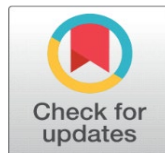


COMMUNICATION THEORIES IN PRACTICE: "A STUDY OF SMALL HINDI NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA"

Dr. Mukesh Kumar ¹✉

¹ Assistant Professor, PG Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Patna, India



Received 29 September 2023
Accepted 30 October 2023
Published 10 November 2023

Corresponding Author

Dr. Mukesh Kumar,
mukesh29kumar@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i10.2023.6577](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i10.2023.6577)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how communication and press theories are enacted, reshaped and reinterpreted through the everyday practices of small Hindi newspapers in India. Based on an empirical study of 38 small Hindi newspapers across 19 Indian states the research analyses the operationalisation of key press and communication theories including Libertarian Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, Democratic Participant Media Theory, Development Communication, Agenda-Setting and Communication for Social Change. The findings demonstrate that small Hindi newspapers play a significant role in shaping local public discourse by foregrounding issues related to governance, development, social justice, and everyday civic concerns that often remain marginal in mainstream media coverage.

While watchdog journalism reflects the normative ideals of press freedom, the study reveals persistent structural constraints such as dependence on government advertising and regulatory mechanisms that complicate editorial autonomy. At the same time strong reader engagement, participatory formats and locally grounded reporting practices highlight the relevance of democratic participation and development-oriented communication theory. This paper challenges the adequacy of universal, market-driven assumptions embedded in dominant communication theories.

Keywords: Small Hindi Newspapers, Communication Theory, Vernacular Press, Media and Democracy, Development Communication, Agenda-Setting

1. INTRODUCTION

"Theories are stories about how and why events occur. Scientific theories begin with the assumption that the universe, including the social universe created by acting human beings, reveals certain basic and fundamental properties and processes that explain the ebb and flow of events in specific processes" [Turner \(1998\)](#). Theory can be defined in numerous ways. "Theories are a set of statements asserting relationship among classes of variables" [Bowers and Courtright \(1984\)](#). A "theory consists of a set of interrelated propositions that stipulate relationships among theoretical constructs and an account of the mechanism that explains the

relationship stipulated in the propositions" [Berger \(2005\)](#). Communication theory has long sought to explain the relationship between media institutions, social power, and democratic life. India's media ecology is marked by linguistic diversity, uneven development and deep socio-political stratification. Small Hindi newspapers operate within this complex terrain, negotiating economic precarity, regulatory dependence and close proximity to their readerships.

This study intervenes by shifting the analytical focus from the application of communication theories to their construction and reconfiguration in vernacular press practices. It adopts a meta-theoretical orientation that understands theory not as a static set of universal propositions, but as a socially and historically situated framework shaped by institutional contexts, power relations, and cultural practices. From this perspective, communication theory is not merely tested through empirical data; it is produced, negotiated, and transformed through everyday journalistic routines.

Their practices Small Hindi newspapers intersect with foundational concerns of communication theory press freedom, social responsibility, democratic participation, development, and agenda formation while simultaneously challenging the assumptions embedded in dominant models derived from Western or metropolitan media systems. Editorial decisions, framing strategies, reader participation, and developmental agendas within these newspapers reveal how theory is enacted at the grassroots level rather than imposed from above.

Moreover, the structural conditions under which small Hindi newspapers operate such as dependence on government advertising, vulnerability to political pressure, and competition from large media conglomerates raise critical questions about autonomy, regulation and epistemic authority in communication theory. These conditions expose the limits of normative theories that presume market freedom, professional autonomy and institutional stability as universal media attributes. By examining small Hindi newspapers across 19 Indian states, this research seeks to reposition vernacular press practices as central to communication theory rather than as peripheral case studies.

