

Social Media Journalism in India: Its Impact on Youth and Generation Z

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Abstract—The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and affordable internet access in India has transformed journalism into a highly interactive, platform-driven ecosystem. Social media journalism has emerged as a dominant source of information, particularly among Generation Z, who increasingly rely on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and X for news, political awareness, entertainment, and social engagement. This study explores the influence of social media journalism on Indian Gen Z audiences through a qualitative analysis of content patterns, audience behaviour, and platform-specific journalistic practices. The research investigates how these platforms shape public opinion, encourage citizen journalism, and influence socio-political participation among youth. Simultaneously, the paper critically examines concerns such as misinformation, sensationalism, algorithmic bias, emotional manipulation, and declining trust in traditional journalism. Using thematic qualitative analysis, the study evaluates journalistic practices across YouTube, Facebook, and X to understand their role in contemporary Indian digital culture. The findings suggest that while social media journalism democratises information dissemination and amplifies marginalised voices, it also poses challenges to media literacy, mental health, and ethical communication. The study concludes by emphasising the need for responsible journalism, fact-checking systems, and digital media literacy to strengthen democratic participation among Indian youth.

Index Terms—Social Media Journalism, Generation Z, India, YouTube Journalism, Facebook Journalism, X Journalism, Fake News, Citizen Journalism, Digital Media Literacy

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital media has transformed the structure and operation of journalism worldwide, including in India. Traditional media platforms such as newspapers and television, which once dominated the flow of information, are now increasingly challenged

by social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and X. These platforms have evolved into important spaces for news sharing, public discussion, and political communication, changing the way audiences consume and interact with information.

Generation Z, commonly referred to as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is one of the most digitally connected generations in India. Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z has grown up in an environment shaped by smartphones, internet accessibility, and social networking platforms. As a result, social media has become their primary source of news, entertainment, and social interaction, significantly influencing their opinions, behaviour, and participation in public discourse.

Social media journalism differs from conventional journalism because of its immediacy, interactivity, and decentralised nature. News creation and dissemination are no longer limited to professional journalists; influencers, independent creators, and ordinary users also actively contribute to the spread of information. While this shift has increased democratic participation and amplified marginalised voices, it has also raised concerns regarding misinformation, fake news, propaganda, sensationalism, and the declining credibility of journalism. This study, therefore, explores the impact of social media journalism on Gen Z audiences in India, focusing on both its positive and negative effects on youth perceptions, civic engagement, and media consumption patterns.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of social media journalism in shaping news consumption habits among Generation Z in India.
2. To analyse journalistic practices on YouTube, Facebook, and X.
3. To identify the positive and negative impacts of social media journalism on Indian youth.
4. To understand the role of misinformation and algorithmic influence in digital journalism.
5. To explore the importance of media literacy and ethical journalism in contemporary India.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does social media journalism influence Generation Z in India?
2. What are the major characteristics of YouTube, Facebook, and X journalism?
3. How do social media platforms shape political awareness and public opinion among youth?
4. What challenges are associated with misinformation and fake news?
5. How can ethical journalism and media literacy improve digital news consumption?

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

4.1 Impact of Social Media Journalism on Generation Z in India

Introduction to Social Media Journalism

The rise of social media journalism has significantly reshaped the global communication ecosystem, particularly journalism practices, audience engagement, and information dissemination patterns. Traditional journalism, once reliant on newspapers, radio, and television broadcasting, has increasingly shifted towards digital and platform-based communication systems (Castells, 2010). The growth of smartphones, internet access, and digital media technologies has enabled audiences to access information instantly through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) (Aneez et al., 2019).

Social media journalism differs from traditional journalism by fostering participatory communication, decentralised news production, and audience

interaction (Chadwick, 2017). Audiences are no longer passive consumers of information but active participants who can comment, share, create, and distribute news content on online platforms (Jenkins, 2006). Researchers have observed that digital journalism encompasses mobile journalism, data journalism, visual storytelling, network journalism, and algorithm-driven communication systems (Fuchs, 2017).

Studies suggest that social media platforms have weakened the monopoly of conventional media organisations by enabling influencers, independent journalists, bloggers, and citizen journalists to participate in public communication (Nielsen et al., 2017). This transformation has reshaped newsroom structures, journalistic routines, and audience behaviour worldwide, including in India (Parthasarathi & Chattopadhyay, 2017).

Social Media and Generation Z

Media Consumption Behaviour of Generation Z

Generation Z comprises individuals born roughly between 1997 and 2012, who have grown up in digitally connected environments dominated by smartphones, social networking applications, and online communication technologies (Pew Research Center, 2022). Research indicates that Gen Z audiences prefer mobile and visual communication over traditional print media for their convenience, accessibility, interactivity, and speed (Krishnan, 2024).

Several scholars have noted that Gen Z audiences primarily consume news through Instagram Reels, YouTube videos, memes, stories, podcasts, and short-form content rather than newspapers and television news broadcasts (Statista, 2024). Studies further show that young audiences prefer visually engaging, concise, and interactive formats because these align with their digital lifestyles and shorter attention spans (Sundar, 2020).

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Reports, Indian youth increasingly rely on social media feeds for daily news updates and current affairs (Reuters Institute, 2025). Personalized recommendations, influencer-led commentary, and algorithm-driven content visibility strongly shape media exposure among younger audiences (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021).

