

Local News in the Digital World: Digital Adaptation and Structural Constraints Facing Small Hindi Newspapers in India

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Abstract

Local newspapers remain central to democratic communication by representing local realities and sustaining community level public discourse. However, rapid technological change and shifting audience media habits have profoundly disrupted the operational, economic and institutional foundations of local journalism. This study examines the nature and extent of digital adaptation among small Hindi newspapers in India, with particular attention to the structural constraints shaping their engagement with digital platforms, content practices, and audience interaction. Grounded in a Constrained Digital Adaptation framework, the study conceptualises digital transition not as a purely technological process but as one mediated by political-economic conditions, including financial precarity, dependence on government advertising, limited digital infrastructure and uneven access to digital skills.

Methodologically, the study adopts content analysis of digital presence websites, social media, mobile applications, video, comment sections, and subscription models. The sample comprises 38 small Hindi newspapers from 19 Indian states and union territories, enabling comparative regional analysis. Findings reveal that digital adaptation among small Hindi newspapers is uneven and often symbolic with most outlets exhibiting limited platform integration and weak audience centric practices. While digital platforms extend visibility, they also intensify dependency and constrain editorial autonomy. The study argues that sustaining small Hindi newspapers and local journalism requires policy support, equitable advertising structures, and targeted digital capacity building to preserve its democratic role in India's evolving media ecosystem.

Keywords: Local journalism; Small Hindi newspapers; Digital adaptation; Structural constraints;

Introduction

Local newspapers worldwide are undergoing profound transformations driven by rapid technological change and shifting audience media habits. Scholars began identifying these pressures as early as the late 1990s, noting that

emerging media technologies and changing patterns of news consumption posed fundamental challenges to the local press (**Pilling, 1998**). The acceleration of digital communication technologies has reshaped not only how news is produced and distributed but also how audiences access, interpret, and engage with journalistic content. Despite these structural disruptions, the core mission of local newspapers to inform communities, represent local realities, and sustain democratic discourse has remained largely intact (**Hess & Waller, 2016**). Contemporary scholarship consistently affirms that local newspapers continue to perform a distinctive democratic function by fostering accountability, locality, and community representation, roles frequently neglected by national and metropolitan media outlets (**Radcliffe & Ali, 2017**).

The Internet as a decentralised and relatively low-cost communication system has fundamentally altered the media environment in which local newspapers operate. Rather than rendering print journalism obsolete, digital expansion has compelled newspapers to reassert their local orientation, intensifying coverage of grassroots issues and hyperlocal concerns. This strategic repositioning reflects the widespread belief that newspapers unable to adapt digitally face long term marginalisation, captured in the assertion that “if newspapers stick to the ink, they will sink” (**Sargeson & Astill, 2005**). Consequently, most local newspapers now function within hybrid media models that combine print editions with online platforms, positioning local journalism as a niche product for geographically defined audiences and advertisers (**Skogerbo & Winsvold, 2011**).

Despite this transition, digital adaptation among local newspapers remains uneven and deeply shaped by structural conditions. Local news organisations continue to negotiate the internet as a journalistic medium, even as broader processes of media convergence blur traditional boundaries between print, broadcast, and digital formats (**Holcomb, 2018**). Media convergence has expanded opportunities for multimedia storytelling, interactivity and audience participation, while simultaneously raising critical questions about journalistic norms such as objectivity, editorial authority, accountability, transparency, and professional gatekeeping (**Wilkinson et al., 2009; O’Sullivan, 2005**). At the same time, global declines in newspaper readership suggest a shift toward condensed, mobile-oriented news consumption, particularly among younger audiences, often at the expense of sustained engagement with long-form print journalism (**Busa, 2014**).

Empirical research further demonstrates significant differences between print and online news audiences. Print readers tend to engage more comprehensively with news content, consume a wider range of genres, and display stronger attachments to local communities than online readers (**Skogerbo & Winsvold, 2011; Ottosen & Krumsvik, 2008**). Online audiences, while generally younger, more educated, and socioeconomically privileged, often consume news selectively and superficially. Moreover, although digital platforms facilitate audience feedback through comments, shares, and social media interactions, meaningful participation remains limited and frequently undermined by incivility, weak editorial moderation, and declining trust in online discourse.

