



Gender Disparity, Digital Divide, and Online Violence: Barriers to Sustainable Representation of Women in Indian Journalism

*Praveen

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication

Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India

Abstract

Despite decades of expansion in Indian journalism, women remain structurally underrepresented as news subjects, sources, bylined writers, television panellists, and newsroom decision-makers, and this gap is increasingly compounded by unequal digital access and rising online violence that make sustained participation in the profession harder rather than easier. This paper synthesises evidence from major cross-national and India-specific monitoring studies published between 2019 and 2025 to assess whether this disparity has narrowed and whether these compounding barriers have eased. Drawing on the Global Media Monitoring Project, UN Women-Newslaundry newsroom audits, the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report, and UNESCO-ICFJ studies on online violence, the review finds that women accounted for just 14% of news subjects and sources in India in the most recent nationally coordinated count, down from 22% in 2010; that women wrote roughly one in four print bylines and held almost no top editorial positions at sampled newspapers; that the South Asian mobile internet gender gap stood at 32% in 2024, more than double the global low- and middle-income country average; and that 75% of women journalists surveyed globally in 2025 reported online violence, up from 73% in 2020, with reports of offline spillover more than doubling. The paper concludes that gender disparity in Indian journalism has not meaningfully narrowed and, on several indicators, is worsening, and argues that closing this gap sustainably requires media organisations to combine leadership reform with digital-safety and connectivity measures, an approach for which women-led outlets such as Khabar Lahariya offer a working model.

Keywords

Gender Disparity; Women Journalists; Media Representation; Indian Journalism; Digital Divide; Online Violence

1. Introduction

The term journalism originates from the French journal, itself derived from the Latin diurnal, meaning a daily register of events [1], and refers broadly to the collection and communication of information about current events through written words, sounds, or images [2]. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines journalism as "the collection and editing of material of current interest for presentation, publication, or broadcast" [3], and reporting within it is conventionally organised around six questions -- what, when, where, who, why, and how [4]. As a profession, journalism in its modern form has a history spanning more than two centuries [5], and for much of that history it has been treated as a masculine domain, with women journalists having to establish their place in the profession against that assumption.



That assumption persists in measurable form. The seventh round of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the largest and longest-running study of gender in the world's news media, found in 2025 that women accounted for just 26% of the people seen, heard, or read about in news content worldwide -- a rise of only nine percentage points since the project began in 1995, when the figure stood at 17% [6]. This persistent gap is the central problem this paper addresses: despite the continued expansion of Indian media -- more newspapers, more news channels, and a rapidly growing digital news sector -- the available evidence suggests that women's presence in, and influence over, Indian journalism has not kept pace, and in some respects may be regressing.

Building on this problem, the specific objectives of this paper are to:

- trace the historical trajectory of women's participation in Indian journalism and the structural barriers that have shaped it;
- synthesise the most recent (2019-2025) empirical evidence on women's representation in Indian print bylines, television panels, and newsroom leadership, alongside global GMMP trend data;
- assess two barriers that compound this disparity in the current period -- the digital access gap and the rise of online violence against women journalists -- using the latest available (2024-2025) data; and
- evaluate the Khabar Lahariya model of women-led rural journalism as a counter-example, and draw out recommendations for media organisations and policymakers.

This paper updates and substantially extends an earlier review of this topic conducted in 2024, replacing dated secondary statistics with the most recent published data available at the time of writing and reframing the analysis around a systematic, thematically organised synthesis of primary monitoring studies rather than a general narrative account. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and sets out the theoretical framework; Section 3 describes the review methodology; Section 4 presents the synthesised findings; Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to theory; and Section 6 concludes with implications and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Trajectory of Women in Indian Journalism

Women's entry into Indian journalism was gradual and contested. Vidya Munshi is widely recorded as the first mainstream female journalist in India, entering the profession in 1942 out of a sense of responsibility to her community, while Pratima Puri became, in 1965, the first prominent woman newsreader on Doordarshan, popularly termed the "First Lady of Indian Television" [7]. Homai Vyarawalla, India's first female photojournalist, covered Delhi and, during the Second World War, reported for the Indian station of the British Information Service, working in conditions that were treated as extraordinary for a woman at the time [7]; Prabha Dutt, denied permission by her own newspaper to cover the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, travelled to the frontlines regardless, and her dispatches were later published [7]. Jha's [8] early study of Indian women journalists documented widespread instances in which male colleagues trivialised or dismissed the professional difficulties women faced, and Byerly's [9] global report on the status of women in news media situated the Indian case within a broader pattern in which women's historical entry into journalism has rarely translated into proportionate influence within newsroom hierarchies.

