REPORT

Digital Journalism Start-Ups in India

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A nomadic shepherd stands with a sheep while listening to music from his mobile phone along a road in Noida on the outskirts of New Delhi February 26, 2012. REUTERS/Parivartan Sharma

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About the Authors

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Executive Summary

In this report, we analyse six examples of digital journalism start-ups developing new editorial priorities, distribution strategies, and funding models for an increasingly digital Indian media environment.

After years of slow growth, internet use and digital advertising has grown very rapidly in India in recent years, powered especially by the spread of mobile internet use, and double-digit growth in both the number of users and which in advertising is expected to continue. India now has the second-largest number of internet users in the world and rapid growth in internet use and digital advertising is seen by many as the biggest market opportunity outside China since the internet took off in the United States in the 1990s.

The start-ups we examine here are examples of how Indian journalists, technologists, and entrepreneurs are working to develop different content-based (the Quint, Scroll), aggregation-based (InShorts, DailyHunt), or non-profit (The Wire, Khabar Laharirya) models for doing journalism fit for a digital India.

Based on interviews with people involved in these starts-ups, and with others working in and around digital journalism in India, as well as material from news coverage, academic research, and industry publications, we show the following:

- The rapid growth in internet use and digital advertising has been accompanied by a large number of new start-ups including both for-profit content-based start-ups, aggregation-based start-ups, and non-profit start-ups. There are more new and interesting experiments in Indian journalism than in most other countries in the world.
- Most of these start-ups recognise that internet use in India is overwhelmingly and increasingly mobile internet use, and as a consequence prioritise mobile-first approaches, based on mobile-optimised websites and mobile apps more than websites for desktop internet users. While many are currently primarily serving English-speaking Indians, most are keen to move into Hindi and local language content to reach a wider audience as more and more Indians come online.
- In terms of distribution, most of these start-ups recognise they are unlikely to be destination sites or apps for large numbers of users at this stage and have prioritised social media distribution to build reach and engagement. (Content-based start-ups and non-profits alike use social media to promote and distribute their content; aggregation-based start-ups have focused on using social media to market their apps.)

- Some of these start-ups have grown very quickly in terms of reach, engagement, and numbers of users, but they increasingly face head-to-head competition with both (a) the digital operations of legacy media when it comes to news content and (b) large international technology companies including search engines and social media, especially for attention and advertising.
- Sustainable business models take time to build and it is too soon to judge the prospects of the start-ups examined here, but it is clear that the combination of low advertising rates, limited willingness to pay for news, and the dominance of legacy media and international technology companies when it comes to digital advertising means start-ups in India face a challenging environment, even as they benefit from rapid growth in the number of users and in overall advertising spend.

The start-ups we look at here – and others like them – are not exempt from the wider challenges facing journalism in India, including business pressures, occasionally weak professional ethics, outside pressures from politicians and others, and issues around owners' and funders' potential conflicts of interest. But they are poised to seize the opportunities represented by the rapid growth of internet use and digital advertising in India, they are often innovative and novel in terms of the journalism they do, how they distribute it, and how they try to fund it. Journalists and news media – old and new – across India and beyond can learn much from the work they are doing to develop distinct forms of journalism fit for an environment that is increasingly digital and in many ways more representative of the global experience than North America and Western Europe.

1. Introduction

India today combines the fastest growth in the number of internet users in the world, a vibrant and diverse legacy news media sector in both print and broadcast, and widespread concerns that some news media are compromised by their pursuit of short-term profit, by weak professional ethics, outside pressures on journalists, and by conflicts of interest related to their owners' other business and political activities. In this report, we review a range of digital journalism start-ups in India that all aim to build on the opportunity afforded by rapid growth in internet use while navigating between on the one hand legacy news media competitors and international technology companies who increasingly expand their online activities and on the other hand the economic, professional, political, and proprietor-related pressures many journalists in India have to confront.[1]

The cases we look at in some detail – the Quint, Scroll, Inshorts, DailyHunt, The Wire, and Khabar Lahairya – all represent different approaches to digital journalism in India, in terms of their content strategies, their distribution strategies, and their strategies for funding journalism on a for-profit or non-profit basis. At this stage, none of them compare with the reach and editorial muscle of leading legacy news media like the *Times of India*, NDTV, or *Dainik Bhaskar*. In India, as elsewhere, established media dominate digital news provision and employ the vast majority of journalists.[2] But all of the cases we discuss here represent important examples of how digital journalism might be done in new ways and by new players in India. By extension, they also shed light on how digital journalism might evolve in other growing low-income democracies with a rapidly developing digital media market, like Bangladesh or even Indonesia.

In this opening section, we will briefly outline the rapidly growing digital media market these start-ups are navigating and summarise some key features of how digital journalism start-ups have developed in other countries that help us understand the situation in India. In the second section, we discuss two cases that are both for-profit content-based start-ups with a clear editorial focus, namely the Quint and Scroll. In the third section, we examine two cases that are for-profit aggregators with a greater emphasis on technology, namely Inshorts (formerly NewsInShort) and DailyHunt (formerly NewsHunt). In the fourth section, we look at two examples of non-profit content-based start-ups with very different editorial ambitions, namely

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[1] For recent research on developments in Indian media and journalism, see e.g. Parthasarathi and Srinivas (2012), Kohli (2013), Mehta (2015), and Ramaprasad et al. (2015). For a recent journalistic treatment, see e.g. http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/the-big-five-the-media-companies-that-the-modi-government-must-scrutinise-to-fulfill-its-promise-of-ending-crony-capitalism. The most recent review of press freedom by Reporters without Borders highlight increasing pressures on journalists from religious groups, political actors, and commercial interests: http://rsf.org/en/india. Painter (2013) presents a range of journalists' perspectives on contemporary Indian journalism.

[2] See e.g. http://www.caravanmagazine.in/perspectives/minority-report and Newman et al. (2015).

The Wire and Khabar Lahairya. The three sections and six case studies are selected to illustrate a range of different ways of thinking about the strategic choices digital journalism start-ups have to make around *content* (what kind of journalism are we doing and how?), *distribution* (what is our target audience and how will we reach it?), and *funding* (what are our sources of income and how will they fund our journalism?). We write on the basis of interviews done between October 2015 and February 2016 with 20 people involved in a wide range of start-ups, as well as background conversations with outside analysts and with legacy media players.

The start-ups we examine have very different origins. Some were launched by well-known journalists like Raghav Bahl and Ritu Kapur of the Quint or Siddharth Vardarajan and Sidharth Bhatia of The Wire. Inshorts and DailyHunt, in contrast, were launched by people with a technology background. Others, like Khabar Lahairya, are growing out of legacy media. At each of them, we have interviewed key individuals involved in launching and running each enterprise. We have singled out these six start-ups for special attention because they together represent some of the variety in the Indian digital journalism start-up scene. (At the end of the report, we provide an overview of a range of other start-ups.) They also indicate where there is less variety, in that many of them are fully or mostly English-language oriented in a country where most of the population does not speak, let alone read, English. At this stage, Hindi and other local-language digital journalism start-ups are few and far between, especially when it comes to original, on-the-ground reporting.

This report investigates what digital journalism is and how it is developing in India. It is a portrait of a rapidly evolving situation that aims to help us learn from early experiences and understand where things are heading in the future. We examine individual start-ups not to predict their eventual success or failure, but as examples of how digital journalism is being pursued in a context that is very different from that of high-income democracies. We look at how technology, the media market, and audience demand is changing in India. But also at how Indian journalists are trying to seize the new opportunities. As Sidharth Bhatia, co-founder of The Wire, said in our interview with him: 'Digital is not going to be the revolution. The revolution is going to be the people behind it.'[3] We have talked to some of those who want to lead the digital revolution in Indian journalism. Our aim is to understand the journalism they do, how they use digital media to distribute it, how they plan to finance it, and where their ventures fit in to the wider and rapidly evolving Indian media market.

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[3] Sidharth Bhatia, co-founding editor, The Wire, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

The Indian Digital Media Market

Digital journalism start-ups in India are aiming to seize the huge opportunity represented by explosive growth in internet use across the country in recent years. In 2015, India overtook the United States and became the second largest internet market in the world in terms of number of users. (China is number one.) At the end of 2014, one industry association estimated the country would reach 400 million internet users by the end of 2017. According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), that figure was reached by December 2015 – just one year later – as growth outpaced most predictions.[4]

As a percentage of the total population of 1.2 billion, the IAMAI figures suggest about 30% of Indians are internet users, well under the global average of over 40%, and pervasive and persistent poverty means that India continues to have a deep digital divide between the poor and the rich, and between rural and urban areas. (Internet use in major metropolitan areas is estimated to be well over 50%, whereas the figure is closer to 10% in many rural areas.) But despite the barriers, growth in recent years has been astonishing, and cheap smartphones are increasingly found even in very poor rural areas. From 1995 to 2010, internet use in India grew from almost nothing to a mere 8%, even as global access reached 30%.[5] From 2011 to 2015, the Indian figure grew to over 30%, and the bulk of that growth is from 2014 and 2015. In absolute numbers, it took 15 years to get the first 100 million Indians online, three more years to reach 200 million, one more year to reach 300 million, and then another year to reach 400 million.[6]

The rapid growth in internet use in India in recent years is primarily driven by the spread of mobile internet access. In 2012, about a third of internet users in India were mobile users. By 2015, IAMAI estimates that the figure is more than 60%. Many of these are mobile-only users. This means that the Indian internet environment is far more mobile-centred than that of high-income democracies, where 80–90% of internet users have both desktop access at home and mobile access via their phone. In India, 65% of internet traffic in 2015 was estimated to be mobile traffic, and most of it is still 2G and 3G access. (In high-income democracies like the United States, the figure is less than 25% and much of it is enabled by faster 4G connections.[7])

A limited telecommunication infrastructure still holds back the roll-out of home broadband and 4G mobile access, especially outside major metropolitan areas. But major telecommunication providers are investing in expanding their infrastructure to provide better access, the Modi government

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[4] Some other sources offer somewhat more conservative estimates of the number of internet users in India, but all agree on the very rapid growth in recent years. We use IAMAI estimates because they are domestic estimates from India and up-to-date.

