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Mobile Journalism in India: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

A phone can help a journalist record an interview, take photographs, edit a video and send a report from the field. This makes mobile journalism useful, but it does not make good reporting automatic. This paper presents a critical review of selected research and professional sources on mobile journalism, with a focus on India. It examines access to stories, local reporting, training, work pressure, verification and safety. The review uses a purposive selection of five sources. It does not include interviews, a survey or a study of original news reports. The sources suggest that mobile reporting can support flexible work and widen participation when journalists receive proper training and editorial support. They also draw attention to unequal access to devices and the risks of putting several tasks on

one reporter. The paper argues that newsrooms should judge mobile journalism by the value of its reporting, rather than by speed or low production cost alone. A phone becomes a useful reporting tool when an organization supports the person who uses it.

Keywords: Mobile journalism, India, smartphones, local news, newsroom training, journalist safety

Introduction

Think of a reporter who reaches a village after a public complaint about drinking water. The reporter can record residents, photograph the water source, speak to the responsible officer and send material to an editor through a phone. This is an illustrative situation, not an incident examined in this study. It helps explain why mobile journalism deserves attention. The device brings several reporting tools into one small object. What the reporter does with those tools still depends on questions, judgement and care.

Mobile journalism, often called *mojo*, means using mobile devices as a main part of gathering, producing or sharing news. For this paper, the focus is reporting and production through smartphones. Reading a newspaper story on a phone is mobile news consumption. Making that story through a phone is a different activity. The two may connect, but they should not be treated as the same thing.

An international literature review by López-García and colleagues examined 199 research articles published between January 2008 and May 2018. It shows that mobile journalism belongs to a wider discussion

about changes in communication and news work. Its findings also remind researchers that a body of international research cannot simply stand for the Indian experience.¹ India needs discussion that pays attention to language, place, work conditions and access to training.

The central question of this paper is simple. Under what conditions can mobile journalism improve reporting in India? Asking this question moves the discussion beyond the excitement around a new device. It also allows us to consider the costs that may remain hidden when an organization describes mobile reporting as cheap and easy.

Purpose and method

This paper is a purposive critical review. It brings selected sources into conversation and develops an argument from them. It does not claim to be a systematic review of all available research.

Public web searches used terms such as “mobile journalism India”, “mobile journalism newsroom skills” and “mobile reporting rural women”. Five sources were selected because they directly addressed a relevant part of the question. These were a

¹ López-García, X., Silva-Rodríguez, A., Vizoso-García, Á. A., Westlund, O., & Canavilhas, J. (2019). Mobile journalism: Systematic literature review. *Comunicar*, 27(59), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C59-2019-01> (Abstract).

published literature review, a study of an Indian newsroom, a Reuters Institute account of a rural women's news organisation, a Reuters Institute summary of research on access to interviewees and a Committee to Protect Journalists safety guide for India. The selection favoured identifiable authors or organisations and sources that explained their evidence or purpose. Promotional claims about devices were excluded.

Access was uneven. The two journal studies were consulted through their published abstracts and publication records. The Reuters Institute web articles and the relevant sections of the safety guide were read as accessible text. The full journal articles and the full report behind the accessibility summary were not inspected. The discussion therefore stays within what these accessible passages support. Footnotes identify the passages used, and the endnotes repeat them for easy checking.

The reading followed four questions. What does a phone make possible in reporting? Who can use it with confidence? What happens to newsroom work? What safeguards does the work need? The paper

separates reported findings from its own suggestions. It makes no claim about how many Indian newsrooms use mobile journalism, how much money they save or whether their audiences trust mobile reports more.

What the selected literature contributes

Kumar and Haneef studied mobile journalism at the Hindustan Times through participant observation and interviews. Their abstract describes a newsroom that sought to train journalists across the organisation in mobile tools and video production. The journalists experienced the change as both gaining skills and losing skills.² This is a useful tension. Learning to record and edit can expand a reporter's abilities, while a new production routine may also reduce the space for older professional practices. The study concerns one English-language newsroom. It should not be read as an account of all Indian journalism.

The other sources address different parts of the problem. The rural training account asks who gets the chance to report. The accessibility research considers the relationship between equipment and

² Kumar, A., & Haneef, M. S. M. (2018). Is mojo (en)de-skilling? Unfolding the practices of mobile journalism in an Indian newsroom. *Journalism Practice*, 12(10), 1292–1310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1389291> (Abstract).

interviewees. The safety guide asks what can happen when the same device holds reporting material and private information. Together, these sources support a discussion of mobile journalism as a working arrangement, not just a camera choice.

