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THE EMERGING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA PLATFORMS IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Keyword	Abstract
Mainstream media, Alternative media, Citizen Journalism, Innovation in Journalism	*"Whoever controls the media controls the mind," said Jim Morrison, the legendary singer, songwriter, and poet. The media, as the "fourth estate," influences the "first," "second," and "third" branches of government in diverse ways. Many different schools of media theory recognise the vital role the media plays in shaping public opinion and determining national agendas. The right to freedom of the press is guaranteed to all Indian citizens under the country's constitution. By disseminating knowledge and enlightening the public, it fosters the development of well-informed communities. India, the world's largest democracy, is home to hundreds of Mainstream, established, or dominant media outlets, some of which are just now starting to feel the pressure from the rise of alternative media.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Free and diversified news media are essential to the health of any democracy, as they serve as the primary means by which citizens are kept informed, powerful actors are held accountable, and public discourse on important issues is fostered. According to the available literature, quality journalism may motivate politicians to serve their citizens better, reduce corruption, and raise awareness about political issues. There is a direct correlation between the institutional framework of a country's media environment and the degree to which its news media are free, diverse, and able to foster democracy. Recent technological and market shifts are impacting these media environments, particularly concerning the proliferation of digital media. The spurt in Mobile Journalism (MoJo) with the coming of mobile devices has given a boom in citizen journalism and access to online journalism has become much easier with cheaper rates. However, certain apparent, overarching similarities provide both possibilities and problems for journalism, media organisations, and public discussion, even if the exact type of change in the media environment differs significantly from nation to country. The three most significant advancements caused by technical and commercial factors today are [1]—

1. The shift toward a more digital, mobile, and social media environment with intense competition for attention has pressured traditional media to develop new digital business models as their traditional operations decline or stagnate. "This is especially true for news outlets such as broadcasters and newspapers, which remain important as news producers but are becoming relatively less important as distributors."

2. Increasing reliance on a handful of large tech companies for "(a) news distribution and (b) digital advertising as a result of their services makes it easier and more appealing for billions of users around the world to navigate and use digital media in ways like search, social networking, video sharing, messaging, etc." [2].

3. Those most interested in news take advantage of these new opportunities to get, share, and comment on the news. "However, a larger number of people opt for more casual and passive forms of use, reflecting the rise of a high-choice media environment in which internet users have access to more and more information in convenient formats and often for free, across a range of increasingly sophisticated personal and mobile devices."

All nations with widespread access to digital media have seen these three changes. They are made possible by technological advancements, and some of the most significant concomitant problems to journalism are related to the commercial consequences. However, it is crucial to remember that media consumers are the ones who ultimately push these trends forward. Viewers' and marketers' adoption of new technologies is driving significant shifts in the media and media industry. Technologies make progress possible. Individuals and institutions make adjustments. The effects on media plurality and informational variety, two pillars of free speech (here defined as the right to send and receive ideas), are complicated. The opportunity for consumers to utilise various sources and encounter various viewpoints has grown as the media landscape has become more digital.

Concurrently, a small number of very large players dominate the environment, and mergers and cutbacks elsewhere in the media landscape threaten to diminish media pluralism by eroding the variety of news production, particularly in smaller markets, less lucrative niche issue areas, and at the local level. The proliferation of online resources has democratised access to knowledge. The advent of search engines and social media has been instrumental in expanding published content's reach, utility, and interest. However, their popularity amongst viewers and advertisers threatens many traditional media outlets, particularly news outlets [3].

Aim of the study-

This review paper aims to explore studies that have examined the shift from Mainstream Media (MSM) to Alternative Media and how Alternative media platforms are becoming a trend or we can say 'dominant paradigm' in news media sector and their role in democracies, highlighting both the benefits and the dangers that have arisen as a result of these shifts. At the same time, we also consider trends in other areas with high per capita incomes and widespread usage of digital media.

Objectives of the study-

- To identify various alternative news media platforms in India.
- To discuss the role of new media in bringing the shift from Mainstream media to Alternative media platforms.

II. ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Let us begin by exploring what the term "alternative" really means. Alternative, as used here, refers to anything other than the standard or expected course of action; it is a departure from the norm. At what point in our life do we start considering other options? When we are unhappy with the path we are currently on, we tend to explore other options. If you are unhappy with your phone's functionality, you may start searching for a different phone or some other configuration that would improve its performance.

Similarly, "another option to the mainstream media" describes alternative media. You may find alternatives to the mainstream media in various formats, including newspapers, magazines, newsletters, radio, television, movies, new media, wall paintings, graffiti, and street art. In other words, when people get dissatisfied with what they hear in the mainstream media, they turn to niche outlets for more nuanced coverage. It is either them making their alternative media or consuming it. *Herman and Chomsky's "Manufacturing Consent"* (1998) discusses the growth of the radical press in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century. According to the author, "this alternative press was successful in sustaining class consciousness; it united the workers because it promoted an alternative value system and framework for looking at the world," which inspired them to take collective action. At one point, this radical press posed a danger to the established media and the government. Unlike traditional media, alternative outlets provide unique perspectives on society and culture. It is important to highlight that, contrary to popular belief, alternative media outlets actively welcome and encourage a wide range of perspectives and ideas. The goal of alternative media is to provide a platform for various viewpoints, as opposed to the singularly negative or widely held one represented by the mainstream media.

In contrast to the mainstream media, alternative outlets encourage the expression of viewpoints that may otherwise be suppressed. The concept of the "public sphere," as outlined by German philosopher and sociologist *Jurgen Habermas*, is conceived of as a social space in which a variety of viewpoints can be voiced, broad issues can be discussed, and collective solutions can be developed, some of which may even influence political action. The public sphere serves as the hub of society's dialogue, but it is important to consider who gets a say in the conversation, what they say, and what they hear. The public sphere of Habermas has been largely superseded by the online world, where extensive discussion and debate have impacted political activity. Movements like India Against Corruption and the Nirbhaya movement are recent instances of how popular discourse may spark political change. In politics, even a single tweet to a minister may start a chain reaction [4].

The Maoist party in India publishes an internal periodical called Jung, also known as Awami Jung, in which they air grievances against the government and the people. Even at the university or college level, student organisations and unions use alternative media to voice their opinions and protests. The Student Federation of India puts out a monthly English magazine called "Student Struggle," a Hindi magazine called "Chatra Sangrash," and many more magazines in regional languages to propagate their message and rally students for social change. Wiki Leaks, founded by Julian Assange, is a well-known international example of a website that seeks to expose government and corporate wrongdoing. Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzales of Democracy Now! are two award-winning journalists from the United States. Senior journalist and political analyst Seema Mustafa believes alternative media is more focused on connecting with rural areas, being devoted to the poor and oppressed, and reporting the truth, despite its smaller size than traditional media. She thinks the media has changed drastically over the last 25 years and that "the takeover of the corporate has resulted in a complete dissociation of the real India from the mainstream media," which is why we need alternate forms of news coverage. Cornia [5] defines two key elements of alternative media: access and involvement. The term "access" refers to the ease with which people from all walks of life, regardless of their location, socioeconomic status, race, or gender, may have access to the information and resources they need to share their ideas and opinions with others.

On the other hand, the emphasis on participation is split between the extent to which people are engaged—from just token to fully invested—and the degree to which they are involved in the design, production, and implementation of media (Fairbairn 2009; Berrigan 1979). Several academics have also emphasised the importance of material's local and cultural relevance in community media. When people can relate to the people behind the scenes of community media, they are more likely to believe what they see and hear. When comparing alternative media to traditional media, Carpentier, Lie, and Servaes [6] find the following features:

Community-focused and modest in size, with special attention paid to the needs of marginalised populations;

- Carry non-dominant discourses and representations, emphasising the significance of self-representation;
- Are horizontally organised to facilitate audience access and involvement within the framework of democratisation and plurality.

More than that, they support a rhizomatic understanding of community/alternative media, which they define as media that "cuts across borders" and "builds linkages and connections among civil society, other community media, the state, and the market" to serve better the community they are a part of without compromising their unique identity.

III. ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN INDIA

The idea of alternative media is still developing in India and is often seen as an anti-establishment and radical outlet. India's history of alternative media dates back to before independence when Indian media served as an alternative to the dominant British media. Small newspapers in regional languages were routinely produced during the period to support the nationalist effort to overthrow the British raj. There was a thriving underground press and radio network. High-literacy states like Kerala were able to set up their newspapers and presses, which sparked a literary and political revolution throughout the country.

A. Folk Media

It is widely agreed that in rural India, folk media plays the most significant role among alternative forms of media. It has been entertaining and informing Americans for centuries. The form that folk media eventually acquired was determined by the norms and customs of those living there. Examples include the Nautanki of

Uttar Pradesh (UP), the Bhavai of Gujarat, the Tamasha of Maharashtra, the Jatra of West Bengal, and the Ramleela and Rasleela of Rajasthan (two of the most famous puppetry shows in India). Nukkad Natak, also known as Street Play, has gained popularity as a folk media in contemporary India, especially in urban areas and educational institutions. Over the last three decades, street theatre has developed into a platform for many kinds of radical activism. The Communist Party of India founded the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in the 1940s, making it a unique alternative media.

Social change and resistance to British tyranny were at the heart of IPTA's mission. Through the power of theatre, they educated the public about their liberties and obligations. After the liberation fight, the national media overlooked many of the concerns that IPTA brought to light. KA Abbas, Dr Homi Bhabha, Ismat Chugtai, Sahir Ludhianvi, and many more were all IPTA members who worked side by side with regular people to make a difference. Upon gaining its independence, India's government recognised the significance of folk and traditional media and created the Song and Drama Division. This team promotes government initiatives and programs via live, in-person folk performances at community events. Herzog [7], a prominent feminist author, wrote a case study titled "Women and Alternative Media (India)", in which she studied the many alternative media outlets for women in India. She spoke on how the Yatra was utilised by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) to reach out to the community and engage them via means like speeches, puppet shows, musical performances, plays, posters, and more. A similar movement, "Save Narmada Yatra," opposed the construction of the Narmada and Saradar Sarovar Dam in Central India.

B. Small-Scale Newspapers

There has always been a need for an alternative voice in India, but until recently, the only real options were underground publications and journals published by radical organisations. A non-governmental organisation (NGO) located in Delhi called "Nirantar" launched a newspaper called "Khabar Lahariya" in 2002. It is an eight-page weekly newspaper published in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and is written in several different regional languages. Topics covered include the operation of local governments and panchayats, educational and healthcare systems, and social and civic issues. Women from underrepresented communities are taught the skills necessary to contribute to the newspaper in various editorial capacities, including reporting, editing, design, illustration, and photography. They even sell and distribute newspapers in corner stores, tea stands, and community centres. "It has 40 members, Khabar Lahariya team distributes 6,000 copies in 600 villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to a readership of 80,000 every week," claims the website khabarlahariya.org. Khabar Lahariya was originally published solely in Bundeli, but it has now expanded into publishing in Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindustani, and Bajjika".

C. Community Radio

Radio stations from All India Radio may be heard nationwide in urban and rural areas. The network is a public service broadcaster; hence it features local and human-interest shows. While commercial radio is focused on news and information, private radio only focuses on enjoyment. As the name implies, community radio stations (CRS) fill the void left by public and commercial radio and are a powerful new form of mass communication. CRSs serve a 5-10 km radius, intending to serve the public good by expanding access to information. Universities, NGOs, freelance journalists, and media organisations are the main CRS owners and operators (not part of any big corporate). They air programs relevant to locals and highlight social concerns that commercial channels sometimes gloss over. It is the goal of community radio to foster community growth by meeting the informational requirements of its listeners. "The programming of community radio should be of direct importance to the community and attention should be on topics about education, health, environment, agriculture, and rural and community development," as stated in the Community Radio Guidelines 2006. Also, fifty per cent of the material must be contributed by community members using their native tongue. For instance, studio-based debates and discussions, call-in shows, conventional music marketing, etc. People-generated material is valuable since it reflects audience sentiment and may be used to create a more in-depth show. Although the material created in all the media mentioned above channels is sometimes crude, it captures the spirit of the alternative media. Therefore, community radio may be thought of as people's media since it is a platform that serves the people and is created by and for the people. Another community radio station (CRS) serving the underserved, migratory workers from neighbouring states and rural residents of the business centre of Gurgaon is Gurgaon ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio Station. Popular languages and dialects like Hindi, Haryanvi, and Bhojpuri are used since they are spoken by the peasants who create the material. Keeping in mind

