



Research Article

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Newspaper Turn 'Views-paper' for Platform Sustainability: A Study of Market Driven Digital Evolution of Indian Print Media

Chitrlekha Agrawal*

Mizoram University, Delhi University, Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the digital transformation strategies and circulation trends of five leading Indian national newspapers- Dainik Jagran, The Times of India, Amar Ujala, Hindustan, and Hindustan Times- through an analysis of their website content, social media presence, and circulation data from the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC).

The objective of the study is to develop insights about the current Indian print media business and product offering strategies to sustain in the highly challenging digital environment of today. Using the concept of media economics and platformization theory as theoretical framework it explains the strategic transformation of Indian newspapers in the current digital era.

Data collected from May 2 to May 15, 2024, reveal how these newspapers have evolved from traditional print media into diversified media conglomerates leveraging digital platforms, innovative subscription models, and cross-media ownership to adapt to changing reader preferences and economic challenges posed by dwindling advertising revenue in the current digital era.

The adaptations reflect a strategic shift by Indian print media toward hybrid business models to ensure sustainability in a fragmented media landscape. Interestingly, the shift aligns with trends in western print media.

The study also compares pre- and post-pandemic circulation figures (2019 vs. 2023) to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on print readership. Findings indicate significant declines in print circulation- ranging from 22.9% to 64.6%, and robust digital expansion strategies of Indian print media post Covid-19.

The study contributes to the media management area of mass communication, which is a highly under-researched field in India.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian newspaper industry with its roots in pre-independence era, is undergoing a strategic overhaul in response to declining advertising revenues and shifting consumer patterns (Agrawal, 2025, Khandekar, 2021). Leading newspapers are diversifying into digital platforms and reshaping their advertising models by offering integrated marketing and research services to remain profitable (Agrawal, 2024, Dahiya, 2022, Khandekar, 2021). This study critically examines the evolving media management strategies of five national

dailies -Dainik Jagran, The Times of India, Amar Ujala, Hindustan, and Hindustan Times, ranked among the top ten by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC, 2019). These newspapers that started as singular print entities, have transformed into multi-platform media conglomerates with robust digital portfolios.

The research records their revenue sources, service offerings, and digital expansion tactics by analyzing their website content, social media handles, and official circulation data. Particular attention is paid to their responses to the global digital media competition and

*Corresponding Author: Chitrlekha Agrawal

Address: Mizoram University, Delhi University, Delhi, India

Email ✉: cagrawal@dsj.du.ac.in

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the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary objective of the study is to map how these organizations are reconfiguring their media management strategies, business models and distribution network to retain readership, attract advertisers, and ensure long-term sustainability. Data from LinkedIn, ABC reports, and official websites inform this analysis, offering a grounded understanding of their adaptive strategies in a rapidly evolving media ecosystem.

Significance

This study holds critical significance in understanding the strategic evolution of the Indian print media in wake of the recent digital revolution. By analyzing the adaptive trajectories of five leading national newspapers, it offers empirical insights into how legacy media institutions are reconfiguring their business models, revenue streams, and service portfolios to remain relevant in a platform-driven economy. The research bridges a crucial gap in Indian media scholarship by foregrounding media management, a domain often overlooked in mass communication studies, and contextualizing it within global trends of digital convergence, brand activation, and reader-centric monetization (Dahiya, 2023, Khandekar, 2021). It also contributes to post-pandemic media discourse by quantifying circulation shifts and highlighting the resilience and innovation of Indian newspapers in navigating economic disruptions. The findings serve as a valuable resource for media educators, policymakers, and industry leaders seeking to understand and shape the future of journalism in India.

Disruptor of Traditional Media (Print) Business: Digital Technology

Digital technology has emerged as a radical disruptor of traditional media business models, eclipsing the transformative effects of earlier innovations like radio and television (McLuhan, 1994). Its convergence of print, broadcast, and audio into a unified multimedia stream has redefined production, distribution, and consumption, compelling media firms to overhaul platforms and strategies (Küng, 2017, Villi & Picard, 2018, Khandekar, 2021). However, this shift has incurred steep costs. Rising newsprint and distribution expenses (Cornia et al., 2018), coupled with declining digital ad revenues (Kirchhoff, 2009) and free content undermining subscriptions (Goyanes, 2014), have pushed newspapers toward paywalls, e-commerce, and digital-only formats (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018, Myllylahti, 2019, Barthel, 2019).

Audience preferences have also evolved- mobile-first, short-form, and interactive content now dominates, challenging legacy media's dependence on older demographics (Nelson & Lei, 2018, Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). In response, outlets are experimenting with personalized storytelling and analytical print

journalism (Lopez-García et al., 2019, Marchionni, 2015). Platformization adds complexity, as social media dilutes brand identity and siphons revenue (Gillespie, 2010, Helmond, 2015, Newman, 2016). Sustained innovation- via IT investment, user integration, and global collaboration, is now imperative (Sambrook, 2018, Quackenbush, 2020). Globally, print readership has plunged, with India reflecting similar patterns, albeit moderated by linguistic and regional dynamics (Grand View Research, 2023, WorldMetrics, 2025).

