

**EMPOWERING RURAL JOURNALISM IN ANDHRA PRADESH:
IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES AND PATHWAYS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT:

The present article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the hurdles and opportunities that define the realm of rural journalism. By scrutinizing the multifaceted roles of rural journalists, this study aims to illuminate their critical contributions to the region's media landscape. Through an in-depth examination of the obstacles encountered by rural journalists, including limited access to information, political and economic influences, and resource constraints, we seek to offer a holistic understanding of the challenges they confront daily. Concurrently, we highlight the potential for growth and development within rural journalism, emphasizing opportunities such as specialized reporting in areas like agriculture, community engagement, and advocacy for positive change. Furthermore, this article underscores the importance of collaboration between rural and urban media outlets and journalists, facilitating the amplification of the impact of rural journalism. Ultimately, this article serves as a call to action, advocating for the recognition and empowerment of rural journalism in Andhra Pradesh. By identifying the obstacles and pathways for development, we aim to deepen the understanding of the pivotal role these journalists play in shaping the future of rural communities and the state as a whole.

Key Words: rural journalists, media landscape, empowerment of rural journalism.

INTRODUCTION:

Journalism, often regarded as the Fourth Estate, is a formidable pillar of democracy, serving as a watchdog, a conduit for information, and a voice for the people. While urban journalism frequently takes center stage, it's essential to recognize the significance and unique characteristics of rural journalism.

Rural journalism is the dedicated practice of collecting, reporting, and disseminating news and information from rural areas and communities. These communities, often situated far from the urban centers, hold their own distinct challenges, opportunities, and stories that deserve attention. The practice of rural journalism involves a deep connection with the local community, understanding its culture, and addressing the issues that matter most to the people living in these areas.

In this specialized field of journalism, rural journalists play a pivotal role in keeping rural populations informed, advocating for their needs, and contributing to the overall well-being of these communities. They are not just reporters; they are storytellers who unravel the unique tapestry of rural life, capturing the essence of rural culture, traditions, challenges, and aspirations. Rural journalism encompasses a wide array of topics, from agriculture and rural economies to local governance, healthcare, environmental issues, and cultural preservation. Rural journalists wear many hats, often functioning as not just reporters but also advocates for community development, guardians of accountability, and ambassadors for rural voices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Muurlink, O., & Marx, E. V. (2023), In terms of communicating sustainable development goals to the public, print newspapers are part of the discourse, but are they part of the solution to sustainable rural and regional communities? COVID-19 coincided with a global print journalism crisis. This research uses a variety of secondary and primary data sources to paint a paradoxical picture of a rural and regional journalism renaissance focused on survival rather than the activist origins of early independent media in the country. In addition to increasing social capital, the new papers focus less on political and financial transparency. The new generation of rural and regional titles may be in their infancy, but with the digital gap in Australia shrinking, they may not have long to evolve.

Perreault, G., Moon, et al. (2022), According to rural journalists in the US, deep community ties and limited resources make them scared to report on hate organizations. Our study analyzes in-depth interviews with 33 U.S. journalists in rural regions to explore their reporting on “hate speech” as a border item. Rural journalists define hate speech but struggle to apply it to community activities, even when they list many sorts of hatred. Journalists often used the term “not hate, but ...” to refer to actions that were inappropriate but not considered hate speech and so not worth reporting on. This method challenges journalists' normative responsibilities to their communities and shows their aim to evade objectivity.

Mahamed, M., Omar, et. al. (2018), Rural residents have used the internet to express multiple opinions. Media coverage of rural development was often minimal. Rural communities have sought alternate forums to showcase their development due to limited access to mainstream media. Information and communication technology (ICT) and digitalization innovation are giving people more platforms to voice out and take action on issues they care about and that mainstream media has ignored, including rural community sustainability. Citizen journalism helps rural communities get and report news, connect them to virtual news outlets, and ensure their voice is heard to start actions and mobilization for a more sustainable rural community. This article examines how citizen journalism may empower communities through freedom of expression by providing hyperlocal stories about local challenges and interests. Previous research suggests rural areas worldwide join the expanding number of citizen journalists.

