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## Shaping the Policy: Recommendations and implication for small Hindi newspapers in India

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### Abstract

This study explores the problems, potentials, and policy implications for small Hindi newspapers in India, which play a vital role in strengthening democratic communication and local accountability. Small newspapers, defined by the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) as publications with a daily circulation of up to 25,000 copies, are often the first to expose scams, highlight rural issues, and report stories overlooked by the mainstream press. Despite their importance in bridging the information gap between citizens and the government, small newspapers face challenges such as lack of financial resources, dependence on advertisements, unequal competition with large chains, and inadequate institutional support. Through sampling, the study conducted in-depth interviews with editors and owners of 38 small Hindi newspapers across 16 states and 3 union territories. Findings reveal systemic issues: biased advertisement distribution by the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), outdated RNI categorization, high newsprint costs, and limited representation in policymaking bodies like the Press Council of India. Small newspapers also struggle to retain professional staff and modernize their operations due to technological and financial constraints. The research proposes comprehensive policy interventions. Key recommendations include establishing a Small Newspaper Development Corporation, subsidizing newsprint, ensuring equitable advertisement distribution, and restructuring the RNI classification to prevent large chains from exploiting benefits meant for smaller publications. Further, integrating journalism students through internships with small newspapers can enhance professionalization at the grassroots level. The study also suggests treating small newspapers as a cottage industry to facilitate financial assistance from banks and public-private partnerships. The implications of these measures underscore the urgent need for government and institutional support to sustain small Hindi newspapers. Empowering them with resources, recognition, and fair policies will not only preserve media plurality but also strengthen India's democracy by amplifying marginalized voices at the local level.

**Keywords:** Small newspapers, RNI, DAVP, policy

### 1. Introduction

The main objective of media is considered as information, education, awareness and entertainment. "Media, the concrete form of this expression has grown in power over a period of time. The fundamental objective of media is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased and decent manner and language. The media today does not remain satisfied as the fourth estate. It has assumed the foremost importance in acting as a communication link between the society and the government. Such is the influence of media that it can make or unmake any individual, institution or any thought. The media's impact on the society in today's scenario is very pervasive and extremely powerful. With so much power and strength, the media cannot lose sight of its privileges, duties and obligations" (Ray, 2005) [20]. In the third world countries like India, the responsibility of media is not only providing news and entertainment but also development of analytical awareness among the masses as our society has been in the constant grip of slavery, poverty, illiteracy, inequality and hopelessness" (Joshi, 2007) [30].

"India being the largest democracy in the world, it becomes very important that the citizens have access to information for proper functioning of its institutions. In the past, the print media shouldered the responsibility of disseminating information and news regarding the happenings within and outside the country" (Press in India, 54th annual report, RNI). "Small newspapers are the pillars of democracy in this country as they cater to the needs of the

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majority of the Indian population and particularly those who live in the rural areas" (Sharma, 2015) <sup>[26]</sup>. The Registrar of Newspapers (India) defines small newspaper as—"A newspaper with a circulation of up to 25,000 copies per publishing day" (Press in India, 54<sup>th</sup> annual report).

"Small newspapers are brought out by people with small means. They come out both from big and small towns and carry local news and cover problems concerning the local public. Many of them are also working on specialized subjects like science and technology, health, family planning, religion, etc. The small newspapers generally speak the local language of the people and are read and understood by them and thus are capable of influencing or building up public opinion at the grass root level. They serve as a bridge between the people living at distant places in the interiors of the country on the one hand and the local administration, state government and the central government on the other"(A Report: Future of Print Media,2001) <sup>[14]</sup>.

"Small newspapers serving their intimate involvement in the local scenario play a more direct role in the process of democratizing communication and motivating socio-economic transformation than newspapers published at trade area. When it is further realized that it is these newspapers which matter most in ensuring accountability to the voters of the people's representatives from the panchayat level, the parliament and the bureaucracy at the grass root level, the important role they play in ensuring vibrant and effective democratic government cannot be over emphasized. It is common knowledge that some scams and scandals in the country have been first exposed by small newspapers" (A Report: Future of Print Media, 2001) <sup>[14]</sup>. For example, "The cement scam of A.R. Antulay was first exposed in regional small newspaper with huge reliable evidences. The infamous incident of Bhagalpur blinding case, which built the image of an English newspaper in the international market, was first published in a small Hindi newspaper. There are numerous examples where the mainstream English newspapers have followed the news items which were already published in the small regional newspapers. "But the aims of small newspapers often reach the inaccessible villages where the big do not care to peep. These newspapers survive mainly on local news, which is as much important to the government in this country as national and international news, if not more. In the largest democracy of the world, small newspapers catering to the overwhelming majority of the people, mostly poor and uneducated, need special patronage and care, to make democracy "The small press has faced a new threat over the past 3-4 years with the big newspapers launching regional supplements to the main paper. These, no doubt, affect the circulations of the local paper but they are not, at least not yet, able to compete with the local newspapers in terms of coverage of local news. The local press enjoys this edge since it has its finger on the pulse of the local populations. It focuses on the comparative importance of local personalities and events and more attuned to local tastes and dislikes. It enjoys a further advantageous position in terms of advertisement potential at local /district level of limited services and products" (Ray, 2005) <sup>[20]</sup>.