[5] Figures from the World Bank.

[6] http://www.iamai.in/media/details/4490

[7] Meeker (2015).

has launched its high-profile Digital India initiative to increase connectivity, and large international players like Facebook and Google have each presented their own initiatives to get more Indians online.[8] As prices for mobile handsets continue to decline and data become more affordable for more Indians, mobile internet use is likely to continue to grow rapidly. Smartphones are already available for around $20 to $30, and several companies are working on cheaper models, with the aim of producing a functional smartphone that can retail for less than INR (Indian rupees) 999 (about $15) in 2016.

Whereas year-on-year growth in the number of internet users in high-income democracies is in the low single digits, in India, the year-on-year growth rate has been over 30% in recent years. Provided handset prices and data tariffs continue to fall, the number of users will continue to rise. One industry report estimates that mobile internet users will comprise at least 70–80% of India's total internet users by 2018.[9] As the spread of cell phones in the 2000s shows, given the opportunity, even very poor Indians prioritise tools that help them communicate and connect with the wider world.[10] In a country where an estimated 42% of the population is under 18 and a smartphone a thing to aspire to – and within range for more and more people – hundreds of millions more will get online in the coming years, most of them with modest mobile access, but many with mobile broadband and some with home broadband. (IAMAI predicts India will add another 100 million internet users, most of them mobile, less affluent, and literate in local languages rather than English, in the course of 2016 alone.)

The massive expansion of internet use in India has been accompanied by significant growth in digital advertising. Estimates vary, but the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) *Indian Media and Entertainment Report* for example suggests annual growth rates of more than 40% a year from 2011 onwards.[11] Figures for 2011 to 2014 are given in Table 1, with FICCI predictions for 2015–2019 included.

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[8] Many of the initiatives are surrounded by political and public controversy, as illustrated by the backlash against the internet.org initiative, led by Facebook and involving six other major technology companies. This aimed to provide affordable access to select internet services but was criticised for favouring Facebook and its allies at the expense of rivals and violating the idea of 'net neutrality': e.g. http://qz.com/582587/mark-zuckerberg-cant-believe-india-isnt-grateful-for-facebooks-free-internet

[9] Boston Consulting Group (2015).

[10] Doron and Jeffrey (2014).

[11] FICCI-KPMG (2015). Again, we use FICCI-KPMG estimates because they are domestic estimates from India and are up-to-date. Some other sources provide a slightly more conservative estimate of digital advertising spend in India, but the growth rates and overall figures are still comparable.

Table 1. The Indian digital advertising market

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 (p)	2016 (p)	2017 (p)	2018 (p)	2019 (p)
Digital ad spend (INR billion, including mobile)	6	8	10	15.4	21.7	30.1	43.5	62.5	84	115.3	138.2	162.5
Digital as % of total advertising market	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	5%	6%	8%	8%	8%
Mobile internet ad spend (INR billion)							5.2	7.7	11.6	16.8	22.1	27.1
Mobile internet as % of digital							12%	12%	14%	15%	16%	17%
Mobile internet as % of total							1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Digital Y-on-Y growth		33%	25%	54%	41%	39%	45%	44%	34%	37%	20%	18%
Mobile Y-on-Y growth								48%	51%	45%	32%	23%
Total ad spend (INR billion)	580	587	652	728	821	918	1026	1159	1330	1532	1740	1964

Source: FICCI-KPMG (2015).

At an estimated INR 62.5 billion (about $975 million), digital advertising in India grew by a factor of ten between 2008 and 2015 and is expected to continue to grow by 20–30% a year in the immediate future. (Overall growth in advertising was 11.7% – with 13.8% for a relatively mature television industry and 8.3% in a newspaper industry where growth is primarily driven by Hindi and local-language titles.)

This is the business opportunity that both digital journalism start-ups and legacy media expanding their digital operations are pursuing. Raghav Bahl, former managing director of Network18 and now founder of Quintillion Media Pvt Ltd (the company behind the Quint) says: 'Today there may only be 20–30 million smartphones. When that 20–30 million smartphones become 300 million smartphones there is an opportunity to get that 270 million when they migrate. So the opportunity is there. Now it's a question of investing in that opportunity.'[12]

Digital journalism start-ups are not alone in pursuing this opportunity. Legacy news media titles like *Times of India*, NDTV, and *Dainik Bhaskar* are all investing in their digital operations and all have greater reach than most of the start-ups we examine here. The most important new international players are from the technology sector. With China largely closed off, most major Western internet players are looking to India for growth. Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other technology companies have all made major investments in India. International publishers like the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street*

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[12] Raghav Bahl, Chairman, Quintillion Media Pvt Ltd, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

Journal, the Huffington Post, and BuzzFeed have also tried to establish a presence in India. Faced with strong domestic brands, many international publishers have failed to build much of an audience in India (and several have scaled back their investment or pulled out). But some international technology companies are doing well. As is the case across the world, search engines – primarily Google – and social media – primarily Facebook – dominate digital advertising. In 2014, search and social media accounted for an estimated 48% of all digital advertising in India, leaving everybody else to compete for the remaining half.[13]

The Indian digital media market in which the journalism start-ups we examine here aim to establish themselves has a number of additional specific features that it is important to keep in mind. The first is the comparatively low average revenue per user in terms of digital advertising. With around 400 million people online in 2015 and estimated total digital advertising revenues of $975m, the total advertising revenues were only about $2.5 per internet user. The same figure for China is over $5 per user. The second is that the reference price for news and media content in India is very low. Print newspapers are sold for INR 5–10 ($0.07-$0.15) or less, little more than their recycling value and heavily subsidised by advertising, and basic pay television packages cost as little as INR 100 a month ($1.5). This means that getting Indians to pay for digital news may be even harder than in high-income democracies where the reference price established by print newspapers and pay television is much higher, even in relative terms. The third is that – like most of Europe but unlike for example the United States – India does not have much of a tradition of domestic philanthropic support for news and media. International donors have supported various news and media related initiatives in India, but individual donations are uncommon and larger foundations like the new 'Independent and Public Spirited Media Trust' (launched in October 2015) are rare.

Lessons Learned from Start-Ups Elsewhere

No other country in the world offers the huge opportunities afforded digital journalism start-ups in India, but it is still worth examining lessons learned from start-ups elsewhere. The first, sobering thing to note is that most digital journalism start-ups – like most start-ups – fail. A frequently repeated estimate is that 75% of all start-ups across all sectors fail, and only 5–0% meet their own stated goals in terms of growth.[14] 'Failure is the norm' says Shikar Ghosh, from Harvard Business School (while underlining that entrepreneurs

[13] FICCI-KPMG (2015).

[14] http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/why-companies-failand-how-their-founders-can-bounce-back

should still be valued for their initiative and experience even when some of their ventures do not succeed).[15]

Looking specifically at some of the most highly visible digital journalism start-ups launched in the United States, it is clear that, even when launched in a favourable environment characterised by rapid growth in both internet use and digital advertising, start-ups need both money and time before they break even, let alone begin to make a profit. Take-off, to use the Silicon Valley jargon, often requires a long and potentially expensive runway. The Huffington Post was launched in 2005 and reported its first profit in 2010. After it was bought by AOL in 2011, millions more was invested in expanding the site's global reach, and the site only reported a profit again in 2015. BuzzFeed, launched in 2006, reported its first annual profit in 2013. Politico, launched in 2007, announced its first profit in 2011. All of these sites have pursued a path of 'users first, profits later' that requires significant investment and patience from their backers. All have first carved out a distinct niche in the United States and then turned to the pursuit of a global audience to reach the scale necessary to break even. All of them have been launched by people with strong networks in other media companies, leveraged for visibility and investment, confirming the wider point that innovators are rarely young, new entrants and more often are people who bring confidence, business knowledge, and social connections accumulated from prior experience at existing organisations to a new venture.[16] Not all of them survived. Some otherwise very impressive start-ups, much lauded at the time, have not made it – like the mobile-first news service Circa and the technology news site GigaOm.

European markets, some of which have as high levels of internet use as the United States, but where country size and language barriers mean that the markets are smaller, where digital advertising has generally grown less rapidly, and where legacy media are often stronger, have been less fertile ground for digital journalism start-ups. One review of nine leading sites across France, Germany, and Italy from 2012 found only one breaking even and concluded that start-ups needed to have very lean operations, diverse business models, and carve out a clearly distinct niche in the market to survive.[17] With limited opportunities for international expansion in other languages than English, the European digital journalism start-up scene has predominantly been made up of niche players who have targeted relatively small, very clearly defined, and often affluent specific audiences and produce editorial content that stands out from what other media provide.