On the basis of the theoretical frameworks this research paper tries to analyze the local media in a global world using the reference of small Hindi newspapers in India. Newspapers are 'the voice of the people' and the interplay between the Global and the Local media leads to a constant process of interaction and evolution. The interaction between the local and the global informs the experience of culture in modern societies. The local press is significant because it may provide a relatively open and pluralistic forum for public discussion and debate at a time when a large section of the national press is increasingly speaking with a monotonously homogenous voice" [Franklin and Murphy \(1991\)](#).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Thomas Jefferson, "the main objective of a free and liberal press is to inform the people in a country and also to ensure that the government carries out its duty of public welfare without irregularities". This theory emphasizes that for better governance, the information must be disseminated to the maximum number of people. In the Indian context where 70% of people live in villages this objective can only be achieved through small newspapers especially when the mainstream media is urban-centric. Robin Jeffery writes in his book that a policeman says that newspapers have made their job difficult as newspapers have made them aware that

they cannot go about beating journalists. Similar things in the Indian context can be achieved through small newspapers [Jeffrey \(2000\)](#).

“That truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate” [Perker \(2006\)](#).

The theory of Libertarianism as we call it places itself at the exact opposite of the Authoritarian Theory and holds that the people have a right to hear all sides to an issue and have the ability to sift through the conflicting views and distinguish truth through falsehood. This theory advocates “a free market place for ideas” where “the truth shall ultimately survive”. The libertarianism has its origins in the seventeenth century writings of John Milton who said that “people should have ‘unlimited access to the ideas and thoughts of other men” [Aggarwal and Gupta \(2002\)](#), and they have the capacity to distinguish the right from the wrong and the good from the bad.

The most important and significant contribution of the theorists of Social Responsibility is “the view that it is more important for the citizens to have the right of access to information than it is for the press to achieve complete freedom of speech” [Sharma \(2004\)](#). It is not enough that large media and economic structures have the freedom to do as they please. They are also obliged to respond to society's needs.

This theory entails that the Social Responsibility of the media goes beyond “objective” reporting to “interpretive” reporting. The Commission on the Freedom of Press notes: “it is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact. Today's complex world needs analysis, explanation and interpretation of everything” [Willis \(2007\)](#).

“Freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as, under pure libertarian theory, one's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against vital social interests” [Siebert et al. \(1956\)](#).

“They endorsed professional responsibility as a way of reconciling market flaws with the traditional conception of the democratic role of the media. The Hutchins commission's Report asserted journalists' commitment to higher goals neutrality, detachment, to the truth. It involved the adoption of certain procedures for verifying facts, drawing of different sources, presenting rival interpretations. In this way, the pluralism of opinion and information, once secured through the clash of adversaries in the free market could be recreated through the “internal pluralism” of monopolistic media. Market pressures to sensationalize and trivialize the presentation of news could be offset by a commitment to inform” [Curran \(1991\)](#).

V.S. Naipaul writes in ‘India: A Million Mutinies Now’ that newspapers provided a platform for the common man to put forward his or her opinion and views. Now millions of Indians are taking up issues through small newspapers and fighting for their rights [Naipaul \(2011\)](#). In rural areas newspapers like ‘Khabar Lahriya’ and ‘Nav-Udhyam’ and community radio stations like ‘Radio Sangam’ and ‘Radio Bundelkhhand’ have set an example that how social participation helps in solving the regional problems and taking up developmental work. In this research, Democratic Participation theory will be judged through the letters written to the editor of the small newspapers under study. With the help of small newspapers, regional developmental issues can be raised by increasing democratic participation through motivation.

According to [Ezah and Enwereuzo \(2016\)](#) "this theory challenged the necessity for the desirability of uniform, centralized, high cost, commercialized, professionalized or state-controlled media'. These should be replaced by multiple, local, small-scale, non-institutional and committed media who shall link the senders of information to its receivers and also form 'horizontal patterns of interaction".

This theory "advocates media support for cultural pluralism at the grassroots level. Media must be used to stimulate and empower pluralism groups. Unlike social responsibility, theory calls for development of innovative 'small' media that can be directly controlled by group members. If they cannot afford such media than the Government should provide them with subsidies so they can do so. The government should identify and fund existing small media and establish training programs to teach group members how to operate on small media. Most Scandinavian countries practice some form of democratic-participant theory" [Baran, Stanley, J. and Davis, Dennis. K., \(2012\)](#).

Development communication is the "study of social change brought about by the application of communication research, theory, and technologies to bring about development. Development is a widely participatory process of social change in society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement, including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over their environment" [Rogers \(1976\)](#).

