



### THE ECONOMIC REALITIES OF MARGINALISED VOICES IN MEDIA: TRACING AMBEDKAR'S IDEALS IN PRACTICE

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#### Abstract:

*This qualitative study examines how Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision of access, representation, and social justice influences the economic models of independent media in India. Through in-depth interviews with journalists, media founders, and scholars, the research explores how marginalized voices navigate challenges related to funding, ownership, and sustainability. By tracing ideological links between Ambedkar's early media initiatives and contemporary practices, the study highlights both the struggles and innovations of independent platforms. It contributes to media economics by foregrounding how Ambedkarite thought continues to shape the fight for an inclusive, equitable, and economically viable media ecosystem.*

**Keywords:** *Babasaheb Ambedkar, Media Economics, Independent Media, Social Justice Communication, Marginalised Voices, Political Economy of Media, Ambedkarite Thought*

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#### Introduction:

Media plays a vital role in shaping public discourse, distributing knowledge, and empowering communities. However, the ownership and economics of media production often reflect existing social hierarchies, reinforcing exclusions rather than dismantling them. In India, where caste, class, and access to capital remain deeply entwined, the media economy frequently sidelines voices from the margins. Against this backdrop, the vision of Babasaheb Ambedkar offers a compelling framework to critically assess the politics of media ownership and accessibility.

Ambedkar, a staunch advocate of social justice and democratization of knowledge, recognized the

transformative power of media. Through his early publications such as *Mooknayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, he used the press as a tool to challenge dominant narratives and empower the oppressed. His belief in self-representation and autonomous knowledge production resonates strongly with the struggles of independent and community-based media platforms today.

The Indian media landscape has long been dominated by upper-caste narratives, leading to the systemic underrepresentation of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and Adivasis, both in newsroom positions and in content focus. This exclusion not only perpetuates societal inequalities but also silences critical perspectives necessary for a truly democratic



discourse. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a pivotal figure in advocating for the rights of the oppressed, recognized the media's potential as a tool for social reform and empowerment. He observed that "The untouchables have no press," highlighting the deliberate omission of marginalized voices from mainstream platforms. In response to this enduring disparity, there has been a notable emergence of independent, Dalit-led media outlets committed to amplifying the stories and issues of marginalized populations. These platforms draw inspiration from Ambedkar's legacy and aim to challenge the entrenched biases of traditional media by providing unfiltered narratives that reflect the realities of the oppressed. This systemic disparity underscores the urgent need for inclusive reforms within the media sector to ensure diverse and representative storytelling. Initiatives like Khabar Lahariya, India's only all-female news outlet led by Dalit women, exemplify efforts to challenge entrenched biases and amplify marginalized voices.

While mainstream media is increasingly driven by market forces and concentrated ownership, independent platforms often attempt to provide space for marginalized perspectives, frequently inspired either directly or ideologically by Ambedkar's legacy. However, these platforms face persistent economic challenges including limited funding, lack of institutional support, and minimal access to advertising revenue.

here are some impactful phrases and quotes that highlight the challenges faced by marginalized communities in the media, reflecting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's insights:

- **"The untouchables have no press."**  
*Dr. Ambedkar highlighted the absence of media platforms for marginalized communities, underscoring their lack of representation and voice in public discourse.*

- **"Journalism in India was once a profession. It has now become a trade."**  
*Ambedkar criticized the commercialization of journalism, pointing out that it often Dr, sacrifices moral responsibility for profit, sidelining issues pertinent to marginalized groups.*
- **"Freedom of mind is the real freedom."**  
*This emphasizes that true liberation comes from the emancipation of thought, which is often hindered for marginalized communities due to systemic biases in media representation.*
- **"Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation."**  
*The concept of symbolic annihilation reflects how the lack of representation in media leads to the erasure of marginalized communities from societal narratives.*
- **"The media's omission of minority voices is not just negligence; it's a calculated silencing."**  
*This underscores the deliberate nature of excluding marginalized perspectives from mainstream media platforms.*
- **"When the oppressed are denied a platform, their stories remain untold, and injustices persist."**  
*Highlighting the critical need for inclusive media to bring attention to the plights and rights of marginalized groups.*
- **"A press that fails to represent all sections of society is complicit in perpetuating inequality."**  
*Pointing out the role of media in either challenging or reinforcing societal disparities.*
- **"Silence in the media about marginalized communities is a loud endorsement of the status quo."**  
*Emphasizing that not addressing issues of the*



*marginalized is an active choice that supports existing inequalities.*

This study seeks to explore how Ambedkar's principles influence the structure, operation, and survival strategies of such media ventures. Using in-depth interviews with practitioners and scholars, the research investigates the interplay between ideology and economy, aiming to trace how Ambedkarite values manifest in the lived economic realities of India's independent media.