## Review of Literature

Baumgarten, S.K and Voltmer, K (2010) <sup>[11]</sup> in his edited book 'Public policy and mass media' investigates the role of the media as an important force that, under certain

circumstances, shapes the processes and outcomes of public policy making. Media can have a direct impact on what people think about certain policy decisions. Eapen, K.E. (1967) <sup>[10]</sup> in his research paper titled 'Daily newspapers in India: their status and problem' stresses that the Hindi newspapers have a potential audience larger than the population of US but face many problems like newsprint, illiteracy, poverty and babel in India. Douglas Sara, Pecora Norma and Guback Thomas (1985) <sup>[23]</sup> in the paper titled 'Work, workers and workplace: is local newspaper coverage adequate?' highlight that the media have their own implicit institutional logics that provides the premises on which events and relation are discerned, described and finally sold to consumer. This study discovered that in some specific instances, three dailies presented quite dissimilar representation of reality. appries that it is common knowledge that some scams and scandals in the country have been first exposed by small newspapers. "The cement scam of *Antulay* was first exposed in regional small newspaper with huge reliable evidences. The infamous incident of Bhagalpur blinding case due to which English newspaper got international reorganization was first published in small newspaper in Hindi. Everett Shu-Ling and Everett Stephen (1989) <sup>[25]</sup> in their study 'How readers and Advertiser benefit from local newspaper competition' revealed that the analysis provided preliminary findings intended to help direct future work to define the characteristics and advantages of pure competition, joint operating agreements and sister newspaper ownership in United States. Future of print media: a report (2001) <sup>[14]</sup> highlighted that the small newspapers serve as a bridge between the people living at distant place in the interior of the country on the one hand and the local administration, state government and the central government on the other. The growth of the small newspapers in the country has been slow and low as compared to the growth of big newspapers. Ray G N (2005) <sup>[20]</sup> in his speech published under title 'Problems and prospects of small newspapers' stressed that the majority of Indian population today lives in rural areas, the need for flow of information to and from the rural area is even greater. The large and more well-known papers are mostly from large cities and towns, not fully aware of the needs and problems of the rural or small town public or of the local taste. The small newspapers enjoy the potential to bridge this gap. Sharma (2015) <sup>[26]</sup> in his book argues that small newspapers are the pillars of democracy in this country as they accommodate the needs of the majority of the Indian population and particularly those who live in the rural areas. Siles Ignacio and Boczkowski Pablo (2012) <sup>[13]</sup> in their study 'Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and agenda for future work' analyze the recent research on the newspaper crisis. It discusses how authors have examined the sources, manifestations, and implications of this crisis, and the proposal to resolve it.

## Theoretical Perspective

**Influence theory:** 'Most of the work here depicts the media as private businesses producing profit, increasingly conglomerate and non-competitive. There corporate interests pursue government policies that benefit the bottom line. While these ways indirectly affect the flow of information, it is of less interest here than other theories of media influence because it falls more in the domain of

interest group politics and can be understood through those models of policymaking. There seems to be little systematic literature in the question of the media using its communication power to influence more global aspects of public policy directly, although this would not rule out agenda setting effects and other indirect influence to policymakers, aiding them in weighting the importance of issues and issue dimensions. ((Jones, D.Bryan; Wolfe, Michelle, 2010) [11])

## Research Methodology

### Objective of the Research

1. To identify the problems faced by owners and editors of small newspapers in India.
2. To identify the relevance of policy regarding small newspapers in India.

Keeping in mind the nature and objectives of the study an in- depth interview of the selected newspapers were carried out. In India small Hindi newspapers are published in only 16 States and 3 UTs. Two small Hindi newspapers of highest circulation in that State have been taken for purpose of the study. Small Newspapers of Hindi to be specified as per 54th annual report of the registrar of newspapers for

India.