These transformations are particularly significant in the Indian context, where small Hindi newspapers occupy a crucial yet precarious position within the media landscape. As the world's largest democracy, India relies heavily on accessible and locally relevant information for the effective functioning of its democratic institutions. Historically, the print media has borne primary responsibility for disseminating news across India's diverse linguistic and regional contexts (**RNI, *Press in India*, 2010**). Small newspapers defined as those with a circulation of up to 25,000 copies per publishing day serve a substantial readership, especially in rural and semi-urban areas (**RNI, 2010**).

Published largely in local languages, small Hindi newspapers are trusted by their communities and play a vital role in shaping grassroots public opinion. They function as intermediaries between citizens and state institutions, strengthening democratic communication and participatory governance (**Sharma, 2006; *Future of Print Media*, 2001**). However, these newspapers operate under severe structural constraints, including financial precarity, limited technological infrastructure, uneven internet penetration, dependence on government advertising and restricted digital skills. While international scholarship has documented similar challenges, small Hindi newspapers in India remain insufficiently examined. Addressing this gap, the present study analyses how small Hindi newspapers navigate digital adaptation amid persistent structural constraints, contributing to broader debates on the sustainability and democratic role of local journalism in the digital age.

Review of Literature

Both the scale and the pace of changes witnessed by local newspapers have increased. The pressures for change centre on two related factors: rapid developments in media technology and shifts in the media habits of the potential audience (**Pilling R. , 1998**). While digital technologies have certainly impacted these roles and responsibilities, the core mission of local newspapers remains unchanged (**Hess, Krissy; Waller, Lisa, 2016**) but local newspapers add value in the areas of democracy and media ecosystems (**Radcliffe, Damian; Ali, Christopher, 2017**).

The internet has made it possible for people all over the world to effectively and inexpensively communicate with each other because the internet is a decentralized system. While the internet expands, the print media is strategically increasing local coverage and going closer to the grass-roots. There is also this common belief now that 'if newspapers stick to the ink they will sink' (**Sargeson, N. and Astill, P., 2005**).

The local press, today, usually retains a print edition that is supplemented with an online edition of local and regional newspapers. These editions seem to specialize in local journalism as a niche product for local audiences and advertisers (**Skogerbo Eli & Winsvold Marte, 2011**). Jesse Holcomb describes in the article 'Digital Adaptation in Local News' that local news publishing is still adapting to the internet as a news medium (**Holcomb, 2018**). The world of media communication has changed and is now called 'media convergence'. Convergence is used to indicate the unification of all earlier media forms in a single medium that can reach new and wide audiences (**Busa, 2014**), as (**Wilkinson, J.S., Grant A.E, Fisher,D.J, 2009**) says "the internet has recently changed our favourite delivery system, Newspapers now provides video, TV offers interactive, chat and radio has web-cams. Online journalism has the potential to pose fundamental questions for established journalism". Objectivity, reader

power, accountability and transparency, the right to reply, access to the audience, new ways of telling stories- questions concerning all of these and more are thrown up when we consider the new forms of news (O'sullivan, 2005).

Newspaper readership and circulation is on the decline in most countries of the world. It has been shown that the use of new technologies and changing lifestyles are responsible for that so now, news offered in a condensed, synoptic format through mobile devices or free papers (Busa, 2014) replaces old and long-form newspaper articles. But, one in ten local news outlets do not have a website; some outlets do not have a presence on Facebook (Holcomb, 2018). It's also true regarding small Hindi newspapers in India. In Europe, the online newspapers 'provide less local news' (Wurff R. V., 2005). Printed newspapers provided their readers with knowledge of more issues than the online newspaper (Schoenbach et. 2005). Online and printed newspapers have different characteristics in terms of accessibility, price digital competence, and media habits and attract audience groups divided by age, gender, education, and income (De Waal and Schoenbach 2010, Van Der Wruuff et. 2008).

In the other side, most newspapers now have an online news portal, where individuals from the community are encouraged to provide feedback and news stories from their locality (Rodrigues, 2010). Journalism now has to reach not only participative but also personalized readers (Thakurata, 2009). Now 'newspapers want to know what is in their readers' mind, and the user-generated content is a gift of the internet that is now coming into papers (Mudgal, 2009). Now, the threat from the internet is real and most Indian newspapers have their own online news portals. As internet penetration grows, people will access information online, putting pressure on newspapers (Rodrigues, 2010).