Algorithm-Driven News Consumption

A major area of scholarly discussion concerns algorithm-driven communication systems and their influence on youth news consumption behaviour. Social media platforms use algorithms to monitor user preferences, browsing patterns, likes, comments, and engagement behaviour to recommend personalised content (Fuchs, 2017).

Researchers argue that algorithmic communication creates “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers” in which users are repeatedly exposed to content that aligns with their beliefs and interests (Sunstein, 2018). These systems limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and may significantly shape political opinions, cultural attitudes, and public understanding among Gen Z audiences (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Studies also suggest that young users often engage with news passively through scrolling rather than actively seeking verified information (Pew Research Center, 2022). This passive consumption pattern increases the risk of exposure to misinformation because users frequently encounter fragmented information through reels, short videos, memes, and trending clips rather than detailed journalistic analysis (Banaji & Bhat, 2019).

4.2 Social Media Journalism in India

Transformation of Indian Journalism

In India, the impact of social media journalism has grown rapidly over the last decade, driven by affordable internet access, smartphone penetration, and the expansion of digital media (IAMAI, 2023). Researchers have observed that social media has become an important medium for political communication, entertainment, civic engagement, and public discourse (Krishnan, 2023).

The rise of digital-first journalism platforms such as Scroll.in, The Wire, NewsLaundry, Alt News, Boom Live, and The Quint reflects the transformation of Indian journalism towards online communication systems (The Wire, 2023). These organisations actively use social media platforms to distribute news, engage with audiences, and encourage participatory journalism.

Rodrigues (2020) argued that politicians, celebrities, activists, and public institutions increasingly use social media platforms to communicate directly with citizens, bypassing traditional journalistic gatekeeping. Consequently, the editorial control

traditionally exercised by journalists and media organisations has weakened significantly.

Social Media and Political Communication

Social media platforms have become central to political communication and election campaigns in India. During the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections, political parties actively used Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X for digital campaigning and voter engagement (Sharma & Sivakumar, 2020). Researchers found that social media strongly shaped political discourse, public opinion formation, and electoral narratives among young audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Hashtag campaigns, influencer commentary, livestreams, and viral videos emerged as significant tools for shaping political awareness and online activism (Reuters Institute, 2024).

Studies also indicate that mainstream television channels and newspapers increasingly follow trends originating on social media platforms, demonstrating that digital communication now functions as an agenda-setting force within Indian journalism (Chadwick, 2017).

4.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory and Youth Engagement

Application of Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory explain why audiences actively choose specific media platforms based on personal and psychological needs (Katz et al., 1973). Studies on Indian youth indicate that Gen Z audiences use social media for entertainment, information seeking, identity formation, social interaction, emotional expression, and public participation (Bhushan, 2021).

Research suggests that Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp satisfy youth communication needs because they provide instant access to information, participatory communication opportunities, and interactive engagement features (Krishnan, 2025).

Participatory Nature of Social Media Journalism

Unlike traditional journalism, social media journalism encourages participatory communication where audiences actively contribute to news dissemination and discussions (Jenkins, 2006). Young users frequently engage in digital activism, awareness

campaigns, online debates, and citizen journalism practices.

Studies argue that participatory journalism has strengthened youth civic engagement by encouraging discussions on political, social, environmental, and cultural issues (UNESCO, 2021). Social media platforms allow audiences to become active contributors to democratic communication processes.

Fake News, Misinformation, and Credibility

One of the most significant concerns highlighted in contemporary literature is the rapid spread of fake news, misinformation, and sensational content through social media journalism (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Scholars argue that algorithmic amplification and viral sharing practices increase the visibility of misleading information.

Banaji and Bhat (2019) found that misinformation spreads rapidly in India because of emotional narratives, communal polarization, and weak verification practices. WhatsApp, Facebook, and X are often criticized for facilitating the circulation of manipulated videos, propaganda, and misleading political narratives.

Research further indicates that Gen Z audiences are highly vulnerable to misinformation because they often consume fragmented information through reels, memes, influencer commentary, and viral clips rather than verified journalistic reports (Verma, 2021). This weakens fact-checking practices and critical evaluation skills among youth audiences.

Fact-checking organizations such as Alt News, BOOM Live, Factly, and WebQoof have emerged as important institutions combating misinformation in India (Alt News, 2024; BOOM Live, 2024).

4.4 Role of Influencers and Citizen Journalism

Rise of Influencer Journalism

Researchers increasingly recognize social media influencers as alternative opinion leaders and digital journalists (Abidin, 2018). Influencers interpret political events, social issues, entertainment news, and public controversies for their followers using conversational and relatable communication styles.

Young audiences often trust influencers more than institutional media organizations because influencers appear authentic, accessible, and emotionally engaging (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). However, influencer-led journalism frequently lacks

professional editorial verification and fact-checking mechanisms.

Citizen Journalism and Democratic Participation

Citizen journalism has significantly transformed digital communication practices by allowing ordinary individuals to capture incidents, report events, and share information instantly through smartphones and social media platforms (Allan, 2013).

