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Research Article

Women in Political Journalism in India: Challenges and Emerging Opportunities

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Abstract

Political journalism plays a crucial role in shaping democratic discourse by informing citizens about governance, elections, public policies, and political accountability. In India, the participation of women in political journalism has expanded over the past few decades; however, their professional journeys continue to be shaped by complex structural, institutional, and socio-cultural challenges. This paper examines how women political journalists in India negotiate workplace barriers such as gender bias, unequal access to leadership roles, safety concerns during field reporting, work–life balance pressures, and the growing threat of digital harassment in the era of networked media.

At the same time, the study highlights emerging opportunities created by the expansion of digital journalism, alternative media platforms, increased gender sensitisation within news organisations, and the visibility of women-led political reporting. By analysing contemporary media trends and scholarly discourse, the paper argues that women journalists are not merely adapting to existing newsroom cultures but are actively reshaping political reporting practices through technological competence, narrative innovation, and professional resilience. The study concludes that the negotiation of challenges and opportunities is redefining the role, identity, and influence of women political journalists within India's evolving media landscape.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the participation of women in journalism in India has expanded significantly across print, television, radio, and digital media platforms. Women journalists are increasingly visible in reporting, anchoring, analysis, and editorial roles, contributing to public discourse on governance, elections, public policy, and international relations. Despite this growing presence, political journalism continues to be shaped by historically entrenched gendered power structures that influence access to sources, newsroom hierarchies, and professional recognition.

Political reporting has traditionally been perceived as a demanding and male-dominated journalistic beat due to its close engagement with political institutions, field-based reporting requirements, irregular working schedules, and heightened public scrutiny. As more women enter this domain, they often navigate complex professional environments marked by gender bias, limited access to influential political networks, and concerns related to physical safety during on-ground coverage. These structural and occupational challenges not only shape career trajectories but also influence the nature and visibility of women's contributions to political journalism.

The rapid transformation of the media ecosystem in the digital era has further reconfigured the conditions of political reporting. Digital platforms and social networking sites have expanded opportunities for independent journalism, audience engagement, and alternative political narratives. However, these developments have also intensified gendered vulnerabilities, exposing women journalists to online harassment, trolling, and targeted disinformation campaigns. The intersection of digital precarity and professional responsibility has thus emerged as a defining feature of contemporary political journalism.

At the same time, the evolving media landscape has created new avenues for professional advancement and participation. The growth of digital news organisations, independent media initiatives, skill-development programs, and increased institutional awareness of gender equality has contributed to the gradual transformation of newsroom cultures. Women journalists are increasingly leveraging technological competence, narrative innovation, and professional resilience to negotiate existing barriers and expand their influence within political reporting.

In this context, a systematic examination of the challenges faced by women political journalists, alongside the emerging opportunities shaping their professional experiences, becomes essential for understanding the changing dynamics of media practice in India. This study seeks to analyse these dimensions in order to provide deeper insights into the negotiation strategies, professional realities, and prospects of women in political journalism within an evolving democratic communication environment.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the major professional challenges faced by women journalists in political journalism.
2. To examine safety concerns and workplace barriers affecting women political journalists.

3. To analyse the impact of digital media and online harassment on women journalists covering political news.
4. To explore emerging opportunities for women journalists in political journalism in the changing media environment.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarly research on gender and journalism has consistently highlighted the underrepresentation of women in political reporting and leadership roles within media organisations. Several studies have examined the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's participation in political journalism. Ammu Joseph (2005) ^[1] in her book discussed the changing position of women in Indian journalism. The author highlighted that although the number of women entering journalism has increased over the years, women journalists still face several professional challenges, such as gender discrimination, lack of decision-making power in newsrooms, and unequal opportunities in reporting important beats such as politics and conflict reporting.

Byerly, Carolyn M. (2013) ^[3] in her global study, examined the status of women in news media organisations. The study revealed that women journalists are still underrepresented in leadership roles and high-profile reporting assignments. The research also pointed out that newsroom structures often reflect gender inequality, which affects the professional growth of women journalists.

North, Louise (2016) ^[4] in her research, analysed gender differences in journalism and highlighted the distinction between "hard news" and "soft news." The study observed that political and economic reporting are traditionally categorised as hard news and are often dominated by male journalists, while women journalists are more frequently assigned to lifestyle or social issues.

Global Media Monitoring Project (2020) presented an international report on gender representation in news media. The report revealed that women remain underrepresented both as journalists and as sources in political news stories. The study emphasised the need for greater gender equality in media representation and newsroom leadership.

Robertson, C. T., Selva, M., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021) ^[8] examined the representation of women in senior editorial positions across 240 major news outlets in 12 countries. The study found that women remain significantly underrepresented in newsroom leadership, with only about 22% of top editors being women, despite women constituting nearly 40% of the journalism workforce. The research highlights that gender disparity persists in media leadership across most countries, indicating structural barriers within news organizations. The study also notes that broader gender equality in society does not necessarily translate into equal representation in media leadership. The authors emphasize the need for institutional reforms and inclusive newsroom policies to improve women's participation in decision-making roles within journalism.