Across the United States and Europe, even where digital journalism start-ups succeed in developing new and interesting forms of content, in

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[15] http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/why-companies-failand-how-their-founders-can-bounce-back
[16] Audia and Rider (2005).
[17] Bruno and Nielsen (2012).

finding an audience, and in establishing a sustainable business, news markets continue to be dominated by those legacy brands that have most successfully moved online, and digital markets more generally are dominated by platforms with far wider scale than any legacy or start-up news organisation.[18] Only in those contexts where legacy media are very weak, have decided not to invest in digital, or where people have lost confidence in them do we see digital brands dominate online news provision.[19] In those markets where journalism start-ups have established themselves as central players in the digital media market, the constant evolution of the digital media environment – with the rise of social media, mobile media, and now increasingly online video – can be as challenging to navigate for digital-born start-ups as for older legacy media. First generation start-ups like Salon and Slate in the United States, or historically important portals like AOL and Yahoo, have not been able to capitalise on their first-mover advantage. (Similarly, the first wave of Indian digital news sites, like the website of the news magazine *Tehelka* and the newspapertoday.com site of the India Today Group, have not been able to maintain their first-mover advantage – though sites like Indiatimes.com and Rediff.com still have millions of users.) Established digital news organisations like the Huffington Post are finding that they, no less than older pre-digital legacy media organisations, have to 'pivot' and constantly adapt and update their editorial, distribution, and business strategies as the digital media environment continues to change.

We turn now to a series of case studies of how six different interesting Indian digital journalism start-ups are making their own decisions about what kind of journalism they want to do, how they distribute it, and how they will fund it. These case studies are based on interviews with people at each start-up supported by other data. We start with two examples of for-profit content-based start-ups (the Quint and Scroll), then turn to two for-profit aggregation-based start-ups (Inshorts and DailyHunt), and then to two non-profit start-ups (The Wire and Khabar Lahairya). At the end of the report, we have compiled a longer list of other interesting digital journalism start-ups in India for reference.

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[18] Meeker (2015).
[19] Newman et al. (2015).

2. For-Profit Content-Based Start-Ups

India has seen the launch of a range of for-profit content-based start-ups that aim to build a sustainable business around editorial content, digital distribution, and a combination of advertising and other commercial revenue streams. They include older sites like Oneindia.com (founded in 2006), India.com (launched in 2011), and FirstPost (also 2011), Indian versions of international brands such BuzzFeed, the Huffington Post, and Quartz, as well as new stand-alone start-ups like the two we focus on here, the Quint and Scroll. Both are for-profit content-based start-ups based on digital distribution, but with quite different editorial strategies and business models.

The Quint

The Quint's motto is 'We are the signal above the noise', and the site aims to provide what they call 'popular digital journalism' across a wide range of topics including 'politics, policy and entertainment, to sports, business, food and everything else that matters'. The Quint emphasises mobile discovery and sharing and aims to provide a blend of video, audio, and text for a quick, visual, and social experience. It publishes in both English and Hindi. Its slogan 'Truth For The Youth' is indicative of its orientation towards a younger demographic than most established Indian newspapers.

The Quint was launched on Facebook in January 2015, as a website in March 2015, and has since added a mobile app and developed various other social media channels. It is part of Quintillion, a new media enterprise launched by Raghav Bahl and Ritu Kapur combining the Quint as a content-based start-up, Quintype, a technology arm (launched with Amit Rathore and based in San Francisco), as well as investments in a range of other Indian start-ups including Sheroes and YouthKiAwaaz. Quintillion is funded by Bahl himself, from the money he made when Reliance Industries acquired his stake in Network18. When the company was established, Bahl spoke to Shuchi Bansal from Livemint and described both the overall strategy and the funding behind Quintillion. 'To build a digital media company you have to focus equally on content and technology. In content, you have to focus equally on

the written word and video. These trends are now crystal clear.'[20] In terms of funding, Bahl explained that he was not actively looking for investment, but open to the right partners coming on board. 'I do have the capital from my exit. We are investing 100% [but] if there was an early stage investor in Google we would love to talk to them. Or if there are large internet media companies looking for a foothold in India, then, yes, we would talk as they would bring understanding, analytics and learnings from other markets.'[21]

The Quint is very much mobile first and social first. 'General traffic trends show that not just new but even traditional media portals are seeing substantial traffic from mobile devices. While desktop usage for legacy media websites would be high, mobile traffic is significantly growing at a higher pace than desktop traffic quarter on quarter,' Ritu Kapur, co-founder and managing director of The Quint, explained in the same interview as the Quint moved from being Facebook-only to also operating across other social media and with its own website and app.[22]

The Quint has grown quickly, with a group of experienced journalists and managers – many, like Bahl and Kapur, with a background at Network18 – and a larger team of young journalists and technologists. In early 2016 it employed about 150 people across editorial, technology, and management functions. It has engaged in a range of partnerships. In June 2015, the Quint partnered with Da Vinci Media to launch a Da Vinci Learning Channel on TV in India as a joint venture. In December 2015, it was one of the first five Indian publishers collaborating with Facebook on their Instant Articles initiative. In March 2016, it announced a ten-year joint venture with Bloomberg to launch a co-branded television news channel and website providing business and financial news across broadcast and digital channels with a joint investment of INR 10 crore (about $20 million). Bahl will own a 74% stake and Bloomberg the remaining 26%.[23] The exact relation between these different partnerships and the Quint brand itself is work in progress as the company continues to evolve.

Kapur insists that both television and newspapers are doing news 'for a much older audience which is a bit at odds with the fact that India is getting younger and India has a great demographic dividend. Nobody is crafting news or bringing news with a perspective and a writing that the young audience might consume.'[24] The Quint is just over a year old, and rapidly evolving across its various channels, but the central focus of the brand itself is on a younger audience of smartphone users active on social media. Raghav

[20] http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/HY1h1x5IXmLBCkPZFV7J1J/Raghav-Bahl-The-digital-ball-game.html
[21] http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/HY1h1x5IXmLBCkPZFV7J1J/Raghav-Bahl-The-digital-ball-game.html
[22] http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/7kO1pSX5WVWUJgDqOvba2H/News-consumption-on-mobile-devices-picking-up-pace-in-India.html
[23] http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/7b5frDPb63BOrI9wiTJWAK/Raghav-Bahl-Bloomberg-ink-deal-to-launch-news-channel-webs.html
[24] Ritu Kapur, co-founder of the Quint, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

Bahl makes it clear that Quint is an evolving enterprise when he says: 'I don't think we want to define artificial parameters for ourselves and say that we want to be confined to this groove. So, honestly while we are clubbed together with The Wire and Catch and Scroll but if you look at The Quint, it's a totally different product.' He adds: 'The Quint is really trying to build a much greater ecosystem of content.'[25]

Bahl suggests that the Quint, with its combination of articles, audio, and videos (they post around 15 short videos daily and have done a few longer documentary-style videos), and a mix of satire, entertainment, sports, and political coverage, is quite distinct from existing digital publishers, both newspapers with more traditional editorial content and other start-ups that tend to have a narrower focus. Across the website, app, and social media channels, the Quint publishes entertainment, lifestyle, and sports content mixed with hard news and commentary. 'In light of the broad spectrum content platform that we are building the Quint to be, our sense is that our competitor will be a legacy player who has successfully migrated to the digital', says Bahl.

The Quint is committed to its own vision of quality journalism, and Kapur says they are playing more with the idiom, format, and styling than with the professional craft itself.

> *Original enterprise content for us is what gets shared, what gets engagement, what gets talked about, commented on and built upon and for that you need journalists . . . You need journalists who can marry new technology with content, who also have enough experience and therefore have the editorial rigour. So the journalism still stays the same. Only our journalists are multimedia commandos.[26]*

Currently, the Quint has three streams of content, one of which is original, the other is what is reported by other media and curated with full attribution, and the third is what they pick up from the same wire sources as everyone else. Right now, the mix is about 50% original content, 20% curated, and 30% aggregated. The site has published a range of important pieces on sexual harassment, freedom of speech, and Hindu nationalism, but, like many other news brands, often finds that lighter entertainment-oriented content generates more traffic online. To avoid being seen as an entertainment-only brand, the Quint is promoting its more substantial journalism via social media and also prioritises these pieces both on-site and in their app. (See the example below of a short video explainer on 'How To Not Sexually Harass a Female Colleague'. Posted across Facebook, YouTube, and the Quint site in February

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[25] Bahl, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

[26] Kapur, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

2016, the video had almost 350,000 views on Facebook alone by mid-April, two months later.)

How to Not Sexually Harass a Female Colleague
More Videos by The Quint

-1:39

The Quint
Just like men, women are also in the workplace to work. Not to be hit on. Not as accessories or objects. If they dress smartly or apply make-up, it's not for you.

Shared with: Public
345,489 Views

Screenshot, the Quint video on Facebook.

With its aggressive expansion, its emphasis on mobile and social distribution, and an evolving editorial strategy focused on younger people, the Quint has built a large audience quickly. On Facebook, for example, it has become one of the most followed brands and generates more engagement than many older and larger brands. (See the chart opposite for data from Facebook Insights.)

Page		Total Page Likes		From Last Week	Posts This Week	Engagement This Week	
1	TOI	The Times of India	7.9m	▲0.5%	250	522.3K	
2	NDTV	NDTV	5.9m	▲0.2%	250	299.1K	
3	ht	Hindustan Times	4.1m	▲0.4%	250	218.3K	
4	The Indian EXPRESS	Indian Express	3.5m	▲0.3%	250	98.2K	
YOU 5	Q	The Quint	3.1m	▲1.5%	250	632.5K	
6	F.	Firstpost	666.3K	▲0.2%	172	45.2K	
7	Buzz Feed INDIA	BuzzFeed India	306.5K	▲2.7%	128	127.1K	
8	C	Catch News	195.1K	▲2.5%	250	48K	
9	S	Scroll	158.4K	▲1.3%	250	23.8K	
10	HUFF POST INDIA	HuffPost India	108.9K	▲1.8%	167	32.9K	
11	The NEWS Minute	TheNewsMinute	55.3K	▲8.2%	250	12.7K	

Source: Facebook data shared by the Quint (Jan. 2016).

