



# The Future of Regional Journalism: Examining the Consequences of Newsroom Shrinking In Jammu And Kashmir And Punjab

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This research paper attempts to explore the implications of the newsroom shrinking of regional newspapers in Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab. In the context of complicated socio-political dynamics, financial constraints and technological advancements, this research tries to discover how shrinking of newsroom resources affect journalistic practices, media freedom and dissemination of credible information. By employing qualitative analysis of primary data, including document reviews, interviews with stakeholders and case studies of media organizations, this paper traces key consequences like reduced local coverage, shrinking media diversity and lack of press freedom. This paper also discusses the policies to alleviate these impacts, pushing for the significance of supporting free media, promoting media literacy and vouching for free and credible journalism. The findings of the paper underscored the considerable and decisive role of regional journalism in sustaining democratic discourse and societal cohesion in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.

Keywords: regional journalism, newsroom reduction, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, media diversity.

## Introduction

As Napoli realized and Picard also have emphasized, regional journalism serves as the cornerstone of any democratic society since it gives an outlet for those at the grassroots level to engage with the institutions of governance and hold them to account for their actions (Napoli, 2020; Picard, 2021). Socio-political diversity combined with difference in culture and tradition like in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab in India comes with its strength in ensuring a localized approach to the relevant event where healthy journalism emphasizes on different sections to give voice to diverse sector (Malik, 2022). However, these regions have in the recent past record disturbing trends where newsroom shrinking is mostly encouraged by financial aspects or even sheer political pressures and certainly the digital landscape.

Besides, the economic sustainability of the traditional media outlets have been brought under pressure due to erosion of the advertisement revenues and change in consumer behavior towards the digital platforms. This economic decline in advertising revenue has been even more pronounced in regional media markets where consumer demand for media content is comparatively smaller and there are limited advertising spaces to book, thus magnifying the economic risks (Gupta & Singh, 2019). Contrary to this advancement in technology, specifically in the digitization processes have led to the change of taste and preference of the audiences with many of the audiences relying on computer technologies for their news needs mainly avoiding the traditional media.

Other than the financial factors the regional journalism in the states of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab bear testaments to the generalized and specific factors arising out of the –political and historical backdrop of these state. For instance, both of them have been experiencing political instability and turbulence for decades, especially, Jammu and Kashmir which experienced the worst type of political ill-stability and armed violence Force led by state apparatus imposes the control over media, regulation of journalistic activities and freedom of speech (Duschinski & Bhattacharya, 2018; Bukhari, 2021).

Similarly, Punjab's the past of social and political movements has shaped media dynamics, influencing both coverage preferences and editorial independence (Bains, 2020; Kaur, 2019).

It is presumed that the repercussions of the shrinking of newsrooms in these regions are profound and multifaceted, as the shrinking newsroom resources has led to reduction in coverage of the local issues and community events, thus not only eroding the public's access to the information to social and civil engagements, but also leading to unaccountability in governance (Moyo, 2020; O'Neill & Smith, 2018).

Moreover, this shrinking of regional newsrooms has also reduced the media diversity, limiting the plurality of perspectives available to the audiences and probably tapering the scope of public engagements (Gillespie, 2021; Newman & Levy, 2019). This pattern has not only endangered the quality of democratic consideration but also weakens the pluralistic base of the media system, which is considered essential for developing informed citizenry (Freedman, 2021; McChesney, 2016).

Furthermore, the influence of this trend of newsroom shrinking extends beyond the journalistic practices to include broader insinuations for press liberty and democratic ascendancy. Rao states that journalists in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab have been witness to increased censorship, harassment and legal challenges, whenever they try to report independently or to make those in power accountable (Rao, 2019; Roy, 2022). This particular pressure on the journalists has a terrifying effect, which further endangers the integrity of the democratic institutions and public trust in media (Carlson & Lewis, 2020; Tandoc & Thomas, 2021).

It has been seen that notwithstanding these challenges, there are always chances to preserve and reinforce the regional journalism in Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab, as multiple initiatives are required to support independent media and promote media literacy among the public and also extend vigorous legal protection for journalists. All these are significant steps to mitigate the adverse impact of newsroom shrinking and encouraging professional journalism in these areas (Schiffrin, 2017; Srinivasan & Kaur, 2023).

