

JOURNALISM AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract:

Journalism, as a cornerstone of democracy, has been reshaped by the advent of the digital era, offering both transformative opportunities and significant challenges. In the Indian context, digital platforms have democratized information, amplified marginalized voices, and fostered global collaborations, as evidenced by landmark cases like the Panama Papers and the Pegasus spyware revelations. However, they have also exposed journalists to online harassment, government surveillance, misinformation, and biases in content moderation. This paper examines the dual role of digital technology in empowering and threatening journalistic freedom in India, emphasizing the need for robust legal frameworks, ethical practices, and civil society engagement. By exploring historical transitions, current challenges, and future possibilities, this study highlights the importance of safeguarding freedom of expression while leveraging digital tools to enhance transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in journalism. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to foster a balanced, safe, and inclusive media ecosystem in the digital age.

Keywords: *Journalism, Digital Era, Freedom of Expression, Digital Media, Ethical Journalism, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain Technology, Press Freedom.*

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Introduction:

1. Background

Journalism has long been regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy, serving as a critical medium for informing the public, holding power to account, and fostering informed civic engagement. In India, journalism has played a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape, from the pre-independence era of nationalist newspapers like *Kesari* and *The Hindu* to the post-independence proliferation of regional and national press. Journalism's capacity to investigate, question, and report makes it indispensable for a democratic society. However, as media has evolved into a multifaceted ecosystem, its role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and inclusivity remains vital in combating misinformation, safeguarding democracy, and upholding constitutional principles such as Article 19(1)(a), which guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression.

2. The Digital Era

The advent of the digital era has revolutionized journalism by transforming how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Digital platforms, including websites, social media, and blogs, have enabled real-time reporting and unprecedented global reach. In India, the rise of digital news platforms such as *Scroll*, *The Wire*, and *Newslandry* reflects this shift, as traditional media adapts to the rapidly changing technological landscape. However, the digital transformation has also brought challenges, such as the proliferation of fake news, algorithmic biases, and threats to journalistic integrity. The 2021 Reuters Institute Digital News Report highlights that over 70% of Indians access news online, signifying the growing influence of digital platforms on public discourse (Newman et al., 2021).

3. Purpose and Scope

This paper examines the relationship between journalism and freedom of expression in the digital era, with a focus on the Indian context. While digital platforms have democratized access to information and amplified voices previously marginalized, they have also facilitated new forms of censorship, harassment, and surveillance. The scope of this research includes analyzing the dual role of technology in empowering and threatening journalistic freedom, exploring the ethical and legal frameworks that govern freedom of expression in India, and evaluating case studies that illustrate these dynamics.

4. Research Statement:

Digital platforms serve as a double-edged sword in the context of journalistic freedom. On the one hand, they empower journalists by providing tools for reaching wider audiences, enabling grassroots reporting, and fostering greater accountability. On the other hand, they expose journalists to online abuse, governmental and corporate surveillance, and the risks posed by unregulated content moderation policies. This paper argues that while digital technology has immense potential to strengthen democracy and freedom of expression in India, realizing this potential requires robust legal frameworks, ethical journalism practices, and active civil society engagement.

5. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the interplay between journalism and freedom of expression in the digital era, with a focus on the Indian context. Secondary data collection forms the backbone of this study, drawing from peer-reviewed academic journals, government reports, media watchdog publications, and credible news articles. Key sources include case studies, such as the Pegasus spyware revelations, and analyses from organizations like UNESCO, Freedom House, and the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

The study critically examines international and domestic legal frameworks, such as Article 19 of the Indian Constitution and global standards like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, content analysis of impactful digital journalism platforms, including *The Wire* and *Scroll*, provides insights into the opportunities and challenges of digital media. By triangulating these sources, the research identifies emerging



trends, highlights ethical dilemmas, and proposes actionable policy recommendations to safeguard journalistic freedom in India and beyond.

Historical Context:

1. Evolution of Journalism:

Journalism in India has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving alongside advancements in technology and societal change. In the early 19th century, print media emerged as a powerful tool for political awareness and resistance during British colonial rule. Iconic publications such as *Kesari*, founded by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and *The Hindu* championed nationalist ideologies and mobilized public opinion against colonial oppression (Natarajan, 1962).