### Interview of

- A. Editor of the concerned newspaper
- B. Owner of the newspaper.

The interview was open ended and the questions were put-up regarding problems faced by SNP

### Sampling

Taking into account the purpose of the study, two Hindi newspapers each from the 19 States (including 3 union territories) had been selected for the study, which amounts to a total of 38 newspapers. The selected 19 states are the only states showing the presence of small newspapers in Hindi language.

### Procedure for selection of sample

For the purpose of selection of sample and to rule out the element of bias, firstly the states are arranged in alphabetical order as shown in column one, then two Hindi small newspapers dailies having the largest circulation in that States of India have been taken. After that numbers are given to that newspaper in chronological order as shown in column two and three of the chart

**Table 1:** List of Small Hindi Newspapers

Andhra Pradesh	1.Swatantravaartha (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.Dainik Jagran (Kangra)
Jharkhand	21.Chamaktha Aiyana (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

### Recommendations and Implications

- **Recommendation:** The Information and Broadcasting Ministry must have a committee meet up to analyze the status and state of small newspapers in India so that their problems and struggles can be addressed to and suggestions can be made to improve their plight.
- **Implication:** A step like this will help small newspapers and the reality of their state will become known to the authorities which can then proffer effective solutions.
- **Recommendation:** The Press Council of India must increase the number of representatives in the small newspapers category as including only 2 members will not give appropriate to result in an inaccurate representation of 47% of newspapers.
- **Implication:** This will ensure that small newspapers get better representation in the Press Council of India so that their problems can be addressed.
- **Recommendation:** The Press Council of India could also suggest to media school students of journalism to for internship in a small or local newspaper. Just like the Bar Council of India, the Press council must also impart journalism the importance of being a serious profession based on the condition of the internship.
- **Implication:** This change will result in the influx of professional workforce into local or small newspapers who will be held accountable and responsible for their job roles. Moreover, such a step will ensure the availability of a professional workforce at the local/ vernacular level of the press.
- **Recommendation:** Small newspapers must be provided with financial and technological assistance. A Small Newspaper Development Corporation should be set up to promote and ensure the sustenance and development of small newspapers.
- **Implication:** This will ensure that small and local newspapers are helped financially and can be made

capable to overcome technological challenges if and when they arise.

- **Recommendation:** Small Newspaper can be treated as a cottage industry. The public-private sector banks should give assistance to newspapers for their establishments and modernization of their technology.
- **Implication:** Such a step will lead to the easy establishment of print units and set up through loans and obtaining new technology and machinery when the need arises.
- **Recommendation:** Newsprint and white printing paper can be made available to small newspapers at concessional rates. The printing papers are brought within the purview of "newsprint" and a specific quantity thereof is earmarked for small newspapers. Newsprint paper can further be subsidized and can be allotted yearly to local and small newspapers through a stipulated quota.
- **Implication:** These way small newspapers can easily obtain the Newsprint and do not have to buy from the open markets at a higher price. If a yearly quota is issued then they do not have to invest a huge sum in purchasing the Newsprint from time to time.
- **Recommendation:** The DAVP must formulate a bias-free and impartial policy in the distribution of advertisement grants. The DAVP must be made free from corruption and bribery. A suitable advertisement policy should be formed for the betterment for small newspapers. The DAVP should display the list of the newspapers which are granted advertisements. All advertisements bills of the newspapers should be settled by the DAVP and the directorate of information and public relations of the state governments within 90 days of the receipt thereof.
- **Implication:** In this way, the DAVP can be made more transparent and corruption can be handled with more vigilance. Moreover, there will be no discrimination against any newspaper and the allotment of advertisement budget by DAVP and their payments can be streamlined and equally distributed.
- **Recommendation:** An autonomous body should be established to monitor the implementation of the advertisement policy. The distribution of advertisements by the public sector and public authorities should also be supervised by this autonomous body.
- **Implication:** By introducing such a body, the DAVP can be checked regularly and the discrimination against small newspapers can be controlled.
- **Recommendation:** 100% of the advertisements which do not concern urban areas should be given small newspapers. The government must change the advertisement policy. The policy must be made more rational and inclusive so that no newspaper is discriminated against.
- **Implication:** So that small newspapers can also receive advertisements without any partiality or discrimination. It has been seen in the past that the newspapers which are being published in the city are advertising about a cow-dung gas plant. Such discrimination and discrepancy not only exist with small newspapers but can be found within English-Hindi newspapers too. Mrinal Pandey also commented in this regard that, "despite the large circulation of Hindi newspaper and

broadcast, the "Ganga Safai Abhiyan" advertisement is given to an English newspaper.

