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Journalism: Forms, Functions, Benefits, Limitations and Contemporary Challenges: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Journalism is the practice through which information about public events, institutions, science, culture and everyday life is gathered, verified, interpreted and communicated. It is at once a profession, an institutional system, a set of methods and a public-service function. This narrative review traces the historical development and principal forms of journalism; examines its informational, democratic, educational, cultural, economic and accountability functions; and weighs these benefits against structural, ethical, technological and safety-related limitations. The forms considered include print, broadcast, online and mobile journalism, and investigative, data, computational, citizen, community, solutions-oriented, advocacy and specialist reporting. Journalism can improve public knowledge, expose wrongdoing, support disaster and health communication, document social experience and enable informed participation. Its performance, however, is constrained by ownership concentration, advertising dependence, political and legal pressure, precarious employment, source manipulation, bias, unequal representation, speed-driven error, platform dependency, misinformation and threats to journalists. The review argues that medium and genre should not be conflated, because a single story may be digital, investigative, data-driven and specialist at once, and that credibility rests less on format than on verification, independence, transparency, fairness, context, correction and accountability. Using India as a case, it shows how linguistic diversity and a large media ecosystem create opportunities for public-interest reporting alongside concerns about access, ownership, polarisation, legal pressure and journalist safety. A framework is proposed for strengthening journalism through robust verification, pluralism, ethical governance, media literacy, sustainable business models and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Journalism; news media; investigative reporting; digital journalism; data journalism; citizen journalism; media ethics; press freedom; misinformation; India.

1. Introduction

Journalism is commonly understood as the disciplined collection, verification, selection, contextualisation and dissemination of information of public relevance. It includes reporting, explanatory work, analysis, commentary and visual or audio storytelling. It is not synonymous with all media content: advertising, public relations, propaganda, entertainment and personal opinion may circulate through the same channels but serve different purposes and carry different accountability arrangements. Professional journalism is distinguished by an explicit commitment to evidence, public interest, editorial responsibility and correction.

The social role of journalism is often described through its contribution to an informed public sphere and its watchdog function. News organisations can scrutinise governments, corporations and other powerful institutions, provide forums for debate and document the experiences of communities. Schudson (2008) argues that the democratic value of the press lies in several distinct functions rather than in a single role, and that these functions matter even when the press is flawed or unloved. None of these roles is automatic. They depend on editorial independence, access to information, pluralism, professional capacity and the safety of reporters. Digital distribution has widened participation and reach, but it has also intensified competition for attention, dependence on platforms and the speed at which unverified material can circulate (Salaverría, 2019; Ekström et al., 2020).

This review offers an accessible but critical account of journalism for students, researchers and general readers. It combines foundational concepts with current debates, separates evidence-supported findings from normative claims, and uses India to show how general arguments play out in a specific media system. Section 2 sets out the objectives; Section 3 describes the review approach; Sections 4 and 5

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trace the history and classify the forms of journalism; Sections 6 to 8 assess its functions, benefits and limitations; Sections 9 to 11 address digital change, the Indian context and ethics; and Sections 12 to 14 propose recommendations, future directions and conclusions.

2. Objectives and scope

The review has six objectives:

- to explain the meaning, historical evolution and principal characteristics of journalism;
- to classify major forms and genres, recognising that categories overlap;
- to examine journalism's public, democratic, educational, cultural and economic benefits;
- to assess limitations, risks, ethical challenges and threats to journalists;
- to discuss digital transformation, data, automation and artificial intelligence (AI); and
- to consider the Indian media environment and identify practical measures for improvement.

3. Review approach

A narrative literature approach was used (Figure 1). The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly reviews identified through bibliographic and publisher records, together with professional guidance and institutional publications from UNESCO, the International Labour Organization, the Reuters Institute, the Editors Guild of India, the Press Council of India and Reporters Without Borders (Table 1). Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to the forms, functions, ethics and digital transformation of journalism, to misinformation and to the Indian context. Authors, titles, publication details and DOIs were cross-checked against publisher, repository or institutional records where available.

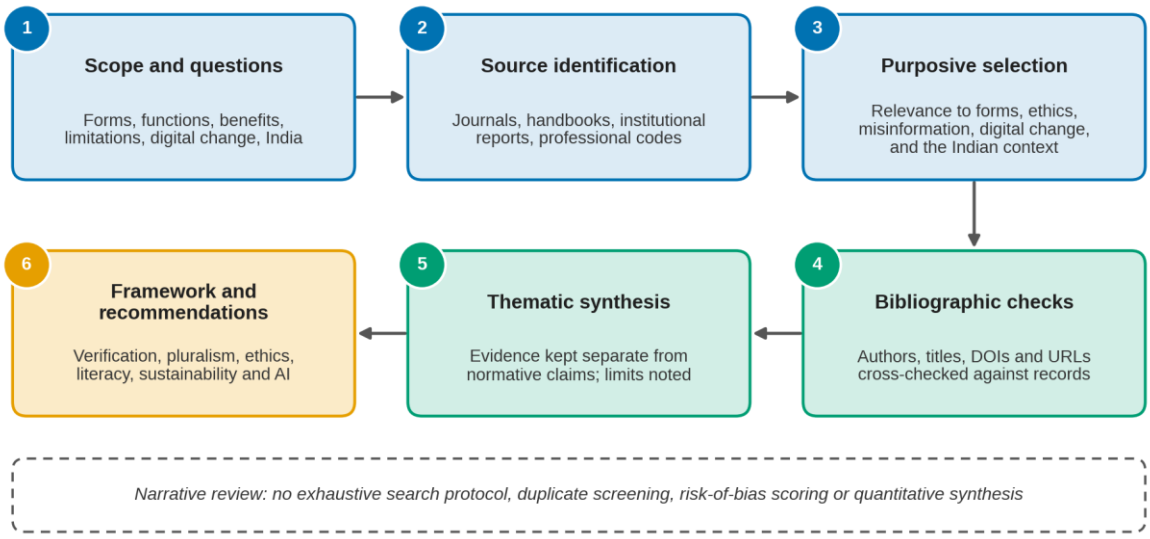


***Figure** 1. Conceptual scheme of the narrative review approach. The review is not systematic: no exhaustive search protocol, duplicate screening, risk-of-bias scoring or quantitative synthesis was undertaken.*

Because selection was purposive, relevant work may have been missed, and the evidence base leans towards English-language scholarship. Institutional rankings and survey figures depend on the time and method of their collection and should not be read as direct measures of journalistic quality. Figures described as conceptual are interpretive syntheses rather than empirical results; Figure 6 is the only figure that plots published indicator data.

