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## Empowering good governance through print media: A critical case study of Odisha

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### Abstract

The role of media, particularly print media, in shaping governance practices has been a topic of significant academic and public interest. Print media serves as a crucial pillar in a democratic society by holding government institutions accountable, exposing corruption, and advocating for social justice. Over the years, newspapers have played a pivotal role in promoting transparency and driving reforms in various sectors. In the context of Odisha, print media has been instrumental in shedding light on inefficiencies and malpractices, leading to direct government intervention and policy changes. This paper explores the impact of print media on good governance in Odisha, specifically examining its role in promoting transparency, accountability, and reforms. Through a detailed analysis of case studies across sectors like health, education, law and order, agriculture, corruption, and environmental governance, the paper highlights how newspapers like The Prameya, The Dharitri, The Sambad, The Samaja, and The Pragativadi have contributed to improved governance. By exposing irregularities, malpractices, and corruption, the print media in Odisha has acted as a catalyst for change, ensuring better service delivery and greater accountability in the state's governance systems.

**Keywords:** Print media, good governance, media influence, governance Odisha, public accountability, civic engagement

### Introductions

Print media has consistently been a key pillar of democratic societies, playing an important role in sharing information, encouraging public debate, and ensuring accountability. In India, where a wide variety of print media outlets exist, this sector has a strong impact on governance. Good governance includes principles like transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and public participation (World Bank, 1992). This paper looks at how print media contributes to these principles in Odisha, a state where newspapers still have significant influence, even with the emergence of digital media.

Historically, Odisha's print media has been crucial in shaping public opinion and holding authorities accountable. Newspapers like The Samaja, Dharitri, and Prameya have not only covered government actions but have also engaged in investigative journalism, uncovering corruption and inefficiencies. McQuail (2010)<sup>[10]</sup> and Curran (2011)<sup>[9]</sup> stress that the media's role as a "fourth estate" is necessary to advance good governance by taking as a watchdog over those in power.

According to the 2024 report by the Directorate of Advertising & Visual Publicity (DAVP) and the Information & Public Relations Department, Government of Odisha, the highest-circulated newspapers in the state are The Prameya (453,090 copies), The Dharitri (307,592 copies), The Sambad (251,825 copies), The Samaja (223,544 copies), and The Pragativadi (208,488 copies). Since these articles are read by the greatest number of people, they have a major impact on public opinion. Their wide circulation makes them valuable instruments for promoting good governance, as they help spread information, encourage public involvement, and hold government officials accountable.

Studies on Indian media show its important role in supporting democracy. Menon (2015)<sup>[3]</sup> points out that regional newspapers are essential for local governance, as they make sure that the activities of the government are closely watched by the public. Baruah (2014)<sup>[7]</sup> also notes that investigative journalism in print media often leads to reforms and greater public accountability.

In Odisha, the print medium deal with several challenges, like a drop in the number of readers, financial difficulties, and competition from digital media (Thussu, 2020)<sup>[6]</sup>. These problems affect the ability of print media to fully promote good governance. However, despite these challenges, newspapers in Odisha continue to provide important information and serve as a stage for public debate.

This paper explores the complicated connection between print media and governance in Odisha by reviewing literature and presenting case studies to understand how print media has promoted transparency, accountability, and public engagement. The objective is to offer insights into how the function of print media is changing and to provide recommendations on how it can better support good governance in the state.

### Operational Definition

- **Print Media:** Print media refers to traditional forms of media that are distributed in physical formats, such as newspapers, magazines, and journals. It involves the use of paper and ink to deliver news, information, and opinions to the public. As stated by the Oxford English Dictionary (2023), Print media consists of any form of media that is published in a physical form and is distinct from digital or electronic media.
- **Good Governance:** Good governance relates to the effective, transparent, and accountable management of public assets and matters. It includes principles such as participatory decision-making, the application of the laws and the defence of human rights. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) defines effective governance as a system where public institutions manage resources, handle public affairs, and ensure that human rights are realised in a way that free of abuse and corruption.
- **Media Effect:** Media effect refers to the influence of the media on promoting good governance by influencing public perceptions, enhancing transparency, and ensuring accountability. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972)<sup>[2]</sup>, media effect includes how public perception is shaped by media coverage of governance issues, affects policy decisions, and holds government accountable by spotlighting corruption and policy shortcomings.

