally trust the news more than those respondents who do not identify as partisans, perhaps suggesting some discontent with the perceived relations between much of the political establishment and the news media covering it.

PROPORTION THAT TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME BY POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE – INDIA



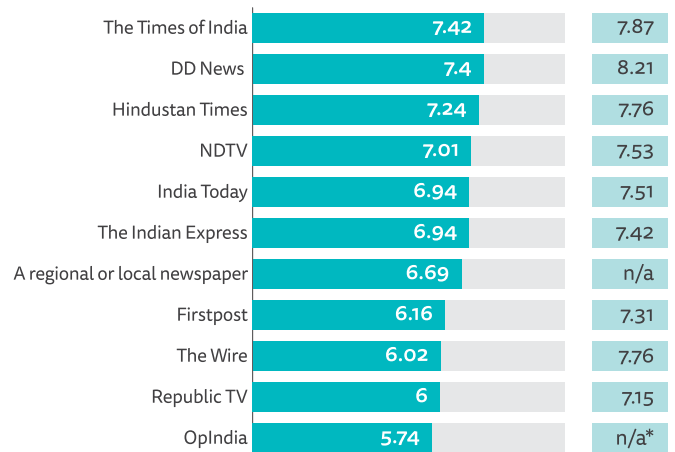
Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time. Base: India BJP = 500; UPA (+ ex-UPA) = 232; Non-partisans (don't know and will not vote) = 280

3.4 BRAND LEVEL TRUST

While levels of trust in the news are generally low among our respondents, at the level of individual brands there is significant variation. Asked to score a wide selection of different types of news brands (TV, print, digital-born) on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy', some brands are scored highly both by those who use the brand and those who are aware of it but have not used it in the past week, whereas other brands are only scored highly by their users and far less highly by those who know the brand in question but do not use it.

In a powerful illustration of how familiarity and a long record can help build trust, the most broadly trusted brands are all legacy brands, including both newspapers like *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, and *Indian Express* as well as television channels like DD News and NDTV. By contrast, newer entrants, whether television stations like Republic TV or digital-born sites like FirstPost, The Wire, and OplIndia, while highly rated by their own users, are significantly less trusted more broadly.

NEWS BRAND TRUST (0 – 10) – INDIA

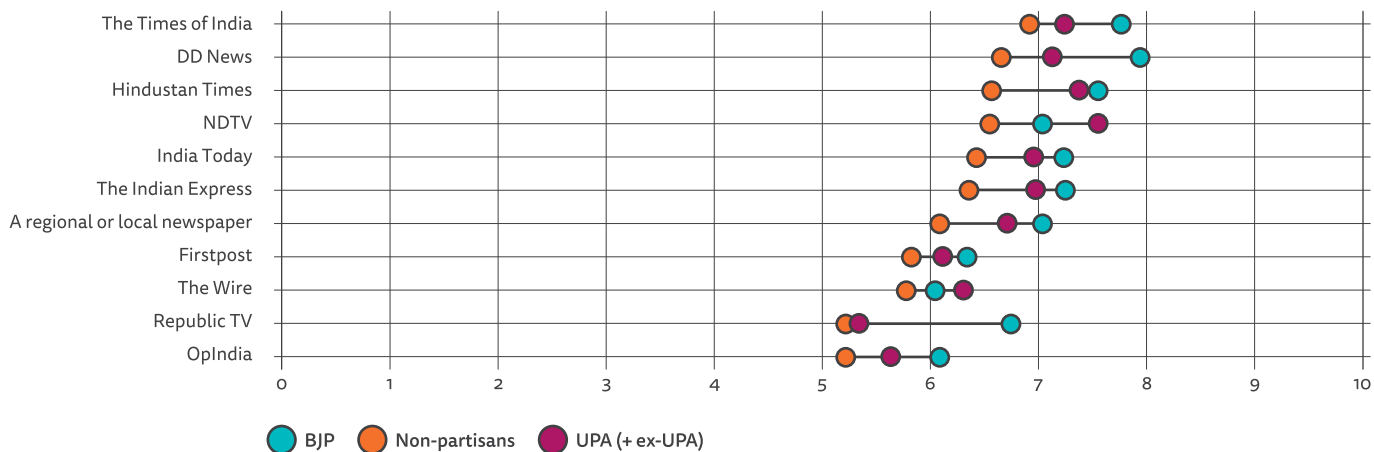


* Note: no figures for users of OplIndia (did not meet 50 minimum threshold)