In terms of reach, the Quint is in a different league from most start-ups in India and competes more directly with legacy players like newspapers and broadcasters. In early 2016, the site generated about 5 million pageviews a month, had 3.1 million fans on Facebook, 85,000 followers on Twitter, 53,000 on Instagram, and 82,000 app installs. These figures are comparable to those of many more established players, and the Quint claims that the month-on-month growth figures are much higher for video traffic.[27] By April 2016, the Quint had more than 4.1 million Facebook likes and over 100,000 Twitter followers.

How expensive is this rapid expansion? 'So, I think the costs are not that much of a worry but I would hesitate to add we have just begun the game. But from what it looks like content gathering costs shouldn't increase dramatically', says Bahl. He adds:

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[27] All data and Facebook ranking shared by the Quint.

what would increase is the amount that we have to put in to innovation and learning, newer technologies of distribution, integrating newer apps, integrating newer engines, how those things play out we don't know, but you will certainly have to do all of that, because the pace of innovation in this medium is amazing, new personalisation, algorithms, all of those things will have to keep on integrating, something will work, something will not. What is the cost we don't know.

Before launch, the Quint's two founders visited the US and looked closely at start-ups there. 'We realised that there was an absolute revolution that's sweeping digital media', says Bahl. BuzzFeed, Mashable, Vice, and Vox are amongst the digital start-ups that have influenced Quint's vision and strategy. The inspiration – adopted to the Indian market – from these players is clear in how Quintillion and the Quint operates. The content strategy is, like that of sites like BuzzFeed and Vice, oriented towards younger people and emphasises a mix of hard and soft news. The distribution strategy is social and mobile first (supplemented later by websites and apps, and then in addition parallel partnerships on television). Both content and distribution strategies are tied in with developing technologies that the company may in the future wish to sell or license to others, as Quintype develops tools for publishers to manage editorial workflows, publish to various channels, formats, and platforms, and integrate predictive analytics for scheduling articles, reader management, social media integration, content recommendation, and ad placement. The business strategy is premised on rapid growth in audience reach and volume and built in large part around advertising. Brands like Microsoft, Coke, Audi, Motorola, Asian Paints, HDFC, ICICI, Standard Chartered are already on the Quint's client list.[28] Currently, the Quint carries traditional display advertising and engages in partnerships around editorial content (Motorola sponsored coverage of the 2015 Bihar elections, for example). In the future, the site wants to develop a separate team for content marketing, in parallel to what sites like BuzzFeed, Vice, and Vox have done in the United States. Speaking to Manisha Pande from NewsLaundry, Partho Ganguly, business head at the Quint, explains: 'We want to create compelling content that resonates with the brand. The content, even if it is weaved around a product, will bring some value to the reader.'[29] So for the Quint, the editorial strategy is digitally native news for younger people, distribution is built around a social-first and smartphone-first approach, and the business on digital advertising, expansion into television, and in the future perhaps content marketing.

[28] Bahl, interviewed by Arijit Sen.
[29] http://www.newslaundry.com/2015/10/29/blurred-lines-will-native-advertising-ruin-journalism-or-be-its-saviour

Scroll

Scroll describes itself as an independent news, information, and entertainment venture that aims to 'bring into sharp focus the most important political and cultural stories that are shaping contemporary India' through rigorous reporting, objective analyses, and expert commentary. Launched in 2014 and led by CEO Samir Patil and editor Naresh Fernandes, Scroll has aimed to use digital production and distribution to build an up-market brand both in terms of editorial content and appeal to advertisers. Before the site launched, Patil in an interview with the *New York Times* identified the kind of space he wanted to occupy: 'India deserves a better national newspaper than what we have'. He underlined that Scroll would aim to deliver better editorial content, a better digital user experience, and, through this, an attractive proposition for advertisers.[30]

Patil explains that, while this was not the case just four or five years ago, internet use in India has now reached a scale, and shows a growth rate, where digital-only media become an attractive proposition.[31] Since he and his partners launched Scroll, they have expanded both their funding base and their operations. In the summer of 2014, the Omidyar Network and the New York-based Media Development Investment Fund invested an undisclosed amount of money in Scroll.[32] In parallel with expanding their own operation, Scroll has also engaged in range of other projects including syndication, a partnership to run Quartz India, and in September 2015 joined forces with Satyagrah to also offer Hindi-language in-depth news.

As with the Quint, Scroll insists that it is committed to the basic principles of traditional journalism – fairness, objectivity, on-the-ground reporting, crosschecking of sources, and a distaste for speculation – even as the site is developing new ways of telling and sharing journalistic stories. Editor Naresh Fernandes sees Scroll's commitment to journalistic professionalism as part of what helps the site stand out in a crowded environment. 'A lot of journalists have abandoned these values in the years in between', he says. So, he insists, 'all we are doing is working to these basic

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[30] http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/22/indias-press-faces-an-online-future/?_r=0

[31] Samir Patil, CEO, Scroll, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

[32] http://www.vccircle.com/news/technology/2014/07/24/digital-daily-scrollin-gets-funding-omidyar-media-development-investment.

principles. The Scroll just wants to document a changing India and do that in many ways and interesting ways in politics, culture, society. This is the most dramatic period of churn this nation has ever seen.'

Scroll positions itself to have almost the pace of a newswire with the depth and sophistication of a quality news magazine, and says it is on the right track in terms of growth. 'It has been quite satisfying just looking at the growth and readership numbers. It also means that people seem to see something in it', says Fernandes. The mix is not unlike Quartz (and Scroll has a partnership with Quartz India) in presenting a combination of quite short pieces and some carefully reported and crafted longer, in-depth pieces. In 2015, for example, Supriya Sharma was the first journalist from a digital news organisation to win the Ramnath Goenka Award for best reporting on politics and governance for her series Window Seat, based on reporting a 2,500-km train journey in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.[33] In a conversation with NewsLaundry, she provides a reporter's perspective on Scroll's balance between new medium and older professional standards: 'The medium might influence the way you tell a story but at the end of the day the challenge remains the same: to get your facts right, to put them together in a way that explains something, and to do so in a way that would make people care.'[34]

Screenshot (the last two articles from Sharma's 26-piece series 'Window Seat')

In parallel with its editorial team, Scroll has a separate distribution team staffed by people with an understanding of search engine and social media algorithms who work to build quality reach in a distributed media environment. Scroll aims to be easily accessible wherever and whenever people choose to read it, which so far has involved developing a simple and sleek responsive design website, an Android app, two email newsletters, and

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[33] Supriya Sharma is a former RISJ Journalist Fellow.
[34] http://www.newslaundry.com/2015/11/27/conversations-with-ramnath-goenka-awardees-talk-to-people-not-just-politicians

a range of social media channels, including most importantly Facebook and Twitter but also YouTube and Instagram.

Fernandes argues that the heart of Scroll is their editorial profile built by journalists who have been reporters and not just managers. Part of the appeal, he says, is that the digital space enables new entrants to prove to people that they deliver something that is distinct from – and perhaps better than – what legacy media offer: 'I think there is the realisation that we need many more voices and the barriers to entry are relatively low in terms of new technologies.' But he also highlights this is an increasingly competitive space:

> *Everybody is digital these days. Our competitors are not the Quint or The Wire but NDTV, The Times of India, The Indian Express. You know there are a great many young people who don't see the physical things. So, I think it is an artificial distinction that everybody is drawing between these digital platforms and what they are saying are mainstream media or legacy media. All are playing for the same readers.*

As a business, Scroll is based on the idea that there is an up-market audience in India that Scroll can serve and that will in turn be attractive to advertisers who will increasingly turn to digital media as internet use and smartphone ownership continues to increase. If the site offers a better quality digital experience, in terms of content and technology, it can draw an attractive audience that will enable it to sell advertising at higher rates than most others while also benefiting from growth in internet use, smartphone access, and digital advertising across India. The Scroll site is currently very light on advertising, and Patil highlights native advertising and sponsored content as the way forward. 'The next step is not going to be Google ads but magazine quality advertisement on the internet', he says.[35] Patil also underlines that content-led e-commerce has a huge potential to sustain this level. Scroll already operates a shop on its website where people can buy 'noteworthy books and ideas' based on editorial recommendations. In short, 'creating interesting experiences on the internet' holds the key to remaining relevant in this space. 'The opportunity is huge,' says Patil. Expansion beyond English and a future investment in more video are also seen as prime opportunities for Scroll.

In terms of editorial content, Scroll's strategy is based around a combination of in-depth reporting and commentary for an up-market audience. Distribution is based on a mobile-optimised website, a mobile app, and social channels, and the business strategy on converting an up-market audience into advertising, e-commerce, and other revenue streams.

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[35] Patil, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

3. For-Profit Aggregation-Based Start-Ups

Inshorts and DailyHunt, the start-ups we turn to next, are also for-profit companies, but pursue a very different strategy from content-based ventures like the Quint and Scroll. Both of them are based around aggregating, curating, and repurposing content originally produced by other media organisations and presenting it to people in user-friendly mobile apps. Both prioritise original technology much more than original content.
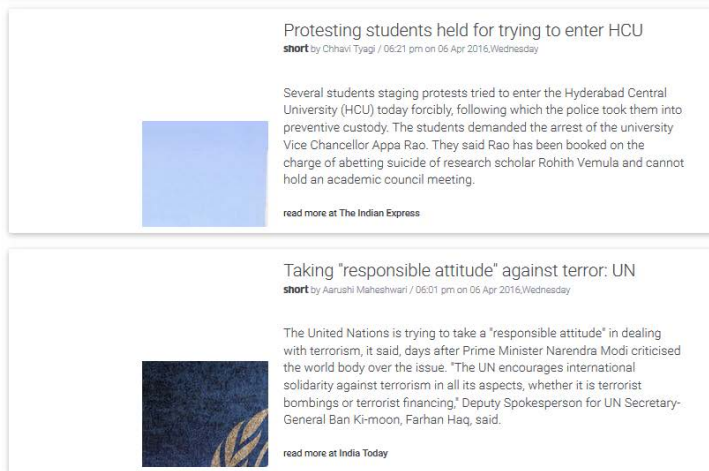
Inshorts

Inshorts presents itself as

> *a news app that selects the latest and best news from multiple national and international sources and summarises them to present in a short and crisp 60 words or less format, personalised for you, in both English or Hindi. All summarised stories contain only headlines and facts, no opinions, to help you stay informed with the current affairs. Whether it's the latest government policies or shakeups in Bollywood, we get them covered and delivered super fast! Get updated with the latest news and current affairs in a jiffy!*

Some aspects of this are clearly aligned with what content-based start-ups like Quint and Scroll are also offering, in terms of offering a curated, quality experience that aims to be digital-first, timely, and convenient. Other aspects set Inshorts apart, such as the idea that it is the app itself – not editors – that 'selects latest and best news', the strict adherence to a short format, and the total reliance on others to do the actual reporting.

