

Live Law Legal news portal Live Law was awarded 'The Best Online Legal Research Tool 2018' at the India Legal Awards 2018 in December. Live Law was also shortlisted for the Agami Prize.

EPW The Economic and Political Weekly *turned 50*. A film commissioned by the Weekly documents its journey to attaining a global reputation for excellence in independent scholarship and critical inquiry. It now occupies a coveted place in the intellectual history of independent India.

THE BETTER INDIA The Better India (TBI) launched *TBI Malayalam* in November 2018. TBI also launched the *Innovation Marathon 2018*, in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission and the NITI Aayog, receiving over 1,400 applications. TBI's campaign in partnership with *MG Motors India* won the Drivers of Digital Awards 2018 prize at Inkspell 2018. This campaign also bagged a Silver Maddie in the category 'Gender Equity' for creating content to "communicate gender sensitivity, inclusiveness, and equitable nature" in November 2018.

ख़बर लहरीया Khabar Lahariya's work was cited by Splice Media under the 'Must-watch' list for South Asian newsrooms. It was also recommended by Asian Correspondent and International Journalists' Network.

DownToEarth *Down to Earth's (DTE) story* on the death of lions in the Gir National Park led to recruitment of an increased number of Range Officers in the sanctuary. DTE's story on the *Satkosia Tiger-Translocation Project* was presented to the Odisha Chief Minister's office as 'key learnings' in the process of translocation of Tigers.

iS. IndiaSpend won the South-Asia Laadli Media award for its *reporting on gender sensitivity* and gender issues in October 2018. One of their reporters also won the Global Health Reporting Contest for reporting on maternal and child health in India in November 2018.

समाचार Samachara's relentless follow-up and coverage of the Kodagu floods was used by the district administration as critical inputs for its rehabilitation program during the crisis.

The NEWS Minute The News Minute's story on *forced C-Section deliveries* in India won it ICFJ's 2018 Global Health Reporting Contest. *News Minute's story on transgenders* won the SCARF Media award for mental health reporting for exploring how "trans-genders are prone to mental health issues due to social stigma and the biological upheaval during the medical gender-affirmation process".



IPSMF Workshop: "Sustainability Goals for Online News Media"



Left-Right: Shubhranshu Choudhary, CG Net Swara; Pratik Sinha, Alt News; Nitin Pai, Think Pragati; Disha Mullick, Khabar Lahariya; Siddharth Varadarajan, The Wire

The Foundation organised a Workshop on Sustainability for its grantees. The Workshop turned out to be an effective platform for knowledge and experience sharing. Almost all of our grantees attended the Workshop and spoke on the sustainability goals that were set for themselves.

The Foundation's CEO, Sunil Rajshekhar welcomed participants and briefly shared some highlights and successes of Grantees. The interventions in niche segments like Law, Environment, Business etc apart from News, Opinion, Policy and Governance had led to a very diverse set of entities supported by the Foundation. As the opportunities for online news media in regional languages was huge, grantees were encouraged to explore opportunities to move into this space.

The combined audience reach of all the grantees put-together was minuscule in comparison to the reach that some of the mainstream media sites commanded. Yet the 'share of voice' that the Foundation's grantees command in the media eco-system is far greater and impactful. The Foundation was exploring a few steps to help in the path to grantee sustenance:

- i) Cost reduction – explore possibility of identifying a common networking and hosting platform to achieve economies of scale.
- ii) Social Media growth – create a consulting service for grantees to

maximise on Social Media reach.

- iii) Monetising Audience 'reach' - The Top 5 grantee sites which command over 80% of the total traffic can combine together for monetisation through a good media-buying entity.

The Workshop focused on three broad themes:

1. Widening your audience base with niche content
2. Importance of creating a sustainable media company and
3. Sustainability of non-profits.

In addition, a session on 'Effective Usage of Social Media for Online News Ventures' was conducted by Sejal Poladia who is Social Media lead at a technology company.

The leitmotif of each of the sessions was 'sustainability' – ensuring long-term business stability without compromising the integrity of their journalism.

Some key takeaways :

1. **The bedrock, towards creating a sustainable media entity:** Trust and credibility, well-narrated, deeply reported independent journalism and high-level of reader engagement, building a reputation for news breaks, creating a liberal newsroom, being balanced and letting people see what is there to see. – (*Dhanya Rajendran*-The News Minute, *Seema Singh*- The Ken and *Y.P Rajesh*-The Print).

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2. Challenges of niche news sites:

Having created a niche for news focusing on South India, The News Minute's (TNM) audience isn't interested in reading about non-South Indian stories. The promoters find it difficult to make TNM pan India, a problem similar to one faced by other south based media. (**Dhanya Rajendran** - *The News Minute*).