The Agenda-Setting Theory (1972) of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw put forth the media's ability to influence the significance of events in the public's mind .

It says that the media does not necessarily tell the masses 'what to think', but they are quite successful at telling them 'what to think about' [DeFleur et al. \(1988\)](#), [McQuail \(2000\)](#), [Littlejohn \(2001\)](#), [Watson \(2003\)](#), [Baran, Stanley, J. and Davis, Dennis. K., \(2012\)](#). The media messages prepared by journalists set the agenda for the audience's perception of events in the society and mentally order and organize their own world on the basis of such perceptions . Here the media professionals try to influence the minds of the public by making the printed and broadcasted messages highly appealing to the masses .

According to this theory "mass media simply by the fact of paying attention to some issues and neglecting others has an effect on public opinion" [Kumar \(2013\)](#).

'People tend to know about those things which the mass media deals with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues . The agenda-setting function given by these theorists maintain that media may not have been successful in telling people 'What to think' but they are impressively successful in telling people 'What to think about' . According to them, "the impact of the mass media the ability to affect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking has been labelled the agenda-setting function of mass communication" .

Newspapers highlight prominent issues of the society according to a set priority and present it to the public through news stories or editorials and letter to the editors. Such issues act as an agenda and influence the public to form opinions in deciding the crucial issues prevalent in society. On the basis of the importance placed on each news item by the media the audience also regards the same importance and priority for the specific news item. In short the agenda of the media becomes the agenda of the public .

In selecting certain themes, displaying them in a specific writing style and perfecting them with appropriate tones news writers through their stories try to shape social reality. This gives an impact on the reader's mind – the ability to affect cognitive change among individuals to structure their thinking which of course is labelled as an agenda-setting function of mass media [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#).

Such news stories encourage people to think and try to bring structural changes in their mind, arousing people to form public opinions as a consequence .

The role and significance of news stories can be elaborately discussed by analyzing the concept of second-level agenda-setting. McCombs discussed second-level agenda-setting by expanding the concept of agenda-setting and linking it with the concept of Framing theory [McCombs and Ghanem \(2001\)](#). Conventional agenda setting focused on the fact that media tells us 'What to think about' whereas through the second level agenda setting, media now tells us 'How to think about it' [Littlejohn, \(2001\)](#).

Media does set an agenda for the people. The maximum need for development in India is in the rural areas but the lack of developmental issues in mainstream media has reduced the role of media in setting an agenda concerning development. This can be achieved through small newspapers which, by raising the regional developmental issues can set the agenda concerning the development. In Uttar Pradesh '*Gaon Connection*' a weekly newspaper has been successful in setting the agenda for rural agriculture development. Likewise small newspapers can set developmental agenda in rural India and inclusive growth can be achieved .

The "press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion; it may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think about . And it follows from this that world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of papers they read" [Baran, Stanley, J. and Davis, Dennis. K., \(2012\)](#).

Communication for social change "emphasizes the notion of dialogue as central them to development and the need to facilitate poor people's participation and empowerment. It stresses the importance of horizontal communication, the role of people as agents of change, and the need for negotiating skills and partnerships. This theory focuses on the dialogue processes through which people can overcome obstacles and identify ways to help them achieve the goals they set for themselves" [United Nations Development Programme \(2011\)](#).

Communication for social change provides a medium for public and private interaction. It allows people to decide among themselves their roles, the basic requirements to improve their lives and the means necessary to achieve those requirements. It employs a composite dialogue strategy that leads to joint efforts in the direction of the recognition of the collective problem, decision-making processes, and the efforts required to execute the solutions related to the development -related issues. "This is the time of renewed interest in communication for development and social change. The combination of innovations in information technologies coupled with widespread citizen mobilization has energized the debate about the role of communication in promoting social change" [Waisbord \(2014\)](#).

The freedom of the press is important not just to democracy but also imperative for human development. The role of media in facilitating human development as well as democratic consolidation emanates from its 'watchdog' function. Free media increases government accountability and public awareness leading to enhanced possibilities of human development. The communication media as essential for the maintenance of society and enquires about the press as a true or a false carrier of news and information. Tonnies considered newspapers to be a 'printed marketplace' now as the press was construed as the organ of the public opinion. The social theory of the media contributes to any formulation of the media's role in the triangle of democracy-media-development.