***Table** 1. Source types used in the review, their role and the caution each requires.*

Source type	Examples in this review	Role in the review	Interpretive caution
Peer-reviewed articles and reviews	Felle (2016); Goode (2009); Perreault & Ferrucci (2020); McIntyre & Lough (2023)	Conceptual and empirical grounding on forms, functions and effects	Context-specific; mostly English-language; experimental findings may not generalise
Scholarly books and reference works	Schudson (2008); Houston (2019)	Definitions and normative frameworks	Normative arguments are not evidence of effects
International handbooks	Ireton & Posetti (2018); Muratova et al. (2019); Jaakkola (2023)	Professional practice, verification, literacy and AI	Guidance for education and practice, not empirical tests
Institutional reports and indices	Krishnan (2025); Reporters Without Borders (2026); International Labour Organization (2026)	Indicators of audience trust, press freedom and safety	Method- and time-dependent; samples may be unrepresentative; indices are expert assessments
Professional and regulatory codes	Editors Guild of India (2025); Press Council of India (2022); Society of Professional Journalists (2014)	Ethical standards in practice	Self-regulatory; compliance varies

Note: Sources are examples of each type, not an exhaustive inventory.

4. Historical development

The history of journalism is closely linked to communication technologies, literacy, commerce, political institutions and struggles over freedom of expression (Figure 2). Early news circulated through oral networks, handwritten newsletters, official proclamations and merchant correspondence. Printing enabled more regular and scalable circulation of news sheets and newspapers. During the nineteenth century, industrial printing, railways, telegraphy and urban literacy expanded the reach and frequency of the press. Radio and television later made simultaneous mass communication possible, and satellite broadcasting extended transmission across borders.

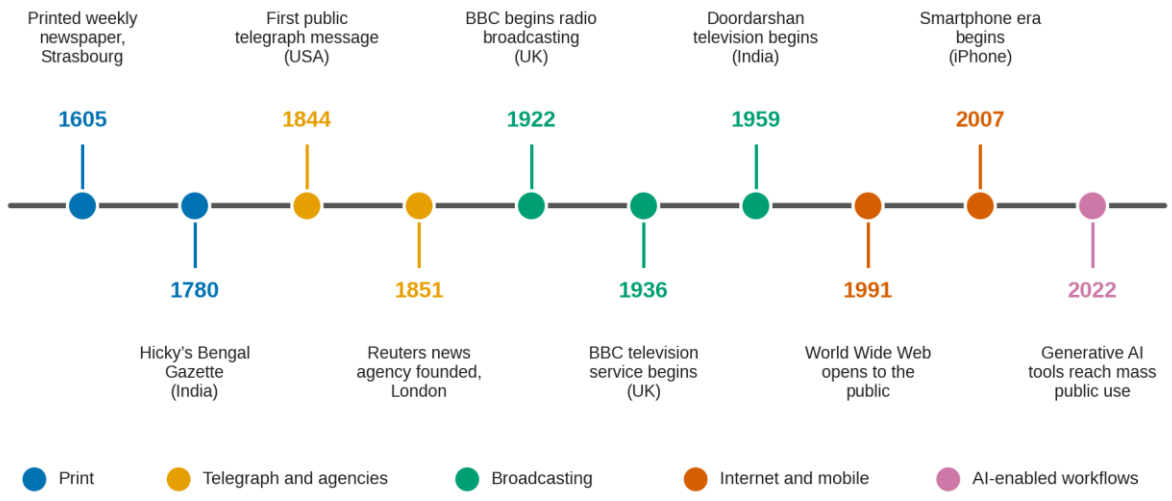


***Figure** 2. Selected milestones in the history of news media, coloured by era. Milestones are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are not drawn to scale.*

The internet changed both production and distribution. News websites, blogs, search engines, social networks, mobile devices, podcasts and video platforms enabled continuous publication and direct audience interaction. The digital transition also changed newsroom economics: advertising shifted to

platform ecosystems, audiences fragmented, and news organisations increasingly rely on subscriptions, memberships, philanthropy, events and diversified revenue. Digital journalism is therefore not simply an online version of print; it involves distinct practices, formats, analytics and relationships with audiences (Salaverría, 2019; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). Table 2 summarises the main change at each stage, together with its journalistic opportunity and associated limitation.

***Table** 2. Historical development of journalism: main changes, opportunities and limitations.*

Period / development	Main change	Journalistic opportunity	Associated limitation
Oral and manuscript circulation	News passed through people and handwritten records	Local knowledge and rapid interpersonal exchange	Limited reach; rumour and unequal access
Printing and newspapers	Repeatable mass circulation	Regular public information and political debate	Censorship, partisan ownership, literacy barriers
Telegraph and industrial press	Faster long-distance news and news agencies	Timely national and international reporting	Standardisation and dependence on agencies
Radio and television	Audio-visual mass broadcasting	Wide reach, immediacy and shared public events	High capital costs; limited channels and gatekeeping
Internet and mobile era	Continuous, networked, multimedia publication	Interactivity, low-cost publishing and global reach	Platform dependency, misinformation and attention competition
AI-enabled workflows	Machine assistance for transcription, translation, search and drafting	Efficiency and accessibility when supervised	Bias, fabricated outputs, opacity, privacy and accountability risks

5. Types and forms of journalism

No single classification captures all journalism. Some labels describe the medium (print, radio, television, digital); others describe the reporting method (investigative, data, explanatory), the subject area (science, health, sports), the relationship with audiences (community, citizen, participatory) or the editorial orientation (solutions, advocacy, opinion). A single report can belong to several categories at once (Figure 3).