the preferences and comprehension of the area's marginalised groups, radio stations broadcast various musical programs, from musicals to discussions and debates, in chaupal style [9].

D. Citizen Journalism

Private companies and corporations have become dominant in India's broadcasting industry. The proliferation of 24–hour news channels in recent decades have reduced government oversight, yet these commercial broadcasters sometimes silence dissenting viewpoints rather than giving them a platform. Dasu Krishnamoorthy, a former journalist and scholar, emphasised the failure of mainstream media to fulfil the job of mass communication and enlighten society in a 2003 article titled "Defining alternative media in the Indian context." He said that the government and traditional media do not give much weight to public opinion and that alternative outlets should instead focus on preparing their staff to take on traditional media. Videos on citizen journalism that air on the private national news channel may also be categorised. Citizen Journalist is a CNN-IBN show where viewers may submit videos recorded about social issues, human rights violations, etc., and the network will consider airing them if they are deemed appropriate. When folks see something, it usually happens in their immediate area, but it may also have broader societal implications. Many mainstream newspapers now include a citizen journalism section; together, these efforts constitute what can be called "alternative media" [10].

IV. NEW MEDIA AND ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The lines between traditional media, user-generated content, and independent media have blurred thanks to the rise of New Media. New media may be categorised as either mass or personal media; however, some who support alternative media see it as a significant alternative medium since it gives individuals a platform to express themselves. The advent of social media, also known as Web 2.0 and including those websites that allow users to produce and share content, has given rise to a new wave of alternative media by giving a voice to previously marginalised groups. Blogs, social networking sites, micro-blogging sites, etc., have made it possible for anybody to express their dissatisfaction with the current system, not only members of radical groups or student unions. Regarding reaching the people and generating asymmetrical engagement, alternative media relies heavily on the many mainstream media formats. However, unlike mainstream media, alternative media information is not presented in a polished manner. One probably already know that trained experts manage the mainstream media while amateurs staff the alternative media. So, the substance is unprofessional, and the presentation may not be great either. One of the major criticisms levelled against alternative media is that it is too independent to be controlled by any one ideology or set of influential interests. Instead of catering to the interests of corporations and special interest groups, alternative media outlets seek to enlighten and educate the public. It stands in opposition to the mainstream narratives spread by mainstream media. In addition to its less-than-professional content, alternative media also benefits from smaller budgets and cheaper operating expenses [10].

A. Independent News Websites

Over the last decade, New Media's popularity as an alternative media outlet has skyrocketed. This is the cheap initial investment needed to begin a venture in this medium. Doing so has made it easier for young businesspeople to launch their own media companies. In addition, it is the hub of all media since it combines the interactivity of print (text and images), radio (sound), and television (visuals). With their instantaneous character, new media have diluted the delayed feedback aspect of traditional mass media. In response to the establishment of media, several independent journalists/organizations have launched their websites. Goodnewsindia.com, Infochangendia.org, and Lokmanch, a Hindi-language website, Gaon Connection, PARI, IndiaSpend, Village Square, Video Volunteers, are few examples of critical and analytical alternative media outlets in India. Khabar Lahriya has also created its website, accessible at http://khabarlahriya.org, where they publish accompanying multimedia, including videos, audio, and images, to its written news stories. Founded in 2006, Merinews.com has become India's most popular citizen-based news service. Its editors have begun publishing a city-centric tabloid and are doing more reviews of citizen submissions [11].

