



News Habits of Maithili-Speaking Youth: A Comparison of Regional and National Media

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the news consumption habits of Maithili-speaking youth in India, examining the divergence between regional-language media engagement and the consumption of national (Hindi and English) media platforms. Although Maithili occupies a constitutionally recognised position under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, its functional presence within the contemporary digital media ecosystem remains critically limited. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study draws upon a structured survey administered to 100 respondents aged 12 to 25 years, alongside a qualitative content analysis of both regional Maithili-language and national media outlets. The quantitative data reveal that 73 per cent of respondents consume news on a daily basis; however, a striking 80 per cent reported that they almost never consume news in the Maithili language, with the overwhelming majority expressing a preference for Hindi and English media. Three principal structural factors underpin this pattern: the limited availability of Maithili-language digital and print content, inadequate institutional support for regional-language journalism, and the dominance of Hindi and English within the formal education system. The study identifies a pronounced policy-practice gap wherein

constitutional and policy-level recognition of Maithili has not translated into corresponding media visibility or consumption among youth. A conceptual research framework integrating language policy theory, media ecology, and sociocultural linguistic theory situates the findings within the broader scholarly debate on linguistic pluralism and democratic media participation. The paper concludes with targeted, evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, media organisations, and civil society directed at revitalising Maithili-language media and fostering substantive engagement among younger audiences.

1. Research Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates three mutually reinforcing theoretical traditions: (a) language policy and planning theory; (b) media ecology theory; and (c) sociocultural linguistic theory. These traditions are not independently sufficient for explaining the complex phenomenon under investigation. Their analytical power lies in their intersection, which forms the epistemological foundation of the present inquiry.

1.1 Language Policy and Planning Theory

Language policy theory, as foundationally articulated by Fishman (1991)^{xxix} and subsequently systematised by Spolsky (2004)^{xxiv}, holds that the formal endorsement of a language within a state's legal architecture does not guarantee its functional vitality in everyday communicative practices. Spolsky distinguishes three analytically separable dimensions: language policy as a formal declaration; language practices as what speakers actually do; and language management as the deliberate effort to modify those practices. The Maithili case exemplifies the tension between a formally articulated language policy (Eighth Schedule inclusion; the provisions of NEP 2020) and actual language practices (near-complete absence from youth news consumption), demonstrating that effective language management interventions are urgently required.

Bourdieu's (1991)^{xxii} concept of linguistic capital enriches this dimension further. Bourdieu argues that languages function within a marketplace of symbolic exchange in which certain languages accumulate prestige and social currency while others are devalued. The historical dominance of Hindi and English in India's educational and administrative apparatus has rendered these languages disproportionately rich in



linguistic capital, while Maithili, notwithstanding its constitutional status, continues to be symbolically devalued within formal domains, reproducing the policy-practice gap across successive generations.

1.2 Media Ecology Theory

Media ecology theory, drawing principally from McQuail (2010)^{vii} and Schramm (1964)^{xxiii}, foregrounds the systemic conditions under which media consumption occurs. Media platforms are understood not as neutral conduits but as environments shaped by economic, technological, and linguistic forces that in turn shape audience practices. The dominance of Hindi and English in India's digital media ecosystem is the product of historically accumulated commercial investment and state patronage that has systematically excluded minority languages from the informational public sphere.

Habermas (1989)^{xxi} provides an indispensable lens through the concept of the public sphere: a space of rational-critical debate through which democratic legitimacy is generated and contested. When the media constituting the public sphere operate predominantly in languages that many citizens do not prefer for formal informational purposes, the conditions for genuine democratic inclusivity are fundamentally compromised. For the Maithili-speaking community, this translates directly into a constrained capacity for equal participation in democratic discourse.

1.3 Sociocultural Linguistic Theory

Sociocultural linguistic theory, informed principally by Crystal (2000)^{xx} and Fishman (1991)^{xix}, emphasises that language shift is embedded within broader socio-institutional forces rather than individual choice. The domain restriction of a minority language to informal contexts while a dominant language assumes its public functions is a well-documented precursor to language endangerment. This perspective enables the study to interpret Maithili-speaking youth's media preferences not as expressions of cultural indifference but as socially conditioned responses to a media environment that structurally affords them little meaningful choice.

[Figure 1: Conceptual Research Framework)

Language Policy Theory (Fishman; Spolsky; Bourdieu)

Constitutional Recognition vs. Functional Language Use and Symbolic Capital





Media Ecology Theory (McQuail; Habermas; Schramm)

Structural Conditions of Media Availability, Access, and Democratic Participation



Sociocultural Linguistic Theory (Crystal; Fishman)

Youth Identity, Domain Restriction, Education, and Intergenerational Language Shift



Youth News Consumption: Maithili Regional Media vs. Hindi and English National Media

2. Introduction

India is a nation of extraordinary linguistic plurality, with several hundred languages and dialects woven into the fabric of its social, cultural, and political life. This diversity is formally acknowledged in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which lists 22 languages as deserving state recognition, promotion, and development. In principle, this constitutional framework affirms a commitment to preserving and advancing India's linguistic heritage. In practice, however, formal recognition does not uniformly translate into equitable representation across the institutions of public life. The domain that reveals this disparity most acutely is the domain of media, where the commercial and structural logic of the information economy has overwhelmingly privileged Hindi and English at the expense of the country's regional languages.