The citizenship and criticality (2Cs) and public knowledge and power (2ps) are fundamental to an understanding and theorization of a social theory of the media. The first three elements (citizenship, public knowledge, and criticality) are directly linked with the role that media plays in development. The idea is this theory taken from the following thinkers with their corresponding concepts to the four elements T.H. Marshall (Citizenship), Immanuel Kant (Public Knowledge), Jurgen Habermas (Criticality) and Michel Foucault (Power). All four elements deal with the media's role in democracy. In this theory it is propounded that the media is central to the health of a democracy. Social theory of the media pertains to the truth-telling and critical questioning functions of the media that relate to its role of a public sentinel. Truth and truth-telling are the critical aspects of public information and intimation. The public needs to know the truth in order to make informed decisions and that democracy is debased every time truth-telling is curtailed [Saeed \(2013\)](#).

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

- 1) **Construction of theory:** This study approaches communication and press practices in small Hindi newspapers through a meta-theoretical lens that emphasises the construction of theory rather than treating theory as a fixed or universally applicable explanatory apparatus. It is grounded in the understanding that theories of communication and journalism are historically situated frameworks, produced through specific social contexts, institutional arrangements, and epistemological traditions rather than neutral descriptions of media reality [Turner \(1998\)](#), [Berger \(2005\)](#).
- 2) **Social Constructionist perspective:** theories of communication and the press are viewed as outcomes of collective meaning-making processes shaped by language, culture and institutional norms [Berger and Luckmann \(1966\)](#). In the context of small Hindi newspapers, concepts such as local journalism, community voice, and public relevance are not pre-given or universal categories. Instead, they are constructed through region-specific linguistic practices, cultural idioms, and structural constraints of vernacular media systems. Theory, therefore, emerges from situated journalistic practices and acquires legitimacy through disciplinary consensus rather than claims of objectivity.
- 3) **Interpretivist perspective:** further conceptualises theory as an analytical tool for understanding meaning rather than predicting outcomes [Geertz \(1973\)](#). Communication practices in small Hindi newspapers are embedded in local life worlds shaped by caste, class, language and regional identity. Theories employed to study such newspapers function as interpretive frameworks that explain how meanings are produced, negotiated and circulated within specific socio-cultural contexts. This perspective foregrounds reflexivity, acknowledging that the researcher's positionality and interpretive choices actively shape theoretical formulation [Schwandt \(1994\)](#).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To examine how press theories are reflected in the practices of small Hindi newspapers in India.

- 2) To analyse the role of small Hindi newspapers in shaping local public discourse through the application of theories.

4.2. 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 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 chronological order according to the unique numbers assigned to each one of them, as shown in column two and three of the chart.

Table 1

Table 1 Newspapers Sample Arranges Chronologically and State-Wise		
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)

5. FINDING

The communication media is essential to the preservation of society its cultural and its history. It also becomes a true (or false) carrier of news and information for a society or community. Newspapers are considered 'printed marketplace' now that the press is interpreted as an organ to express public opinion. The Media Social Theory contributes to the formulation of the role of the media in the democratic-media-development triangle.

5.1. THE FREE PRESS THEORY

Freedom of the press is a vital concept but is only meaningful to the extent that this freedom exercised [B. G. V. \(1977\)](#) . Press freedom is important not only for democracy but for human development as well. Media's role in facilitating human development as well as consolidating a democracy emanates from its function as a watchdog . Free press theory focuses on providing the general public with important information and to play the role of watchdog so that people could know about the relevant issues . The media is also expected to act as the watchdog to maintain a check on government policies. The media's purpose is to inform and discover the truth, as well as keep a check on the government. Some small Hindi newspapers are doing their role as a watchdog. To name a few of these watchdogs, *Hind Samwad* (Asansol), *Kumaon Times* (Haldwani), *Kirti Krant* and *Dainik Alok* (Bhopal), *Tarun Mitra* (Thane), *Tyagi Times* (Sonipat), *Asli Azadi* and *Savera India Times* (Daman). All of them fulfil the role well in their local regions.