The young are increasingly moving to online media (De Waal and Suchoen Bach 2010, 93), but, Print is still at the heart of the business, but we need to understand how best to attract an audience, whatever the media portfolio, and then sell that audience to advertisers (Astill, 2005).

A more radical strategy for the future of local papers has been emerging that exploited the distribution potential of the internet (Pilling R. , 1998).

The internet is posing a serious commercial challenge to the press; it is also an opportunity to expand access to local journalism beyond the borders of the locality for which it is primarily intended. Online editions can be read across the globe. Digital printing technologies have made it easier to transmit paper copies of local newspapers overseas cheaply and quickly (Mcnaair B. , 1998). Shifting circulation and advertising patterns along with the rapid growth of internet traffic would have already informed them of the changes facing them (Pilling R. , 1998). Local news organizations are serious about connecting with their audiences. They need to think through the possible consequences of their relative commitment to the internet (Allan, 1998).

The printed local newspapers were assessed as most important but their online editions were also important to a substantial part of the audience. The printed newspapers were more popular than its online; 82% of the population read the print editions. Among the daily readers of the online newspapers, 80% were daily readers of the printed newspapers too. Only 5% read online more often than printed newspapers (Skogerbo Eli & Winsvold Marte, 2011). The new technology does create an opportunity for a much greater audience involvement and feedback.

Editors can measure responses to individual stories- hits on their websites. They are deliberately developing discussion forums and communities of bloggers on their websites to stimulate debate about local issues (**Pilling R. , 1998**).

Consumption of all content categories, except sports, was higher among the print than the online audience, and people read fewer genres online than in print. The daily print audience on average read almost four content types, whereas the daily online readers on average read three categories. The print audience accordingly, seemed to read the newspaper more thoroughly than the online readers. The survey found that they usually scrolled through the online newspapers to see what the news is, whereas they read the printed version from beginning to the end. Only 10% of frequent online readers the online newspaper discussion forums, whereas 44% of the daily print readers read letters to the editor. The difference may be the quality of the genre. Postings to online discussion forums were neither edited nor vetted, and accordingly, less reader-friendly than the carefully selected and proofread letters to the editors (**Skogerbo Eli & Winsvold Marte, 2011**).74% of the daily online readers agreed that the online newspapers were more superficial than the printed one (**Ottosen, Rune & Krumsvik, Arne. H., 2008**).

On average, frequent online readers were younger, richer, more educated, more politically active, and more often male than frequent print readers (**Busa, 2014**).

Online local/regional newspapers were preferred by those who were strongly attached to their locality. Attachment to the locality had a strong effect on print readership, but no significant effect on online readership. Feeling strongly attached to local community correlates with reading the printed edition, but not the online version of the local newspaper. The printed newspaper is still the central media channel. Those who feel strongly attached to their locality are likely to be particularly interested in the print format. They simply found most of the content relevant to their everyday lives in the printed newspaper. For the newspaper, that uses local news in the process of reinventing themselves in the geographical and cultural terms. They indicate that online and print audiences may have distinctly different preferences (**Skogerbo Eli & Winsvold Marte, 2011**).

There are some findings from a study of the digital footprint of more than 2000 US local news outlets. This report attempts to tell the story of that transformation by numbers. The study also offers a comparative perspective between various sectors of local media including radio and television broadcast, daily and weekly print, digital-native publishers and collegiate press.

- i. 12% of local news outlets do not have their own website.
- ii. Most local media are on social media.
- iii. Mobile app responsive design is more common - 84% of local news sites have opted for them.
- iv. A slight majority of local news outlets, 57%, offer an online pathway to subscription, donation or membership.
- v. Local news websites are generally split when it comes to their commenting architecture-a small majority (56% of outlets) - offer comment sections on their stories.
- vi. 47% of local news outlets offer video on their site. Of those that do, 44% host their videos on YouTube.
- vii. Links to live streams of video or audio (16%) and podcasts (11%) are fairly uncommon among local news

websites.

- viii. 23% of local news websites redirect to secure a version. 39% of local news outlets offer or promote a newsletter product on their website. Daily newspapers (65%) and digital-native publishers (57%) lead the way here (**Usher, 2014**).

The vast majority of the public are now engaging with news on their cell phones (**Patel, 2018**). Some local newspapers have moved into exploring chat apps such as We Chat and WhatsApp as a point of interaction with news consumers (**Debora, Wenger. & Bob, Papper., 2018**), but smaller community newspapers do not have a social media presence (**Jeffrey, Gottfried. & Elisa, Shearer., 2017**).