Fisher, C., Nolan, D., McGuinness, K., & Park, S. (2022), Between January 2019 and February 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused nearly 200 journalistic outlets to close, reduce service, terminate print editions, or consolidate. Regional news outlets were severely hit, highlighting the need for government and business actions to boost the sector. Local and regional journalistic role performance scholarship is well-established in Australia, but few studies have examined TV, radio, online news, and print journalists' perspectives. This research uses survey data from 307 regional Australian journalists and 31 in-depth interviews to fill this gap. Our data shows that regional reporters understand and narrate their duties differently across media platforms, which is crucial in current debates about the sustainability of Australian rural journalism.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To identify the demographic profile of the respondents.
- To analyse the problems faced by the journalists.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

H₀₂: There is no significant effect of Age of respondent on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

H₀₃: There is no significant effect of Income of the respondent on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The method of study used is a descriptive one. Data collected by using multistage random sampling. The first stage randomly 4 (Anantapur, Krishna, Prakasam and Vizianagaram) districts are selected out of 26 districts. In the second stage in each district 4 mandals are selected. Stage three from each mandal 10 random responses were collected from the rural area. Respondents were interviewed and surveyed using a standardized questionnaire for this research 160 respondents. Journals, magazines, newspapers (especially business newspapers), subject-specific books, and websites are some of the places where secondary data may be found. The statistical analyses were performed using ANOVAs and t-test (Welch test) in SPSS 27.0.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to evaluate internal consistency, social scientists utilised Cronbach's alpha to test the dependability of a scale (Schmitt, 1996). In addition to these methods, the mean, standard deviation, and variance were computed and used at various levels of data analysis. The Cronbach's alpha value for 22 parameters was 0.781, indicating the reliability of the scale.

Table1: Demographic profile of Respondents

| Parameter & Description | No. of Respondents | % |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Gender | | |
| ➤ Male | 160 | 100.0 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| ➤ Female | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Education qualification | | |
| ➤ Graduation | 126 | 78.8 |
| ➤ Post-graduation | 34 | 21.3 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Caste | | |
| ➤ OC | 32 | 20.0 |
| ➤ BC | 41 | 25.6 |
| ➤ SC | 53 | 33.1 |
| ➤ ST | 34 | 21.3 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status | | |
| ➤ Married | 108 | 67.5 |
| ➤ Unmarried | 52 | 32.5 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Location | | |
| ➤ Anantapur | 40 | 25.0 |
| ➤ Krishna | 40 | 25.0 |
| ➤ Prakasam | 40 | 25.0 |
| ➤ Vizianagaram | 40 | 25.0 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Personal Income (monthly) | | |
| ➤ Less than Rs 5,000 | 34 | 21.3 |
| ➤ Between Rs 5,001 to 10,000 | 51 | 31.9 |
| ➤ Between Rs 10,001 to 15,000 | 46 | 28.8 |
| ➤ More than Rs 15,000 | 29 | 18.1 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Religion | | |
| ➤ Hindu | 103 | 64.4 |
| ➤ Islam | 38 | 23.8 |
| ➤ Christian | 19 | 11.9 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |
| Age (in Years) | | |
| ➤ Below 25 | 32 | 20.0 |
| ➤ Between 26 to 30 | 50 | 31.3 |
| ➤ Between 31 to 40 | 42 | 26.3 |
| ➤ Above 40 | 36 | 22.5 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 |

Table 1 analyzes the demographic profile of the respondent. The survey aimed to collect information on various parameters such as gender, education, caste, marital status, personal income, religion, and age of the respondents.

- The table reveals that all the respondents are male, which indicates a lack of gender diversity in the sample. The table also shows that the majority of the respondents have graduation as their education qualification (78.8%), followed by post-graduation (21.3%). This suggests that the respondents are well-educated and have a high level of literacy.
- The table also shows the caste distribution of the respondents, which is an important social factor in India. The table shows that the largest proportion of the respondents belong to SC caste (33.1%), followed by BC caste (25.6%), ST caste (21.3%), and OC caste (20.0%).
- The table also shows the marital status of the respondents, which is another important demographic variable. The table shows that the majority of the respondents are married (67.5%), while the remaining are unmarried (32.5%). This suggests that the respondents are mostly in a stable family situation and have a spouse or partner.
- The table also shows the location of the respondents, which is the geographical variable of the survey. The table shows that the respondents are evenly distributed across the four districts, with 40 respondents from each district. This indicates that the sample is balanced and covers the different regions of the state.
- The table also shows the personal income of the respondents, which is the economic variable of the survey. The table shows that the respondents have a wide range of income levels, from less than Rs 5,000 to more than Rs 15,000 per month. The table shows that the most common income category is between Rs 5,001 to 10,000 (31.9%), followed by between Rs 5,001 to 10,000 (28.8%), less than Rs 5,000 (21.3%), and more than Rs 15,000 (18.1%). This suggests that the respondents have a moderate level of income and are not very rich or poor.
- The table also shows the religion of the respondents, which is the cultural variable of the survey. The table shows that the majority of Hindu respondents (64.4%), followed by Muslims (23.8%) and Christians (11.9%), which aligns with the religious composition expected in the region.
- The table also shows the age of the respondents, which is the biological variable of the survey. The table shows that the respondents have a range of age groups, from

