Short-Form Video Platforms and the Crisis of News Credibility in India

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Abstract— **India's news consumption is changing as a result of short-form video platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. A Bain & Company analysis estimates that by 2020, there were over 200 million short-form video viewers in India, and by 2025, that number is expected to increase to between 600 and 650 million. These sites are among the fastest-growing digital media platforms in the nation, with active users spending about an hour a day on them, according to the same survey. Additionally, according to a RedSeer survey, indigenous applications already draw over 250 million users, with almost two-thirds of them living in tier-2 and lower cities, underscoring the medium's profound societal reach.**

Even with this quick expansion, there are still serious doubts regarding the reliability of the news. Television is still seen as the most reliable news source, according to national surveys like those by the Reuters Institute and Axis My India, while short-form video platforms are ranked far lower. Short films' algorithmic, entertainment-driven, and extremely viral nature increases the likelihood of inaccurate information, hyperbole, and decontextualized reporting.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this article analyses these dynamics by integrating case studies of misinformation occurrences that disseminated between 2023 and 2024, content analysis of viral short-form news videos in different Indian languages, and a nationwide poll of young respondents between the ages of 18 and 30. According to the study, short-form video promotes engagement and democratizes access to information, but it also makes India's journalism's continuing credibility issue worse. The growth of these platforms runs the danger of increasing public mistrust of news and compromising the integrity of democratic information flows in the absence of more robust fact-checking, algorithmic transparency, and focused media literacy initiatives.

Keywords—**Short-form video platforms, News consumption, Youth media habits, News credibility, Misinformation, Digital media in India, Algorithmic amplification**

I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of local apps like Moj and Josh, as well as short-form video (SFV) platforms like YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, has significantly changed how Indian millennials consume news. These platforms, which are expected to have over 600 million users by 2025, have become important information sources, especially for audiences between the ages of 18 and 30, who are both technologically savvy and demographically essential to India's digital transformation (RedSeer Consulting, 2024; Reuters Institute, 2024). By reducing barriers to participation and elevating various regional viewpoints, these platforms democratize access, but they also exacerbate issues of sensationalism, disinformation, and waning public confidence in media (Nielsen & Fletcher, 2020; Banaji & Bhat, 2020). In contrast to traditional media, SFV settings rely heavily on user-generated material and automated curation, which results in little editorial control and makes determining trustworthiness challenging. Expanded inclusivity on the one hand and a crisis of news reliability on the other highlight how urgent it is to look at how SFVs affect young people's interest in current events in India and how they alter more general discussions about media accountability, trust, and democratic discourse.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Over the last ten years, there has been a significant shift in the Indian media landscape. India has grown into one of the world's biggest digital marketplaces, with over 850 million internet users and about 600 million active social media users as of 2025 (Meltwater, 2025). This growth is especially noticeable among young people, who make up the biggest segment of digital users and are thus defined as those between the ages of 18 and 30 (Pew Research

Centre, 2023). In this context, domestic platforms like Moj and Josh, as well as short-form video (SFV) platforms like YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, have become important venues for interacting with news and sociopolitical commentary in addition to amusement. India is expected to have more than 650 million SFV users by 2025, with Tier-II and Tier-III cities seeing the majority of this development (RedSeer Consulting, 2024).

Indian news consumption has always been dominated by print and television. But these models have been upended by the democratization of mobile internet, which has been made possible since 2016 by low-cost smartphones and reasonably priced data plans (Bain & Company, 2021). Although SFVs were first created for amusement, they are now often used as platforms for public discourse, civic engagement, and news dissemination. While there are chances for inclusion because of this dual function, there are also significant worries about legitimacy, false information, and the decline of journalistic standards (Nielsen & Fletcher, 2020; Narayan & Narayanan, 2022).

III. GLOBAL AND INDIAN TRENDS IN DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMPTION

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, social media is becoming the main entry point for younger people, while conventional media trust is steadily declining globally (Reuters Institute, 2023; 2024). The trend is most noticeable in India, where 35% of users under 30 choose television and just 12% resort to print as their primary news source, while over 60% of users under 30 rely on social media (Reuters Institute, 2024).