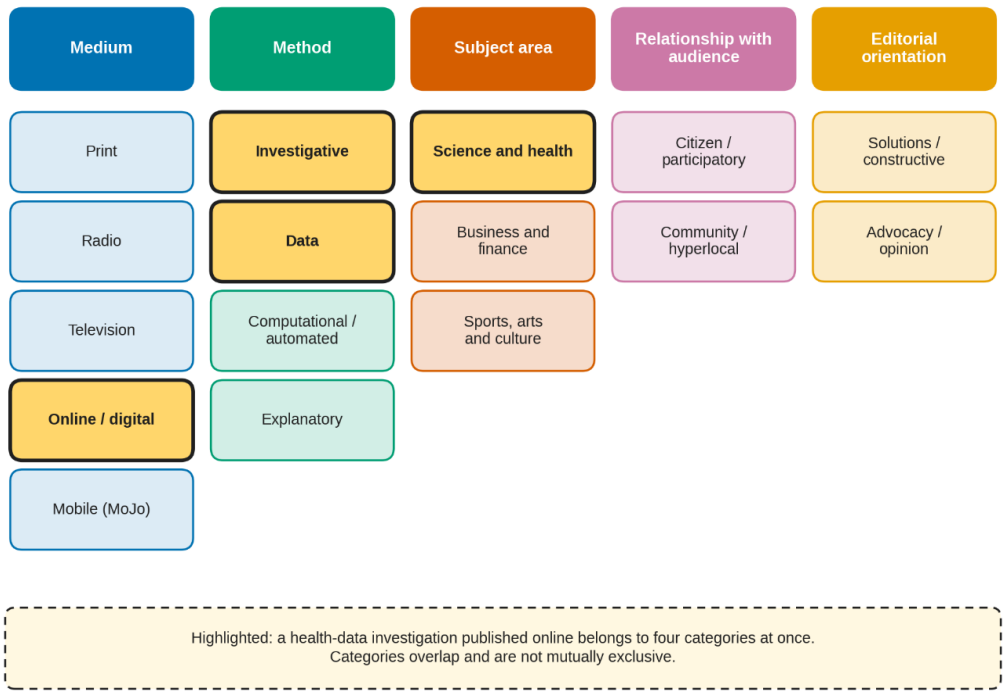


***Figure** 3. Practical taxonomy of journalism along five dimensions. Categories overlap and are not mutually exclusive; the highlighted boxes show one story (a health-data investigation published online) that belongs to four categories at once.*

Table 3 summarises the characteristics, strengths and risks of the principal forms. Two patterns emerge. First, limitations tied to the medium, such as cost, reach and speed, differ from those tied to method or orientation, where the main risks concern skills, verification and the boundary between evidence and argument. Second, forms that widen participation, including citizen, community and participatory journalism, tend to raise verification, privacy and safety questions. Classification helps to describe journalism, but it does not by itself indicate quality.

***Table** 3. Forms of journalism: characteristics, benefits and limitations.*

Form	Typical characteristics	Benefits / strengths	Limitations / risks
Print journalism	Newspapers, magazines, periodicals; edited text and images	Durable record; depth; easy archiving and annotation	Distribution costs; declining print reach in some markets; slower updates
Radio journalism	Audio news, interviews, bulletins, community radio	Low-bandwidth reach; portability; accessibility for non-readers	Limited visual evidence; dependence on signal and airtime
Television journalism	Video reports, live coverage, studio discussion	Strong visual communication; broad reach; immediacy	High production costs; spectacle and sound-bite pressure; visual framing bias
Online / digital journalism	Websites, apps, newsletters, podcasts and multimedia	Fast updates; hyperlinks; global reach; interactive formats	Algorithmic visibility; misinformation; cybersecurity and monetisation pressures
Mobile journalism (MoJo)	Reporting and editing with mobile devices	Low-cost, portable, useful in remote or breaking situations	Device limitations; safety, metadata and verification concerns
Investigative journalism	Long-term inquiry into concealed wrongdoing or systemic failure	Accountability; exposes abuses and institutional failures	Costly, slow, legally risky; source protection and retaliation concerns
Data journalism	Analysis and visualisation of structured or unstructured data	Reveals patterns; reproducibility; supports complex explanation	Data quality problems; statistical misinterpretation; digital skills gap
Computational / automated journalism	Algorithms, code or automated systems assist news discovery or production	Scale, speed and pattern detection	Opaque models, bias, errors and unclear responsibility
Citizen / participatory journalism	Members of the public contribute reports, images, testimony or analysis	Local access, diversity and rapid eyewitness material	Verification challenges; privacy and safety; unequal influence
Community / hyperlocal journalism	Coverage of neighbourhoods, local services and civic life	Local accountability; relevance; community identity	Small revenue base; limited staff and specialist resources
Solutions / constructive journalism	Reports on responses to problems, with evidence and limitations	Can broaden public understanding beyond crisis narratives	Can become promotional or minimise structural conflict if poorly done
Advocacy / opinion journalism	Explicit argument for a position or policy	Makes values and arguments visible; stimulates debate	Can blur fact and opinion; selective evidence
Science / health journalism	Research, medicine, public health and risk reporting	Translates evidence; supports informed decisions	Scientific uncertainty can be oversimplified; conflicts of interest
Business / financial journalism	Markets, firms, labour, trade and public finance	Improves economic literacy and scrutiny	Market influence, insider access and advertiser pressure
Sports / arts / cultural journalism	Sport, literature, entertainment and cultural life	Documents culture; builds shared experiences	Commercial access and celebrity dependence

6. Core functions and benefits

6.1 Informing the public

The primary function of journalism is to provide timely, accurate and relevant information. Reporting can help people understand public policy, elections, employment, education, health, disasters, scientific developments and local services. Good journalism distinguishes confirmed facts from allegations, estimates and uncertainty, and supplies enough context for audiences to interpret events.

6.2 Democratic accountability and the watchdog role

Independent reporting can investigate the use of public money, conflicts of interest, corruption, corporate conduct, human-rights violations and failures of public administration. Data reporting and collaborative investigations increase the capacity to analyse large records and trace complex systems (Felle, 2016). The watchdog role is strongest when journalists have source access, legal protections, editorial independence and adequate time.

6.3 Public debate and participation

Journalism provides a shared space in which competing claims and policy choices can be examined. It can make marginalised voices visible and connect citizens with institutions. Citizen journalism and social news broaden participation, although digital networks create new forms of gatekeeping through platform design, moderation and unequal visibility (Goode, 2009).