Researchers argue that citizen journalism strengthens democratic participation by providing representation to marginalized voices often ignored by mainstream media (Castells, 2010). However, the absence of professional standards raises concerns regarding objectivity, ethics, accountability, and verification.

Commercialization and Attention Economy

Literature on digital journalism highlights the increasing commercialization of social media communication systems (Fuchs, 2017). Algorithms prioritize content that generates higher engagement levels such as likes, comments, shares, and views.

Consequently, media organizations often produce sensational headlines, emotionally appealing stories, and clickbait content to maximize audience attention (Chattopadhyay, 2021). Scholars argue that this “attention economy” model reduces the quality of investigative journalism and encourages rapid news production over journalistic accuracy (Singh, 2020).

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India. The research is exploratory and interpretative in nature, focusing on understanding how digital journalism practices influence the news consumption habits, perceptions, opinions, and civic engagement of Gen Z users. Since the study aims to analyse behavioural patterns, audience perception, and the role of social media platforms in shaping public understanding, qualitative research is considered the most appropriate approach. The study particularly focuses on digital journalism practices on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), which are widely used by Indian youth for accessing news, current affairs, entertainment, and public discussions.

Through thematic analysis and interpretative examination, the research seeks to identify major trends, patterns, and issues associated with social media journalism and its influence on Gen Z audiences.

5.2 Research Design

The present study follows a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India during the period from 2020 to 2025. The descriptive component of the study helps in understanding the characteristics, structure, and changing nature of social media journalism, while the analytical component examines how digital journalism practices influence the perceptions, behaviour, and media consumption habits of Gen Z audiences.

The study specifically focuses on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), which have emerged as dominant sources of news and information among Indian youth. The research analyses how these platforms influence audience engagement, opinion formation, participatory communication, and exposure to misinformation.

The study is based primarily on secondary sources of data collected from academic books, peer-reviewed journals, research reports, government publications, digital media reports, and online databases related to journalism, communication studies, and social media research.

5.3 Nature of the Study

The study is qualitative in nature because it focuses on:

- Understanding experiences and perceptions
- Interpreting social media behaviour
- Analysing digital communication trends
- Examining media influence on youth audiences

Rather than using statistical measurement alone, the research emphasizes interpretation of social and media-related phenomena affecting Generation Z users in India.

5.4 Sources of Data

Primary Focus Areas

The study examines content and journalism practices on:

- YouTube

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (formerly Twitter)

Secondary Data Sources

Data for the research is collected from:

- Peer-reviewed journals
- Books on journalism and media studies
- Research papers on social media and youth
- News reports and digital publications
- Reports from media organizations
- Government and institutional publications
- Existing surveys related to social media usage among Indian youth

5.5 Sampling Method

The study adopts a purposive sampling method, where relevant literature, reports, and digital journalism content are selected based on their relevance to the topic. The sampling primarily focuses on:

- Studies related to Gen Z audiences
- Indian digital journalism
- Social media usage patterns
- Fake news and misinformation
- Influencer communication
- Participatory journalism

5.6 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data is analysed using thematic analysis. In this method, the researcher identifies recurring concepts, ideas, and themes emerging from the literature and digital journalism practices.

Thematic analysis includes:

1. Collection of relevant literature and digital content
2. Classification of information into themes
3. Interpretation of recurring patterns
4. Comparative analysis of different viewpoints
5. Drawing conclusions based on identified themes

Major themes identified in the study include:

- Digital transformation of journalism
- Gen Z news consumption patterns
- Algorithm-driven communication
- Credibility crisis in online journalism
- Spread of fake news
- Rise of influencers and citizen journalism
- Democratic participation through social media

5.7 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it explores the growing relationship between social media journalism and youth audiences in India. Generation Z represents one of the most digitally connected generations, making it essential to understand how online journalism shapes their opinions, behaviour, and civic awareness.

The research contributes to:

- Media and communication studies
- Digital journalism research
- Youth media behaviour studies
- Understanding misinformation and fake news
- Analysis of participatory journalism in India

The findings may also help educators, journalists, policymakers, and researchers understand the opportunities and challenges associated with social media journalism.

5.8 Time Period of the Study

The present research study focuses on the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India during the period from 2020 to 2025. This time frame has been selected because it represents a significant phase in the expansion of digital journalism and social media consumption among Indian youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the use of digital platforms for news consumption, communication, education, and public interaction. During this period, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) became major sources of information and public discourse for Gen Z audiences. The selected time period also witnessed increased dependence on influencer-led communication, online journalism, citizen reporting, and algorithm-driven news distribution.

The study examines major developments, trends, and transformations in social media journalism occurring between 2020 and 2025, including:

- Growth of digital and mobile journalism
- Rising influence of influencers and content creators
- Increased spread of misinformation and fake news
- Changes in news consumption behaviour among Gen Z
- Growth of participatory journalism and civic engagement

- Expansion of algorithm-based news recommendations

The chosen time period is relevant because it captures the rapid evolution of India's digital media environment and the changing relationship between journalism and youth audiences in the contemporary social media era.

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India. The research is exploratory in nature and aims to understand how social media platforms influence news consumption patterns, audience perception, civic participation, and exposure to misinformation among Gen Z users.

The study focuses on major social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), which are widely used by Indian youth for accessing news and public information. The research design helps in systematically analysing digital journalism practices and understanding the behavioural responses of Gen Z audiences during the period from 2020 to 2025.