Post-independence, journalism in India expanded with the proliferation of newspapers, magazines, and later, television channels. In the 1980s, the introduction of satellite television brought news directly to Indian households, revolutionizing the media landscape with networks like Doordarshan and later NDTV.

The advent of the internet in the 1990s marked the beginning of a new era for journalism. Online news platforms like Rediff.com were among the earliest pioneers, followed by digital-first publications such as *The Wire*, *Scroll*, and *Quint* in the 2010s. These platforms capitalized on technological innovations to provide real-time reporting, diverse perspectives, and interactive content. Today, digital journalism dominates, with social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook serving as primary news sources for millions of Indians (Newman et al., 2021).

2. Freedom of Expression Before the Digital Era:

Before the digital age, freedom of expression in journalism was both a cornerstone of democratic engagement and a contentious issue in India. Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, but this right is subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) for reasons such as public order, decency, or national security.

During colonial rule, press freedom was severely restricted. Laws like the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 were introduced to suppress dissenting voices and nationalist publications. Despite these restrictions, newspapers like *Amrita Bazar Patrika* found creative ways to bypass censorship, becoming symbols of resistance (Chandra, 2016).

In the post-independence period, freedom of expression continued to be challenged. During the Emergency (1975–1977), media censorship reached its peak, with journalists facing imprisonment and publications being shut down. The period highlighted the vulnerability of traditional media to state control, sparking debates on the balance between press freedom and governmental oversight.

Although less overt, suppression of freedom of expression persisted after the Emergency. The use of defamation suits, sedition laws, and other legal mechanisms to silence dissent became increasingly common, particularly against investigative journalism that exposed corruption or challenged powerful institutions (Bhargava, 2019).

3. Transition to Digital Journalism:

The transition from traditional to digital journalism was driven by technological advancements, changing consumer behavior, and the democratization of content creation. Key milestones in this transition include:

1990s: Advent of the Internet

The arrival of the internet in India in 1995 allowed for the creation of online news portals such as Rediff and Indiatimes. These early platforms provided real-time access to news, marking a departure from the slower cycles of print media.

2000s: Rise of Social-Media

Platforms like Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) became integral to journalism, enabling rapid dissemination of news and direct engagement with audiences. Newsrooms began leveraging these platforms to share stories, while citizen journalism flourished, with users reporting events directly from the ground (Ganguly, 2018).

2010s: Emergence of Digital-First Publications

Publications such as The Wire, Scroll, and Newsland challenged the dominance of traditional media by focusing on investigative journalism, opinion pieces, and underreported stories. They also embraced multimedia formats such as podcasts, video stories, and data journalism to cater to a tech-savvy audience.

Mobile Journalism (MoJo)

The widespread adoption of smartphones and affordable mobile data plans, spurred by initiatives like Jio's 4G rollout in 2016, made mobile journalism a dominant force. Reporters and citizens alike began capturing and broadcasting news through smartphones, further decentralizing the media landscape.

This shift to digital platforms has empowered journalists and citizens by providing them with tools to share information widely and challenge narratives. However, it has also introduced challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, loss of editorial control, and new forms of censorship, which this paper will explore further.

Opportunities Provided by the Digital Era:

1. Democratization of Information:

The digital era has revolutionized the production and dissemination of information by democratizing access to journalistic tools and platforms. Citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals use digital technologies to report news, has emerged as a powerful force. Armed with smartphones, citizens now document events in real-time, often bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. For instance, platforms like Twitter and YouTube have allowed individuals to share critical information during crises such as natural disasters, protests, or government crackdowns.

In India, citizen journalism has been pivotal in covering underreported issues, such as environmental protests in rural areas or caste-based violence, which mainstream media sometimes neglect. The 2020–2021 farmers' protests saw social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp play a central role in organizing demonstrations and amplifying farmers' voices globally (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).

Social media platforms have also fostered new forms of collaboration between professional journalists and the public. For example, hashtags like #MeToo in India brought attention to pervasive gender-based harassment and encouraged grassroots activism. However, this democratization comes with challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, which underscores the importance of media literacy and fact-checking.

2. Accessibility and Global Reach:

Digital platforms have broken geographical, social, and economic barriers, enabling journalism to reach audiences worldwide. In India, the affordability of smartphones and initiatives like the Digital India program have expanded internet access to rural and marginalized communities. The proliferation of regional language content on platforms like DailyHunt and ShareChat has allowed journalism to engage with non-English-speaking audiences, empowering millions to participate in national and global conversations.