6.4 Education, science and health literacy

Explanatory journalism can translate technical evidence into accessible language, compare risks, identify uncertainty and challenge unsupported claims. In health and science reporting, journalists should distinguish preliminary studies from established evidence, avoid causal claims from weak observational data, disclose conflicts and seek qualified independent expertise. During outbreaks and emergencies, timely and clear reporting can support protective behaviour, but sensationalism can amplify fear.

6.5 Social inclusion and cultural memory

Reporting can document the experiences of communities whose concerns receive little institutional attention. Local-language journalism is particularly important in multilingual societies. Archives and sustained coverage also create a public record of social change, disasters, cultural practices and institutional decisions.

6.6 Economic and market functions

Business journalism communicates information about firms, employment, prices, markets, trade and public budgets. Local reporting can help residents understand infrastructure, consumer issues and service delivery. Journalism is also an economic sector in its own right, supporting employment in reporting, editing, photography, production, distribution, technology and research.

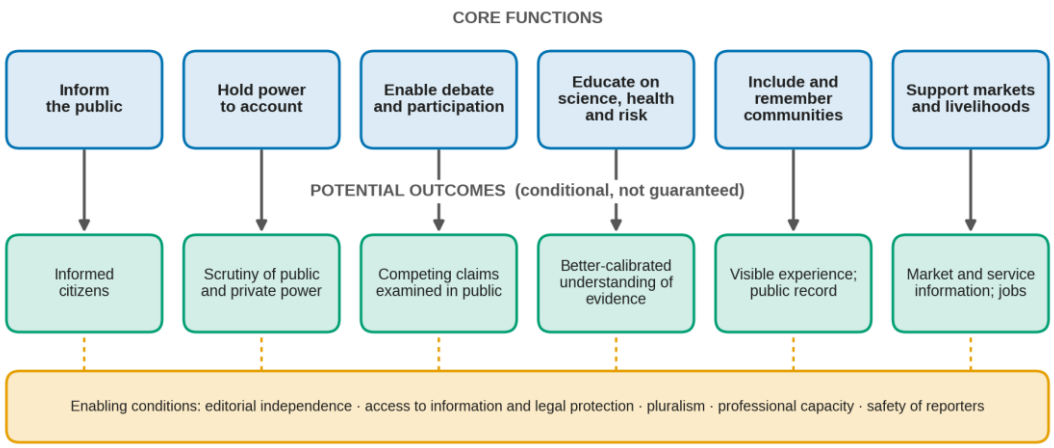


***Figure** 4. Core functions of journalism and the outcomes they can support. The scheme is qualitative: outcomes are conditional rather than guaranteed and depend on the enabling conditions shown.*

Figure 4 summarises these functions and the outcomes they can support. Those outcomes are conditional. They depend on enabling conditions, including editorial independence, access to information, legal protection, pluralism, professional capacity and the safety of reporters, whose absence is examined in Section 8.

7. Benefits and limitations: A balanced assessment

Table 4 sets the potential benefits of journalism against the conditions under which those benefits fail to materialise.

***Table** 4. Benefits and limitations of journalism across social dimensions.*

Dimension	Potential benefits	Potential limitations / conditions
Knowledge	Verified facts, context and explanation	Errors, omissions, poor sourcing or oversimplification
Democracy	Scrutiny, debate and informed participation	Capture by political or commercial interests; unequal access
Public safety	Warnings, emergency information and risk explanation	Panic, inaccurate early reports, privacy harms
Social justice	Visibility for neglected groups and injustices	Stereotyping, tokenism, retraumatisation or extractive reporting
Economy	Market information and consumer accountability	Advertiser influence; market rumours; conflicts of interest
Culture	Preservation of memory, language and public discussion	Cultural bias and under-representation
Technology	Multimedia, data analysis and broad distribution	Platform dependency, surveillance, algorithmic bias
Participation	Eyewitness contributions and community reporting	Unverified content, doxing and coordinated manipulation

The benefits of journalism are therefore conditional rather than guaranteed. The presence of news outlets does not automatically produce accountability or informed citizens. Quality depends on how information is gathered, whose voices are included, what is omitted, how uncertainty is represented and whether mistakes are corrected.

8. Limitations and structural challenges

Seven structural challenges are discussed below and summarised, with illustrative indicators that could be used to monitor them, in Table 5.

***Table** 5. Structural challenges for journalism, mechanisms of influence and illustrative indicators.*

Challenge	Mechanism of influence	Illustrative indicators
Commercial pressure and ownership concentration	Dependence on advertisers, owners or sponsors narrows editorial priorities; cost cutting reduces specialist and investigative capacity	Ownership transparency; revenue mix; share of original staff-produced reporting
Political pressure, censorship and legal risk	Access restrictions, surveillance, strategic lawsuits, detention or vague regulation chill reporting	Press-freedom indices (expert assessments); number and outcome of legal actions against journalists
Bias, framing and agenda setting	Selection, language, images and sources shape public understanding; reliance on official sources	Source-diversity audits; complaint and correction records; content analyses
Speed, competition and misinformation	Rewarding speed and emotion increases error and amplification of false or manipulated material	Time to correction; audits of verification practice; reach of debunked claims
Representation and access	Rural, linguistic-minority, women's, disability and low-income perspectives are under-represented; connectivity is uneven	Coverage and staffing by language, region and gender; connectivity and device access
Safety and working conditions	Attacks, harassment, trauma and insecure contracts reduce quality and sustainability	Incident monitoring; contract type and social-protection coverage; safety protocols
Emotional and social effects	Repeated exposure to distressing news can contribute to distress, compassion fatigue or disengagement in some audiences	Audience surveys of news avoidance and well-being; testing of solution-oriented formats

Note: Indicators are illustrative suggestions, not validated measures.

8.1 Commercial pressure and ownership concentration

Newsrooms require revenue, but dependence on advertising, wealthy owners, sponsors or politically connected investors can compromise editorial independence. Cost reductions may lead to fewer specialist reporters, greater reliance on agency copy and press releases, and reduced capacity for investigative work. The phenomenon often called 'churnalism' describes the recycling of externally supplied material with limited independent reporting, and it raises questions about source power and newsroom capacity. Research on source use shows that journalists depend on others for much of the information in their stories, that sources may have agendas of their own, and that balancing sources complements the checking of individual facts (Hertzum, 2022).

