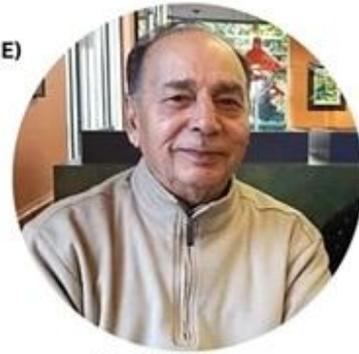




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Title: Enhancing Public Health Reporting in Vernacular Media: Perspectives of Hindi Journalists in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Media experts and journalists themselves have been advocating for the need for training reporters who write on public health issues due to the sensitive and technical nature of the subject. Since there is no formal sensitisation of journalists before they are asked to cover health. In a diverse country such as India, journalists come from different social backgrounds and varied levels of academic qualifications, with not many possessing the necessary skills and knowledge to write on public health. This study seeks to recognise the barriers faced by Hindi journalists reporting on public health in Uttar Pradesh and to understand their readiness to undergo professional training in public health reporting to overcome these barriers. A quantitative research approach was adopted for the study, and primary data were collected through a bilingual questionnaire shared with the accredited Hindi journalists of Uttar Pradesh. As many as 324 valid responses were received, which were then tested to ascertain the associations and differences between variables. Results showed that Hindi journalists in Uttar Pradesh faced several barriers in writing on public health, and professional training would help to overcome at least some of these challenges.

Key-words: *Media experts and journalists, formal sensitisation of journalists, barriers, professional training etc*

Introduction

The need for training journalists in health reporting was felt during the Coronavirus pandemic, though the narrative has been in the public domain for a long time. Reporting of COVID-19 across the globe left much to be desired, with the media resorting to sensationalism and some genuinely failing to report accurately due to an inadequacy of knowledge of public health issues, in addition to barriers in reporting. This was more glaring in the case of Hindi journalists, for whom finding alternatives to technical/scientific terms, analysing data, and understanding research was challenging. The media personnel themselves admitted to a lack of adequate knowledge on public health.

Traditionally, journalists covering health do not undergo any formal training or sensitisation. They read and learn

as they write. Journalists come from varied social backgrounds and different educational levels, and may not have the necessary understanding of scientific issues, including public health. However, a low understanding of issues can have serious implications for health reporting, as it involves people's lives.

The media in India is showing significant growth, particularly in the print and digital media. According to a report published by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 2025, the print media had managed to sustain and grow in India. Print media continues to draw advertisers, which helped increase revenues by 1% in 2024, though subscription revenues declined by 1% because of rising prices and declining sales. Digital media surpassed television for the first time, contributing 32% to the revenue of the media and entertainment sector, the FICCI Report claimed. The e-

papers, too, have shown substantial growth, with their estimated readership reaching 10% of physical newspapers (FICCI, 2025).

Despite the rise of electronic, digital, and social media, print media is the most sought-after media platform (Noordeen and Hettiarachchi, 2020). In the Indian context, print media continued to grow even during the COVID-19 phase. As many as 1,097 new publications were registered with the Press Registrar General of India (erstwhile Registrar of Newspapers in India) in 2021-22. Of a total of 10,152 newspapers published in the country, Hindi newspapers accounted for the largest share at 4,496. Circulation-wise, also, Hindi newspapers accounted for the highest share at 10,79,01,806 copies per publishing day (PRGI, 2022-23). According to the Press Registrar General of India Report, 2022-23, Uttar Pradesh continued to lead with 2,259 registered newspapers and 21,660 registered periodicals. The Internet in India Report, 2024, published by Kantar-IAMAI, claims that more and more people were using the internet for news, with a large share of users connecting from rural India. The same report says that Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, at 50%, 46%, and 43%, respectively, are at the lowest rung of internet connectivity, but were showing internet penetration at a faster pace.

Justification and Relevance of the Study

The importance of media in health communication has been proven over the years, particularly during the COVID-19 outbreak, when it was the only source of information. Researchers have recommended well-developed training programs or courses for health journalists (Keshvari *et al.*, 2018).