The Inshorts app has already been widely praised, with rave reviews from both BuzzFeed and *Times of India*, a 'Best Innovation App' from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), as well as being named as one of the best apps of 2015 by Google. The concept is simple yet powerful – all stories can be reduced to 60 words, and then presented in a quick, convenient, and personalised feed for individual users. Inshorts looks at stories from other news organisations, rewrites them in their 60-word format, and the app then makes them available on the user's phone with a link to the original source. This is in part a technology play around aggregation and ease of use. But it is also about a brand identity in the crowded Indian media landscape, as expressed by Inshorts' slogan: 'No Opinion, Just News.' (See the examples overleaf.)

Screenshot of Inshorts stories

The idea for Inshorts came from a group of students of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). In March 2016, Azhar Iqubal, one of the three co-founders of Inshorts, explained the idea behind the app in an interview with the *Financial Express*:

> [We] noticed that on an average, people who read newspapers read the headline of a story and a few more lines after it. And with the prevalent scenario, people have less time to go into the details and prefer things that are on-the-go. So we thought why not develop an app that combines brevity with speed, links a small summary to a detailed news article. That's when News in Shorts, now known as Inshorts was born.[36]

The three founders started off with a Facebook page in 2013, targeted at fellow students. Their success with the Facebook page experiment made them believe that it could be a smartphone app and a great business venture in itself, and they launched the company in 2014. Inshorts still operates several social media channels, including a Facebook page with over 800,000 likes and a Twitter handle with more than 12,000 followers, but these are used for handling customer relations and for promoting the app, not for distributing content. Similarly, the Inshorts website serves to promote the app and describe the company, not to deliver news to readers.

At the end of 2015, Inshorts operated with a team of about 60 people, with around 25 content writers, about 15 people in the tech team, and assorted other roles. The editorial team basically works to rewrite stories to fit the 60-word format and then scores news items across the categories (1) extremely important, (2) important, and (3) good to know.

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[36] http://www.financialexpress.com/article/industry/companies/ Inshorts-app-interview-with-co-founder-azhar-iqubal/224610

The team generates around 120 stories every day. These are scored on a scale of 1,000, 800, and 600, respectively, by editors. Stories scored at 1,000 are shown to all Inshorts' users across categories. On the app there is something called All News which should basically have all the news, right from 600 to 1,000. Then there are top stories. The top stories are the ones that are given 800 and 1,000 points. Based on the users' engagement with the app and user behaviour and the kind of content one is spending more time on or one is clicking more on or on one's bookmarking, the Inshorts algorithm then works to predict and present what each reader individually is most likely to read or be interested in, and adjust the editorially assigned scores automatically on this basis to further personalise each user's news feed over time. To constantly improve the editorial and automated curation, the Inshorts team have signed up 20,000 readers for an initiative called 'Insiders'. 'The idea is working with these guys to get daily feedback from them on the efficiency of the "my feed" they have', says, Aman Raj.[37] For people who want the full story behind an Inshorts piece, the app presents a link to the source (and Inshorts get a commission from the partner website for traffic delivered this way). In February 2016, the app reached 3 million downloads across Android and iOS, and Iqubal has said the aim is to hit 30 million before the end of 2016, in part by spreading beyond English-language content.[38]

In an interview with *Business Standard* in April 2016, Iqubal expanded on the position he sees Inshorts occupying in the Indian media market.

> *The readers who get their news from a curated feed on Twitter are not my users. My users are those who don't track news but want to take a look once a day. … We don't want to break news. We just want to give our readers a snapshot and while they are getting that, we show them branded content.*[39]

Inshorts works from a series of initial investments from a range of different backers. Initially, the founders applied to NASSCOM's start-ups programme, a new initiative at the time that was supposed to be a sort of an aggregator of the start-up ecosystem. Through that they were discovered by the T-Labs accelerators, a for-profit accelerator part of the Times of India group. Sachin Bansal, one of Flipkart's co-founders, was also an early investor. It was a very much a tech-engineer's company. Two additional rounds of funding secured an additional $24 million in the course of 2015, from Tiger Global and a range of other individual and institutional investors.

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[37] Aman Raj, Inshorts, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

[38] http://www.financialexpress.com/article/industry/companies/ Inshorts-app-interview-with-co-founder-azhar-iqubal/224610

[39] http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/ Inshorts-knows-how-it-will-make-money-116040400361_1.html

For revenues, Inshorts has linked up with e-commerce platforms like Flipkart, makemyTrip, BookMyShow, and several others. Readers are presented with relevant links to e-commerce platforms along with their short stories, and if they find the link relevant, they can click and go to the marketplace. Inshorts then gets a commission for any transaction that follows. Aman from the Inshorts team says:

> *What we surely know is that we do not want to play the [advertising] impressions game, which is basically take the same message and serve it to whatever number of people you have on your platform. You say you have x number of impressions and x number of clicks and then get paid by the clicks. That's what we don't want to do. That's a traditional model of advertising. It does not work. It is not every efficient as well. What we would rather do is to make sure we have enough strength on identifying the interest of the readers and based on that serve them marketing or advertising content which they are most likely to engage with. To be able to do that we need to have great precision of our recommendation.*

The site is also experimenting with branded content. The aim is to break even by the end of 2016.

In terms of its content strategy, Inshorts aggregates material from other sources and repackages it to fits its format. Its distribution strategy is built around its mobile app with various social media channels serving more to handle customer relations and promote the app. The business model is evolving and currently based on directing traffic to websites from which news has been aggregated in return for a commission.

DailyHunt

DailyHunt is another app that provides a mix of news, exam preparation materials, and e-books. It promises users it will help them 'stay updated with breaking news, current events & daily news headlines on politics, business, technology, Bollywood, sports, live cricket score & more for India & World'. It offers news and books in a range of local Indian languages including Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and more, as well as exam preparation materials for tests including the IBPS, UPSC, SSC, and others. On its website, DailyHunt boasts more than 90 million users and 2.3 billion monthly pageviews, and offers access to more than 100,000 articles daily from over 200 publications across 12 languages.

Originally called NewsHunt, the app was created for Nokia's Symbian operating system back in 2009 by Umesh Kulkarni and Chandrashekhar Sohoni to address the problem of showing regional language content on mobile devices. The NewsHunt platform was built to solve this problem at an application level and making it all work on phones whether they natively supported the language or not. It has since expanded with apps for Android and iOS. The company was acquired by Verse Innovation in 2011 and Verse founder Virendra Gupta now serves as CEO of the relaunched DailyHunt. From the outset, the focus on local Indian languages, frequently underserved with digital content and services, opened up an almost untapped audience for this app, a market that is still growing. Vishal Anand, CPO at DailyHunt, explains:

> *With vernacular literacy far greater than English, Indian languages has been our key focus. For regional language content – we had the best real world example of newspapers, where the readership of local language newspapers was significantly higher as compared to English dailies. The product also caught on in popularity with people away from their home towns looking for a connect to their place, whether in India or abroad..*[40]

As Virendra Gupta, has pointed out: 'The next 400 million mobile internet users will be local language users'.[41] This is an important opportunity. Only about 10% of Indians read English, and more people are literate in other languages like Hindi, Bengali, and Telugu. These people form a much larger market than the elite English-speaking crowd. They are the audience DailyHunt aims to serve, in India and beyond (by the end of 2015, the app was available in 19 countries).

