



Managing Election Misinformation: Comparing Artificial Intelligence Policies Across Indian News Organizations

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Citation

Mathur, T., & Kumar, P. (2026). Managing Election Misinformation: Comparing Artificial Intelligence Policies Across Indian News Organizations. In Innovative Research Thoughts in Social Sciences (Vol. 2, Number 2, pp. 86–98). Zenodo.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20713452>

Abstract

Indian elections are vulnerable to artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Generative media and deepfakes can quickly amplify political misinformation to voters. Currently, the Indian media lacks a consistent standard to deal with the technology. This article explores the policy gap through a comparative assessment of three policy approaches. It reviews the regulations of The Quint for its digital newsroom, the rules of the government's Press Information Bureau, and the code of ethics of the Press Council of India. These publicly available documents show a diverse regulatory landscape. The Quint bans journalists from using generative tools to create content, prioritising accuracy. The government has stringent legal requirements, mandating tagging of synthetic media and instant removal. The Press Council of India is based solely on journalistic ethics, and has no technical rules. This study is constrained by a lack of data, as legacy newspapers don't publish technology policies. This study shows that existing self-regulation processes are not fast enough for today's elections. The research offers a minimal three-point interim policy on human verification and disclosure for media organisations.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Indian elections, media regulation, digital journalism, synthetic media

Introduction

The use of artificial intelligence changed how political campaigns were conducted during the Indian general election in 2024. Synthetic media was deployed by political parties. The public was confronted with tangible videos. In one case, an AI video brought a dead politician, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, back to life to campaign for the current political candidates. In the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, political agents sent out millions of deepfake videos of a political leader, Manoj Tiwari, speaking in various languages. These examples show the use of synthetic audio and video to deceive. These tools make it easy and cheap to produce misleading political videos. It poses a threat to India's electoral process.

The media bear the responsibility of legitimating political messages. But the Indian media face an acute problem because they lack a code of practice when it comes to synthetic media. Some news outlets see generative technology as a means to generate content. They employ algorithms for automated writing or digital art. Other journalists understand that synthetic media undermines the very objectivity of news. A recent assessment of the Indian news media states that the increasing use of automation brings significant ethical issues, including bias and

misinformation (Chhipa, Dixit, & Shukla, 2026). This structural divide leaves the information ecosystem at risk.

The amount of altered media during recent elections highlights the need for rigorous editorial policies. Studies assessing electoral security in India reveal political actors using deepfake techniques to create fake political speeches and endorsements. These strategies seek to undermine trust and influence voters (International Journal of Advanced Research, 2026). Journalists are the first line of defence. Failure to adopt clear guidelines around the identification of synthetic media can result in media magnifying the disinformation. Coordinated action is needed for public protection.

This paper explores the regulatory gap in the Indian media. It takes into account the public technology policies of three different organisations. It examines the digital fact checking guidelines of The Quint, a new digital news organisation. It also reviews the government directives issued by the Press Information Bureau, the government entity. It also examines the code of ethics of the Press Council of India, the traditional statutory print media regulator. The lack of a national approach is evident when one compares these three bodies. The variations between the three models are striking. The Quint employs a fact

checking team and bars media professionals from using generative AI to publish articles. They value human verification over machine efficiency. The government, on the other hand, is enforcing strict laws. The Press Information Bureau mandates companies to tag synthetic media and provide instant take-down services. For its part, the Press Council of India is bound by general journalistic standards set long before the advent of contemporary generative algorithms. They warn against misinformation but don't provide any specific technical guidelines for newsrooms.

This study has a narrow focus. These data are sourced entirely from public policy statements and government announcements. The use of public data has limitations. Legacy newspaper and television broadcasters in India do not release technology guidelines. As a result, this paper cannot offer a comprehensive list of all newsrooms in India. It does provide an in depth examination of three organisations and their approach to synthetic media. Our insights are based on policies as they stand at the time, acknowledging technologies are changing faster than rules.