- **Recommendation:** There are about 25 occasions in the year on which special advertisements are released by central and state governments or its instrumentalities. The authorities should ensure that the advertisements on these occasions are distributed equitably among big and small newspapers.
- **Implication:** This will ensure that small newspapers are provided financial support.
- **Recommendation:** The press Information Bureau should arrange for free news agencies service for small newspapers. The service of the news agencies must be free or at a low price.
- **Implication:** In this way, small newspapers can effectively initiate newsgathering. Small newspapers are very well acquainted with their own region but with the help of news agencies, they can reach far and wide. The small newspapers which give greater coverage and weightage to issues of national development should be given further concessions and facilities.
- **Recommendation:** Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) is a Government of India statutory body of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for the registration of the publications that classifies newspapers into small, medium, and big categories. This categorization needs to be changed. When R.N.I. was established in 1956, there were three categories created in which newspapers with a publication count of less than 25000 were hailed as small newspapers. As per the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), *Dainik Bhaskar* is ranked at #4 in the world among the most circulated newspapers. However, as per RNI's definition, the same newspaper, *Dainik Bhaskar*, is categorized as a small newspaper in Himachal Pradesh. According to Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) *Dainik Jagran* in the most circulated newspapers in India, but as per RNI's definition, the same newspaper, *Dainik Jagran* categorized small newspapers in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir. Today after 63 years, these categories are not proving to be effective at all as they were six decades ago. Because of this categorization, small newspapers have to compete with big house newspapers which are benefiting from such classifications. For example, the DAVP advertisement grant being allotted to the big house newspaper is an example of partiality and discrimination against the small newspapers. The DAVP gave *Northern Times*, a paper in J & K, a sum of Rs. 1426857 from 2010-11 to 2016-17 as advertisement grant whereas another newspaper edition belonging to the same category, *Dainik Jagran*, is given an advertisement grant of Rs. 6548733/- from 2010-11 to 2016-17. If both belong to the same category as per the RNI then why is there a difference of Indian Rupees 5121876 in the advertisement budget of the two newspapers? Thus, all editions of a chain newspaper in the country with the same name should be treated as one newspaper for all purposes. A company of chain newspapers publishing dailies, weeklies, and other periodicals should be treated as a single unit for the purpose of newsprint allocation and issuance of advertisements by the public authorities.



- **Implication:** This will lead to a new categorization of newspapers. It will also ensure that a unit for newspapers numbers will not only be the published area but the entire country. A company of chain newspapers publishing dailies, weeklies and other periodicals should be treated as a single unit. In this way, big house newspapers will not be included in the small categories.
- **Recommendation:** Specific measures must be taken to ensure that chain newspapers do not hinder developments and growths of small newspapers particularly at the local level.
- **Implication:** In this way, small newspapers will not have to face unfair competition at the behest of big house newspapers.
- **Recommendation:** The application for newspaper publication must be physically verified by District Magistrate.
- **Implication:** This will prevent newspaper frauds.
- **Recommendation:** Each newspaper must submit a newspaper copy every month at the local Press Bureau Office in its publication area.
- **Implication:** This will prevent newspaper publication frauds pertaining to those newspapers which are printed only when they receive advertisement grants or only paper.
- **Recommendation:** The yearly publication details, submitted to the RNI, of newspapers should be verified in a physical manner.
- **Implication:** This will help authorities keep a check on those newspapers which are published only for the government officials but are not available to the public.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the indispensable role of small Hindi newspapers in strengthening grassroots democracy, ensuring accountability, and amplifying local voices often ignored by mainstream media. Despite their democratic relevance, these newspapers continue to face structural and financial challenges such as inequitable advertisement distribution by the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), outdated categorization by the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), rising newsprint costs, and limited representation in policymaking bodies like the Press Council of India. These constraints hinder their ability to retain professional staff, modernize operations, and compete fairly with large newspaper chains.

The findings underscore the urgent need for policy reforms. Establishing a Small Newspaper Development Corporation, providing subsidized newsprint, ensuring transparent and equitable advertisement policies, and restructuring the RNI classification are critical steps to safeguard the interests of small newspapers. Additionally, initiatives such as treating small newspapers as a cottage industry, extending financial assistance through banks, and creating internship opportunities for journalism students can enhance their sustainability and professionalism.

Empowering small Hindi newspapers with institutional support, fair recognition, and financial stability will not only preserve media plurality but also strengthen India's democratic fabric by amplifying marginalized voices, promoting accountability, and ensuring that vital local concerns continue to find space in the national discourse.

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