



Some regulation required in online landscape: Mariam Mammen Mathew



Alan John
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Kottayam: Media organisations often scoff at the idea of regulation, but in the digital arena, such control may be required, feels Mariam Mammen Mathew, CEO of Manorama online and Chairperson of the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA). In a candid interview with Fourth Estate, Mariam who heads all online entities of Manorama, shared valuable insights into digital media and the approaching AI era.

Mariam emphasised that the need for the regulation comes out of the uncontrolled expansion of the digital space. Misinformation, she agrees, is one of the biggest maladies. Mariam stressed the association's role in spreading awareness while advocating government regulation. "To make them aware is what we can do as a media organisation and an association. Nowadays, people don't look at the credibility of their sources. This creates a problem. It allows almost anybody to become a trustworthy content provider."

She went on to give an example in the form of influencers who don't have to go through all the checks and balances a media organisation has to deal with but are still considered reliable. "In one way media organisations are also at fault for not being able to understand this new digital

platform as fast as the influencers. They have this tendency of burying their head in the sand which has affected them adversely in this situation," said Mariam. DNPA, she said, is also focussing on bringing out new sustainable business models for themselves.

repetitive tasks. But she believes that there should be some attribution. "It is necessary to give credit to AI when it is being used." Discussing the shift towards premium content, in Manorama online, Mariam acknowledged the challenges but emphasised the need to

India, which needs better regulation to support premium content.

When asked about the large number of ads that a viewer has to see in order to read the article on any site, she responded by saying, "Ads are our only source of revenue. Journalism also needs to be paid. Our premium subscription is ad-free. I don't want to inflict ads on our customers. It is only because we have no choice."

However, being the CEO of Manorama Online is not her first leadership role. She was also the Vice President of JP Morgan Chase. Reflecting on her time in finance, Mariam noted that managing teams, overcoming challenges, and dealing with failures were crucial skills she brought to her media role. "I learned a lot from my bosses at JP Morgan, particularly how they managed newcomers, delegated responsibilities, and handled mistakes," she recounted. These experiences helped her build and nurture effective teams at Manorama Online.

She also pointed out the similarities between the two seemingly different roles. Her work in digital innovation at JP Morgan involved steering traditional practices towards new, digital methodologies—a challenge she found similar in her media role. "The challenge was to break the old way of thinking and bring in a new perspective," she explained.

As a CEO she made it clear that numbers matter but as a chairperson of the DNPA, she values ethics more. Playing these roles she tries to navigate and harness this vast expanse called the internet.



Mariam Mammen Mathew

When asked about the future of digital media, Mariam, highlighted the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the media industry. While human creativity remains irreplaceable, AI can enhance efficiency by handling

demonstrate the value of high-quality content. "We need to convince our users that there is a value to what we are producing," she said, stressing the importance of unique, non-replicable content. She also pointed out the issue of intellectual property rights in

Kerala Pride March: Highlighting progress, confronting ongoing struggles



Steffy Samuel

Kochi: Kerala Queer Pride, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the upliftment of the LGBTQ+ community, is gearing up for their annual pride march in Patakkad in August-October this year. The colourful and proud event is often attracts a lot of conversation around diversity in sexuality and gender. Unlike prior years when a single person organised the whole event, this year's celebration is organised by a 'pride commission'. Pride month commemorates years of struggle for civil rights and the ongoing pursuit and accomplishment of equal justice under the law for the lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender and queer community. "The growing support and shifting mindsets of people over the last decade is something we appreciate, even though there is far to go," says Anagh, the Joint Secretary of Dhisha Kerala, a non-government organisation. Anagh also added that despite all the positive developments, it is important to note that their community still faces legal and social difficulties. For example, same-sex relationships were decriminalised in 2018 following the Supreme Court's ruling, but there is still no recognition of same-sex relationships or adoption rights. Kerala is known for its growing policies and social welfare measures and has

been at the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights in India. In 2015, Kerala conducted the world's second survey about LGBTQ+ individuals, which provided valuable insights into the lives and experiences of the community. Later in 2016, Kerala became one of the first states in India to establish a welfare policy for the transgender community and proposed implementing free gender affirmation surgery through government hospitals. Although Kerala has been in support, there has been an increasing opposition to LGBTQ+ rights in the state, led primarily by Muslim organisations and some "anti-LGBTQ+" groups. "One person's, right to an opinion should not infringe on another's right to exist, after all, we live in

a country that believes in equality and fundamental rights", said Tony Varghese, Marketing Head of Kerala Queer Pride. "Threats start coming weeks prior, (to the event) which even goes to the extent of death threats which are extremely ruthless," he further added. Cyberbullying against the community and its supporters has been at an all-time high. As Kerala continues Pride Month, it is crucial to acknowledge the progress made while also recognising the challenges that still lie ahead. The state must continue to work towards creating a more inclusive and accepting society for all its citizens, regardless of anything.