Existing self-regulation processes are inadequate to protect the public during election campaigns. A mixture of guidelines leads to confusion for journalists and

consumers. The goal of this paper is to outline the policy shortfalls, and suggest a solution. Drawing on the comparative approach, this study proposes a simple three point temporary policy for media houses in India. This emphasis is on public disclosure and human oversight. Adopting these regulations will enable news media to report on deceptive political material without compromising on facts.

Review of Literature

(Bantanoor, 2026)

This study aims to understand how synthetic media and deepfakes contribute to the spread of false information during Indian election cycles. The researcher utilizes a qualitative methodology. They evaluate secondary data such as official studies, policy documents, and news reports concerning digital disinformation. The findings reveal that political actors use deepfake methods to generate fake speeches and alter campaign messages to sway public opinion. The researcher notes that current legal structures fail to address these issues adequately. A multifaceted approach involving strict legal frameworks and digital literacy is necessary to protect electoral integrity in India.

(Arya & Sharma, 2023)

This paper investigates the application of generative artificial intelligence within the Indian media industry. The authors aim to identify the practical opportunities and challenges that newsrooms face when adopting these tools. The methodology relies on a descriptive overview and industry analysis of current digital newsroom practices. The research shows that automated tools offer distinct advantages for preliminary review, language formatting, and creating digital art. The authors caution that these tools have severe limitations in understanding complex academic or political contexts. Media organizations face a significant challenge in balancing automated efficiency with the need for factual accuracy.

(Matich, Thomson, & Thomas, 2025)

This research asks how unique the threats posed by generative artificial intelligence are to visual journalism. The study aims to contextualize modern algorithmic tools against historic tensions in news production. The methodology combines a conceptual literature review with empirical interviews gathered from visual journalists across three continents. The findings indicate that concerns regarding synthetic media resemble older debates about manipulated photography and the transition to social media. The authors state that while the scale of the threat is larger,

the fundamental risk to journalistic objectivity and professional boundaries remains a historic problem.

(Borz & De Francesco, 2024)

This study addresses how multiple organizational and political actors can manage the risks of digital political campaigning. The research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of regulatory compliance in the digital space. The authors apply a multi-level actor methodology. They review regulatory instruments adopted by governments and online platforms to reduce online disinformation during elections. The findings demonstrate that digital platforms often exhibit only symbolic commitment to regulatory principles rather than practical enforcement. The researchers detail that mitigating the risks of digital campaigning requires interdisciplinary coordination and strict legal accountability for political actors.

(Chhipa, Dixit, & Shukla, 2026) This book chapter evaluates the rapid adoption of automated tools by Indian journalists. The authors aim to document the specific ethical concerns that arise when newsrooms automate their reporting processes. The methodology involves a qualitative assessment of the current technological transition within the Indian media landscape. The study finds that while automation increases production speed, it introduces severe risks

regarding bias and unverified information. The authors state that the Indian media ecosystem currently lacks the necessary ethical guardrails to handle synthetic content responsibly.

Research Gaps

A review of this literature reveals distinct research gaps. Most current studies focus heavily on the theoretical risks of deepfakes or the broad legal frameworks needed to stop them. Very little empirical research documents the internal editorial processes of specific Indian newsrooms during an active election cycle. The literature lacks quantitative data regarding how frequently local Indian journalists actually use synthetic verification tools. Academic studies currently rely on secondary policy reviews instead of direct observational data from media organizations. This lack of primary newsroom data limits our understanding of how self-regulation functions in practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative multi-case study comparing document analysis to assess media regulation practices of various Indian organisations during elections. Document analysis is a research technique that involves

examining and assessing documents. This method suits the purposes of the current study as media regulations, editorial policies and government directives are text artifacts. They can be examined to determine the official regulations of journalistic practice.

The qualitative nature of the data requires a qualitative approach because it is policy text rather than statistical data. The study does not quantify the extent of journalists' use of artificial intelligence. Rather, it focuses on the governing rules that govern how they must use it. Through comparisons of the precise wording of the policies, it reveals inconsistencies, gaps and redundancies in the existing regulatory framework. This approach allows us to determine which models provide prescriptive technical advice and those that only suggest non-binding ethical statements.