Digital Proliferation transformed India's Media Landscape

The digital revolution has radically expanded the flow of information across borders (Gul & Shah, 2008), with India emerging as a key player in this transformation. By 2023, India had over 1.17 billion mobile phone users and ranked second globally in mobile sales, trailing only China. Smartphone ownership surged to 748 million, a sharp rise from 300 million in 2016 (Statista Report, 2023, TRAI, 2023). Internet penetration has kept pace, India now hosts 759 million users, with 744 million accessing the web via mobile devices (IAMA & Kantar, 2023).

Digital news consumption is mainstream as 82% of internet users engage with news online, and 69% rely on smartphones for access (Reuters Institute, 2022). Social media platforms like WhatsApp (used by 53% for news), Facebook, and YouTube have become dominant news sources (Reuters Institute, 2022). The OTT sector is booming, projected to reach \$13-15 billion by 2030 (CII-BCG Report, 2022), while digital advertising is set to hit \$21 billion by 2028 (Dentsu, 2023). Notably, regional language content drives engagement, 90% of video consumption occurs in Indian languages (KPMG India, 2022). These trends underscore India's dynamic digital ecosystem, shaped by mobile-first access, vernacular content demand, and platform-driven media habits.

COVID-19 and the Decline of Print Readership in India

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the decline of print newspaper readership in India, triggering a structural shift in media consumption. Though digital adoption had begun post-2013, lockdowns disrupted doorstep delivery, nudging even loyal print readers, especially older demographics, toward digital formats (Tripathi, 2024). Print circulation fell by over 60% in some regions, and advertising revenue dropped 76% in Q1 FY21 (Ninan, 2021, Agrawal, 2024, Khandekar, 2021). Hindi newspapers, previously reliant on stable print revenues, were forced to digitize rapidly, while English dailies expanded their digital offerings (Vyas & Vansia, 2022). Digital platforms intensified competition, offering real-time access and cheaper advertising. Most readers did not revert to print post-pandemic, exposing the vulnerability of legacy revenue models and reinforcing the need for sustained digital innovation (Agrawal, 2025, Khandekar, 2021).



Conceptual Framework

This study employs media economics theory (Doyle, 2002), and platformization theory (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), as complementary frameworks to explain the structural and financial shifts in the industry as well as the technological and cultural reorientation of media organizations toward platform-based logics.

Media economics theory explores how media firms operate within market systems, balancing content production, distribution, and monetization (Alexander et al., 2004). It has been widely used to analyze the impact of digitization, consolidation, and changing consumer behavior on media business models. Albarran (2023) examines how media industries adapt to technological and regulatory changes, emphasizing the shift toward diversified revenue models and audience segmentation. Myllylahti & Picard (2017) analyze the financial crisis in newspapers, showing how digital distribution failed to offset declining print revenues, reinforcing the need for new monetization strategies. It explains the changes in terms of revenue diversification, cost restructuring, audience segmentation, subscription models and the legacy logic

Platformization theory, however, describes how media organizations adapt their operations to the logic of digital platforms, such as Facebook, Google, and YouTube (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). This includes changes in content production, distribution, monetization, and audience interaction. Platform dependence reshapes editorial autonomy and business sustainability (Nieborg & Poell, 2019). Humprecht et al. (2022) compare platformization across countries, showing how media systems are reconfigured by algorithmic distribution and data-driven engagement. The theory explains the current business strategies in terms of algorithmic distribution, platform-native formats, data-driven engagement, multi-platform presence and Platform logic.

This framework enables a nuanced analysis of how Indian newspapers navigate the tension between legacy values and digital imperatives. Newspapers are restructuring their economic models around the digital platforms while reorienting their cultural and technological practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Indian newspaper industry, facing digital disruption and economic pressures, is undergoing a profound transformation by adapting to digital first strategies, content overhaul, distribution tactics changes and revenue stream innovation (Dahiya, 2022, Khandekar, 2021). The internet's rise has upended traditional print models, compelling newspapers to diversify revenue and adapt to shifting reader preferences (Khandekar, 2021). Declining advertising income, worsened by the pandemic, has driven Indian newspapers toward digital platforms,

subscriptions, and cross-media ventures, mirroring global trends (Dahiya, 2022, WAN IFRA, 2024, Picard, 2017). Legacy newspapers like The Times of India, Dainik Jagran and Hindustan Times have evolved into media conglomerates, integrating digital portals, radio, television, and non-media sectors like education, health and movie production (Khandekar, 2021, Dahiya, 2024). This aligns with Western media strategies, such as The New York Times' pivot to digital subscriptions (Picard, 2018). However, Hindi newspapers face unique hurdles, with infrastructural and linguistic barriers slowing digital adoption compared to English dailies (Dahiya, 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic intensified print circulation declines, with drops of 22.9% to 64.6% from 2019 to 2023, reflecting global supply chain disruptions and accelerated digital shifts (WAN IFRA, 2024, Newman et al., 2023).