Maithili is spoken primarily in the Mithila region of Bihar and eastern Jharkhand, as well as across the Terai belt of south-eastern Nepal. It is among the oldest continuously spoken literary languages of South Asia, with a rich written tradition extending over more than six centuries. The language is most famously associated with the medieval poet Vidyapati, whose compositions in Maithili continue to be recited in religious ceremonies and sung at cultural gatherings across the Mithila region to this day, constituting a living literary heritage of profound cultural significance. Despite this extraordinary heritage, and despite its constitutional recognition through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003, Maithili continues to occupy a structurally marginal position within the contemporary Indian media landscape, in both its print and digital dimensions.



The historical trajectory of this marginalisation is inseparable from the broader politics of language in post-independence India. The gradual consolidation of Hindi as the dominant language of administration, education, and public communication in the decades following independence systematically undermined the institutional foundations upon which the public use of regional languages like Maithili had historically rested. Schools and universities shifted to Hindi and English as the primary media of instruction, government offices conducted their business in Hindi, and national media platforms invested heavily in Hindi and English content. Maithili, like many other regional languages, found itself progressively restricted to the domains of domestic life, cultural ritual, and informal community communication.

The emergence and rapid proliferation of digital media over the past two decades has not reversed this trend; if anything, it has intensified it. Mobile devices, social networking platforms, and online news aggregators have collectively displaced print newspapers, radio, and broadcast television as the dominant channels of information access, particularly for younger demographic cohorts.^{xii} In the Indian context, the digital revolution has been overwhelmingly mediated through Hindi and English language platforms, which possess the commercial infrastructure, algorithmic visibility, and institutional support necessary to dominate the digital information environment. Regional languages such as Maithili, lacking these advantages, have been further marginalised within an information ecosystem that increasingly operates as if they do not exist.

The socio-educational landscape compounds this structural disadvantage in a particularly consequential way. An increasing proportion of Maithili-speaking youth receives formal education in Hindi or English medium institutions, acquiring functional proficiency in dominant languages as a prerequisite for academic achievement and professional mobility.^x The result is a linguistic bifurcation that is characteristic of minority language communities under pressure: the mother tongue is retained as the language of private cultural identity, family affection, and communal ritual, while the dominant languages of education and formal communication colonise the public and informational dimensions of life. Maithili-speaking youth thus inhabit a complex and often unarticulated tension between the language of their cultural identity and the languages of their informational and professional worlds.

This paper investigates the news consumption habits of Maithili-speaking youth with systematic empirical rigour, examining the extent to which they engage with regional Maithili-language media as compared to national (Hindi and English) media. The study traces the structural, institutional, and sociocultural determinants of the observed consumption patterns, and documents the policy-practice gap



between India's formal constitutional language commitments and the lived media behaviour of Maithili-speaking youth. In so doing, it aims to contribute both original empirical data and policy-relevant analytical insights to the growing scholarly discourse on regional language media, digital media transformation, and linguistic pluralism in contemporary India. The stakes of this inquiry extend beyond academic interest alone: they touch upon the fundamental question of whether India's constitutionally proclaimed commitment to linguistic pluralism can survive the structural pressures of the digital age.

2.1 Significance of the Study

This study carries significance along three interconnected dimensions. Theoretically, it advances the application of language policy theory, media ecology, and sociocultural linguistics to a South Asian minority-language context that has been systematically neglected in the scholarly literature. Empirically, it generates the first systematic quantitative dataset on the news consumption habits of Maithili-speaking youth, filling a lacuna that has hampered evidence-based advocacy and policymaking. Practically, the findings provide directly actionable insights for media organisations, policymakers, and educational institutions whose decisions will determine whether Maithili survives as a functional language of public discourse in the digital age.

2.2 Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions are employed consistently throughout this study:

Youth: Individuals aged 12 to 25 years, encompassing secondary school, undergraduate, and postgraduate student cohorts. This range is consistent with the United Nations definition of youth and aligns broadly with the National Youth Policy of India (2014).

News Consumption: The act of regularly accessing and engaging with journalistic content concerning current events, public affairs, politics, or social issues through any medium, including print newspapers, broadcast television, radio, online news portals, social media platforms, or news aggregator applications.

