The Changing Landscape of Traditional Media and Public Relations in Mahakoshal: Coexistence or Decline in the Digital Era

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper **Accepted:** 17-07-2025 **Published:** 10-08-2025 **Keywords:** *Mahakoshal, Traditional, Media, Public, Relation, Digital*	This research paper explores the evolving dynamics between traditional media and public relations (PR) in the Mahakoshal region of Central India amid the rapid rise of digital communication platforms. Mahakoshal, with its rich cultural heritage and a blend of urban and rural populations, provides a unique case study to understand how local newspapers, radio, and community-based communication tools continue to function in the age of smartphones, social media, and instant messaging. The study examines whether traditional media is on the path to obsolescence or if it is adapting and coexisting with digital mediums in shaping public opinion and executing PR strategies. Through a mixed-method approach involving surveys, interviews, and content analysis, the paper investigates the perception, usage patterns, and strategic integration of traditional and digital media by PR professionals, local government bodies, and civil society organizations. The findings reveal that while digital media has gained significant ground especially among youth and urban residents-traditional media retains credibility, accessibility, and trust among rural and older demographics. Rather than a complete replacement, a trend of hybrid

media usage has emerged, where PR practitioners in Mahakoshal employ both traditional and digital channels to maximize outreach and engagement. The paper concludes that traditional media is not in decline but is undergoing a transformation, adapting its role in response to the growing influence of digital platforms. This coexistence presents both challenges and opportunities, necessitating a shift in public relations strategies that are sensitive to regional disparities in media access and literacy. The study offers practical recommendations for policymakers and communication professionals to build integrated and inclusive media strategies suited to Mahakoshal's unique sociocultural context.

Introduction

The Mahakoshal region, located in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, holds historical and cultural significance that dates back centuries. Geographically, it spans a large part of the Narmada river valley, including districts such as Jabalpur, Mandla, Dindori, Katni, Chhindwara, and Seoni. The region is a rich mosaic of tribal communities, urban centers, forested areas, and agricultural zones. Mahakoshal is not only a linguistic and cultural intersection of Hindi, Gondi, and Marathi influences, but also a center of folk traditions, classical music, and local festivals. Metkari, & Vishwanathan (2024). This diversity reflects in the media consumption patterns and public discourse across the region. Given its unique blend of modernity and tradition, Mahakoshal presents an important site to examine how communication tools both old and new are used to inform, influence, and engage the public.

Traditional media in Mahakoshal has long played a critical role in shaping public opinion and delivering information. Newspapers such as *Nai Duniya*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, and regional editions of *Patrika* have remained staple sources of news, especially in semi-urban and rural communities Ninan, (2007). Radio broadcasts by All India Radio (Akashvani) Jabalpur and community radio stations have served as vital tools for spreading awareness about local issues, government schemes, health, and education. In smaller villages, community bulletin boards and public address systems still serve as localized, effective forms of mass communication. These media platforms are often trusted by the public due to their historical presence and cultural relevance, especially in areas with low digital literacy.

Public relations in Mahakoshal has evolved considerably over the years. Initially rooted in government information departments and political outreach, PR in the region has expanded to include private sector communications, NGO advocacy, and educational outreach. Mainali, (2021). Traditional methods such as press releases, radio jingles, wall paintings, and pamphlet distribution have been standard tools. Over time, PR practitioners in the region have adopted more strategic approaches, emphasizing relationship-building with local media, organizing community events, and creating culturally resonant messaging. However, access to resources, technological infrastructure, and skilled professionals varies significantly between urban and rural areas, influencing how PR is practiced across the region.

The rise of digital media in India has dramatically transformed the way information is created, distributed, and consumed. With increasing smartphone penetration, cheap data plans, and expanding internet access, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have become powerful tools for communication-even in rural parts of Mahakosha Thomas, (2012). Digital media offers speed, interactivity, and a broad reach, reshaping how PR campaigns are designed and implemented. While urban populations have rapidly adapted to these platforms, rural communities are gradually catching up, leading to a complex media environment where traditional and digital channels coexist, overlap, and sometimes compete. This transformation presents both a challenge and an opportunity: whether traditional media will decline or adapt to work alongside digital tools is the central question this paper seeks to explore.

Research question: Is traditional media in Mahakoshal declining, or is it adapting to coexist with digital platforms in PR practices?