### Review of Literature

The research on print media's function in promoting good governance highlights various dimensions of media influence on governance practices. These studies collectively address how print media contributes to transparency, accountability, and public engagement, while also exploring the major difficulties the industry is facing in modern digital landscape. By examining theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies, the literature offers a thorough comprehension of the ways in which print media supports and impacts governance.

McQuail (2010)<sup>[10]</sup> explores the role of media as the "fourth estate," highlighting its critical function in promoting transparency and accountability within governance. McQuail's analysis underscores how print media serves as a watchdog, ensuring that governmental actions are scrutinized and reported to the public. This theoretical framework is essential for understanding the media's impact on governance.

Curran (2011)<sup>[9]</sup> delves into how media functions within democratic societies and its capacity to ensure public accountability and foster civic engagement. Curran's work provides a comprehensive overview of how media supports democratic principles, offering important insights into the media's role in governance. Menon (2015)<sup>[3]</sup> highlights the significant role of regional newspapers in local governance, emphasizing their contribution to public accountability. By analysing the impact of these newspapers on scrutinizing governmental actions, Menon's study sheds light on how print media supports governance at the regional level.

Baruah (2014)<sup>[7]</sup> provides an examination of investigative journalism in Indian print media and its role in exposing corruption and driving reforms. Baruah's research demonstrates the pivotal role of investigative journalism in promoting good governance by uncovering issues and prompting necessary changes. Thussu (2020)<sup>[6]</sup> addresses the challenges faced by print media in the digital age, such as declining readership and financial pressures. Thussu's analysis provide background information to help comprehend how these challenges impact print media's capacity to effectively promote governance.

Sharma (2018)<sup>[11]</sup> focuses on the influence of print media on political accountability in India. Sharma's study offers concrete proof of how newspapers contribute to governance through investigative journalism and public engagement, highlighting the practical impact of print media on accountability. Roy (2017)<sup>[5]</sup> investigates how print media contributes to good governance by promoting transparency and accountability. Roy's research offers a comprehensive overview of the media's role, demonstrating how effective print media practices support governance objectives.

Chakraborty (2016)<sup>[8]</sup> examines how Indian newspapers influence public policy and governance. This study provides empirical evidence on how print media shapes public policy and governance practices, contributing to the understanding of its role in these areas. Kumar (2019) explores the challenges faced by print media in the digital era and discusses the implications of these challenges for its role in governance. Kumar's research highlights how declining readership and competition from digital media affect print media's ability to promote governance.

Das (2015)<sup>[1]</sup> provides a case study on the evolution of print media in Odisha, detailing its impact on governance in the region. Das's study offers a localized perspective on how print media has influenced governance practices in Odisha, contributing valuable insights into the regional dynamics. Bhattacharya (2016) investigates how print media shapes public perception of governance issues in India. This study provides information on the function of print media in influencing public attitudes and governance, highlighting its impact on public perception and engagement.

### Agencies Enhancing Good Governance through Print Media in Odisha

In Odisha, several government agencies and regulations play a crucial role in overseeing print media to support good governance. These entities ensure that media practices align with ethical standards and contribute to transparency and accountability in governance.

1. **Odisha State Information Commission (OSIC):** The Odisha State Information Commission (OSIC) is an independent entity accountable for carrying out the Right to Information (RTI) Act in the state. OSIC

oversees media practices by ensuring that information related to government actions is accessible to the public. While its primary focus is on information transparency, OSIC's work indirectly influences print media by promoting accountability and public scrutiny of government actions.