B. Social Media as Alternative Media

People may now have their voices heard in modern debates and conversations because of the widespread distribution of social media. Twitter has become as reliable as television news for some people as their primary

source for immediate updates. They see Twitter as a platform for voices that would be marginalised by more established news outlets to be heard. The mainstream media would have hidden many significant and controversial stories half a decade ago. However, with the power of social media, it is increasingly difficult to hide knowledge. By publishing content such as blog posts, tweets, status updates, articles, etc., social media enables the average person to take on the producer role. The large initial investment required to launch a newspaper or television network made such ventures seem unrealistic in the past. However, the emergence of new forms of media—especially social media—has paved the way for many young journalists to forge successful careers as business owners. Exactly how many individuals use social media? Is it not still primarily focused on the metropolitan elite? How often does a problem that mostly affects rural areas become the topic of greatest debate in cyberspace? Is it now used for advertising? Indeed, all these concerns are valid, and there are instances when social media serves more as a promotional tool than a forum for dialogue and debate. Whether or not any material posted on social networking networks can be trusted has been called into question. There might be catastrophic repercussions from hastily posted data. If you believe anything, you need to double-examine the facts. Producing anything for social media requires high social responsibility and sensitivity, even if just one person is involved. [12]

V. FUTURE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Users, journalists, and media outlets are essential to developing alternative media. There has to be an investigation into whether the purpose of journalism is to serve the public interest via its articles or the financial interests of corporations. Journalists need to be aware of the goals and functions of the media and place special emphasis on problems of social progress and individual liberties. For alternative media to thrive, the next generation of communication tools is just as important as the responsibility of journalists today. In only ten years, new forms of media have revolutionised human interaction. No longer are journalists the only ones with a vital weapon to express their opposition; now, the general public does, too. As was said in the introduction, the websites mentioned above, blogs, micro-blogs, and social networking sites are all extremely inexpensive mediums made possible by the advent of new media. What happens to alternative media in the future depends on how internet users put new technologies to use. People are utilising the Internet in unprecedented ways thanks to portable devices like iPads and smartphones, but so far, it has mostly been the urban elite who have had access to it; thus, there is a pressing need to reach out to rural communities as well. CG Net Swara, established in 2008, is one such organisation that effectively uses technology to become a significant non-mainstream communication channel. Swara means "voice" in Sanskrit, while CG Net refers to the Central Gondwana Network. "it is a voice-based platform, freely accessible by mobile phone that enables anybody to report and listen to tales of local interest," the website proclaims. Journalists oversee the reported content and then make it accessible for replay online and by phone. The media mostly ignore the tribal population in the Central Gondwana area, but this is something that CG Net Swara aims to change. There was a story about this on livemint.com. "The portal consists of four parts: callers, who give missed calls to the portal phone number to report or listen to news; a server that returns the call and collects and stories the audio bytes; moderators who publish the byte on the website; and website visitors, who can be journalists from traditional media outlets looking to cover a story, NGOs looking to extend support, urban activists who follow reported stories, or anyone else interested in the portal's content." The grassroots effect of this alternative media is also clear: many caller complaints are addressed after being brought to the attention of the administration [13].

VI. RELATED WORK

The networks and off-device protocols executed by servers in data centres provide the devices we name "mobile phones" the capacity to offer a wide variety of feature sets and affordances. Applications that use the data channel's SMS, USSD, MMS, still images, video uploading and playing, and the Internet at large have been developed [14]. Their choices must balance accessibility, depth, and cost, which have been hotly disputed. The human voice is the most globally shared method of communication; nevertheless, every mobile device on the globe has a microphone and a speaker. Voice is not a perfect communication medium since it is linear and difficult to search, language is complex yet difficult to learn, and phone calls are expensive compared to other forms of communication. However, speech interfaces provide widespread availability, low cost, and simplicity in many situations [15, 16]. Therefore, it is heartening to witness a proliferation of voice apps that aim to solve