MASCOM: not just a place to learn, but a place to belong

Aami V Shaju



Kottayam: This is the story of three non-malayalis students Pratyusha, Saksham, and Tharushi, who defied language and cultural barriers to forge their path at Mascom. The institute became more than just a journalism school for them; it transformed into a bridge, connecting them across cultures and languages.

For Tharushi, a Sri Lankan exchange student, the biggest battles were language and cultural differences. The beauty of the Malayalam language captivated her, but navigating the nuances proved challenging. Interspersed relations were a hurdle too, with Kerala's culture contrasting with Sri Lanka's more direct approach.

The training for the lab television bulletins captivated her the most. "The supportive technical faculty and the thrill of broadcast sessions opened a new world of journalism for me, which made this my favourite educational experience yet," says Tharushi.

For Hyderabad native Pratyusha, the initial hurdle was writing, particularly mastering the inverted pyramid style. However, with the help of the faculty, her writing improved. "Language itself wasn't a barrier, thanks to the supportive faculty and students," says Pratyusha. Finding stories was a challenge, but Mascom equipped her to face failures and learn from them, a valuable skill for any journalist.

Saksham, a budding photojournalist, found his calling shift from documenting



From left: Pratyusha Sista, Tharushi W., Saksham Sinha
Photo credit: Ashirvadh A Nair

during the course he added, "Mascom became my home away from home." These three students, each with their unique backgrounds, found not just a place to learn, but also a place to belong. The other students learnt from the diversity they brought into Mascom

reporting. He craved a deeper connection with the stories he captured. "All the faculty here played a pivotal role in shaping me, not just as a journalist, but as a person comfortable expressing himself and leading teams," says Saksham. As he never visited his hometown Patna

AI's role in newsrooms: to be or not to be



Tharushi Weerasinghe

Kottayam: The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) worldwide has been swift, and its relationship with the media remains cautious yet exploratory. In Kerala, AI is now used in newsrooms for tasks such as image generation and language correction, as companies navigate the ideal middle ground.

"AI cannot be the primary creative element—that will still be original human content," said Mariam Mammen Mathew, CEO of Manorama Online. She noted that AI should create efficiencies in cost, time, or convenience. "AI can handle the drudgery." Most companies are still analysing what AI is good for.

Commenting on the impact on the job market, Mariam stated that while some jobs will face redundancy, new ones will be created.

Currently, Manorama Online and Onmanorama use AI to generate search tags, create audio news in-house, and produce videos with human intervention. "Our AI projects focus on creation, research, automation, and revenue," said Mariam. She also adds that experimentation is a large part of the AI journey. "We are trying text-to-audio, text-to-video, and infographic creation, which are all in the pipeline stage."

Loss of jobs because of AI is a fear that many journalists have. Veteran journalist and digital media trainer, Anil Philip says, "This is not a risk at this point because we are not ready for AI to take over newsrooms." He emphasised

that AI must be approached as a "tool" and nothing more. While some opposition based on job security fears is to be expected, and sometimes justified, being open to new technology is important. "At the end of the day, the adoption of AI in newsrooms should assist in improving the quality of information and writing," Philip said. He also noted that AI is making it easier to meet deadlines as news cycles speed up due to the internet. "With AI, I can save time and decide which press releases are worth reporting and which aren't."

AI tools can now fact-check, transcribe, translate, and even help with pronunciation for broadcast media journalists. Philip refuted the idea that AI tools are making journalists lazy. "If they let AI take over every aspect of their job, they'll become redundant, and

that is not a risk any journalist will take," he said. He referred to how some international news outlets now use AI to generate entire news reports. While this may be effective in some instances, he insisted that some form of gatekeeping is necessary. "There has to be a human editor that cross-checks without complete reliance on AI."

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Mariam Mammen Mathew, CEO of Manorama Online.

LAB PAPER REVIEW SESSION

① I am happy with your effort. You all did a great job.

"Mentally preparing for the "BUT"*

② BUT, I think there are few concerns. I would like to discuss with you

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