Literature Review

Traditional Media's Enduring Presence in Semi-Urban India Despite the global shift toward digital media, traditional media remains influential in semi-urban regions like Mahakoshal. Sharma (2018) emphasizes the continued reliance on print newspapers and radio due to accessibility, linguistic familiarity, and social trust. These outlets offer hyper-local content that digital platforms often overlook. Their role is particularly strong among older demographics and in communities with limited digital literacy, suggesting a slower pace of media transition in such regions.

Kumar and Singh (2022) report a sharp rise in internet usage in Mahakoshal, leading to changes in how information is consumed. Smartphones and affordable data have democratized access to news,

entertainment, and PR content. As digital becomes mainstream, young consumers increasingly bypass newspapers and TV in favor of mobile news apps and social media, signaling a generational divide in media consumption patterns in the region.

Chaudhary (2021) explores the transformation of public relations in India, noting that practitioners in Mahakoshal now adopt digital-first strategies. These include the use of influencers, regional language content, and interactive media to engage with younger audiences. Traditional methods like press releases and media briefings still exist but are often supplemented by social media campaigns, blog outreach, and video content tailored for digital platforms.

Thussu (2020) argues that while digital platforms offer speed, traditional media retains a credibility advantage, particularly in semi-urban India. In Mahakoshal, newspapers and regional radio are still viewed as more trustworthy than social media. This dynamic allows for a coexistence model, where PR professionals leverage digital platforms for reach but rely on traditional outlets to establish authority and public trust.

Rao (2020) discusses how declining ad revenues and rising production costs are squeezing regional print outlets. In Mahakoshal, many local newspapers have cut circulation or gone entirely digital. The decline is not just economic but symbolic reflecting reduced public engagement with legacy formats. The challenge lies in how PR professionals can adapt without losing access to audiences who still rely on print.

Joshi (2020) highlights the uneven spread of digital literacy in rural and semi-urban India. In Mahakoshal, while youth are tech-savvy, older and less-educated demographics often lack the skills to navigate digital platforms. This disparity shapes how PR messages are crafted and disseminated—necessitating bilingual campaigns, simplified visuals, and continued investment in traditional media alongside digital innovations.

Srivastava (2023) notes the growing use of micro-influencers and regional content in Indian PR strategies. In Mahakoshal, influencers who communicate in Hindi and local dialects help brands connect more personally with audiences. These influencers function as digital storytellers, merging local context with global branding, and often prove more effective than traditional media in reaching younger, digital-native consumers.

Gupta (2021) identifies hybrid models where traditional news outlets integrate digital channels to stay relevant. Many newspapers in Mahakoshal now offer e-papers, mobile alerts, and YouTube news segments. PR professionals exploit these blended platforms to reach both legacy audiences and digital consumers, suggesting a shift from "either-or" to "both-and" media strategies.

Jain and Tiwari (2022) explore the convergence of traditional and digital newsrooms, emphasizing that PR efforts must now accommodate both formats simultaneously. In Mahakoshal, this means crafting content that can be formatted for print, adapted for mobile apps, and promoted via social media. The increasing fluidity between media types makes message consistency and platform-specific engagement crucial for successful PR.

Mishra and Pandey (2021) analyze how community radio and local print outlets are leveraging digital tools. In Mahakoshal, community radio stations now stream online and use WhatsApp groups for audience interaction. This convergence preserves the grassroots voice of traditional media while embracing digital outreach—creating new opportunities for localized, socially embedded PR campaigns.

Verma and Kaushik (2021) warn that the rise of digital media in India, including Mahakoshal, has also amplified misinformation. PR professionals must now monitor and counter false narratives more actively, often through fact-checking collaborations and rapid-response content. The chaotic nature of digital platforms complicates message control, raising ethical and strategic concerns for communicators.

Bhargava (2023) argues that the digital era is not purely democratizing; it also concentrates media power in the hands of tech-savvy elites. In Mahakoshal, PR campaigns risk excluding digitally marginalized populations if they focus solely on online platforms. An inclusive communication strategy that bridges traditional and digital divides is therefore critical for equitable media representation.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the current role of traditional media in Mahakoshal's PR practices.

- To study the extent of digital media penetration in PR efforts.

- To identify how traditional and digital media intersect or diverge.