2.2. Global Measures of Women's Presence in News: The GMMP Series

The GMMP provides the longest continuous cross-national record of women's presence in news content, monitoring the same indicators every five years since 1995. Progress on this measure has been uneven rather than steady: the global figure held flat at 24% between the 2010 and 2015 rounds, a period the GMMP's own analysis described as progress having almost stalled, before resuming a slow rise [10], [11]. Its most recent, 2025 round found that women made up 26% of news subjects and sources worldwide, that women's presence as reporters had risen to 41% globally (from 28% three decades earlier), and that Asia and the Middle East remained the lowest-scoring regions, with women comprising only 19% of subjects and sources [6]. Coverage of gender-based violence, monitored for the first time as a distinct indicator in this round, accounted for under 2% of all news stories globally despite the scale of the issue [6]. India's most recent nationally coordinated GMMP count, conducted in 2020 by the Network of Women in Media, India, found women's presence as news subjects and sources at just 14%, a marked decline from 22% in 2010 and 21% in 2015 [12] -- indicating that, unlike the gradual global improvement, India's trajectory on this specific indicator has moved in the opposite direction over the past decade.

2.3. Gender Disparity in Indian Print and Broadcast Newsrooms

Two large India-specific newsroom audits, both conducted by UN Women in partnership with Newslaundry, provide the most detailed available picture of gender disparity within Indian media organisations. The first, covering 55 organisations across 10 cities, found that women made up only around a quarter of writers at sampled English newspapers and wrote about one in five of their articles, with the imbalance considerably worse in Hindi papers, where women made up 17% of writers and were credited with only 11% of bylines; digital media performed comparatively better, with women contributing close to 40% of articles at sampled digital outlets [13]. The same audit found that none of the sampled newspapers had a woman in the top editorial role, compared with 26.3% of leadership positions held by women at online news portals, 20.9% at television channels, and 13.6% at magazines [13]. A follow-up audit covering the 2019-2020 period found the imbalance largely unchanged or worse: across mainstream English and Hindi newspapers, three of every four articles were authored by men, and on television debates men held roughly four of every five panel seats, rising to nine in ten on Hindi-language channels [14]. Vaishali's [15] qualitative study of women journalists at Kannada television channels similarly found that, despite growing numbers of women entering broadcast journalism, career advancement into senior editorial or anchoring roles remained comparatively slow, echoing the national leadership figures reported above.

2.4. Structural Barriers, Beat Segregation, and the Glass Ceiling

Beyond aggregate representation figures, several studies point to a pattern of occupational segregation within Indian newsrooms. Bhagat's [16] national survey for the National Commission for Women found that women journalists widely felt they had to be "twice as good" as male colleagues to be taken seriously, and identified organisational norms -- rather than a lack of ambition or ability -- as the primary obstacle to women's advancement into senior or high-profile beats such as politics, crime, and sports. Tomar [17] similarly highlights the persistent underrepresentation of women's issues and concerns in mainstream coverage, framing this as a direct consequence of women's continued exclusion from editorial decision-making rather than a simple oversight in content selection, a conclusion Sharma and Sanjeev [18] reach independently in their critique of how Indian print and electronic media portray women during economic liberalisation and globalisation.

2.5. Gendered Portrayal in Entertainment Media and Advertising

The same asymmetry that limits women's presence in newsrooms is reflected in how women are portrayed across Indian film, television, and advertising. Munshi's [19] analysis of Indian television found that popular soap operas consistently romanticise women's loyalty to family obligations over individual autonomy, while Bathla [20] argues that Indian media's broader silence on women's issues and movements reflects and reinforces women's marginalisation as full participants in public life rather than merely private, domestic actors. This pattern extends to advertising, where working women are still frequently depicted in relation to beauty and domestic-product marketing that narrows, rather than broadens, the range of femininity presented to audiences.