From its origins in news, the app has grown to include magazines, books, comics, and now also exam preparation. As a result, NewsHunt was rebranded as DailyHunt in September 2015. The company does not create content itself. It is an aggregator of content from various sources and relies on automated display decisions and users' selecting what they want. 'The stories that the user sees is based on their implicit and explicit intent. As a result we do not have an editorial team,' says Vishal. Content comes from a series of partnerships with news media and a wide range of other publishers that mean that DailyHunt is able to offer a complete selection of stories (unlike RSS-based providers) and over time tailor users' experience on the basis of what they have read in the past. DailyHunt's staff of over 200 people, including almost a 100 engineers, focuses on developing a technical interface, user experience, and content discovery that works for its diverse user base

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[40] Vishal Anand, CPO at DailyHunt, interviewed by Arijit Sen.
[41] http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/how-dailyhunt-became-india-s-top-news-app-115102700696_1.html

across different languages, a wide range of mobile devices, and different kinds of content. The company has, for example, bought BuyT, a product discovery and recommendation platform, and integrated it into the app to improve content and product recommendations for users and integrate its mobile advertising operations.
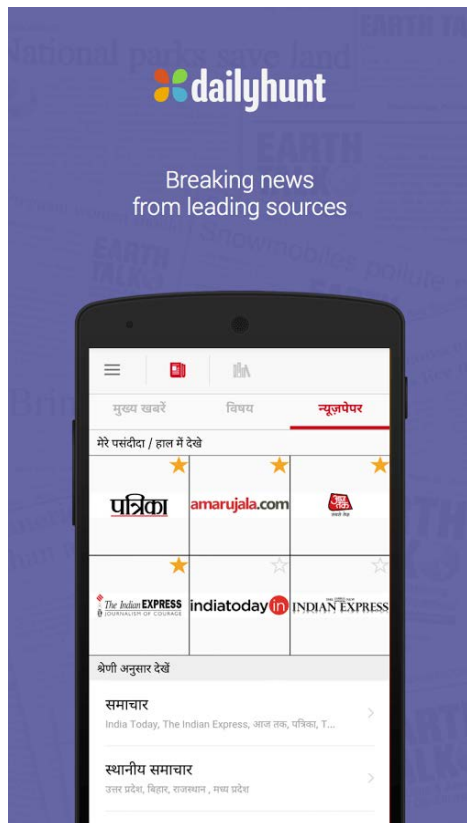
Screenshot, DailyHunt app (from Goolge Play)

DailyHunt's business is based on advertising and sales of e-books. (In the past, the company has experimented with other business ideas, including a job portal that they say 'went nowhere'.) Vishal argues DailyHunt has a bright commercial future ahead of it, as the digital advertising and e-commerce markets are growing rapidly in India and DailyHunt is well positioned to benefit from this. Currently, an estimated 90% of smartphones on the market do not support one or more Indian languages, but the Dailyhunt app works on all platforms (Android, iOS, Windows, Tizen, Java, Symbian, Blackberry) irrespective of whether the device is capable of displaying Indian fonts. This the team behind it sees as key to its success, both in terms of news and in terms of other forms of text-based content. The highly fragmented Indian language book publishing market, for example, has long lacked an effective digital distribution platform. With DailyHunt's large user base, it provides very high reach for Indian-language publishers interested in digital distribution. They also underline that India lacks a mass market digital payment mechanism, 'credit card reach is only 2%. Operator billing through

iPayy which lets the user pay through their pre-paid balance or phone bill is the only viable online payment mechanism.' Thus, distribution through one trusted platform that already has a payment system in place is attractive for many publishers.

So far, multiple backers have demonstrated that they believe that DailyHunt can deliver the scale, technology differentiation, and monetisation that Vishal argues are required for a start-up to succeed. By late 2015, Verse had secured more than $40 million in backing for DailyHunt from a range of funders including Matrix Partners, Sequoia Capital, and the Omidyar Network.

DailyHunt continues to invest its efforts in bringing more regional language content on a variety of mobile devices. 'We are vying for the attention of users who spend close to 3 hours plus on our platform each month. As a result we end up competing with a range of apps from news aggregators to the likes of Facebook', says Vishal. Locally, DailyHunt thinks that for their size and scale no one compares. Global news aggregators like Flipboard or Google News are competitors for them as pure news aggregators. That said, DailyHunt argues that these international players lack proper support for Indian regional languages (unless natively supported by phone) and access to the wealth of local language content that DailyHunt has. In the Indian digital space DailyHunt stands out through their support for the lowest-end mobile devices all the way to expensive smartphones and their coverage of regional language content. Vishal says: 'Our product works on the premise of regional languages and regional news market. English news market is limited by literacy of 10% of total of 75% Indian literacy.'

The content strategy of DailyHunt is thus based on aggregation from a wide range of partner sources (well beyond news). Distribution is exclusively through the mobile app. The business is based on advertising and sales of e-books and other material.

4. Non-Profit Start-Ups

In India, as elsewhere, most journalism has been based on for-profit business models (newspapers, television news channels), state support (the state broadcaster Doordashan), and/or various forms of political or proprietorial patronage (where media are funded to advance instrumental interests beyond publishing). Non-profit media pursue a different model, where journalism is less closely tied to the pursuit of profit or political influence, and instead based on a combination of foundation funding, community support, and individual donations. Two very different examples of non-profit start-ups pursuing digital journalism in India are The Wire and Khabar Lahariya.

The Wire
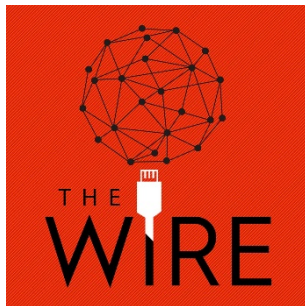
The Wire was founded in March 2015 by Siddharth Vardarajan, former Editor of *The Hindu* and Sidharth Bhatia, a journalist and writer based out of Bombay. M. K. Venu, former managing editor of the *Financial Express*, and the writer Raghu Karnad also joined the original team. The site presents itself as follows:

> *The founding premise of The Wire is this: if good journalism is to survive and thrive, it can only do so by being both editorially and financially independent. This means relying principally on contributions from readers and concerned citizens who have no interest other than to sustain a space for quality journalism.[42]*

It launched with investment from the founders and is publicly looking for additional support from foundations. Recently it was given the prestigious 'Startup of the year' RedInk journalism award by the Press Club in Mumbai.

Varadarajan described the aim of the team behind The Wire in an interview with LiveMint when the site launched:

> *We want to build a platform for independent journalism. The decline in editorial standards in our country is closely linked with the business model of*

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[42] http://thewire.in/2015/05/10/introducing-the-wire

> *the Indian media that often leads to editorial compromises. We want to be a mainstream news platform free of commercial and political pressures.*[43]

Unlike sites such as the Quint or Scroll, The Wire did not initially have a newsroom. Its core approach towards journalism includes publishing of commentary and opinion pieces, curated material from news agencies, and pieces by outside contributors including journalists, public intellectuals, and academics from India and beyond. Vardarajan, Bhatia, and Venu run the editorial side of The Wire supported by a team of six journalists. Sidharth Bhatia, co-founding editor, says:

> *as far as The Wire is concerned, we are very very, clear. We think of ourselves despite our tiny size and despite the fact that ridiculously low number of people are running it, it is about institution-building and heading to become something much bigger where we will say that after a few years we are an authoritative source of opinion and reportage in India, about India whether you are sitting as an academic in Chicago or whether you are sitting in Guwahati – as it happens we have a lot of north-eastern coverage – this is where you should come. So it's niche only in the sense that it is tiny but it is growing. We are tiny in every sense of the word, operationally, financially, in terms of the audiences we command. I wish I could have 1/100th of the audience the Times of India commands. But let's talk five years down the line.*[44]

It remains an open question what kind of audience The Wire can build off the back of commentary, curated wire material, and outside contributions. Currently, the site does not have the editorial resources to compete head-on with legacy media or indeed with start-ups like the Quint or Scroll in terms of producing original content. But the site has had an impact with commentary from some of its high-profile contributors. In February 2016, for example, Siddharth Vardarajan wrote a widely discussed piece on the controversial arrest of a left-wing student activist on the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and the way in which other media covered the story. Specifically, Vardarajan called out the high-profile talk show host Arnab Goswami from the television channel Times Now for using doctored footage in a segment on the case. Times Now and Goswami angrily denied the charge, but they were later forced to accept that a video used on Goswami's show had indeed been doctored (see screenshots).

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[43] http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/hh3F4srDSuGG7aQaQWqckL/Former-editor-of-The-Hindu-to-launch-news-website.html
[44] Sidharth Bhatia, co-founding editor of The Wire, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

Times Now First Denies Airing Doctored Video, Then Concedes it Did

BY SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN ON 20/02/2016 • 109 COMMENTS

Times Now has accused The Wire of running a "factually inaccurate" story about the showing of a doctored video on the channel. The charge is laughable.

On Kanhaiya: It is Time to Stand Up and Be Counted

BY SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN ON 19/02/2016 • 54 COMMENTS

From fabricating a case to resorting to violence and peddling forged 'evidence', all those who have worked to ruin a young life must be brought to account.

Screenshot from The Wire.

The very public spat with Goswami helped raise the profile of The Wire, which publicly thanked Times Now on Twitter for driving so much traffic to the Wire that its website crashed.[45]

Screenshot from Twitter

As opposed to for-profit content-based start-ups like the Quint or technology-based aggregators like Inshorts, The Wire aims to develop into an independent not-for-profit digital platform. The site is not looking for venture capital funding or commercial investments. Instead, the founders want to develop a model based on grants and donations. Bhatia says that people have come forward and donated money and all money will be transparently spent. He adds that The Wire does not have a set business plan at this stage but underlines that it does not intend to develop into a for-profit venture. At the moment the site and its founders are looking at developing its funding model over the next two to three years.

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[45] http://www.scoopwhoop.com/Arnab-Goswami-Vs-Siddharth-Varadarajan-Timeline-Of-Times-Now-And-The-Wire-FaceOff

As Siddharth Varadarajan explained when the site was launched, the editorial ambition is clear. 'We want to be a news site that publishes original content and is reporter driven.'[46] The content strategy is building from the visibility and reputation that the original founders bring to the site and their ability to bring in outside contributors. The distribution strategy is based on a combination of a mobile-friendly website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter handle. The funding model, in contrast, remains a work-in-progress. Many of The Wire's ambitions, both in terms of producing original content, doing on-the-ground reporting, and building a mainstream audience, are, as Varadarajan said to LiveMint, 'long-term idea[s] that kicks in once we have the monetary aspect worked out'.[47]

Khabar Lahariya

KHABAR LAHARIYA
A PRODUCT OF WOMEN, MEDIA AND NEWS TRUST

Khabar Lahariya is a very different example of non-profit journalism in India. Whereas The Wire is a very recent venture, built around a group of prominent male journalists, oriented towards a national audience of relatively elite readers, and published in English and online only, Khabar Lahariya is run by a co-operative of women, built around an older bi-weekly community newspaper first published in the Bundelkhand district of Uttar Pradesh, and continues to have a clear regional orientation in its news coverage.

