

Building Community Ties: The Community Media's Contribution to Adivasi Social Cohesion

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and empowerment among Adivasi communities in India. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach rooted in perception phenomenology, the research incorporates Social Identity Theory and Empowerment Theory to explore how community media enhances cultural identity, agency, and socioeconomic development within these communities. Through in-depth interviews and participant observations, the study captures insights into the experiences of Adivasi individuals related to education, economic growth, and women's empowerment, all facilitated by community radio, television, and digital platforms. The findings indicate that community media plays a vital role in preserving Adivasi culture and identity, expanding educational access, and fostering socioeconomic progress, particularly for women. Community radio has proven to be an essential tool for sharing legal, health, and agricultural information, while local television and digital media platforms have empowered Adivasi individuals to engage in advocacy and civic participation. This study emphasizes the crucial role of community media in helping Adivasi communities safeguard their cultural heritage, enhance their well-being, and actively engage in socio-political issues, highlighting its potential as a means for social justice and community resilience.

Keywords: Adivasi Communities, Community Media, Digital Inclusion, Media Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Community media extends to any type of media created by or for a community. Because of the growth of alternative and participatory media methods including community media, we media, citizens media, and grassroots journalism, traditional mainstream journalism techniques are changing both online and offline. Put another way, it's the ability to establish or make use of local media outlets, like magazines, radio stations, and neighborhood newspapers, as alternatives to national media outlets. Community media is used to promote civic engagement and social consciousness. "Increased involvement" and "entry" are critical elements in the growth of community media.

It is recommended that media creators to provide a forum for people to voice their opinions. Community media is frequently defined by groups under particular guidelines, although these guidelines are frequently crossed by the wide-ranging but constrained nature of such media.

It is frequently characterized as a distinct segment of the media environment because of its independence, civil society roots, and emphasis on public service above profit. Apart from commercial and governmental media, this segment of the media is essential to the community's ability to engage in democratic discourse, talk about regional concerns, and obtain trustworthy information. However, because every location has its own unique variants, there is no consensus on what constitutes community media. Community media nevertheless reaches a different audience than mainstream media, even if it is still classified as mass media.

Community media has a major global role in promoting cultural variety. Tomlinson .J claims that cultural imperialism in the media industry—where foreign media corporations dominate local markets and subvert indigenous cultures—is a direct result of globalization. Community media, on the other hand, challenges this trend by encouraging the creation of regional content and offering a forum for cultural expression. Local communities can preserve and support their own languages, customs, and viewpoints when they are given authority over media

production (Tomlinson, J., 1991)). This element is essential to preventing the potential cultural homogeneity that results from the global dissemination of media.

Additionally, community media can be utilized as a teaching tool, particularly in places without robust official education systems. In several Latin American, Asian, and African nations, community radio stations have played a significant role in advancing agricultural education, public health, and literacy. By employing regional languages and emphasizing the distinct requirements of certain communities, these media outlets are vital in bridging the information gap and providing people with the skills they need to improve their quality of life (UNESCO, 2016).

With the obstacles presented by the dominance of international media conglomerates, community media continues to exist. It has adapted to the digital age by embracing new technologies like social media and mobile platforms in order to increase its influence and reach. Sometimes, as in the cases of Brazil and India, local media has worked well with global networks like MTV or Star TV to produce material that speaks to the unique needs and tastes of the communities in which it is produced. This suggests that local media can use global platforms to give alternative views to a forum, even in the face of powerful global media conglomerates (Compaine, 2005).

While providing valuable social services by addressing local issues, community media frequently faces a number of challenges, including unwelcome laws, censorship, unfair licensing procedures, restricted access to the frequency spectrum, insufficient official recognition, inadequate funding, a shortage of seasoned journalists and media specialists, and competition from both public and private broadcasters (Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2013). These platforms are often community-driven, relying on participation to provide material that improves local representation and democratic engagement (Veronis & Ahmed, 2015).

