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Public Perception of AI Anchors in Indian News Media: A Case Study of AI Sana on Aaj Tak

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Indian news media is changing rapidly as it negotiates multiple disruptions and interventions (Banerjee, D. 2024). Besides dealing with a populist regime, it is also experimenting with integrating new technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). This study explores public perception of AI anchors in Indian news media, focusing on AI Sana, the AI anchor of Aaj Tak, a leading Indian news channel and part of one of the largest media conglomerates in India (Bhula, P. 2022) (Basuroy, T. 2024). Shortly after one year of its launch, the initiative won the International News Media Association (INMA)'s 2024 Global Media Award for 'The Best Use of AI in Customer-Facing Products' and was adjudged best in South Asia for 'AI-led newsroom transformation' (International News Media Association, 2024). This research aims to understand how news audiences react to AI-driven news presentations and their implications for the broader news landscape.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010), which allows for an in-depth examination of power dynamics, trust, and counter-hegemony in media content. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework offers a robust approach for analysing the public perception of AI-driven news presentations. This framework is particularly effective as it integrates three key dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the discourse surrounding AI anchors like AI Sana. By analyzing the user comments on YouTube videos featuring AI anchors, we aim to uncover the underlying themes and sentiments expressed by viewers. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of audience reactions and the socio-political implications of AI adoption in news media. Our findings indicate that users reveal not just their acceptance, resistance, or contestation of the news organization's use of AI technology but also their anxieties about broader media narratives and socio-political realities.

The study contributes to the discourse on AI in the media industry by highlighting how audiences contest and challenge the ideological leanings of news channels through their comments. The findings provide important insights for news organizations in India and similar markets as they navigate the integration of AI technologies into their operations.

Keywords: Indian news media, Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI anchors, Audience perception, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

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