The Free Press Theory also includes the influence of the government as it is the government which distributes the advertising fund through DAVP. To sustain and run a small Hindi newspaper, one needs to have a stable economic condition but due to unequal price wars, technical, and human recourse deficit, they can't survive without the support of governments. The free press is required for media pluralism and diversity, if big conglomerates capture all that space then the motto of free press theory will not be validated. For example, – *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Jansatta*, *Dopahar Ka Saamana* and *Rajasthan Patrika* are occupying the space of local media and destroying them.

This theory also takes a philosophical point of view that man is a rational being and can distinguish between truths and falsehood and is capable of making suitable choices for himself. Before independence newspapers were mission [Jeffrey \(2000\)](#), now newspapers are “more about profits than they are about people” [D'Souza \(2000\)](#). This is the current state of affairs because many newspapers only get to be published when they receive advertisement grants or when their finances are in better shape due to wrong means. For example, *News Reader* and *City Times* (Lucknow), *Rudra Times* (Haridwar), *Northern Times* (Jammu), *Ishan Times* and *Rashtrawadi Times* (Delhi), *Samachar Khoj* and *Chattisgarh Swar* (Raipur).

The media's purpose is to inform, entertain, and discover the truth, as well as to keep a check on the government. As 68 per cent of the Indian population lives in rural areas, small newspapers can be crucial to reach masses. Moreover, through newspapers we not only preserve and promote plurality and diversity but protect and promote the right to free expression. Robin Jeffery wrote that a policeman told him that ‘as newspapers are actively participating in social operations, their job has become difficult’. This means newspapers are creating awareness among readers, but there are miles to go before we can call it a success.

5.2. THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY OF PRESS

Social Responsibility theory provided that the Social Responsibility of the media goes beyond objective reporting and includes interpretive reporting in its operations. The media needs to report with details analysis and interpretation. The most vital and essential contribution of Social Responsibility theorists is the view that it is more important for citizens to have the right to access information than for the press to achieve full freedom of speech.

Newspapers have their own social responsibility towards the readers, but many times the same is not reflected in newspapers. Sometimes, the information is dispensed through sensational tools, for example, news stories from *Dainik Jagran* (Jammu) the headline of news was "*Shradhaluyon par hamla*" (An Attack on the Pilgrimage) but the news had no factual confirmation about an attack because the incident occurred due the explosion of a gas cylinder being carried in a vehicle. The security of Amarnath pilgrims is a very sensitive issue in India, and the newspaper only wanted to create turmoil and rouse the communal sentiments by publishing such news.

5.3. DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION MEDIA THEORY

The Democratic Participant Media theory focuses on the needs, interests, and aspirations of the active receiver in a society . According to this theory, media institutions constructed are closely involved with the social life of people. They are more in control of their audiences providing them with opportunities to access and to contribute . This theory advocates media support at the grassroots level for cultural pluralism . It is necessary to use media to stimulate and empower groups of pluralism . Unlike the theory of social responsibility, there is a need to develop innovative "small" media that can be controlled directly by group members. If they cannot afford such media they should receive subsidies from the government so that they can do so. The government should identify and fund existing small media and set up training programs to teach members of the group how to operate at a small scale . Most countries in Scandinavia practice some form of this theory in order to increase participation in democracy.

Through the democratic participation of small newspapers will allow the inclusion of maximum readers because small newspapers are brought out from the local area. 66% of newspapers are related to small newspapers. Small newspapers cover the majority of the population of India and the geographical region.

5.4. THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION THEORY

Development communication is the study of change brought about by the application of research, theory, and technologies of communication. Development is a broad participatory process of social change in society. The main idea behind development communication theory is media stands for the development of people in a nation or helps the target population. Development is an extensive participatory process of social change in a society that brings about both social and material development and upholds the pillars of democracy for everyone.

Hind samwad, Tyagi Times, Kumaon Times, Dainik Alok, Kirti Kranti, Asli Azadi, Savera India Times and Chamaktha Aiyana are the newspapers which are trying to create an environment for development to take place. They publish news about a local area's problems so that they are noticed by the government which in turn can begin the process of ensuring that correct measures are taken place.