These days, algorithmic recommendation algorithms power platforms like YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, which act as significant middlemen in deciding what tales young Indians are exposed to. According to research by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI, 2023), more than half of young people would rather watch brief videos than read lengthy articles or whole news broadcasts. Additionally, RedSeer Consulting (2023) highlights that regional and language-specific content shapes SFV development, strengthening voices outside of urban centres.

International organizations also issue risk warnings. The problem of "platformized misinformation," where algorithmic amplification favours sensationalism over veracity, was brought to light by UNESCO in 2022. SFVs speed up the dissemination of false information in India, as evidenced by a number of incidents ranging from election-related propaganda to health disinformation during the COVID-19 epidemic (Banaji & Bhat, 2020)

IV. THE PROBLEM OF NEWS CREDIBILITY

While the emergence of SFVs democratizes access, it also causes a problem of legitimacy. Short-form videos are frequently created by individual creators with little verification, in contrast to traditional news sources with professional editing standards. According to Fletcher and Nielsen (2018), audiences' assessments of credibility are made more difficult by this change, which blurs the lines between journalism and opinion.

This issue is exacerbated in India, where media literacy differs greatly among demographic groups. Chibber and Malik (2021) discovered that since they have less exposure to fact-checking efforts, young people in smaller cities are especially susceptible to false information. The use of SFVs by political actors and influencers to advance partisan narratives is growing, making it more challenging to discern between propaganda and reliable journalism (Thussu, 2021).

V. RESEARCH GAP

Research on short-form video platforms in India is still lacking, despite the fact that studies conducted globally look at social media, disinformation, and young news consumption. Research has frequently focused on usage for entertainment purposes (Athique, 2019) or on the more widespread phenomenon of fake news on digital platforms (Gupta & Kumar, 2020).

Few studies examine how, in the particular sociopolitical and technical environment of India, algorithmically curated SFVs influence young people's views of news trustworthiness. This disparity is crucial. Political, social, and cultural discussions are rapidly taking place online in India, the largest democracy in the world and one of the fastest-growing digital economies. Therefore, it is essential for both scholarship and practice to comprehend how young people negotiate trustworthiness on SFVs.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This work adds to conversations about policy as well as scholarly issues. By applying frameworks of algorithmic gatekeeping and media credibility to India's quickly changing SFV ecosystem, it theoretically expands on these concepts. From a practical standpoint, it offers guidance to journalists, educators, legislators, and tech firms on how to improve digital literacy, platform regulation, and fact-checking efforts to safeguard the integrity of democratic debate.

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth are the most engaged and powerful generation influencing online news cultures, according to research on digital media consumption in India. Since 2016, the news ecosystem has changed dramatically due to the widespread availability of smartphones and inexpensive mobile connectivity. Younger people are increasingly relying on social media platforms for information (Bhatnagar, 2021; Pew Research Centre, 2023). The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 states that social media is the main source of news for about 60% of Indians under 30 years old, outperforming print and television. This change is also emphasized by domestic reports: By 2025, there will be more than 650 million users of short-form video (SFV) platforms in India, according to RedSeer Consulting (2024), with Tier-II and Tier-III cities accounting for two-thirds of this development. This transition is an indication of both a technological and a societal shift, as younger people' access to, interpretation of, and engagement with current affairs have been redefined by the vernacularization of material and the participatory logic of digital platforms (Athique, 2019; Thussu, 2021).