Sampling

Our study uses a purposive sampling approach to identify the entities for investigation. Purposive sampling is a process of subject selection, whereby subjects are selected because they represent different, critical sub-groups of a population. India has a vast information space with thousands of regional and national news organisations. We cannot examine all of them because of the time constraints of this research. Hence, we sample

three entities that represent the mainstay of India's media regulation.

- The first is The Quint. This is a digital-first journalism company. The Quint has a fact-checking vertical, WebQoof, which regularly counters political mis- and disinformation. It's important to include a digital-native entity because they come face to face with synthetic media every day, and they develop quick decision-making rules to deal with threats.
- The second entity we have chosen is the Press Information Bureau, which represents the regulatory control of the state. This would include the mandates issued by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Election Commission of India. The government is the "big stick" legal enforcer. The inclusion of the state is important as the government regulations set the legal framework for platforms and publishers in relation to manipulated political content.
- Our third entity is the Press Council of India. This is the traditional statutory ethics ombudsman for the print media. The Press Council is the historic benchmark of journalistic ethics in the nation. The inclusion of this statutory body in this study allows the

research to explore the adequacy of traditional ethics codes to address the technical challenges posed by synthetic media.

The sampling strategy does not include major legacy newspapers and television broadcasters. Preliminary searches found these traditional media organisations rarely publish their editorial technology rules. Without public documents, they cannot be included in an official document analysis. The sample is limited to the entities that publish their rules about digital content.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was limited to obtaining official public documents from the three organisations. The data was collected in April 2026. This period is crucial as it represents the regulatory regime post the exponential rise of synthetic media in the 2024 and 2025 Indian elections.

The study team visited the websites of The Quint, the Press Information Bureau, and the Press Council of India. They searched for documents that included keywords such as artificial intelligence, synthetic media, deepfakes, editorial guidelines and election misinformation.

For The Quint, the main document researchers accessed is the official "About Us" and the

editor's methodology page published under the WebQoof brand. These pages define the operating guidelines for their journalists and fact-checkers. In the case of the government, researchers collected official press releases and advisories published on the portal of the Press Information Bureau. This includes advisories issued to the social media intermediaries for the detection and expulsion of deepfakes under the Information Technology (IT) Rules. In the case of the Press Council of India, the key policy document is the official report and chairperson's speech of the National Press Day celebration on "Media in the age of AI".

The research only utilises primary policy documents or official announcements. It does not include the second-hand reporting of the policies for fear of misreading or journalistic spin. The documents were downloaded as text files to create a fixed data set for coding.

Thematic Framework and Coding Matrix

This study uses a coding matrix to compare the documents. The researchers cannot just read the policies and provide summaries. They need to extract information according to specific variables to compare the documents objectively. Three key variables are used to assess each document.

First is Content Creation Restrictions. This

variable assesses if the policy sets clear limits on employing synthetic tools to create text, audio or video content for publication. In the coding process, this variable asks whether an organisation issues an outright ban, permission under certain circumstances, or does not address synthetic generation at all. This variable is used to identify whether the policy is concerned with newsroom practices or moderating content.

The second variable is Public Disclosure and Labeling. This variable relates to the policy's transparency requirements. If a news media company publishes a doctored video to disprove a misinformation claim, the public should be aware the video is fake. The coding checks whether the guidelines require clear visual watermarks, audio tags or particular text labels in either the headline or the body of the article. It also notes whether these tags are mandated for all political content or just election-specific material.

The third factor is Verification Protocols and Accountability. This relates to the human oversight of production. The coding checks whether the policy requires all synthetic content to be edited by a human. And it examines responsibility. For example, if a machine makes an error of fact, or posts a defamatory political statement, the policy should reveal who takes responsibility for this

error. The researchers scanned each document line by line to identify phrases that relate to these three variables. We then put the text into a matrix. This format enables a comparison of how each company responds to the same regulatory issue.

Research Question: How do Indian media organizations and state bodies regulate the use of synthetic media during election cycles?