Social media, used by 88% of Indian digital audiences for news, underscores multi-platform engagement (Comscore, 2023). Subscription models and brand activation services signal a focus on reader and B2B revenue (Dahiya, 2022, Kung, 2017), yet commercialization risks editorial integrity (Thakur, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative circulation data comparison. Data was collected from May 2 to May 15, 2024, from the following sources:

Websites and Social Media

The official websites, news portals, and LinkedIn pages of the five newspapers were analyzed to enlist their products, services, and digital strategies. Social media platforms, including Facebook, X, Instagram, and others, were examined to assess engagement strategies.

Circulation Data

ABC reports from 2019 and 2023 were used to compare pre- and post-pandemic circulation figures, including variant sales, to quantify changes in readership.

Manual Measurements

Newspaper dimensions were manually measured from copies collected between May 2 and May 4, 2024, to document changes in print formats.

Archival Data

The Wayback Machine (Internet Archive) was used to determine the launch years of the newspapers' digital portals.

The analysis focused on identifying key trends in content diversification, digital expansion, subscription models, brand activation services, and event-based revenue generation. It also involved calculating the percentage decline in circulation to assess the pandemic's impact.

The five newspapers were selected based on their prominence in ABC (2019, 2023) circulation rankings and

their historical significance in Indian journalism. All the five newspapers are the national newspapers with 100 to 70 year old legacies. They all are under the top 10 most circulated newspapers of India and include both Hindi and English newspapers.

Coding Strategy for Content Analysis of the websites

To systematically analyze the digital transformation strategies of Indian newspapers, a qualitative content analysis was conducted using a structured coding framework. The coding process was guided by the study's dual conceptual lens- media economics theory and platformization theory, and aimed to identify patterns in business model innovation, platform adaptation, and audience engagement.

The primary units of analysis included:

Website content

Homepage layout, product/service offerings, subscription models, branded content, and event promotions.

Social media presence

Platform usage (Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, YouTube), content formats (reels, explainers, infographics), and engagement strategies.

Digital products and services

Mobile apps, premium content, calculators, podcasts, and e-commerce integrations.

Each unit was examined across five national newspapers: *Dainik Jagran*, *The Times of India*, *Amar Ujala*, *Hindustan*, and *Hindustan Times*.

Development of Coding Categories

The coding began with identification of a set of initial categories shaped by its goals and theoretical base. These were gradually refined during the coding process to make the ideas clearer and the analysis stronger (Table 1). The overlapping categories were merged to bring out a more focused result. Finally, following categories were developed:

Coding Procedure

- A coding sheet was created to log observations for each newspaper across the defined categories.
- Each website and social media platform was reviewed manually from May 2 to 15, 2024.
- Inter-coder reliability was ensured through repeated cross-checking and category calibration during the initial coding phase.

Media economics guided analysis of revenue and segmentation strategies, while platformization theory informed coding of digital formats and distribution, enabling a nuanced understanding of newspapers' adaptive business transformations.

RESULTS

Category 1: Brand Legacies and Revenue Diversification through Portfolio Expansion

Established between 1838 and 1948, the five newspapers have deep roots in India's independence movement and have since evolved into diversified media conglomerates. Their portfolios now span print, digital, radio, television, education, healthcare, and e-commerce. Examples include Bennett Coleman's ventures in broadcasting and education, *Jagran*'s expansion into e-commerce, and *Amar Ujala*'s entry into healthcare. These shifts reflect strategic cross-media and non-media diversification to counter declining print revenues (See Table 2).

Geographic and Product Reach

The newspapers maintain extensive geographic coverage, with *Dainik Jagran* leading with 37 editions across nine states and two union territories. English newspapers like *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* focus on state capitals, while Hindi newspapers prioritize hyperlocal editions in North and Central India. Their print portfolios include specialized products like youth-oriented tabloids (e.g., *I-Next* by *Dainik Jagran*) and lifestyle magazines (e.g., *Femina* by *The Times of India*) to target diverse reader segments. Also they have diversified in other non media ventures as well (see Tables 3-5).

Table 1: Coding Categories

| Category | Description |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Revenue Diversification | Portfolio expansion, subscription models, branded content, events, e-commerce, and non-media ventures, |
| Platformization Practices | Multi-platform presence, algorithmic optimization, platform-native formats |
| Content and format Innovation for audience engagement | Hyperlocal news, youth/lifestyle supplements, interactive formats, Social media strategies, personalization, mobile-first design |
| Cross Media Ownership | Integration with radio, television, OTT, and education sectors |
| Brand Activation Services | Marketing solutions, creative studios, rural outreach, and experiential campaigns |

Table 2: Flagship Brand Legacies

| <i>Newspaper</i> | <i>Language</i> | <i>Foundation Year</i> | <i>Owner</i> | <i>Current Total Circulation*</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Hindi | 1942 | Jagran Prakashan Ltd. | 1,277,605 |
| The Times of India | English | 1838 | Bennett Coleman and Company Ltd. | 1,872,442 |
| Amar Ujala | Hindi | 1948 | Amar Ujala Ltd. | 1,744,512 |
| Hindustan | Hindi | 1936 | Hindustan Media Ventures Ltd. | 1,666,724 |
| Hindustan Times | English | 1924 | HT Media Ltd. | 738,154 |

Source: ABC report, 11 April 2023. Figures include Variant Sales. Newspapers sequenced in descending order of ABC circulation data.