However, the emergence of SFVs as news middlemen presents difficult problems. SFV platforms are influenced by algorithmic recommendation systems that give priority to virality, brevity, and emotive appeal, in contrast to legacy media, where professional gatekeeping controls the flow of content (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). Sensational, eye-catching, or emotionally charged information has more attention as a result, frequently at the price of accuracy or context. According to UNESCO (2022), this type of "platformized misinformation" might hasten the spread of false narratives, especially in settings with unequal access to digital literacy. Similar issues are reflected in Indian scholarship: Young users were disproportionately impacted by social media misinformation about COVID-19 and election politics, as shown by Banaji and Bhat (2020); Narayan and Narayanan (2022) further contend that the lack of robust fact-checking infrastructure on SFV platforms increases susceptibility to rumours, conspiracy theories, and propaganda. On sites such as YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, the distinction between knowledge and entertainment is blurred, making it more challenging for viewers to assess reliability (Chibber & Malik, 2021).

Scholars also acknowledge that SFVs increase inclusion and involvement in the Indian public discourse. By using these platforms to elevate under-represented perspectives, vernacular producers and grassroots journalists broaden the range of news stories that young audiences may access (Athique, 2019; Thussu, 2021). However, there is a paradox associated with this democratization: even though more voices are joining the news ecosystem, public confidence in journalism is still dropping. Nielsen and Fletcher (2020) state that although the level of scepticism varies by platform, young people worldwide are wary of both conventional and digital news sources. While young interaction with SFVs is quite strong in India, Axis My India (2023) found that trust in the factual accuracy of such news material is still much lower than that of television news. When considered collectively, the literature highlights the dual nature of SFVs: they offer a fresh, approachable avenue for young people to engage with news, but they also blur the lines between fact and fiction, posing pressing issues of media literacy, regulation, and credibility in the biggest democracy in the world.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative-analytical research approach and only uses secondary data sources to investigate how Indian youth's news consumption is influenced by short-form video (SFV) platforms. The methodological decision is based on the understanding that peer-reviewed research, institutional reports, and existing datasets offer strong insights into media consumption trends, platform expansion, and

credibility issues in India's quickly changing digital environment.

Three complementary methodologies are integrated into the analysis. First, a macro-level understanding of SFV penetration, demographic trends, and the relative importance of traditional versus digital news sources can be obtained by reviewing extensive surveys and industry reports (such as the Reuters Institute Digital News Reports, Pew Research Centre studies, IAMAI, RedSeer Consulting, and Bain & Company). Second, critical viewpoints on disinformation, trust, and young people's digital behaviour in India are provided via a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal papers. This covers research on algorithmic influence, news credibility, and the fuzziness of the lines between journalism and entertainment. Third, to demonstrate how SFVs serve as vectors of disputed information, a few case studies of disinformation events recorded in secondary sources. Such as regional political propaganda, election-related misinformation, and COVID-19 health rumors are examined.

The study uses a thematic content analysis approach to synthesise different sources, looking for recurrent themes in reports and literature, including algorithmic amplification, trust, content vernacularization, and misleading tendencies. This method ensures both breadth and depth of analysis by enabling triangulation across several data sources, including quantitative surveys, qualitative investigations, and institutional documentation. Since the objective is to critically evaluate the substantial body of existing empirical evidence rather than create new raw datasets, the lack of primary data collecting is a purposeful methodological decision.

In order to create a comprehensive knowledge of the potential and difficulties presented by SFVs in India's news ecosystem, the technique integrates descriptive statistics from institutional reports with interpretative insights from academic literature. This design circumvents the ethical and practical limitations of field-based surveys while guaranteeing rigour, authenticity, and relevance.

IX. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Young People's Dependency on News Short-Form Video Platforms

Large-scale survey data indicates that SFV platforms are becoming a more important source of news for Indian youth. Nearly 60% of Indians under 30 rely on social media as their primary news source, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024, while print and television continue to wane. By 2025, RedSeer Consulting (2024) predicts that there will be over 650 million SFV users in India, with growth being driven by regional and vernacular artists. This suggests that SFVs, which combine news and entertainment into a single digital experience, have taken centre stage in how young Indians interact with current events. But this dependence also marks a shift away from conventional journalism, where more legitimacy was guaranteed by professional norms and editorial standards.