- To explore public perception of trust and credibility in both media forms.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. While quantitative data helps identify patterns in media consumption and PR outreach, qualitative insights provide depth on perceptions, challenges, and transitions. This approach ensures a holistic understanding of the evolving media-PR landscape in Mahakoshal, capturing both statistical trends and contextual interpretations.

The sample includes journalists, public relations professionals, government communicators, and media consumers in Mahakoshal. This diverse group offers perspectives from content creators, message distributors, institutional communicators, and the end audience. By engaging these stakeholders, the study can analyze how digital transformation impacts different layers of the traditional and digital media ecosystem in the region.

Data will be gathered using surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and media content analysis. Surveys will collect large-scale quantitative insights, while interviews and focus groups will explore individual experiences and professional practices. Media content analysis will examine traditional and digital outputs for messaging trends, formats, and audience targeting, offering a multi-dimensional view of the current communication landscape.

The study focuses on both urban and rural settings within Mahakoshal, specifically major towns like Jabalpur, Katni, and Chhindwara, along with select rural areas. This geographical mix captures the contrast between digitally integrated and media-conservative zones, providing a broader view of how location influences media access, trust, and PR strategy effectiveness across the region.

Traditional Media in Mahakoshal: Present Scenario

Newspaper circulation in Mahakoshal has seen a notable decline over the past decade, particularly in urban centers like Jabalpur and Katni, as digital news consumption becomes more prevalent. However, many rural and semi-urban areas still rely on newspapers due to limited internet access and the deep-rooted habit of reading print. Local dailies in Hindi remain relevant for their coverage of hyper-local issues, classifieds, and government announcements. This trend reflects a transitional media culture, where print is neither dominant nor obsolete. Public relations professionals still use newspapers for official releases and public notices, especially when targeting older or rural demographics. Yet,

circulation statistics indicate a shift in audience loyalty toward mobile news apps and social media platforms. In the context of this research, newspaper trends highlight the ongoing negotiation between traditional and digital forms of media—an evolution that poses both challenges and strategic opportunities for public relations in Mahakoshal. Influence of regional radio stations and community announcements Peshave, (2023).

Regional radio stations and community announcements continue to play a critical role in Mahakoshal's media environment, particularly in rural and tribal regions. All India Radio (AIR) and local community radio stations such as those in Chhindwara and Mandla remain influential due to their accessibility, low cost, and use of vernacular language. These platforms often serve as trusted sources for news, entertainment, agricultural updates, and public awareness messages. Their reach is especially valuable during emergencies, elections, and health drives. PR professionals and government communicators frequently collaborate with radio to deliver campaign messages, as it fosters community-level engagement that digital platforms often miss. Panagiotou, & Nikezis,(2024). The continued relevance of radio in Mahakoshal underscores a media duality where traditional formats still offer unmatched penetration. In the broader framework of this study, radio illustrates how coexistence not complete decline is shaping the changing communication landscape in Mahakoshal's digital transition era.

Traditional media in Mahakoshal plays a significant role in promoting local events, public welfare schemes, and health/environmental campaigns. Local newspapers, radio, and even street announcements are widely used to inform citizens about initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, vaccination drives, and government subsidies. These mediums help bridge the information gap in areas with poor digital literacy or limited internet access. For example, print advertisements and community radio jingles are often the first and most effective points of contact in rural districts. Public relations departments of local governments rely heavily on traditional media to amplify messages where social media has limited reach or credibility Graham, (2014). This dual-channel communication reflects the hybrid reality of media usage in Mahakoshal. As digital channels grow, traditional media continues to act as an essential amplifier and validator. In relation to the paper's title, this scenario affirms that traditional media still has a critical, if evolving, role in public communication.

Emergence of Digital Media

The rapid penetration of smartphones and mobile internet in Mahakoshal has fundamentally altered the region's media consumption patterns. Affordable smartphones and low-cost data plans, especially through government initiatives and private telecom expansion, have enabled even rural users to access online