They do not provide one national verdict. That is why this paper uses them to identify conditions and tensions, rather than to declare that mobile journalism has already transformed the whole country.

Opportunities for reporting

A smartphone can combine recording, note-taking and communication. This can reduce the amount of equipment a journalist needs to carry for a suitable assignment. A lighter setup may help when travel is difficult or when a story develops away from a newsroom. The benefit is practical. It does not mean that every assignment can be covered well by one person with one phone.

There is also a question of how people respond to equipment. The Reuters Institute's account of Panu Karhunen's research describes interviews with 11 mobile journalists and an experiment in a

Helsinki shopping centre. More people agreed to an interview with a lone phone reporter than with a two-person television crew.³ This offers a reason to examine whether a smaller setup can make some encounters easier. It does not prove that Indian interviewees will respond in the same way. The experiment changed both the equipment and the crew size, so it cannot isolate the effect of the phone alone.

Access is only the beginning. A person may feel comfortable speaking and still receive poor treatment in the finished report. A journalist must listen, explain the purpose of recording and represent the answer fairly. Equipment can make the first approach easier. It cannot perform these responsibilities.

Mobile reporting may also help journalists develop a local beat. A reporter who can gather material without waiting for a separate camera team has another way to pursue a small story. The editorial question should be whether that story matters to the community. A complaint about a bus service or a missing teacher may deserve

³ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (n.d.). *Closer to the story: Accessibility and mobile journalism*. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/closer-story-accessibility-and-mobile-journalism> (Research summary and Helsinki experiment paragraphs).

attention even when it does not promise a large online audience.

This is where the Indian discussion becomes especially useful. Laura Oliver's 2022 Reuters Institute article describes Khabar Lahariya's move towards digital reporting and its training of reporters in smartphone video. It also describes a rural journalism training programme for young women. Some participants had to borrow phones from family members or neighbours to attend the online course.⁴ The account shows both a reporting opportunity and a barrier to participation. It is based on interviews with the organisation's representatives, rather than an independent measurement of the programme's long-term results.

A phone may be available in a household without being freely available to the person who wants to report. Training therefore needs to consider time, permission and control over the device. Treating ownership alone as access would miss this problem.

Language is another practical opportunity. A newsroom can prepare an interview, a

spoken explanation and checked subtitles for the audience it wants to serve. In a Hindi report, an English app interface should not decide how clearly the reporter explains the story. Regional expressions may need explanation, while local names need careful checking. These are editorial decisions. The phone supplies the tools for making them.

The work behind the convenience

The phrase "one-person reporting" can make the work sound simpler than it is. The same journalist may have to ask questions, watch the sound level, check the frame, take notes, contact an editor and arrange travel. A task that looks easy on a screen can require difficult choices in the field.

Consider another illustrative situation. During an interview, a resident makes an important claim just as the microphone stops working. The reporter must decide whether to pause, repeat the question or record the answer as a written note. Technical attention and careful listening now compete. This is not evidence of a common failure rate. It shows why training

⁴ Oliver, L. (2022, January 18). *This news site is training hundreds of young women in digital journalism to reach remote audiences in news deserts across India*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/news-site-training-hundreds-young-women-digital-journalism-reach-remote-audiences-news-deserts> (Training hundreds of young women and An eye-opening experience sections).

should prepare people to handle overlapping responsibilities.

The tension identified in the Hindustan Times study helps frame this concern. Adding skills can be valuable, but a newsroom should also ask what time and support the new work requires.⁵ A reporter who learns editing may gain creative control. If the organisation simply adds editing to an unchanged workload, the same skill can become another demand. The present review treats this as a question for newsroom planning, not a measured finding about Indian working hours.

Lower equipment costs also need a fuller account. Newsrooms should include microphones, repairs, data charges, storage, training and the reporter's time when they estimate costs. This paper has no financial data and cannot calculate savings. Its recommendation is to make those costs visible before deciding that mobile work is inexpensive.

A fair policy should clarify whether staff use their own phones, who pays for work-related expenses and what happens when a device fails. These questions matter because the organization benefits from the

reporting. They should not be left for a journalist to solve alone after an assignment has begun.

