

# “News Narratives, Editorial Voices and Reader Interventions: A Tri-Layered Discourse Analysis of Small Hindi Newspapers in India”

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## **Abstract**

Small and local newspapers play a crucial yet underexamined role in shaping democratic communication in India. This study analyses how small Hindi newspapers construct news narratives, articulate editorial positions and facilitate reader participation within a constrained and localized media environment. Using a tri-layered discourse analytical framework the research examines news content, editorials and Letters to the Editor across a stratified sample of 38 small Hindi newspapers from 19 Indian states based on year-long monthly sampling.

The findings reveal a dominant glocal news flow in which international, national and hyper-local stories coexist, while regional or state level reporting remains largely absent. Editorials emerge as key sites of ideological framing, oscillating between watchdog journalism and political mobilization under conditions of limited editorial autonomy. The Letters to the Editor section, though potentially constituting a micro-public sphere is unevenly institutionalized and marked by restricted access and gendered underrepresentation. The study positions small Hindi newspapers as normatively ambivalent democratic institutions expanding access to public discourse while reproducing structural constraints and contributes to debates on vernacular journalism, media decentralization and democratic accountability.

## **Keywords**

Small Hindi newspapers, Local journalism, Editorial discourse, Letters to the Editor, Media and democracy.

## **Introduction**

News media constitute a central pillar of democratic societies by shaping public knowledge, political awareness and civic engagement. While considerable scholarship has focused on national and elite media institutions small and local newspapers have received comparatively limited academic attention. In the Indian context, small Hindi newspapers occupy a crucial yet understudied position within the media ecosystem. Deeply embedded in local social structures and accessible to non-elite readerships, these newspapers serve as primary sources of information

for large rural and semi-urban populations, thereby exerting sustained influence over everyday public consciousness.

Unlike metropolitan dailies, small Hindi newspapers operate within constrained economic and institutional frameworks, shaping distinctive editorial practices and news priorities. Their content frequently combines international, national and hyper-local events within a single discursive space, producing a hybrid or “glocal” news flow. While this structure allows readers to connect local experiences with broader political developments, it also reveals significant gaps—particularly the near-erasure of regional or state-level reporting. Such patterns reshape political imagination by fostering strong local and national identification while weakening regional awareness, with important implications for democratic accountability in a federal polity.

Editorials represent a key site where the ideological and normative functions of small newspapers become visible. Through persuasive language and evaluative framing, editorials interpret political events, assess governance, and articulate moral judgments. Drawing on agenda-setting and framing traditions, editorials function simultaneously as watchdog mechanisms and instruments of social advocacy. However, this dual role is inherently fragile. Under conditions of political pressure, resource scarcity, or ideological alignment, editorial discourse may shift from critical scrutiny to sensationalism or communal polarization, thereby undermining journalistic autonomy and ethical responsibility.

Complementing news and editorials, the Letters to the Editor (LTE) section offers one of the few institutionalized spaces for citizen participation within print journalism. LTEs enable readers to critique reporting, respond to editorial positions, and articulate community concerns in their own voices, positioning this section as a potential micro-public sphere. Nevertheless, uneven publication practices, limited access, and underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups complicate its democratic promise and raise questions about inclusivity and voice.

This study adopts a tri-layered discourse analytical framework to examine news narratives, editorial voices, and reader interventions in small Hindi newspapers across India. By analyzing these interconnected layers, the research seeks to illuminate how meaning, power, and participation are negotiated within local-language journalism. In foregrounding small Hindi newspapers as complex, normatively ambivalent, yet democratically significant institutions, the study contributes to broader debates on media decentralization, public sphere theory, and the role of vernacular journalism in sustaining democratic discourse.

## Review of Literature

News plays a vital role in human affairs. It keeps us informed of what is happening in our own country and the world at large. Its significance has been greatly increased by the spread of education, which sharpens and cultivates our curiosity about what happens around us (**Busa, 2014**).