Regional Media: News outlets, platforms, and channels operating primarily or exclusively in the Maithili language and oriented towards the Maithili-speaking community of the Mithila region and its diaspora. This is distinguished from National Media, referring to outlets operating primarily in Hindi or English and serving pan-Indian audiences.



Language Shift: The process by which a speech community, or a segment of it, progressively adopts a language other than its mother tongue for communicative functions previously performed in the mother tongue. Language shift in this study is understood as a structural and socially conditioned phenomenon, consistent with the theoretical framework elaborated in Section 1.

3. Literature Review

The scholarly literature relevant to this study spans three intersecting domains: (a) language use, vitality, and shift within Maithili-speaking communities; (b) digital media transformation and youth news consumption in India; and (c) the relationship between language representation in media and democratic participation. A critical synthesis of each domain follows.

3.1 Language Shift and the Sociolinguistic Position of Maithili

The sociolinguistic literature on Maithili documents a measurable and accelerating process of functional language shift, particularly among urban and educated young speakers. Kumar and Goyal (2022)ⁱ conducted a detailed sociolinguistic survey of Maithili-speaking communities in Bihar and documented a progressive reduction in the use of Maithili within formal and semi-formal communicative contexts. Social mobility, urbanisation, and sustained exposure to structurally dominant languages are identified as the principal drivers. Jha (2021)ⁱⁱ systematically documented Maithili's limited digital footprint, attributing this to inadequate technological infrastructure and the absence of professional content producers working in the language.

Priya, Lata, and Choudhary (2021)^x provide quantitative evidence that while Maithili remains predominant in home and family communication, it is rarely deployed in formal or informational contexts, a textbook manifestation of domain restriction. Jha (2018)^{ix} situates this within a longer historical trajectory, documenting how Hindi's post-independence assertion as the dominant language of administration systematically eroded the institutional foundations of Maithili's public use. Prakash (2018)^{xi} extends this analysis, arguing that the hegemony of Hindi over Maithili constitutes a political rather than merely linguistic phenomenon.

The Census of India (2011)^{xxv} records approximately 13.58 million Maithili speakers in India. However, this demographic scale has not translated into commensurate media representation. Kumar and Choudhary (2025)^{xvii} further observe that the natural language processing ecosystem for Maithili remains nascent, with minimal digital tools available to support Maithili-language digital media at scale.



3.2 Digital Media and Youth News Consumption in India

Kar, Sharma, and Dey (2018)ⁱⁱⁱ established that mobile-first youth audiences in India are increasingly reliant upon digital channels for news, with consequences particularly severe for regional languages lacking digital representation. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2024)^{xii} corroborates this, documenting that online and social media platforms have overtaken print newspapers as the primary news source for Indian youth, with Hindi and English platforms commanding the vast majority of digital audience share.

Kaur and Gadhoke (2024)^{xiii} examine algorithmic recommendation systems, arguing that these amplify dominant-language content while de-prioritising minority-language material, reinforcing linguistic marginalisation through a self-perpetuating feedback cycle. Oppili and Padmanabhan (2022)^{xiv} document declining readership of regional-language print newspapers among college students, with digital aggregators displacing active regional-language reading habits.

Ken Research (2023)^{xv} notes that vernacular digital news market growth is concentrated in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu, leaving smaller scheduled languages including Maithili commercially underserved. Dalberg Advisors (2021)^{xvi} observe that sustainability models for minority-language digital journalism remain structurally underdeveloped, constrained by inadequate advertising revenues and absent coordinated state intervention.

3.3 Language, Media Representation, and Democratic Participation

Chakravartty and Roy (2016)^{vi} argue that genuine media pluralism in multilingual democracies requires substantive linguistic representation across outlets, commensurate with the demographic significance of the languages concerned. Where languages are systematically underrepresented in media, their speakers are correspondingly disadvantaged in their capacity to access information and exercise the communicative rights associated with democratic citizenship.

Habermas (1989)^{xxi} provides a theoretical lens through the public sphere concept, while McQuail (2010)^{vii} and Gans (1979)^{viii} illuminate the systemic commercial biases disadvantaging minority-language journalism. Schramm (1964)^{xxiii} reminds us that the relationship between media infrastructure and language vitality is shaped by deliberate policy choices. Gautam and Poudel (2022)^{iv} demonstrate that institutionalised exposure to a dominant language in formal settings produces the functional displacement



of minority languages. Avant Garde Solutions (2023)^v corroborate this in the Indian digital context, documenting strong homogenising pressures particularly among youth.

4. Research Gap

The following section identifies the specific scholarly lacunae that this study directly addresses, establishing its original contribution to the field.

4.1 Absence of Media-Centric Empirical Studies. Existing scholarship on Maithili is predominantly historical, cultural, or broadly sociolinguistic in orientation. Empirical studies examining the media consumption behaviour of Maithili-speaking youth using primary quantitative data are conspicuously absent. This study fills this lacuna with original survey data from 100 Maithili-speaking youth respondents.

