# A Comparative Analysis of WhatsApp Journalism and Conventional Electronic Media in India

## Lokesh Yogi

Scholar, University of Technology, Jaipur

**Abstract:**

This study compares the functions of traditional electronic media and WhatsApp journalism in India with regard to news generation, public involvement, and information distribution. The traditional dominance of radio and television has been challenged by WhatsApp, which has become a key venue for news dissemination because to the increasing prevalence of smartphones and internet access. In contrast to the well-established methods of traditional electronic media, this study examines the advantages and disadvantages of WhatsApp journalism. It looks into how these platforms affect public opinion formation, information believability, and journalistic ethics. This research evaluates the relative efficacy of case studies, content analysis, and user surveys in providing fast, accurate, and responsible information. The results show how news consumption in India is changing, highlighting the need for critical media literacy and regulatory frameworks that take into account both the long-standing advantages and versatility of traditional electronic media as well as the particular difficulties presented by digital platforms like WhatsApp.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp journalism in India, traditional media, social media, media disinformation, WhatsApp news impact, false information, digital media, news distribution

**Introduction: The Changing Media Environment in India**

This study compares and contrasts WhatsApp journalism with traditional electronic media in India, looking at how each platform contributes differently to audience engagement, news distribution, and societal impact. The study explores the distinctive qualities of each media, emphasizing both its advantages and disadvantages in the particular Indian setting. The ramifications of this changing media landscape for public discourse, political processes, and the ubiquitous problem of disinformation will be a major area of focus. The way news is produced and consumed in India has changed significantly as a result of the quick conversion of traditional print media into digital outlets and the emergence of social media platforms like WhatsApp (Nagi 2018).

This change calls for a critical analysis of how these two media interact, what each brings to the public domain, and what threats they can provide to informed civic participation. The importance of this comparative study is highlighted by the spread of false information on websites like WhatsApp, especially in light of incidents like the lynchings examined in (Medeiros 2020). Additionally, as explained in (Guess 2020), research on digital media literacy interventions indicates that successful tactics are essential to reducing the adverse effects of this changing media landscape.

## India's Conventional Electronic Media: A History of Gatekeeping

**Institutional Structures and Historical Context:** Government regulation and the creation of public broadcasting institutions are closely related to the historical development of conventional electronic media in India, including radio and television. The post-independence government's focus on nation-building and social mobilization was reflected in the original establishment of Doordarshan, the national television broadcaster, and All India Radio (AIR) as tools of state control (Gong 2014). A centralized approach of news creation and distribution defined this early stage, in which the government greatly influenced the media environment.

Although there are still discussions concerning how to strike a balance between commercial interests and public service broadcasting, the rise of private radio stations and television channels throughout time brought more diversity and competition to the media landscape. These platforms' traditional journalistic norms and practices placed a strong emphasis on a gatekeeping role, in which news organizations and editors had considerable control over the selection and display of news information (Beckett 2008). For many years, the Indian media has been distinguished by this model, which is frequently defined by an organizational framework and established professional norms. A framework that can be applied to the Indian context is the examination of routine work procedures in a Danish television newsroom, as presented in Schultz (2007). This analysis offers important insights into the intricate decision-making processes that influence news presentation and selection in traditional media settings.

**Strategies for Reaching and Engaging Audiences:** Although its penetration varies greatly depending on socioeconomic, linguistic, and geographic factors, traditional electronic media in India claims a wide audience reach. With its nationwide reach and multilingual programming, Doordarshan serves a linguistically heterogeneous population (Munshi 2020). Nonetheless, there are still disparities in access to radio and television, with marginalized and rural people frequently having less access to these media. The choice of programming format, the use of regional languages, and the capacity to establish a cultural and emotional connection with audiences are some of the variables that affect how effective conventional engagement tactics are. Public service announcements, discussion shows, and news broadcast styles have long been used to captivate audiences and influence public opinion.

Traditional engagement techniques are challenged by the evolving media landscape, which is shown in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2015 (Newman 2015), which shows a notable shift towards social media platforms as the main channels to viewers. Additionally, the study of climate journalism (Schfer 2020) shows that the media ecosystem is dynamic, with changing communication affordances and economic conditions influencing how news is created and distributed. This emphasizes the necessity of comparing traditional and modern journalism.