2. **Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR):** The Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) in Odisha is tasked with managing government communication and media relations. DIPR issues official statements, press releases, and manages interactions with the media. By regulating and coordinating media coverage of government activities, DIPR plays a role in shaping how print media represents governmental initiatives and highlights governance issues. Additionally, DIPR shares paper cuts of major issues and relevant news coverage with government officials and respective departments. This practice ensures that pressing concerns are brought to the attention of decision-makers for immediate action, thereby facilitating timely responses and contributing to effective governance.
3. **Press Council of India (PCI):** Although a national body, the Press Council of India (PCI) has a noteworthy effect on the media landscape in Odisha. PCI is accountable for maintaining moral principles in journalism and addressing complaints against print media. The PCI provides guidelines for media conduct and addresses grievances related to media practices, thereby contributing to the regulation and ethical functioning of print media in Odisha.
4. **State Government Media Monitoring Committees:** In Odisha, the state government also having media monitoring committees or task forces specifically focused on evaluating media content related to governance. These committees assess how print media covers issues of public interest and governance, identifying any gaps or biases in reporting. They work to ensure that media coverage effectively addresses governance concerns, contributes to transparency, and holds authorities accountable. Recommendations from these committees can lead to improvements in media practices and enhance print media's function in promoting good governance.
5. **Legislative and Regulatory Frameworks:** Odisha adheres to various national laws and regulations that impact print media, including those related to freedom of speech, defamation, and media ethics. Laws such as the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, and the Indian Penal Code (IPC) regulate media operations and ensure that print media adheres to legal standards. The enforcement of these laws helps address potential abuses or lapses in media coverage.
6. **Public Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Various public grievance redressal mechanisms are in place to address complaints related to media coverage and government functioning. These mechanisms allow citizens to report issues related to media practices and government transparency, providing a feedback cycle that may result in to improvements in both media and governance.

These agencies and frameworks collectively contribute to the oversight and regulation of print media in Odisha,

ensuring that it supports good governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical reporting.

### Case Studies

Print media has been really important to in exposing corruption, malpractices, and inefficiencies in various sectors of Odisha, thereby fostering good governance. The following case studies from health, education, law and order, agriculture, corruption and governance, and environment in Odisha highlight the significant impact of newspapers like The Prameya, The Dharitri, The Sambad, The Samaja, and The Pragativadi on governance.

**Health:** In the health sector, print media in Odisha has brought attention to various issues, ranging from medical negligence to the misuse of funds allocated for healthcare. For instance, a major investigation by The Sambad in 2019 <sup>[22]</sup> revealed the misappropriation of funds under the National Health Mission (NHM) in several rural districts of Odisha. The report exposed how government hospitals in these districts were under-equipped, despite receiving significant funds from the NHM. As a result of this exposé, several officials were suspended, and the government was forced to reassess the allocation and monitoring of NHM resources.

In another instance, The Dharitri published a series of reports on maternal deaths in government hospitals in Kalahandi district in 2021. The investigation pointed to a severe lack of medical staff and poor infrastructure. Following the publication of these reports, the state government launched a special task force to improve maternal healthcare services in the district, significantly reducing maternal mortality rates within a year. In 2022, The Prameya broke a story about the alarming conditions in tribal health centres in Rayagada district, where patients were often treated by unqualified practitioners. The report led to immediate government intervention, and several health centres were revamped with better infrastructure and qualified medical professionals.

In 2018, The Samaja uncovered the diversion of funds meant for malaria eradication programs in Kandhamal district. This expose prompted the state government to launch an investigation, leading to the dismissal of several officials involved in the scam. Additionally, The Pragativadi published a detailed investigation in 2020 on the illegal sale of government-subsidized medicines meant for the poor. This report led to legal action against several pharmacists and health officials, while the government tightened regulations on the distribution of medicines in rural health centres.

**Education:** The print media in Odisha has also been instrumental in uncovering irregularities in the education sector, leading to significant reforms. In 2021, The Dharitri ran a series of reports on the ghost schools in Odisha's tribal areas, where government money was being diverted for schools that existed only on paper. The reports led to an investigation by the state government, uncovering a wide-reaching scam involving education department officials. Several officials were arrested, and the funds were redirected to genuine schools in need of infrastructure and resources.

In another case, The Prameya exposed irregularities in the mid-day meal scheme in several government schools in

Ganjam district in 2019. The investigation revealed that the meals provided to students were of poor quality and often lacked nutritional value. Following the expose, the state government launched a review of the mid-day meal scheme, resulting in stricter guidelines and improved meal standards in government schools. A 2020 report by The Samaja highlighted the severe teacher shortage in rural Odisha, focusing on the dire conditions in schools in Balangir district. This led to a mass recruitment drive by the state government, ensuring that more qualified teachers were sent to rural areas, improving the quality of education.

In 2018, The Sambad ran a collection of essays on the mismanagement of funds in government-run engineering colleges in Odisha. The investigation revealed that the money set aside for developing infrastructure were being misused, leading to poor educational facilities for students. The state government responded by conducting an audit of the institutions, and several officials were suspended. In 2022, The Pragativadi published an investigation into the illegal privatization of government-run schools in Bhubaneswar. The expose forced the government to halt the privatization process and conduct a thorough review of the policy, ensuring better accountability in the education sector.