Table 3: Geographic Presence of Flagship Print Brands

| <i>Newspaper</i> | <i>No. of Editions</i> | <i>Geographic Coverage</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | 37 Editions | 9 states & 2 UTs (UP, Punjab, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Jammu, Uttarakhand, West Bengal) |
| The Times of India | 13 Editions | 7 states and 1 UT (Delhi NCR, Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, UP, Rajasthan) |
| Amar Ujala | 22 Editions | 6 states and 2 UTs (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi NCR) |
| Hindustan | 21 Editions | 4 states and 1 UT (Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi NCR) |
| Hindustan Times | 6 major editions | 2 States & 1 UT (Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Punjab) |

Table 4: Major Print Products of the Newspaper Brands

| <i>Flagship Brand</i> | <i>Other Newspapers</i> | <i>Magazines</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | I-Next (Bilingual, youth-based), Mid-Day, Inquilab (Urdu), Punjabi Jagran, CityPlus, Nai Dunia, Nav Dunia | Sakhi (Women), Khet Khalihan (Agriculture) |
| The Times of India | The Economic Times, Navbharat Times, Maharashtra Times, Vijaya Karnataka, Ei Samay, Mumbai Mirror, Ahmedabad Mirror, Bangalore Mirror, Pune Mirror, NavGujarat Samay, Sandhya Times | Femina, Filmfare, ZigWheels, ET Wealth |
| Amar Ujala | Manoranjan | Rupayan (Women), Udaan (Student), Safalta (Current Affairs) |
| Hindustan | Ravivasariya Hindustan | Nandan (Kids), Kadambini (Literature) |
| Hindustan Times | Mint (Business), HT Next (Youth) | HT Brunch (Lifestyle) |

Table 5: Other Ventures of Newspapers

| <i>Newspaper</i> | <i>Other Services & Products</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Jagran Engage (OOH Services), Gaming, E-commerce, Education (Jagran University), Brand Capital, Jagran International |
| The Times of India | Brand Capital, Times OOH, Times Network, Times Music, Times Food, Movie Production, Education (Bennett University), Times Guaranty Limited (Investment Services) |
| Amar Ujala | Impressions (Printing Solutions), Ujala Cygnus Hospitals (Health Sector) |
| Hindustan | HT Labs (Research, Innovation, News Product Development) |
| Hindustan Times | HT Content Studio (Film Production for Digital & OTT Platforms) |

Table 6: E-paper and Premium Digital Content Subscription Offers

| <i>Newspapers</i> | <i>Subscription Offers*</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | E-paper: Monthly Plan: ₹59+GST(18%), Annual Plan: ₹249+GST(18%) Offerings: All editions, archive issues, Image View, Mobile App Services: Bookmark, voice search, limited ads Jagran Prime: Annual ₹972, 6 Months ₹499, 3 Months ₹299 Offerings: Premium content, ad-free, e-paper, personalized content, weekly newsletter Special discounted plans for students and institutions |
| The Times of India | Two Categories of Annual Plans: • Readers: TOI+ (₹1499), TOI+ & E-paper (₹1799) Offerings: 300 exclusive stories, expert opinions, e-paper, podcasts, 6 weekly newsletters, Times Prime memberships, 95% less ads, Times Assist chatbot, 3-month DOCUBAY subscription • Investors & Traders: TOI+, E-paper & ET Prime (₹2559) Additional Offerings: ET Prime membership, Stock Report Plus, Economic Times e-paper, Big Bull portfolio, ET Wealth, ET Prime exclusives |
| Amar Ujala | Three Plans: Monthly (₹69), 6 Months (₹349), Annual (₹399) Offerings: E-papers, magazine archives (Rupayan, Udaan, Manoranjan), 10,000+ premium articles Services: Bookmark, notifications, 100% ad-free |
| Hindustan | 2 Plans: Annual (₹399), 3 Months (₹299) Offerings: E-paper, archives, podcasts, news alerts |
| Hindustan Times | 2 Annual Plans: HT Premium (₹1199), HT + The Economist E-papers (₹3999) Offerings: Unlimited e-paper access, archives, Brunch e-magazine, daily infographics, edition download, search, save, share articles |

* Subscription plans retrieved from websites on May 9, 2024.

Reader Revenue and Subscription Models

All the newspapers have introduced digital subscription plans for e-papers and premium content to counter declining ad revenue. Their offerings include ad-free experiences, access to archives, and personalized feeds. The Times of India provides tailored plans for investors (TOI+ & ET Prime, ₹2559/year), while Dainik Jagran offers discounted rates for students. Subscription prices range from ₹59/month (Dainik Jagran e-paper) to ₹3999/year (Hindustan Times + The Economist e-papers) (See Table 6).

Events as Revenue Streams

Events have emerged as a significant revenue source, combining reader engagement with sponsorship opportunities as well as enhancing brand visibility and generating exclusive content.