The ability of community media to bump up the voices of underprivileged groups—especially in neighborhoods with a diverse immigrant population—is a key characteristic. Veronis and Ahmed (2015) assessed the ways in which multicultural media in Ottawa served as a conduit between immigrant communities and local government, bringing out the significance of these media outlets in fostering assimilation and civic engagement. By providing timely, pertinent information that addresses local problems more effectively than national outlets, community media plays a critical role in crisis communication (Oh et al., 2013).

In times of social emergency, community media—which provides rapid updates customized to the community—is extremely important. During social catastrophes like natural disasters or political turmoil, community radio and social media platforms play a crucial role in exposing lies and providing accurate news to the public (Oh et al., 2013). Participatory approaches are often employed by these platforms to involve the community in content creation, fostering a sense of ownership and trust in the shared knowledge (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

India's decentralized structure defines the country's community media landscape. As a response to the dominance of corporate and governmental media, community media offers several platforms for citizen engagement and social change. One noteworthy instance is community radio, which has expanded throughout India since the government opened up the airwaves in the early 2000s. At the moment, these stations are essential for addressing neighborhood problems, imparting knowledge, and encouraging social discourse, especially in rural areas (Koradia, Z., & Seth, A., 2017).

It is crucial to use community media to empower India's underprivileged populations. Community media, for instance, enables women's organizations and Dalit activists to draw attention to issues like corruption and land rights. Tribal groups can disseminate local news via mobile phones, for instance, thanks to the "CGNet Swara" platform. This is an essential means of communicating grassroots issues to a wider audience. These instances show how community media connects local people to larger policy frameworks, so fostering a democratic process that is more inclusive (Bandura, A., 2009).

Despite these successes, community media in India faces many challenges. Sometimes, operational activity can be limited by government rules and stringent control procedures. Community radio stations, for instance, often rely on translated government bulletins and must go by certain standards for their own news broadcasting. This limits their capacity to effectively handle local issues. Insufficient financing and resources also frequently impede the expansion of community media, particularly in areas with low media literacy and no technical support (Moitra, A., Das, V., Vaani, G., Kumar, A., & Seth, A., 2016).

In India, community media is still an effective vehicle for change. It empowers the people by promoting social justice, challenging established hierarchies, and fostering participatory democracy. As community media develops, it increasingly incorporates digital platforms and mobile technology to expand its influence and audience. To ensure that the opinions of all Indian citizens—especially those living in remote and underprivileged areas—are recognized and considered in the nation's democratic processes, community media presence must grow (Roy, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Media

Carpentier's study deals with the ways in which community media promotes engagement, presenting it as an arena for democratic engagement and strengthening local communities. He emphasizes the tension that exists between participation and regulation, pointing out that community media faces challenges such as limited funding and regulatory limitations. Carpentier emphasizes the value of community media in advancing inclusiveness and assisting grassroots initiatives, particularly for those from underprivileged communities. (Carpentier, 2011)

Fraser, C., & Restrepo-Estrada, S. addresses the numerous ways in which community radio empowers nearby communities, emphasizing its use in development contexts. By providing vital information on health, education, and agriculture, she claims that community radio may be a powerful tool for promoting social change. The study emphasizes the critical role that community ownership and involvement play in ensuring these media channels remain sustainable. (Fraser, C., & Restrepo-Estrada, S. (2002).

A thorough examination of the ways in which community media, especially in remote and underprivileged areas, might foster social change is provided by Gumucio Dagron. He looks at several case studies where local development goals, like raising literacy rates and mobilizing communities against social injustices, were greatly aided by community media. Dagron highlights the significance of community media prioritizing local community involvement over corporate or governmental objectives (Gumucio Dagron, A, 2001).

Community Media in India

Furisch, E. performed a thorough investigation of community radio in India, emphasizing its importance in strengthening democratic communication in rural communities. They highlight the challenges posed by government laws while emphasizing the possibility of community radio supporting underrepresented populations, especially women and rural communities. Their findings also emphasize the significance of deploying more adaptive techniques to strengthen the sector's impact and effectiveness (Fursich, E. 2008).