Having said that it is presumed that the future of regional journalism in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab centers around the concentrated efforts to deal with the complex interaction of economic, technological, and political challenges facing the regional media sector.

### Objectives

This research aims at assessing how newsroom shrinking impacts the growth of regional journalism predominant in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) while focusing on how these changes impact media pluralism, journalists, and the right to information of the public.

1. To investigate the broader streams of revenue generation that the regional media outlets of J&K and Punjab face – the shift towards digital platforms, reduced advertising revenues.
2. To study the competing hypothesis about the changes taking place in the consumption and distribution of news due to the effects of digital technologies in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.
3. To understand current approaches which are being employed by politicians and civil society and media in order to sustain regional journalism taking into account the monetary and political challenges.

### Review of Literature

Journalism is important in region-specific matters of social orientation, administrative accountability, cultural heritage, and identity especially in politically and culturally sensitive regions such as Punjab, India and Kashmir or Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) (Malik, 2022, Kaur, 2019). For this purpose, this research synthesizes the-available work to present a clear understanding of the challenges, trends, and implications of newsroom closures in different regions. It also focuses on the social processes of interaction with media in the context of political, technological, and, to a certain extent, economic transformation.

That is the reason why factors like financial viability are such a great determining factor when it comes to the sustainability of regional journalism. Nielsen and Ganapati (2018) giving examples that traditional media organisations have undergone under tremendous pressure due to the low advertising revenue and consumers' shift to digital. Both Gupta and Singh (2019) also observe this at J&K and Punjab pointing out a problem that regional dailies face when in a struggle to survive amidst dwindling circulations and advertisement revenue opportunities.

Chadwick (2017) posited that due to the new digital technology, the way people receive and relay news around the globe had transformed. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2021) mention that while digital platforms are wonderful for the distribution of news, these could also pose a number of problems such as the presence and effect of algorithms and fake news. Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab has shifted to digital news consumption to varying extents, disrupting regional media's commerce and editorial objectives (Newner & Levy, 2019).

The security situation in the region: The political history of Jammu and Kashmir includes several decades of unrest and security issues, and this has influenced the practices of journalism and media freedom in the region (Duschinski & Bhattacharya, 2018). Bukhari (2021) explores the challenges that hinder the ability of journalists to work freely in the conflict regions by exercising self-censorship and the threats of violence.

As with media charisma and the editorial freedom in Punjab that have been influenced by the histories of the social movements; this also impacts the kinds of voices offered in the regional media publications (Bains, 2020). Downsizing of newsrooms is not just a mere on paper phenomenon but has a direct impact on

plurality of media and the practices prevailing in the journalism. Building on Malik (2022), we can focus on the way J&K outlet cuts have affected capacity of the public to engage in civic activities and general responsibility through minimizing local issues and events coverage.

Explaining the need for media pluralism, Gillespie (2021) has pointed to the importance of a diversity of media ownership for public and outspoken democracy. Despite these challenges, academic voices advocate for strategies to sustain regional journalism in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. To enhance the organizational requirements of human resource sharing and to encourage the local voices Allan and Peters (2020) recommend the formation of synergistic relationships between media organizations, the civil society, and academic institutions. Schiffrin in his article has opined that while policy advocacy separately for journalistic autonomy and schemes of legal protection of this category is important to protect press freedom and construct a corpus of media pluralism, such recommendations are vital for the growth of media pluralism in a number of regional areas as well.

The key issues that have been presented in the literature analysis involve the various challenges that journalism in the regions of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab experience due to legal restrictions set by the government, technical challenges, and financial concerns. Thus, it is possible to overcome these challenges and try to sustain vibrant and vital regional journalism by building cooperation, gaining necessary policy backing and supporting calls for a free press that consequently meets the diverse needs of the local communities and upholds democratic tenets in culturally important regions.