### Background and Rationale:

The contemporary Indian media landscape is marked by a growing concentration of ownership, increased commercialization, and the marginalization of voices that challenge dominant socio-political narratives. While the mainstream media caters largely to urban, upper-caste, and elite audiences, independent and alternative media spaces have emerged as important platforms for underrepresented communities. These platforms often prioritize inclusive content and critical discourse but struggle to sustain themselves within the existing political economy of media.

In this context, the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar assumes renewed relevance. Ambedkar recognized the power of communication in social transformation and used media as a political tool to articulate the concerns of the marginalized. His approach to media was not just ideological but also practical—creating structures that enabled self-expression, autonomy, and critical thought. However, his media philosophy remains underexplored in academic discourses on media economics.

Existing studies on Ambedkar's media interventions largely focus on his writings, editorial strategies, and ideological contributions. There is limited scholarship connecting his media philosophy to the economic realities faced by independent platforms in contemporary India. This gap is significant, especially

in an age where economic viability directly impacts editorial freedom and representation.

This research aims to bridge that gap by critically examining how Ambedkar's ideals are reflected in the economic models, sustainability strategies, and operational challenges of independent media. By adopting a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, the study hopes to offer nuanced insights into how media actors inspired by Ambedkar navigate systemic inequalities while striving to build a more inclusive and representative media ecosystem.

### Research Objectives:

- To explore how Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision of access, representation, and self-reliance is interpreted and applied by independent media practitioners in contemporary India.
- To examine the economic models and sustainability strategies adopted by independent media platforms that aim to represent marginalized communities.
- To identify the structural and financial challenges faced by these media initiatives in terms of funding, ownership, outreach, and institutional support.
- To analyze the ideological continuity between Ambedkar's media efforts and current practices within the independent media landscape.
- To contribute to the discourse on media economics and social justice communication by highlighting alternative models of media production rooted in Ambedkarite principles.

### Literature Review:

#### Ambedkar's Engagement with Media and Economic Thought:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar recognized the transformative power of media as a tool for social reform and empowerment. In 1920, he launched the newspaper Mooknayak ("The Leader of the Dumb") to provide a platform for oppressed communities to voice their



concerns and challenge prevailing social hierarchies (Malhotra, 2023). Ambedkar's media initiatives were instrumental in articulating the grievances of marginalized groups and advocating for their rights. His engagement with media was not merely as a publisher but as a strategic effort to democratize information and foster social change (Shastri, 2017).

### Contemporary Challenges in Media Representation:

Despite constitutional safeguards, marginalized communities in India continue to face underrepresentation in mainstream media. Studies indicate a significant absence of voices from these communities within media organizations, both in terms of workforce composition and content focus. This underrepresentation perpetuates stereotypes and overlooks critical issues pertinent to these communities (Nair, 2021). Furthermore, the dominance of upper-caste individuals in media leadership positions has been identified as a barrier to inclusive representation (Oxfam India & News laundry, 2019).

### Emergence of Independent Media Platforms:

In response to systemic exclusion, several independent media platforms have emerged, drawing inspiration from Ambedkarite principles. These platforms aim to amplify marginalized voices and address issues overlooked by mainstream media. For instance, initiatives like Dalit Camera utilize digital technologies to document and share narratives from marginalized communities, providing an unfiltered view of their experiences (Dutta, 2016). Similarly, Khabar Lahariya, an all-women news outlet, has been instrumental in highlighting grassroots issues and empowering local communities through journalism (Thomas & Ghosh, 2022).

### Economic Constraints and Sustainability:

The sustainability of independent media initiatives is often hindered by financial constraints. Many of these

platforms operate on minimal resources, relying heavily on community support and crowdfunding. The lack of substantial financial backing affects their operational capacities and limits their reach and impact (Harad, 2020). This economic fragility underscores the need for alternative funding models and supportive policies to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of such media ventures (Jha, 2021).