Singh, B. K., considers the process by which community media helps to close the urban-rural divide in India. He believes that community radio stations in remote regions are important forums for local voices, raising awareness about issues such as physical well-being, agricultural activities, and higher education. The study also demonstrates how community radio encourages participatory communication, which is critical for local government and decision-making processes (Singh, B. K., et.al., 2010).

Community Media in Education, Disaster Preparedness, and Cultural Preservation

KM, M. S., & Nair, L. V. study the impact of community media on schooling in India's urban slums. They state that community media, notably educational shows on television and radio broadcasts, has played a key role in giving educational opportunities to poor youth. Their research shows how these programs provide significant assistance and support, supporting students in overcoming hurdles along their academic journeys (KM, M. S., & Nair, L. V. (2024).

Ahsan, M. N., & Khatun, A. focuses on the role of community media in disaster preparation in coastal Indian villages. The study underlines the importance of local radio stations and community networks in disseminating critical information during natural disasters, hence promoting community safety and readiness. It emphasizes the role of community media in fostering resilience by equipping residents with the expertise and abilities needed to deal with catastrophes effectively (Ahsan, M. N., & Khatun, A. 2020).

Community media's role in assisting communities in maintaining their cultural identity is the focus of research. Sharma, L., et.al., discuss how these communities cope with the challenges of life while maintaining their cultural

heritage through community radio shows. They highlight the important role community media plays in cultural preservation (Sharma, L., Rathore, H. S., & Sharma, G. S. 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, with perception phenomenology being the primary tool. It leverages perception phenomenology to explore and acquire a thorough knowledge of Adivasi groups' lived experiences and viewpoints of Adivasi communities in detail. The study is anchored in two theoretical frameworks: Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000).

- Social Identity Theory examines how Adivasi communities use community media to reinforce their cultural identity and promote togetherness. This theoretical lens enables the investigation of collective identity development and its consequences for social cohesiveness in these societies.
- Empowerment Theory explains how community media increases agency and self-efficacy, especially among Adivasi women. It gives insights into the methods by which community media promotes socioeconomic mobility, educational access, and social ties.

The study investigates the impact of community media on various dimensions of Adivasi life, including education, economic advancement, and women's empowerment. Through extensive interviews and participant observations, the research captures the experiences, attitudes, and meanings attributed by Adivasi communities to the influence of community media in their daily lives (Creswell, 2012).

The analytical process consists of several phases: data collection, data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. These phases are indispensable for systematically reviewing qualitative data collected from interviews and observations, ensuring comprehensive and reliable findings (Miles et al., 2014). Integrating Social Identity and Empowerment theories into the qualitative analysis highlights the intersections of identity, empowerment, and community media's role in addressing socioeconomic, educational, and gender-related challenges. These frameworks also guide the interpretation of findings and their connections to existing theoretical constructs.

Data Collection and Sampling

1. **In-depth Interviews:** A purposive sample technique was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with Adivasi community members. This style allows participants to unequivocally express their opinions on education, socioeconomic mobility, and the empowerment provided by community media.
2. **Participant Observation:** To supplement the interviews, participant observation was used to capture real-time engagement with media in the community. This strategy sheds light on how media helps Adivasi communities preserve their culture and increase their socioeconomic status.

Through these methods, the study systematically captures authentic experiences, yielding rich qualitative data for in-depth analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis adheres to the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) to ensure rigor and systematic examination:

1. **Data Collection:** Raw data from interviews and observations was meticulously organized and documented to facilitate subsequent analysis.
2. **Data Condensation:** Initial themes were identified that focus on the influences of community media on identity, empowerment, education, and economic advancement. Broad themes such as Cultural Preservation, Educational Growth, and Women's Empowerment were further refined into specific categories, with sub-themes emerging around legal rights, youth engagement, and civic participation.
3. **Data Display:** Findings were organized in a structured manner to highlight key areas such as cultural preservation and socio-economic growth, allowing for clearer interpretation and understanding of the data.
4. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Conclusions were iteratively tested against Social Identity Theory and Empowerment Theory, ensuring theoretical alignment and reliability of insights. This iterative

process involved cross-referencing findings with existing literature to substantiate claims and enhance the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

To improve the study's validity, triangulation methods were used to compare findings from diverse data sources, such as interviews, observations, and theoretical frameworks. Also, member checking was used, allowing participants to review and validate interpretations of their experiences, thus ensuring the accuracy of the findings.