below 25 to above 40 years. The table shows that the most common age group is between 26 to 30 years (31.3%), followed by between 31 to 40 years (26.3%), above 40 years (22.5%), and below 25 years (20.0%). This suggests that the respondents are mostly young and middle-aged and have a high level of energy and enthusiasm.

Table 2: ANOVA & Welch test values on the empowering rural journalism based on the Location of the respondent.

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|---|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Infrastructure and Resources | | | | |
| ➤ Level of access to technology, such as computers, internet, and digital equipment, for journalists in your organization | 3.946 | 0.022 | 4.039 | 0.022 |
| ➤ Limited technology resources impacted your ability to gather, process, and disseminate news in rural areas | 7.206 | 0.001 | 6.442 | 0.003 |
| ➤ Access to Integrate digital reporting tools and platforms effectively into your rural journalism practices | 22.869 | 0.000 | 9.344 | 0.000 |
| Socioeconomic Challenges | | | | |
| ➤ Job insecurity / Uncertainty | 16.901 | 0.000 | 18.914 | 0.001 |
| ➤ Low pay/job insecurity | 30.118 | 0.000 | 12.583 | 0.003 |
| ➤ Long hours/stress | 4.682 | 0.011 | 14.901 | 0.002 |
| ➤ Work life balance | 9.332 | 0.000 | 4.199 | 0.019 |
| ➤ Financial challenges have you encountered in sustaining your rural journalism operation, | 5.821 | 0.001 | 11.369 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Financial limitations impact the recruitment and retention of journalists, reporting in your organization | 8.663 | 0.000 | 3.619 | 0.029 |
| Political Interference and Pressures | | | | |
| ➤ Political interference in the operations and editorial decisions of your rural journalism outlet | 14.078 | 0.000 | 4.859 | 0.010 |
| ➤ Some local leaders/groups | 8.880 | 0.000 | 3.205 | 0.046 |
| ➤ Some govt.officials/employees demanding their favor news | 11.444 | 0.000 | 7.075 | 0.014 |
| Technological Barriers | | | | |
| ➤ Access to Desktop/ Laptop computer | 3.039 | 0.031 | 3.630 | 0.031 |

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|---|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| ➤ Faced challenges related to internet infrastructure, such as slow connections or service interruptions, that hinder your digital journalism efforts | 13.487 | 0.000 | 4.602 | 0.013 |
| ➤ Level of digital literacy among journalists in your organization, and have you provided training to address technological gaps | 11.601 | 0.000 | 7.202 | 0.012 |
| | | | | |
| Training and Skill Development | | | | |
| ➤ Undergone formal training in journalism and mass communication from a recognized University/ Institute | 3.751 | 0.013 | 4.451 | 0.016 |
| ➤ Professional training in journalism (organized by your employer/past employer / any other agencies) | 48.772 | 0.000 | 6.632 | 0.003 |
| ➤ Have journalists in your rural journalism outlet received formal training in journalism and media-related skills? | 11.769 | 0.000 | 4.646 | 0.041 |
| ➤ Adequate resources, such as training materials, trainers, or online courses, available for the continuous development | 7.267 | 0.001 | 6.320 | 0.017 |
| ➤ Faced challenges in accessing training resources due to your rural location or financial constraints | 16.218 | 0.000 | 17.851 | 0.001 |
| ➤ Proficient level in digital and multimedia skills, including video production, photojournalism, and social media engagement | 3.566 | 0.016 | 3.380 | 0.039 |
| ➤ Gaps in digital and multimedia skills impact the quality and adaptability of your journalism in the digital age | 14.169 | 0.000 | 14.733 | 0.001 |

H_{01} : There is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

Table 2 displays the outcomes of the F test and Welch test. It demonstrates that the p-value of F statistics is less than the 5 per cent threshold of significance for Infrastructure and Resources, Socioeconomic Challenges, Political Interference and Pressures, Technological Barriers, Training and Skill Development. In all situations, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism. The findings indicate that Location has a substantial effect on all areas of rural journalism responders.