Media, in its various forms, has been used as an effective tool for health communication. With the relevance and credibility of the print and digital media platforms growing in India despite a downward trend globally, it becomes pertinent to train and skill journalists to empower them overcome the barriers they encounter while reporting on health.

Uttar Pradesh is of great relevance in the study as it is the most populous state of India, and its health indicators have an overall impact on national health indicators. It also has the largest number of Hindi newspapers, the highest circulation, and the highest number of registered periodicals. Hindi media having such a large footprint, a sensitised and trained cohort of Hindi print and digital journalists who write on health, becomes critical to ensure accurate, authentic, and evidence-based reporting.

Statement of the Problem

Hindi journalists writing on public health issues face several challenges. Some of these include barriers in translating medical/scientific documents and technical terms into simple Hindi easily understood by the readers, the inability to identify credible sources of health information, understanding and analyzing research papers and data. There is also a communication gap between English-speaking scientists and vernacular journalists.

This research will seek to understand the perceptions of Hindi journalists of Uttar Pradesh on the barriers they face when writing on health-related issues and their

willingness to undergo training on public health to overcome these barriers.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the Uses and Gratification Theory, which focuses on the individual use of media and the satisfaction derived from it, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory explaining how innovations are adopted, the Libertarianism Theory about open media platforms, the Agenda Setting Theory that seeks to influence the media, and the Health Belief Model that analyses peoples' behaviour based on media influence. This overall framework describes the influence of media on the masses and the criticality of helping journalists overcome barriers to write credible health reports.

Review of Literature

A newsroom is every day filled with information from various sources and on various subjects, with stakeholders trying to influence the public through the media on scientific issues, including health. While some information is generic, scientific information requires clarity (Pinkerton, 2016).

Comprehension of health stories by the audience is also a challenge faced by journalists, in addition to low knowledge of health issues and their inability to identify and reach out to experts for gaining knowledge and information (Wallington *et al.*, 2010). Experts claim that training would skill journalists to understand scientific research, evaluate medical evidence before dissemination, and produce credible stories.

Creating authentic scientific translation is also challenging in India because translators and journalists often lack knowledge and proficiency in Hindi and English or in other languages. The absence of equivalents for scientific and technical terms in regional languages aggravates the issue (Patariya, 2016).

Experts have long advocated better interaction between scientists and journalists to bridge this linguistic gap by translating scientific terminology into vernacular languages and scientific communication (Kapoor, 2017).

Heston (2024) drew attention to major deficiencies in medical research reporting in the online news platforms. The researcher has suggested structured reporting formats for ensuring the quality and transparency of medical research communication.

Journalists trained and experienced in health reporting can enhance the quality of news coverage in terms of accuracy and reliability; however, more research is required for this (Reid, 2024).

Newer scientific inventions being made globally pose a challenge for language journalists in ensuring linguistic and conceptual accuracy, and there are wide gaps that need to be bridged in scientific translation, particularly in Indian languages, to improve the quality of translation of science communication (Priya and Choudhury, 2025).

The demand for skilled professionals has increased with the rapid expansion of media and technological advancement. This calls for specialised training for journalists (Bharthur, 2017). Murthy (2020) draws attention to the gap between policy and practice in

journalism and the inconsistencies in journalism curriculum.

Most journalists, irrespective of the language, rely heavily on press releases for information on health issues. This often leads to a conflict of interest as journalists are unable to verify facts and details provided in the press release. The health industry giants often use this as an opportunity to influence health news by promoting products rather than health information (Morrell *et al.*, 2013). Hence, it becomes important that health journalists have adequate knowledge to figure out the difference between news, advertising, and propaganda.

Journalists have cited several reasons for the low quality of health reports. One being an inability to research health stories due to a shortage of time and lack of skills to research and create quality content (Larsson *et al.*, 2019).

There is now a rising concern that media literacy among journalists has not been adequately addressed. A study on journalists in Jaipur notes that 78% took information from unreliable and unverified sources (Khatti, 2019).

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence and technology has enhanced the risk of misinformation and disinformation, making it crucial for journalists to distinguish between real and fake information.

As has been mentioned above, there is an increasing preference for regional language periodicals among Indian readers (PRGI, 2022-23).