3. Fighting misinformation and fake news:

Both subscription and advertising revenue streams are a challenge and donor/philanthropic contributions are crucial for sustainability of entities that make a choice of doing very niche content. However, there could be revenue generating possibilities through a proposed App which will empower users on fake-news detection.

(**Pratik Sinha** - *AltNews*)

4. The Subscription model:

Niche audiences are willing to pay for deep investigative pieces especially on subjects that impact business and economy as well as on emerging businesses. The Ken depended entirely on Subscriptions and has achieved great success in building a subscriber base both from individuals as well as through institutional sales. The Ken also broke the perceived rules of the game by completely moving out of the clickbating game and used email as a tool to build an audience.

(**Seema Singh** - *The Ken*)

Subscriptions create an emotional connect with the reader: With a differentiated and clear ideological ethos, the reader is ready to pay for it. The only way to be "anti-fragile" was to create an engagement with the reader and induce him to subscribe. There is no point indulging the social media number game as the legacy media houses have audiences in the hundreds of millions. There is no way new media would be able to catch up. - (**Prasanna Viswanathan** - *Swarajya Magazine*).

There is great concern that the subscription model can limit 'reach', thereby impacting opportunities for growth. (**Dhimant Parekh** - *The Better India*)

5. Value-added Content – like a 'fixed deposit':

The Caravan is



Left-Right: Govindraj Ethiraj, IndiaSpend; Dhanya Rajendran, The News Minute; P.V.Dinesh, Live Law; Seema Singh, The Ken

not in the mass-game and targets a discerning audience - if the content is value-added, well-researched and well written, the millennials don't mind paying. The Caravan's deep dive stories and profiles are of great archival value and likened to a 'fixed deposit'. Some content can be resurrected even years later if the subject matter is back in the news - like their investigative stories on Justice Loya or the NDTV story. The Caravan is being approached for movie rights for some of their stories. (**Vinod Jose** - *The Caravan*).

6. Syndicating to other platforms:

While anxious about the efficacy of social media, etc., (except perhaps YouTube), contextualising and creating appeal for a larger audience was the key to sustainability. Khabar Lahariya which depended on Grants from Institutional donors and revenue from their YouTube channel, now intends to capitalize on the opportunities in content syndication to increase its revenue flow. (**Disha Mullick** - *Khabar Lahariya*).

7. Dependence on Philanthropy

always: Though looking at monetising content in other ways, The Wire relies on reader donations and institutional grants. The Wire will always depend on Philanthropy as it wants to keep the content free. It is confident that this will work, even though some funders have backed out from the support due to extraneous circumstances. (**Siddharth Varadarajan**-*The Wire*).

Grants and donations crucial for survival: While accepting the importance of revenue-streams for sustainability there seemed to be no other way for entities like CG Net Swara operating in the media-dark

regions. (**Shubranshu Choudhary** - *CGNet Swara*).

8. Sustainability is to the cause not to the business:

Unless there is donor funding, one can't make the choices one wants. Grants and donations are key to long term sustenance. Pragati though had rejected several offers for grants from foreign sources as it defeated the purpose for which their Foundation stood for: Think Pragathi currently survives on grants from Indian philanthropic institutions and by generating revenues from public policy education programs run by its parent - Takshashila Institution.

(**Nitin Pai** - *Think Pragati*).

9. Fighting misinformation and fake news:

Both subscription and advertising revenue streams are a challenge and donor/philanthropic contributions are crucial for sustainability of entities that make a choice of doing very niche content. However, there could be revenue generating possibilities through a proposed App which will empower users on fake-news detection.

(**Pratik Sinha** - *AltNews*)

On the question of tools available to actually garner revenues, there was anxiety, with most editors/founders, expressing concern over the challenge of monetising traffic from digital and social media platforms.

It was evidently clear through the interactions that IPSMF's grantees are keenly trying to develop alternative sources of funding and revenue streams. Some of the grantees are still experimenting with their revenue models and some have established successful revenue channels. Most grantees are well positioned to increase their operating revenues through single or multiple revenue streams - advertisements (banner ads, posters, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, etc.) sponsored content, events, paid research, subscription, membership, recurring donation commitments, etc. It clearly came out that most of the grantees think that sustainability in content cannot be a 'one window' stream, but a culmination of leveraging "multiple sources" of revenue, of course, on the back of independent, solid and credible content. ●



Left-Right: Prasanna Viswanathan, Swarajya Magazine, Y. P Rajesh, The Print; Dhimant Parekh, The Better India; Vinod K Jose, The Caravan