Speed, evidence and trust

A phone can help a journalist send material quickly. Accuracy needs its own time. Before publishing a clip, the editor may need to confirm when it was recorded, where it was recorded and what happened before the visible moment. A clear picture does not answer these questions by itself.

This matters when a short video seems to explain an entire dispute. The camera may show an argument without showing its cause. An interviewee may offer an allegation that requires a response from another person. A report should make these limits clear. Fast recording must not turn an unfinished claim into a completed account.

Editing also creates responsibility. Removing a pause may improve the flow of a video, but removing part of an answer can change its meaning. Captions should match what the person said. Background music should not make an uncertain claim sound settled. These are the review's proposed

⁵ Kumar, A., & Haneef, M. S. M. (2018). Is mojo (en)de-skilling? Unfolding the practices of mobile journalism in an Indian newsroom. *Journalism Practice*, 12(10), 1292–1310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1389291> (Abstract).

editorial principles, rather than findings from a coded sample.

Trust requires a visible route for correction. If a mobile report contains a wrong name or misleading subtitle, the newsroom should correct it where the audience encountered it and record the change. A quiet replacement may leave the earlier error in circulation. A clear correction shows that the organization accepts responsibility for the work.

Safety and unequal access

The reporting phone may also hold contacts, messages and unpublished interviews. This makes its loss more serious than the loss of a camera alone. The Committee to Protect Journalists' 2024 India election guide warns that seized or damaged phones can expose reporting information. Its device-preparedness section also stresses backup planning and communication arrangements.⁶ The guide addresses a particular election context. Here, it supports a wider editorial concern about protecting material and the people connected to it.

A newsroom should decide how reporters store sensitive material and how they contact an editor if their phone stops

working. Safety planning should happen before a difficult assignment. Sending someone with a small device does not remove the risks of the location or the story.

Nor should the appearance of ordinary equipment encourage secret recording as a routine habit. The review recommends clear identification and informed permission where possible. In a sensitive situation, the editor and reporter need to consider the public interest, possible harm and alternatives. Convenience alone is a weak reason to hide the purpose of recording.

The training example discussed earlier also suggests that access deserves more than a technical checklist. A person may know how to use an app but lack regular access to a device, a quiet place to edit or support for travelling to a story. A programme can address these obstacles through shared equipment, local mentoring and suitable learning materials. Whether these measures succeed needs separate evaluation.

Implications for newsrooms and journalism education

Mobile journalism training should begin with reporting. Students need to learn how

⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists. (2024, March 7). *India elections 2024: Journalist safety guide*. <https://cpj.org/2024/03/india-elections-2024-journalist-safety-kit/> (Digital Safety, Basic device preparedness section).

to ask a follow-up question, confirm a fact and explain uncertainty. Recording and editing lessons should build on those habits. A polished clip with weak evidence is still a weak report.

Assignments should test the whole process. A student can submit a short report with a source list, a record of checks and a brief explanation of editing decisions. This would help teachers assess judgement as well as technical skill. It would also make the invisible work of reporting easier to discuss.

Newsrooms can use a similar approach. Editors should agree on the purpose of an assignment, the material needed and the time available. Some stories suit a lone mobile reporter. Others need another journalist, specialist equipment or a longer investigation. The choice should follow the story.

Success should include clear explanations, fair sourcing, corrections and useful follow-up. Views can show that a report travelled, but they do not establish that it answered a community's questions. A mobile journalism policy should therefore connect production targets with editorial quality.

Limits and future research

This review uses a small, selected source base. Some journal evidence was accessible only at abstract level. The sources differ in

purpose and setting, so their findings cannot be combined into a national estimate. The paper also does not test current phone models or compare mobile and conventional reporting costs.

Future research could follow reporters through complete assignments in Hindi and other Indian-language newsrooms. Interviews and observation could examine which tasks help them and which tasks create pressure. Separate studies could compare access to training, reimbursement practices and correction routines. Audience research would be needed to understand trust. None of these outcomes can be inferred from the number of phones in use.

Conclusion

Mobile journalism offers a practical way to gather and produce news. The selected sources show reasons to take it seriously, while also raising questions about skills, access and safety. Its value depends on the working conditions around the device.

For India, the useful next step is to support reporting in more places and languages while giving journalists time, training and editorial help. A phone can make a story easier to record. Good journalism still requires someone to ask the right questions and an organization willing to support the answers.

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