8.2 Political pressure, censorship and legal risk

Journalists may face restrictions on access, surveillance, intimidation, strategic lawsuits, detention, censorship or violence. Regulatory frameworks can protect against defamation and harmful content, but vague or disproportionate restrictions may chill legitimate reporting. Press freedom is not an exemption from law; it is a condition for scrutiny and public debate.

8.3 Bias, framing and agenda setting

News selection is unavoidable, because no newsroom can cover every event. Decisions about prominence, language, images, sources and framing can shape public understanding. Bias may arise from individual assumptions, newsroom routines, ownership, political alignment, audience targeting or dependence on official sources. Fairness does not require treating all claims as equally credible; it requires evaluating evidence consistently and representing relevant perspectives proportionately.

8.4 Speed, competition and misinformation

Continuous publishing and social-media competition can reward speed and emotional intensity. Early reports may contain incomplete information, while false or manipulated material can spread rapidly. UNESCO's journalism education handbook emphasises accuracy, independence, fairness, confidentiality and verification as central practices for responding to disinformation (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). The handbook also distinguishes misinformation, disinformation and malinformation (Table 6), a distinction that matters because each calls for a different journalistic response.

***Table** 6. Information disorder: terms, intent and typical journalistic response.*

Term	Definition	Intent to harm	Typical journalistic response
Misinformation	False information shared without intent to cause harm	No	Verify, correct and explain without amplifying the error
Disinformation	False information deliberately created or shared to cause harm	Yes	Trace origin and spread; document methods; avoid giving unexamined prominence
Malinformation	Genuine information shared to cause harm, for example private material leaked or taken out of context	Yes	Weigh public interest against harm; protect privacy and vulnerable people

Source: terms as used in Ireton and Posetti (2018); responses are the author's synthesis.

8.5 Representation and access

Rural communities, linguistic minorities, women, people with disabilities and economically disadvantaged groups may be under-represented as both sources and audiences. Digital access is uneven, and online-first strategies can exclude people with limited connectivity, devices or digital literacy.

8.6 Journalist safety and working conditions

Physical attacks, online harassment, threats, trauma, insecure contracts and poor occupational protections affect the quality and sustainability of journalism. Safety requires more than individual precautions: it also depends on employer policies, labour rights, legal safeguards, source protection and accountability for attacks. The International Labour Organization (2026) frames the safety of journalists as depending not only on freedom of expression but also on the enjoyment of fundamental labour rights, which places employment conditions alongside physical protection in the safety debate.

8.7 Emotional and social effects

Repeated exposure to violent or catastrophic news can contribute to distress, compassion fatigue or disengagement in some audiences. Solutions and constructive journalism have been proposed as ways to include evidence-based responses alongside accounts of problems. Constructive journalism has developed as both a philosophy and a practice, but it remains a field in need of further conceptual and empirical development (Mast et al., 2019). Experimental research suggests that solution information can influence readers' emotional responses and attitudes towards stories, while evidence for behavioural effects is less consistent (McIntyre, 2019; McIntyre & Lough, 2023).

9. Digital journalism, data and artificial intelligence

Digital journalism combines text, images, audio, video, hyperlinks, interactive graphics and real-time updates. It can improve accessibility and allow audiences to explore primary documents or datasets. Yet the same environment can privilege engagement metrics over public value. Algorithmic recommendation systems influence which stories are seen, while platform rules and revenue-sharing arrangements affect newsroom sustainability. Whatever the technology, the editorial core remains a verification-first workflow in which review and correction are integral rather than optional (Figure 5).

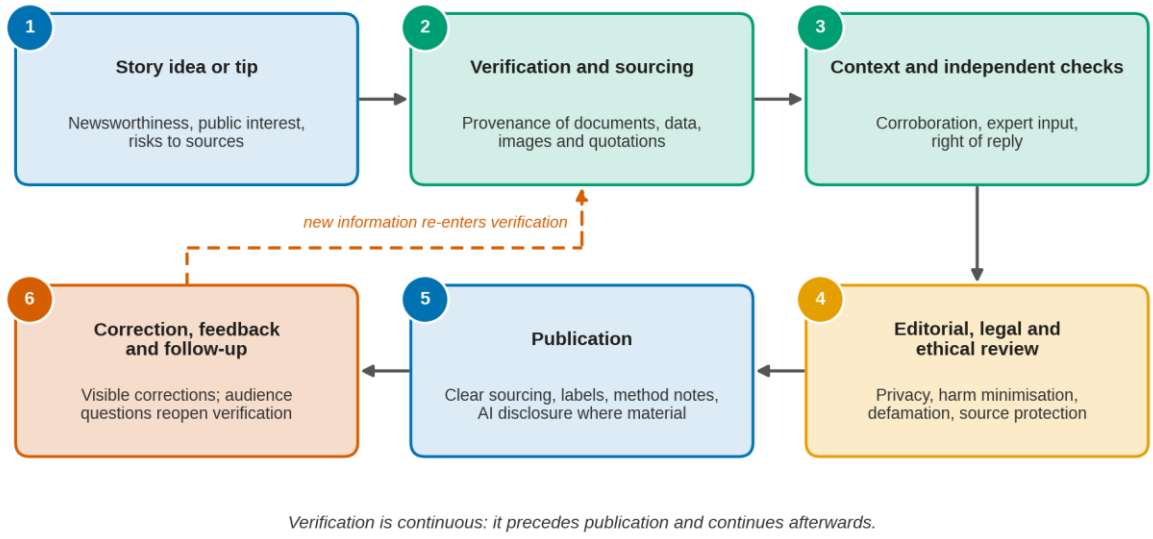


***Figure** 5. Verification-first editorial workflow. Editorial review and post-publication correction are integral, not optional; new information returns the story to verification.*

Data journalism uses quantitative analysis and visualisation as part of reporting. A sound workflow includes acquiring data, assessing provenance and completeness, cleaning records, analysing patterns, checking results against other evidence and explaining limitations. Visualisations should identify sources, denominators, time periods and uncertainty. A chart can mislead through truncated axes, inappropriate scales, selective time windows or confusion of correlation with causation (Houston, 2019; Felle, 2016); common pitfalls and safeguards are listed in Table 7.