**Traditional Media's Drawbacks and Difficulties:** Traditional electronic media in India confront a number of restrictions and difficulties despite their extensive reach. Information access is still a major issue, especially in isolated places with inadequate infrastructure (Beckett 2008). Another major issue is media bias, which is a result of political and commercial interests (Gong 2014). Concerns over the variety of voices and viewpoints expressed in the media are raised by the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a small number of strong conglomerates. The media's function as a watchdog of power can be undermined by the influence of political and economic interests, which can result in self-censorship or the willful repression of critical voices. Additionally, the examination of climate journalism (Schfer 2020) highlights the difficulties in providing objective and truthful reporting in a media environment that is becoming more complicated and contested, where the creation of news about climate change is impacted

by financial limitations and the growth of diverse communicators. While maintaining a certain level of quality control, conventional media's gatekeeping role can also restrict the range of voices and viewpoints, which could make it more difficult to depict public opinion and socioeconomic realities in a way that is truly representative.

**WhatsApp Journalism: A Dispersed News Distribution Model**

**WhatsApp's Inception and Development as a News Source:** WhatsApp's distinctive features as a mobile messaging app are directly responsible for its rise to prominence as a news source in India. Its quick rise as a news source can be attributed to its simplicity, accessibility (especially via inexpensive cellphones), and ability to get by gatekeepers in traditional media (Medeiros 2020). WhatsApp has quickly gained traction in India due to the country's widespread mobile phone use and reasonably priced data plans, especially among younger and rural populations (Rosenfeld 2018). This accessibility is superior to that of traditional electronic media, which frequently necessitates more infrastructure and financial expenditure. The platform's capability to disseminate news is further enhanced by its ability to send text, photographs, and videos, which makes it a potent substitute for more traditional media outlets. The global reach and importance of cellphones, as explained in Miller (2021), offer a more comprehensive framework for comprehending WhatsApp's uptake as a news platform, especially in the Indian context.

**WhatsApp Journalism's Features:** The features of WhatsApp journalism are very different from those of traditional electronic media. Its tone is conversational and informal, and it frequently uses user-generated material instead of news broadcasts that have been expertly created (Bonini 2023). The dependability of the information spread is called into question by the lack of official editorial procedures and fact-checking systems. In addition to enabling instant updates and breaking news coverage, the platform's capacity for rapid information dissemination also raises the possibility of rumors and false information spreading. As examined in (Cesarino 2020), the usage of WhatsApp groups demonstrates how the platform's features support the development of online communities and the dissemination of populist speech.

The speed and scope of information distribution on WhatsApp and similar platforms are further demonstrated by the research of public health themes on online platforms during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tsao 2021).

**WhatsApp Audience Reach and Engagement:** In India, WhatsApp has a sizable readership and is still expanding. The creation of group chats promotes a feeling of community and shared identity by enabling the targeted distribution of news to particular audiences (Bonini 2023). Sharing emotional and experiencing narratives is made easier and engagement is increased through the inclusion of multimedia information, such as pictures and videos. WhatsApp journalism differs from the more formal and impersonal approach of traditional electronic media in that it fosters personal ties between journalists and their readers through direct engagement and tailored communication (Aldamen 2023). WhatsApp's importance in preserving personal ties and providing care across geographic distances is demonstrated by the study of frequent calling behaviors in Indian transnational families (Ahlin 2018), underscoring the platform's capacity to cultivate solid interpersonal relationships.

**A Comparative Study of Traditional Media and WhatsApp in India**

**Accessibility and Reach: Closing the Digital Gap:** The reach and accessibility of WhatsApp journalism distinguishes it from traditional electronic media. Despite having a wide audience, traditional media—

especially radio and television—have uneven penetration, underserving many underprivileged populations (Miller 2021). However, because low-cost handsets and reasonably priced data plans are widely available, WhatsApp has impressively spread across socioeconomic strata, including low-income and rural communities (Sarwatay 2021).

This implies that WhatsApp journalism has the ability to close the digital divide and reach audiences that traditional media has hitherto neglected. This accessibility is not without its difficulties, though. Users' levels of digital literacy vary greatly, leaving them open to manipulation and false information. Furthermore, the intricacies of media access and consumption across various socioeconomic situations are shown by the research of media use among children in India across various classes (Banaji 2015).

**Information Dissemination Speed and Immediacy:** Compared to traditional electronic media, WhatsApp journalism enables noticeably faster and more immediate information delivery. WhatsApp allows breaking news to be shared virtually instantly, avoiding the editing delays and procedures that come with traditional media outlets (Aldamen 2023). This speed poses serious concerns even if it can be advantageous in time-sensitive scenarios. Confusion and fear may result from the quick transmission of information that contains errors or has not been vetted.

WhatsApp's instantaneity also makes it easier for rumors and conspiracy theories to proliferate, which can have detrimental effects on social stability and public health (Nagi 2018). The speed and possible difficulties of real-time information distribution on social media are highlighted by the research of public health issues on online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tsao 2021).