4.2 Lack of Comparative Analysis. Systematic comparative analysis of the relative engagement of Maithili-speaking youth with regional Maithili media versus dominant-language national media is absent from the literature. Such comparison is essential for understanding the mechanisms of linguistic marginalisation within the Indian media ecosystem.

4.3 Insufficient Quantitative Data on Language Shift. The existing literature on language shift among Maithili speakers is largely qualitative or ethnographic. Quantitative data documenting the degree to which Maithili-speaking youth have migrated toward dominant-language media alternatives, and identifying the structural drivers of this migration, remain limited.

4.4 Underexplored Policy-Practice Disjuncture. Despite Maithili's constitutional recognition and inclusion in NEP 2020, very little research has examined how formal commitments translate into changes in media production, institutional support, or youth media behaviour. This study contributes directly and substantively to this critical but underexplored dimension.

5. Rationale of the Study

5.1 The Disjuncture Between Constitutional Recognition and Functional Media Usage

Maithili's inclusion in the Eighth Schedule represents a formal acknowledgement of its cultural and demographic importance. However, this recognition has not generated commensurate improvements in the visibility, accessibility, or consumption of Maithili-language media among youth, who constitute the



language's most critical constituency for intergenerational continuity. The disjuncture between policy endorsement and lived media practice constitutes a paradox of considerable scholarly and policy significance.

5.2 The Digital Turn and the Intensification of Linguistic Marginalisation

The proliferation of digital media has intensified linguistic marginalisation by embedding it within the commercial and algorithmic logic of platform capitalism. Without a robust and algorithmically discoverable digital presence, regional-language media cannot compete for the sustained attention of youth who navigate the information landscape predominantly through smartphones and curated content feeds. This study captures these dynamics at a critical historical juncture and is therefore both timely and analytically significant.

5.3 The Imperative of Empirical Evidence for Policy and Practice

The absence of systematic empirical data has constrained the capacity of policymakers and advocacy groups to develop evidence-based strategies. By generating quantitative data on consumption patterns and identifying structural determinants of language preference, this study provides the empirical foundation necessary for targeted and effective interventions directed at reversing the observed trend of Maithili marginalisation within the media domain.

6. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following specific research questions:

RQ1: What are the prevailing news consumption patterns, in terms of frequency, preferred medium, and language of choice, among Maithili-speaking youth in India?

RQ2: To what extent do Maithili-speaking youth engage with Maithili-language regional media relative to Hindi and English national media?

RQ3: What are the principal structural, institutional, and sociocultural factors accounting for the observed preference for Hindi and English media?

RQ4: What is the nature and extent of the policy-practice gap between the constitutional recognition of Maithili and the observed media consumption behaviour of Maithili-speaking youth?



7. Research Objectives

In consonance with the research questions above, this study pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To document and describe the news consumption habits of Maithili-speaking youth, including frequency, preferred media platforms, and preferred language of content.
2. To measure and compare the relative engagement of Maithili-speaking youth with Maithili-language regional media versus Hindi and English national media.
3. To identify and analyse the structural, institutional, and sociocultural factors contributing to the marginalisation of Maithili-language media in youth news consumption.
4. To examine the policy-practice gap between constitutional recognition of Maithili and observable media consumption behaviour among youth.
5. To formulate evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, media organisations, and educational institutions directed at strengthening Maithili-language media consumption among youth.

8. Methodology

8.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative survey-based data collection with qualitative content analysis. The combination permits triangulation of findings, enhancing validity, completeness, and interpretive depth, ensuring that quantitative patterns and qualitative structural contexts are considered in concert rather than in isolation.

8.2 Quantitative Component: Structured Survey

The quantitative dimension was operationalised through a structured survey administered to 100 respondents aged 12 to 25 years, spanning educational levels from secondary school through to postgraduate study. The instrument elicited information concerning news consumption frequency, preferred media platforms, language of preferred content, reasons for language preference, and the domestic newspaper-reading environment. Participants were recruited from schools and universities in Maithili-speaking regions using snowball sampling to ensure access to respondents embedded within the



relevant linguistic community. Quantitative data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis including frequency distributions and percentage calculations.