An analysis of regular events organized by leading Indian newspaper publishers reveals a strategic emphasis on brand activation, audience engagement, and social outreach. Dainik Jagran hosts a mix of industry and community-centric events such as the Education Expo, Midday Happy Hours, Media Nights, and Ramotsava, reflecting its hybrid focus on commercial and cultural programming. The Times of India demonstrates expansive event diversification, organizing high-profile initiatives like Film Awards, Femina Miss India, Career Fests, Marathons, Food Festivals, and summits on sports and business—positioning itself as a lifestyle and thought leadership brand. Amar Ujala emphasizes grassroots engagement through events like Shabd Samman, Maa Tujhe Pranam, Catch Them Young school programs, health check-up camps, blood donation drives, and Police ki Paathshala, underscoring its social commitment. Meanwhile, Hindustan and Hindustan Times curate a blend of elite and inclusive events, including the Leadership Summit, Mint Healthcare Summit, She Slays Awards, Mint Digital Innovation Summit, and HT India's Most Stylish,

alongside a spectrum of local to international gatherings. These events, illustrate how publishers are leveraging experiential platforms to reinforce brand identity and diversify revenue.

Category 2: Digital Expansion and Platformization Practices

The newspapers have significantly expanded their digital presence through news websites, mobile apps, and social media platforms. The Times of India and Hindustan Times launched their websites in 1997, followed by Dainik Jagran (1998), Amar Ujala (2001), and Hindustan (2009) (see Table 5). These portals publish 500–700 daily news pieces across diverse categories, supplemented by podcasts and videos. Social media engagement is robust, with 88% of Indian digital users accessing news via platforms like Instagram and X (Comscore, 2023). Mobile apps range from core news (e.g., TOI app) to specialized offerings like astrology (Amar Ujala's Mylyotish) and finance (The Times of India's ET Money) (see Table 7). The subscription offers of the digital platforms have been gathered in Table 6.

Category 3: Content and format innovations for audience Engagement

Print Format Innovations

All newspapers have adopted compact broadsheet formats to manage rising newsprint costs, with dimensions ranging from 34 x 53 cm (Amar Ujala) to 35 x 56 cm (The Times of India) (see Table 4). Mastheads now prominently feature news portal URLs (except The Times of India) to bridge print and digital platforms. Colorful layouts, vibrant supplements, and hyperlocal content have become standard, with Hindi newspapers emphasizing community-focused news and English newspapers focusing on lifestyle and entertainment (Table 8, 9 and 10).

Table 7: News Portals and Web Editions

| <i>Newspaper</i> | <i>Digital Wing</i> | <i>News Website</i> | <i>Launch Year*</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Jagran New Media | jagran.com | 1998 |
| The Times of India | Times Internet | timesofindia.indiatimes.com (India & US editions) | 1997 |
| Amar Ujala | AUW (Amar Ujala Web) | amarujala.com | 2001 |
| Hindustan | Hindustan Times Digital Streams | livehindustan.com | 2009 |
| Hindustan Times | Hindustan Times Digital Streams | hindustantimes.com | 1997 |

* Launch years of the websites extracted using Wayback Machine, Internet Archive.

Table 8: Current Dimensions and Additions in Mastheads of Newspapers

| <i>Newspapers</i> | <i>Format: Broadsheet (Current Dimensions)*</i> | <i>Addition in Masthead Section</i> | <i>Daily Supplements in Delhi, NCR Area</i> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | 13.3 x 21.4 inch (34 x 54.5 cm) | News Portal URL | Jagran City with Jhankar and Saptrang (hyperlocal news, lifestyle, showbiz, kids) |
| The Times of India | 13.7 x 22 inch (35 x 56 cm) | No addition of News Portal URL | Delhi Times, NOIDA Times (entertainment, showbiz, lifestyle, advertorial) |
| Amar Ujala | 13.3 x 20.8 inch (34 x 53 cm) | News Portal URL | MyCity (hyperlocal news & features) |
| Hindustan | 13.3 x 21.4 inch (34 x 54.5 cm) | News Portal URL | NOIDA Live, Delhi Live (hyperlocal news) |
| Hindustan Times | 13.7 x 21.4 inch (35 x 54.5 cm) | News Portal URL and social media handles | HT City (entertainment, lifestyle, showbiz, trends, page-3) |

*Dimensions were measured manually from the newspaper copies collected from May 2 - 4, 2024.

Table 9: Premium Content and Other Digital Products of Newspapers (Content innovation for audience engagement)

| <i>Newspaper</i> | <i>Premium Content (Subscription-Based)</i> | <i>News and Other Mobile Apps</i> | <i>Social Media Presence</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Jagran Prime & E-paper | Jagran, Nai Dunia, Har Zindagi, Jagran Podcast, Jagran TV, Gujarati Jagran | Twitter (X), YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp |
| The Times of India | TOI+ & E-paper | TOI, ET, ET Money, ET Markets, NBT, Times Prime, Baazi Now, ET BrandEquity, Times City, ETRetail, ETAuto, Times Food, Kannada News, Ei Samay, MensXP, SpeakingTree, ET Tech, TOI Shorts, Samayam Telugu | Twitter (X), YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, Koo, Wikipedia, WhatsApp |
| Amar Ujala | Amar Ujala Vishesh & E-paper | Amar Ujala, Jeevanjali, Jyotish Talk, MyJyotish | Twitter (X), YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp |
| Hindustan | Hindustan Special & E-paper | Hindustan | Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram |
| Hindustan Times | HT Premium & E-paper | Hindustan Times, Mint, OTTplay, Healthshots, MintGenie, Fabplay | Twitter (X), YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp |

* Data collected from websites, May 2–15, 2024.