***Table** 7. Common data-visualisation pitfalls and safeguards.*

Pitfall	How it can mislead	Safeguard
Truncated or manipulated axes	Exaggerates or minimises differences	Start bar-chart axes at zero; label scales; flag broken axes
Inappropriate scales	Logarithmic, dual or uneven scales confuse non-specialist readers	Match the scale to the claim; explain unusual scales
Selective time windows	Chosen start and end dates create or hide trends	Show the full available series; justify the window
Correlation presented as causation	Readers infer causal effects from association	Use cautious language; note confounders and study design
Missing denominators	Raw counts ignore population or exposure	Report rates alongside counts; define the denominator
Hidden provenance or uncertainty	Readers cannot judge data quality or margin of error	Cite source, date, method and limitations; show uncertainty

Source: author's synthesis; see Houston (2019) and Felle (2016) for context.

Artificial intelligence can assist transcription, translation, document search, summarisation, image analysis and routine data processing. It can also produce fabricated quotations, false citations, synthetic images, biased classifications and plausible but incorrect narratives (Table 8). Human editorial responsibility cannot be delegated to a model. News organisations should disclose material AI use where relevant, protect confidential sources and personal data, retain human verification, document provenance and provide correction mechanisms. UNESCO's handbook on reporting on AI highlights

the need for journalists to understand AI systems, their social effects and the associated accountability questions (Jaakkola, 2023). Porlezza (2024) shows that European press councils have largely overlooked data-driven phenomena such as algorithms and news automation, and warns that where self-regulators do not act, other institutions may regulate in ways not designed for journalism.

***Table** 8. AI-assisted newsroom tasks: potential benefits, principal risks and minimum safeguards.*

Task	Potential benefit	Principal risk	Minimum safeguard
Transcription and translation	Speed; access to multilingual material	Errors in names, numbers and dialect; privacy of recordings	Human check against the source; secure handling of confidential audio
Document search and summarisation	Faster triage of large document sets	Omissions; distorted or fabricated content	Verify against originals; never rely on a summary alone
Image and video analysis	Pattern detection; support for geolocation	Misclassification; synthetic media not detected	Independent provenance checks; document the method
Drafting and headline suggestions	Efficiency; accessible formats	Fabricated quotations or citations; bias; homogenised style	Editor remains accountable; check every fact and quotation; disclose material use
Dataset analysis and pattern detection	Scale and speed	Opaque models; biased classification	Document methods; test findings against other evidence

Source: author's synthesis informed by Jaakkola (2023) and Porlezza (2024).

10. Journalism in India

India has a highly diverse media environment, including national and regional newspapers, television channels, radio, digital-native outlets, independent reporters, community media and extensive social-media distribution. Its linguistic diversity makes regional and local journalism essential for meaningful public communication. Digital platforms have enabled new forms of collaboration and lower-cost publication, while legacy print and broadcast outlets continue to serve large audiences.

The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2025 India chapter describes a fragmented and diverse news environment, reports an overall trust-in-news score of 43% among its survey respondents, and notes concerns about concentrated media ownership, harassment and legal challenges (Krishnan, 2025). In the same sample, YouTube (55%), WhatsApp (46%), Instagram (37%) and Facebook (36%) were the platforms most used for news (Figure 6b). The report explicitly cautions that its online sample, composed mainly of English-speaking news users, is not nationally representative and under-represents the importance of traditional media. Such findings should therefore be interpreted with methodological care rather than treated as a complete measure of Indian public opinion.

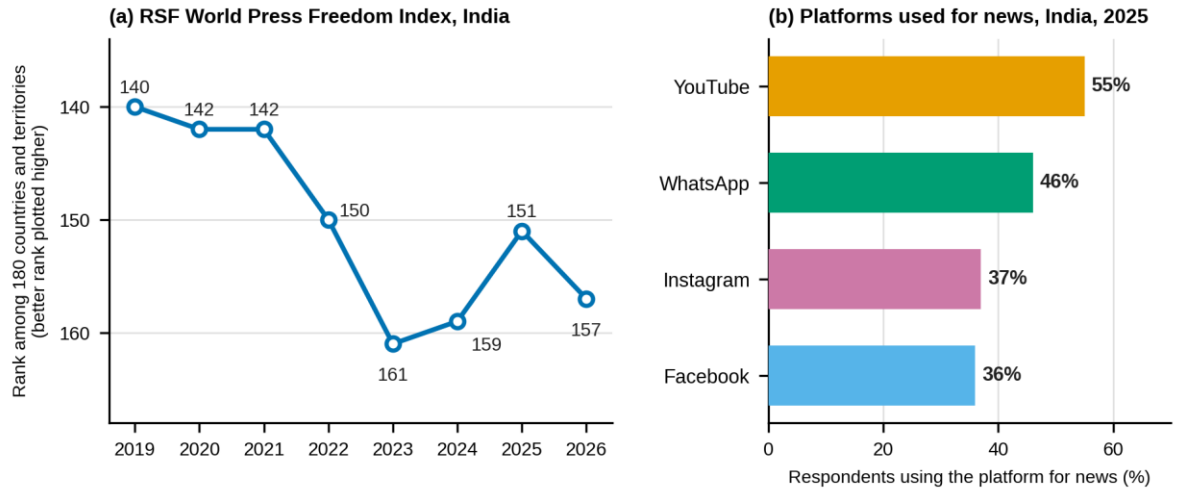


***Figure** 6. Published indicators for India: (a). Rank in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index among 180 countries and territories, 2019–2026; a lower number is a better rank. (b). Percentage of respondents using each platform for news in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025 India sample, which comprises mainly English-speaking online news users and is not nationally representative. Sources: Reporters Without Borders (2026); Krishnan (2025).*

India's challenges include the financial sustainability of independent newsrooms, political and commercial influence, online harassment, threats to reporters, misinformation on messaging networks, uneven digital literacy and the need for stronger local reporting. Press-freedom indices provide comparative indicators but rest on defined expert-assessment methods and should not be confused with direct audits of every newsroom or journalist. The RSF index placed India 140th in 2019, 142nd in both 2020 and 2021, 150th in 2022, 161st in 2023, 159th in 2024, 151st in 2025 and 157th in 2026 (Figure 6a; Reporters Without Borders, 2026). Rank changes reflect the movements of other countries as well as India's own score. RSF's country assessment documents concerns involving media pluralism, ownership, political pressure and journalist safety; these assessments should be read alongside other evidence and domestic debate.