8.3 Survey Instrument

The structured survey instrument comprised 12 items organised across four thematic modules: (a) general news consumption frequency and preferred media platforms; (b) language of preferred content and reasons for language preference; (c) frequency of Maithili-language news consumption; and (d) household media environment. Response formats included five-point frequency scales, multiple-choice options, and rank-ordering tasks. The instrument was reviewed by academic peers prior to deployment and piloted with a small group of five respondents to assess clarity and item comprehensibility, with minor revisions made on the basis of pilot feedback. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the core attitudinal items was computed at 0.74, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

8.4 Qualitative Component: Content Analysis

The qualitative dimension comprised a systematic content analysis of a purposively selected sample of regional Maithili-language news outlets alongside national (Hindi and English) news outlets. The outlets analysed included Mithila Mitra and Maithil (Maithili print), Mithila Mirror (digital), alongside Dainik Jagran and The Hindu (Hindi and English national comparators). The analysis assessed the availability of Maithili-language news content, the depth and breadth of its coverage relative to dominant-language outlets, the quality of digital platform design, and the provision of audience engagement features. Thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to identify recurring structural conditions in the Maithili media landscape. To ensure analytical rigour, inter-coder reliability was assessed through independent coding by two of the research team members on a sub-sample of 20 per cent of the content units analysed; the resulting Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.81 indicates strong agreement and supports the reliability of the thematic categories applied.

8.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered throughout to standard ethical protocols. Participation was entirely voluntary, with all respondents providing informed consent. The anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents were rigorously maintained. No personally identifiable information is reproduced in this paper.



8.6 Limitations

The sample size of 100 respondents, while appropriate for this study's exploratory and descriptive purposes, constrains generalisability to the broader Maithili-speaking youth population. The use of snowball sampling introduces the possibility of sample homogeneity and network-based bias. The study's primary geographic focus on Bihar means that Maithili-speaking communities in Nepal and major metropolitan diaspora centres are not fully represented. Furthermore, the present study does not disaggregate findings by gender or by urban-rural residential status, both of which are likely to be significant variables in shaping media consumption behaviour among Maithili-speaking youth. The household newspaper-reading data (Table 5) were collected using descriptive categorical labels rather than precise numerical frequencies, which limits the quantitative precision of analysis in that dimension. Future research employing larger, geographically diverse, and fully stratified samples that incorporate gender and urban-rural residence as explicit analytical variables would substantially strengthen the evidential basis of the conclusions presented here.

9. Findings

This section presents the findings of the structured survey administered to 100 Maithili-speaking youth respondents. All data are presented descriptively without interpretive commentary, which is reserved for Sections 10 and 11.

9.1 Frequency of News Consumption

| Frequency of News Consumption | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Daily | 73 |
| Weekly | 9 |
| Rarely | 14 |
| Never | 4 |

Table 1: Frequency of News Consumption Among Maithili-Speaking Youth (N = 100)

82% of Maithili-speaking youth surveyed consume news at least weekly, yet 80% almost never do so in their mother tongue.



A significant majority (73 per cent) reported consuming news on a daily basis. The combined daily and weekly figure of 82 per cent indicates that the overwhelming majority of respondents are regular news consumers.

9.2 Preferred Language for News Consumption

| Language | Preference Ranking |
|----------|-----------------------|
| English | 1st (Most Preferred) |
| Hindi | 2nd |
| Maithili | 3rd (Least Preferred) |

Table 2: Language Preference for News Consumption Among Maithili-Speaking Youth (N = 100)

Despite Maithili being the mother tongue of all respondents, it was identified as the least preferred language. English emerged as the most preferred, followed by Hindi, documenting a striking inversion of linguistic identity and informational media practice.

9.3 Frequency of Consuming Maithili-Language News

| Frequency of Maithili News Consumption | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Almost Never | 80 |
| Sometimes | 16 |
| Regularly | 4 |

Table 3: Frequency of Maithili-Language News Consumption Among Respondents (N = 100)

A striking 80 per cent reported almost never consuming news in Maithili, while only 4 per cent did so regularly. These figures document the severe functional marginalisation of Maithili as a language of news consumption even among its native-speaking youth.

9.4 Primary Reasons for Preferring Hindi and English Over Maithili

| Primary Reason for Language Preference | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------|
|--|----------------|

| Primary Reason for Language Preference | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------|
| Greater number and variety of Hindi/English news sources available | 41.4 |
| Lack of awareness of Maithili-language news sources | 36.4 |
| Educational background in Hindi/English medium institutions | 22.2 |

Table 4: Primary Reasons for Preferring Hindi/English Over Maithili for News Consumption ($N = 100$)

All cited reasons are structural and institutional in character: the abundance of Hindi and English sources (41.4 per cent), the invisibility of Maithili alternatives (36.4 per cent), and the formative influence of dominant-language schooling (22.2 per cent). Read in conjunction with Table 2, which established Maithili as the least preferred language for news consumption overall, Table 4 clarifies that this preference inversion is not volitional but is structurally produced by the conditions of availability, visibility, and educational habituation.

9.5 Household Newspaper-Reading Environment

| Household Newspaper-Reading Situation | Prevalence Among Respondents |
|---|------------------------------|
| No physical newspaper at home | Majority |
| Occasional purchase | Moderate |
| Subscription (typically by older household members) | Minority |
| Daily reading by youth respondent personally | Very Low |

Table 5: Household Newspaper-Reading Environment as Reported by Respondents ($N = 100$)

The data indicate a widespread decline in print newspaper consumption. Where subscriptions exist, they are typically maintained by older household members, indicating a generational rupture in newspaper reading with particular implications for Maithili-language print journalism.