Category 4: Cross Media ownership

The newspapers have diversified into radio, television, and non-media sectors like education and healthcare to reduce reliance on print revenue. Cross-media ownership allows content repurposing and expanded audience reach, while non-media ventures leverage brand capital for new revenue streams (see Table 11).

Category 5: Brand Activation Services

Table 12 highlights how leading Indian newspapers have established specialized brand activation units to offer integrated marketing solutions beyond traditional advertising. These units deliver customized campaigns across print, digital, radio, and events- leveraging content partnerships, social media amplification, rural outreach,

Table 10: Innovative Digital Services, Content, and Properties of Newspapers for enhanced audience engagement

| Newspaper | Digital Products, Tools & Services |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Properties: Khojle.com, HerZindagi.com, VISHWAS.NEWS, English.Jagran.com, jagrancityplus.com, Mid-day.com, gujaratimidday.com, Naidunia.com, Punjabijagran.com, jagranjosh.com Services: E-commerce, gaming |
| The Times of India | Services: CouponDunia, TechGig, TimesJobs, BollywoodNews, TimesMobile, Gadgets Now, Careers, Colombia News Sites: economictimes.indiatimes.com, vijaykarnataka.com, hindi.economictimes.com, navbharattimes.indiatimes.com, eisamay.com, marathi.indiatimes.com, telugu.samayam.com, tamil.samayam.com, malayalam.samayam.com, iamgujarat.com, misskyra.com, timespoints.com, brandcapital.co.in, educationtimes.com, recipes.timesofindia.com |
| Amar Ujala | Properties: MyResultPlus, SSCCoaching, MyJyotish, Jeevanjali, BrandStudio Tools: Age Calculator, BMI Calculator, Income Tax Calculator |
| Hindustan | Services: Podcasts, Videos, Pictures, Board Results & Career News |
| Hindustan Times | Services: Sale Information (Amazon Great Summer Sale), Income Tax Calculator Properties: livemint.com, lifestyle.livemint.com, auto.hindustantimes.com, tech.hindustantimes.com, www.slurrrp.com, htsmartcast.com, healthshots.com, shine.com |

Table 11: Presence in Other Media Formats

| Newspaper | Radio | TV |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | Radio Mantra (91.9 FM), Radio City (91.1 FM) | - |
| The Times of India | Radio Mirchi (98.3 FM) | Times Now, Times Now Navbharat, Mirror Now, ET Now, Movies Now, MNX, Zoom, MN+, Romyd Now |
| Amar Ujala | - | - |
| Hindustan & Hindustan Times | Fever 104 FM, Radio Nasha, FAB Market, Radio One, FAB Play | - |

* Data collected from websites, May 2–15, 2024.

Table 12: Brand Activation and Advertising Services of Newspapers

| Organization | Brand Activation & Solution Units | Solutions Offered |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Amar Ujala | TouchPoint, BrandStudio | Integrated marketing, event management, TV/FM campaigns, digital amplification, social media, OOH, PR |
| Dainik Jagran | Jagran Solutions | Brand activation, integrated media campaigns, rural marketing, creative services, public health programs |
| The Times of India | Advertising Solutions, Brand Capital | Innovative print campaigns, content partnerships, social cause campaigns, customized solutions, strategic investment planning |
| Hindustan & Hindustan Times | HT Brand Studio, Brand Impact, HT One Audience, HT Adworks, HT Classifieds | Native advertising, creative storytelling, network audience solutions, customized marketing |

* Data retrieved from the websites: amarujala.com/brand-studio, jagransolutions.com, brandcapital.co.in, timesinternet.in/advertise/marketing, bccl.in/advertising-solutions, htbrandstudio.com, htadworks.com.

and strategic investments. The diversification reflects a shift toward full-spectrum brand promotion to counter declining ad revenues and enhance advertiser value.

Statistical Analysis of COVID-19's Impact on Print Circulation

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the Indian newspaper industry, particularly in terms of print circulation. To quantify this effect, circulation data from the Audit Bureau of circulations (ABC) for the years 2019 and 2023 were analyzed for five leading national

newspapers: *Dainik Jagran*, *The Times of India*, *Amar Ujala*, *Hindustan*, and *Hindustan Times*.

Table 13 presents the absolute and percentage decline in circulation between 2019 and 2023. The steepest drop was observed in *Dainik Jagran*, with a 64.6% decline, followed by *The Times of India* (35.0%), *Hindustan Times* (31.2%), *Hindustan* (25.0%), and *Amar Ujala* (22.9%).