Tomar, Ranu (2011), in her research paper, tried to highlight the poor representation of issues related to women in media coverage. The researcher explored the challenges faced by women journalists and emphasised the need for transformation

in media practices to bridge the gap between the social identities of women and men in journalism. Rao, Shakuntala (2016) ^[9] examined the transformation of Indian journalism in the context of technological developments and changing media practices. The study highlighted that the expansion of digital media platforms and online journalism has created new professional opportunities for journalists, including women. These developments have enabled women journalists to engage more actively in political reporting, commentary, and public discourse through digital media spaces.

Neyazi, Taberez Ahmed (2019) ^[10] discusses the growing influence of the internet and digital communication in transforming journalism practices in India. The study explains how the expansion of internet access and online media platforms has enabled journalists to connect with wider audiences and engage in new forms of reporting and public communication. The development of digital journalism and online news platforms has therefore created new professional opportunities for journalists to participate in public discourse and political communication in the digital era.

From the above studies, it can be observed that although women journalists have made significant progress in the field of journalism, they still face several professional and structural challenges. The existing literature mainly focuses on gender representation, newsroom culture, and media portrayal of women. However, there are limited studies that specifically examine the participation of women in political journalism in India. Therefore, the present study attempts to analyse the role of women in political journalism along with the challenges they

face and the emerging opportunities in the evolving media landscape.

Conceptual Framework

The present study proposes a conceptual framework to explain the factors influencing women's participation in political journalism in India. The framework highlights two major dimensions: professional challenges and emerging opportunities. Professional challenges represent the structural and occupational barriers faced by women journalists while working in political reporting. These challenges include gender bias within newsroom practices, safety concerns during field reporting, digital harassment and online trolling, lack of political beat assignments, and difficulties in maintaining work-life balance. Such factors often restrict the professional growth and participation of women journalists in political journalism.

On the other hand, the changing media environment has also created several emerging opportunities for women journalists. The expansion of digital journalism platforms, independent media initiatives, and social media reporting has enabled women journalists to express their perspectives more freely and reach wider audiences. Online political commentary and increased visibility of women journalists in digital spaces are also contributing to their growing participation in political journalism.

Thus, the framework demonstrates that while women journalists continue to face several professional challenges, the evolving digital media ecosystem is simultaneously creating new opportunities that support their participation and representation in political journalism.

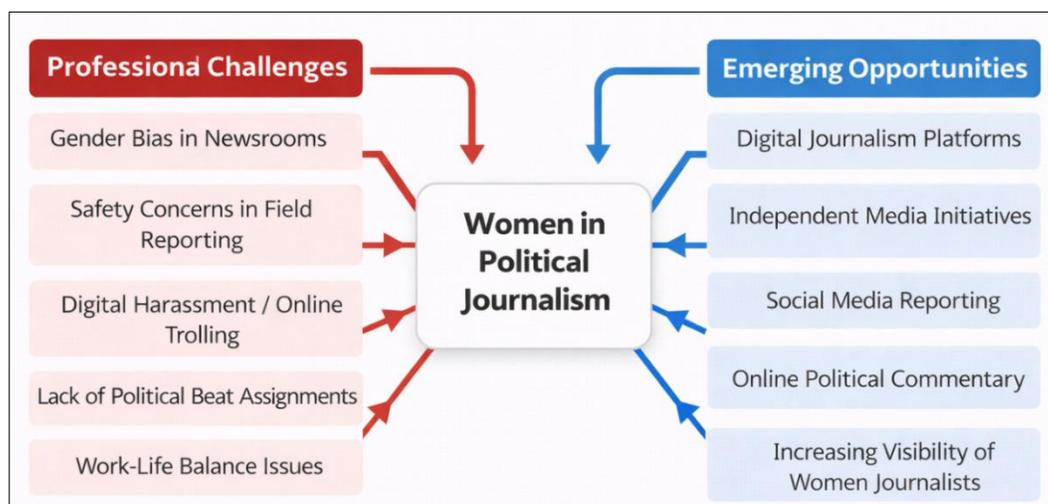


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework showing Professional Challenges and Emerging Opportunities influencing Women in Political Journalism.

The conceptual framework illustrates the key factors influencing women's participation in political journalism. It shows that women journalists encounter multiple professional challenges, such as gender bias, safety concerns, and digital harassment, which may restrict their professional growth. At the same time, the expansion of digital media platforms and independent journalism initiatives has created emerging

opportunities that support greater visibility and participation of women in political reporting.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach to analyse the role, challenges, and emerging opportunities for women in political journalism in India. The

research primarily relies on secondary data sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reports by media organisations, and studies conducted by international institutions focusing on gender representation in media.

The methodology involves a systematic review and analysis of the existing literature on women journalists, gender inequality in media institutions, newsroom culture, and the evolving landscape of political journalism in India. Reports from organisations such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), and studies by Indian media scholars have been examined to understand patterns of participation and challenges faced by women journalists.