9.6 Qualitative Content Analysis: Media Landscape Assessment

The content analysis of selected Maithili-language and national media outlets revealed several structurally significant patterns that contextualise and corroborate the survey findings. Maithili-language print newspapers, including Mithila Mitra and Maithil, were found to publish predominantly locally focused content covering cultural events, regional political news, and agricultural developments. Their digital presence was either absent or severely limited: none of the Maithili print outlets analysed maintained a fully functional mobile-optimised website, nor did any operate a dedicated social media channel producing regular news content. Coverage frequency was irregular, with several outlets publishing weekly or fortnightly rather than daily.

Maithili digital-only outlets, including Mithila Mirror and several YouTube-based Maithili news channels, demonstrated more consistent publishing frequency but suffered from limited reach and discoverability. A systematic search for Maithili-language news content on Google News and the YouTube news section returned minimal results relative to comparable searches in Hindi and English, confirming the algorithmic invisibility of Maithili media. In contrast, the national Hindi and English comparator outlets (Dainik Jagran and The Hindu) maintained comprehensively designed mobile-responsive platforms, active social media channels with multiple daily posts, and sophisticated content recommendation and archival systems. The structural asymmetry between the two media ecosystems was stark and directly aligned with the consumption patterns documented in the survey data: the digital media environment has not merely failed to amplify Maithili-language journalism; it has actively marginalised it through architectural design and algorithmic prioritisation.

10. Survey Analysis

10.1 High News Engagement Coexisting with Structural Language Displacement

The 73 per cent daily news consumption rate challenges assumptions regarding youth disengagement from news media and is consistent with national-level studies of Indian youth.^{xiii} However, this high level of general engagement does not correspond to any meaningful consumption of Maithili-language media. The disjuncture between cultural identity and informational media behaviour is structurally determined rather than attitudinally driven.



10.2 Structural Rather Than Attitudinal Language Shift

The reasons cited for preferring Hindi and English are structural and institutional rather than expressions of cultural disaffiliation. The abundance of Hindi and English sources (41.4 per cent), the invisibility of Maithili alternatives (36.4 per cent), and the formative influence of dominant-language schooling (22.2 per cent) collectively indicate that marginalisation is a consequence of structural media deficits and institutional hierarchies rather than any deliberate rejection of Maithili identity.

10.3 The Digital Transition and the Structural Crisis of Maithili Print Media

The household data confirm the national trend of declining print media consumption among youth.^{xiv} Historically, Maithili newspapers such as Mithila Mitra and Maithil have been institutional anchors of Maithili-language public discourse. The collapse of print reading habits combined with the underdevelopment of digital alternatives has left younger generations with essentially no institutionalised contact with Maithili news media, a structural crisis requiring urgent remedial action.

10.4 Marginalisation by Structural Absence Rather Than Active Rejection

The most analytically significant conclusion is that the low consumption of Maithili-language news is driven not by indifference or deliberate identity rejection, but by the structural absence of Maithili from the available media landscape. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991)^{xxii} argument that the devaluation of a language within the symbolic marketplace of linguistic capital is a socially reproduced condition sustained through institutional arrangements, not a natural outcome of competition between linguistic equals.

11. Discussion

11.1 The Paradox of Cultural Affiliation and Mediated Disengagement

One of the most theoretically significant findings is the paradox between the cultural identity of Maithili-speaking youth and their media behaviour. While Maithili cultural practices including Chhath Puja, Saurath Sabha, and the living tradition of Vidyapati's compositions are observed with vigour across the Mithila region and its diaspora, this deep cultural affiliation does not extend to news consumption. This is a textbook manifestation of domain restriction: Maithili flourishes in intimate cultural contexts while being displaced from formal informational ones. Cultural identity alone, in the absence of institutional



support and structural media reform, is insufficient to sustain a minority language in the public informational sphere.

11.2 Education as a Structural Driver of Media Language Preference

The 22.2 per cent of respondents citing their Hindi or English-medium educational background as the primary reason for their media language preference represent the measurable influence of institutional linguistic socialisation. This finding is consistent with research across South Asian multilingual contexts^{iv} and reinforces the argument that educational policy is a primary lever for shaping media consumption habits across generations. Without serious investment in Maithili-medium foundational education, the formal education system will continue producing graduates functionally conditioned to seek news in Hindi and English, regardless of their mother-tongue identity.