### Methodology

This research explores how newsroom downsizing has had diverse consequences on regional journalism in both Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Punjab employing a qualitative method of research. Three main approaches are incorporated in the research design: questionnaires, focus groups, case studies, surveys and structured and semi-structured interviews. First, a document review was conducted where theory on the subject, academic works, records, and the media were reviewed to set the premise. This paper served to throw into focus of some of the political, technological, and economic challenges that local media organizations in these areas encounter. Secondly, through purposive sampling, fifteen key informants including journalists, editors, media experts and representatives of CSOs, and policymakers were interviewed using semi structured interviews. The interviews conducted for this study targeted the use of journalism practices, media diversification and specific freedoms wishing to gather more information about the impact of reduction in newsrooms.

Third, single-source qualitative analysis of selected media of J&K and Punjab was done through Studying specific Radio stations, Television Channels. In these case studies, officials of important parties were asked, editorial policies were examined, and financial records were scrutinized, and newsroom activities were documented. This approach provided researchers with rich insights as to how some media organisations manage strict limitations on the available budgets, maintain editorial independence, and communicate with their audiences. Extent of reliability of the results was ensured by cross checking the results from the different approach. Among the various ethical principles that were not violated during the research process, confidentiality and informed consent were two cardinal principles that were adhered to religiously. By adopting this methodological approach, it was possible to fully map out the concerns and approaches necessary to keep sustaining regional journalism in these culturally and, in many cases, politically sensitive areas.

### Findings

An analysis, of these documents painted a rather complex picture of regional journalism in Punjabi and the state of J&K including political constraints, technological influence, and economic challenges. Researches made by academics and articles showed that traditional media experienced a severe decline in its revenues any further deteriorated by the way the digital revolution influence people's behaviour of reading the news. It has brought about the viability of local media organizations though it has prompted newsroom layoffs and reorganisation initiatives which infringes on editorial independence and plurality. Interviews in the present study were semi structured which provided data that exposed increased changes in the journalism profession and media pluralism in J&K and Punjab due to newsroom ^{c} reductions. Evaluating their effectiveness and calibre, the journalists and the editors expressed their concern regarding the dwindling standards that compelled them to compromise their local perspectives as a result of the pressures from the editorial desks and limited resources at their disposal. It was a frequent concern shared by many stakeholders as to how challenging it is to cope with threats, legal challenges and censorship and how do all these impact press freedom and journalism. There are strategies that were touched on as including: transitioning to digital platforms, encouraging for media literacy programs and partnership to enhance preparedness against influence were among the strategies that were discussed with regard to the issue at hand.

A realization of how reduction of newsroom affects operational operations and strategic directions of media organizations was made through an analysis of particular media organizations. In these organisations, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, respondents aver that while to was imperative to adapt to

financial stringency and ensure that the community remained as pivotal as before, something that was achieved through these plans. Different organizations received and performed differently in one of the key concerns of media, such as editorial independence and relevance across various stakeholders. They also demonstrated resilience through acts of othering and subverting multiple forms of media, forming strategic partnerships, and renewing commitment to the society's trust in journalism. In the analysis of the collected qualitative data derived from survey interviews and case studies applying content analysis, it was found that the examination resulted in recurring top reliable themes such as the diminution in local news, challenges surrounding media sustainability, and measures to safeguard press freedom. The findings underscored the centrality of regional media in preserving popular and political culture in J&K and Punjab as well as in fostering democracy. Despite the significant challenges noted above, stakeholders demonstrated courage and innovative ways of adapting to changes in media environments, proposing policy interventions, training and public engagement activities to coalesce support for regional journalism.

The emerging conclusions of the study provide insights into the multiple impacts of the newsroom closures for the local journalism sector in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. Media ecosystems have shifted based on the economic realities and evolving digital environment, which threatens the traditional structural and behavioral conventions associated with commercial and professional media organizations. Political actors' pressures introduce additional problems and pose a risk to the media pluralism and the freedom of the press. Still, the study identifies the roles that stakeholders can play to advance media freedom, foster innovation, and support laws that defend independent media and democracy. The results underscore how some regional media remain eager to thrive no matter how challenging the landscape may be, but they also show how much more work is still to be done in finding steady models which will serve the public's interest and produce accountability.

