



The Last Mile Connectivity of Rural Journalism in India

Aditya Yadav

Research Scholar,

Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communication

Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur

Shubham Kushwaha

Research Scholar,

Bhaskar Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication,

Bundelkhand University, Jhansi

Abstract

Rural journalism in India plays a crucial role in strengthening democracy by giving a voice to marginalised and geographically isolated communities. However, the “last mile connectivity” problem continues to hinder the effective dissemination of information in rural regions due to inadequate digital infrastructure, low internet penetration, low media literacy, and economic constraints. This paper examines the challenges faced by rural journalism in India in achieving last-mile communication and explores how digital technologies, community media, mobile journalism, and government initiatives are reshaping rural information ecosystems. The study also highlights the role of citizen journalism and hyperlocal media platforms in bridging the communication gap. Human civilisation invented satellites, AI, and quantum computing, yet a farmer still struggles to access reliable local news because a telecom tower has been “coming soon” since 2018. Remarkable species, honestly.

Keywords: Rural Journalism, Digital Divide, Community Media, Mobile Journalism, Connectivity

1. Introduction

India resides significantly in its villages, with nearly 65% of the population living in rural areas. Rural journalism functions as an essential medium for disseminating information related to agriculture, governance, healthcare, education, and local development. However, despite rapid digital expansion, rural journalism faces a major challenge in achieving “last mile connectivity,” referring to the final stage of delivering news and communication services to remote populations.



The rise of digital media and mobile internet has transformed urban journalism, but rural regions continue to experience unequal access to communication technologies. Poor broadband infrastructure, language barriers, low digital literacy, and economic inequality hinder effective media penetration in villages. Consequently, rural populations remain underrepresented in mainstream media narratives.

This paper investigates the structural challenges of rural journalism in India and evaluates emerging digital solutions aimed at improving information accessibility and community participation.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the major challenges faced by rural journalism in India.
2. To examine the role of digital technology in rural news dissemination.
3. To explore community-based and mobile journalism models in rural communication.

3. Research Methodology

This study is based on a case study and descriptive research approach. Secondary data has been collected from scholarly journals, government reports, books, digital archives, and research articles related to rural journalism, ICT development, and digital inclusion in India.

4. Case Studies

4.1 Mobile Vaani: A Participatory Model of Rural Journalism in India

Gram Vaani developed **Mobile Vaani** as a voice-based participatory media platform aimed at strengthening communication and civic engagement among rural and marginalized communities in India. Unlike mainstream digital platforms that depend heavily on smartphones, literacy, and internet access, Mobile Vaani operates primarily through an **Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** system, allowing users to participate using even basic feature phones. Which is honestly one of the rare moments technology remembered poor people exist outside startup pitch decks.

The platform was initiated around 2012 and became particularly active in states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and parts of Uttar Pradesh. Its core objective is to create a “community-owned media ecosystem” where rural citizens are not merely consumers of information but active producers and distributors of local news and public discourse.



Role in Rural Journalism

Mobile Vaani transformed the traditional one-way communication model into a **participatory journalism model**. Rural citizens themselves become reporters, contributors, and watchdogs of local governance.

Key Contributions

1. Hyperlocal News Dissemination

The platform circulates information regarding: village infrastructure, road construction, ration distribution, MNREGA payments, healthcare services, agricultural issues, local corruption, and Panchayat decisions. Unlike mainstream urban-centered media, Mobile Vaani prioritizes issues directly affecting village populations.

2. Grievance Redressal and Accountability

One of the most significant impacts of Mobile Vaani has been its role in public accountability. Citizens can record complaints regarding government schemes or administrative negligence. For example: delayed pensions, corruption in subsidy distribution, non-functioning schools, and absence of healthcare workers. These recordings are amplified through the network and often forwarded to local authorities and journalists. In several documented cases, officials responded after public pressure generated through the platform.

3. Empowerment of Marginalized Communities

Mobile Vaani particularly supports: women, migrant workers, Dalits, tribal communities, and low-income rural populations. Traditional media systems often exclude these groups due to economic and social barriers. Mobile Vaani provides a relatively democratic communication space where individuals can speak in local dialects without formal journalistic training.

Research on the platform found that participation increased confidence among users and encouraged civic awareness and collective action.

4. Information During Crises

During emergencies and public crises, Mobile Vaani became an important communication channel for: COVID-19 awareness, vaccination campaigns, labor migration information, health advisories, and government welfare schemes. Its low-tech accessibility made it especially useful in areas with poor internet penetration.



Mobile Vaani and Last Mile Connectivity

The concept of “last mile connectivity” refers to delivering communication services to populations living in remote or underserved regions.

Effective Rural Journalism

= Accessibility + Participation + Local Language Communication

Mobile Vaani addresses last-mile connectivity through: low-cost access, voice technology, multilingual communication, decentralised reporting, and community participation. Unlike internet-based journalism platforms that depend on data connectivity, Mobile Vaani functions even in low-bandwidth environments through ordinary mobile calls. This makes it highly effective in rural India, where digital infrastructure remains uneven.

Academic Significance

Scholars consider Mobile Vaani an important example of:

- ICT for Development (ICT4D),
- participatory communication,
- citizen journalism,
- rural digital empowerment.

The platform demonstrates how communication technologies can strengthen democratic participation when adapted to local realities instead of blindly copying urban digital models.

4.2 People's Archive of Rural India (PARI)

People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) is an independent digital journalism platform founded by P. Sainath in 2014 to document the lives, cultures, and struggles of rural India. The platform focuses on stories often ignored by mainstream urban-centred media, including farmers, labourers, tribal communities, artisans, and migrant workers.