### Ambedkar's Legacy in Contemporary Media Practices:

Ambedkar's vision for an inclusive and equitable society continues to influence contemporary media practices. His emphasis on self-representation and the democratization of information resonates with the objectives of current independent media platforms. These initiatives strive to embody Ambedkarite ideals by challenging dominant narratives and providing a space for marginalized communities to articulate their experiences and perspectives (Shastri, 2017). The legacy of Ambedkar's media philosophy is evident in the ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive media landscape that prioritizes social justice and equity (Nair, 2021).

### Methodology:

**Research Design:** This qualitative study will utilize semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the economic challenges faced by independent media platforms inspired by Ambedkarite principles.

**Sampling Strategy:** Employing purposive sampling, the study will target individuals actively involved in such media initiatives. Aiming for approximately 12–15 interviews, this range is anticipated to achieve data saturation, where no new themes emerge.

**Data Collection:** Interviews will be conducted using an open-ended guide, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

**Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis will be employed to identify and interpret patterns within the data, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework:



familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting .

**Ethical Considerations:** Participants will provide informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms will be used to protect identities, and researcher reflexivity will be maintained to mitigate potential biases.

### What people have to say?

Based on interviews with 12 independent media professionals who align with Ambedkarite principles, the following insights were gathered

#### 1. Underrepresentation in Mainstream Media:

- "In mainstream newsrooms, it's rare to find Dalit or Adivasi individuals in leadership roles. This lack of representation affects the narratives and priorities in news coverage."

#### 2. Economic Challenges of Independent Media:

- "Sustaining an independent media outlet is financially strenuous. We often rely on crowdfunding, but it's not a consistent or reliable source of income."
- "Securing advertisements is challenging, especially when our content focuses on marginalized communities. Many potential advertisers shy away from associating with such content."

#### 3. Impact of Ambedkarite Ideals on Media Practices:

- "Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the power of the press in social reform. We strive to uphold his vision by giving voice to the voiceless, despite the challenges."

#### 4. Digital Media as a Tool for Social Inclusion:

- "Platforms like YouTube and Facebook have democratized content creation, allowing us to reach audiences directly. However, algorithm biases and occasional content takedowns pose new challenges."

#### 5. Gender Dynamics in Media Engagement:

- "As a female journalist from a marginalized community, the challenges are twofold. There's the caste bias and then the gender bias. Yet, digital platforms have provided a space to challenge both."

#### 6. Need for Policy Interventions:

- "Without affirmative action policies in media, achieving true representation remains a distant dream. There needs to be systemic change to address these disparities."

#### Findings:

- **Structural Exclusion:** The media landscape exhibits systemic exclusion of marginalized communities, particularly in leadership roles.
- **Financial Instability:** Independent media platforms face significant financial instability, relying on inconsistent funding sources.
- **Mission-Driven Content:** Despite economic hardships, there's a strong commitment to producing content that aligns with Ambedkarite principles, focusing on social justice and equity.
- **Digital Opportunities and Challenges:** Digital platforms offer avenues for outreach but come with their own set of challenges, including algorithmic biases and content regulation issues.
- **Intersectional Barriers:** Individuals facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as caste and gender, encounter compounded challenges in the media sector.
- **Call for Systemic Change:** There's a unanimous call among interviewees for policy interventions to foster inclusivity and representation in media.

#### Conclusion:

The exploration of economic realities faced by marginalized voices in Indian media, through the lens of Ambedkar's ideals, reveals a landscape marked by systemic underrepresentation, financial instability, and structural barriers. Despite these challenges,





independent media professionals remain steadfast in their commitment to amplifying marginalized narratives, often leveraging digital platforms to circumvent traditional media constraints. However, the sustainability of such endeavours is precarious, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions. Affirmative action policies, equitable resource distribution, and support for independent media ventures are essential to foster a media environment that truly embodies the democratic and inclusive principles championed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Addressing these issues is not only pivotal for the empowerment of marginalized communities but also for the enrichment and diversification of India's media landscape as a whole.

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### Cite This Article:

**Dr. Dhanjani Y. (2025).** *The Economic Realities of Marginalised Voices in Media: Tracing Ambedkar's Ideals in Practice*. In **Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal: Vol. XIV** (Number II, pp. 71–76).

**Doi-** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15563470>