Newspaper headlines are not just about chronicling the daily occurrences specifically; they are essential windows to information. From a newspaper headline, one can draw not just news but also views and the state of society. The “public response to the event that is of more sociological or even political importance in defining the nature of the state or society” (**Ramagundam, 2005**).

Editorials of a newspaper look at different domains of life from a political perspective. To contextualize their investigation, it appears useful to first look at studies on media and politics, secondly at the newspaper(s) in which they appear, and thirdly at the political context of their time of publication. Editorials certainly participate in the actualization of framing and agenda-setting (**McCombs, 1997**). Their efficiency as watchdogs depends partly on a combination of their independence (from political and financial sources of power) and a plurality (**Hamilton 2003; James 2004**). To their primary role of being news providers, some media outlets also add the role of news commentators (**Le, 2010**).

Through the editorials, we establish the relationship between media and power or politics. “The connection between media and politics has been the object of numerous studies for several decades” (**Bennett, 1996; Curran, 2002; Gans, 2003; Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Hackett & Zhao, 1998; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; McLeod et al. 2002; McNair, 2006; Schudson, 1995; Servaes & Lie, 1997; Siebert et al. 1956**).

The letters section is a crucial part of the newspaper and can be described as a ‘platform for debate’ that gives voice to the readers. The letter's section is a platform for the opinions of individual readers (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). Letters are a ‘barometer of local feeling’ and represent the opinion of the community (**Sigelman, K. & Walkosz, B. J., 1992**). The letter's page is for local people who are often afraid of getting in touch with officialdom. By writing a letter, they can have a say (**Williams R. , 2005**). The letters section is one of the most widely read items of the newspaper, after the front page (**Gregory, L. & Hutchins, B. , 2004**). The letter's page also acts as a ‘good PR for newspapers’ (**Pharo, 2005**). Letters are ‘hazy reflections of the public opinion (**Grey, D. L. & Brown, T. R. , 1970**). As (**McNair, 2000**), The letter's sections are a ‘wide open’ forum for public debate. Letter writers play an active role in shaping the discussion of local communities (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**).

The local newspaper should provide the individual with a platform, which is often their only platform” (**Hadwin, 1998**), (**Hynds, 1991**), LTE section creates the public sphere through the readers. The letter's sections serve a series of practical purposes for local papers, they strengthen ties between newspapers and their communities (**Tunstall, 1977**), (**Jorgensen-Wahl, 2002**). This section is a ‘measure of the paper's health’ (**Hadwin, 1998**). The letters section is one of the most dangerous pages in the newspaper because people can slip in the most diabolical things. As their role is to manage the debate, rather than censor it (**John, 2005**).The letters to local newspapers reflect ongoing debates on issues central to the well-being of the community. Thus, local issues take up the majority of the letter’s pages (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). LTE section provides the newspapers with much-needed feedback on their coverage. This is especially useful for the vast majority of local newspapers (**Franklin, Local Journalism and local media : Making the local news , 1998**)“The letters to the editor section have a unique place in local. journalism because it is the only place in the newspaper where readers have their say, in their own words” (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). “Readers should be encouraged to participate and to express their opinions,

their fears and their hopes in the columns of their newspaper. The local newspaper should provide the individual with a platform, which is often their only platform” (**Hadwin, 1998**), “The older readers were frequent readers of letters to the editor” (**Skogerbo, Eli. & Winsvold, Marte., 2011**).

‘Letter writers as people who ‘have civic pride, have seen things change in their communities, and do not like it (**Keighley, 2005**). The point of these letters is to give different people a platform (**Hadwin, 1998**) and not stick to creating a monopoly of opinions on the LTE page. Letters to the editor are the most popular Column of the newspaper which is also the most read part after the lead pages in a newspaper (**Oreh, 1978** ). Local newspapers now receive letters on email. Editors approve of this development because it may have resulted in an increase in the volume of letters as email has doubled the number of contributions (**Hansford, 2005**). The new technology is not without their drawbacks. One problem is that they enable the proliferation of ‘Astroturf’ or ‘synthetic’ grassroots opinion’ (**Berman, 2003**).