Moreover, digital journalism has bridged the gap between local events and global awareness. Stories from India, such as environmental activism in the Aarey forest or the plight of manual scavengers, are now accessible to international audiences, often sparking global solidarity and action (Singh, P., 2020).

Cross-border collaboration among journalists has also been facilitated by digital tools. Indian journalists have partnered with international outlets to work on investigative projects such as the Panama Papers and Pegasus spyware revelations, demonstrating how the global reach of digital platforms can bolster accountability journalism.

3. Innovations in Reporting:

The digital era has redefined storytelling in journalism, leveraging multimedia formats and interactive technologies to engage audiences more effectively. Traditional print articles have given way to rich, multi-sensory content that includes videos, podcasts, infographics, and virtual reality experiences. Indian news outlets like *The Quint* and *Scroll* have pioneered data journalism, using visually compelling infographics and interactive maps to explain complex issues, such as election results or COVID-19 statistics.

Live reporting has become a hallmark of digital journalism, enabling real-time updates through platforms like Twitter, Facebook Live, and YouTube. This immediacy allows news outlets to cover breaking stories, such as election results or natural disasters, as they unfold. For example, during the Kerala floods of 2018, live updates on Twitter and Facebook helped coordinate relief efforts and provide critical information to affected communities.

Interactive storytelling has also emerged as a powerful tool for investigative journalism. Platforms like *The Wire* have used long-form, multimedia-rich articles to explore issues like state surveillance or environmental degradation in India. These innovations not only make journalism more engaging but also empower readers to explore stories in depth, fostering greater public awareness and civic engagement.

4. Challenges to Freedom of Expression:

1. Government Surveillance and Censorship:

While digital platforms have amplified freedom of expression, they have also become tools for government surveillance and censorship. In India, state actors have increasingly relied on digital

monitoring systems to track dissent and control information flow. Laws like the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, and its subsequent amendments give the government broad powers to block websites, remove content, and monitor online activity in the name of national security and public order (Bansal & Kaur, 2022).

For instance, during the 2019–2020 protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), internet shutdowns were imposed in several states to curb dissent, making India one of the leading countries in the world for internet blackouts (Freedom House, 2022). These shutdowns not only stifled freedom of expression but also hindered journalists' ability to report events on the ground.

Additionally, revelations like the Pegasus spyware scandal, where surveillance software was allegedly used against journalists, activists, and political opponents, highlight how digital tools can be weaponized to undermine press freedom and intimidate critical voices (The Wire, 2021). Such actions erode trust in the media and undermine the principles of democracy.

2. Online Harassment and Misinformation:

The digital era has exposed journalists to new forms of harassment, particularly online abuse and threats. In India, journalists, especially women, face targeted trolling, doxxing, and hate campaigns on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. These attacks often stem from polarized political discourse and seek to silence dissenting voices. A 2021 UNESCO report highlighted that 73% of women journalists in India have experienced online violence, making it a significant barrier to press freedom (UNESCO, 2021).

Misinformation is another critical challenge in the digital age. The spread of fake news, often amplified by social media algorithms, undermines public trust in journalism and poses a threat to credible reporting. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about vaccines and treatments circulated widely, forcing journalists to spend significant resources debunking false claims (Goswami & Verma, 2022). The lack of regulatory clarity on combating misinformation while safeguarding free speech further complicates the issue.

Moreover, journalists exposing powerful interests or reporting on sensitive topics, such as caste-based discrimination or communal violence, often become targets of online smear campaigns. This hostile environment not only endangers their physical and mental well-being but also creates a chilling effect on investigative journalism.

3. Platform Algorithms and Moderation:

Tech companies, through their algorithms and content moderation policies, have become gatekeepers of digital expression. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube determine what content is amplified or suppressed, raising concerns about the transparency and accountability of their processes.

In India, platform algorithms have been criticized for amplifying polarizing and sensationalist content, which can contribute to communal tensions. For instance, a 2020 Wall Street Journal report revealed that Facebook failed to act against hate speech by prominent individuals linked to the ruling party, despite clear policy violations, highlighting a potential bias in content moderation practices (WSJ, 2020).