Content analysis of scholarly publications and media reports was conducted to identify key themes related to gender discrimination, safety concerns, work-life balance, access to political networks, and digital harassment. Additionally, case studies of prominent women political journalists in India were reviewed to understand their contributions and professional experiences in political reporting.

The analytical framework of the study focuses on two primary dimensions influencing women's participation in political journalism:

- Professional challenges faced by women journalists
- The emerging opportunities created by the evolving digital media environment

By integrating insights from existing literature and institutional reports, the study seeks to examine the professional challenges encountered by women journalists and the emerging opportunities that shape their participation in political journalism in India.

5. DATA INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of the collected data reveals significant insights regarding the participation of women journalists in political journalism in India. The analysis is based on two primary dimensions identified in the analytical framework of the study: professional challenges and emerging opportunities.

• Professional Challenges

The findings indicate that women journalists face several professional challenges while working in political journalism. One of the major challenges identified in the study is gender bias within newsroom structures, where political reporting is often perceived as a demanding and high-pressure beat that is traditionally assigned to male journalists. As a result, women journalists sometimes receive fewer opportunities to cover major political events, election campaigns, or investigative political stories.

Another important challenge highlighted in the study is safety concerns during field reporting. Political journalism frequently requires journalists to cover protests, political rallies, and conflict-related events, which can pose physical and psychological risks. Women journalists often experience additional concerns related to harassment or intimidation during such assignments.

The study also reveals the growing issue of digital harassment and online trolling faced by women political journalists. With the expansion of social media platforms, women journalists are increasingly exposed to abusive comments, threats, and gender-based criticism online. These challenges have the potential to affect both their workplace performance and psychological well-being.

In addition to these challenges, work-life balance and professional pressures also influence the participation of women in political journalism. The irregular working hours, extensive travel, and continuous monitoring of political developments can create difficulties in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

• Emerging Opportunities

Despite these challenges, the study also identifies several emerging opportunities that are contributing to the growing participation of women journalists in political journalism. One of the most significant developments is the expansion of digital journalism platforms, which have created new spaces for independent reporting and political commentary. Digital media has enabled women journalists to bypass traditional newsroom hierarchies and establish their presence through online news portals, podcasts, and social media platforms. These platforms allow journalists to present diverse perspectives and engage directly with audiences.

The study also indicates that the increasing presence of women journalists in television debates, political interviews, and digital news programs has enhanced their visibility in political discourse. Many women journalists are now actively contributing to policy discussions, election analysis, and international political reporting.

Furthermore, the growth of independent media initiatives and digital journalism networks has encouraged greater participation of women journalists by providing alternative professional opportunities beyond traditional media institutions.

Overall Interpretation

Overall, the interpretation of the data suggests that while women journalists continue to face several professional challenges in political journalism, the evolving digital media environment is simultaneously creating new opportunities for their participation and visibility. The interaction between these challenges and opportunities plays a crucial role in shaping the present and future role of women journalists in political reporting in India.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are categorised into two major dimensions identified in the analytical framework: professional challenges and emerging opportunities influencing women in political journalism in India.

Professional Challenges

1. The study indicates that women journalists in political journalism face structural and professional barriers within

- media organisations, which influence their career growth and professional experiences.
- Gender bias within newsroom practices remains a significant challenge, as political reporting is often perceived as a demanding beat traditionally dominated by male journalists.
 - The findings reveal that limited access to political networks and important political assignments restricts the professional opportunities available to women journalists in political journalism.
 - The study highlights safety concerns during field reporting, especially while covering political rallies, protests, and conflict-related political events.
 - Another important challenge identified is digital harassment and online trolling, which frequently targets women journalists who actively engage in political reporting on social media platforms.
 - The study also finds that irregular working hours and demanding reporting schedules can create difficulties in maintaining work–life balance for women journalists.

Emerging Opportunities

- The study finds that the expansion of digital journalism platforms has created new opportunities for women journalists to participate in political reporting.
- The rise of independent digital media platforms and online news portals has allowed women journalists to engage in political reporting beyond traditional newsroom hierarchies.
- Social media platforms have also increased the visibility and professional reach of women journalists, enabling them to participate more actively in political discourse.
- Finally, the study suggests that although women journalists face several professional challenges in political journalism, emerging opportunities created by digital media and evolving media practices are gradually strengthening their role in political reporting in India.

7. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the status of women in political journalism in India with particular focus on the professional challenges and emerging opportunities influencing their role in the field. The findings reveal that women journalists continue to face several structural and professional barriers, including gender bias in newsroom practices, safety concerns during field reporting, limited access to political networks, and increasing instances of digital harassment. These challenges often influence their professional experiences and career progression in political journalism.

At the same time, the evolving media landscape has created new opportunities for women journalists through the expansion of digital journalism platforms, independent media initiatives, and social media engagement. These developments have enabled women journalists to participate more actively in political discourse and reach wider audiences. The study suggests that although professional challenges persist, emerging opportunities within digital media are gradually strengthening

the visibility and influence of women journalists in political reporting. Therefore, promoting gender-sensitive newsroom practices and ensuring safer professional environments can further enhance the participation of women in political journalism in India.

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