



Hindi Journalism at 200: Scope, Challenges and Future in the Digital Era (1826–2026)

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of Hindi journalism from 1826 to 2026, highlighting its shift from early print traditions to a rapidly expanding digital environment. Beginning with Udant Martand, Hindi journalism has served as both an information medium and a reflection of India's socio-political and cultural dynamics (Datta, 2019; Sharma, 2019). The paper analyzes the scope of contemporary digital Hindi journalism, focusing on its increasing reach alongside structural and ethical challenges. Drawing on historical developments, readership data, and digital trends, the study finds that digitalization has improved accessibility and audience engagement (IAMAI, 2025; Reuters Institute, 2025). However, it has also intensified concerns such as misinformation, economic pressures on media institutions, declining editorial standards, and constraints on press freedom (Kumar, 2021; CPJ, 2025; RSF, 2026). The study suggests that strengthening regulation, professional training, and ethical practices is essential to sustain the credibility and future relevance of Hindi journalism.

Keywords:

Hindi Journalism; Digital Media; Press Freedom; Misinformation; Vernacular Media; Media Ethics; Digital Transformation; News Consumption; Patrakarita; Media Economy

Introduction

Journalism is considered an essential pillar of democracy because it informs citizens, promotes public debate, and ensures accountability in society. Hindi journalism occupies a unique position in India due to its wide linguistic reach and historical contribution to social and political awareness. From the colonial period to the digital age, Hindi journalism has continuously adapted itself to changing political, technological, and economic conditions.

The year 2026 marks two hundred years since the launch of *Udant Martand* by Juggal Kishor Shukla in Calcutta. This milestone provides an opportunity to examine the historical journey of Hindi journalism and evaluate its present condition in the digital era. The transformation from print newspapers to digital platforms has created new opportunities for audience expansion and participation. At the same time, it has also generated serious concerns regarding misinformation, commercial pressure, editorial independence, and the future sustainability of journalism.

Digital technology has altered the way news is produced and consumed. Smartphones, social media applications, online portals, and artificial intelligence have changed audience behaviour and newsroom practices. Hindi journalism has benefited from this digital expansion because millions of new internet users consume content in regional languages. However, the growth of digital media has also intensified problems such as fake news, sensationalism, online harassment, and declining public trust.

This paper studies the evolution, scope, and challenges of Hindi journalism in the digital

age while emphasizing the need for ethical and independent journalism in contemporary India.

Literature Review

Several scholars have studied the development and transformation of Hindi journalism in different historical and technological contexts. Datta explains that Hindi journalism emerged as an important medium of cultural identity and nationalist consciousness during the colonial period. Sharma also highlights the contribution of Hindi newspapers to public awareness and democratic participation across two centuries.

Akhtar argues that digital journalism in South Asia has reshaped democratic communication by expanding access to information while simultaneously increasing the risk of misinformation and political influence. Mahajan discusses how mobile technology has transformed Hindi journalism by creating new opportunities for audience engagement and digital storytelling.

Kumar examines the spread of misinformation in Hindi digital spaces, particularly through WhatsApp and social media platforms, and stresses the importance of verification practices. Yadav studies the political economy of Hindi media and argues that ownership structures and advertising pressures significantly influence editorial independence.

The existing literature shows that while digital media has strengthened the reach of Hindi journalism, it has also produced ethical, economic, and political challenges that require serious academic attention.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the historical evolution of Hindi journalism from print to digital media
2. To analyze the growth of Hindi digital journalism.
3. To identify major challenges in the digital era.
4. To suggest measures for strengthening ethical journalism.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-method and descriptive approach. The study is mainly based on secondary sources such as books, journal articles, reports, newspapers, and digital media studies. Data has been collected from publications of the Press Council of India, Reuters Institute, Internet and Mobile Association of India, Registrar of Newspapers for India, and international press freedom organizations.

The paper also uses historical analysis to understand the growth of Hindi journalism from the nineteenth century to the present digital age. Contemporary examples from digital platforms, social media journalism, and Hindi news portals are included to examine current trends and challenges.

5. Historical Evolution of Hindi Journalism

5.1 Early Development of Hindi Journalism

Hindi journalism began with the publication of *Udant Martand* on May 30, 1826. Although the newspaper survived for a short period because of financial difficulties and lack of colonial support, it established the foundation of Hindi-language journalism.

During the nineteenth century, newspapers such as *Banaras Akhbar*, *Sudhakar*, and *Samachar Sudha Varshan* contributed to the growth of Hindi public discourse. Bhartendu Harishchandra played a major role in connecting journalism with literature, nationalism, and social reform. His publications encouraged cultural awakening and promoted the use of Hindi as a public language.

5.2 Hindi Journalism and Nationalism

In the twentieth century, Hindi journalism became closely linked with the Indian freedom movement. Newspapers served as instruments of political awareness and mass mobilization. Publications such as *Pratap* under Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi strongly criticized colonial policies and defended social justice.

Mahatma Gandhi also recognized the importance of vernacular journalism. Through publications like *Navjivan*, he communicated political ideas in simple language that reached ordinary people. During this period, Hindi journalism became an important platform for anti-colonial thought and democratic participation.