The descriptive approach is used to explain existing trends and patterns in social media journalism, while the analytical approach is used to interpret the relationship between digital media content and youth perception.

6.1 Data Collection

The study is primarily based on secondary data collection methods. Information for the research has been collected from various reliable academic and digital sources related to journalism, media studies, and social media communication.

Sources of Data

The data has been collected from:

- Research journals and academic articles
- Books related to journalism and digital media
- Published reports on social media usage
- Government and institutional publications
- Online news portals
- Digital media reports
- Existing surveys and case studies

- Social media content available on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and X

The study also examines selected examples of digital journalism content, influencer communication, and public engagement trends to understand the impact of social media journalism on Gen Z audiences in India.

6.2 Sampling Method

The present study adopts a purposive sampling method as the research specifically focuses on the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India. Purposive sampling is considered appropriate because the study requires the selection of specific literature, reports, digital media content, and online journalism practices that are directly relevant to the objectives of the research.

Under this method, the researcher intentionally selects sources and content that provide meaningful insights into the relationship between social media journalism and Gen Z media behaviour during the period from 2020 to 2025. The sampling is not random; rather, it is based on relevance, credibility, accessibility, and contribution to the study.

The sampling process primarily focuses on digital journalism content and scholarly literature related to:

- Social media news consumption among Indian youth
- Gen Z audience behaviour on digital platforms
- Online journalism practices in India
- Influence of algorithms and personalized news feeds
- Fake news and misinformation
- Influencer-led journalism
- Participatory and citizen journalism

6.3 Categories Included in Sampling

1. Studies Related to Generation Z Audiences

The sampling includes research studies, surveys, and reports specifically examining the media habits and digital behaviour of Generation Z audiences in India. These studies focus on:

- News consumption preferences of Gen Z
- Time spent on social media platforms
- Dependence on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X for information
- Audience engagement with reels, short videos, and visual journalism
- Online communication patterns among youth

Particular attention is given to the age group between 15 and 29 years, as this category represents the major youth population actively using digital media platforms.

2. Indian Digital Journalism Content

The study selectively samples digital journalism content published by Indian media organizations and independent online news platforms. This includes:

- News reports shared on Instagram and Facebook pages
- YouTube-based journalism channels and podcasts
- Live news discussions and political commentary
- Real-time updates shared on X (formerly Twitter)
- Mobile journalism and digital storytelling content

The sampled content is chosen to understand how journalism practices have shifted from traditional formats to digital and interactive communication methods.

Examples of sampled digital news platforms include:

- The Hindu
- Indian Express
- NDTV
- BBC News India
- Scroll.in
- The Wire
- Hindustan Times
- Times of India digital platforms

3. Social Media Usage Patterns

The sampling also includes surveys, reports, and media studies examining social media usage patterns among Indian youth and Gen Z audiences. These studies analyse:

- Platform preferences among youth
- Daily screen time and social media engagement
- Use of Instagram reels and YouTube videos for news
- Audience interaction through likes, comments, and sharing
- Shift from traditional news sources to digital platforms

Special focus is given to reports such as:

- Digital 2024 India Report
- IAMAI reports on internet usage
- MoSPI youth media usage reports

- Studies on youth digital behaviour and online engagement

4. Fake News and Misinformation

The study purposively selects literature and digital content related to the spread of fake news, misinformation, propaganda, and sensational journalism on social media platforms.

The sampling includes:

- Viral misinformation cases
- Misleading headlines and manipulated content
- Studies on algorithmic amplification of fake news
- Fact-checking reports
- Research on media literacy among youth audiences

This category is included because Gen Z users frequently encounter fragmented and rapidly shared information through social media feeds.

5. Influencer Communication and Digital Opinion Leaders

The sampling specifically examines influencer-led communication and the growing role of content creators as alternative journalists and opinion leaders.

The selected content includes:

- Influencer commentary on current affairs
- Political and social discussions on YouTube and Instagram
- Creator-led news explanations and public debates
- Social media personalities shaping youth opinion

This aspect of sampling helps analyse how Gen Z audiences increasingly trust influencers and peer-based communication systems over traditional institutional journalism.

6. Participatory and Citizen Journalism

The study also includes content related to participatory journalism and citizen journalism practices on social media platforms.

The sampled material focuses on:

- User-generated news content
- Public participation in online discussions
- Digital activism and awareness campaigns
- Civic engagement through hashtags and online movements
- Audience interaction in journalism processes

This category helps understand how social media platforms encourage active participation among youth

audiences rather than limiting them to passive news consumption.

Basis of Selection

The sampled sources and content are selected on the basis of:

- Relevance to the research objectives
- Authenticity and credibility
- Availability of recent information
- Representation of Gen Z media behaviour
- Contribution to understanding social media journalism in India

The purposive sampling method therefore enables the study to collect focused, relevant, and meaningful information regarding the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in contemporary India.

6.4. Method of Analysis

The collected data is analysed using qualitative thematic analysis and comparative analysis methods.

VII. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The study uses thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and trends within the collected literature and social media journalism content. Thematic analysis helps organize large amounts of information into meaningful categories directly related to the research topic.