The letters' section is one of the few places that provide a sense of the hotly debated topics in each local community, and they are invaluable in forging and maintaining ties between newspapers and their readers (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). Letter writers are ‘local people who feel motivated and involved in a given issue’ (**John, 2005**). These are people who make the effort to pen a letter ‘feel anger, passion, or the urge to set the record straight. They want to uncover something that they feel others should know about (**Deacon, 2005**).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The findings of this study allow us to conceptualize a unified theoretical framework explaining how small Hindi newspapers operate within India’s complex media ecology.

The first strand, Glocal News Flow Theory, explains the hybrid geographic pattern of news circulation in small newspapers. The examples in this study from Obama’s U.S. election victory to hyper-local incidents such as hospital negligence reveal that these newspapers collapse global, national, and local boundaries (**Busa, 2014**). Yet the near absence of regional coverage (0.80%) demonstrates that the “middle sphere” connecting districts and states is critically weak. As **Ninan (2007)** argues, the increasing localization of national newspapers has blurred regional identities; small newspapers, influenced by this model, now deliver a product that presents global and national worlds but bypasses the regional altogether. This fragmented news geography reshapes public consciousness by producing citizens who are intensely aware of local and national concerns but disconnected from their own state-level realities.

The second strand, Watchdog–Catalyst Duality Theory, explains the normative tensions within local journalism. Small Hindi newspapers aspire to perform two classical functions of the press: acting as watchdogs exposing administrative failures, and acting as catalysts for social and developmental change (**Vergheese, 1977**). Examples of criticism, social reform campaigns, and developmental reporting reflect these roles. However, this duality becomes unstable when political and ideological forces intervene. As **Jeffrey (2000)** and **Ninan (2007)**

demonstrate, newspapers can slide into partisan mobilisation, particularly on communal issues such as Ayodhya. In such moments, watchdog journalism weakens, and catalytic journalism becomes ideological rather than developmental. This study's examples of sensationalised and communalised headlines from exaggerated casualty numbers to communal framing underscore how fragile the duality becomes when professional autonomy is undermined.

The third strand, Public Sphere Participation Theory, interprets the editorial and Letters to the Editor (LTE) sections as micro-public spheres where elite and citizen voices interact. Editorials through constative, directive, acknowledgement, and commissive speech acts (Bach & Harnish, 1979) shape top-down frames and political interpretations. LTEs provide bottom-up participation, enabling citizens to critique, debate, and influence local discourse (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). Yet participation is uneven, with limited female representation and inconsistent publication across newspapers. Despite these limitations, LTEs remain one of the few accessible democratic forums for community-level dialogue.

Taken together, these theories show that small Hindi newspapers function as multi-scalar, normatively ambivalent, and participatory-yet-fragmented institutions. They link global and local worlds, balance critique with advocacy, and create spaces for public engagement but remain constrained by structural vulnerabilities, political pressures, and uneven editorial practices. The integrated framework illustrates that strengthening small Hindi newspapers requires restoring regional journalism, safeguarding editorial independence, and expanding inclusive public participation to reinforce their democratic role.

## Research Methodology

### Objective of the Research

1. To examine how news is presented in small Hindi newspapers.
2. To study the views and values expressed through editorials in small Hindi newspapers.
3. To examine how readers' voices influence or respond to news and editorials.

### 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. The sampling of newspaper issues (edition dates) was undertaken based on the sampling technique devised by Stempel (1952): a monthly stratified sample of 12 issues (one issue per month) for a single newspaper for one entire year was taken (**Stempel, 1952**).