Q6_2018_trust How trustworthy would you say news from the following brands is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'. Base: All those who have heard each brand. All above 50

To examine the intersection between partisanship and trust, we have analysed variation in trust at the brand level by political orientation. The overall pattern reflects our more general findings regarding trust – that non-partisans tend to trust individual brands less than partisans, just as they trust the news in general less than partisans. In most cases, respondents who identify with the BJP trust individual news brands more than other respondents, especially Republic TV. The only exceptions to this pattern are NDTV and The Wire, both of these are more highly trusted by respondents who identify with parties currently or recently aligned with the UPA. It is important to stress, however, that most of these differences are small, and partisanship is far less correlated with trust in news in India than it is in, for example, the United States.

NEWS BRAND TRUST BY POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE - INDIA



Q6_2018_trust How trustworthy would you say news from the following brands is? Please use the scale below, where 0 is 'not at all trustworthy' and 10 is 'completely trustworthy'. Base: All those who have heard each brand. India: BJP = 500; UPA (+ ex-UPA) = 232; Non-partisans (don't know and will not vote) = 280

4. Disinformation

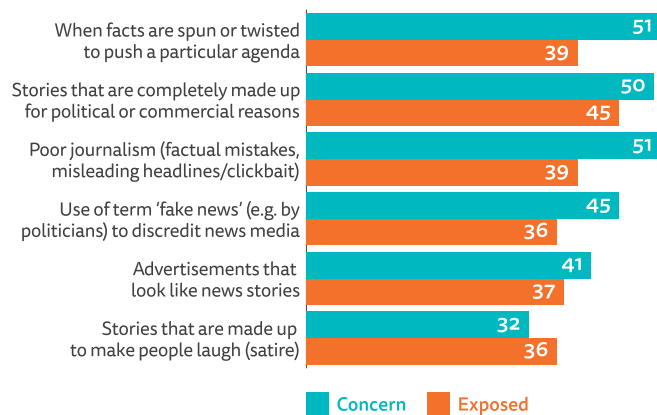
4.1 DISINFORMATION: PERCEPTIONS, CONCERNS, AND EXPOSURE

In a highly politicised context, a country with a history of communal violence and characterised by explosively growing access to new digital media and low trust in news, disinformation has emerged as a pressing issue in India. Of our respondents, 57% say they are concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet, a number comparable to levels of concern in Turkey and the United States.

Growing use of social media and messaging applications has been accompanied by a series of troubling incidents, including a wave of violence spurred in part by messages shared on WhatsApp and Facebook. A BBC article from August 2018 suggests that at least 25 people have been lynched by mobs after reading false news spread on WhatsApp.²² (It is worth noting that respondents who say they use Facebook and/or WhatsApp for news do not report higher levels of concern over whether the news they come across is real or fake.)

To better understand disinformation problems in India, we asked our sample of English-language internet users about their exposure to and concern over different types of potentially problematic content that previous research for the Reuters Institute identified as examples of what the public associate with 'fake news' and disinformation.²³ The categories include false news narrowly defined ('Stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons') but also hyperpartisan political content, whether from politicians, pundits, or publishers ('Stories where facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda'), 'poor journalism' (stories that respondents consider marred by factual mistakes, inaccuracies, etc.), and more.

CONCERN OVER AND EXPOSURE TO 'FAKE NEWS' - INDIA



Q_FAKE_NEWS_2. To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about the following. Chart shows 'extremely concerned' and 'very concerned'. **Q_FAKE_NEWS_3.** In the LAST WEEK which of the following have you personally come across? Base: India = 1013

Levels of concern over all these categories are high in India, with the majority of our respondents expressing concern over hyperpartisan content (51%), false news (50%), and poor journalism (51%) – the percentage of respondents who in addition say that they themselves have come across such problematic content in the last week is generally lower, but still comparatively high, with around four in ten reporting exposure. (We should stress here again our sample are English speakers and that results might differ considerably among users who consume and share news and information in their local languages.)