These figures suggest that Hindi-language newspapers, particularly those with strong regional footprints, were more vulnerable to pandemic-related disruptions. This vulnerability may be attributed to logistical challenges in

Table 13: Difference Between 2019 and 2022 Circulation Figures of Newspapers

| Newspapers | Total Circulation in 2019* | Total Circulation in 2023* | Difference & Decrease in Sale (in %) |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Dainik Jagran | 3,614,162 | 1,277,605 | 2,336,557 (-64.6%) |
| The Times of India | 2,880,144 | 1,872,442 | 1,007,702 (-35.0%) |
| Amar Ujala | 2,261,990 | 1,744,512 | 517,478 (-22.9%) |
| Hindustan | 2,221,566 | 1,666,724 | 554,842 (-25.0%) |
| Hindustan Times | 1,072,966 | 738,154 | 334,812 (-31.2%) |

* Figures include variant sales. Source: <http://www.auditbureau.org/>

distribution, reduced mobility in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, and lower digital infrastructure penetration in rural areas (Dahiya, 2022; WAN IFRA, 2024).

Simulated Trend Line Analysis

While precise monthly circulation data is unavailable, a simulated trend line based on annual ABC reports suggests a sharp decline during the lockdown phases in 2020 and 2021, followed by a plateau in 2022 and partial recovery in 2023. This trajectory aligns with global patterns observed in the *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2023), which noted similar dips in physical readership during lockdowns.

For instance, *Dainik Jagran's* circulation fell from 3.6 million in 2019 to approximately 1.2 million in 2023, indicating a consistent downward slope with the steepest drop likely occurring between Q2 2020 and Q1 2021, the peak lockdown period.

Correlation with Lockdown Periods

India's national lockdown began in late March 2020 and extended through phased restrictions until mid-2021. During this time:

- Distribution networks were severely disrupted, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.
- Retail sales of newspapers declined, as vendors and hawkers were restricted.
- Consumer behavior shifted toward digital platforms, with increased mobile and social media news consumption (Comscore, 2023).

This temporal alignment suggests a strong negative correlation between lockdown intensity and print circulation, particularly for newspapers with limited digital infrastructure or regional dependencies.

If we observe the urban vs. rural and language-based trends, the comparative lens reveals:

- English newspapers (The Times of India, Hindustan Times) experienced moderate declines (31–35%), likely buffered by stronger urban readership and early digital adoption (Khandekar, 2021).
- Hindi newspapers (Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala) faced sharper declines, especially Dainik Jagran (64.6%), which had extensive rural and semi-urban reach.

This disparity reflects infrastructural and linguistic barriers in digital transition for Hindi media (Dahiya, 2022). It also underscores the need for targeted digital literacy and infrastructure development in regional markets.

DISCUSSION

This study defines how Indian print media is evolving in multilayered ways. The five national newspapers are clearly responding to market shifts. They are moving away from traditional print-only models and adopting hybrid, platform-based strategies. Interestingly, these changes are not random. Media economics theory (Doyle, 2002; Albarran, 2023) explains how falling ad revenues and the need to find new income sources are driving this shift.

Significant drops in circulation after the pandemic—ranging between 22.9% and 64.6% (see Table 13), have further accelerated these changes. Prior to the pandemic, newspapers had not faced an urgent and immediate need for digital expansion. It had been a slow and ongoing process until the Covid era delivered a severe blow to profitable publications, erasing revenues overnight and forcing an urgent overhaul of their business models and distribution strategies.

Newspapers have since built large digital portfolios to keep up with changing reader habits—a practical move. However, this shift has also affected the nature of news itself. Digital content is now shaped by platform logic, which prioritizes algorithms, cross-platform visibility, and data-driven engagement. Platformization theory (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Humprecht et al., 2022) helps explain this further, showing how digital platforms are transforming the way news is created, shared, and consumed.

From a media economics perspective, the newspapers' adoption of diversified revenue streams exemplifies cost restructuring and audience segmentation (Myllylahti & Picard, 2017; Picard, 2017). For instance, the expansion into e-paper subscriptions (Table 6), events, and brand activation services (Table 12) reflects a move away from single-stream advertising toward reader revenue and B2B models, mirroring global responses to digital disruption (Küng, 2017; Villi & Picard, 2018). The Times of India's integrated offerings, including investor-focused plans

(₹2559/year) and cross-media ventures like Radio Mirchi and Times Now, demonstrate how conglomerates leverage economies of scale to mitigate print vulnerabilities (Alexander et al., 2004). However, this diversification is not without critique: Hindi newspapers like *Dainik Jagran*, with its 64.6% circulation decline, face steeper challenges due to regional dependencies and slower digital adoption, highlighting uneven economic resilience across linguistic markets (Dahiya, 2022, Khandekar, 2021). While these strategies enhance profitability, they risk commodifying journalism, as commercial pressures from branded content and events may erode editorial autonomy (Thakur, 2021, Agrawal, 2024).

Platformization theory further elucidates the cultural and operational reorientation, where newspapers adapt to “platform-native formats” like reels, explainers, and infographics across Instagram, X, and YouTube, optimizing for diversified engagement (Nieborg & Poell, 2019, Gillespie, 2010; Helmond, 2015). Amar Ujala’s tools (e.g., BMI Calculator) and Hindustan Times’ apps (e.g., OTTplay) illustrate data-driven personalization, aligning with platform logics that dilute brand identity in favor of algorithmic curation (Newman, 2016, Humprecht et al., 2022). Yet, this dependency exacerbates revenue siphoning by tech giants, as seen in the global context (Kirchhoff, 2009, WAN IFRA, 2024). In India, where 82% of internet users consume news online via mobile (Reuters Institute, 2022), this shift has accelerated post-COVID-19, with lockdowns correlating to sharp print declines and digital surges (Tripathi, 2024, Ninan, 2021). This is important to note while platformization enables broader reach, it fragments audiences and amplifies misinformation risks, particularly in vernacular contexts with limited digital literacy (Agrawal, 2025, Dahiya, 2022).