5.3 Post-Independence Expansion

After Independence, Hindi newspapers expanded rapidly due to increasing literacy, urbanization, and political participation. Newspapers such as *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Hindustan*, and *Navbharat Times* became widely circulated across North India.

The Emergency period (1975–1977) represented a major challenge for press freedom in India. Government censorship during this period demonstrated the

vulnerability of journalism under political pressure. However, it also strengthened the commitment of many journalists toward editorial independence and democratic values.

6. Hindi Journalism in the Digital Era

6.1 Digital Growth and Audience Reach

The spread of affordable internet and smartphones after 2010 significantly expanded the reach of Hindi journalism. According to IMAI and Reuters Institute reports, Hindi has become one of the most consumed languages for digital content in India.

Hindi news websites, YouTube channels, and mobile applications now attract millions of users daily. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become major channels for news circulation. This digital transformation has enabled Hindi journalism to reach audiences beyond traditional geographical boundaries.

6.2 New Forms of Digital Journalism

Digital platforms have introduced new forms of journalism including podcasts, live streaming, video explainers, short-form content, and multimedia reporting. Platforms such as *The Wire Hindi* and *Gaon Connection* have demonstrated the possibilities of independent and rural-focused journalism.

Citizen journalism has also emerged strongly in the digital era. Ordinary users now share videos, photographs, and local updates through smartphones. This has increased public participation in news production but

has also created concerns regarding accuracy and verification.

6.3 Economic Transformation

The shift from print to digital media has disrupted the traditional business model of journalism. Advertising revenue that once supported newspapers has increasingly moved toward digital platforms and global technology companies such as Google and Meta.

As a result, many Hindi media organizations face financial pressure. Cost-cutting measures, shrinking newsrooms, and dependence on sensational content have affected journalistic quality. Subscription-based digital journalism is growing slowly, but most audiences still expect free access to online news.

7. Challenges of Hindi Journalism in the Digital Age

7.1 Misinformation and Fake News

The rapid spread of misinformation is one of the biggest challenges facing Hindi journalism today. False news, manipulated videos, and misleading social media posts spread quickly through WhatsApp and digital platforms.

Misinformation has sometimes contributed to communal tension, violence, and political polarization. Hindi-language fake news often reaches rural and semi-urban audiences where digital literacy levels may be limited. Therefore, fact-checking and verification have become essential responsibilities for journalists.

7.2 Political Pressure and Press Freedom

Press freedom in India has faced increasing challenges in recent years. International reports indicate concerns regarding attacks on journalists, legal pressure, and political influence over media organizations.

Hindi journalists working in politically sensitive areas are often vulnerable to intimidation and harassment. Dependence on government advertising and corporate ownership patterns can also influence editorial decisions and weaken independent reporting.

7.3 Artificial Intelligence and Technological Challenges

Artificial intelligence is transforming journalism globally. AI tools can support translation, transcription, audience analysis, and content generation. However, they also create risks such as automated misinformation, deepfake videos, and manipulated digital content.

Hindi journalism faces additional challenges because many journalists lack advanced digital training. Newsrooms must develop skills related to digital verification, multimedia reporting, and cyber security to remain credible in the evolving media environment.

7.4 Labour Conditions and Ethical Concerns

Economic instability in the media industry has weakened labour conditions for many journalists. Freelancers and rural correspondents often work without secure salaries, contracts, or legal protection. Such insecurity may increase vulnerability to political or commercial influence.

The rise of sensationalism and “paid news” has also damaged public trust. Competitive digital environments sometimes encourage speed and emotional content over accuracy and ethical reporting.

8. Recommendations

The following measures may help strengthen Hindi journalism in the digital age:

1. Strengthen Fact-Checking and Ethical Journalism

Hindi media organizations should establish strong fact-checking systems and promote ethical reporting practices to reduce misinformation and maintain public trust.

2. Improve Digital Skills and Journalism Education

Journalism institutions and media organizations should provide training in digital reporting, multimedia storytelling, fact verification, and artificial intelligence tools.

3. Protect Press Freedom and Labour Rights

Strong legal protection and fair working conditions should be ensured for journalists to safeguard editorial independence and professional security.

Promote Sustainable and Independent Media Models

Hindi media organizations should develop subscription-based and reader-supported models to reduce excessive dependence on advertising and political influence.

Conclusion

Hindi journalism has completed a remarkable journey of two hundred years. From the publication of *Udant Martand* in the colonial era to the expansion of digital platforms in

the twenty-first century, Hindi journalism has played a vital role in shaping public opinion and democratic culture in India.

The digital era has created unprecedented opportunities for growth and accessibility. At the same time, it has introduced major challenges including misinformation, political pressure, economic instability, and declining editorial standards. The future of Hindi journalism depends on its ability to balance technological innovation with ethical responsibility.

To remain credible and socially relevant, Hindi journalism must strengthen its commitment to truth, public service, and democratic values. The traditions established by pioneers such as Bhartendu Harishchandra and Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi continue to offer guidance for the future of journalism in India.

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