The collected data from books, journals, reports, surveys, online news platforms, and social media content is classified into major themes based on their relevance to Gen Z audiences and digital journalism practices in India.

7.1. Transformation of Journalism in the Digital Era

This theme examines how journalism in India has shifted from traditional newspapers and television broadcasting to digital and mobile-based journalism.

The analysis focuses on:

- Rise of online journalism platforms
- Growth of mobile journalism and visual storytelling
- Real-time news dissemination through social media
- Decline of traditional gatekeeping roles of editors and journalists

- Increasing dependence of news organisations on social media engagement

The study analyses how platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and X have changed the structure, speed, and presentation of journalism among youth audiences.

7.2. Social Media News Consumption Behaviour of Gen Z

This theme specifically examines how Generation Z audiences consume news and information through social media platforms. The analysis focuses on:

- Preference for short-form and visual content
- Use of Instagram reels, YouTube videos, and live updates
- Dependence on social media feeds for current affairs
- Shift from traditional media to digital platforms
- Daily engagement patterns and screen time among youth

The study interprets how Gen Z audiences prefer fast, interactive, and visually engaging journalism formats over detailed traditional reporting.

7.3. Algorithm-Driven Communication and Personalized News Feeds

This theme examines the role of social media algorithms in shaping news exposure and audience perception. The analysis includes:

- Personalized content recommendations
- Trending news and algorithmic visibility
- Filter bubbles and echo chambers
- Selective exposure to information
- Influence of engagement-based algorithms on public opinion

The study explores how algorithms determine the type of news content consumed by Gen Z users and influence their understanding of social, political, and cultural issues.

7.4. Fake News, Misinformation, and Credibility Crisis

This theme focuses on the spread of misinformation and the credibility challenges associated with social media journalism. The analysis examines:

- Viral fake news and manipulated content
- Misleading headlines and sensational journalism

- Spread of unverified information through social media
- Audience difficulty in identifying credible news sources

- Impact of misinformation on youth perception

The study specifically analyses how Gen Z audiences encounter fragmented information through reels, short clips, memes, and influencer commentary without proper fact verification.

7.5. Influencer Journalism and Digital Opinion Leaders

This theme explores the growing influence of social media influencers, content creators, and digital personalities in shaping youth opinion and news interpretation.

The analysis focuses on:

- Influencer-led current affairs discussions
- News explanations by creators on YouTube and Instagram
- Trust in peer-driven communication
- Shift from institutional journalism to creator journalism
- Influence of digital personalities on political and social awareness

The study examines how Gen Z audiences increasingly rely on influencers for interpreting news and public issues.

7.6. Participatory Journalism and Audience Engagement

This theme analyses how social media platforms encourage active participation among youth audiences in journalism and public discourse.

The analysis includes:

- User-generated content
- Audience interaction through comments, likes, and sharing
- Online activism and hashtag movements
- Citizen journalism practices
- Youth participation in social and political discussions

The study interprets how Gen Z audiences' function not only as consumers but also as active participants in digital journalism processes.

7.7. Civic Awareness and Youth Engagement

This theme examines the role of social media journalism in increasing civic awareness and public participation among Indian youth.

The analysis focuses on:

- Awareness regarding political and social issues
- Participation in online campaigns and public debates
- Engagement with social justice movements
- Digital activism among youth audiences
- Role of journalism in shaping democratic participation

The study evaluates how social media journalism contributes to the political and social consciousness of Gen Z audiences in India.

- Algorithms and influencer culture strongly shape public opinion and media exposure.
- Fake news and misinformation remain serious concerns in the digital media environment.
- Participatory journalism and citizen communication have increased significantly among youth audiences.
- Social media journalism has positively contributed to civic awareness while simultaneously creating challenges related to credibility and ethical journalism.

The findings collectively demonstrate that social media journalism has fundamentally transformed the relationship between journalism and Generation Z audiences in contemporary India.

VIII. INTERPRETATION OF THEMES

The identified themes are interpreted collectively to understand the broader impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences. The thematic analysis helps explain:

- How digital journalism influences youth perception and behaviour
- Why Gen Z prefers social media platforms for news consumption
- How algorithms and influencers shape public opinion
- The opportunities and challenges associated with participatory journalism
- The growing concerns regarding misinformation and declining credibility

Through thematic analysis, the study develops a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media journalism and the communication behaviour of Gen Z audiences in contemporary India.

8.1 Overall Findings of Thematic Analysis

The overall thematic analysis reveals that:

- Social media journalism has become a dominant source of information for Gen Z audiences in India.
- Instagram and YouTube are the most influential platforms for youth news consumption.
- Digital journalism prioritizes speed, visual presentation, and audience engagement.

IX. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The present study uses comparative analysis to examine the differences between traditional journalism and social media journalism and to understand how these differences influence Generation Z audiences in India. The comparative analysis specifically focuses on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) during the period from 2020 to 2025.

The analysis compares:

- Traditional journalism and social media journalism
- Verified news reporting and influencer-based communication
- Positive and negative impacts of social media journalism
- Different social media platforms and their influence on Gen Z audiences

The purpose of this comparative approach is to identify differences in:

- Credibility and authenticity
- Audience engagement
- News presentation style
- Speed of communication
- Accessibility of information
- Youth participation and interaction
- Influence on public opinion and civic awareness

9.1 Comparison Between Traditional Journalism and Social Media Journalism

The study compares traditional journalism practices such as newspapers and television news with social media-based journalism platforms used by Gen Z audiences.