2.6. Digital Access and the Gender Divide

As Indian journalism has moved increasingly online, unequal digital access has become an additional barrier to women's participation as both producers and consumers of news. Early reporting on this gap found that India accounted for a disproportionate share of the global digital gender divide, with women's mobile phone and internet usage rates trailing men's by a wide margin [21]. More recent, systematically collected data confirms that this gap has not closed: the GSMA's 2025 Mobile Gender Gap Report found that, while the gender gap in mobile internet use across low- and middle-income countries overall stood at 14% in 2024, the gap in South Asia was more than double that, at 32% -- the widest of any region alongside sub-Saharan Africa [22]. Because digital literacy is now a practical prerequisite for participation in much of Indian journalism, particularly at the growing digital-native outlets where women's byline share is comparatively higher [13], this regional digital divide represents a direct constraint on women's ability to enter and sustain careers in the profession, not merely a general social inequality running alongside it.

2.7. Online Violence Against Women Journalists

There is another and increasingly severe type of violence that has been recorded in recent literature and is taking place online against women journalists. In the original 2020 survey, the UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists' (ICFJ) groundbreaking global study revealed that 73% of women journalists faced online violence during their reporting activities, primarily through access to private messages, threats of physical or sexual violence, and coordinated attacks related to disinformation campaigns [23]. A subsequent survey in 2025 of more than 6,400 journalists in 119 countries revealed this figure had increased to 75%, with the percentage of female journalists reporting online attacks that had extended offline to women who were victims of harassment, intimidation or assault more than doubling, from 20% in 2020 to 42% in 2025 [24]. This escalation is a direct disincentive for women to continue their participation in the profession and also expand their visibility in the profession in the Indian context as it is now integral to how journalists create and maintain a professional public profile on the Internet.

2.8. Alternative and Feminist Journalism Models: The Khabar Lahariya Case

In this context of structural, digital and safety-based barriers, Khabar Lahariya provides a documented counter-example. Established in 2002, and staffed since 2015 by the digital media company Chambal Media, with an estimated reach of 5 million people each month via digital platforms, the newspaper is run by women reporters, many of whom are from Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim communities, who are based in the Bundelkhand region, and work in roughly 2-3 dozen districts across Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh [25]. Its founder Kavita Devi has called into question its origins, given the scepticism leveled by some that the news could be reported by rural, often illiterate, women [26]. The fact that Khabar Lahariya continues to grow and be recognized internationally shows that the barriers listed above are not a hurdle, but at the same time, it

also shows that the fully women-led newsroom is an exemplary counter-trend to the pattern of barriers women have faced in other newsrooms as documented in Sections 2.3 and 2.4.

2.9. Theoretical Framework

The paper uses three related theoretical frameworks. The theory of the symbolic annihilation of women in mass media of communication, as detailed by Tuchman [27] is used to address the chronic underrepresentation of women documented by the GMMP and the Indian newsroom audits, which posits that women are less visible, trivialised or condemned within media content in a manner that reflects, and reinforces, their marginal status in society at large. The structural barriers to women's entry into senior editorial roles are addressed within the framework of Kanter's [28] theory of structural tokenism, which posits that organisations with a low percentage of the specific group in top positions are likely to create structural barriers for that group based on informal networks, mentoring deficits, and increased scrutiny of the token's performance. Finally, the emergence of alternative, women-led outlets such as Khabar Lahariya is approached through feminist media theory [29], which frames women's active production of media content -- rather than their passive representation within it -- as a direct challenge to patriarchal media structures. Taken together, these three frameworks generate the expectation that gender disparity in Indian journalism will persist wherever structural barriers to entry and advancement remain unaddressed, but that it can be directly counteracted by women's own control over media production.

Taken together, this literature establishes that women's underrepresentation in Indian journalism is well documented at the level of content, bylines, and leadership, and that this underrepresentation is increasingly compounded by two more recent barriers -- unequal digital access and online violence -- that received comparatively little attention in earlier reviews of this topic. What remains missing is a single, updated synthesis that brings these older representation findings together with the most recent (2024-2025) digital-divide and online-safety data to assess whether the overall gender gap in Indian journalism is narrowing or widening. The present paper addresses this gap.

3. Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic set of procedures used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a research topic [30]. This paper does not collect new primary data; instead, it uses a structured narrative review design to synthesise findings from the major existing empirical studies of gender in Indian and global journalism, prioritising the most recently published data available at the time of writing.

3.1. Research Design

A structured narrative review design was adopted, combining a systematic search for relevant primary data sources with a thematic synthesis of their findings. This design was chosen over primary data collection (for example, a fresh byline count or panel audit) because several well-resourced, large-sample studies already provide recent, methodologically robust data covering the same indicators this paper set out to examine; the contribution of this paper lies in bringing that dispersed evidence together, updating it with 2024-2025 sources, and interpreting it through the theoretical framework set out in Section 2.9, rather than in duplicating existing data collection.

3.2. Search Strategy and Sources

Sources were identified through a combination of targeted searches of the websites of the principal monitoring bodies in this field -- the World Association for Christian Communication (publisher of the GMMP), UN Women, Newslaundry, UNESCO, the International Center for Journalists, and the GSMA -- and general academic and news-database searches using the terms "women journalists," "gender disparity," "newsroom gender gap," "digital gender gap," and "online violence against women journalists," restricted to India-focused or globally comparative sources published between 2015 and 2026. Six primary data sources anchor the synthesis presented in Section 4: the GMMP 2020 and 2025 rounds [12], [6]; the UN Women-Newslaundry 2019 and 2021 Indian newsroom audits [13], [14]; the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025 [22]; and the UNESCO-ICFJ online violence studies of 2020 and 2025 [23], [24].

3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they reported quantitative, sample-based findings on women's representation, participation, or safety in journalism or news media, and if the underlying survey, count, or monitoring exercise was clearly described. Sources were excluded if they consisted only of unattributed statistics, single-case anecdotes without a stated sample, or commentary that did not reference an identifiable underlying study. Where more recent data on the same indicator was available, the most recent source was prioritised in Section 4, with earlier sources retained in Section 2 to illustrate change over time.

3.4. Analytical Approach

Findings extracted from the included sources were organised thematically around four indicators identified in the literature review: (i) women's presence in news content as subjects, sources, and reporters; (ii) women's participation in bylines and newsroom leadership; (iii) the digital access gap; and (iv) online violence against women journalists. Frequencies and percentages were reported as published in the original sources; no new statistical computation was performed beyond direct comparison of figures across years and across the sources described in Section 3.2.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

Because this paper synthesises rather than independently verifies the findings of others, its reliability rests on the credibility of the underlying sources. All six anchor sources listed in Section 3.2 are large-sample studies (ranging from several hundred to several thousand respondents, articles, or news items) conducted or commissioned by established international bodies (WACC, UN Women, UNESCO, ICFJ, GSMA) using publicly documented methodologies, which supports the validity of treating them as authoritative for the indicators they measure. A limitation of this approach, discussed further in Section 5.7, is that the paper cannot resolve methodological differences between studies (for example, differing sample frames between the 2019 and 2021 Indian newsroom audits) and instead reports each source's findings as published.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This paper draws exclusively on previously published, publicly available aggregate data and involved no direct contact with, or collection of data from, human participants. All sources are cited to their original publishers, and no individual survey respondent identified in the underlying studies is named or otherwise identifiable in this paper.

4. Results

This section reports the synthesised findings from the six anchor sources objectively, organised by the four themes set out in Section 3.4; interpretation in relation to theory is presented in Section 5.

4.1. Women's Presence in News Content: Global and Indian Trends

Table 1. Women as News Subjects and Sources: GMMP Trend Data, 1995-2025

Scope	Year	Women as Subjects/Sources	Source
Global	1995	17%	GMMP
Global	2010	24%	GMMP
Global	2015	24%	GMMP
Global	2020	25%	GMMP
Global	2025	26%	GMMP
Global (Asia region)	2025	19%	GMMP
India	2010	22%	GMMP
India	2015	21%	GMMP
India	2020	14%	GMMP

Table 1 shows that the global figure for women's presence as news subjects and sources rose from 17% in 1995 to 26% in 2025, a nine-point increase over thirty years [6]. That increase was not steady: the global figure held flat at 24% between 2010 and 2015, a period the GMMP's own analysis described as progress having almost stalled [10], [11], before resuming a slow rise to 25% in 2020 and 26% in 2025 [12], [6]. Over the same broad period, India's own trend moved in the opposite direction on this indicator, falling from 22% in 2010 to 14% in 2020, the most recent nationally coordinated count available [12]. Globally, women's presence as reporters reached 41% in 2025, up from 28% three decades earlier [6], and coverage of gender-based violence, monitored as a distinct indicator for the first time in 2025, accounted for under 2% of news stories worldwide [6].