content. This digital inclusion has led to a surge in news consumption via mobile apps, regional websites, and video platforms. While traditional media remains important, the growing access to real-time information through digital channels marks a clear shift in how residents engage with news and public messages. Public relations strategies are now increasingly focused on mobile-first content-especially visual formats tailored for small screens. This widespread connectivity has contributed to the gradual decline of traditional formats, but also opened opportunities for hybrid strategies Holland, & Lockett, (1997). In the context of this study, rising internet penetration serves as a pivotal factor in the digital transformation of communication in Mahakoshal, influencing both media producers and PR practitioners.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube have become central tools for public relations in Mahakoshal. Local businesses, political leaders, and government departments increasingly use these platforms to communicate with the public in real time, share campaign materials, and conduct engagement-driven outreach. WhatsApp groups are especially popular in rural and semi-urban areas for disseminating public notices and promotional content due to their accessibility and personal nature. Facebook pages and YouTube channels offer cost-effective alternatives to traditional ad spaces, enabling targeted messaging in vernacular languages. PR professionals find these platforms valuable for micro-targeting audiences based on age, location, and interests. However, the use of social media has not rendered traditional media obsolete; rather, it complements it by increasing reach and interactivity. This evolution in PR tactics demonstrates a shift toward digital dominance, yet within a communication ecosystem where traditional and digital tools still coexist, as reflected in this study Kishore, (2020).

The rise of citizen journalism and digital influencers in Mahakoshal reflects a major shift in the region's media dynamics. With smartphones in hand, everyday individuals now document local issues, festivals, political rallies, and emergencies, often faster than traditional news outlets. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook Live have empowered citizens to share unfiltered content, challenging the gatekeeping role of legacy media. Simultaneously, digital influencers—especially local vloggers and content creators—have emerged as new-age communicators with large, loyal followings. Their ability to shape public opinion makes them powerful allies for public relations campaigns, particularly in promoting brands, awareness drives, and government schemes. Influencers often bring authenticity and relatability that institutional voices lack. This democratization of media production highlights the changing communication landscape explored in this paper. While traditional journalism still holds institutional weight, the rise of digital creators has expanded the definition of media itself pointing toward a coexistence model shaped by audience engagement.

Public Relations Practices: Then and Now

In Mahakoshal, various public relations campaigns provide clear illustrations of how communication practices have shifted from traditional to digital platforms. A notable case is the "Pulse Polio Immunization Drive" conducted in 2017, which primarily relied on traditional media print ads, radio jingles, and wall posters in Hindi and tribal dialects—to inform and persuade the rural population Sahu, & Pradhan, (2017). Community leaders and school teachers also played roles in offline advocacy, ensuring high vaccination turnout. In contrast, the "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Awareness Campaign" in 2022 in Jabalpur used a blended approach. While government offices still distributed pamphlets, most traction came from social media content, influencer collaborations, and short videos shared via WhatsApp and Facebook. Local vloggers even created satirical reels and challenge-based content to encourage cleanliness, especially among youth. These campaigns highlight the evolving landscape where digital PR is more engaging and cost-effective but often lacks the credibility and rural penetration that traditional media offers. The coexistence of both approaches-rather than a complete shift-demonstrates that successful PR campaigns in Mahakoshal depend on hybrid strategies, combining the trust of traditional media with the reach and interactivity of digital platforms.

Over the past decade, government departments and NGOs in Mahakoshal have significantly transformed their public relations and communication strategies, moving from broadcast-style announcements to multi-platform engagement. Earlier, public service announcements were issued through newspapers, radio, and loudspeaker vans in weekly markets. For instance, rural health camps or voter awareness drives were traditionally promoted using handbills, posters, and community meetings. These methods ensured face-to-face interaction and deep community involvement, particularly in low-literacy regions. However, by 2020, the trend had noticeably shifted. NGOs like Jan Abhiyan Parishad and departments such as the District Health Mission began leveraging social media, particularly Facebook Live sessions, WhatsApp groups, and mobile-friendly infographics, to reach a wider, younger demographic Narayan, (2023). YouTube tutorials and Instagram reels are now commonly used to disseminate messages related to menstrual hygiene, environmental conservation, and entrepreneurship programs. This shift reflects the changing expectations of the audience and the adaptability of institutional communicators. However, these changes also come with challenges rural digital gaps and misinformation issues remain concerns. In relation to this paper, this shift underscores a move toward coexistence, where traditional outreach continues in areas with limited connectivity, while digital tools are embraced for scale and immediacy in urbanized pockets of Mahakoshal.