Hence, it becomes more important to ensure that journalists writing on health have the necessary knowledge on the subject, are sensitised, and have the necessary skills to research and write evidence-based stories.

Research Gap: Several studies have been conducted on the barriers faced by journalists in reporting on public health, but the number of studies on the challenges of Hindi journalists in Uttar Pradesh is limited. The studies on understanding the perception of Hindi journalists on the barriers and their readiness to undergo training to overcome barriers are also limited.

Objectives

- To recognize the barriers faced by Hindi journalists reporting on public health in Uttar Pradesh.
- To understand the readiness of Hindi journalists in Uttar Pradesh to undergo professional training in public health reporting

Methodology

A quantitative approach was used for the study, and data were collected through an online survey with the help of a bilingual questionnaire sent to accredited journalists. The database of 5,700 journalists working for Hindi newspapers and digital platforms was obtained from UP Sanchar App, the official app of the Uttar Pradesh government, and assistance was sought from the Centre of Advocacy and Research, an NGO working on media advocacy related to health in the state, to encourage journalists to respond to the questionnaire. Three hundred and twenty-four valid responses were received. Data was transferred from the Google Sheet to SPSS for descriptive and inferential tests to analyse the demographic

characteristics of respondents and ascertain associations and differences between variables.

4. Data Analysis: This section presents the details of the data for the two objectives and their interpretation. Of the 324 valid responses received, 172 had received no training on public health issues, while the remaining (152) had undergone some training during their careers.

Did you receive any formal training in health reporting during your career? * What are the barriers faced during writing on public health issues? Crosstabulation

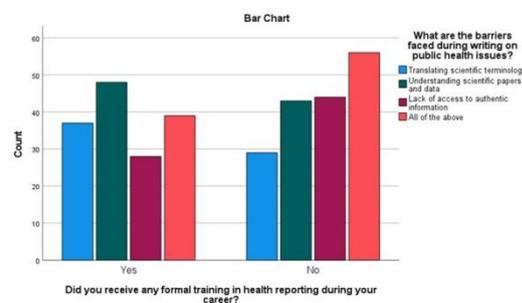
Count	Did you receive any formal training in health reporting during your career?	What are the barriers faced during writing on public health issues?				Total
		Translating scientific terminology	Understanding scientific papers and data	Lack of access to authentic information	All of the above	
	Yes	37	48	28	39	152
	No	29	43	44	56	172
	Total	66	91	72	95	324

Objective 1: To recognize the barriers faced by Hindi journalists reporting on public health in Uttar Pradesh

This analysis discusses the barriers journalists encounter while writing on public health issues.

Did you receive any formal training in health reporting during your career? * What are the barriers faced during writing on public health issues? Crosstabulation

Count	Did you receive any formal training in health reporting during your career?	What are the barriers faced during writing on public health issues?				Total
		Translating scientific terminology	Understanding scientific papers and data	Lack of access to authentic information	All of the above	
	Yes	37	48	28	39	152
	No	29	43	44	56	172
	Total	66	91	72	95	324



Graph 1: Perception of respondents on barriers faced during public health reporting



Graph 2: How Will Professional Training Improve the Quality of Reporting?

Interpretation: The analysis examines the relationship between formal health reporting training and barriers faced by journalists when writing on public health. The Chi-Square test shows that though the overall association between training and barriers faced is not statistically significant, there is a weak, noticeable association with the training, indicating that there is a possibility that trained journalists can experience a difference in relation to

barriers faced. However, trained journalists face lower barriers.

Trained journalists reported difficulties in understanding scientific papers and data, while untrained journalists experienced greater challenges in accessing authentic information. Notably, a significant portion of both trained and untrained journalists (95 total) indicated that they faced all the listed barriers, such as translating scientific terminology to regional languages, understanding scientific papers and data, as well as a lack of access to authentic information.

