

# **From Newsroom to Networked Device: Re-theorising Mobile Journalism as a Socio-Technical Field in the Indian Media Ecosystem**

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## **Abstract**

Mobile journalism has become a defining feature of contemporary news production in India, driven by widespread smartphone adoption, affordable data access, and platform-based news distribution. While existing scholarship has examined mobile journalism primarily as a technological practice or professional skill, limited attention has been paid to its structural implications for journalism as a field. This paper argues that mobile journalism in India represents a socio-technical transformation that reshapes journalistic power, professional identity, and legitimacy. Drawing on field theory and digital journalism scholarship, this conceptual study re-theorises mobile journalism as a distinct socio-technical field constituted by journalists, mobile technologies, platforms, audiences, and institutional norms. Through a qualitative synthesis of existing literature, the study identifies emerging forms of journalistic capital that increasingly define authority and visibility in mobile-first news environments. By grounding the analysis in the Indian media context, the paper contributes to journalism theory by extending field-based approaches to the Global South.

**Keywords:** Mobile journalism, field theory, socio-technical systems, Indian media, digital journalism

## **Introduction**

Journalism in India has undergone significant transformation with the rise of mobile technologies and digital platforms. Smartphones have become central tools for news gathering, production, and dissemination, particularly in a media environment characterised by intense competition, rapid news cycles, and mobile-first audiences. India's large and diverse population, combined with expanding internet access, has accelerated the adoption of mobile journalism across television, digital, and regional news organisations (Thakur & Harsh, 2025).

Despite this transformation, academic discussions often frame mobile journalism as a technological innovation or a set of professional skills. Such approaches tend to understate the broader structural changes that mobile journalism introduces into journalism as a social institution. This paper argues that mobile journalism in India should be understood as a socio-technical field in which journalistic authority, capital, and professional identity are continuously negotiated. By applying field theory to the Indian media ecosystem, the study addresses a critical gap in journalism research and offers a theoretical framework that captures the deeper implications of mobile-first news production.

### **Mobile Journalism and News Production**

Mobile journalism has been widely studied as a practice that enhances speed, flexibility, and cost efficiency in news production. Scholars argue that mobile devices allow journalists to perform multiple roles independently, reducing reliance on traditional newsroom infrastructures (Westlund, 2013; Cameron, 2013). Indian studies similarly highlight how mobile journalism enables real-time reporting and expands coverage in resource-constrained environments (Thakur & Harsh, 2025).

However, much of this literature remains descriptive, focusing on technological adoption rather than examining how mobile journalism reshapes power relations and professional hierarchies within journalism.

### **Field Theory and Journalism**

Field theory conceptualises journalism as a structured social space shaped by power relations, professional norms, and various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2005; Benson & Neveu, 2005). Within this framework, technological change introduces new actors and destabilises established hierarchies. Scholars note that digital technologies have intensified competition for visibility and legitimacy within journalism (Vos et al., 2012). Yet, mobile journalism has rarely been theorised as a field in itself, particularly in non-Western contexts.

### **Digital Journalism in the Indian Context**

India's digital media ecosystem is characterised by platform-driven news distribution, audience participation, and blurred boundaries between professional and citizen journalism. Research shows that mobile phones and digital platforms have altered newsroom routines and editorial priorities (Bhardwaj & Siddhaqui, 2023). Studies on Indian digital journalism further suggest that speed, audience engagement, and platform visibility increasingly shape journalistic credibility (Rao, 2019; Neyazi, 2018). Despite these insights, there is limited theoretical work that integrates mobile journalism into a broader understanding of journalism as a structured field.

### **Objectives:**

1. To re-theorise mobile journalism as a socio-technical field within the Indian media ecosystem.
2. To examine how mobile technologies, reshape journalistic capital and professional legitimacy.
3. To extend field-based analysis of journalism to the Global South context.

This study set out to re-theorise mobile journalism in India as a socio-technical field rather than a mere technological practice. The discussion elaborates how mobile journalism restructures journalistic power, professional identity, and legitimacy within the Indian media ecosystem. By interpreting mobile journalism through field theory, the paper moves beyond descriptive accounts of mobile reporting to highlight deeper structural transformations.

### **Reconfiguring Journalism as a Socio-Technical Field**

The findings suggest that mobile journalism in India operates within a socio-technical field where journalistic practices are shaped by both human actors and technological systems. Unlike traditional newsroom-centred journalism, mobile journalism is embedded in networked environments where smartphones, platforms, and algorithms actively shape news production and circulation. This confirms

that journalism can no longer be understood solely as an institutional field governed by editors and organisations, but must also account for the influence of technological infrastructures.