## Finding

### News

News plays a vital role in human affairs. It keeps us informed of what is happening in our own country and the world at large. News is the honest, unbiased, and complete account of events and concerns of the public. News texts are written to report information on news and current events and relayed to a mass audience by print, broadcast, or the internet. In this study, the researcher has studied news stories of local-small Hindi newspapers in India. Example ----

- Aphrat collector ki rihaai ke liye naksaliyon ne rakhi shartey (Swatantra Vaartha, Nizamabad).
- Daman municipal pramukh evam uppramukh ka chunav aaj (Ashali Azadi, Daman).
- Murdon ki chhati par bichha di pipeline (Dainik Alok, Bhopal).
- 5 Aur Bachchon Ki Maut, Aspatal ke bahar pradarshan (Hind Samwad, Asansol).
- Khelon me Pradesh ke pahalvano ne kiya naam roshan (Tyagi Times, Sonipat).
- Vaigyanik anusandhan par kharch doguna kiya jayega : Manmohan singh (Jansatta, Chandigarh).
- Obama ne fir jeeta America (Dainik Jagran, Patiala).

Based on the above examples, we can infer that the geographical region of news stories of small newspapers is Glocal which features news originating from international to local spheres.

The newspaper must be a watch-dog and a critic and provide criticism which is positive and constructive. It could be a catalyst in the process of social and economic transformation but only if it goes to the grassroots of social and development journalism. News does not lurk so much in the corridors of power as much as it does in the factory and the fields of school and laboratory, poverty and social injustice also constitute 'News' (Vergheese, 1977 ). Example-

- Kayede me rahen kanoon Mantri (Rajasthan Patrika, Kolkatta) -- Criticism
- Utpadan ke sath sthaniya sahbhagita sunishchit ho-Munda (Chamaktha Aiyana, Jamshedpur) – Economic transformation
- Purn karyon ka upyogita praman patra tatkal karaye uplabdh (Kumaon Times, Haldwani) –Watch-dog
- Garibon ko sidhe nakdi UPA ki krantikari yojna: Sonia (Jansatta, Chandigarh)- Developmental
- Kanya bhrun hatya se manav sabhyta vinash ke kagar par: Kavar Maharaj (Tyagi Times, Sonipat) – social

Newspaper headlines are not just about chronicling the daily, they are essential windows to information. From a newspaper headline, one can draw not just news but also views and the state of society. Example ---

- Gusse ke chapet me Satta ka Shikhar (Dainik Jagran, Jammu).
- Char dhamako se pune me dahshat (Jansatta, Chandigarh).

- Pati,patni,beti ki sansanikhej hatya (Chamaktha Aiyna, Jamshedpur).
- Goli maar kar ki hatya (Hind Ssamvad, Asansol).
- Yuvraj cancer se pidit videsh me ho raha hai ilaz (Jansatta, Chandigarh).
- Gang ka 'Gold' Game (Dopahar Ka Sammana, Mumbai).
- Pravasi bhartiyaon ke liye nai pension yojna shighra: Manmohan (Swatantra Vaartha, Nizamabad).

In this study, the researcher has found that an absence of regional news. The localizing big dailies today have created a national-local product which is blurring the existing regional identity of the people living in the various Indian states. The trend which one can witness shows that, usually, the first part of the newspaper brings in the national universe into rural and semi-urban homes; the second part brings the immediately local universe that the reader would recognize. As a result, one cannot find news of even neighbouring districts in the small newspapers which seems to be disappearing from local editions. According to the data shared in this study, only 0.80% of the news is related to regional geographical regions. Today the regional news is being replaced by local. The most serious charge against Local newspapers is that they adhere to the localization phenomenon to such an extent and share less news of the state as a whole. Thus, local news found no regional resonance as there was no effort on the part of the newspaper to collate and organize local reports from across the state, thematically. This is because all newspapers had different editions originate from different parts of the state, it is difficult to get news from the whole state in one place. Newspapers were localized to an extent that, even within a district, there were different pages for different parts (Ninan, 2007).