4.2. Bylines and Newsroom Leadership in Indian Print and Broadcast Media

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Bylines, Panels, and Leadership in Indian Media (2019-2021)

Indicator	Category	Value	Study Year
Print Bylines	English-language papers, articles by women	~20%	2019
Print Bylines	Hindi-language papers, articles by women	11%	2019
Print Bylines	All mainstream papers, articles by men	~75%	2021
Digital Bylines	Sampled digital outlets, articles by women	~40%	2019
TV Panels	English-channel debate seats held by men	~80%	2021
TV Panels	Hindi-channel debate seats held by men	~90%	2021
Newsroom Leadership	Top editorial roles held by women, newspapers	0%	2019
Newsroom Leadership	Editors/proprietors at top newspapers held by women (est.)	~13%	2022
Newsroom	Leadership roles held by women, TV channels	20.9%	2019

Leadership

Newsroom Leadership	Leadership roles held by women, online portals	26.3%	2019
Newsroom Leadership	Leadership roles held by women, magazines	13.6%	2019

Table 2 shows that women's byline share was lowest in Hindi-language newspapers (11%) and highest in digital media (around 40%) as of the 2019 audit [13], and that the follow-up 2021 audit found men still held roughly three of every four print bylines and the large majority of television panel seats, with the imbalance more pronounced on Hindi-language channels [14]. None of the sampled newspapers in the 2019 audit had a woman in the top editorial role, compared with leadership shares of 26.3% at online portals, 20.9% at TV channels, and 13.6% at magazines [13]. A later industry estimate for 2022 put the share of editors and proprietors who were women at roughly 13% across India's leading newspapers [31], suggesting modest movement away from the 0% figure recorded in 2019, though this later estimate uses a broader definition of top roles (editors and proprietors combined) and is not directly comparable on a like-for-like basis.

4.3. The Digital Access Gap

Table 3. Mobile Internet Gender Gap, by Region (2024)

Region	Mobile Internet Gender Gap
Low- and middle-income countries (overall)	14%
South Asia	32%
Sub-Saharan Africa	29%

Table 3 shows that the mobile internet gender gap across low- and middle-income countries stood at 14% in 2024, having stalled after narrowing in 2023, while South Asia's gap of 32% was more than double the overall figure and, together with sub-Saharan Africa's 29%, was the widest of any region monitored [22].

4.4. Online Violence Against Women Journalists

Table 4. Online Violence Against Women Journalists: 2020 vs. 2025 Survey Findings

Indicator	2020 Survey	2025 Survey
Experienced online violence while working	73%	75%
Linked online attacks to offline harm	20%	42%

Table 4 shows that the share of women journalists reporting online violence rose from 73% in the 2020 UNESCO-ICFJ survey [23] to 75% in the 2025 follow-up survey of over 6,400 respondents across 119 countries, while the share reporting that online attacks had spilled into offline harm more than doubled, from 20% to 42%, over the same period [24].

4.5. Composite Summary

Table 5. Composite Summary of Headline Indicators

Theme	Headline Indicator	Most Recent Value
Content	India: women as news subjects/sources (2020)	14%
Bylines	India: women's byline share, Hindi papers (2019)	11%
Leadership	India: women in top newspaper editorial roles (2019)	0%
Digital access	South Asia: mobile internet gender gap (2024)	32%

Safety	Global: women journalists reporting online violence (2025)	75%
Safety	Global: online attacks linked to offline harm (2025)	42%