In the Indian context, this shift is particularly significant due to the scale and diversity of mobile news consumption. Journalists increasingly work in conditions where mobile devices are not supplementary tools but primary instruments of news work. This supports the argument that mobile journalism constitutes a restructured field in which professional norms and routines are reorganised around portability, immediacy, and constant connectivity. The field is therefore socio-technical in nature, as journalistic authority emerges from the interaction between professional judgement and technological affordances.

### **Transformation of Journalistic Capital in Mobile-First Environments**

A key contribution of this study lies in identifying how mobile journalism reshapes journalistic capital in India. Traditional forms of capital, such as institutional affiliation or professional seniority, remain relevant but are increasingly supplemented or challenged by new forms of capital specific to mobile-first journalism.

Technological capital has become central, as journalists who possess skills in mobile filming, editing, and live reporting gain greater professional visibility and employability. This is especially evident in Indian newsrooms facing economic constraints, where mobile journalists are valued for their ability to produce multi-format content independently.

Platform capital further alters power relations within journalism. Visibility on digital platforms increasingly determines the reach and perceived relevance of news content. Journalists and organisations adapt editorial strategies to platform logics, including metrics such as engagement, shares, and real-time traction. This shifts authority away from traditional editorial gatekeepers towards platform-mediated visibility, reshaping how legitimacy is established in the field.

Audience capital also emerges as a critical resource. In mobile-first environments, audience interaction, trust, and participation play a growing role in defining journalistic credibility. Journalists who cultivate engaged audiences often gain symbolic authority, even outside established newsroom hierarchies. This reflects a broader transformation in which professional legitimacy is increasingly co-produced with audiences rather than solely granted by institutions.

### **Shifts in Journalistic Habitus and Professional Identity**

The findings indicate that mobile journalism reshapes journalistic habitus by encouraging new professional dispositions. Journalists internalise expectations of speed, adaptability, and continuous responsiveness to audiences. In the Indian media ecosystem, this habitus is shaped by competitive digital markets, linguistic diversity, and regional news demands.

This transformation has implications for professional identity. Journalists increasingly define themselves as mobile, multi-skilled, and platform-aware professionals rather than as specialists tied to a single medium. While this enhances flexibility and innovation, it also introduces tensions related to workload, verification, and editorial autonomy. The pressure to remain visible and relevant within platform-driven environments can blur the boundaries between professional journalism and content production.

### **Implications for Journalistic Autonomy and Editorial Power**

The socio-technical nature of mobile journalism raises important questions about journalistic autonomy in India. As journalists depend more on platforms and mobile technologies, editorial power becomes

distributed across human and non-human actors. While this decentralisation allows for faster and more inclusive reporting, it also exposes journalism to external pressures such as algorithmic prioritisation and audience-driven metrics.

This discussion highlights that mobile journalism does not simply democratise news production but reorganises power within the journalistic field. Autonomy is no longer exercised solely through editorial decision-making but is negotiated through technological competence, platform visibility, and audience engagement. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing the future of journalism in mobile-first societies.

### **Contribution to Journalism Theory**

By conceptualising mobile journalism as a socio-technical field, this study extends field theory to account for contemporary transformations in journalism, particularly in the Global South. The Indian media ecosystem illustrates how technological infrastructures and social conditions jointly shape journalistic practice. This perspective contributes to journalism studies by offering a framework that captures both continuity and change in professional journalism.

This paper argues that mobile journalism in India should be understood as a socio-technical field rather than merely a technological extension of traditional journalism. By applying field theory to mobile-first news production, the study highlights how journalistic authority, capital, and professional identity are reconfigured in the digital age. The paper contributes to journalism studies by offering a context-sensitive theoretical framework that reflects the realities of media production in the Global South.

### **Conclusion**

Re-theorise mobile journalism in India not merely as a technological innovation or a professional skillset, but as a socio-technical field that is actively restructuring journalistic practice, authority, and legitimacy. By drawing on Bourdieu's field theory and digital journalism scholarship, the study has argued that mobile journalism represents a deeper institutional transformation in which journalists, technological infrastructures, platforms, and audiences are jointly implicated in the production and circulation of news. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of mobile reporting to foreground the structural and symbolic consequences of mobile-first news production within the Indian media ecosystem.

Unlike prior studies that treat mobile journalism primarily as a tool-driven or efficiency-oriented practice, this paper advances a field-based theoretical framework that situates mobile journalism within broader struggles over power, capital, and legitimacy. It demonstrates that mobile journalism in India is not simply an extension of traditional journalism through portable devices, but a reconfigured field in which professional norms, hierarchies, and identities are being reorganised around portability, immediacy, and continuous connectivity. In this sense, mobile journalism constitutes a socio-technical field in which technological affordances are not external to journalism but internal to its very structure and logic.