The Hindi press was drawn from society and when caste and communalism shaped discourse, their conduct as media also became part of that discourse. The events of Ayodhya in 1990 became a memorable case study of the role the print media played in inflaming the communal tension. Newspaper *Dainik Jagran* used the "Ayodhya issue to establish its supremacy" as newspapers in Uttar Pradesh (Ninan, 2007). The newspaper revolution also ignited the *Hindutva* ideology and the issue of the temple and mosque in Ayodhya in North India. The newspapers adopted Hindu ideologies and the eyes, minds, and hearts of the readers were influenced by the ideas and ideologies of the newspaper (Jeffrey, 2000). Example ---

- The Editor of '*Swatantra Bharat*', in the news that killed fifteen people for destroying the Babri Masjid, put the 1 before 15 to offset plate. This news was printed on the main page and the number of deaths was exaggerated to 115 from the original number 15.
- Hindi newspaper "*Aj*" exposed the news of the riots spread after the first procession of the *Bhartiya Janata Party* in detail on 2 November 1990. And in its different editions, the number of people dying was different. This number was 100 in Varanasi and Agra editions, 200 in Kanpur and it increased to 400-500 in the Ranchi edition.

- *Aj's* Agra edition published an incorrect report in December with the following headline: "Killing of Hindu patients by Muslim medical staff at the Aligarh Muslim University Hospital".

In this study, the researcher found that some news stories from *Dainik Jagran*, Jammu to be questionable too. The headline of one of the news stories was, "Attacks on Pilgrims" but the entire incident was a result of a Gas cylinder explosion. The newspaper went ahead with such a story because the newspaper knew that the securities of the Amarnath pilgrims are a very sensitive issue and the newspaper wanted to sensationalize this particular incident.

Other examples, In, Dopahar *Ka Saamana* ---

- Priyanka ka hath 'Mullo' ke sath.
- Congress ki chati par chadhenge 'Musalman'. This shows how communalism shapes discourse of the public sphere in India.

### Editorials

Editorials depict how the media perceive and react to the world around them. Each editorial defines at a given time how media constructs their socio-cultural environment and where they position themselves in it. In this sense, they are snapshots of the socio-cultural identities created by the media. Editorials present many advantages for discourse analysts interested in media and politics: they are short, easily obtainable, and particularly interesting for their persuasive strategies. To be properly understood, they need, on the one hand, to be submitted to a linguistic, bottom-up analysis that some would (rightly) qualify as "microscopic" and, on the other hand, the complex sociopolitical context in which they appear requires the analyst to delve into numerous archives of all sorts for the "macroscopic", top-down analysis.

The purpose of an utterance is recognized by the type of speech act it represents. (Bach, K. & R. M. Harnish, 1979), distinguish four types of speech acts: "constative" (i.e. stating how something is), "acknowledgment" (i.e. expressing feelings concerning a certain event or state of affairs), "directive" (i.e. trying to get the listener to do or not to do something), and "commissive" (i.e. speaker's intention and belief formed by his or her utterance which obligate him to do something).

Example ---

### Constative Editorials

- Loktantr kitna paripakv? (Kirti Kranti).
- Jeet ki ranniti (Rajasthan Patrika).
- Chnautipur dayitva (Dainik Jagran, Patiala).
- Naye netritva se rubaru (Dainik Bhaskar, Simla).
- Yah kaisa aadarsh (Janabhumi Herald)
- Panchvarshiy yojna me vikas (Savera India Times)
- Mudde par chhidi bahas (Ashali Azadi)

### Acknowledgment Editorials

- Pradhanmantri ki nek salah (Kirti Kranti).
- Sarahniya pahal (Dainik Jagran, Jammu).
- Band se hasil (Rajasthan Patrika).
- Rashtrapati par aam sahmati ho Swatantra Vaartha, Visakhapatanam).
- Dubta Majuli (Dainik Purvoday, Jorhat).
- Raksha saudon par swal uthane wale Deshdrohi kaise? (Tyagi Times).

### Directive Editorials

- Chaupat svashthya vyavstha (Chamaktha Aiyana).
- Aabhavgrast police (Danik Jagran, Bhatinda).
- Hashiye ke log (Jansatta).
- Khanan par manan (Dainik Jagran, Kangra).
- Badlav se hi pragati sambhav (Swatantra Vaartha, Nizamabad).
- Maria Kam me lago (Dopahar ka Sammna).
- Belagam hoti Bimariyan (Kumaon Times).