Professional ethics references in the Indian context include the Editors Guild of India's Code of Practice, first adopted in 2002 and revised in 2007, which was updated and re-released in February 2025 (Editors Guild of India, 2025), and the Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Conduct, whose 2022 edition guides the print media (Press Council of India, 2022). Ethical self-regulation should protect accuracy and accountability without becoming a mechanism for suppressing legitimate criticism. Table 9 summarises opportunities and responses in the Indian context.

***Table** 9. Indian context: opportunities and responses.*

Indian context: opportunity	Why it matters	Risk / response
Regional-language journalism	Reaches communities in their own languages and contexts	Invest in translation, local expertise and editorial quality
Investigative and local reporting	Can scrutinise public spending, services and local power	Protect sources and reporters; provide legal and safety support
Digital-native newsrooms	Can experiment with formats and collaborations	Diversify revenue and strengthen cybersecurity
Community and rural media	Improves local representation and service information	Support training, connectivity and financial sustainability
Media literacy	Helps audiences assess sources and manipulated content	Integrate verification skills into schools and public education

11. Ethics, standards and professional responsibilities

Ethical journalism requires more than avoiding deliberate falsehood. It involves careful verification, independence, fairness, proportionality, minimisation of harm, privacy protection, source confidentiality, transparency and accountability. These principles can conflict. For example, the public interest in exposing wrongdoing must be balanced against the safety of vulnerable sources and the privacy of people who are not responsible for the wrongdoing. Widely cited codes, such as that of the Society of Professional Journalists (2014), organise these duties around seeking and reporting truth, minimising harm, acting independently and being accountable and transparent. Table 10 links each principle to practical application.

***Table** 10. Ethical principles and their practical application.*

Principle	Practical application
Accuracy and verification	Confirm names, dates, locations, documents, images and quotations; seek independent corroboration
Independence	Disclose conflicts; resist gifts, inducements and improper editorial pressure
Fairness and context	Give subjects a meaningful opportunity to respond; avoid false balance and misleading framing
Minimising harm	Consider foreseeable effects on children, victims, vulnerable sources and bystanders
Privacy and consent	Avoid unnecessary identification and exposure of sensitive personal information
Confidentiality	Protect sources when promised; assess digital security and metadata risks
Transparency	Explain methods, uncertainty, corrections, sponsorship and material AI assistance
Accountability	Correct errors promptly, visibly and with an explanation proportionate to the mistake

A useful distinction is between objectivity as an aspiration to disciplined evidence and impartiality as a claim to have no perspective. Journalists cannot be free of all social positions, but they can make methods visible, test claims consistently, disclose conflicts and correct errors. Fairness is not the same as giving unsupported claims equal weight with well-established evidence.

Credibility follows from these practices rather than from format. Figure 7 depicts trust as the outcome of repeated practice: verification and source diversity support accuracy and transparency, which build public trust; trust invites engagement and scrutiny; and scrutiny is productive only where corrections and accountability are visible and editorial independence is protected. The cycle is a heuristic, not a measured causal model.

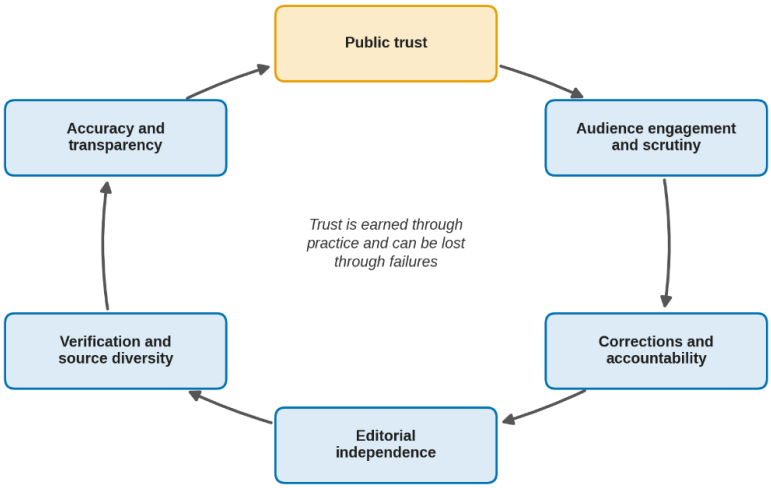


***Figure** 7. Conceptual trust-and-accountability cycle. Trust is earned through practice and can be lost through failures. The figure is an illustrative framework, not a measured causal model.*

12. Recommendations for strengthening journalism

The following measures follow from the analysis above. They are offered as practical directions rather than as interventions whose effects have been tested, and they are labelled R1 to R10 in Figure 8 and Table 11.

R1. Protect editorial independence through transparent ownership, a clear separation of advertising and editorial decisions, and disclosure of conflicts.
R2. Invest in verification, fact-checking, source diversity, data literacy and specialist reporting.
R3. Adopt visible correction policies and preserve an accessible record of significant corrections.
R4. Build sustainable revenue models, including subscriptions, memberships, grants and public-interest funding, with safeguards against donor influence.
R5. Strengthen legal, digital, psychosocial and physical safety support for journalists and their sources.
R6. Use AI only with documented policies, human oversight, privacy safeguards and clear accountability.
R7. Expand local-language, rural, community and disability-inclusive reporting.
R8. Teach media and information literacy so that audiences can evaluate evidence, identify manipulated media and distinguish reporting from opinion and advertising (Muratova et al., 2019).
R9. Develop collaborative investigations where cross-newsroom cooperation can reduce costs and improve verification.
R10. Evaluate journalism by public value, accuracy, relevance, inclusion and accountability, not by clicks or speed alone.