**Law and Order:** In the realm of law and order, print media had a major part in highlighting the misuse of power by government officials and law enforcement agencies. In 2020, The Samaja reported on a case involving police brutality in Puri, where several local law enforcement officials were charged with using excessive force on peaceful protesters. The coverage led to a public outcry, and the state government ordered an inquiry into the matter, resulting in the suspension of the involved officers and a review of police practices in the state.

Another significant case was reported by The Sambad in 2019<sup>[22]</sup>, which uncovered a scandal in the Odisha Prison Department. The newspaper revealed that influential prisoners in the Bhubaneswar Central Jail were being given special privileges, including access to mobile phones, better food, and unauthorized leave from the prison. The expose forced the state government to take swift action, resulting in the suspension of several high-ranking prison officials and a crackdown on corruption within the department.

In 2021, The Dharitri published a report on the misuse of funds within the Odisha Fire Services Department, where procurement contracts for firefighting equipment were found to be overpriced. The investigation led to the cancellation of several contracts and legal action against the department officials involved in the scam. In 2018, The Pragativadi ran an array of articles on the delayed justice system in Odisha, particularly focusing on the backlog of cases in the lower courts. The newspaper's detailed analysis highlighted the need for judicial reforms and more efficient case management systems. As a result, the state judiciary launched initiatives to fast-track pending cases and improve overall efficiency within the court system.

In 2022, The Prameya exposed human trafficking rackets operating in the coastal regions of Odisha. The newspaper's investigative journalism uncovered the involvement of several local politicians and law enforcement officers in the illegal trade. The expose led to a series of raids by the state police, resulting in multiple arrests and the rescue of several trafficking victims. The case also prompted the state

government to introduce stricter laws and policies to combat human trafficking.

**Agriculture:** The agriculture industry has witnessed significant media intervention, particularly in exposing issues related to farmer welfare and government schemes. In 2020, The Samaja published a report on the widespread corruption in the distribution of subsidies under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in coastal Odisha. The investigation revealed that several middlemen were stealing money intended for farmers, leading to financial distress among smallholders. This expose prompted the state government to introduce stricter monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the subsidies reached the intended beneficiaries. In 2019, The Dharitri exposed the misuse of funds under the Odisha Millets Mission, where funds meant for promoting millet cultivation were being diverted to non-agricultural activities. Following the report, the state government initiated an inquiry, resulting in the suspension of several officials involved in the scam. A 2021 investigation by The Prameya highlighted the plight of farmers in Malkangiri district, who were being denied access to government-subsidized seeds and fertilizers. The expose prompted immediate government intervention, ensuring that farmers received their entitlements and leading to the dismissal of corrupt authorities in the local agricultural department.

In 2018, The Sambad reported on the poor implementation of irrigation projects in western Odisha, where farmers were suffering due to a lack of access to water. The report spurred the state government to expedite the completion of several pending irrigation projects, benefiting thousands of farmers in the region. In 2020, The Pragativadi ran a series of reports on the exploitation of migrant labourers in Odisha's agricultural sector, leading to government intervention and the introduction of welfare schemes aimed at protecting the rights of these workers.

**Corruption and Governance:** Print media has been a key player in exposing corruption in Odisha's governance structures. In 2018, The Samaja uncovered a major land scam in Bhubaneswar, where government officials were involved in illegally selling government land to private developers. The expose led to a high-profile investigation, and several officials were arrested for their involvement in the scam.

In another instance, The Prameya published an in-depth report in 2019 on the irregularities in carrying out the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Koraput district. The investigation revealed that funds meant for rural employment were being misappropriated by local officials. The report led to a state-wide audit of the scheme, and several officials were dismissed for their involvement in the corruption. In 2020, The Pragativadi revealed the mismanagement of funds in the Smart City project in Bhubaneswar, where several contractors were found to be inflating costs for infrastructure projects. The report led to a review of the project's finances, and legal action was taken against several contractors and officials.