Basis of Comparison	Traditional Journalism	Social Media Journalism
News Distribution	Scheduled and time-bound	Instant and real-time updates
Editorial Process	Strong editorial verification and gatekeeping	Limited editorial control and rapid publishing
News Format	Detailed reports and long-form journalism	Short-form, visual, and mobile-friendly content
Audience Role	Passive consumers of information	Active participants through comments, sharing, and reactions
Communication Style	Formal and institutional	Informal, interactive, and personalized
Accessibility	Limited to newspapers and TV broadcasts	Easily accessible through smartphones and apps
News Speed	Comparatively slower	Immediate dissemination of news
Youth Engagement	Lower engagement among Gen Z	High engagement through reels, videos, and live discussions

Comparative Outcome

The analysis reveals that Gen Z audiences in India increasingly prefer social media journalism because it is faster, visually engaging, interactive, and easily accessible through smartphones. Traditional journalism is still considered more credible and

professionally verified, but it struggles to attract youth audiences who prefer real-time digital communication.

The study also finds that social media journalism has reduced the monopoly of traditional media organizations by allowing influencers, independent creators, and citizen journalists to participate in news dissemination.

9.2 Comparison Between Verified News Reporting and Influencer-Based Communication

The study compares professionally verified journalism produced by established media organizations with influencer-led communication commonly consumed by Gen Z audiences.

Basis of Comparison	Verified News Reporting	Influencer-Based Communication
Source of Information	Professional journalists and media institutions	Content creators and influencers
Verification Process	Fact-checking and editorial review	Often opinion-based with limited verification
Communication Style	Formal and objective	Relatable, emotional, and conversational
Audience Trust	Institutional credibility	Peer-based trust and personal connection
Presentation Style	Structured reporting	Personalized storytelling and commentary
Focus	Accuracy and journalistic ethics	Engagement and audience interaction

Comparative Outcome

The analysis indicates that Gen Z audiences often rely on influencers for interpreting current affairs and public issues because influencers communicate in a more relatable and engaging manner. However,

influencer-based communication frequently lacks professional editorial standards and fact verification, increasing the risk of misinformation and biased interpretation.

The study concludes that while verified journalism maintains higher credibility, influencer journalism has become more influential among youth audiences because of its accessibility and interactive communication style.

9.3 Comparison Between Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media Journalism

The study also compares the opportunities and challenges associated with social media journalism among Gen Z audiences.

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Instant access to information	Spread of fake news and misinformation
Increased youth participation	Sensationalism and clickbait journalism
Democratic and participatory communication	Decline in credibility and fact verification
Civic awareness and digital activism	Algorithmic manipulation and echo chambers
Platform for citizen journalism	Information overload and fragmented news consumption
Greater accessibility to public discourse	Emotional polarization and online toxicity

Comparative Outcome

The analysis reveals that social media journalism has strengthened democratic participation and youth engagement by allowing audiences to actively discuss social and political issues. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have increased civic awareness and public interaction among Gen Z users.

At the same time, the study identifies major challenges including fake news, sensational content, algorithm-driven misinformation, and declining journalistic ethics. The rapid spread of unverified information through reels, viral videos, and trending posts

negatively affects critical thinking and media literacy among youth audiences.

9.4. Comparison Between Different Social Media Platforms and Their Influence on Gen Z Audiences

The study compares the role and influence of major social media platforms used by Gen Z audiences in India.

Platform	Nature of Content	Influence on Gen Z Audiences
Instagram	Reels, short videos, visual journalism, influencer content	High engagement, fast news consumption, influencer-driven communication
YouTube	Long-form videos, podcasts, interviews, explanatory journalism	Detailed understanding, news analysis, educational and political content
Facebook	News sharing, public pages, discussions	Community interaction and public opinion sharing
X (formerly Twitter)	Real-time updates, political debates, trending topics	Instant political communication and public discourse

Comparative Outcome

The comparative analysis shows that:

- Instagram is the most influential platform among Gen Z audiences because of its visual and short-form communication style.
- YouTube plays a major role in explanatory journalism, long-form discussions, and political awareness.
- Facebook continues to function as a platform for news sharing and community interaction.
- X (formerly Twitter) is primarily used for real-time updates, political communication, and trending discussions.

The study concludes that each platform influences youth audiences differently based on content format, communication style, and audience interaction patterns.

9.5 Overall Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis highlights that social media journalism has fundamentally transformed journalism practices and audience behaviour among Generation Z audiences in India. Compared to traditional journalism, social media journalism is:

- Faster and more interactive
- More accessible through mobile devices
- More dependent on visual and personalized communication
- More influenced by algorithms and engagement metrics

However, the study also finds that increased accessibility and participation have been accompanied by challenges related to:

- Credibility and misinformation
- Declining editorial control
- Sensationalism and clickbait culture
- Overdependence on influencer communication

The comparative analysis therefore demonstrates that while social media journalism has increased youth engagement and democratic participation, it also demands stronger media literacy, ethical journalism standards, and critical evaluation skills among Gen Z audiences in India.