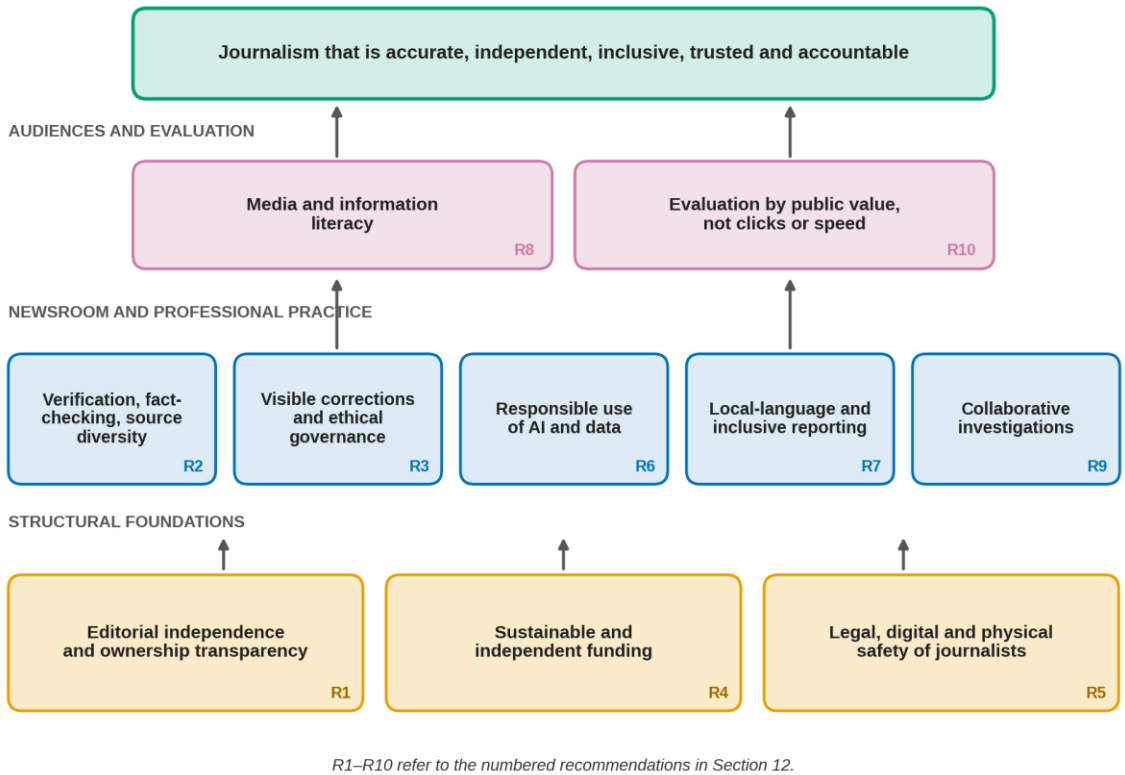


***Figure** 8. Proposed framework for strengthening journalism. Structural foundations support newsroom and professional practice, which together with audience literacy and public-value evaluation support accurate, independent, inclusive, trusted and accountable journalism. R1–R10 refer to the numbered recommendations.*

***Table** 11. Recommendations mapped to the challenges addressed, lead actors and illustrative indicators of progress.*

Recommendation	Main challenge addressed	Lead actors	Illustrative indicator
R1. Editorial independence	Commercial and political pressure	Owners, publishers, editors	Public ownership disclosure; written firewall between advertising and editorial
R2. Verification and specialist capacity	Speed-driven error; misinformation	Newsrooms, journalism schools	Documented verification steps; training provided
R3. Visible corrections	Gaps in accountability	Editors, press councils	Published correction policy; time to correction
R4. Sustainable revenue	Advertising dependence	Publishers, funders, policymakers	Revenue diversification; donor-independence safeguards
R5. Safety support	Threats, harassment, precarious work	Employers, unions, governments	Safety protocols; access to legal aid; contract coverage
R6. Governed AI use	AI-related error, bias and privacy risk	Newsrooms, regulators	Published AI policy; records of human sign-off
R7. Inclusive local reporting	Representation and access	Newsrooms, funders, community media	Coverage by language and region; accessible formats
R8. Media and information literacy	Misinformation; weak verification skills	Schools, platforms, newsrooms	Curriculum inclusion; programme reach
R9. Collaborative investigations	Cost, capacity and verification	Newsrooms, networks	Joint projects completed; shared verification
R10. Public-value evaluation	Metrics distorted by clicks and speed	Editors, funders, researchers	Use of accuracy, relevance, inclusion and accountability measures

Note: Indicators are illustrative suggestions, not validated measures.

13. Future directions

Journalism is likely to become more networked, multimedia, data-intensive and AI-assisted. Its future will depend not only on technological innovation but on whether institutions can preserve independent verification, public trust and financial sustainability. New opportunities include multilingual automated transcription, accessible formats, collaborative investigations and public-interest data tools. New risks include synthetic media, surveillance, opaque recommendation systems, increasingly precarious work and the erosion of local reporting capacity. The central professional challenge is to use new tools without weakening the principles that make journalism socially valuable.

14. Conclusions

Journalism is a plural and evolving practice rather than a single medium or style. Its forms range from print and broadcasting to digital, investigative, data, citizen, community and specialist reporting. Its potential benefits include informing citizens, scrutinising power, supporting public debate, explaining science and health, documenting communities and enabling accountability. Its limitations arise from commercial and political pressure, bias, uneven representation, misinformation, technological dependence, unsafe working conditions and inadequate resources. Neither technology nor professional status guarantees quality. Journalism earns legitimacy through demonstrable accuracy, independence, fairness, context, transparency, correction and accountability. In India and globally, a resilient journalism ecosystem requires plural ownership, protected reporters, sustainable newsrooms, strong

ethical practice and an informed public. Because this review is narrative and its sources were selected purposively, the framework proposed here is conceptual; it should be tested through comparative newsroom studies and audience research.

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Author contributions

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Competing interests

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Ethics approval and informed consent

Ethics committee approval and informed consent were not required because this article is prepared from published literature and publicly available institutional materials and does not report new research involving human participants or animals.

Data availability

No new datasets were generated or analysed for this narrative review. The published indicators plotted in Figure 6 are available from the sources cited in its caption.

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Generative AI tools were used to assist with the preparation, drafting, language editing, reference checking and figures preparation. The author is responsible for verifying factual statements, references and takes responsibility of the prepared manuscript.

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