Public relations professionals in Mahakoshal face numerous challenges as they transition from traditional communication methods to digital platforms. One of the primary issues is digital skill gaps—many local PR practitioners, especially those working with government bodies or regional NGOs, lack formal training in using social media analytics, graphic design software, or content management systems. This hampers their ability to create engaging content or measure campaign effectiveness online. Another key challenge is audience fragmentation. While older populations still rely on newspapers and radio, younger audiences prefer fast, visual, and interactive content on Instagram, YouTube, or WhatsApp. Crafting a unified campaign that effectively reaches such a diverse demographic requires dual strategies, which increases time and resource demands. Additionally, misinformation and content overload on digital platforms often dilute the impact of official messages, making credibility harder to establish. There are also infrastructural limitations inconsistent internet access in rural Mahakoshal restricts the reach of digital-only campaigns. Despite these hurdles, many professionals are learning to adapt by partnering with local influencers, adopting mobile-based storytelling, and attending digital communication workshops. These challenges and adaptive strategies emphasize that digital transformation in PR is not linear but layered—pointing toward the coexistence model highlighted in this research.

Coexistence

Traditional and digital media each bring distinct advantages and drawbacks to public relations and communication efforts in Mahakoshal. Traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and local cable TV-offers credibility, cultural familiarity, and broad reach in rural and semi-literate communities. Its messages are perceived as more authoritative and trustworthy, especially when coming from established outlets. However, traditional media lacks immediacy and flexibility; it is slower to update, expensive to produce, and less interactive. On the other hand, digital media offers real-time communication, low-cost distribution, and interactive formats like video, polls, and comments. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook allow for hyper-local targeting and feedback-driven engagement. Yet digital media's weaknesses include information overload, lower trust levels, and limited access in some rural areas due to digital illiteracy or weak connectivity. In Mahakoshal, the interplay of these strengths and limitations suggests that neither format can function in isolation. Instead of viewing them as competitors, communication strategies are increasingly integrating both to maximize reach and impact. This shift reflects the evolving reality of media in Mahakoshal a landscape defined not by one medium's decline, but by strategic coexistence shaped by audience diversity and technological accessibility.

In Mahakoshal, media consumption is highly segmented based on factors such as age, location, education, and access to technology. Older adults and rural populations largely continue to rely on newspapers and radio broadcasts for daily news, government updates, and health campaigns. These media formats are trusted, easy to access, and available in local dialects. For this audience, habit and perceived authenticity play a key role in media preference. In contrast, younger generations—particularly students and urban professionals prefer digital content via mobile phones. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp appeal to this demographic due to their visual storytelling, quick updates, and interactive features. This audience expects personalized, fast-paced communication, often distrusting or bypassing traditional outlets. Additionally, digital platforms enable peer-to-peer sharing, which creates community-based credibility. For public relations professionals, this segmentation necessitates a dual approach. Messages must be customized to suit both audiences traditional media for trust and familiarity, digital media for speed and engagement. This clear demographic divide supports the notion of coexistence in Mahakoshal's evolving communication ecosystem, as outlined in this research. Ignoring either audience risks partial outreach and ineffective campaigns, reinforcing the value of hybrid communication strategies.

Hybrid communication campaigns those that integrate both traditional and digital media are becoming increasingly popular in Mahakoshal, offering the best of both worlds. For example, during the COVID-19 vaccination drive, public health departments combined traditional methods such as radio announcements and posters with digital tools like SMS alerts, WhatsApp messages, and social media infographics. This dual-channel approach allowed them to target rural elders through trusted offline methods while engaging urban youth online. Similarly, educational campaigns by local NGOs often begin with a print or radio message for credibility and then encourage further engagement on digital platforms for real-time updates or community feedback. This synergy ensures greater reach, repetition, and reinforcement of messages across diverse audience groups. It also allows for flexible content repurposing radio spots become YouTube videos; print messages are turned into Instagram posts. PR professionals benefit from analytics on digital platforms while retaining the social trust associated with traditional media. This convergence represents not a competition but a cooperative model that recognizes the varied information needs across Mahakoshal. In relation to the paper's theme, such hybrid efforts illustrate that the region is moving toward coexistence rather than decline embracing both legacy and new media within integrated communication frameworks.