Community Media in developing the Lifestyle of Adivasi

A community is a faction of living beings with a common socially important trait, such as location, standards, traditions, beliefs, principles, practices, or sense of self. Communities can feel a connection to a specific geographical location (such as a country, village, town, or neighborhood) or in online spaces using communication platforms (Joosten et al., 2015; MacQueen et al., 2001). Strong relationships that go beyond just family connections are crucial for building a sense of community, which plays a significant role in defining people's identity, behavior, and positions in various social institutions like family, home, work, government, society, or humanity as a whole (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

The idea of "community" is frequently viewed in a favorable light, used by populists and advertisers to encourage feelings of mutual happiness, well-being, and unity, leaning towards a nearly attainable utopian society (Putnam, 2000).

India's indigenous communities, or Adivasi, are a diverse group that play a significant role in the country's cultural fabric. Approximately 8.6% of Indians are members of Adivasi communities, who are distinguished by their distinctive languages, rituals, and lifestyles (Government of India, 2011). These communities often reside in remote locations and face significant obstacles to both socioeconomic advancement and cultural preservation (Bhasin, 2013).

Adivasi identity is inextricably linked to their ancestral lands, which are essential to their cultural traditions and general well-being. Research indicates that because Adivasi people are primarily engaged in cultivation, hunting, and gathering, they depend on land rights to protect their cultural legacy and social identity. Adivasi groups' migration as a result of urbanization and industrialization jeopardizes their social cohesion and ability to preserve their culture (Xaxa, A., & Devy, G. N. 2021).

Education is yet another important component that affects communities of Adivasis. Studies reveal that the rate of literacy in Adivasi groups is significantly lower than the national average because of obstacles such as a lack of schools and culturally relevant curriculum. In addition to limiting economic prospects, this educational divide maintains social inequality (Gandhi.M, 2022).

The interplay of caste, class, and gender adds complexity to the difficulties faced by Adivasi groups. Their struggle for recognition and social justice highlights how important it is to have inclusive policies that deal with these difficult problems (Ram, B., Singh, A., & Yadav, A. 2016).

In India, community media is essential to the uplift of various communities, particularly through the amplification of local voices and the addressing of issues that impact underprivileged groups. Scholars have noted that community media fosters democratic participation by enabling people to voice their thoughts, which in turn supports local government and development (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). For instance, by allowing women to discuss significant social issues and share their experiences, community radio has developed into a potent tool for empowering women and promoting gender equality (Agarwal & Kumari, 2016).

Adivasi communities have been shown to benefit from community media's ability to empower them by providing a forum for addressing issues and preserving cultural narratives. According to studies, community radio is essential for disseminating knowledge and increasing awareness of rights and privileges, which in turn increases civic engagement.

Furthermore, women have played a critical role in Adivasi communities, fighting for resources and rights. It has been demonstrated that educating and assisting women in their communities raises the socioeconomic standing of the community as a whole. In their communities, Adivasi women frequently take significant roles in promoting environmental sustainability, health, and education (Rupavath, R., 2022).

Community media initiatives in India have significantly improved literacy rates and educational outcomes, especially in rural areas. These initiatives usually adapt their content to meet the unique needs of nearby communities, making education more widely available and relevant. ((Moitra, A., Das, V., Vaani, G., Kumar, A., & Seth, A., 2016). Moreover, community media serves as a forum for cultural expression, protecting local languages and customs that are in danger of extinction from the effects of globalization (Smith, R. C. 2017).

Community media is vital during catastrophes because it disseminates critical information and raises awareness of safety precautions during natural disasters. Through the use of local networks, community media effectively mobilizes communities and makes sure that vital information reaches the people who need it most. (Kanjilal, M. K., Malik, K. K., & Kapoor, P., 2024).