Given the high levels of concern over hyperpartisan content, the political context of disinformation, and evidence that some political groups have actively disseminated disinformation, we examined levels of concern and exposure by political leaning.²⁴ There are, however, no partisan differences. Concern over disinformation and false news are similar across all our respondents regardless of which party they support.

4.2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR FIXING DISINFORMATION ISSUES?

Given that many respondents agreed that India is plagued by a range of disinformation issues, it is important to understand who, if anyone, they believe should act to address these issues. We asked respondents whether they felt publishers, platform companies, and/or the government should do more to make it easier to separate what is real and what is fake on the internet, and reminded them that any action to decrease/reduce the amount of misinformation (in the media or in social media) is likely to have the consequence of reducing, to some extent, the range of real or legitimate news or opinion available.

We find considerable appetite for action against disinformation and action from all different actors. Regardless of political affiliation, about two-thirds of our respondents felt that publishers, platforms, and/or the government should all do more to address disinformation problems. Compared to the United States, our India respondents express similar levels of appetite for action from publishers and platforms, and significantly greater appetite for government action.

PROPORTION WHO THINKS THAT EACH ACTOR SHOULD SOLVE THE MISINFORMATION PROBLEM



Q_FAKE_NEWS_4_2_1. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: The Government should do more to make it easier to separate what is real and fake on the internet; Media companies and journalists should do more to make it easier to separate what is real and what is fake on the internet; Technology companies (e.g. Facebook and Google) should do more to make it easier to separate what is real and what is fake on the internet. Base: USA = 2401; India = 1013

²² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-45140158>

²³ Nielsen and Graves 2017.

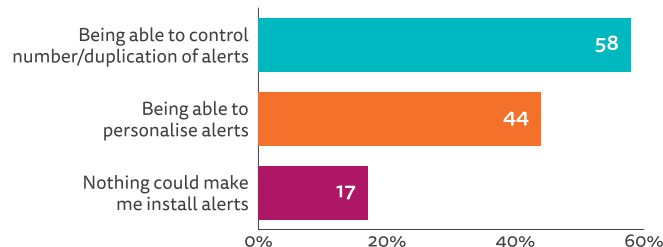
²⁴ A BBC report released in Dec. 2018 states that a significant portion of the news being shared was political, and that right-wing networks were much more organised than the left when it came to spreading fake nationalistic stories, including ones about the personality and prowess of Prime Minister Narendra Modi – see Chakrabarti et al. 2018.

5. Future Trends

5.1 MOBILE APPLICATIONS AND ALERTS

As noted, 68% of our respondents name their smartphone as their main device for accessing online news. The move to mobile phones has clearly gone hand-in-hand with the move to distributed discovery, where social media and other platform intermediaries are becoming more important than conventional forms of direct access. But publishers who have invested in mobile strategies are seeing a return as smartphones also offer new ways of serving their users. The fact that 12% of our respondents identified mobile alerts as their main way of accessing online news suggests publishers with effective mobile strategies have future opportunities to retain a direct connection with their readers. While 50% of respondents say they get the right number of news notifications, 34% say they get too many. For publishers interested in expanding their reach and serving their audiences via mobile alerts, it is important to understand what might convince people to sign up. We asked those who do not currently receive news alerts what might convince them to sign up, and while 17% say 'nothing' could, more express an appetite for controlled, personalised alerts.

PROPORTION THAT SAY EACH REASON WOULD ENCOURAGE THEM TO USE NEWS ALERTS – INDIA

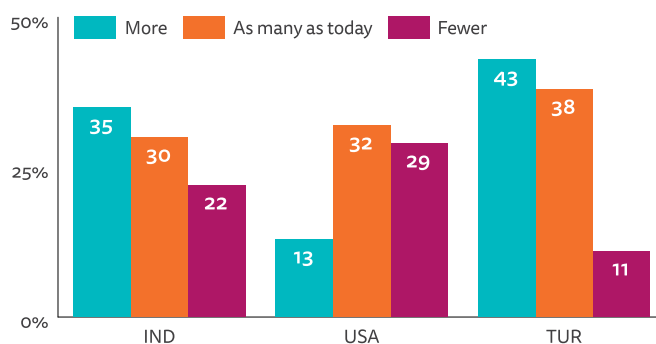


Q10b_2018_4. You use a mobile device but said you have not received a mobile notification in the last week, which of the following features would encourage you to use or install alerts/notifications for news? Base: All that use a smartphone or tablet but did not receive a news alert in the last week = 614

