



Press release

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What lies ahead for India's digital journalism start-ups?

India has the fastest levels of internet growth in the world.

This recent explosion in internet use, sparked by the spread of mobile internet access, has meant a surge in digital advertising. And along with India's established legacy media industry, there's a host of new digital journalism start-ups pursuing the sudden opportunities offered by the growth.

There are more new and interesting experiments in Indian journalism than in most other countries in the world.

Who are these new players? What strategies are they pursuing when it comes to content, distribution and funding? And what are the economic, professional and political pressures that they face?

A new report from the Reuters Institute sets out to explore content-based, for-profit start-ups The Quint and Scroll, aggregation-based organisations Inshort and DailyHunt and non-profit start-ups The Wire and Khabar Lahariya, along with the wider, rapidly changing context in which they're operating.

Many are currently primarily serving English-speaking Indians, but most are keen to move into Hindi and local language content to reach a wider audience as more and more Indians come online.

Digital Journalism Start-up in India, by Arijit Sen and Reuters Institute Director of Research Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, analyse this rapidly evolving situation, with the ambition of helping journalists, academics and decision makers learn from early experiences and understand where things are heading in the future.

"We examine individual start-ups not to predict their eventual success or failure, but as examples of how digital journalism is being pursued in a context that is very different from that of high-income democracies," explains lead author Arijit Sen, and continues, "With their mobile- and social-first strategies, some Indian start-ups have built considerable audiences very quickly, relying in large part on exploiting the potential of third-party platforms like Facebook and Twitter." At the same time, Sen says, "digital journalists in India still face some of the same economic, professional, and political pressures newspaper and television journalists struggle with."

“Despite their often innovative approaches to content, distribution, and the business of digital news, the combination of low advertising rates, limited willingness to pay for news, and the dominance of legacy media and international technology companies when it comes to digital advertising means that most start-ups in India face a challenging environment commercially—even as they benefit from rapid growth in the number of users and in overall advertising spend”, says RISJ Director of Research Rasmus Kleis Nielsen.

Examining what sets those start-ups studied apart from other media outlets in the country, the report shows how a generation of journalists, technologists, and media executives are experimenting with new forms of journalism fit for a digital India, developing new kinds of content, distribution, and revenue models, while navigating between legacy media competitors and the global players who dominate digital advertising.

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About the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

The Thomson Reuters Foundation is the core funder of the Reuters Institute, based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. The Institute was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford 32 years ago. The Reuters Institute, an international research centre in the comparative study of journalism, aims to be global in its perspective and provides a leading forum for scholars from a wide range of disciplines to engage with journalists from around the world. See <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

About the Authors

Arijit Sen is a former Gerda Henkel Fellow at the Reuters Institute at Oxford University and an alumnus of the School of Law in SOAS, London, and Calcutta University. A three-time recipient of India’s Ramnath Goenka Award for Excellence in Journalism, and formerly a journalist with NDTV and Senior Special Correspondent for CNN-IBN, he now works for Amnesty International.

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen is Director of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford and editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Press/Politics*. His work focuses on changes in the news media, political communication, and the role of digital technologies in both. He has done extensive research on journalism, political campaigns, and various forms of activism, and a significant amount of comparative work in Western Europe and beyond. His work has been covered by news media all over the world and he frequently speaks at both academic and industry/professional conferences.

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