various issues in developing countries and places with limited means. Giving voicemail to the homeless in the United States [17]; providing impromptu group support for non-governmental organisations [18]; disseminating health information [19]; bringing web content to resource-constrained classroom settings [20], and facilitating the exchange of agricultural advice for [21] and by [22] farmers in India are all examples. There are voice projects that emphasise using voice menus, some that use speech recognition, and others that aim to record and save users' contributions. This is where Alternative media blooms. For populations where poor literacy or other circumstances limit access to the usage of other media, these latter systems may be the most intriguing for those looking to encourage participatory processes (from letters to the editor to blogging). The boundaries between mobile phones and community radio are beginning to blur as voice-based implementations make it possible for communities with limited resources to create text-based content to be active participants in the creation and dissemination of the "stories" they want to tell and the agendas they want to set [23]. However, most of these community platforms are still in the testing phase, and widespread implementation of systems for long-term usage in the field is uncommon. From what we can see, very few initiatives we examined communicate back to people through text or speech systems about the information they have acquired," OSI said in its evaluation of citizen media in 2010. The Budget Tracking Tool in Kenya and the African Elections Project are the only initiatives that enable individuals to do more than just submit information from their non-Internet-connected phones, joining CG Net Swara in this regard. [24] (p 35).

VII. CONCLUSION

Journalism's location in the globalised society of the twenty-first century leads us to the inevitable conclusion that how news and public opinion are produced and disseminated are undergoing profound changes. The Internet has revolutionized the reporting, editing, and dissemination of news. People used to only consume media, but today they're actively participating in the production of their own works. When it comes to mass communication, those who were formerly only receivers are increasingly becoming creators and transmitters. Smartphone penetration has increased, allowing news organizations to more easily harness the crowd's untapped journalistic potential. It used to take journalists a lot of effort and time to find out how the general people felt about a topic or subject, but today all it takes is a click. One of the most valuable assets for media outlets around the world is Big Data, which includes a wide variety of data types such as text (from traditional news articles and social media platforms), imagery (including Instagram, professional photographs, satellite imagery, and increasingly aerial imagery captured by UAVs), and video (from television networks, YouTube, Vimeo, and other channels).

Brain McNair [25] argues that the effect of new media and technology has led to the fragmentation of the dominant paradigm of journalism in the twentieth century, exemplified by professional journalists generating objective and accurate information. McNair is certain that journalism will survive in its current climate since it is essential on many different social, political, and cultural dimensions, contrary to the predictions of many other writers. There is hope for the industry of journalism. As it has done so, it will change and develop from the quaint formats of the first newsprint to the slick presentation of today's evening newscast. However, when things change, I wonder whether it will be for the better or worse. ([26], p. 21). Citizen journalism and other types of online reporting have also evolved in recent years. To a certain extent, everyone with access to the Internet is also free to write and discuss their thoughts, which may offer a certain (critical) alternative to the dominating mainstream media. Many people in their 20s and 30s, as well as those in their 40s and 50s, rely on citizen journalism as their primary and constant source of online news.

The media landscape is changing before our eyes, and these trends can be seen in every sector of the news industry worldwide. Economic statistics related to the press market on a global scale, most notably newspaper readership and advertising revenues, imply that the crisis scenarios, according to which the conventional press would cease to exist totally, are likely exaggerated. However, we must embrace the reality that newspapers will never again be the primary news source. To keep up with the ever-changing tastes of your audience, one need to do more than analyse the technical and technological changes in news production. Young people, in particular, seem to have abandoned the long-existing means of mass communication in favour of the small screens of their mobile phones or tablets, with virtually all of them watching or following digital information sources and accounts of the mainstream (and often also alternative or citizen journalism) media producers available via social networks. The value of virtual interaction is increasing rapidly. "Predictions of the future of communication trends based on the European Communication Monitor 2016 indicate that mobile communication will overtake social media and social networks as the primary means of addressing an audience

in 2019". This will be followed by online communication via websites, e-mail, intranets, and press and media relations with online newspapers and magazines ([27], p. 61). The primary tool of recording and sending information to others and post it on social media is through mobile phones largely which is giving rise to new term that is Mobile Journalism. It is safe to say that technology and new media is the change agent and creating a new norm of journalism as alternative media. Alternative media also adds to the diversity of news sources, where the complex idea of diversity is the media's democratic function and the normative ramifications of alternative media across the board. ([28], p. 1)

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