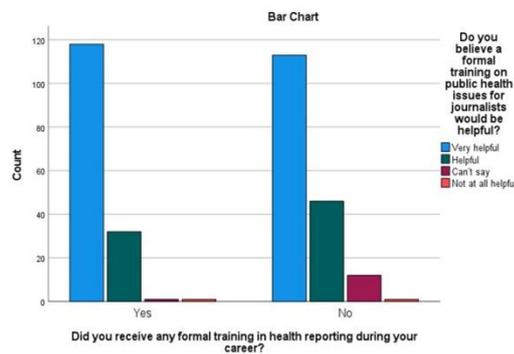
Although the results suggest a slight difference between the two groups, the data indicate that formal training does not entirely mitigate these barriers. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the importance of incorporating better training programs, particularly in areas related to scientific comprehension and information sourcing.

Graph 2 suggests that all respondents believed that professional training would improve the quality of reporting, though in different ways. More than half of the respondents (52.25%) said training would equip them to include information and data in news stories, simplify technical terms, incorporate quotes of experts and health officials, and use the latest research on the subject in the content.

Objective 2: To understand the level of readiness of Hindi journalists in undergoing professional training in public health reporting

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
If you think a formal training on public health reporting would be helpful, how would it improve the quality of report?	324	3.28	1.737	.097



Graph 3: Do you believe a formal training on public health issues for journalists would be helpful?

Interpretation: This table corresponds to the results of the guided question, which consisted of a one-sample t-test diagnosis concerned with assessing the effect ("perceived impact") of journalistic formal training in public health reporting on improving the quality of reports published by journalism media.

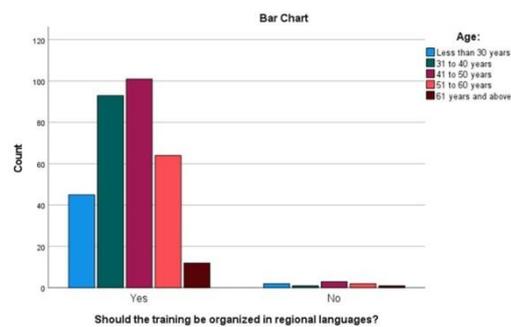
Performing the one-sample statistics, this shows that the mean value for the perceived enhancement regarding improvements on the quality of reporting lies at 3.28, which is given a standard deviation and standard error mean of 1.737 and 0.097. The 95% CI for the mean

difference runs between 3.09 and 3.47 and gives more support for the reliability of the results.

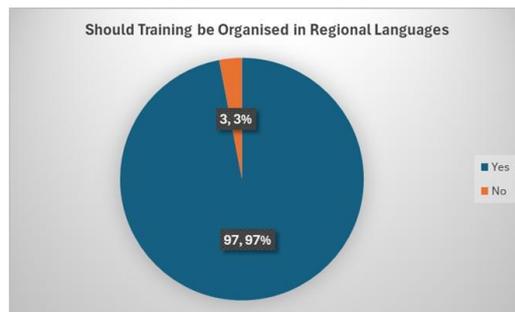
The result of the effect size analysis by Cohen's d (91.737) and correction by Hedges (1.741), the effect size analysis shows a big effect size, indicating that the effect on improving the quality of public health reporting is great as a result of formal training.

The results indicate that journalists find it highly likely that formal training in public health reportage would significantly improve the quality of the reports. Given the mean high score and huge effect size, the research shows journalists perceive the need for structured training programs to improve accuracy, depth, and effectiveness in health journalism.

Crosstabulation of Age Group and Opinion on Organizing Training in Regional Languages



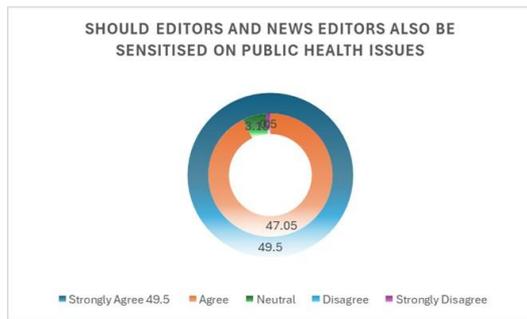
Graph 4: Perception of respondents on organising training in regional languages?



Graph 5: Should Training Be Organised in Regional Languages?



Graph 6: How will Professional Training Improve the Quality of Reporting?



Graph 7: Should Editors and News Editors also be Sensitised on Public Health Issues?