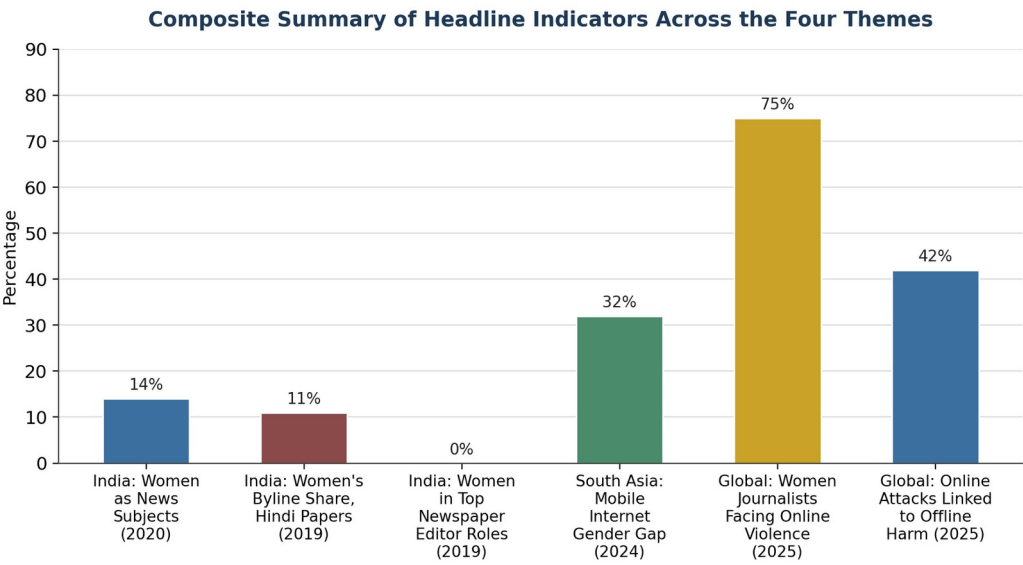


Fig. 1. Composite Summary of Headline Indicators Across the Four Themes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Symbolic Annihilation and Chronic Underrepresentation

The GMMP trend data in Table 1 offers direct empirical support for Tuchman's [27] theory of the symbolic annihilation of women in mass media: at 14% presence as news subjects and sources in 2020, Indian women are, in Tuchman's terms, rendered largely invisible in the content that constitutes the country's news agenda, and the decline from 22% in 2010 suggests this invisibility is deepening rather than resolving with time. The fact that global figures improved modestly over the same period, while India's figure fell, indicates that whatever structural factors are driving change elsewhere are not operating, or are being offset by other forces, within the Indian news industry specifically.

5.2. Structural Barriers and the Glass Ceiling in Indian Newsrooms

The newsroom leadership figures in Table 2 -- zero women in the top editorial role across sampled newspapers in 2019, rising only to an estimated 13% by 2022, and shares ranging from roughly 14% to 26% across other media types -- are consistent with Kanter's [28] account of structural tokenism: with so few women in senior positions to begin with, the informal networks, sponsorship, and visibility that typically enable further advancement remain concentrated among men, reproducing the imbalance across successive cohorts of journalists rather than narrowing it. The modest movement recorded between 2019 and 2022 is consistent with tokenism theory's own prediction that change, where it occurs at all under these conditions, tends to be slow and partial rather than structural. This reading is reinforced by Bhagat's [16] finding that women journalists feel they must outperform male peers simply to be considered equally credible, and by the persistence of beat segregation documented by Tomar [17] and Sharma and Sanjeev [18], in which women remain concentrated in features and lifestyle coverage rather than the politics, crime, and business beats that more often lead to senior editorial roles.

5.3. The Compounding Effect of the Digital Divide

The 32% mobile internet gender gap recorded in South Asia in 2024 (Table 3) is not simply a background social-inequality statistic; given that digital-native outlets now offer the comparatively best byline representation for women (around 40%, per Table 2), a regional digital access gap more than double the global low- and middle-income country average represents a direct structural constraint on the growth of the very media segment where women's participation is currently strongest. In effect, the segment of Indian journalism best positioned to narrow the gender gap documented in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 is itself constrained by unequal digital access.

5.4. Escalating Online Violence as a New Barrier

The rise in online violence documented in Table 4 -- from 73% to 75% of women journalists surveyed globally between 2020 and 2025, with the share reporting offline spillover more than doubling to 42% -- adds a safety-related barrier to entry and retention that was largely absent from earlier reviews of gender disparity in Indian journalism. Read alongside feminist media theory [29], which treats women's active production of media content as itself a form of resistance to patriarchal structures, this trend suggests that online violence functions, whether by design or effect, as a mechanism that raises the personal cost of that resistance specifically for women who achieve public visibility as journalists.