Table 3: ANOVA & Welch test values on the empowering rural journalism based on the Age of the respondent.

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|---|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Infrastructure and Resources | | | | |
| ➤ Level of access to technology, such as computers, internet, and digital equipment, for journalists in your organization | 3.881 | 0.063 | 7.075 | 0.054 |
| ➤ Limited technology resources impacted your ability to gather, process, and disseminate news in rural areas | 2.121 | 0.124 | 2.897 | 0.061 |
| ➤ Access to Integrate digital reporting tools and platforms effectively into your rural journalism practices | 3.556 | 0.080 | 8.140 | 0.052 |
| Socioeconomic Challenges | | | | |
| ➤ Job insecurity / Uncertainty | 4.645 | 0.061 | 8.315 | 0.059 |
| ➤ Low pay/job insecurity | 3.880 | 0.063 | 3.311 | 0.041 |
| ➤ Long hours/stress | 5.543 | 0.051 | 3.752 | 0.078 |
| ➤ Work life balance | 4.094 | 0.069 | 4.804 | 0.057 |
| ➤ Financial challenges have you encountered in sustaining your rural journalism operation, | 3.430 | 0.075 | 3.788 | 0.064 |
| ➤ Financial limitations impact the recruitment and retention of journalists, reporting in your organization | 4.476 | 0.063 | 2.607 | 0.090 |
| Political Interference and Pressures | | | | |
| ➤ Political interference in the operations and editorial decisions of your rural journalism outlet | 3.437 | 0.078 | 2.467 | 0.091 |
| ➤ Some local leaders/groups | 3.302 | 0.089 | 2.461 | 0.094 |
| ➤ Some govt.officials/employees demanding their favor news | 3.419 | 0.051 | 9.486 | 0.053 |
| Technological Barriers | | | | |
| ➤ Access to Desktop/ Laptop computer | 23.748 | 0.000 | 10.621 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Faced challenges related to internet infrastructure, such as slow connections or service interruptions, that hinder your digital journalism efforts | 15.403 | 0.000 | 3.205 | 0.046 |
| ➤ Level of digital literacy among journalists in your organization, and have you provided training to address technological gaps | 4.094 | 0.019 | 4.804 | 0.011 |
| Training and Skill Development | | | | |

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|---|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| ➤ Undergone formal training in journalism and mass communication from a recognized University/ Institute | 10.505 | 0.000 | 7.271 | 0.014 |
| ➤ Professional training in journalism (organized by your employer/past employer / any other agencies) | 3.426 | 0.019 | 8.140 | 0.001 |
| ➤ Have journalists in your rural journalism outlet received formal training in journalism and media-related skills? | 6.745 | 0.002 | 6.408 | 0.002 |
| ➤ Adequate resources, such as training materials, trainers, or online courses, available for the continuous development | 20.386 | 0.000 | 13.353 | 0.001 |
| ➤ Faced challenges in accessing training resources due to your rural location or financial constraints | 2.864 | 0.039 | 3.626 | 0.031 |
| ➤ Proficient level in digital and multimedia skills, including video production, photojournalism, and social media engagement | 4.177 | 0.007 | 10.607 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Gaps in digital and multimedia skills impact the quality and adaptability of your journalism in the digital age | 3.862 | 0.043 | 6.094 | 0.034 |

H₀₂: There is no significant effect of Age of respondent on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

Table 3 displays the outcomes of the F test and Welch test. It demonstrates that the p-value of F statistics is less than the 5 per cent threshold of significance for Technological Barriers, Training and Skill Development. In all these situations, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism. The findings indicate that Age of the respondents has a substantial effect on Technological Barriers, Training and Skill Development of rural journalism responders.

The respondent Infrastructure and Resources, Socioeconomic Challenges, Political Interference and Pressures which are insignificant. In all these above situations, we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism. The findings indicate that Age of the respondents has no substantial effect on Infrastructure and Resources, Socioeconomic Challenges, Political Interference and Pressures of rural journalism responders.

Table 4: ANOVA & Welch test values on the empowering rural journalism based on the Income of the respondent.