### Commissive Editorials

- Sharminda hain hum (Chamaktha Aiyana)
- Dal jheel ka Hoga sanrakshan (Dainik Jagran, Jammu)
- Sansad ka ksharan (Dainik Jagran, Patiala)
- Patri ki sudh (Jansatta)
- Avilamb rooko Gundai (Dainik Purvoday, Guwahati)
- Shiksha ke star ki chinta (Ashali Azadi)

When the specific type of complex speech act has been defined for each editorial, it still remains to be seen to whom that speech act is addressed. In the case of conservatives, commissives or acknowledgements, it can be assumed that the addressee is the newspaper's general readership. Media is essential for the functioning of democracy. They provide information without which no choice exists. To fulfil this function, they need to select what they will present, and choose how to present it. This allows them to bring the public's attention to important issues that could otherwise be deliberately left ignored by politicians; in that, they play the important role of a "watchdog". However, in being watchdogs, media can also use their power in ways that are detrimental to the good functioning of democracy: their 'framing', 'agenda-setting', and 'priming' of news can unduly influence the public in one way or the other.

In this study, the researcher's analysis shows that small Hindi newspapers have editorials carrying a majority of

47.56% of political content. This shows the deep connection between political spheres and editorials. The editorials of *Dopahar ka saamana* become news for other newspapers. Based on this tendency of the editorials, they can be divided into four main types:

- The newspapers which cover local news stories and which focus on local issues in their editorials. Example – *Kumaon Times, Dopahar ka Saamana*.
- Newspapers which mostly cover local news stories but cover national issues in their editorials. Example – *Ashali Azadi, Savera India Times, Kirti Kranti, Chamaktha Aiyana, Hind Samwad, Tyagi Times, Dainik Alok, Tarun Mitra*.
- Newspapers which feature national coverage both in their news stories as well as editorials. Example - *Dainik Jagran, Dainik Bhaskar, Jansatta, Jan Hitashi*.
- Newspapers which feature a mix of national-local issues in both their news stories as well as editorials. Example – *Dainik Purvoday, Swatantra Vaartha, Janabhumi Herald and Rajasthan Patrika*.

As far as *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar* are concerned, these are the 2 newspapers which publish 2 editorials in which one features national coverage and the other one is related to local news or news from the state they are being published from.

### Letters to Editor

Every newspaper has to reserve a column for letters from the readers, where readers can express their views on various subjects, including their critique of the inaccuracies in the news and views expressed earlier (**PCI, 2001**). However, only 12 newspapers out of the 23 small newspapers publish Letters to the Editor (LTE). Example – *Swatantra Vaartha*, Nizamabad and Visakhapatnam (Pathak Vartha), *Dainik Purvoday*, Guwahati and Jorhat (Priy Sampadak), *Jansatta* (Chaupal), *Janabhumi Herald* (Chitti Charcha), *Dainik Bhaskar* (Pathak Samwad), *Danik Jagran*, Kangra, Patiala, Bhatinda and Jammu (Pathaknama), *Rajasthan Patrika* (Pathak peeth). *Dopahar ka Saamana* publishes the LTE section only in the Sunday edition called 'Pati'. Usually, in the LTE section. All newspapers publish the name and place of the writer but the *Janabhumi Herald* newspaper publishes only the name of contributors.

In the following newspapers, the LTE column was not being published, example-- *Savera India Times, Ashali Azadi, Jan Hitaisi, Tyagi Times, Chamaktha Aiyana, Dopahar ka Saamana, Tarun Mitra, Dinik Alok, Kirti Kranti, Kumaon Times, Hind Samwad*.

LTE are the most popular Column of the newspaper which is also the most read part after the lead pages in a newspaper. The format of the newspaper has changed and now letters are coming through the email. Yet the popularity of this column has never declined (**Oreh, 1978** ). Example- *Rajasthan Patrika, Dainik Jagran* (Kangra).