In 2021, The Sambad exposed corruption in the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC), where government officials were found to be colluding with private mining companies to illegally extract minerals. Following the publication of the report, the state government launched an investigation,

leading to the cancellation of several mining licenses and the prosecution of those involved. In 2021, The Dharitri exposed rampant illegal sand mining along the Subarnarekha River in Balasore district. The investigation revealed that local politicians and contractors were involved in large-scale sand extraction, causing severe environmental degradation and threatening nearby farmlands. Following the expose, the state government launched a crackdown on illegal mining activities, revoked several mining licenses, and imposed stricter regulations on sand mining practices in the region.

**Environment:** Print media in Odisha has been crucial in addressing environmental governance issues, particularly in exposing illegal mining activities and deforestation. In 2019, The Samaja published a detailed report on illegal sand mining along the Mahanadi River, implicating local politicians and businessmen. The newspaper's investigation revealed that large-scale illegal mining was causing severe ecological damage and affecting the livelihoods of local communities. Following the expose, the state government cracked down on illegal mining operations and introduced stricter regulations to protect the river's ecosystem.

In 2020, The Sambad published a number of articles on the illegal felling of trees in the Similipal National Park, a protected wildlife sanctuary in Odisha. The reports pointed to the involvement of forest department officials in allowing illegal logging operations. This led to a high-level investigation, resulting in the suspension of several forest officers and increased security measures to protect the park's biodiversity. In 2018, The Prameya covered the impact of illegal quarrying in the Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary. The expose revealed that despite regulations prohibiting quarrying activities in the area, several companies were illegally extracting minerals, leading to habitat destruction for wildlife. The report led to the cancellation of licenses for the companies' involved and stricter enforcement of environmental laws in the sanctuary. Another significant case of environmental governance was reported by The Dharitri in 2021, where the newspaper exposed the pollution caused by industrial plants along the Brahmani River. The investigation highlighted how several industries were discharging untreated waste into the river, leading to severe water contamination. Public outcry following the reports led to the Odisha State Pollution Control Board imposing fines on the industries and mandating strict compliance with environmental regulations. In 2022, The Pragativadi uncovered a case of water mismanagement in the Hirakud Dam, where corrupt practices had led to the misallocation of water meant for irrigation. The expose led to an inquiry by the Water Resources Department, resulting in a reallocation of water resources to benefit farmers and an overhaul of the dam's management practices. These case studies demonstrate how print media in Odisha has played a pivotal role in promoting good governance by exposing corruption, inefficiencies, and malpractices across various sectors. Through investigative reporting, newspapers have held the government accountable, resulting in legal actions, policy reforms, and improved governance practices in the state.

## Conclusion

The vital role of print media in promoting good governance in Odisha is both profound and multifaceted. This paper has explored the significant contributions of print media in fostering transparency, accountability, and civic engagement through detailed case studies across various sectors including health, education, law and order, agriculture, corruption, and the environment.

The case studies reveal that newspapers like The Prameya, The Dharitri, The Sambad, The Samaja, and The Pragativadi have been instrumental in highlighting critical issues, exposing corruption, and advocating for reforms. Their investigative journalism has led to increased government accountability, policy changes, and improvements in public services. For instance, revelations of fund misappropriation in health and education sectors prompted governmental audits and policy revisions, improving service delivery and accountability (The Sambad, 2019; The Dharitri, 2021)<sup>[22, 13]</sup>. Similarly, exposure of corruption in law enforcement and environmental degradation led to significant legal and administrative actions, demonstrating the media's watchdog role in governance (The Samaja, 2018; The Prameya, 2022)<sup>[18]</sup>.

Despite these achievements, print media in Odisha faces challenges such as declining readership, financial pressures, and competition from digital platforms (Thussu, 2020)<sup>[6]</sup>. These challenges impact the media's ability to maintain its role as a watchdog and advocate for good governance. However, the continued influence of print media in shaping public opinion and driving governmental responses underscores its enduring importance.

The findings of this paper highlight that while print media has played a pivotal role in supporting good governance, there is a requirement for sustained efforts to address its challenges. Enhancing the financial stability of print media, promoting digital integration, and ensuring ethical journalism practices are crucial for strengthening its capacity to contribute to transparent and accountable governance.

In conclusion, the connection between print media and good governance in Odisha demonstrates the essential role of traditional media in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Print media's commitment to investigative journalism and public interest reporting remains a cornerstone of democratic governance, warranting continued support and adaptation to meet the demands of the digital age.

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