5.5. COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Communication for social change refers to a medium for public and private interaction. It empowers the public to decide their roles themselves, identify the basic requirements which can improve their lives and the necessary means to achieve those requirements. It emphasis a combined dialogue approach which results in joint efforts in the recognition of the shared problem, decision making

processes, and the efforts required to implement the solutions related to the developmental issues. Now is the time for a new interest in communication for development and social change. Innovative information technologies coupled with widespread citizen participation has upgraded the role of communication in promoting social change.

Some small newspapers act as a vehicle for social change in their local area where they are published.

5.6. THE AGENDA SETTING THEORY

The agenda-Setting Theory prescribes that the media does not necessarily inform the public 'what to think', but it guides them towards 'what to think about'. The news reported by journalists set the agenda for the audience's opinion about the events taking place in our society and organize their own world view on the basis of such opinions. The journalists try to influence the minds of the public by preparing appealing printed and broadcasted messages for the public.

Newspapers emphasize on the important issues of society and with a set priority and provide it to the masses through news stories, editorials, and letter to the editors. Such issues act as agenda and influence public opinion. The agenda building approach pursues the question, "Who sets the media agenda?" And tries to identify the variables that determine whether an issue has a successful career in the newsstand or not. The journalist decides "what comes on the media agenda through their selection and placement of information and statements as well as through their commentaries. Thus, the media themselves are active participants and contribute to the agenda- building process" [Mathes and Pfetsch \(1991\)](#).

Newspapers highlight prominent societal issues on the basis of a set priority and present them through various representations. Based on the media's emphasis on each news item, the audience lends the same importance and priority to specific news items. In short, the media's agenda becomes the public's agenda.

In 1989, Shiv Sena started publishing 'Saamana' newspaper from Mumbai. In 1998, its circulation was 82,000. 'Saamana' became the main journal of the locals and the party. Supporters of this party are the main readers of this newspaper [Jeffrey \(2000\)](#). *Samna* is the daily of the Shiv Sena party, the aggressive political organization built around Bal Thackeray's legacy which is programmed on Hindu and Marathi supremacy. *Samna* had a privileged position which paved the way for newspapers and journalists to be controlled by others. No other newspapers in Mumbai enjoyed the same degree of free speech as *Samna* (Jeffrey, Marathi: Big newspapers are elephants, 1997). *Dopahar Ka Sammana* newspaper has its own political agenda for readers. For example – Priyanka ka hath 'Mullo' ke sath, and congress ki chati par chadhenge 'Musalman'. Newspaper *Dopahar ka Sammana* is politically associated with Shiv Sena and they have strong inimical sentiments towards the Muslim community. This is also substantiated by the review of literature through Suketu Mehta, that 'If the word, "Muslim" is not mentioned on the front page, not even a single copy will sell'.

But on the other hand, some newspapers are setting the agenda for development in their local areas. For example, *Hind Samwad*, *Tyagi Times*, *Kumaon Times*, *Dainik Alok*, *Kirti Kranti*, *Asli Azadi*, *Savera India Times* and *Chamaktha Aiyna*.

5.7. THE SOCIAL THEORY OF MEDIA

The Social theory works on the fundamentals of citizenship and criticality (2Cs) along with public knowledge and power (2Ps). The first three elements are directly

linked with the role of media in development and all four elements deal with the media's role in democracy. Media is essential for democracy to prevail. Small scale Hindi newspapers are creating the public sphere in local areas through news, views and letters to the editors to encourage citizens to think critically and develop a culture of questioning.

Social theory of the media refers to the media as a provider and presenter of important issues. The public should know the truth in order to make informed decisions. It is important to note that as whenever freedom of media is curtailed, democracy is violated. Social theory of the media contributes to the media's role in the democracy-media-development triangle.