5.2 APPETITE FOR ONLINE NEWS VIDEO

Online news video is another area with potential for growth, and one in which many Indian publishers are already investing.²⁵ While a challenging area where substantial investments have often failed to meet high expectations elsewhere, as users who increasingly embrace both high-end on-demand premium video and short, sharable, social forms of video still seem to have a modest appetite for online news video, the Indian market seems to have potential for growth. And though English-language Indian internet users currently consume more text over video, there is an appetite for more video in the future – 35% of our respondents say they would like to see more online video news. Despite many still reading text stories, there seems to be an appetite for more videos among internet users of all ages.

PROPORTION THAT WANTS TO SEE MORE ONLINE NEWS VIDEO – SELECTED MARKETS

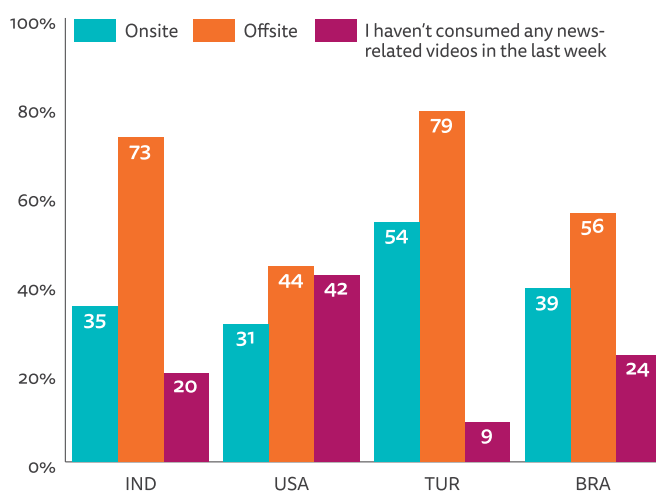


Q11_VIDEO_2018b. News organisations can decide to produce stories in text or video format. With this in mind, in the future would you like to see? Please select one option only. Base: USA = 2401; Turkey = 2019; India = 1013

5.3 VIDEO VIEWING MOVING OFFSITE

From publishers' point of view, the appetite for more online news video is an opportunity, but the majority of online news video viewing is taking place offsite. Just 35% of our respondents say they have watched online video news on a publisher's website or app, compared to 73% who have watched online video news on offsite platforms like YouTube and Facebook. (The numbers add up to more than 100 because a significant minority watch online news video both on- and offsite.) This is broadly in line with other industry research suggesting YouTube and Facebook account for 60–70% of total online video consumption in India.²⁶

PROPORTION THAT USED ONSITE/OFFSITE VIDEO DURING THE PAST WEEK – SELECTED MARKETS



Q11_VIDEO_2018a. Thinking about consuming online news video (of any kind) over the <last week>, which of the following did you do? Please select all that apply. Base: USA = 2401; Turkey = 2019; Brazil = 2007; India = 1013

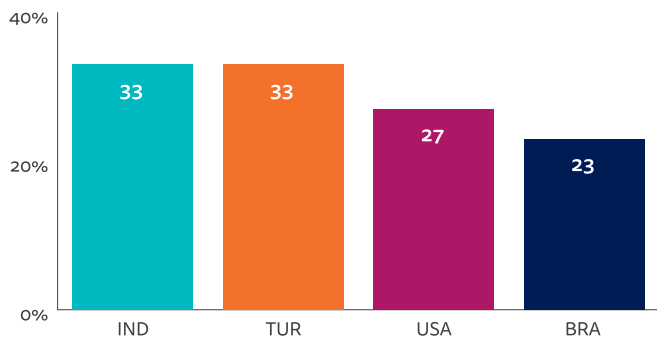
²⁵ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/indian-news-media-and-production-news-age-social-discovery>

²⁶ KPMG 2018.