Local news publishers are still struggling to build a sustainable online business model. This analysis finds that a majority of local news outlets (57%) offer an online pathway through subscription, donation, or membership. This differs substantially depending on the type of outlet. Print outlets are most likely to offer a pathway to pay (**Holcomb, 2018**). The adoption of paywalls on newspaper websites found that 785 of large US newspapers have some kind of online paywall (**Stroud, Natalie (Talia) Jomini & Duyn, Emily Van & Alizer, Alexis & Lang, Cameron., 2017**).

Comment sections on news websites are sometimes treated by the journalism community with a mixture of tolerance and contempt. Comments on their websites have been subjected to toxic doses of trolling and general incivility. On the other hand, the comment section offers an opportunity, primitive as it may be, for audiences to discuss the content they are reading and perhaps even interact with a brave journalist. This analysis found that local news websites were generally split when it came to their commenting architecture a small majority (56% of outlets) offer comment sections on their stories (**Wenger, Debora & Papper, Bob., 2018**).

Research has shown that social media is a pathway to community news for many, but social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram offer community members an opportunity to interact with stories and journalist through “likes, emojis, comments, shares”, and other metrics. A solid majority of the audiences are on Facebook (78%), while just over half (54%) are on Twitter. Even local news outlets without their own websites are sometimes found on Facebook, after all, it is easier to create a social media profile than to wrangle a Word Press template. 34% of offline publishers have an active Facebook page (**Gottfried, Jeffrey & Shearer, Elisa., 2017**).

This analysis found that across all local media sectors, nearly half (47%) offered video on their websites. YouTube plays an outsized role when it comes to hosting digital news video for local news outlets. The majority of the videos are embedded through a third-party hosting service. Most of the video found on local news websites were pre-recorded. The analysis suggests that podcasting has not achieved critical mass in the local news world, with just 11% of local news outlets promoting or linking to a podcast on their website (**Holcomb, 2018**).

This study is anchored in Constrained Digital Adaptation Theory, which conceptualizes the digital transition of small Hindi newspapers as a structurally mediated process shaped by political-economic conditions rather than by technological opportunity alone. While digital media environments ostensibly lower barriers to entry, small vernacular newspapers in India continue to operate under chronic financial precarity, dependence on government and institutional advertising, limited newsroom staffing, and uneven access to digital infrastructure. These constraints shape not only the pace of digital adoption but also its depth, resulting in forms of partial or symbolic digitization such as basic websites or social media reposting without full integration of multimedia practices, data analytics or audience centric workflows. From a critical media studies perspective, digital adaptation is thus understood as a negotiated outcome within asymmetrical power relations involving ownership structures, revenue dependency and regulatory frameworks (Mosco, 2009; Pickard, 2019). In this study, these constraints are empirically examined through content analysis indicators (frequency of updates, multimedia use, platform diversity) and through interviews with editors regarding resource allocation and institutional pressures.

The framework further incorporates a Platform Local Nexus perspective to analyse how platformization reshapes local news production and circulation. Digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube function as infrastructural intermediaries that reorganize visibility, reach, and monetization through algorithmic logics privileging engagement, speed, and affective content. For small Hindi newspapers, this produces a tension between locally embedded journalistic norms contextual reporting, linguistic intimacy, and accountability to community audiences and platform incentives that often reward decontextualization and metric-driven visibility. While platforms may expand circulation, they simultaneously weaken editorial control, blur source recognition, and intensify dependency on opaque technological systems. This nexus is operationalized by analysing platform-specific content formats and by interviewing editors about algorithmic pressures, traffic volatility, and perceived loss of editorial autonomy (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018).

Finally, the study draws on Community Agenda Resilience Theory, extending agenda-setting theory by foregrounding community cultural and linguistic capital as a source of local media endurance. Small Hindi newspapers historically function as micro public spheres that articulate everyday civic concerns through shared language, social proximity, and trust-based networks. Digital tools can strengthen this role through audience interaction and rapid dissemination, yet platformized public spheres also fragment attention and challenge epistemic authority. This study examines whether and how community-sourced reporting, local framing, and reader participation sustain agenda-setting power in digital contexts. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework to analyse how small Hindi newspapers navigate digital transformation amid structural constraints, platform dependence, and enduring obligations to local publics (McCombs, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

Research Methodology**Objective of the Research**

1. To analyse the nature and extent of digital adaptation in small Hindi newspapers across platforms, content practices, and audience engagement.