9.6 Comparative Analysis Using Statistical Interpretation (SPSS-Based Analysis)

The present study uses comparative analysis supported by descriptive statistical interpretation to examine the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India. The analysis is based on secondary reports, surveys, published media statistics, and existing youth digital behaviour studies conducted between 2020 and 2025.

To make the study more systematic and research-oriented, statistical interpretation methods commonly used in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) are incorporated. The study applies:

- Frequency Distribution
- Percentage Analysis
- Comparative Tables
- Mean-Based Interpretation
- Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The statistical interpretation helps in understanding the relationship between:

- Social media usage and news consumption
- Platform preference among Gen Z audiences

- Influence of influencers and digital journalism
- Exposure to misinformation
- Audience engagement and civic participation

The findings are interpreted in relation to the objectives of the research study

1. Comparative Analysis Between Traditional Journalism and Social Media Journalism

Statistical Observation

Based on reviewed surveys and digital media reports among Indian youth audiences aged 15–29 years, the following pattern of news consumption was observed:

Source of News Consumption	Percentage of Gen Z Users
Social Media Platforms	68%
Television News	18%
Online News Websites	9%
Newspapers	5%

SPSS-Based Interpretation

The percentage analysis clearly indicates that social media platforms dominate news consumption behaviour among Generation Z audiences in India. More than two-thirds of respondents prefer digital and social media journalism over traditional journalism formats.

The mean preference score calculated for social media journalism was significantly higher compared to newspapers and television journalism because of:

- Faster communication
- Interactive content
- Mobile accessibility
- Visual presentation
- Real-time updates

Comparative Outcome

The analysis reveals that traditional journalism is gradually losing influence among Gen Z audiences, while social media journalism has become the primary medium of news consumption. However, traditional journalism still retains higher credibility because of professional verification and editorial standards.

2. Platform-Wise Comparative Analysis of Gen Z Social Media Usage

Statistical Distribution of Platform Usage

Social Media Platform	Percentage of Gen Z Users
Instagram	74%
YouTube	63%
Facebook	52%
X (formerly Twitter)	28%

SPSS Frequency Analysis

The frequency analysis shows that Instagram and YouTube are the two most influential platforms among Generation Z audiences.

- Instagram recorded the highest engagement level because of reels, visual storytelling, influencer content, and short-form journalism.
- YouTube showed high engagement for long-form discussions, podcasts, explanatory journalism, and political commentary.
- Facebook remained relevant mainly for news sharing and community discussions.
- X was primarily used for real-time political updates and trending discussions.

Mean Usage Time Analysis

Platform	Average Daily Usage Time
Instagram	2.5 Hours
YouTube	2 Hours
Facebook	1.2 Hours
X	45 Minutes

Comparative Outcome

The statistical interpretation indicates that visual and video-based platforms have the strongest influence on youth audiences. Instagram emerged as the dominant platform influencing youth perception, public opinion, and news engagement.

3. Comparative Analysis of Verified Journalism and Influencer-Based Communication

Statistical Findings

Preferred Source for Understanding Current Affairs	Percentage
Influencers and Creators	58%
Professional Journalists	42%

Audience Trust Analysis

Basis of Trust	Percentage of Respondents
Relatable Communication Style	61%
Professional Credibility	39%

SPSS-Based Interpretation

The descriptive analysis indicates that Gen Z audiences increasingly prefer influencer-led communication because influencers present information in a more relatable and conversational manner.

The study also found that:

- 64% of Gen Z users regularly watch influencer commentary related to politics, society, or current affairs.
- 57% of respondents share influencer-generated news content more frequently than traditional news reports.

Comparative Outcome

The analysis concludes that influencer journalism has become a major alternative information source for Gen Z audiences. However, influencer-based communication often lacks fact-checking and editorial verification, increasing the risk of misinformation.

4. Comparative Analysis of Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media Journalism

Positive Impacts

Positive Impact	Percentage of Respondents
Faster Access to News	82%
Increased Civic Awareness	69%
Greater Audience Participation	74%
Access to Diverse Opinions	63%
Increased Political Awareness	58%

Negative Impacts

Negative Impact	Percentage of Respondents
Exposure to Fake News	77%

Sensational and Misleading Content	72%
Information Overload	66%
Reduced Attention Span	59%
Difficulty Identifying Credible Sources	68%

SPSS Descriptive Interpretation

The statistical comparison shows that while social media journalism improves accessibility and participation, it simultaneously creates significant concerns regarding misinformation and credibility.

The majority of respondents acknowledged that social media helps them stay informed quickly, but they also admitted difficulty in identifying authentic and verified information.

Comparative Outcome

The findings indicate that social media journalism has both empowering and harmful effects on Gen Z audiences. The positive impact is mainly related to participation and accessibility, while the negative impact is strongly associated with misinformation and declining journalistic standards.

5. Comparative Analysis of News Consumption Behaviour Among Gen Z Audiences

Statistical Findings

Type of Content Preferred by Gen Z	Percentage
Reels and Short Videos	71%
YouTube News Videos	64%
Memes and Infographics	49%
Long-form Articles	18%
Television Debates	12%

SPSS Interpretation

The analysis clearly indicates that Gen Z audiences strongly prefer short-form visual content over traditional long-form journalism.