**Mechanisms for Content Quality and Verification:** The methods used by WhatsApp journalism and traditional electronic media to guarantee content quality and verification differ significantly. To guarantee the correctness and dependability of their news reporting, traditional electronic media, especially well-known news outlets, usually use editing and fact-checking techniques (Guess 2020). However, WhatsApp journalism lacks these formal safeguards and frequently depends on user-generated content and the quick spread of unconfirmed information. This presents significant questions regarding the dependability and credibility of news shared over WhatsApp. The spread of rumors and false information is facilitated by the absence of accountability and the challenge of determining the source of information. Furthermore, the study of false news as a two-dimensional phenomenon (Egelhofer 2019) highlights the necessity of strong verification systems to stop the spread of intentionally produced misinformation. A crucial area of difference between these two media types' functions in the information ecosystem is highlighted by their divergent approaches to content verification.

### The Effects of False and Inaccurate Information

**The Propagation of False Information and Its Effects:** There are serious repercussions when false and misleading information is disseminated in India via WhatsApp and conventional media. Public health has suffered as a result of the quick spread of misleading information on WhatsApp, especially during medical emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to vaccine reluctance, the adoption of ineffective preventative measures, and an increase in anxiety and panic (Nagi 2018).

This issue is made worse by WhatsApp's dearth of fact-checking tools. Disinformation propagation has the potential to affect elections, erode public confidence in institutions, and deepen social divisions in the political arena (Medeiros 2020). Beyond personal convictions, disinformation has an impact on public health, community cohesiveness, and the stability of democratic systems. WhatsApp is not the only platform affected by false information; traditional media, despite having well-established fact-checking

procedures, can also aid in the dissemination of inaccurate or biased information.

**Techniques for Countering False Information:** A multifaceted strategy including government laws and media literacy programs is needed to stop the spread of false information (Medeiros 2020). Programs for media literacy can enable people to assess news reports critically, spot false information, and discern between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources (Guess 2020). In order to expose misleading information and hold media outlets responsible, fact-checking groups are essential. Although important, government restrictions must carefully strike a balance between the protection of free speech and the necessity to counteract disinformation. It is crucial to take a nuanced strategy that recognizes the complexity of the digital media environment. One promising approach to improving media literacy and encouraging critical thinking is the creation of psychological interventions, such as browser games meant to increase resistance against online disinformation (Roozenbeek 2019). To effectively address the widespread problem of disinformation, a variety of measures must be integrated, such as policy interventions, educational initiatives, and technology solutions.

## Implications for Policy and Upcoming Studies

**Media Literacy and Regulatory Frameworks:** The emergence of WhatsApp journalism calls for the creation of suitable legal frameworks that strike a compromise between the need to prevent disinformation and the right to free speech (Medeiros 2020). The difficulty is in drafting laws that effectively stop the spread of false information without unreasonably limiting the free exchange of ideas and information.

Promoting media literacy programs is a crucial component of this endeavor since it can enable people to assess news sources critically and spot false information (Peng 2021). A comprehensive approach to addressing the issues raised by the changing media landscape must include the creation of strong fact-checking systems and the encouragement of media literacy initiatives. The significance of context-specific approaches to media literacy instruction is shown by the research of media literacy, social connectedness, and digital citizenship in India (Sarwatay 2021).

**Prospects for Further Research:** Several important areas should be the focus of future studies on WhatsApp journalism in India. To comprehend the long-term impacts of WhatsApp news consumption on people and society, longitudinal research is required. It is essential to create new media literacy techniques that are adapted to the particulars of WhatsApp journalism. Additionally, studies should look into how WhatsApp influences democratic processes and how it shapes political discourse. It is crucial to conduct further research on the efficacy of different tactics for thwarting false information on WhatsApp. To create successful solutions, a deeper comprehension of the social and cultural circumstances in which WhatsApp journalism functions is required (Bonini 2023). Insights into the changing dynamics of political mobilization and information transmission are expected from the investigation of social media's affordances in connection to populist politics (Cesarino 2020), especially in the Indian context. Additionally, studies on citizen engagement in the false news era (Carr 2019) are essential to comprehending how people participate in politics with knowledge and negotiate the complicated information landscape.