More people are now able to access technology and community media because of digital platforms that facilitate connections between disparate community groups. This growth makes it possible for community media to engage younger generations and inspire them to contribute to the betterment of their community. In India, community media not only empowers individuals but also strengthens links between neighbors, fostering a common identity that is essential for societal cohesion (Debsarma, D., Singha, D., & Choudhary, B. K., 2024).

Its outlets encourage women to share their stories and advance their causes by raising awareness of women's rights and issues. These platforms support gender equality in the community while also giving women more power by amplifying their voices (Sinha, A., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results: Analyzing Community Media's Impact on Adivasi Well-being

The qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observations were coded and categorised according to themes about the influence of community media. The approach, which draws on Social Identity Theory and Empowerment Theory, investigates how Adivasi people develop a sense of identity, agency, and social empowerment through community media. Key discoveries include:

Cultural Preservation and Identity

- Adivasi culture is greatly promoted and preserved by community media outlets, particularly radio and television. Initiatives for storytelling, as highlighted by Akhup, A. (2014)., allow Adivasi individuals to document and share their experiences, thus strengthening cultural identity and fostering pride among the youth. The majority of community radio listeners reported a stronger attachment to their cultural roots, while certain participants in local TV shows celebrating Adivasi festivals expressed an increased sense of cultural pride. These findings resonate with Social Identity Theory, illustrating how media reinforces collective identity and community bonds.

Educational Access and Socioeconomic Growth

- Community media has played a crucial role in enhancing educational outreach within Adivasi communities (Mathur, S., 2016). Localized TV programming contributed to an increase in awareness of educational opportunities among Adivasi youth. This aligns with Empowerment Theory, emphasizing the media's role in enabling Adivasi individuals to access valuable educational resources, ultimately leading to socio-economic advancement. Furthermore, the rise of digital platforms increased information dissemination regarding employment, skill development, and agricultural techniques, and improved understanding of modern agricultural methods (National Institute of Rural Development survey). This impact underscores the ability of media to facilitate socio-economic growth by disseminating knowledge vital for self-sufficiency.

Women's Empowerment and Civic Engagement

- Community media has been instrumental in empowering Adivasi women by providing platforms for discussing health, rights, and employment opportunities. For instance, the 2/3rd majority of women listeners felt that community radio enhanced their understanding of legal rights, while the majority reported a stronger connection to community initiatives due to relevant broadcasts. Moreover, the utilization of digital media for advocacy led to an increase in knowledge of legal rights among Adivasi

groups (KM, M. S., & Nair, L. V. (2024), supporting Empowerment Theory's focus on agency and illustrating how media platforms empower Adivasi women to engage in community advocacy and voice their concerns publicly.

Various Community Media Platforms

The role of community media in enhancing the well-being of Adivasi groups is increasingly significant, as these communities face unique challenges related to cultural preservation, educational access, and socioeconomic growth (Moitra, A., Kumar, A., & Seth, A, 2021).

- **Community Radio:** Community radio stations provide a vital platform for Adivasi communities to share their stories and local issues. These stations facilitate engagement and interaction, fostering a sense of ownership among listeners. Community radio has effectively disseminated critical information on legal rights, health, and education, thus empowering Adivasi communities (Dutta, U. (2016). Over **300 community radio stations** in India address local Adivasi concerns (Indian Media Studies), demonstrating their significance in augmenting health literacy and civic engagement.
- **Local Television:** Like radio, local television plays an important role in showcasing Adivasi culture and challenges. Programs that highlight Adivasi stories raise awareness about financial, health, and agricultural issues while providing educational content. This contributes to an increase in awareness of educational opportunities among Adivasi youth, critical in addressing the literacy gap.
- **Digital Platforms:** The rise of digital media offers new opportunities for Adivasi communities, enabling them to access information that aligns with their needs. With the majority of rural India having mobile internet access by 2022 (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2022), digital platforms have become essential for advocacy and mobilization, allowing Adivasi groups to better understand their rights (Rao & Das, 2023).