5.4 AD-BLOCKING (ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNGER USERS) A THREAT TO THE BUSINESS

Given Indian publishers' reliance on advertising revenues, widespread ad-blocking is a challenge for the business of online news. Even though many publishers have taken steps to tackle ad-blocking, a third of our respondents continue to use ad-blockers. This is in line with other industry research which has suggested at least 122 million Indians use ad-blockers, and that ad-blocking is prevalent on both mobile and desktop.²⁷

PROPORTION THAT USES AN AD-BLOCKER – SELECTED MARKETS



QAD3. And do you currently use software on any of your personal devices (e.g. laptop, smartphone etc.) that allows you to block adverts on the internet (e.g. Adblock Plus)? Chart shows 'Yes'. Base: USA = 2401; Turkey = 2019; Brazil = 2007; India = 1013

5.5 OPPORTUNITIES AROUND VOICE-ACTIVATED SPEAKERS AND AUDIO

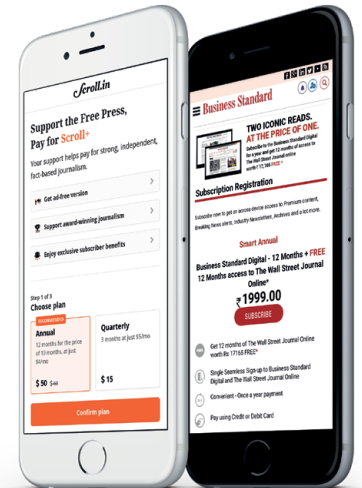
Another growing segment (though from a very low base in India) is voice-activated speakers like Alexa and Google Home: 9% of our English-language internet user respondents say they currently use a voice-activated system, and more than half of these (5%) use them to access news. Like publishers elsewhere, Indian news media need to think about their strategy for this rapidly evolving segment. Audio more broadly also offers opportunities, with growing popularity among Indian internet users as well. Among our respondents, the most popular podcasts are from traditional Indian news brands like *The Times of India*, NDTV and Aaj Tak, but international brands like TED, Oprah, and YouTube personality Logan Paul are also popular.

5.6 WILL INDIANS PAY FOR ONLINE NEWS?

In an increasingly competitive market for online advertising, where audiences are embracing ad-blocking, and where advertisers often opt for the cheap, targeted options provided by large platform companies, Indian publishers' reliance on advertising puts them at risk. Some are reconsidering their strategy and business models and have been experimenting with new pay models, some of them subscription based.

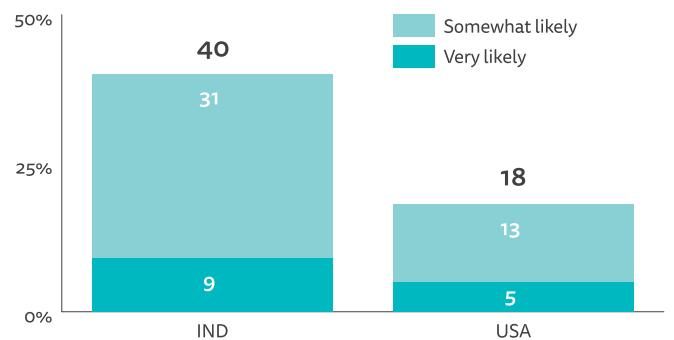
Widely used legacy brands like NDTV and *The Times of India* do not have a paywall on their website, but they do offer subscription-based mobile apps: NDTV app users can pay INR 550 (US\$ 7.73) annually for an ad-free experience and *The Times of India's* ET Prime recently launched a morning briefing app with a yearly subscription for INR 2499 (US\$ 35.11). The financial newspaper the *Business Standard* has operated a subscription model for some time, the digital-born news site Scroll has introduced Scroll+ offering exclusive subscriber benefits, and the online-only *The Ken* launched in 2017 with a subscription-based model. Other publications are experimenting with subscription-based podcasts, micropayments, and experiences.

The audience reaction to growing experimentation with pay models in Indian journalism is still unclear. A quarter of our English-language, internet using respondents say that they have paid in some form for some kind of digital news in the last year, a figure that will include many different kinds of payments, many not primarily for online news (for example, print subscriptions that come with digital benefits), is based on recall which can lead to overstatements, and is in any case not representative of the wider Indian media market.