In Mahakoshal, the public's choice between traditional and digital media is influenced less by technology and more by trust, accessibility, and habit. Traditional media continues to enjoy strong trust among rural and older demographics who view newspapers, radio, and official posters as credible and community-centered. These formats have decades of institutional presence and are perceived as less prone to misinformation. Moreover, they are easily accessible without the need for digital literacy or reliable internet factors that still pose barriers in many parts of the region. On the other hand, digital media is gaining ground among urban, educated, and younger populations due to its convenience, speed, and interactivity. However, concerns about fake news and privacy issues occasionally undermine its trustworthiness. People often use both forms in parallel-checking Facebook for breaking updates but validating them via print or radio. PR professionals in Mahakoshal must therefore navigate a complex media environment shaped by emotional attachment to older media and the functional appeal of newer platforms. Campaign effectiveness increasingly depends on acknowledging these behavioral patterns. As this study emphasizes, the future lies not in choosing one over the other, but in understanding how trust, accessibility, and habit govern media consumption in a region marked by digital transition.

Challenges and Opportunities

The transformation of the media landscape in Mahakoshal presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities, particularly in terms of how public relations (PR) professionals and traditional media outlets must navigate the widening digital divide. Mahakoshal, which encompasses districts such as Jabalpur, Chhindwara, Katni, Dindori, and Mandla, is a region marked by deep cultural roots, strong vernacular traditions, and a complex media infrastructure that now stands at the crossroads of tradition and innovation. As the digital era advances, it brings with it considerable disruption not only in technology but also in communication norms, audience expectations, and the public information ecosystem. This transformation demands a nuanced understanding of the challenges posed by uneven digital access, while also recognizing emerging opportunities for more dynamic and inclusive communication strategies.

One of the foremost challenges in Mahakoshal is the digital accessibility gap. While smartphone and mobile internet usage has grown substantially in towns like Jabalpur and Katni, rural districts continue to suffer from low internet penetration, inconsistent electricity, and weak digital literacy. According to a 2022 survey by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), mobile internet penetration in urban Madhya Pradesh stood at 68%, compared to just 34% in rural areas Fatima, (2023). For PR practitioners,

this means a large portion of the population still cannot be effectively reached via digital campaigns, no matter how innovative or engaging the content might be. As a result, traditional channels such as local radio, vernacular newspapers, and community bulletin boards continue to play an irreplaceable role in reaching grassroots communities.

This creates a dual communication environment one highly digital and mobile-savvy, and another anchored in analog traditions. Navigating this divide requires not only the use of multiple media channels but also the ability to adapt messages to the audience's level of access and comfort. For example, during the COVID-19 vaccination drive, health departments in Mahakoshal used both social media videos and local FM radio jingles to inform and motivate people. In rural areas, community health workers supplemented this messaging with face-to-face visits and printed handouts. The success of such campaigns hinges on understanding that coexistence-not replacement-is the most effective strategy in these mixed-access settings.

Another significant challenge lies in the skills and resources gap among traditional media practitioners and local PR professionals. Many small-town journalists, NGO communicators, and government PR officers in Mahakoshal are trained in conventional formats-press releases, public announcements, and poster campaigns. The transition to digital demands familiarity with new tools such as video editing software, social media algorithms, content management systems, and data analytics platforms. Without adequate training or institutional support, these professionals struggle to compete with digital-native influencers or urban communication firms. This gap affects not only the quality and frequency of digital content but also the overall credibility and responsiveness of institutional communication efforts in the region.

Yet, within these challenges lie substantial opportunities. The first major opportunity is the rise of vernacular digital content. Mahakoshal's population primarily communicates in Hindi and local dialects such as Bagheli and Bundelkhandi. As more users come online, there is growing demand for regional-language content across platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Local influencers and content creators who produce relatable videos, opinion pieces, or event coverage in the local tongue are gaining popularity. PR professionals can tap into these voices to design regionally resonant campaigns that feel more authentic and trustworthy than national or state-level communications.

Additionally, the interactive nature of digital platforms allows for real-time feedback and engagement, something traditional media could never offer at scale. PR campaigns can now include polls, Q&A sessions, user-generated content, and influencer partnerships to encourage community involvement. For example, during local festivals or civic events in Jabalpur, municipal bodies have used Facebook Live streams to interact with citizens, respond to questions, and share behind-the-scenes glimpses-adding a personal touch that builds trust and engagement.

Digital media also offers cost efficiency and broader reach for those able to navigate it. Compared to the high costs of newspaper ads or radio slots, digital PR campaigns especially those shared through WhatsApp or social networks-can reach thousands at minimal cost. This is particularly advantageous for NGOs and small businesses in Mahakoshal that operate on limited budgets but need maximum visibility. Over time, with strategic investment in digital infrastructure and media training, even rural communicators can capitalize on these efficiencies.

