

Digital transitions in the newsroom: How are Indian language papers adapting differently?

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*In a new [report](#) published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Centre for Internet and Society, **Zeenab Aneez** explores how Indian newsrooms are adapting their workflow and processes to cater to an increasing digital audience and the implications these changes have on how journalists produce news.*



Global discussions about how the rise of the Internet has impacted journalism and news publishers has involved accounts of newspapers stopping publication altogether, or bringing their presses to a halt in order to direct resources to publishing solely digital content as in the case of Newsweek or the Independent. Large newspapers like The New York Times and The Guardian have successfully managed to transition from print only publications to multimedia news providers, bringing out both print and digital news but this is an ongoing and costly process.

In the Indian context however, things are a bit different, especially with regard to Indian language newspapers whose print business remains profitable, which positively impacts the dynamics of this transition. For our report, we interviewed over 30 senior editors, managers and rank-and-file journalists of three newsrooms – [Hindustan Times](#), [Dainik Jagran](#) and [Malayala Manorama](#) – to understand how large Indian newspapers are reorganising themselves to cater to the demands of the digital space.

It has always been known that the print industry in India is still growing and we found that this leaves big Indian newspapers in a more comfortable position when it comes to investing in digital operations. Contrary to our assumptions, we discovered that these newspapers are taking aggressive steps to capture India's growing digital audience and while Hindustan Times' transition is very similar to English-language newspapers abroad, both Malayala Manorama and Dainik Jagran have adopted approaches that are specific to their niche audience and their position as market leaders.

Expansion rather than transition

In contrast to the Hindustan Times, which has reorganised and equipped its existing print newsroom to do print as well as digital and mobile journalism, both the Indian language newspapers have focused on launching digital operations that run parallel to the print newspaper organisation.

This involved creating new brands ([Jagran Online](#), [Jagran Josh](#), [Manorama Online](#)), opening up new offices and hiring new personnel geared towards putting purely digital media products, that are not limited to news.

Sukirti Gupta, [CEO of MMI Online](#) explains, "When we started thinking of our digital strategy, we were not looking so much at news but asking if there are new areas of growth as a media company and content was the first thing that seemed exciting for us. We looked at two genres that we thought would be great – health and education."

Jagran Online includes ten websites covering news, health, entertainments, blogging and classifieds. Manorama Online lists fifteen websites as part of their operations, of which about ten are news, feature or content websites while the rest include a matrimonial site, classifieds and portals for real estate listings and doctor's appointments.

Changing rhythms in the newsroom

The production and distribution of digital news content for Malayala Manorama and Dainik Jagran is handled primarily by their respective digital counterparts from a separate newsroom. In adopting this approach, both newspapers have partially shielded their traditional newsrooms from the difficulties that arise when moving from a print to a digital newsrooms. At the same time Manorama Online and MMI Online, which operate as start-ups within these incumbent organisations, partially avoid the inertia that comes from their established organisational and professional cultures. Although print reporters are not directly involved with the digital publication, they continue to be the primary source of news for the website and mobile applications and have to adapt their workflow according to the demands of the online space.

This means that breaking news, a prominent feature of online news, has been made a priority for all reporters. “The journalism remains the same,” says Santosh Jacob George, Editor, Manorama Online, “the only difference is that we have to break the news ourselves while print has the whole day to produce the story. We’ve requested our print reporters to file first for online, either directly into the CMS or via WhatsApp.” At Dainik Jagran, Digital Editor Shekhar Tripathi, has the right to ask a reporter to file the story immediately for the website. “First our policy was print but now online is our first priority, but not at the cost of print. If a story breaks at 8 am, it first comes to me on WhatsApp. If I’m interested, I ask the reporter for more details and then to file the story. Our print reporters have gotten into the habit of filing stories online, they give us the facts first and add perspective later,” he says.

This change in rhythm has not come easily to the print newsrooms which are accustomed to filing stories towards an evening deadline but efforts by management are towards promoting a systematic collaboration between the print and online desks. Dainik Jagran’s Chief Editor has made digital a part of every journalist’s Key Result Area (KRA). “So it’s not just the digital team’s responsibility but now everyone has it in his list of duties and responsibilities to support digital,” explains Gupta. At Malayala Manorama, a clear set of guidelines to streamline workflow were introduced; ‘They called in senior people from print to have detailed discussions on this and our senior editors also visited individual bureaus and spoke to reporters there,’ informs an associate content producer, recalling efforts to sensitise print journalists to the demands of digital news.

Emergence of new forms of newswork

Apart from the changes in workflow, the medium demands the use of various new tools and methods to gather, publish and distribute news. This has resulted in the emergence of new kinds of newswork performed by a new category of news workers. At the Hindustan Times newsroom, this work is performed by journalists who work on the online and audience engagement desks while at Dainik Jagran and Malayala Manorama, it is carried out by ‘content producers’ of the digital newsrooms. Although writers and editors for Manorama Online are journalism graduates who have also undergone journalism training specific to MM’s writing styles and journalistic values, they are designated as ‘content producers’ to differentiate their role from that of print journalists. At MMI Online, content producers do not necessarily possess prior journalistic experience, but have experience in web content production.

These content producers are social media savvy, have an eye for trending topics, are acutely aware of their competition and feel directly responsible for performance of their stories and subsequently, revenue. “We have to be very quick and prepare keyword-stuffed, trending news in a matter of minutes. It’s a race not just to get clicks but to retain the audience,” informs a junior content producer at Jagran Josh. “In print, your job [is], you write your story and you are done. With online we are more responsible for the outcomes. A well-researched story may not garner too many views so we have the option and the responsibility to package and redistribute the story until it finds the audience,” explains a senior content producer at Manorama Online.

Aside from these key observations, our interviews revealed the increased use of audience analytics combined with the introduction of new applications like [Chartbeat](#) and [Parse.ly](#) that analyse performance of stories and aid in editorial decision making, the increased use of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as a source of news and distribution, experiments with new forms of storytelling, especially with the use of mobile phones and a renewed focus on hyperlocal news especially in the case of Indian-language publications.

Our findings, which are limited to observations of what changes are taking place within newsrooms and how this is impacting journalists, open up several questions about the current state of journalism in India, the increasing interdependence on social media platforms, especially Facebook, the use of external software to make editorial decisions, the evolving role of journalists in digital newsrooms and finally, the question of developing a sustainable business model for news on the web.

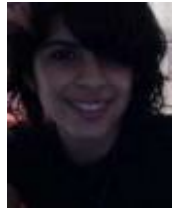
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Note: This post gives the views of the author, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Author

Zeenab Aneez is an independent journalist and researcher in the field of digital media and culture. Her interests include digital publishing practices, new media journalism, media ecologies and digital labour. She was previously a reporter at The Hindu, Hyderabad, and has recently completed an MA in Digital Media and Culture at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick. She is associated with the Researchers at Work (RAW) programme at the Centre for Internet and Society, leading a multi-year study on digital transition in Indian news media.



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