11.3 Algorithmic Ecosystems and the Perpetuation of Linguistic Hierarchy

The structural role of digital ecosystems in perpetuating linguistic hierarchies is evident.ⁱⁱⁱ The finding that 36.4 per cent of respondents lacked awareness of Maithili news sources indicates that the problem is not merely one of content supply but of discoverability and platform visibility. Without interventions in search engine optimisation, social media strategy, and regulatory advocacy for algorithmic equity, Maithili news platforms will remain functionally inaccessible to large segments of the youth demographic regardless of content volume or quality.

11.4 Language Vitality, Democratic Inclusion, and the Urgency of Intervention

Crystal (2000)^{xx} has documented that the progressive restriction of a minority language to informal domains is a reliable precursor to language endangerment. If Maithili-speaking youth conduct their entire informational lives in Hindi and English, the intergenerational transmission of functional Maithili literacy in formal domains will be progressively undermined, and with it the preconditions for a viable Maithili-language media ecosystem.

Beyond cultural preservation, this carries implications for democratic inclusion. Drawing on Habermas (1989)^{xxi}, the marginalisation of Maithili from the media-constituted public sphere simultaneously marginalises its speakers from full democratic participation. A community compelled to access public information through acquired rather than native languages is not fully included in the democratic process,



regardless of formal constitutional recognition. This democratic dimension elevates the problem from a matter of cultural policy to a matter of constitutional obligation.

12. The Policy-Practice Gap

A central concern of this study is the disjuncture between formal, policy-level recognition of Maithili and the empirical reality of its media consumption among youth, characterised throughout this paper as the policy-practice gap.

12.1 Constitutional and Policy-Level Recognition

The constitutional recognition of Maithili through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 formally established its status as a scheduled language deserving state support. NEP 2020^{xxviii} articulates a clear commitment to mother-tongue education, recommending instruction in the home language as the preferred medium up to Grade 5 and, where feasible, beyond. The recognition of Maithili by the Sahitya Akademi, Maithili programming on All India Radio, the Sahitya Akademi Award for Maithili literature, and the designation of Maithili as a CBSE examination subject collectively attest to a substantial degree of formal institutional endorsement.

However, the implementation of these commitments in Bihar and Jharkhand remains uneven. The gap between stated policy and actual practice constitutes what Spolsky (2004)^{xxiv} would characterise as a failure of language management: policy has not been translated into practice through the institutional mechanisms, regulatory enforcement, or sustained resource allocation that effective language management requires.

12.2 The Reality of Implementation

The empirical findings of this study reveal that policy commitments have generated little measurable improvement in the media visibility or consumption of Maithili-language journalism among youth. The 80 per cent of respondents who almost never consume Maithili-language news, combined with the structural invisibility of Maithili media within the digital ecosystem, attest to this failure. The constitutional promise of linguistic pluralism remains unrealised in the lived informational experience of Maithili-speaking youth.



12.3 Dimensions of the Gap

The policy-practice gap operates across three interconnected dimensions. At the institutional level, there is a gap between the policy mandate and actual provision of Maithili-medium educational content, journalist training, and financial support for regional-language media. At the structural level, the algorithmic logic of dominant digital platforms excludes minority-language content from the discovery pathways through which youth access news. At the level of awareness and access, even youth with latent interest in Maithili-language media are unable to locate or navigate available platforms due to limited digital visibility and poor user-experience design.

13. Conclusion

This study has examined the news consumption habits of Maithili-speaking youth in India against the backdrop of a national media landscape that is structurally configured to marginalise regional languages. The empirical findings are both stark and illuminating. While Maithili-speaking youth demonstrate a high level of habitual news engagement, with 73 per cent reporting daily consumption, their engagement is mediated overwhelmingly through the channels of Hindi and English language media. A striking 80 per cent reported almost never consuming news in the Maithili language, the very tongue in which the medieval poet Vidyapati composed verses that are still sung at weddings and recited at temples across the Mithila region. The contrast between the cultural vitality of the language and its near-complete absence from the informational lives of its young speakers is both theoretically significant and deeply concerning.

The study demonstrates that this pattern is not a product of attitudinal rejection. Maithili-speaking youth do not turn away from their mother tongue out of contempt or cultural disaffiliation. They turn away because the media environment offers them no meaningful alternative: no accessible Maithili-language news portal optimised for mobile reading, no Maithili podcast to accompany a morning commute, no algorithmically visible Maithili news channel on the social media platforms they use daily. The problem is one of structural absence rather than individual preference, of institutional failure rather than personal choice. This distinction is analytically critical, because it implies that the solution lies not in persuading youth to value their language more, but in building the structural and institutional conditions under which that value can be expressed and sustained in the informational domain.

The study further documents a pronounced and multi-dimensional policy-practice gap. India's constitutional commitment to the scheduled languages, including Maithili, has not been matched by the institutional architecture, regulatory framework, or financial investment necessary to translate that



commitment into functional media vitality. NEP 2020's provisions on mother-tongue education, if rigorously and equitably implemented, offer a genuine avenue for generational change; but implementation has been slow, uneven, and inadequately resourced. The gap between what the Constitution promises and what Maithili-speaking youth actually experience in their informational lives is a democratic deficit that demands urgent and sustained attention from all stakeholders with a responsibility for India's linguistic heritage.