The publication of the first letter in the *Times of India* and statesman newspaper was considered very prestigious. It used to include letters of great writers (**Ogan, 1982**). Similarly, in the LTE of *Jansatta*, the letters of many esteemed writers are also published. Example- K.Vikram Rao and Chaman Lal.

The letter's sections are also often a source of ideas for news stories (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**), Example when

Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) showed three historical men Akbar, Ranjit Singh, and Ashok as hosts in the hoarding of its hotels, then Arvind Mohan wrote a letter in the 'Dinman' magazine, after which ITDC was forced to withdraw this advertisement (**Rampal, 1984**), this is the power of LTE. Through this column, readers expose many problems in their own locality. The reader also reveals the error of an article and news in the letters to the editor (**Sinha, 1986**). In Jansatta newspaper, readers also point out errors that may exist in an article. Moreover, in the LTE section, both aligned and opposing views are published together which results in a holistic representation of a news story or viewpoint.

“The letters to the editor section has a unique place in local journalism because it is the only place in the newspaper where readers have their say” *Swatantra Vaartha* newspaper gives the maximum space to issues related to their region. “Readers should be encouraged to participate and to express their opinions, their fears and their hopes in the columns of their newspaper. The local newspaper should provide the individual with a platform, which is often their only platform” (**Hadwin, 1998**), but some local newspapers do not have an LTE column.

The reader’s column is not a charity to the readers. It is one of the ways in which accountability of the newspaper is ensured (**PCI, 2001**), but the researcher found many newspapers they do not publish the LTE section.

Most papers will not print contributions that are anonymous or lack contact information. Editors usually reject contributions from outside the papers. Editors prefer shorter letters, and rarely publish ones that are longer than 200 words, but the first letters published in *Jansatta* and *Dainik Purvoday* newspaper respectively were longer than 200 words. *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar* mostly publish 100 words letters. They edit down longer contributions that add to the debate, even as they lament that getting them into a publishable shape can be one of the toughest jobs in the newsroom. It is difficult because letter writers often express themselves in what editors describe, variously, as ‘convoluted’, ‘confused’ and ‘rambling’ language – the language of the impassioned amateur writer, rather than that of a polished professional journalist. Editors struggle to preserve the personal voice and the substance of the letter (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**).

Although, newspapers discuss many local issues there are newspapers in which letters to editors are on a different geographical region than the one they are published from. For example, *Rajasthan Patrika* is published from Kolkatta but it publishes letters from Rajasthan. Similarly, in *Dainik Bhaskar* (Shimla), letters of readers from Chandigarh and Punjab. *Dainik Jagran*, Jammu edition gives space to letters from Punjab readers. Whereas the nature of the LTE of *Jansatta* is national. *Jansatta* is published from Chandigarh but it features letters from readers from all over India. Hence, the newspaper is unable to establish a connection with local readers through the LTE section. As per the researcher's analysis, most LTE sections are published by big houses running small newspapers, hence the letters are not regional but of those geographical areas from which that edition is not published. However, *Swatanta Vaartha* (Andhra Pradesh) and *Dainik Purvoday* (Assam) publish letters from local readers. In these newspapers, the LTE Section also publishes poetry.

Local issues take up the majority of the letters page. The quality of public health, transportation services and the rising price of petrol are a few examples (**Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998**). The LTE of *Swatantra Vaartha* and *Dainik Purvoday*, *Janabhumi Herald* and *Dainik Jagran* have letters written by regional readers.

However, the researcher analyzed that in this particular section, the contribution of the female's readers was less than 10 %. Out of the 216 letters to editors published in this section, only 20 were from female contributions. The maximum number of letters published in this section were 5 published in *Dainik Bhaskar* (Shimla) and *Dainik Bhaskar* (Jammu), followed by *Dainik Jagran* (Patiala).