The Khabar Lahariya website, Facebook page, and Twitter handle have grown out of a newspaper first launched by the Delhi-based NGO Nirantar in 2002 as a way to empower women locally and to serve one of the poorest and least developed regions in India. Khabar Lahariya is Hindi for 'News Waves' and is a group of newspapers written, edited, illustrated, produced, and marketed by rural women in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Its editions are often the only local-language newspaper available to readers where it is published. It covers local news with an emphasis on what the all-female editorial collective call a 'perspective sensitive to structures of power – whether gender, class, caste or religion'.[48] Frequently, they are the only ones covering these issues in the area. 'We have travelled to villages where reporters have not even set their foot after Indian independence in 1947', says Kavita, one of the co-founders of Khabar Lahariya.[49] The newspaper itself is printed twice a

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[46] http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/hh3F4srDSuGG7aQaQWqckL/Former-editor-of-The-Hindu-to-launch-news-website.html

[47] http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/hh3F4srDSuGG7aQaQWqckL/Former-editor-of-The-Hindu-to-launch-news-website.html

[48] http://www.khabarlahariya.in/page.php?pid=1&cid=1&rid=0&pagename=what-s-unique&lang=english#.VwQ45nrl-oc

[49] Kavita, co-founder, Khabar Lahariya, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

week in a range of dialects and editions across Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and says it reaches an estimated 100,000 print readers on a regular basis.[50]

Its digital development has been a rapid one – less than a year after it launched its website and Facebook page in 2013, the newspaper won a 'Best of Online Activism' special award at Deutsche Welle's Global Media Forum. It has won a slew of other prizes and has been held up as 'an exemplary model for transformative rural media' by the Wharton Business School and the CII/KPMG report on ICT in India.[51] The focus on poor, rural readers and its legacy as a print product does not detract from the importance of digital for Khabar Lahariya. Kavita says: 'The young generation carries a smartphone and a lot of people use it. So we thought that we could also be a part of this, that people can watch small video clips, see it for real, hear us and see the reports.' Disha, another co-founder notes:

> *The website was launched in 2013 and I think in the last one and half years, on social media platforms, our presence has increased. This includes Facebook, Twitter and even WhatsApp for the last six–seven months has seen active use. The collaboration between the network of our reporters and also the network of local news journalists has also seen active use of these platforms in the last six to eight months.[52]*

Digital for Khabar Lahariya is a supplement to, not a substitute for, print. In far-flung villages where electricity and technology are almost absent, a print product can reach people who remain offline. Disha adds:

> *Khabar Lahariya's roots and history is closely associated with literacy movement. And when Khabar Lahariya started the idea was in areas where the literacy level is really low, particularly female literacy, if there is a medium of local language in those areas it could help women and non-school goers to attain and sustain their literacy level in those areas. So local media is important.*

But digital channels can supplement the print product and make local news available to people who may not pick up the newspaper. The context Khabar Lahariya operates in has changed in the last years, as mobile penetration has also increased in poor rural areas. When the website was launched initially it was just like an archiving system, where some of the stories would be uploaded on the website, only some would be translated, and it wasn't so extensively promoted or circulated. 'Now we do it actively through social

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[50] http://sarai.net/khabar-lahariya-rural-empowerment-goes-digital

[51] Awards: http://www.khabarlahariya.in/page.php?pid=12&cid=7#.VpavyJN96t9 (accessed Jan. 2016).

[52] Disha, co-founder, Khabar Lahariya, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

media and also through the website. Last year we carried out crowdfunding twice and through that our networks also increased', says Disha.

Khabar Lahariya does reach additional readers through its digital channels, including its website, Facebook page, and Twitter handle. But print distribution still has the highest reach. Internal data suggest its monthly reach on Facebook, for example, is around 40,000 viewers, less than half of the estimated weekly print readership. Mrinalika Roy looked into the digital distribution strategy of Khabar Lahariya as part of a research project done at the Sarai Program at CSDS and concluded that, while access is still an obstacle, the rapid dissemination means this is less and less of a barrier. Instead, the issue is that many rural mobile internet users find other online offers more compelling than local news. One of the local people Roy spoke to asks polemically, 'Do you think these young boys [with mobile phones] will access the Khabar Lahariya website, read the articles and share them with others?'[53] Instead, a large part of Khabar Lahariya's digital strategy seems focused on fundraising – the top of its website, for example, prominently features an inspiring video in English about the newspaper itself and the work it does (rather than a local news story in a local language or dialect): see screenshot. Having a website and various social media accounts help make the newspaper more visible well beyond its circulation area, and the site is used to solicit both individual donations and sponsorship.

Screenshot from http://khabarlahariya.org (5 Apr. 2016).

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[53] http://sarai.net/khabar-lahariyas-online-foray-successes-and-failures

This is important work for Khabar Lahariya. Historically, the paper has relied on support from major funders like the Doorabjee Tata Trust (DTT) and the United Nations Democracy and Equity Fund (UNDEF). DTT has supported the paper for over ten years, and the UNDEF project was a grant for about two years to help set up and expand their digital edition. But both of these grants have come to an end, and the paper's situation is precarious. 'Whenever we have presented our model to funders we have been told that this is unsustainable.'[54] They are now looking beyond donations and foundations and considering advertising. Disha says: 'If you know what the Vice media model is, we are thinking if we can follow that. Our primary audience of the videos will be very niche. We can tell advertisers if they wish to advertise in those videos they can reach out to them.'

The Khabar Lahariya's local, rurally oriented content is clearly distinct, dealing with areas and issues that receive little, if any, mainstream media attention. But both their print/digital distribution model and their grant-based funding model are currently under pressure.

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[54] Kavita, co-founder of Khabar Lahariya, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

5. Conclusion

In this report, we have presented a portrait of a rapidly evolving digital media environment in India and a series of case studies of journalism start-ups that are trying to carve out a distinct position in it. With their very different content, distribution, and funding models, the Quint, Scroll, Inshorts, DailyHunt, The Wire, and Khabar Laharirya all represent ways in which Indian journalists, technologists, and entrepreneurs are developing new ways to practise journalism, get news to people, and fund production and distribution. They are some of the revolutionaries active in the ongoing digital revolution in Indian journalism.

In terms of the journalism they do, some of them have identified relatively distinct profiles that set them apart from many other Indian news organisations – whether it is in the Quint's focus on digitally native news for younger people or Khabar Lahariya's focus on rural areas not covered by other media. Much of the output is instantly recognisable as decidedly 'digital', in part because many of these sites have adapted aspects of digital journalism as developed elsewhere – both in terms of long-form, in-depth articles and documentary videos and, in greater volume, in terms of more transient short-form content flowing across websites, apps, and social media channels in a steady stream. These trends, towards both longer-form and enduring *and* more short-form and ephemeral content is perhaps particularly clear online, whether with popular sites like the Quint (or BuzzFeed) or more elite-oriented sites like Scroll (or Quartz). But they are hardly unique to online-only news sites – similar developments can be seen across many newspaper and broadcasters' digital output, including Indian newspapers and broadcasters, where entertainment and sports mix with in-depth analysis and independent reporting.

All of the digital journalism start-ups we have discussed here, and others like them across the subcontinent, are well positioned to benefit from the ongoing and rapid growth in internet use in India. Whether it will take them where they want to go is a separate question. Start-ups can succeed in many ways. They can have a cultural, social, or political impact on the world around them, they can demonstrate new innovations that in turn inspire others, and individuals involved in them can succeed even if the organisations they are part of may not.

Will start-ups like the ones we look at here thrive in the future? They all benefit from the overall growth of internet use in India, but each category considered faces different challenges.

As digital becomes a more and more important part of the Indian media environment in terms of both how people spend their time and where advertisers spend their money, *content-based for-profit start-ups* like the Quint and Scroll will increasingly face head-on competition from legacy titles like

Times of India, NDTV, *Dainik Bhaskar*, and countless others. Many of these organisations are already prominent players in digital news, and as they leverage their strong brands, editorial resources, and financial firepower, digital start-ups will have to prove that they are editorially distinct, organisationally flexible, and technologically nimble to compete and retain or build an edge over bigger competitors. (These may in turn struggle to adapt to digital, as many legacy media have struggled elsewhere in the world.[55]) Beyond this, these start-ups face some of the same business challenges as content-based companies elsewhere, namely a difficult environment in which advertising tends to go to large players like Facebook and Google, where readers are often reluctant to pay for content, and where other revenue streams have so far delivered only limited results. The business of digital news is challenging for everyone, even in a rapidly growing market like India's.

Aggregation-based start-ups like Inshorts and DailyHunt, with their clear focus specifically on mobile apps that supplement media organisations' own contact with users, do not face the same head-to-head competition with large domestic legacy media. Instead, they face the prospect of global technology companies with similar or comparable services turning their full attention to India and overcoming the technical obstacles that currently limit their popularity, especially with users with cheap smartphones, limited data access, and little or no English literacy. As Virendra Gupta from DailyHunt put it, for these technology-based start-ups, the 'real competition is Facebook' (and could be Amazon, Google, or other large global players too).[56] Here the question is how distinct the aggregation-based start-ups will remain, and what kind of loyal user-base they will build before they face head-on competition from international alternatives who may benefit from being larger scale and resources than can be found even in the Indian market (as regionally distinct search engines and social networking sites have found in the past when faced with competition from large US-based players). Many digital markets are winner-takes-all markets where a few players dominate the battle for attention and advertising. With aggregation as with content, it remains to be seen who the winners will be in India.