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|--|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Infrastructure and Resources | | | | |
| ➤ Level of access to technology, such as computers, internet, and digital equipment, for journalists in your organization | 3.323 | 0.039 | 8.409 | 0.010 |
| ➤ Limited technology resources impacted your ability to gather, process, and disseminate news in rural areas | 4.968 | 0.003 | 3.626 | 0.031 |
| ➤ Access to Integrate digital reporting tools and platforms effectively into your rural journalism practices | 3.910 | 0.022 | 13.024 | 0.002 |
| Socioeconomic Challenges | | | | |
| ➤ Job insecurity / Uncertainty | 34.811 | 0.000 | 8.315 | 0.009 |
| ➤ Low pay/job insecurity | 3.097 | 0.048 | 18.973 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Long hours/stress | 5.627 | 0.001 | 11.180 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Work life balance | 3.567 | 0.031 | 9.486 | 0.005 |
| ➤ Financial challenges have you encountered in sustaining your rural journalism operation, | 4.733 | 0.004 | 5.444 | 0.006 |
| ➤ Financial limitations impact the recruitment and retention of journalists, reporting in your organization | 3.235 | 0.042 | 6.737 | 0.016 |
| Political Interference and Pressures | | | | |
| ➤ Political interference in the operations and editorial decisions of your rural journalism outlet | 4.514 | 0.013 | 5.123 | 0.029 |
| ➤ Some local leaders/groups | 3.822 | 0.024 | 8.654 | 0.000 |
| ➤ Some govt.officials/employees demanding their favor news | 3.805 | 0.012 | 4.115 | 0.021 |
| Technological Barriers | | | | |
| ➤ Access to Desktop/ Laptop computer | 7.815 | 0.001 | 6.321 | 0.021 |
| ➤ Faced challenges related to internet infrastructure, such as slow connections or service interruptions, that hinder your digital | 3.558 | 0.031 | 4.084 | 0.020 |

| Parameter & Description | F | Sig. | Welch | Sig. |
|--|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| journalism efforts | | | | |
| ➤ Level of digital literacy among journalists in your organization, and have you provided training to address technological gaps | 3.284 | 0.040 | 4.467 | 0.045 |
| | | | | |
| Training and Skill Development | | | | |
| ➤ Undergone formal training in journalism and mass communication from a recognized University/ Institute | 5.177 | 0.007 | 6.068 | 0.004 |
| ➤ Professional training in journalism (organized by your employer/past employer / any other agencies) | 3.896 | 0.010 | 3.530 | 0.031 |
| ➤ Have journalists in your rural journalism outlet received formal training in journalism and media-related skills? | 38.983 | 0.000 | 4.274 | 0.049 |
| ➤ Adequate resources, such as training materials, trainers, or online courses, available for the continuous development | 4.422 | 0.005 | 3.212 | 0.046 |
| ➤ Faced challenges in accessing training resources due to your rural location or financial constraints | 5.885 | 0.004 | 3.991 | 0.023 |
| ➤ Proficient level in digital and multimedia skills, including video production, photojournalism, and social media engagement | 13.448 | 0.000 | 4.496 | 0.015 |
| ➤ Gaps in digital and multimedia skills impact the quality and adaptability of your journalism in the digital age | 3.975 | 0.009 | 3.512 | 0.035 |

H₀₃: There is no significant effect of Income of the respondent on the empowering rural journalism in the study area.

Table 4 displays the outcomes of the F test and Welch test. It demonstrates that the p-value of F statistics is less than the 5 per cent threshold of significance for Infrastructure and Resources, Socioeconomic Challenges, Political Interference and Pressures, Technological Barriers, Training and Skill Development. In all situations, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of location on the empowering rural journalism. The findings indicate that Income of the respondent has a substantial effect on all areas of rural journalism responders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study report illuminated rural journalism's challenges and prospects in Andhra Pradesh. An in-depth demographic examination of respondents revealed numerous noteworthy trends and implications for rural journalism in the region. Our survey found a gender gap in rural journalism, with most respondents being male. Empowering rural journalism requires female engagement and representation to ensure varied perspectives and opinions are heard. The high number of respondents with graduate degrees reflects a large rural journalism talent pool. However, training and resources to improve journalism abilities are as crucial. The range of caste backgrounds among respondents shows that rural journalism may represent and solve community concerns. Rural journalism should be inclusive and attentive to caste demands. Understanding respondents' incomes can help create viable rural journalism models. This statistics should inform rural journalist compensation and support. Age greatly affects rural journalism respondents' Technological Barriers, Training, and Skill Development. These data show that enabling rural journalism in Andhra Pradesh requires a multifaceted strategy. This should include gender equality, training, regional reporting, and diversified community and issue coverage. Rural journalism may improve information quality, community engagement, and socio-economic advancement in rural Andhra Pradesh by tackling these constraints and capitalizing on development opportunities. We think our research will lay the groundwork for future work in this vital sector.

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