The analysis shows that mobile journalism operates within a networked environment where smartphones, platforms, and algorithms function as active structuring forces rather than neutral tools. In the Indian context, where mobile phones are the primary medium of news access for large segments of the population, this shift is particularly consequential. Journalists increasingly produce, edit, and distribute news directly from networked devices, often outside the physical newsroom. As a result, journalistic authority no longer flows primarily from institutional position or editorial hierarchy but emerges from the interaction between professional judgement and technological competence. This reconfiguration confirms that journalism

today must be understood not only as a social institution but also as a socio-technical system in which human and non-human actors co-produce journalistic outcomes.

A central contribution of this study lies in its conceptualisation of emerging forms of journalistic capital in mobile-first environments. The paper has argued that technological capital, platform capital, and audience capital are becoming increasingly salient alongside traditional institutional and professional capital. Technological capital, in the form of mobile filming, editing, live-streaming, and platform optimisation skills, now plays a crucial role in shaping professional visibility, employability, and newsroom status. In resource-constrained Indian newsrooms, where journalists are often expected to perform multiple roles, such skills function as a key differentiator and source of symbolic value.

Platform capital further restructures power relations within journalism by making algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, and platform reach central determinants of relevance and legitimacy. Journalists and news organisations adapt editorial strategies to platform logics that privilege speed, visuality, and audience engagement. This adaptation redistributes symbolic authority away from traditional editorial gatekeepers towards platform-mediated forms of recognition. What gains traction on digital platforms increasingly defines what counts as important news, thereby reshaping editorial priorities and professional hierarchies within the field.

Audience capital adds a further layer to this transformation. In mobile-first environments, credibility and symbolic authority are increasingly co-produced with audiences through interaction, trust, and participation. Journalists who cultivate loyal and engaged audiences—often across multiple platforms—can acquire symbolic power that rivals or even exceeds that of formally senior professionals within established institutions. This reflects a broader shift in which professional legitimacy is no longer granted solely by newsroom hierarchies or peer recognition but is increasingly negotiated in public, platformed spaces.

The study also highlights significant shifts in journalistic habitus and professional identity. Mobile journalism fosters dispositions oriented towards speed, flexibility, adaptability, and constant responsiveness to audiences. Journalists internalise expectations of perpetual connectivity, multi-skilling, and real-time engagement, reshaping how they understand their professional roles and responsibilities. In the Indian media ecosystem, this habitus is further shaped by intense market competition, linguistic diversity, and regional news demands, which place additional pressures on journalists to be mobile, visible, and continuously productive.

While these transformations enhance flexibility, innovation, and inclusivity, they also generate new tensions and vulnerabilities. The intensification of workload, the compression of verification time, and the pressure to conform to platform metrics pose challenges to journalistic autonomy and professional standards. The blurring of boundaries between reporting, content production, and audience management risks diluting editorial judgement and reinforcing metric-driven news values. These tensions underscore the ambivalent nature of mobile journalism, which simultaneously expands journalistic possibilities and deepens structural precarities.

Importantly, the socio-technical framing adopted in this paper reveals that mobile journalism does not simply democratise news production but reorganises power within the journalistic field. Editorial authority is no longer exercised solely through institutional hierarchies or professional norms but is increasingly negotiated through technological competence, platform visibility, and audience engagement. As journalists become more dependent on platforms and mobile technologies, editorial power becomes distributed across human and non-human actors, including algorithms and interface designs. This

redistribution of power raises critical questions about autonomy, accountability, and the future of professional journalism in mobile-first societies such as India.

By extending field theory to mobile journalism in the Global South, this paper contributes to journalism studies in three key ways. First, it offers a context-sensitive theoretical framework that captures both continuity and change in journalistic practice. Second, it foregrounds the constitutive role of technological infrastructures and platforms in shaping journalistic power and legitimacy. Third, it highlights how professional authority and symbolic capital are being redefined in mobile-first news environments, particularly in non-Western media systems that remain under-theorised in dominant journalism scholarship.

Future research should empirically examine these dynamics across regional, linguistic, and organisational contexts in India to test and refine the conceptual claims advanced here. Comparative studies across Global South media systems would further illuminate how socio-technical transformations interact with distinct political, economic, and cultural conditions. Such work would deepen understanding of how mobile journalism is reshaping journalism not only as a practice, but as a structured field of power.

This study argues that mobile journalism in India is best understood as a socio-technical field that is reconfiguring the foundations of journalistic authority, capital, and professional identity in the digital age. By theorising mobile journalism through a field-based lens, the paper provides a framework for analysing the long-term implications of mobile-first news production for journalism as a social institution. In doing so, it contributes to a more global, theoretically grounded understanding of contemporary journalism in an era defined by mobility, platforms, and networked technologies.

### Recommendations

1. Journalism education in India should incorporate critical perspectives on mobile journalism and digital power structures.
2. Media organisations should reflect on how platform dependence influences editorial autonomy and professional standards.
3. Future research should empirically examine mobile journalism practices across regional and linguistic media in India.

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