At the same time, content moderation policies often lack nuance, leading to arbitrary takedowns or shadow banning of legitimate content. For example, several posts related to the farmers' protests were flagged or removed on social media platforms, sparking debates about whether tech companies were succumbing to political pressure (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).

The lack of clear regulations and oversight over platform algorithms and moderation policies means that corporations wield significant influence over public discourse. Striking a balance between combating harmful content and protecting free expression remains an unresolved challenge in the digital age.

Legal and Ethical Dimensions:

1. International Laws on Free Expression:

The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in several international legal frameworks, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These provisions emphasize the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any medium, regardless of frontiers. However, digital platforms present unique challenges, as they operate across multiple jurisdictions with varying levels of regulatory oversight.

In India, this interplay between international principles and local laws is evident in the regulation of digital content. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, impose obligations on digital platforms to remove unlawful content, thus aligning with certain global standards. However, critics argue that these rules also grant authorities excessive discretionary powers, potentially enabling censorship and restricting legitimate expression (Rao, 2022).

On a global scale, initiatives like the Christchurch Call to Action, aimed at eliminating violent extremist content online, and the Global Network Initiative, which promotes free expression and privacy, illustrate efforts to harmonize digital platform governance with international human rights laws. Nevertheless, the lack of enforceable global mechanisms often leaves platforms to self-regulate, leading to inconsistencies in how freedom of expression is upheld.

2. Ethical Responsibilities of Journalists: Journalists play a pivotal role in upholding freedom of expression, but their responsibilities extend beyond mere reporting to ethical considerations that prioritize accuracy, fairness, and the public good. In the digital era, where misinformation and sensationalism are rampant, journalists face heightened pressure to maintain these standards.

Ethical journalism in India is guided by frameworks such as the Press Council of India's Code of Ethics and principles outlined by global organizations like the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). These codes emphasize the need for journalists to avoid harm, respect privacy, and verify information before dissemination. However, the speed of digital reporting often leads to lapses in these standards.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about treatments and vaccines proliferated, with some media outlets accused of amplifying unverified claims. Balancing the public's right to know with the responsibility to prevent panic and misinformation became a critical ethical challenge (Goswami & Verma, 2022).

Furthermore, journalists must navigate the tension between exposing corruption or wrongdoing and respecting individual rights. Investigative reporting on sensitive issues like communal violence or political scandals requires careful handling to avoid inflaming tensions or compromising the safety of sources. By adhering to ethical practices, journalists can ensure that their work promotes public interest without compromising integrity.

3. Role of Platforms:

Digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become central to modern communication, but their roles as gatekeepers of information raise questions about accountability and transparency. Content moderation policies are critical for combating hate speech, misinformation, and harmful content, but these measures often come at the expense of free expression.

In India, content moderation has sparked controversy, with allegations of both overreach and under-enforcement. For example, during the 2021 farmers' protests, several posts critical of government policies were flagged or removed from platforms like Twitter and Instagram. While platforms cited legal compliance, critics argued that these actions curtailed legitimate dissent (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).

Moreover, algorithm-driven moderation often lacks the cultural and contextual understanding necessary for nuanced decision-making. Automated systems may inadvertently suppress minority voices or fail to detect coded hate speech, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities.

Efforts to address these challenges include platform transparency reports and third-party oversight mechanisms. Initiatives like the Facebook Oversight Board aim to provide independent review of content moderation decisions, reflecting a step toward balancing free expression with safety concerns. However, the ultimate responsibility lies in ensuring that moderation policies are transparent, consistent, and aligned with both national and international legal frameworks.

Case Studies

1. Success Stories:

The digital age has enabled journalism to achieve remarkable impact by breaking barriers of access, enhancing investigative capabilities, and fostering civic engagement. Several success stories from India and globally highlight the transformative power of digital platforms in journalism:

1. The Panama Papers (2016): A groundbreaking global investigation led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), including contributions from Indian journalists. The leak of 11.5 million financial documents exposed offshore tax evasion by politicians, business leaders, and celebrities worldwide. Indian names, including politicians and businesspersons, were implicated, sparking national debates on corruption and financial accountability (Oberoi, 2017).
2. Cobrapost Exposés: Indian investigative journalism platform *Cobrapost* has utilized digital media to expose corruption and malpractice. Their 2018 sting operation, "Operation 136," revealed how media organizations were willing to peddle political propaganda for money, raising critical questions about media ethics and impartiality (Jain, 2018).