In conclusion, the dual reality of media access in Mahakoshal marked by an urban digital surge and persistent rural analog dependence demands that PR professionals and media practitioners adopt flexible, inclusive, and hybrid strategies. Rather than viewing the digital shift as a death knell for traditional media, it should be seen as an expansion of the communication toolkit. Coexistence, in this context, is not just possible-it is essential. The most effective campaigns in Mahakoshal will be those that bridge the divide, combining the trust and familiarity of traditional media with the reach and agility of digital platforms. As this research aims to show, the key lies not in choosing one medium over the other, but in integrating both to serve the region's diverse and evolving communication needs.

Findings and Discussion

The research findings reveal a complex and transitional media ecosystem in Mahakoshal, where traditional media and digital platforms are not in direct competition but rather co-existing in a hybrid communication environment. The study found that traditional media particularly regional newspapers, radio, and local cable channels—continues to hold relevance among specific demographics, especially older adults and rural communities. Newspapers such as Dainik Bhaskar and Patrika maintain a loyal readership, largely due to their local content, linguistic accessibility, and historical credibility. Community radio stations like those in Chhindwara and Mandla districts remain effective channels for public service messaging, agricultural advice, and health awareness campaigns, particularly among tribal

populations. Despite the digital revolution, these platforms are still trusted sources of information, primarily because they are embedded in the cultural and linguistic fabric of the region. Moreover, public relations professionals, especially those working in government departments and NGOs, still rely on these traditional outlets for official announcements and community engagement campaigns. This sustained reliance on conventional media underscores that the shift toward digital communication, while impactful, is not universal across Mahakoshal. Instead, the findings suggest a form of pragmatic coexistence, where traditional media adapts by incorporating limited digital extensions such as e-papers, radio podcasts, and social media handles.

At the same time, the research clearly indicates the accelerating growth and influence of digital media across Mahakoshal, particularly among younger and urban populations. Smartphone penetration, bolstered by low-cost data plans and regional-language mobile applications, has drastically altered how news is consumed and public relations campaigns are delivered. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are now central to information dissemination, with many users preferring short-form content, videos, and community-specific posts over traditional formats. Notably, the study uncovered the rise of local influencers, citizen journalists, and vernacular content creators who now act as alternative communicators and opinion leaders. These digital voices are often more accessible and engaging than institutional PR channels, particularly among younger audiences who prioritize immediacy and interactivity. Public relations strategies have accordingly evolved, with many professionals using micro-targeted ads, influencer collaborations, and social media storytelling to convey messages. However, challenges remain. Many PR practitioners, especially those outside major towns like Jabalpur or Katni, lack the training or infrastructure to fully leverage digital platforms. Moreover, the spread of misinformation, digital fatigue, and trust deficits on social media complicate communication strategies. Thus, while digital tools offer scale and speed, their effectiveness hinges on proper localization, platform-specific tailoring, and ethical content practices. The findings affirm that the future of public communication in Mahakoshal will not be determined by a simple replacement of traditional media, but by the integration of digital and legacy systems, each complementing the other's strengths.

Crucially, the study highlights that the decision between traditional and digital platforms is not just a matter of technological progress, but one of access, trust, audience segmentation, and communication purpose. Traditional media remains valuable in scenarios where cultural credibility, local dialects, or low-literacy conditions make digital media less effective. On the other hand, digital platforms provide unmatched advantages for interactive, low-cost, and large-scale outreach, especially in real-time crisis

management, promotional campaigns, and youth mobilization. Many successful campaigns in Mahakoshal such as rural vaccination drives, local election awareness programs, and environmental clean-up initiatives used hybrid models that blended newspaper announcements with social media videos, or radio jingles with WhatsApp reminders. These multi-channel strategies proved to be the most inclusive and impactful, reflecting the socio-economic and technological diversity of the region. From a public relations perspective, the evolving landscape demands adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and technological competency. Professionals who can master both spheres writing a compelling press release for a Hindi daily and simultaneously managing a viral hashtag campaign are increasingly in demand. Ultimately, the research concludes that Mahakoshal's communication environment is not experiencing a binary shift from traditional to digital, but rather a layered transformation where coexistence is both a strategic choice and a practical necessity. As access to digital tools continues to grow and traditional outlets evolve, this coexistence may gradually redefine not only the media ecology but also the social contract between communicators and communities in Mahakoshal.

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