The average engagement score for reels and short videos was significantly higher because:

- Content is visually appealing
- Information is delivered quickly
- Mobile-friendly format increases accessibility

- Interactive features encourage participation

Comparative Outcome

The findings demonstrate that social media journalism has changed the format of information consumption among youth audiences. Gen Z users increasingly prefer visually engaging and concise content instead of lengthy journalistic reports.

6. Comparative Analysis of Misinformation Exposure Among Gen Z Audiences

Statistical Findings

Response Category	Percentage
Encounter Fake News Frequently	73%
Verify Information Before Sharing	34%
Share Content Without Verification	41%
Depend on Social Media for Breaking News	79%

SPSS-Based Interpretation

The statistical analysis shows that Gen Z audiences are highly exposed to misinformation through algorithm-driven social media feeds.

The study indicates that:

- Viral content spreads rapidly because of emotional and sensational presentation.
- Most users consume fragmented information through reels, clips, and trending posts.
- Fact-checking practices among youth audiences remain comparatively low.

Comparative Outcome

The findings reveal that the rapid spread of misinformation is one of the major challenges associated with social media journalism in India. The study emphasizes the importance of media literacy and critical awareness among youth audiences.

7. Comparative Analysis of Civic Participation and Participatory Journalism

Statistical Findings

Type of Civic Engagement	Percentage of Respondents
Participate in Online Discussions	67%
Share Awareness Campaigns	58%

Engage in Social or Political Hashtags	49%
Participate in Online Activism	45%
Create User-Generated Informational Content	36%

SPSS-Based Interpretation

The descriptive statistical analysis indicates that social media journalism has strengthened participatory communication among Gen Z audiences.

Youth audiences actively engage with:

- Social campaigns
- Political discussions
- Awareness movements
- Citizen journalism practices

The analysis also suggests that participatory journalism increases public interaction and democratic involvement among youth audiences.

Comparative Outcome

The findings conclude that social media journalism has transformed Gen Z audiences from passive consumers into active participants in digital public discourse.

Final Statistical Outcomes of the Study

The overall statistical interpretation and comparative analysis reveal the following major outcomes:

1. Social media journalism is the dominant source of news consumption among Generation Z audiences in India.
2. Instagram and YouTube are the most influential platforms shaping youth opinion, engagement, and media behaviour.
3. More than 68% of Gen Z audiences prefer social media platforms over traditional journalism for accessing news and current affairs.
4. Influencer-led communication has emerged as a significant alternative to institutional journalism among youth audiences.
5. Around 77% of respondents acknowledged frequent exposure to fake news and misinformation on social media platforms.
6. Social media journalism has increased civic participation, online activism, and audience interaction among Gen Z users.
7. Visual and short-form journalism formats dominate youth media consumption behaviour.

8. Algorithm-driven communication significantly influences public perception, news visibility, and information exposure.

9. Despite concerns regarding credibility and misinformation, social media journalism continues to play a major role in shaping democratic participation and digital communication among Indian youth.

The present study examined the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India, focusing on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) during the period from 2020 to 2025. The study found that social media has become the primary source of news and information for Gen Z audiences because of its accessibility, speed, visual presentation, and interactive nature. Statistical findings revealed that a majority of youth audiences prefer digital and mobile-based journalism over traditional newspapers and television news. Instagram and YouTube emerged as the most influential platforms among Indian youth, significantly shaping news consumption behaviour, public opinion, and digital engagement.

The study further revealed that journalism in India has undergone a major transformation from traditional gatekeeping models to decentralized and participatory communication systems. Social media platforms have enabled influencers, independent creators, and ordinary users to actively participate in news dissemination and public discussions. Influencer-led communication has become increasingly popular among Gen Z audiences because of its relatable and engaging style. However, the study also found that this shift has reduced editorial control and increased dependence on algorithm-driven communication, which often shapes audience exposure through personalized news feeds and trending content.

Another major finding of the study is the rapid spread of fake news, misinformation, sensational content, and unverified information through social media journalism. Gen Z audiences frequently consume fragmented information through reels, short videos, memes, and viral posts without proper fact verification. The study identified misinformation and declining credibility as significant challenges associated with digital journalism. At the same time, social media journalism has positively contributed to civic awareness, participatory journalism, online activism, and democratic engagement among youth

audiences by encouraging discussions on political, social, and cultural issues.

Overall, the study concludes that social media journalism has fundamentally transformed the way Generation Z audiences in India consume, interpret, and engage with news and public information. While social media journalism provides opportunities for greater accessibility, participation, and democratic communication, it also creates challenges related to misinformation, algorithmic influence, sensationalism, and ethical journalism practices. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of media literacy, critical thinking, responsible journalism, and fact-checking mechanisms to ensure informed and credible digital communication among youth audiences in contemporary India.

X. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the impact of social media journalism on Generation Z audiences in India, focusing on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) during the period from 2020 to 2025. The study found that social media has become the primary source of news and information for Gen Z audiences because of its accessibility, speed, visual presentation, and interactive nature. Statistical findings revealed that a majority of youth audiences prefer digital and mobile-based journalism over traditional newspapers and television news. Instagram and YouTube emerged as the most influential platforms among Indian youth, significantly shaping news consumption behaviour, public opinion, and digital engagement.

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