More significantly, our survey documents a considerable willingness to pay for online news in the future. Of our respondents who do not currently pay, 39% said they are at least 'somewhat likely' to pay for news in the next year (much more than users in the United States), and 9% said they were 'very likely' to pay for online news in the future. This suggests that Indian publishers who can put together a convincing content offering around great journalism, and deliver it in a compelling way, have an opportunity to reach a significant number of potential subscribers.

PROPORTION THAT WOULD PAY FOR ONLINE NEWS IN THE FUTURE – SELECTED MARKETS



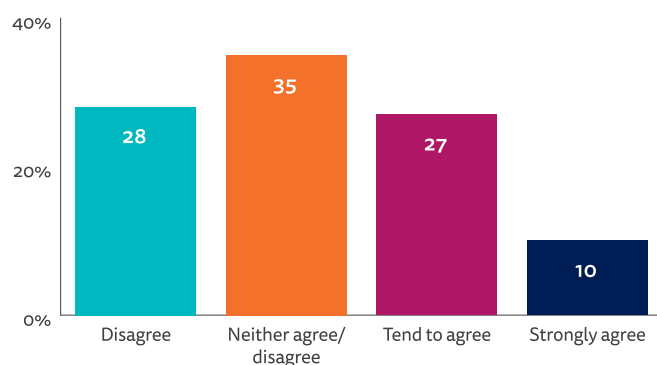
Q7aiv. You said you have not paid for online digital content in the last year...How likely or unlikely would you be to pay in the next 12 months for online news from particular sources that you like? Base: Those who have not paid for online news in the last year. USA: 1868; India 666

²⁷ Punit 2016.

5.7 WILL MORE PEOPLE DONATE TO NEWS?

With news organisations like Newslaundry and The Wire already operating on a donations model, and non-profit news growing around the world, it remains to be seen how many Indians will donate to news. As in other markets, Indian internet users displayed high levels of agreement with the idea that news organisations should ask for donations from the public if they are unable to cover their costs in other ways. Of our respondents, 10% 'strongly agreed' they would consider donating to a news outlet if they were unable to cover their costs in other ways, suggesting significant potential for growing donation-based models.

PROPORTION THAT WOULD DONATE TO AN OUTLET – INDIA



Q7c_DONATE_2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I would consider making a donation to a news outlet I like if they were unable to cover their costs in other ways. Base: India 1013

When asked in open-ended survey questions why they might donate to support news, respondents gave a range of different reasons, from a desire to maintain standards, to concerns over media freedom, to a desire to support entrepreneurialism.

“Because in the age of fake news it is very hard to get the original content. But there are some media websites and persons who are trying to maintain the dignity of journalism and that’s why I support them by donating.”

(Male, 29)

“The digital news service is necessary for freedom of media.”

(Male, 27)

“It will encourage more start-ups.”

(Female, 21)

Conclusion

In this report we have presented a snapshot of how English-language internet users in India engage with news and media, and shown that they are embracing a mobile-first, platform-dominated media environment where search engines, social media, and messaging applications play a key role in how people access and use news. We also find that our respondents have low trust in many news media, high concerns over the possible implications of expressing political views, and are worried about different kinds of disinformation.

We have studied only the news and media habits and opinions of English-language internet users and our results should thus not be taken as representative of the wider Indian media scene, but the results presented here provide useful evidence on how a significant subset of the Indian public engages with news, and provide publishers and others interested in serving this part of the Indian public with important information about current and future trends.

It is clear that we should expect to see the rapid move to digital, mobile, and platform media continue, both due to growing internet access across India, and due to generational replacement.

This move presents Indian publishers with a range of important opportunities including developing their mobile offerings, their news alerts, and their email newsletters to better serve domestic and overseas audiences, as well as the opportunity to leverage distributed discovery to reach people who do not come direct to publishers (the majority of our respondents). It also presents them with clear challenges, as digital media become a more and more important part of the overall Indian media landscape, competition for attention and advertising will intensify, and legacy publishers used to dominating their home market will face intensified competition from smaller digital-born new entrants and, most importantly, from large platform companies.

The evolving relationship between publishers and platforms will shape the wider evolution of Indian journalism and the Indian news media industry, with hundreds of millions of new users coming online in the years ahead, and opportunities around mobile, video, and voice, but also challenges as digital advertising may not go to publishers, who will have to consider other sources of revenue to fund their journalism, including, for some, advertising beyond display, donations, or pay models.

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