Code Name	Definition	Inclusion Criteria (Code when the text mentions)	Exclusion Criteria (Do not code when the text mentions)	Verified Example Text from Sources
Content Creation Restrictions (CCR)	Rules dictating the permissible use of generative tools to write articles or create visual media.	Explicit bans or permissions on using artificial intelligence to generate text, video, or audio for publication.	Guidelines concerning standard spell-check, basic translation tools, or search engine optimization.	The Quint prohibits reporters from using generative tools for creating news articles or photo-realistic images.
Public Disclosure and Labeling (PDL)	Mandates requiring platforms or publishers to inform the audience that a piece of media is synthetic.	Directives on visual watermarks, audio disclaimers, or metadata tagging for deepfakes and altered election material.	General copyright disclaimers, website terms of service, or traditional photography credits.	Press Information Bureau advisories mandate that synthetic information must carry prominent labels indicating the content is digitally modified.
Verification Protocols and Accountability (VPA)	Requirements for human oversight and the assignment of editorial or legal responsibility for published content.	Rules demanding a human editor review algorithmic outputs or Statements assigning legal liability for misinformation.	Standard copyediting protocols or basic peer review processes for human writers.	The Press Council of India emphasizes that existing norms of Journalistic conduct regarding factual verification apply strictly to new technological tools

Qualitative Document Analysis Codebook

Documents Coded:

1. Editorial and WebQoof guidelines (The Quint)
2. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology Advisories via Press Information Bureau (Government of India)
3. National Press Day 2023 Report (Press Council of India)

Findings and Analysis

Thematic Analysis

The researchers coded the three policy documents using the qualitative codebook. This yielded specific guidelines and regulations of The Quint, the Press Information Bureau and the Press Council of India. The results are presented under the three variables: Content Creation Restrictions, Public Disclosure and Labeling, and Verification Protocols and Accountability.

Content Creation Restrictions

This study shows a stark difference in the way these news media companies govern the creation of synthetic media. The Quint has the strictest policy. Their code of ethics makes it clear that journalists should not use generative tools to produce news stories or images. They equate automation with fake news.

The Press Council of India is very different. An analysis of their report on National Press

Day reveals no technical constraints. The statutory authority raises concerns about the risks of misinformation generally but doesn't prohibit or regulate the production of synthetic text by media professionals.

The government recommendations of the Press Information Bureau also do not address the creation of synthetic content by newsrooms. Government directives deal only with the hosting of synthetic media by social media platforms. The government does not dictate what journalists publish, but it does dictate where. This leaves a large gap in the production of news without external regulation.

Public Disclosure and Labeling

Labeling requirements are heavily state-centric. This is one category where the state reigns. Press Information Bureau advisories rigidly insist on labeling by digital platforms of artificial information. If an edited political video is shared during elections, it must be marked as digitally edited.

Self-regulatory frameworks lack such guidelines. Neither The Quint nor the Press Council of India has technical guidelines for watermarking. The Press Council has no public disclosure protocol for using AI. If an old-school newspaper uses an algorithm to create a political data-viz, present ethical guidelines don't compel them to disclose the algorithmic process. This suggests that self-

regulation is not transparent enough.

Verification Protocols and Accountability

Models vary greatly in terms of accountability. The Quint uses required human verification. Their WebQoof section involves human editors debunking political misinformation. The newsroom team is solely responsible for the accuracy of the news.

The Press Council of India also needs human intervention, but this is based on old rules. Their position is that the traditional rules of journalistic practice should be applied to new technology. Their council considers it a moral and ethical responsibility of the reporter. They don't provide any new means of oversight.

The government creates a legal obligation for accountability. Advisories issued by the Press Information Bureau caution digital platforms that they will be liable under the Information Technology Rules if they do not comply. The government allocates accountability through a strict deadline, requiring the takedown of deepfakes within a certain period.

The thematic analysis confirms that there is no coordinated policy. The online newsroom has internal prohibitions. The government relies on punitive legal requirements and labelling. The traditional legislated body relies on old-fashioned ethical

recommendations. This leaves journalists with no "standard operating procedure" (SOP) to respond to synthetic media in the fast-moving election cycle. The lack of uniform labels in newsrooms is the most significant weakness identified.