Sampling

Considering the objectives of this study, two Hindi newspapers each from 19 States (including 3 union territories) were selected for the study, amounting to a total of 38 newspapers. The selected 19 states are the only states which show a significant presence of small newspapers in the Hindi language.

Procedure for selection of sample: -

For selection purposes and to rule out the element of bias, the states were first arranged in an alphabetical order as shown in column one. Thereafter, two daily newspapers each with the largest circulation in respective states were chosen. These newspapers were arranged in a chronological order according to the unique numbers assigned to each one of them, as shown in column two and three of the chart.

Andhra Pradesh	1.SWATANTRA VAARTHA(Nizamavadi)	2.SWATANTRA VAARTHA(Vishakhapatnam)
Assam	3.DAINIK PURVODAY(Guwahati)	4. DAINIK PURVODAY (Jorhat)
Bihar	5.BIHAR KI HAKIKAT(Muzaffarpur)	6.MONA TIMES(Muzaffarpur)
Chandigarh	7.PAHALI Khabar(Chandigarh)	8.JANSATTA(Chandigarh)
Chhattisgarh	9.SAMACHARKHOJ(Raipur)	10.CHHATTISGARH SWAR(Raipur)
Daman and Diu	11. SAVERA INDIA TIMES (daman)	12. ASALI AZADI(Daman)
Delhi	13.RASHTRAWADI TIMES(Delhi)	14. ISHAN TIMES(Delhi)
Gujarat	15.JANABHUMI HERALD(Surat)	16.JAN HITAISHI(Baroda)
Haryana	17.BABYIAN TIMES (Rohtak)	18.TYAGI TIMES(Sonapat)
Himachal Pradesh	19.DAINIK BHASKAR(Shimla)	20.JAGRAN DAINIK (kangra)
Jharkhand	21.CHAMAKTHA AIYNA(Jamshedpur)	22.APNA INDIA (Ranchi)
Jammu and Kashmir	23.DAINIK JAGRAN (Jammu)	24.NORTHERN TIMES(Jammu)
Maharashtra	25.DOPAHAR KA SAMANA(Mumbai)	26.TARUN MITRA(Thane)
Madhya Pradesh	27.DAINIK ALOK(Bhopal)	28.KRITI KRANTI(Bhopal)
Punjab	29.DAINIK JAGRAN(Patiala)	30.DAINIK JAGRAN(Bathinda)
Rajasthan	31.ASIAN STANDARD(Jaipur)	32.HELLO TIMES(Jodhpur)
Uttar Pradesh	33.CITY TIMES(Lucknow)	34.NEWS READER(Lucknow)
Uttarakhand	35.RUDRA TIMES(Haridwar)	36.KUMAON TIMES(Haldwani)
West Bengal	37.HIND SAMWAD(Asansol)	38.RAJASTHAN PATRIKA(Kolkata)

Finding

Digital adaptation in Local Media

How are small newspapers responding to digital disruption in India? To answer this question, the researcher has analyzed the trends on through the following parameters:

- Websites
- Social media page
- Video
- Mobile application
- Comment section
- Digital subscription
- Podcasts
- Advertising

Newspaper	Website	Social Media	Mobile App	Comment section	Digital subscription	Podcast	Advertising	Video
Asli Azadi	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓
ChamaktaAaina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DainikAlok	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dainik Bhaskar	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Dainik Jagran	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Dainik Jagran	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
DainikPurvoday	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
DainikPurvoday	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dopahar ka Saamna	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X
Hind Samwad	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dainik Jagran	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Jan Hitaishi	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Janabhumi Herald	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jansatta	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Kirti Kranti	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dainik Jagran	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Rajasthan Patrika	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Kumaon Times	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Savera IndiaTimes	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
SwatantraVartha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Swatantra Vartha	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TarunMitra	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	X
Tyagi Times	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 1: Digital adaptation in small Hindi newspapers in India

Through this analysis, the researcher has found that digital adaptation by small Hindi Newspapers does not exist or exists scantily. Example – *Kumaon Times* (Haldwani), *Hind Samwad* (Asansol), *Dainik Alok* (Bhopal), *Jan Hitaisi* (Vadodara), *Tyagi Times* (Sonipat). Newspaper *Kirti Kranti* (Bhopal) has an only social media presence. *Janabhumi Herald* (Surat), *Chamakta Aiyana* (Jamshedpur) and *Swatantra Vartha* (Nizamabad and Vishakhapatnam) newspapers do not have their own websites but these newspapers are available on readwhere.com (<https://www.readwhere.com>). Also substantiate by (Holcomb, 2018).