PARI uses multimedia storytelling through articles, photographs, videos, interviews, folk songs, and oral histories. It preserves disappearing rural traditions, regional languages, and indigenous knowledge systems while highlighting issues such as agrarian distress, rural poverty, migration, caste discrimination, and gender inequality.

The platform also serves as an educational and research resource for students, journalists, and scholars studying rural society and communication.



PARI contributes to last-mile rural journalism by digitally connecting grassroots voices with wider national and global audiences.

PARI Journalism = Rural Stories + Digital Archive + Social Representation

Its major significance lies in preserving rural cultural heritage and promoting inclusive, people-centred journalism. A strangely rare concept now, considering much of modern media treats villages like decorative background scenery unless elections are approaching.

4.3 Community Connectivity Models

Community connectivity models refer to locally managed communication systems developed to improve internet and media access in remote rural areas where commercial telecom services are weak or unavailable. These models focus on community participation, affordable technology, and localized infrastructure to strengthen rural communication networks. Such models include: community Wi-Fi networks, rural internet centers, community radio stations, local digital media hubs, and mesh network systems. The main objective is to provide reliable and low-cost communication services to underserved populations. Unlike centralized telecom systems, community-driven networks are designed according to local needs and geographical conditions.

These models help rural journalism by enabling villagers and local reporters to: share hyperlocal news, access government information, report social issues, participate in digital communication, and strengthen citizen journalism. Community connectivity is especially important in remote villages where poor internet infrastructure limits access to education, healthcare, and media services. Studies show that localized communication systems improve: digital inclusion, information accessibility, civic participation, and grassroots democratic engagement.

Community Connectivity

= Local Infrastructure + Affordable Access

+ Community Participation

These models are considered effective because they reduce dependency on large telecom companies and encourage sustainable, community-based communication ecosystems. Naturally, villagers often end up building practical communication solutions themselves while



giant corporations conduct twelve seminars about “digital transformation” inside hotel conference halls with imported muffins.

5. Conclusion

Last-mile connectivity remains a major challenge for rural journalism in India despite rapid digital growth. Poor internet connectivity, weak infrastructure, low digital literacy, and economic inequality continue to limit access to information in many villages. As a result, rural communities often remain disconnected from mainstream media and public discourse. However, community media, mobile journalism, and digital platforms such as Mobile Vaani and PARI have shown significant potential in bridging this communication gap. These platforms promote citizen journalism, local-language communication, and grassroots participation by allowing rural people to share their stories, raise public issues, and preserve cultural traditions.

For inclusive democratic development, India must focus not only on improving digital infrastructure but also on empowering rural communities through affordable internet access, digital literacy, participatory journalism, and support for local media. Rural journalism is not merely about reporting village news; it is essential for ensuring informational justice, social representation, and democratic inclusion for millions living beyond urban centers. A democracy cannot become fully inclusive if rural voices remain unheard simply because the signal disappears before the truth arrives. Human progress continues its strange hobby of inventing advanced technology while forgetting basic accessibility.

6. Suggestions

1. Expansion of rural broadband infrastructure.
2. Promotion of affordable internet access in villages.
3. Strengthening community radio and hyperlocal journalism.
4. Digital literacy programs for rural populations.
5. Financial support for independent rural journalists.
6. Development of local-language digital content.
7. Integration of AI and mobile technologies in rural reporting.
8. Encouraging participatory and citizen journalism models.



References

1. Sindakis, S., et al. (2024). *Bridging the gap in rural technology adoption*. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Springer Nature.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03080-w>
URL: [Springer Article](#)
2. Moitra, A., Kumar, A., & Seth, A. (2021). *An Analysis of Impact Pathways arising from a Mobile-based Community Media Platform in Rural India*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2104.07901>
URL: [Arxiv Paper on Mobile Vaani](#)
3. Shruthi, K. A., et al. (2021). *A Survey on Rural Internet Connectivity in India*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2111.10219>
URL: [Arxiv Rural Connectivity Survey](#)
4. Salemink, K., Strijker, D., & Bosworth, G. (2017). *Rural development in the digital age*. Journal of Rural Studies.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.06.018>
5. Correa, T., et al. (2016). *Digital Inclusion in Rural Areas*. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12154>
URL: [Oxford Academic Article](#)
6. Rao, S. (2014). *The Last Mile: Gateway to Rural Empowerment in India*.
URL: [OpenEdition Article](#)
7. Brewer, J. et al. (2022). *Last Mile Connectivity: Addressing the Affordability Frontier*. Asian Development Bank.
URL: [ADB Working Paper](#)
8. Ramdasi, V., & Onkar, P. (2025). *Improving Last Mile Transport Connectivity in Rural India*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21606/servdes2025.83>
URL: [Research Paper PDF](#)
9. McMahon, R., et al. (2011). *Digital Divides and the First Mile*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2011.2.2.2>



10. Benda, N. C., et al. (2020). *Broadband Internet Access Is a Social Determinant of Health*. American Journal of Public Health.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305784>
11. Moitra, A., Kumar, A., & Seth, A. (2021). *An Analysis of Impact Pathways arising from a Mobile-based Community Media Platform in Rural India*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2104.07901>
URL: [Arxiv Research Paper](#)
12. Seth, A. (2019). *The Elusive Model of Technology, Media, Social Development, and Financial Sustainability*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1907.06360>
URL: [Arxiv Paper on Gram Vaani](#)
13. [Gram Vaani Official Website](#)
14. UNESCO-Pearson Initiative Report:
UNESCO Mobile Vaani Case Study
15. ResearchGate Study:
[Mobile Vaani Media Case Study](#)
16. [PARI Official Website](#)
17. [PARI Wikipedia Overview](#)
18. [Research on Rural Connectivity Models](#)
19. [ADB Last Mile Connectivity Report](#)