Conclusion

Common ground is the foundation of democratic elections. Citizens need information to vote. Synthetic media complicates this. In recent elections in India, political actors used synthesised audio and video to spread disinformation. This information is sifted through the Indian media. It is the job of journalists to authenticate and expose fiction. This comparative document analysis study shows that Indian newsrooms lack the cohesive organisational structure to carry out this role. Regulation is highly atomised.

This study examined three different policy approaches to synthetic media in India. The results reveal a lack of unity. The Quint is the online news industry. They have stringent guidelines. They have protocols preventing journalists from generating content using generative tools. The state is the Press Information Bureau. The state issues prescriptive directives. These orders compel digital media to denotate manipulated media and take down misleading content within tight deadlines. The statutory body is the Press Council of India. Their strategy is

based entirely on traditional ethics. They impose the traditional verification guidelines on contemporary algorithms.

These three approaches operate in isolation. The online newsroom uses internal prohibitions to avoid errors. The state uses punitive threats to compel platform acquiescence. The regulatory body is based on moral suasion. This leaves journalists exposed. If a doctored video of a public candidate emerges hours before an election, there should be a standardised approach for journalists. The presence of multiple advisories leads to confusion. The delay affects the public.

The lack of a consistent editorial policy in the Indian media industry presents particular risks. Old-school newsrooms tend to embrace new media before developing ethical policies. In the absence of industry guidelines, editors must make swift judgements about sophisticated fake media. This leads to inconsistent reporting. One media outlet could report a computer-generated political audio clip as unverified, while another network could publish it as a breaking news story. This undermines the public's confidence in news media.

This policy gap is currently filled by the government. Government directives increasingly control information flows in elections. Leaving regulation solely to the

state poses another problem. State directives favour censorship over investigation. Government demands for removal of content from the platform prevents fact-checkers from studying, debunking and explaining the object. The self-regulation of the press needs to be as strong as its legal framework. The examples above demonstrate that the self-regulation of media in India is lagging behind the state and technology.

Recommendations

The research shows that the media in India cannot wait for a foolproof technological solution. Media houses need interim guidelines for synthetic political media. This paper recommends a three-point, temporary policy for all Indian news media to adopt before the next election:

- The first recommendation is to ban the creation of synthetic content for reporting. Media companies must explicitly prohibit the use of algorithms for news copy, images and video simulations. Automation can be fast, but it can't be certain. An office must ensure that every word and photograph in its reports is based on human perception and reliable information. If the newsroom elects to use generative technology for non-primary purposes (e.g., translating articles into different languages), the

policy should explicitly prohibit these activities from interfering with primary reporting. It ensures the main product is protected from algorithmic mistakes.

- The second recommendation is for universal public labelling of manipulated media. Transparency must be a technical feature. A media outlet that produces a generated video to counter a political hoax must clearly indicate that it is altered. A media watermarking protocol should be developed. This means adding a permanent stamp to all generated images and including audio warnings in all generated clips. The warning must be part of the media itself. It's not enough to provide a disclaimer in the text below a video. Videos are often taken out of the context in which they were originally published and sent via messaging apps. Static labeling ensures it stays with the package.
- The third solution calls for human verification. Old-fashioned copy editing is no longer enough to detect political fakes. Journalists need dedicated verification processes, like WebQoof. Media should designate particular editors to recognise synthetic manipulation. All online content from social media or

political campaigns must be funneled through this desk. The policy should also ensure accountability. If the company publishes unverified synthetic media, the policy must establish that managing editors, not algorithms, are responsible for the information. Editors must be responsible for legal and ethical oversight.

This study has several limitations. The research is based on public documents. The comparison assesses the official rules of only three organisations. The major traditional publishers in India are completely silent about their technology policies. The unwillingness of these legacy broadcasters and newspapers to release their rules limits an industry-wide evaluation. This paper assesses the design of the rules, but it cannot assess the degree to which journalists adhere to these rules in practice. This study offers a partial but vital assessment of the Indian media.

Political actors' technological know-how will only grow. The recent Indian elections showed deep fake media is mainstream. Journalism companies must accept that adhering to old ethical standards is irresponsible. The Press Council of India and news outlets must work together to create technical media guidelines. The three-point proposal is a good place to start. Journalists

should rally around their high ethical standard to safeguard elections from online manipulation.

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