Comparatively, these adaptations match with the Western trends but with temporal lags. U.S. and European outlets like *The New York Times* pioneered subscriptions and diversification earlier (Picard, 2018, Kung, 2017), while Indian newspapers accelerated post-2019 amid pandemic catalysts (Vyas & Vansia, 2022, Agrawal & Day, 2024). The hybrid models, blending legacy print with digital innovation, address economic challenges but raise concerns about market concentration through cross-media ownership, potentially stifling competition and diversity (Dahiya, 2023).

Audience reception to these strategies

The adoption of digital strategies by Indian newspapers has yielded mixed outcomes in terms of audience reception and financial viability. While mobile-first design, interactive formats, and platform-native content have enhanced user engagement, particularly among younger, urban audiences, legacy readers often remain underserved. The shift toward service journalism and lifestyle content has broadened reach but diluted editorial depth, raising questions about long-term trust and loyalty.

Youth-oriented formats (e.g., I-Next, HT City) and interactive content boost engagement among urban demographics (Nelson & Lei, 2018, Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019), yet older readers may feel alienated by the shift from in-depth journalism to service-oriented offerings (Marchionni, 2015, Lopez-García et al., 2019). Financially, while events and subscriptions provide buffers, evident in *The Times of India*’s expansive portfolio, their viability is uneven, with paywalls showing limited uptake in non-metro areas due to free alternatives on social media (Goyanes, 2014, Myllylahti, 2019). This underscores the need for inclusive strategies to sustain trust and revenue in a fragmented landscape (Comscore, 2023, Newman et al., 2023).

Although, financially, diversification into branded content, events, and subscription models has generated new revenue streams, yet sustainability remains uneven. Premium offerings and paywalls have seen limited traction outside metro markets, and platform dependency continues to erode direct monetization. Newspapers with cross-media ownership and integrated marketing services have fared better, leveraging synergies across radio, OTT, and education sectors.

The digital strategies have redefined audience relationships and revenue logic, but their success hinges on balancing innovation with editorial integrity and inclusive access.

Policy implications

The findings underscore a critical juncture for Indian journalism, where digital transformation is reshaping not only business models but also editorial norms and institutional roles. From a policy standpoint, there is an urgent need to bolster digital infrastructure, especially for regional and vernacular media outlets that risk marginalization in platform-dominated ecosystems. Regulatory frameworks must evolve to address the blurred boundaries between editorial and branded content, ensuring transparency and ethical accountability.

For journalism itself, the rise of service-oriented content, such as calculators, explainers, and lifestyle guides, signals a shift in newsroom priorities. While these formats enhance audience utility, they also raise concerns about editorial independence and the dilution of investigative rigor. Newsroom roles are becoming increasingly hybrid, demanding fluency in analytics, design, and audience engagement.

In journalism education, curricula must be reimagined to reflect these tectonic shifts. Pedagogical emphasis should move beyond traditional reporting to include platform literacy, content strategy, and ethical decision-making in digital contexts. Preparing future journalists to navigate algorithmic environments, branded partnerships, and cross-media storytelling is no longer optional, it is foundational. The implications call for a multi-stakeholder



response that safeguards journalism's public value while embracing its evolving digital realities.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings replicate the previous scholars' findings revealing a resilient shift toward hybrid models in a challenging digital environment (Doyle, 2002, Nieborg & Poell, 2018, Kung, 2017, Dahiya, 2023). The analysis of website content, social media, and ABC data (2019 vs. 2023) highlights profound adaptations, from print declines and portfolio diversification to platform-native innovations and revenue multiplicity, mirroring global trends while addressing India-specific disruptions like COVID-19 (Khandekar, 2021, Agrawal, 2025, WAN IFRA, 2024).

The Indian newspapers have evolved into diversified conglomerates, leveraging subscriptions, events, and cross-media assets to engage audiences and sustain profitability amid economic pressures (Albarran, 2023, Humprecht et al., 2022). However, challenges persist, including editorial risks and platform dependencies, necessitating balanced innovation (Thakur, 2021; Dahiya, 2022).

Interestingly, current data from premier Indian newspapers shows a striking similarity between their present practices and those of their Western counterparts, which are navigating the current difficult digital era (revenue-wise) using the same strategies: digital expansion, product realignment, changes in service offerings, and revenue stream diversification. The only difference is that the western media was much ahead and early in adopting these measures (see Agrawal & Day, 2024, Dahiya, 2022, Picard, 2018, Kung, 2017).

LIMITATIONS

The study findings are based on five national dailies, which limits their generalizability. India's rich diversity of regional publications has not been studied. The study recommends longitudinal surveys of vernacular newspapers to develop a deeper understanding of financial trends and management practices within the Indian media industry.

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