Dainik Purvoday has an Internet edition but, in that section, only an e-paper appears on the website. About the Internet edition, the newspaper says ‘the Internet edition of *Dainik Purvoday* is a part of the ongoing exercise of trying to trace more people interested in India, especially in its northeastern region’. The same page also says ‘People who belong to Daman but live abroad can access the news of the region on this page’ (Bhatt, 2018).

Some small Hindi newspapers have a prominent digital presence. For example *Dainik Jagran* (Jammu), *Dainik Jagran* (Patiala and Bhathinda), *Dainik Jagran* (Kangra), *Jansatta* (Chandigarh), *Dainik Bhaskar* (Shimla), *Dopahar ka Sammana* (Mumbai), *Rajasthan Patrika* (Kolkata), *Tarun Mitra* (Thane), *Savera India Times* and *Asli Azadi* (Daman).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that digital adaptation among small Hindi newspapers in India remains uneven, limited, and largely symbolic, confirming arguments advanced within Constrained Digital Adaptation Theory. While digital technologies ostensibly lower barriers to entry, the empirical evidence demonstrates that structural constraints financial precarity, dependence on government advertising, limited newsroom capacity, and uneven digital infrastructure significantly shape both the pace and depth of digital transition. For a majority of the sampled newspapers digital presence is restricted to basic websites, e-paper replicas, or sporadic social media activity, rather than integrated multimedia storytelling, audience analytics, or participatory workflows.

This pattern aligns with global research suggesting that local news organisations often adopt digital tools in partial or instrumental ways, without transforming underlying journalistic routines or revenue models. The reliance on aggregators and platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and news-hosting portals illustrates what this study conceptualises as a Platform Local Nexus: platforms expand visibility and circulation but simultaneously weaken editorial autonomy, blur source recognition, and intensify dependence on opaque algorithmic systems. Editors’ limited control over reach, monetisation, and audience data reinforces asymmetrical power relations between local publishers and digital intermediaries, echoing concerns raised in political-economy and platform-society scholarship.

At the same time, the findings complicate narratives of inevitable decline by highlighting the continued relevance of print editions and community embeddedness. Newspapers with strong local identity, linguistic intimacy, and reader trust particularly in rural and semi-urban contexts continue to exercise agenda-setting influence, even when

their digital presence is weak. This supports the study's use of Community Agenda Resilience Theory, which emphasises cultural proximity and trust as sources of endurance for local journalism in the digital age.

Importantly, the coexistence of digitally prominent and digitally marginal newspapers within the same linguistic and regional ecosystem suggests that digital transformation is not uniform but stratified. Larger or chain-affiliated newspapers demonstrate greater platform integration, while smaller independent outlets remain structurally constrained. The discussion therefore underscores that the future of small Hindi newspapers cannot be understood solely through technological determinism; rather, it must be analysed through the intersecting forces of political economy, platformisation, and community-based journalistic practices.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital adaptation among small Hindi newspapers in India is uneven, constrained and largely shaped by structural rather than technological factors. While digital platforms offer opportunities for expanded reach and audience interaction, most small newspapers remain confined to partial or symbolic forms of digitisation, such as e-papers or limited social media presence. Financial precarity, dependence on government advertising, limited newsroom capacity, and uneven digital infrastructure continue to restrict deeper integration of multimedia practices and sustainable digital business models

At the same time, the findings reaffirm the continued democratic relevance of small Hindi newspapers. Their linguistic intimacy, community embeddedness, and trust based readership enable them to retain agenda setting power at the grassroots level, even in digitally constrained environments. The study concludes that the future sustainability of small Hindi newspapers and local journalism in India requires targeted policy interventions, equitable advertising frameworks, and capacity building initiatives that recognise local newspapers not merely as market actors but as essential democratic institutions within India's evolving media ecosystem.

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