### Discussion

The findings of the research indicate that the future of local journalism in India's Punjab and J&K has dire consequences following the shrinking of newsrooms. The decline in local coverage has been noted, and it has been likened to a considerable reduction in cultural advancements and concerns depiction. This aspect raises a major issue to resource allocation, meaning that journalists working in these areas are likely to have limited resources in regards to proper reporting. This influences not just the tensile and the omnibus of the news and infotainment agendas, but also the media's propensity to portray the various voices of the society. The ignorance of the restrictively selected spectrum of opinions in media and democratic policy further aggravates the deterioration of media pluralism due to closing and media mergers. Both of these trends are dangerous for the key principles of media diversity and representation which is required to educate the citizens and encourage their active participation in the democratic process.

The result also underlines the critical challenges to press freedom as now currently faced by journalists in Punjab and J&K. Self-censorship, embarrassment, threats and lawsuits have been used by authorities to instill fear in journalist to hinder their ability to report sensitive issues on political process as well as the violations of human rights. Besides eradicating objectivism in journalism, these demands also have a freezing effect within the watchdog media's responsibility for exposing government impunity and advocating for openness. Furthermore, the use of digital platforms in news dissemination offers new opportunities in getting increased access to the areas and people, but also comes with new challenges such as fake news and algorithmic biases that aggravate the media landscape in such places.

But still, our study has identified some promising strategies and measures to sustain regional journalism in both the regions; J&K and Punjab. The institutions such as academic organizations, civil society and media needs to provide acquired knowledge for resource sharing while media freedom needs to be advocated and the general public educated. Improving the capability and sustainability of regional media in the increasingly challenging techno-economic environment means that innovations in diversification of media revenue, digital strategies, and participatory journalism can help regain a strong communication link to the greater community. Demonstrating interest and support for the rights of journalists and freedom of speech are crucial the necessities of democratic state and individual in any politically and culturally sensitive region.

### Conclusion

It stress upon the role of regional media as the bulwark of cultural thoroughbreds of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the frontier to defends that alone democracy as well as the public accountability resides. Still, shrinkage of newsroom associated with political restrictions, technological increase and economic factors pose a significant risk to the sustainability and effectiveness of regional media. The decrease of advertising revenues has been highlighted as an important issue for traditional media outlets and their financial sustainability has been an issue due to the transition of people's consumption of news through online sources. This has led to reduced public involvement and reporting on issues that affect locals and other residents in the region. Localised reporting used to be an important aspect in educating citizens and strengthening community togetherness within these places, a reality that has now been hampered by this trend.



As per the perceptions of the media researchers, and news writers and editors interviewed for the study, downsizing in newsrooms has added more risk and responsibilities to the media professionals along with reducing the range of the news stories. Free inquiries and critical investigations have been hampered by an insecure environment that independent media has faced due to censorship, intimidation, and legal persecution. These problems are more visible in the context of Journalists working in J&K especially in the current geopolitical global order where journalistic methods entail more dangers and require more complication. Nevertheless, both at national and regional levels, media organisations have proven to be extraordinarily resilient and creative. In this sense, these organisations are flexing their muscles through activities such as campaigning for better standards based on the journalistic ethic, forging partnerships, and taking advantage online technologies. Nonetheless, there are still challenges in maintaining editorial independence and ensuring that complex and diverse stories are covered to the optimum.

The implications of newsroom reduction that various media companies in J&K and Punjab faced are also highlighted through the different effects and the efforts companies made to overcome such effects are also illustrated through the case studies. To innovate digital platforms offer new opportunities in participation and revenue but new forms of challenges contain algorithmic biases and fake information. People have been able to expose themselves to a lesser number of views due to reduced media diversity and the increased consolidation of media ownership, which has weakened pluralism that is crucial for the existence of democracy.

Thus, the relation could be drawn that policy, technology and economic challenges can only be met through a co-ordinate approach if regional journalism in J&K and Punjab is to sustain itself. There is a dire need for policy intervention and proactivity to support independent media continued operation, provide baseline legal recourse for journalists, and increase product media literacy within the public. Media organisations, civic society and academic institutions must join hands it will increase the local voices in the media and the sustainability of the regional journalism ecosystems. Thus, it is possible to provide stakeholders with an environment in which journalism can flourish, and regional media can continue to perform its crucial functions of promoting democratic values and the informed population, as well as social cohesion in these politically and culturally significant territories.

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