B. Lack of Credibility and Trust Gap

Trust in SFVs' news content is still rather low, despite their popularity. According to Nielsen and Fletcher (2020), audiences are exposed to fragmented, decontextualized, and frequently sensational tales in algorithm-driven environments, which breed scepticism. Axis My India (2023) found that although most young people in India get their news from SFVs on a regular basis, their trust in the veracity of this information is considerably lower than that of television news. This implies that although SFVs satisfy the needs for accessibility, speed, and convenience, they fall short in meeting the need for dependability. The ensuing "trust gap" makes it more difficult for SFVs to play a part in democratic debate, where reliable information is essential for informed citizenry.

C. Risks of Misinformation and Algorithmic Amplification

The contribution of algorithmic recommendation systems to the spread of false information is a common issue in the literature. Algorithms frequently choose emotionally charged and visually arresting information above truth, as shown by Fletcher and Nielsen (2018). The propagation of rumours and conspiracy theories is accelerated by viral short films, which is known as "platformized misinformation," according to UNESCO (2022). While Narayan and Narayanan (2022) draw attention to similar trends during elections, Banaji and Bhat (2020) describe how health misinformation during COVID-19 disseminated quickly through brief digital clips in the Indian setting. These results demonstrate how SFVs

are particularly vulnerable to manipulating material because of their structural affordances, which include brevity, shareability, and virality.

D.   News Vernacularization and Democratization
SFVs democratise news distribution and increase inclusion in spite of these dangers. According to Athique (2019) and Thussu (2021), SFVs are used by grassroots journalists and vernacular artists to magnify regional viewpoints, broadening India's digital public sphere. Additionally, according to RedSeer (2023), almost 70% of SFV users are from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, indicating a move away from elite, metropolitan-centric media and towards more regionalized stories. As a result of different perspectives entering the newsroom without reliable verification systems, this inclusion both increases participation and challenges credibility

E.   Consequences for Democratic Discussion and Media Credibility
When combined, these results highlight a paradox: SFVs both strengthen credibility crises and encourage adolescent involvement. On the one hand, they facilitate vernacularization, reduce entrance barriers, and support the participatory nature of digital democracy. However, they increase the risk of disinformation by obfuscating the lines between journalism and entertainment as well as between fact and fiction. According to the literature, enhancing digital literacy, platform accountability, and fact-checking infrastructure would be critical to the trustworthiness of news in India in the future (Chibber & Malik, 2021). In the absence of such measures, the emergence of SFVs runs the danger of exacerbating the decline in public confidence in journalism, which might have long-term effects on democratic engagement

X. CONCLUSION

This study, which solely used secondary sources from peer-reviewed research and institutional reports, looked at how Indian youths consume news on short-form video (SFV) platforms including YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels. The results show that there are two realities. For the younger generation in India, SFVs have become essential news sources because to their speed, accessibility, and variety of vernaculars.

However, they create a significant lack of trust, which is fuelled by disinformation, decontextualized narratives, and algorithmic amplification.
There are three main ramifications. First, the crisis of trust highlights how urgent it is to reconsider India's digital media administration. Platforms need to be more accountable for controlling news content and preventing algorithmic biases that prioritise virality above truth. Second, a structural imbalance is shown by the trust gap: adolescents are more drawn to SFVs, despite television news maintaining a greater level of confidence. Investing in digital literacy programs that provide young audiences the essential skills to assess online information is necessary to close this gap. Last but not least, the democratization of news through vernacular voices shows that SFVs present both opportunities and challenges. Their participatory aspect can improve India's democratic communication environment if it is adequately controlled and encouraged.
All things considered, the emergence of SFVs signals a turning point in India's media landscape. They represent a structural shift in how young people interact with and consume news, not just a fad. The difficulty is not in opposing these platforms, but rather in integrating literacy, accountability, and credibility processes within them. To preserve journalism's place in a democratic society, future studies must keep an eye on these changes, particularly how algorithms, user behaviour, and trust interact.

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