The revitalisation of Maithili-language media is not a peripheral cultural concern. It is a democratic imperative, a constitutional obligation, and a matter of informational justice. A nation that allows the informational infrastructure of a constitutionally recognised language to atrophy through inaction is a nation that has not yet fully honoured the aspirations of its most linguistically diverse communities. The present study offers, in the form of its empirical findings and its evidence-based recommendations, a modest but rigorous contribution toward the scholarly and policy conversation through which those aspirations might yet be realised.

13.1 Future Research Directions

The present study, while offering the first systematic empirical account of Maithili-speaking youth news consumption, necessarily operates within scope limitations that define a clear agenda for future scholarship. Future research should seek to replicate the survey with larger, stratified, and geographically more representative samples, encompassing both the Maithili-speaking diaspora in metropolitan centres and the Maithili-speaking community in the Terai region of Nepal. Longitudinal studies tracking the same cohort over time would provide insights into whether media consumption patterns shift as respondents progress through the education system. Comparative studies examining analogous language communities, including Bhojpuri, Dogri, and Bodo speakers, would illuminate whether the policy-practice gap documented here is specific to Maithili or characteristic of scheduled minority languages more broadly. Finally, experimental studies testing the impact of targeted interventions such as school-based Maithili media literacy programmes, or the introduction of algorithmically optimised Maithili digital news portals, on the news consumption behaviour of young Maithili speakers would provide the causal evidence base currently absent from this field.

14. Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented on the basis of the empirical findings of this study and are directed at the four principal categories of stakeholders.



14.1 For Government and Policymakers

1. **Establish a dedicated Maithili Language Media Development Fund.** A ring-fenced, independently administered fund within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting should provide sustainable support for Maithili-language journalism, digital content production, and public broadcasting, prioritising youth-oriented digital platforms. Doordarshan and All India Radio stations serving Maithili-speaking regions should be directed to allocate dedicated airtime to Maithili-language news and current affairs.
2. **Implement a Regional Language Digital Visibility Policy.** The Press Council of India, in coordination with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, should develop enforceable minimum standards for the digital discoverability of scheduled-language journalism on major platforms, drawing upon comparable frameworks such as the European Union's Digital Services Act.
3. **Ensure full implementation of NEP 2020 mother-tongue provisions.** State governments in Bihar and Jharkhand should be held to rigorous account for the timely realisation of the NEP 2020 mother-tongue instruction commitment, requiring large-scale Maithili-medium textbook production, teacher training, and integration of Maithili-language media literacy into the school curriculum.

14.2 For Media Organisations and Journalists

4. **Invest in the digital transformation of Maithili-language media.** Existing Maithili-language newspapers and broadcast media should invest urgently in responsive web design, mobile applications, and search engine optimisation. Maithili-language news podcasts and short-form social media content offer low-cost avenues for recapturing the digital-native youth demographic.
5. **Develop youth-centric and interactive content strategies.** Maithili-language news platforms should commission content engaging youth audiences on higher education, employment, and digital culture. Interactive features including reader polls, community discussion forums, and comment sections conducted in Maithili would foster active participation and community ownership among young readers.



14.3 For Educational Institutions

6. **Integrate Maithili language and media literacy into formal curricula.** School curricula in Maithili-speaking regions should incorporate compulsory modules in Maithili language proficiency and media literacy, including critical engagement with Maithili-language newspapers and broadcast media. At the university level, courses in Maithili literature and language should be strengthened, developing the formal register students require to engage with news and public discourse in the language.
7. **Create affirming institutional spaces for Maithili language use.** Educational institutions should promote Maithili in school debates, cultural events, and elocution competitions. Annual Maithili Language Days, Vidyapati Smriti Samaroh events, and inter-institutional Maithili oratory competitions would counteract the symbolic devaluation that currently discourages young speakers from using Maithili in educated and public contexts.

14.4 For Civil Society and Community Organisations

8. **Launch a sustained public campaign to promote Maithili pride and active language use.** Community and cultural organisations should develop a high-visibility campaign projecting a contemporary and aspirational image of Maithili through social media, literary figures, and community events. Maithili-language public speaking forums, storytelling events, and literary discussions in Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai would create affirming public spaces that normalise using Maithili in formal and semi-formal contexts.
9. **Support community-based Maithili media and academic research.** Civil society organisations should support grassroots Maithili media initiatives including community radio stations and hyperlocal news portals. Academic institutions should be encouraged to establish dedicated research centres on Maithili language, media, and culture, generating the sustained empirical evidence base required for ongoing policy and media development.

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