Satisfaction Levels of Adivasi Community with Community Media

Research findings highlight the positive impact of community media on the satisfaction levels of Adivasi communities:

- **Community Radio:** Studies on Sangham Radio indicate that Adivasi and marginalized communities benefit greatly from community radio's reach, which provides essential information on health, agriculture, and legal rights, thereby fostering community bonds and empowerment. (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. 2023).
- **Community Television and Video Projects:** Participatory media initiatives, such as those led by Video Volunteers and the Deccan Development Society, have empowered Adivasi groups by creating and distributing locally relevant content that addresses their needs in agriculture, health, and rights advocacy. These projects have been shown to elevate community satisfaction and engagement. (Community Media Reports, 2023).
- **Digital and Social Media:** Platforms like CGNet Swara provide Adivasi communities with tools to report local news and grievances, often resulting in increased government action and raising social awareness about issues facing these communities. (Ekta Parishad and CGNet Swara Reports, 2022).

Discussion

The thematic findings align closely with Social Identity Theory and Empowerment Theory, illuminating the intricate relationship between community media and Adivasi empowerment.

- **Social Identity Theory:**
This theory is essential to comprehending how community media creates a shared identity, which is essential for maintaining cultural traditions and promoting group welfare. People can better connect with heritage and customs because of the sense of community that media fosters. Community radio and local TV shows are pivotal in reinforcing social ties and cultural pride.

- **Empowerment Theory:**

This theory emphasises how community media gives Adivasi people, especially women, more agency via improved access to resources and civic engagement. The growing awareness of women's legal rights and their increased participation in community lobbying accentuates the media's contribution to Adivasi peoples' socio-political engagement, which empowers them to successfully navigate and confront social inequality concerns.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, community media channels are pivotal in enhancing the empowerment and well-being of Adivasi communities in India. This study reveals that community radio, television, and digital media provide Adivasi individuals with essential information related to socioeconomic development, education, and health, significantly impacting their lives. Research findings indicate a high level of satisfaction among Adivasi users, towards improved access to health and educational information through community radio, and also expressing satisfaction with educational content broadcast on community television (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2023; National Institute of Rural Development, 2023). Furthermore, the rise of digital media has catalyzed new avenues for activism, thus Adivasi participants feeling empowered to advocate for their rights.

These results accentuate that community media functions not only as a vehicle for disseminating information but also as a vital tool for cultural preservation, civic engagement, and empowerment. By fostering a shared identity among community members, community media helps reinforce cultural ties and pride, aligning with Social Identity Theory. Additionally, the enhanced access to resources and knowledge supports Empowerment Theory, emphasizing the importance of agency and active participation in social issues.

Moreover, the participatory nature of community media allows Adivasi individuals to narrate their own stories, promoting a sense of empowerment and self-awareness (Akhup, A., 2014). This active engagement in media initiatives cultivates community cohesion and strengthens their voices in broader societal discussions. Overall, the transformative impact of community media on Adivasi communities highlights its essential role in promoting not only individual well-being but also collective resilience and social justice.

Upon analysis of the circumstances, some recommendations may be made to enhance the effectiveness of community media in supporting Adivasi communities:

Increased financial support and aid to regional media retail locations

To ensure community media projects last longer and reach a wider audience, more funding and support from governmental and non-governmental entities is needed. This support could facilitate the establishment of more community radio and television stations in the area that focus on Adivasi issues.

Training and skill development

To ensure community members get the most out of community media, it's critical to establish training programs in media administration, digital literacy, and content creation. Adivasi communities will be able to take control of their own narratives thanks to this capacity-building

Blending Digital Media

By fusing conventional community media with more easily accessible digital media, impact, and involvement can be amplified. To facilitate this integration, initiatives in remote Adivasi regions are required to improve internet connectivity and digital literacy (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2022).

Emphasize on Culturally Relevant Content

To establish stronger relationships with Adivasi groups, community media content should highlight regional customs, dialects, and narratives. Bhattacharya et al. (2021) state that research has demonstrated an increase in audience pleasure and engagement when culturally relevant content is designed.

Regular assessment and communication procedures

Community media platforms can better grasp the evolving needs of Adivasi communities by integrating feedback mechanisms. Regular assessments can help tailor content to address specific community challenges and promote participation.

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