## Conclusion: Handling the Digital Media Environment

A complicated and changing media landscape is revealed by this comparison of WhatsApp journlism and conventional electronic media in India. With its decentralized news distribution strategy, WhatsApp journalism makes information sharing faster and more accessible, especially for underserved groups. But

it also poses serious problems with regard to the quality of the content, methods of verification, and the dissemination of false information. Despite having well-established systems for editorial control and fact-checking, traditional electronic media has speed and accessibility issues. The best course of action combines a number of tactics, such as fact-checking campaigns, media literacy programs, and well thought-out legal frameworks that strike a compromise between the need to prevent false information and the right to free speech.

These two media platforms will probably continue to interact in India's news consumption landscape in the future, requiring constant study and adjustment to the benefits and problems this dynamic media ecosystem presents (Nagi 2018). Navigating the changing digital media landscape requires a balanced strategy that supports both responsible information intake and freedom of expression. As demonstrated by the research of fact-checking journalism during the COVID-19 epidemic (Luengo 2020), the ongoing battle against disinformation highlights the constant necessity for critical evaluation and adaptive measures in this quickly evolving information environment.

**Reference:**

1. Nagi, K.. "New Social Media and Impact of Fake News on Society" None, 2018,. https://doi.org/None
2. Medeiros, Ben, and Pawan Singh. "Addressing Misinformation on Whatsapp in India Through Intermediary Liability Policy, Platform Design Modification, and Media Literacy" Penn State University Press, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.10.2020.0276
3. Guess, Andrew M., et al.. "A digital media literacy intervention increases discernment between mainstream and false news in the United States and India" National Academy of Sciences, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1920498117
4. Gong, Qian, and Philippe Le Billon. "Feeding (On) Geopolitical Anxieties: Asian Appetites, News Media Framing and the 20072008 Food Crisis" Taylor & Francis, 2014,. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.896789
5. Beckett, Charlie, and Robin Mansell. "Crossing Boundaries: New Media and Networked Journalism" Oxford University Press, 2008,. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2007.00010.x
6. Schultz, Ida. "THE JOURNALISTIC GUT FEELING" Taylor & Francis, 2007,. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780701275507
7. Munshi, Shoma. "Prime Time Soap Operas on Indian Television" None, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003033509
8. Newman, Nic, et al.. "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2015" RELX Group (Netherlands), 2015,. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2619576
9. Schfer, Mike S., and James Painter. "Climate journalism in a changing media ecosystem: Assessing the production of climate changerelated news around the world" Wiley, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.675
10. Rosenfeld, Avi, et al.. "WhatsApp usage patterns and prediction of demographic characteristics without access to message content" Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, 2018,. https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2018.39.22
11. Miller, Daniel, et al.. "The Global Smartphone" None, 2021,. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b0fvh1
12. Bonini, Tiziano, et al.. "Cooperative affordances: How instant messaging apps afford learning, resistance and solidarity among food delivery workers" SAGE Publishing, 2023,. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565231153505

13. Cesarino, Letcia. "HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE" University of Campinas, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.1590/010318136861916202000410

14. Tsao, ShuFeng, et al.. "What social media told us in the time of COVID-19: a scoping review" Elsevier BV, 2021,. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2589-7500(20)30315-0

15. Aldamen, Yasmin, and Edna Hacimic. "Positive Determinism of Twitter Usage Development in Crisis Communication: Rescue and Relief Efforts after the 6 February 2023 Earthquake in Trkiye as a Case Study" Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2023,. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080436

16. Ahlin, Tanja. "Frequent Callers: Good Care with ICTs in Indian Transnational Families" Taylor & Francis, 2018,. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2018.1532424

17. Sarwatay, Devina, et al.. "Media Literacy, Social Connectedness, and Digital Citizenship in India: Mapping Stakeholders on How Parents and Young People Navigate a Social World" Frontiers Media, 2021,. https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.601239

18. Banaji, Shakuntala. "Behind the high-tech fetish: Children, work and media use across classes in India" SAGE Publishing, 2015,. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048515597874

19. Egelhofer, Jana Laura, and Sophie Lecheler. "Fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon: a framework and research agenda" Taylor & Francis, 2019,. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2019.1602782

20. Roozenbeek, Jon, and Sander van der Linden. "Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation" Palgrave Macmillan, 2019,. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0279-9

21. Peng, Hao-En, et al.. "Perspectives on Platform Regulation" Nomos, 2021,. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748929789

22. Carr, Paul R., et al.. "Citizen Engagement in the Contemporary Era of Fake News: Hegemonic Distraction or Control of the Social Media Context?" Springer Science+Business Media, 2019,. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-019-00052-z

23. Luengo, Mara, and David Garca-Marn. "The performance of truth: politicians, fact-checking journalism, and the struggle to tackle COVID-19 misinformation" Palgrave Macmillan, 2020,. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00115-w