Finally, *non-profit start-ups* like The Wire and older non-profits like Khabar Laharirya face two sets of challenges. The first is competition with for-profit and state/politically sponsored media for people's attention (including competition with entertainment and social alternatives). Even if they escape some of the pressures that for-profit media and media supported by proprietors face, non-profit media still have to compete with them. Can they build an audience to achieve the cultural, social, and political impact that they

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[55] Boczkowski (2004), Küng (2015).

[56] https://www.techinasia.com/dailyhunt-newshunt-news-app-india

seek? The second is then building a funding model around the audience they draw and the impact they have, in an environment where for various reasons large international grants may be harder to come by and where, domestically in India (like in many other countries around the world), there is little tradition for non-profit support for news, whether from individuals or foundations. Beyond this lie the issues that face non-profit media elsewhere, including pressures from some sponsors and the temptation to consciously or unconsciously cater to the interests and values of individual donors, who are often from a wealthy minority of the population.

As they face these challenges, digital journalism start-ups in India have an exceptional chance to produce new and engaging forms of journalism as an alternative or supplement to what is produced by Indian legacy media, media that have many qualities – but also the challenges highlighted in the opening of our report, including in many cases an orientation towards short-term profits, occasionally dubious professional ethics, problems with outside pressures, and sometimes conflicts of interest related to their owners' other business and political activities.[57]

The rise of the internet in India does not in itself place journalism start-ups beyond these pressures. Journalism, digital or not, has to secure some form of funding to sustain itself, digital journalists no less than other journalists feel the full power of political actors and other powerful groups when they are crossed (as illustrated by the harassment of Scroll.in contributor Malini Subramaniam in Chhattisgarh after her detailed and dogged reporting on alleged human rights violations by security forces in the region).[58] Professional malpractice like producing 'paid news' happens online as it does offline, and, as the case of FirstPost, which was acquired by Reliance Industries when it took control of Network 8 in 2014, illustrates digital journalism ventures are not necessarily exempt from being acquired by politically powerful actors.[59] For all their many qualities, the primarily English-language, urban-oriented, and digital media discussed here do little to address the economic inequalities, urban/rural divides, and differences across language and caste that characterise Indian society.[60] (We have yet to see truly innovative examples of what original *digital* journalism serving poorer local-language people with lower levels of literacy, cheap

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[57] Again, see e.g. Parthasarathi and Srinivas (2012), Kohli (2013), Mehta (2015), and Ramaprasad and Gudipaty (2015) for discussion of these issues.

[58] See e.g. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Chhattisgarh-journo-Malini-Subramaniam-forced-to-pack-up-quit-Bastar/articleshow/51059878.cms

[59] As the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) noted in a 2014 paper, 'There may be thousands of newspapers and hundreds of news channels in the news media market, but if they are "all controlled" by only handful of entities, then there is insufficient plurality of news and views presented to the people.' Furthermore, 'many news websites belong to those entities already present in print and television mediums'. See TRAI (2014). Vinod Jose, editor of The Caravan (interviewed by Arijit Sen,), expressed the same concern, that for some entities in the digital media space, 'content control will map itself directly with an understanding between cell-phone companies, corporate ownership, editorial boards'.

[60] On this point, see e.g. Chattopadhyay (2012), Rao and Wasserman (2015), and Udupa (2015).

smartphones, and limited data looks like.) And aggregators dependent on others' content obviously cannot rise above the editorial and other weaknesses and biases of this content, however sophisticated their technology might be.

Raj Chengappa, the President of the Editors' Guild of India, maintains that the 'rise in digital platforms is a major force multiplier for journalists'. However, he also identifies major areas of concern. According to him, the concerns include, 'Who are the gatekeepers for these digital platforms? How far does analytics decode a consumers' preferences and pre-decide the array of news that he or she will have the option to choose from? In short, who is curating the content?' as well as concerns over the business models for digital journalism and the commercial pressures journalists may face. The answer underlined by all the people we interviewed for this report is that the key to good journalism in the digital space is to ensure that every bit of news that is put out is based on fundamentally sound reporting. This includes the kind of 'fair, balanced, credible and accurate reporting' that Chengappa says he wants to see online and to which everyone interviewed says they are committed.[61]

To make that work as the internet becomes a more and more important part of the Indian media environment, a new generation of Indian journalists, technologists, and entrepreneurs – including those we have interviewed for this report – will have to develop editorial priorities, distribution strategies, and funding models fit for a digital India – *digital*, in that the media environment is changing, and *India*, in that they can draw on the best qualities and traditions inherited from previous generations of Indian journalists even as they also face some classic challenges around pressures from business and politics.

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[61] Raj Chengappa, President of Editors' Guild of India, interviewed by Arijit Sen.

Appendix: Some Other Digital Journalism Start-Ups in India

BuzzFeed India: http://www.buzzfeed.com/tag/india This social news and entertainment company started India operations in August 2014. The India-focused platform has a host of feature videos and light news. Readers have the option to switch to http://www.buzzfeed.com/news which a standard news platform. Long-form stories featured in http://www.buzzfeed.com/bigstories do not have an India focus.

Catch News: www.catchnews.com Promoted by the Patrika Group of Rajasthan, this digital platform 'aims to filter and provide news-on-the-run for an impatient new generation', as well as cater to a 'deeper consumer' of news. It is in English and Hindi. Catch has an editorial team of experienced and trained journalists. It launched in June 2015.

Daily O: www.dailyo.in The online opinion platform of the India Today Group. It entered the market around September 2014. It gets commentators to write on a wide range of subjects. The site seems inspired by the collaborative publishing service Medium. It puts a reading time-duration on every article.

FirstPost: http://www.firstpost.com Owned by Reliance Industries Ltd, it is part of Network18 media conglomerate. When it was launched in 2011, it was a unique digital platform that had a fair mix of opinions, reports, and videos, often in collaboration with CNN-IBN.

Gaonconnect: www.gaonconnection.com This digital platform positions itself to be India's first professionally run rural newspaper. Launched in 2012 by a journalist, this paper aims to provide a connection between rural and urban India.

Huffpost India: http://www.huffingtonpost.in Launched in India on November 2014, the Huffington Post's Indian edition is in partnership with legacy player the *Times of India*. It has an eight-member editorial team. It is a news and blogging platform and is supported by *ToI*'s reach with readers and advertisers.

Indiaspend: www.indiaspend.com This claims to be India's first data journalism website. It uses open data to explore a gamut of issues. It also takes pride in the fact that the specialisation of its journalism focus has turned it into an 'agency of record' for a range of subjects. It is non-profit and is a project of the Spending & Policy Research Foundation.

MediaNama: http://www.medianama.com Established in 2008 by Nikhil Pahwa, MediaNama is a portal for news about digital media and telecommunication in India. It has a significant following in media and policy circles and on Twitter and a focus on business and regulatory issues. It is owned by MixedBag Media Pvt Ltd.

Newslaundry: www.newslaundry.com Launched in February 2012 by a group of four people all of whom were associated with various levels of journalism, it started as a media critique platform. It is self-funded and has a button called 'I Pay to Keep News Free' through which it also tries to get monetary support for its work. Newslaundry Media has also raised some money from Omidyar Network and Singapore-based Digital Media Laboratory.

Peepli: www.peepli.org A niche website that focuses on long-form investigative reporting, its four-member team uses all kinds of tools available to 'enhance storytelling' (from the website). It focuses on long-form stories.

People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) https://ruralindiaonline.org A website that focuses on 'the everyday lives of everyday people', it was launched by P. Sainath, acclaimed journalist and former rural affairs editor of *The Hindu*. It is unique in terms of its focus on people and lives and issues that rarely get a mention in mainstream media.

ScoopWhoop: http://www.scoopwhoop.com The site was launched in 2013 by a group of Indian Institute of Mass Communication alumni all working in advertising. The site curates and creates stories focused on India and is heavily focused on social media distribution, having built a significant following on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

The Hoot: www.thehoot.org It started in March 2001, an online media-watch platform that was launched by a group of journalists. The Hoot's motto of 'The more the media matters, the more we need to track what it does' is perhaps most apt now.

The News Minute: http://www.thenewsminute.com It is a digital news platform founded by two journalists and a finance person. It began in 2014. It focuses specifically on the five southern states. It also has a regional language (Tamil) Facebook page. In 2015 it raised an undisclosed amount of funding from Quintillion Media.

Thumbprint: www.thethumbprintmag.com Launched in 2012 by Teresa Rehman, this is a unique digital platform from India's north-east. They claim

to be a bridge between the eight states in this corner of India and the rest of India and the world. It makes a consistent attempt to focus on overlooked stories from north-east India.

Youth Ki Awaaz: http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/ The site was launched by Anshul Tewari in 2008 as a community blog and has since expanded into a platform for citizen journalism and public debate, with thousands of contributors from all over the world. In addition to publishing reports, commentary, and opinion pieces, the site promotes various campaigns.

List of interviewees

Abhinandan Sekhri, Newslaundry
Aman Raj, Inshorts
Dhanya Rajendran, the News Minute
Disha, Khabar Lahariya
Kavita, Khabar Lahariya
Naresh Fernandes, Scroll
Nic Dawes, *Hindustan Times*
Prem Panicker, journalist, co-founder of Rediff
Raghav Bahl, the Quint/Quintillion Media
Raheel Khursheed, Twitter India
Raj Chengappa, President, Editors' Guild of India
Rajesh Mahapatra, *Hindustan Times*
Ritu Kapur, the Quint
Samir Patil, Scroll
Sidharth Bhatia, The Wire
Sumandro Chattopadhaya, Centre for Internet and Society
Vignesh, the News Minute
Vinod Jose, The Caravan
Vishal Anand, DailyHunt

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