Letters from a local councilor are of little relevance to the public debate. Such contributions move the section away from the idea that it is for ordinary people. "Editors are less keen to include the letters of their 'regulars' or those letter writers who are frequent contributors" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1998). There are some who write letters regularly, for example- Indra Singh Dhigan (*Jansatta*, Chandigarh), Umasankar Gopal (*Dainik Jagran*, Patiala), Sham Vidrohi (*Dainik Jagran*, Kangra) and Madan Singhal (*Dainik Purvoday*, Jorhat). Editors seek to limit contributions from regulars because they seek out a diversity of voices (John, 2005).

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that small Hindi newspapers function as complex and contradictory sites of democratic communication, simultaneously expanding public access to information while reproducing structural and ideological limitations. The tri-layered analysis of news narratives, editorial voices, and reader interventions demonstrates that these newspapers are not merely scaled-down versions of national dailies but distinct journalistic formations shaped by locality, language, and institutional vulnerability.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the empirical confirmation of a *glocal* pattern of news flow in small Hindi newspapers. By juxtaposing international events, national politics, and hyper-local incidents within the same publication, these newspapers collapse spatial hierarchies and enable readers to situate local experiences within broader political imaginaries. However, this apparent inclusivity masks a critical absence: the near-erasure of regional or state-level news. The data showing only 0.80% regional coverage supports Ninan's argument that excessive localization fragments regional consciousness, producing readers who are politically alert at the local and national levels but disconnected from state-level governance. This has serious implications for federal accountability, as the regional sphere—where many policy decisions are operationalized—remains largely invisible.

The analysis of editorial discourse further highlights the normative instability of small Hindi newspapers. Editorials frequently perform a watchdog role by critiquing governance failures and addressing social issues, aligning with classical democratic expectations of the press. At the same time, the dominance of political content (47.56%) indicates a deep entanglement between editorial agendas and political power. When professional autonomy is weakened, this watchdog role risks transforming into ideological mobilisation, as evidenced by sensationalised and communalised reporting during moments of political tension. These findings reinforce Jeffrey's and Ninan's observations that vernacular newspapers can act as powerful agents of political influence, shaping not only opinion but emotional and communal responses.

The Letters to the Editor (LTE) section emerges as a fragile yet vital space of participatory democracy. Where present, LTEs function as micro-public spheres that allow readers to contest news narratives, correct inaccuracies, and articulate local grievances. However, the absence of this section in a majority of newspapers, combined with gendered underrepresentation and editorial gatekeeping, significantly limits its democratic potential. Rather than being an inherent feature of local journalism, participation appears contingent on institutional will and ownership structures.

Taken together, these findings suggest that small Hindi newspapers occupy a normatively ambivalent position within India's media ecology. They expand access to news and public expression while simultaneously constraining the depth, diversity, and inclusivity of democratic discourse. Strengthening their democratic role therefore requires not only economic sustainability but also renewed commitments to regional journalism, editorial independence, and genuinely inclusive public participation.

## Conclusion

This study establishes that small Hindi newspapers remain indispensable yet structurally fragile actors within India's democratic media landscape. Through a tri-layered analysis of news narratives, editorial voices, and reader interventions, the research demonstrates that these newspapers perform a crucial mediating role between global events, national politics, and local lived realities. Their accessibility and linguistic proximity enable them to reach audiences often excluded from elite media circuits, thereby sustaining everyday democratic communication.

However, the findings also reveal persistent limitations that constrain their democratic potential. The near absence of regional or state-level reporting weakens citizens' engagement with federal governance and narrows political imagination. Editorials, while frequently articulating watchdog and developmental concerns, remain vulnerable to ideological alignment, sensationalism, and communal framing when editorial autonomy is compromised. Similarly, the Letters to the Editor section, despite its capacity to function as a micro-public sphere, is unevenly institutionalized, marked by restricted access and limited representation of women and marginalized voices.

Taken together, these patterns position small Hindi newspapers as normatively ambivalent institutions—simultaneously enabling participation and reproducing exclusions. The study contributes to media and communication scholarship by foregrounding vernacular journalism as a distinct and consequential field of analysis. Strengthening the democratic role of small Hindi newspapers requires renewed emphasis on regional journalism, protections for editorial independence, and more inclusive participatory spaces that reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

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