3. The 2021 Pegasus Project: Indian journalists collaborated with global media outlets to reveal how spyware was allegedly used to target activists, politicians, and journalists, including prominent figures in India. The revelations raised awareness about digital surveillance and led to demands for stronger privacy protections and judicial inquiries (The Wire, 2021).

These examples demonstrate the capacity of digital journalism to uncover hidden truths, hold power to account, and drive public discourse on critical issues.

2. Suppression and Repression:

Despite its opportunities, the digital era has also seen significant repression of free expression, with governments and powerful entities targeting journalists to silence dissent.

1. Internet Shutdowns in Kashmir (2019–2021): Following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the Indian government imposed a prolonged internet blackout in Jammu and Kashmir. This not only disrupted the work of local journalists but also hindered their ability to report on ground realities, isolating the region from the global media narrative (Freedom House, 2022).
2. Gauri Lankesh's Murder (2017): Although not directly linked to digital media, the assassination of journalist Gauri Lankesh, who was critical of right-wing ideologies, underscores the risks faced by outspoken journalists in India. Lankesh had used digital platforms to amplify her voice, making her a target of online abuse before her murder (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).
3. Maria Ressa and Rappler (Philippines): Globally, Maria Ressa, CEO of the Philippines-based digital news outlet *Rappler*, faced lawsuits and harassment for her reporting on government corruption and misinformation. Her case highlights how digital journalism often attracts repression, particularly in authoritarian regimes, but also the resilience of journalists in the face of such challenges (UNESCO, 2021).

These instances reveal the challenges digital journalists face, from government censorship to physical threats, and the urgent need for stronger protections for press freedom.

3. Impact of Whistleblowers and Leaks:

Whistleblowers and leaks have played a pivotal role in exposing corruption, surveillance, and unethical practices, significantly impacting public discourse and policy in the digital age.

1. Edward Snowden and Mass Surveillance (2013): Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked classified information revealing global surveillance programs operated by the NSA and its allies. His disclosures exposed the extent of mass data collection, including the surveillance of Indian citizens through programs like PRISM. Snowden's revelations sparked global debates on privacy and prompted policy changes in several countries (Greenwald, 2014).
2. WikiLeaks and Cablegate (2010): WikiLeaks, founded by Julian Assange, released a trove of classified U.S. diplomatic cables that exposed corruption, war crimes, and political intrigue. The leaks had ripple effects in India as well, with cables revealing insights into India-U.S. diplomatic relations and internal

political dynamics. WikiLeaks highlighted how digital platforms can disrupt traditional power structures by making confidential information accessible to the public (Khullar, 2011).

3. Cambridge Analytica Scandal (2018): While not a traditional whistleblower case, the exposure of Facebook's data misuse by whistleblower Christopher Wylie revealed how personal data was harvested and used to influence elections, including in India. The case underscored the need for stronger data protection laws and raised awareness about the intersection of privacy, technology, and democracy (Cadwalladr, 2018).

These cases illustrate the profound influence of whistleblowers and leaks in the digital era, empowering citizens with information while challenging governments and corporations to operate transparently and ethically.

Future Perspectives:

1. Technological Advancements:

Technological advancements have the potential to revolutionize journalism by improving efficiency, transparency, and accessibility. Key developments include:

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI is transforming the newsroom by automating tasks such as fact-checking, data analysis, and content creation. For instance, tools like *Google's Fact Check Explorer* use AI to verify claims, while platforms like *Reuters' Lynx Insights* assist reporters in identifying patterns within large datasets (Bradshaw, 2021). However, AI also poses ethical concerns, such as algorithmic biases and the rise of deepfakes, which could undermine trust in journalism.
2. Blockchain Technology: Blockchain can address issues like content authenticity, copyright protection, and secure payment systems for independent journalists. Decentralized platforms like *Civil* aim to create immutable records of published articles, ensuring that journalistic content cannot be tampered with or censored post-publication (Kunova, M. (2024)).
3. New Tools for Storytelling: Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are emerging as immersive tools for storytelling, allowing audiences to engage with stories in a more impactful way. For example, Indian outlets like *The Quint* have experimented with 360-degree videos to cover events such as protests and natural disasters, providing viewers with a sense of presence on the ground (Mehta, 2021).