Key takeaways success on Social Media

- 1 Grantees to connect each of the social media accounts:** Facebook, Google, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn to leverage synergies.
- 2 Use the URL builder:** With three URL generators entities need to be sure to use the correct URL generator because the URLs to websites, Google Play Store and Apple App Store are different from each other.
- 3 Search Engine Optimisation (SEO):** To ensure that Google is kind to grantee efforts, to pay particular attention to keywords used in the description. To add only appropriate ones: For instance, #independent media, #public-spirited journalism, etc. Say no to very generic ones #Freedom # Media.
- 4 Increase frequency of postings:** Wherever required, as it takes time for content to register and build.
- 5 Use third-party quotes** in the text. As that leads to extra points in the Google algorithm.
- 6 Pay particular attention** to the 'About Us' section. Never to be neglected. This is critical for site rankings.
- 7 Add a 'blog' section** on your website and use guest blog spots. Gain extra points on Google algorithms.
- 8 Use LinkedIn:** Users are concentrated and focused. They are looking for content and are not averse to long-form content.
- 9 Tag your employees, friends** on Twitter and FB posts for that extra mileage and to increase the chances of engagement.
- 10 Do live videos** whenever possible.
- 11 Use Facebook** to increase visibility and reach.
- 12 Use Instagram for story-telling:** Use up to 30 hashtags. Helps in figuring in broad spectrum searches. In Instagram, pay particular attention to detailed 'Bios'.
- 13 On Twitter use Bitly and Google URL shorteners:** Use relevant tags. As shelf-life of a Tweet is just about an hour, increase tweets.
- 14 On YouTube:** Create a channel, use hashtags, merge content, write proper descriptions, use links, the first comment should be from the entity - create contextual engagement.
- 15 SM platforms** are language-agnostic, so the logic of Google Search rankings extends across the language spectrum.
- 16 Use linkbacks** in your text, as it increases the rankings.

Based on the session by Sejal Poladia on "Effective use of social media by online ventures".

TIMELINE OF GRANTS	
MEETINGS	GRANTEE NAMES
FY 2018-19: 3 Meetings	Media Vigil*, Imphal Free Press*, Azhimukham, The Print (Hindi and Science), East Mojo, Max Maharashtra, Saptahik Sadhana, Sikkim Chronicle.
FY 2017-18: 8 Meetings	Swarajya, The Caravan, Alt News, Samachara, The Wire (Urdu & Marathi), Think Pragati, Dool News, Khabar Lahariya, The Print, Down To Earth, Covai Post*, Satyagrah*.
FY 2016-17: 7 Meetings	The Better India, Live Law, Gaon Connection, Economic and Political Weekly, WTD News, The News Minute, The Wire (Hindi), The Ken.
FY 2015-16: 5 Meetings	IndiaSpend, The Wire, CGNet Swara.
Total Commitment – INR 39 Cr	
*Entities yet to commence prefunding formalities	

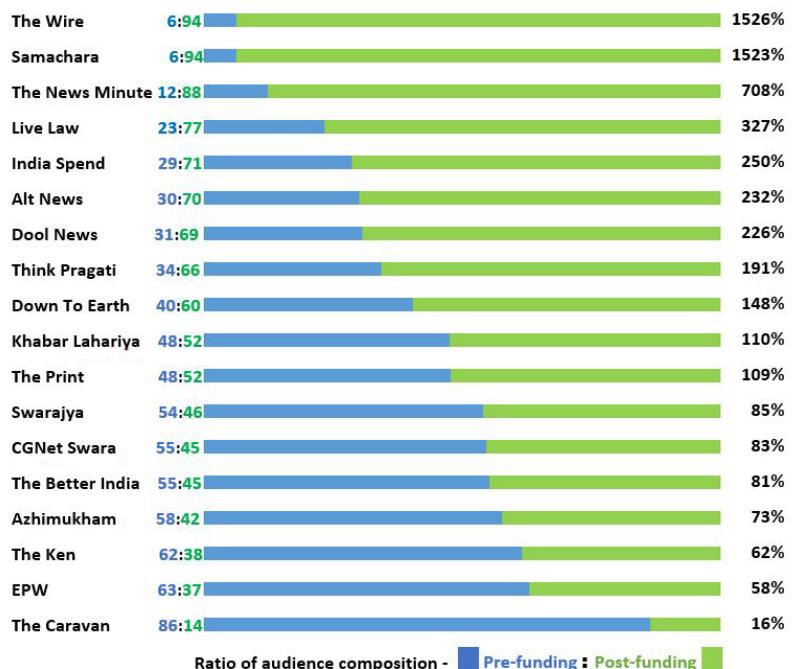
IPSMF funding supports

Over **350** Independent Journalists

from **18** Online Media entities across India

Growth of **64%** since funding commenced

IPSMF Grantees record huge growth post-funding





Focus on regional media – Our new grantees

IPSMF is now focused on regional media, as we believe that bolstering it can act as a catalyst for creating an ecosystem of independent and deep-reported narratives which reflect ground realities. In that context, the Foundation has identified and is, on the cusp of, supporting the following media entities which it believes exemplifies the spirit of ‘muddy boots’ reporting and journalism.