5.5. The Khabar Lahariya Counter-Model

Khabar Lahariya's growth to an estimated 5 million monthly reach through an all-women reporting network [25] demonstrates that the barriers documented in Sections 5.1-5.4 are not insurmountable, and offers a practical illustration of feminist media theory [29] in action: by controlling production rather than merely appearing within content produced by others, the outlet has built a large, sustained audience while training several hundred rural women in digital journalism skills, directly addressing the digital-literacy dimension of the gap documented in Section 5.3 [26]. At the same time, its scale relative to the size of the Indian news industry as a whole means it functions more as a proof of concept than as a structural solution to the disparities documented at the sector level in Table 2.

5.6. Overall Synthesis

Read together, the evidence synthesised in Section 4 does not support a narrative of steady, if slow, improvement in Indian women's position in journalism. Women's presence in Indian news content declined over the past decade even as the comparable global figure improved; newsroom leadership remains close to entirely male at the top of the country's largest newspapers; the digital access gap that increasingly determines who can participate in the fastest-growing part of the industry is wider in South Asia than in almost any other region; and the personal cost of public visibility as a woman journalist, measured through online violence, has risen sharply in the same period. Only the Khabar Lahariya case offers a clear counter-trend, and it does so precisely by operating outside the mainstream structures in which the other indicators were measured. Taken as a whole, these findings describe a gap not just in who is present in Indian journalism at a given moment, but in whether that presence can be sustained: representation gains are undermined where digital access is unequal and where the personal cost of visibility, measured through online violence, keeps rising, making women's participation in the profession harder to sustain rather than easier.

5.7. Limitations

This review has several limitations. First, as a synthesis of secondary data, it cannot resolve methodological differences between the underlying studies -- for example, differences in sample frame or newspaper

selection between the 2019 and 2021 Indian newsroom audits [13], [14] -- and instead reports each source's findings as published. Second, no India-specific figure from the 2025 GMMP round was available in accessible published form at the time of writing; the most recent confirmed India-level figure used in Section 4.1 is therefore the 2020 round, and the true current figure may differ. Third, the online-violence data in Section 4.4 is global rather than India-specific, since no comparably large India-only survey on this topic was identified during the search described in Section 3.2. Finally, this review does not include primary interviews with Indian women journalists, which would allow the structural patterns identified here to be examined against journalists' own accounts of their experience -- a valuable direction for future research.

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to determine whether the gender disparity long documented in Indian journalism has narrowed in the period since it was last reviewed. The synthesised evidence indicates that it has not: women's presence in Indian news content fell over the past decade even as the global figure improved, newsroom leadership in the country's largest newspapers remains almost entirely male, and two barriers that received little attention in earlier reviews -- the regional digital access gap and the sharp rise in online violence against women journalists -- have emerged as significant additional constraints on women's full participation in the profession. The one clear counter-trend, the continued growth of the women-led outlet Khabar Lahariya, demonstrates that these barriers can be overcome but has not, on the evidence reviewed here, translated into comparable change across the mainstream Indian news industry.

The practical implication is that closing this gap requires Indian media organisations to move beyond recruitment alone and address newsroom leadership pipelines, digital-safety support for women journalists, and the underlying digital access gap simultaneously, since the evidence reviewed here suggests these barriers are compounding rather than independent. Future research should prioritise an India-specific, large-sample study of online violence against women journalists to fill the data gap identified in Section 5.7, a fresh national byline and newsroom leadership audit to update the 2019-2021 figures relied on in this paper, and qualitative research capturing Indian women journalists' own accounts of navigating the structural, digital, and safety-related barriers identified in this review. Framed this way, closing the gap is not only a matter of improving representation at a single point in time, but of making women's participation in Indian journalism sustainable over a career -- which is precisely where the digital-access and online-safety barriers identified in this review currently do the most damage.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the researchers and organisations whose publicly published monitoring data -- GMMP, UN Women, Newslaundry, GSMA, UNESCO, and the International Center for Journalists -- made this synthesis possible.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

This paper does not have primary data. All figures reported in Section 4 are drawn from the publicly available published reports cited throughout the paper and listed in Section 13.