Interpretations: Graph 4 gives the distribution of responses to the question 'Should the training be organized in regional languages?' across different age groups. Out of 324 valid responses, the majority (315 individuals) support organizing training in regional languages. The highest number of affirmative responses comes from the age group '41 to 50 years' (101 respondents), followed closely by the '31 to 40 years' group (93 respondents). The least support comes from the '61 years and above' group, with only 12 respondents agreeing.

On the other hand, only 9 individuals across all age groups oppose the idea, with the highest number of negative responses from the '41 to 50 years' age group (3 respondents).

Overall, a significant majority of respondents from all age groups favour organizing training in regional languages.

Graph 5 shows an overwhelming support for organising training in regional languages, with 97.9 percent of respondents wanting the interventions in vernacular languages.

Graph 6 clearly indicates that professional training would improve the quality of reporting, as news stories would be supported by information and data (24.5%), simplified with technical terms (15%), incorporate the latest research (1.1%), and include quotes from experts and health officials (7.3%). More than half of the respondents (52.25%) said they would incorporate all these in the stories.

The importance of sensitising editors and news editors on public health issues is clearly reflected in Graph 7. It suggests that editors and news editors have a role in editing and placement of stories, and their being sensitive to health issues is as critical as the journalist who files the story.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of data shows that Hindi journalists face barriers in understanding scientific papers, analysing data, accessing authentic information, and simplifying technical terms. While training can help overcome some of these barriers, not all are addressed by this intervention. Training can help in the simplification of technical terms and accessing and referring to the latest research in news stories.

These results statistically prove that journalists face significant challenges while reporting on public health issues. Trained journalists reported difficulties in understanding scientific papers and data, while untrained

journalists experienced greater challenges in accessing authentic information, in addition to other challenges.

Of the 324 respondents, 95 said translating scientific terminology, understanding scientific papers and data, and a lack of access to authentic information were all challenges. For 66 respondents, translating scientific terminology was a barrier, 91 said understanding scientific papers and data was a challenge, and 72 perceived a lack of access to authentic information was an issue.

Breaking this down, of the 152 trained journalists, 37 found it difficult to translate scientific terminology, 48 were unable to understand scientific papers and data, 28 said lack of access to authentic information, while 39 said they faced all these barriers when reporting on public health. On the other hand, 172 untrained journalists 29 said translating scientific terminology was a challenge, 43 said understanding scientific papers and data was difficult, 44 said lack of access to authentic information was challenging, and for 56, all these were barriers.

Training would help journalists understand the importance of incorporating the quotes and opinions of subject experts in their news reports. Reliable information and data would also become part of routine reporting. Data analysis suggests that trained journalists are likely to face fewer barriers than those who do not receive any training, although the data also indicates that formal training does not help remove these barriers entirely. Training should focus on how journalists can obtain authentic and credible information and analyse data accurately.

The results support the idea that health journalism training should be conducted in regional languages to enable vernacular journalists to comprehend scientific information for writing in different languages, and not just in Hindi, which is the focus of this research. The highest number of journalists supporting training in regional languages ranged between 31 and 50 years. This, perhaps, because these were practising journalists and did face challenges. Those least interested in training in regional languages were over the age of 50 years. This is possibly because this cohort has either retired or is on the verge of retirement. Some of those below the age have also expressed support for training in regional languages. The number is less than that in the 31-50 years bracket. Perhaps some of them could have been trained in journalism institutes or could use technology to overcome hurdles.

Discussion: It is clear that Hindi journalists in Uttar Pradesh face barriers while reporting on health issues. These include translating scientific terminology, understanding scientific papers and data, and a lack of access to authentic data. Identifying and accessing information from authentic sources is one barrier that would be overcome if journalists underwent professional training.

The respondents strongly believe that journalists would benefit from formal training on public health-related issues. This has critical implications for public health initiatives, media literacy, and the role of media platforms in disseminating health-related content.

These findings highlight the importance of public health journalism and the willingness of Hindi journalists in Uttar Pradesh to participate in the training. This calls for

the media organizations to provide more opportunities and resources to support such initiatives.

Limitations

This study is confined to Hindi print and digital media platforms in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The paper is based on the perception of journalists and does not examine whether training helps in addressing the barriers.

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