Sikkim Chronicle



SIKKIM CHRONICLE

Founded by three young journalists Nirmal Mangar, Yougan Tamang and Kabita Sharma in 2007, Sikkim Chronicle (SC), www.thesikkimchronicle.com, is digital news-platform that harnesses the technology and power of Mojo to highlight issues, events and personalities in Sikkim. With more than 15 years of journalism behind them, Sikkim Chronicle based in Gangtok has been one of the pioneers of MoJo in the state and has already garnered significant traction and momentum in its reach on the social media in English and Nepali.

Armed with an intimate knowledge of local issues and the local contexts, and skilled in reporting, anchoring and multi-media, Sikkim Chronicle's accent is on video as the preferred tool for telling a story.

With a commitment to serious and committed ground-based journalism and galloping adoption of online in the state, with a young population, Sikkim Chronicle has the potential to emerge as an impactful and socially-relevant media leader in Sikkim.



Max Maharashtra



Max Maharashtra, www.maxmaharashtra.com, strives to narrate the stories of the depressed and the marginalised in Marathi. Founded by Ravindra Ambekar in January 2017, Max Maharashtra, operating out of Mumbai, is entrenched and rooted in the issues and context of Maharashtra, other than being able to access a bevy of expert opinion from the state.

Max Maharashtra believes in ground-reported narratives on political and social issues and is particularly focused on the issues of farmers, Dalits and gender. With an already significant each in the online news and opinion space, Max Maharashtra seeks to mainstream the largely untold stories of the less heard.

With an accent on videos, including live events, Max Maharashtra relies on the old-fashioned but critical boots on the ground mode to source its stories.

Saptahik Sadhana



With a legacy extending to exactly seven decades, Saptahik Sadhana, www.weeklysadhana.com, is a treasure trove of Marathi literature and journalism. Led by iconic editors, a rarity in today's journalism and based in Pune, Sadhana is an acknowledged repository of credible and serious journalism with conviction to cover topics and subjects which are critical but hugely neglected. Specialising in views and perspectives, Sadhana seeks to delve on “questions that mainstream media doesn't even ask”.

Saptahik Sadhana is perceived to fulfil the dire need for a serious and ground level domain-knowledge take on critical issues. An opportunity to prove (as their print edition has exhibited) that there are takers for serious online journalism. Sadhana's long-form journalism combined with a savvy online effort, we believe, can lead to real, socially-relevant, impact, especially on the millennials.

EastMojo



EastMojo, www.eastmojo.com, is a mobile-first platform which aims to transform the way news from Northeast India is created and consumed. Headquartered in Guwahati, EastMojo is committed to being an independent and credible news platform of the Northeast, it also focuses on developing fact-checking tools built into the CMS.

Founded by Karma Paljor and Tanushree Hazarika, EastMojo seeks to remedy the poor media attention and the stereotypical narratives that the Northeast of India is prone to and segue into the growing interest in the region and investment because of the Act East Policy - the “Northeast as a gateway to South-East Asia”.

EastMojo is designed to make news from the North East, interesting, impactful and relevant, not only to a regional audience but for the people from the North East in other parts of India. It seeks to specialise in in-depth and investigative stories using videos and the mobile-first platform to maximise reach.

Azhimukham



Azhimukham, www.azhimukham.com, founded by senior journalists Josy Joseph and Priya Solomon in 2013 specializes in long-form narratives, detailed investigative stories, informed and edgy perspectives in Malayalam. Based in Thiruvananthapuram, Azhimukham is committed to showcasing the issues of Dalits, transgenders, corruption, women, etc., which are usually neglected by the mainstream media in Kerala.

With founders who have a record for credible journalism, especially in the investigative format, Azhimukham is now poised to make a mark among the Malayalee audience, including the considerable diaspora which is spread all across the globe.

MediaVigil



Media Vigil, www.mediavigil.com, is a Hindi news site, owned by Media Vigil Trust, a not-for-profit entity based out of Delhi. It is primarily targeted at the readers in the Hindi heartland states of UP, Bihar, Delhi, MP and Chhattisgarh.

It focuses on the issues and contexts of the underprivileged sections of the community like Dalits, tribals, women and minorities. Founded by Dr Pankaj Srivastava and Abhishek Srivastava, senior journalists, it is edgy and strong in its views and perspectives.