AI Usage Disclosure

No generative AI or writing assistant was used during manuscript preparation to assist with anything.

Author Contributions

Author contributions are reported using the CRediT taxonomy. Praveen: Conceptualization, Supervision, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft. Kusham Lata: Review & Editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

References

- [1] S. Kundra, *Fundamentals of Journalism*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2005.
- [2] N. C. Pant and J. Kumar, *Dimensions of Modern Journalism*. Delhi: Kaniksha Publishers and Distributors, 1995.
- [3] Webster's Third New International Dictionary, "Journalism." [Online]. Available: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/journalism>
- [4] Journalist Journal, "What is journalism anyway?," 2008. [Online]. Available: <http://journalistjournal-emike.blogspot.in/2008/01/what-is-journalism-anyway.html>
- [5] N. Shamsi, *Encyclopaedia of Mass Communication in Twenty-First Century*, vol. I. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2005.
- [6] World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and UN Women, "Global Media Monitoring Project 2025: Who makes the news?," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://whomakesthenews.org/>
- [7] A. Joseph, "Working, watching and waiting: Women and issues of access, employment and decision-making in the media in India," UN Women, 2002. [Online]. Available: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/EP4Joseph.PDF>
- [8] R. Jha, *Women Journalists: Issues and Concerns*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992.
- [9] C. M. Byerly, *Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media*. Washington, D.C.: International Women's Media Foundation, 2011.
- [10] World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), "Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project 2010," 2010. [Online]. Available: <https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2010-reports>
- [11] S. Macharia, "Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 report," World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), 2015. [Online]. Available: <https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2015>
- [12] World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), "Global Media Monitoring Project 2020: Who makes the news?," 2021. [Online]. Available: https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL20210713.pdf
- [13] UN Women, Newslaundry, and Teamwork Arts, "Gender inequality in Indian media: A preliminary analysis," 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/gender-inequality-in-indian-media-a-preliminary-analysis/>
- [14] Newslaundry, UN Women, and Hyatt, "Gender representation in Indian newsrooms," 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/07/13/newsroom-gender-gap-men-get-over-80-of-tv-panel-slots-75-of-bylines>
- [15] H. B. Vaishali, "Role of women journalists: A study of Kannada television channels," unpublished study, 2015.

- [16] P. Bhagat, "Status of women journalists in the print media," National Commission for Women, 2004. [Online]. Available: <http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/status%20of%20women%20journalists%20in%20india.pdf>
- [17] R. Tomar, "Representation of women's issues in the media: Bridging the gender gap," unpublished research paper, 2011.
- [18] K. Sharma and Sanjeev, "Media, globalisation and the portrayal of women in India," unpublished article, 2005.
- [19] S. Munshi, *Remote Control: Indian Television and the Construction of Middle-Class Identity*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2010.
- [20] S. Bathla, *Women, Democracy and the Media: Cultural Reconstruction in Globalised India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004.
- [21] Livemint, "She is offline: India's digital gender divide," 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/sD6mVqLAEa7cvfJtmdXXuO/She-is-offlineIndias-digital-gender-divide.html>
- [22] GSMA, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/>
- [23] J. Posetti and N. Shabbir, Eds., *The Chilling: A Global Study of Online Violence Against Women Journalists*. Paris: UNESCO and International Center for Journalists, 2022.
- [24] UN Women, UNESCO, and International Center for Journalists, "Tipping point: The chilling escalation of violence against women in the public sphere in the age of AI," 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-survey-reveals-rising-violence-against-women-journalists>
- [25] Chambal Media, "Khabar Lahariya." [Online]. Available: <https://chambalmedia.com/khabar-lahariya/>
- [26] UN News, "From rural margins to media trailblazers: India's women journalists are rewriting the news," 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166917>
- [27] G. Tuchman, "The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, G. Tuchman, A. K. Daniels, and J. Benet, Eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 3-38.
- [28] R. M. Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- [29] L. van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage Publications, 1994.
- [30] C. R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, 2nd ed. New Delhi: New Age International, 2004.
- [31] Newslaundry, "87 per cent of editors and proprietors at India's top newspapers are men," 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.newslaundry.com>