While these advancements present exciting opportunities, their adoption must be guided by ethical principles to ensure they enhance, rather than compromise, journalistic integrity.

2. Policy Recommendations:

To safeguard freedom of expression in the digital era, it is essential to establish comprehensive policies that balance rights with responsibilities:

1. Strengthening Data Protection Laws: India's recently enacted Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) is a step forward, but it must be implemented transparently to prevent misuse and ensure accountability. Provisions should be strengthened to safeguard journalists and whistleblowers from surveillance (Mohan.S, 2024).

2. **Combatting Misinformation:** Governments, media organizations, and tech platforms must collaborate on initiatives to combat misinformation while respecting free speech. This includes promoting media literacy programs, establishing independent fact-checking bodies, and regulating content moderation to avoid arbitrary takedowns (Goswami & Verma, 2022).
3. **Global Collaboration for Digital Rights:** International frameworks should align to uphold freedom of expression across borders. Initiatives like the Christchurch Call should be expanded to include a broader focus on disinformation and online harassment (UNESCO, 2021).
4. **Platform Accountability:** Mandating transparency reports, algorithmic audits, and independent oversight of tech companies can prevent the abuse of power by digital platforms. India's IT Rules (2021) should be refined to provide clearer guidelines on content moderation while safeguarding users' rights (Bansal & Kaur, 2022).

By implementing these measures, governments and civil societies can create an environment that fosters free, fair, and safe journalism.

3. A Vision for Free Expression:

A sustainable vision for freedom of expression in the digital age requires a multi-stakeholder approach that addresses technological, social, and ethical dimensions.

1. **Ensuring Balanced Journalism:** Journalists must prioritize accuracy and impartiality to rebuild public trust in media. Media organizations should invest in training and resources to equip reporters with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of digital reporting.
2. **Promoting Inclusivity:** Digital platforms and newsrooms should ensure representation of marginalized voices to create a more inclusive media ecosystem. Initiatives like India's *Khabar Lahariya*, a digital news outlet run by rural women, serve as powerful examples of grassroots journalism that challenges systemic inequalities (Banaji, 2021).
3. **Fostering a Culture of Safety:** Governments, platforms, and civil society must work together to protect journalists from physical and online threats. This includes strengthening legal protections, enhancing cybersecurity, and creating support networks for journalists facing harassment or censorship (UNESCO, 2021).

By leveraging technology, implementing robust policies, and fostering ethical journalism, it is possible to create an environment where free expression thrives alongside accountability and inclusivity.

Conclusion:

Journalism remains an indispensable pillar of democracy, serving as a watchdog, a voice for the marginalized, and a crucial bridge between the governed and those in power. In a diverse and pluralistic society like India, the media plays a vital role in fostering accountability and enabling public discourse. The digital era has significantly amplified journalism's reach and impact, transforming it into a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and exposing corruption. However, to ensure that journalism continues to thrive as a safeguard of democratic values, the foundational principle of freedom of expression must be protected.

This paper has highlighted the dual role of the digital era in reshaping journalism, presenting both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, the democratization of information has empowered citizen journalism and amplified marginalized voices, while technological advancements, such as AI and blockchain, have enhanced reporting tools and promoted greater transparency. Digital platforms have also expanded journalism's global reach, fostering impactful collaborations like the Panama Papers and Pegasus Project. On the other hand, challenges persist, including government surveillance and censorship, such as in the Pegasus spyware case, which pose threats to press freedom. Online harassment, particularly against women journalists, and the proliferation of misinformation undermine credibility and safety. Furthermore, platform algorithms and opaque content moderation policies risk introducing bias and suppressing dissenting voices.

To address these issues and protect the future of journalism, a collaborative approach involving governments, tech platforms, and civil society is essential. Governments must strengthen legal protections for journalists, uphold constitutional guarantees like Article 19(1)(a), and implement transparent data protection laws while ensuring proportional regulation of digital platforms. Tech platforms should prioritize transparency in algorithmic operations and moderation policies, invest in tools to combat misinformation, and protect journalists from harassment. Civil society has a crucial role to play in promoting media literacy programs to build public resilience against misinformation and advocating for the rights of journalists and marginalized voices through grassroots movements and international collaborations. By fostering this multi-stakeholder approach, India can ensure that journalism continues to safeguard democracy while embracing the transformative potential of the digital age.

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