Freedom of the press is not only important for democracy but also essential for humanity's survival and progression. Media must take its role of watchdog seriously to ensure human development as well as democratic consolidation. Freedom of media enhances government accountability and public awareness, leading to better opportunities for social development and the overall human condition. The communication media is essential for the maintenance of society and a procurer and dispenser of truth and news.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that small Hindi newspapers in India actively operationalise multiple communication and press theories, thereby challenging their marginal positioning within dominant media scholarship. The evidence suggests that these newspapers function as critical sites where classical press theories particularly Libertarian, Social Responsibility, Democratic Participant, and Development Communication theories are not merely applied but reinterpreted in response to local socio-political realities. Unlike metropolitan media organisations, small Hindi newspapers foreground grassroots concerns such as governance failures, agrarian distress, social inequalities and developmental deficits, reinforcing their agenda-setting role at the community level.

The study further reveals that while elements of the Libertarian theory are visible in watchdog journalism, structural dependencies especially reliance on government advertising and political pressures limit complete editorial autonomy. This tension underscores the relevance of Social Responsibility theory, as many newspapers balance press freedom with interpretive and developmental reporting aimed at public welfare. Democratic Participant Media Theory finds strong resonance through reader engagement, letters to the editor, and locally embedded reporting practices, positioning these newspapers as facilitators of participatory public discourse.

Importantly, the findings support a meta-theoretical argument that communication theories themselves are shaped by context. Small Hindi newspapers expose the limitations of universal, market-driven media models and highlight the need for theory-building grounded in vernacular and Global South media practices. By situating theory within lived journalistic routines, this study contributes to a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of communication and press theory.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Aggarwal, V. B., & Gupta, V. S. (2002). *Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- B. G., V. (1977). The Media in a Free Society: Proposals for Restructuring. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12(18), 731–740.
- Berger, A. A. (2005). *Media Analysis Techniques* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Bowers, J. W., & Courtright, J. A. (1984). *Communication Research Methods*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.
- Curran, J. (1991). *Mass Media and Democracy*. Polity Press.
- Curran, J. (1991). *Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal*. In J. Curran (Ed.), *Mass Media and Society*. London: Edward Arnold.
- DeFleur, M. L., & Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1988). *Theories of Mass Communication* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.
- D'Souza, J. B. (2000, May 6–12). Journalism: Profit Over People. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(19), 1597–1598.
- Ezah, N. C., & Enwereuzo, N. V. (2016). Internet Mediatization: New Opportunity for Women in Politics. In J. Wilson & N. D. Gapsisi (Eds.), *Overcoming Gender Inequalities Through Technology Integration* (p. 215). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-9773-7.ch011>
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
- Franklin, B., & Murphy, D. (1991). *What news? The Market, Politics and the Local Press*. London: Routledge.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Jeffrey, R. (2000). *India's Newspaper Revolution*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Kumar, R. (2013). Society, Media, Communication and Development Linkages: An Analysis of Anglo-Saxon Theories in the Context of Developing Countries. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 5(3), 25–34.
- Littlejohn, S. W. (2001). *Theories of Human Communication* (7th ed.). Albuquerque, NM: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Mathes, R., & Pfetsch, B. (1991). The Role of the Alternative Press in the Agenda-Building Process: Spill-Over Effects and Media Opinion Leaders. *European Journal of Communication*, 6(1), 33–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323191006001003>
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McCombs, M., & Ghanem, S. I. (2001). The Convergence of Agenda-Setting and Framing. In S. R. Grant (Ed.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (4th ed.). New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Naipaul, V. (2011). *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. London: Picador.
- Perker, G. (2006). Knowing the Enemy. *The New Yorker*, 18(December), 61–69.
- Rogers, E. (1976). *Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

- Saeed, S. (2013). *Screening the Public Sphere: Media and Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Routledge India.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 118–137). Sage Publications.
- Sharma, D. (2004). *Mass Communication: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication Pvt. Ltd.
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Turner, J. H. (1998). *The Structure of Sociological Theory* (6th ed.). Wadsworth Publishing.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2011). *Communication for development*. New York: United Nations Organization.
- Waisbord, S. (2014). The Strategic Politics of Participatory Communication. in K. G. Wilkins, T. Tufte, & R. Obregon (Eds.), *The Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change* (147). New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118505328.ch10>
- Watson, J. (2003). *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process* (2nd ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Willis, J. (2007). *The Media Effect: How the News Influences Politics and Government (Democracy and the News)*. Praeger. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798400684159>