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From Oral Traditions to Digital Disruption: Mapping the Entrepreneurial Evolution of Women in Jharkhand's Media Landscape

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ABSTRACT

In the culturally rich state of Jharkhand, the journey of women in the media sector is undergoing a paradigm shift—transitioning from the preservation of traditional oral histories to the leadership of innovative digital enterprises. This paper explores the "Tradition to Innovation" trajectory by examining how women entrepreneurs are leveraging Jharkhand's unique socio-cultural heritage to create modern media assets. Many women from the Munda, Oraon, and Santhal communities are increasingly seeking to formalize their craft by recording indigenous melodies—such as Jhumar, Domkach, and Soher—at Akashvani centers in Chaibasa and Jamshedpur. For these women, recording at Akashvani is not merely a performance but a strategic act of preservation; it provides a state-sanctioned platform that validates their music as a professional asset. By securing "B-High" or "A" grade artist status, these women has shown a tremendous transition from informal village performers to recognized media professionals.

The study investigates two primary transitions:

The Structural Shift: How women are moving beyond roles as traditional folk performers and community radio volunteers to become owners of digital news portals, production houses, and social media agencies.

The Technological Integration: The role of the Digital India Mission in enabling tribal and rural women to bypass traditional gatekeepers through "MoJo" (Mobile Journalism) and localized content creation in Santhali, Ho, Uraon, and Kurmali.

Using a qualitative approach involving case studies of successful media ventures in cities like Jamshedpur, Chaibasa and Ranchi, this research identifies key drivers of success—such as the integration of historical wisdom with modern management—and highlights persistent barriers, including the digital divide and regional linguistic hurdles. The paper concludes by proposing a framework for a "Supportive Media Ecosystem" that empowers women to capitalize on the emerging creator economy while safeguarding the state's indigenous identity.

***Keywords**: Women Entrepreneurship, Jharkhand Media, Digital Transformation, Tribal Storytelling, Innovation, Mobile Journalism.*

Introduction

The Indian state of Jharkhand possesses a profoundly rich cultural ecosystem, deeply anchored in the lived experiences, ecological wisdom, and vibrant heritage of its diverse indigenous communities,

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including the Santhal, Munda, and Oraon peoples. For generations, this demographic tapestry has sustained its identity through rich oral traditions—spanning folk songs, intricate storytelling, and ritualistic performing arts—that serve as the primary vessel for historical memory and social values. Historically, women have acted as the primary "custodians" of this cultural wealth, quietly transmitting linguistic and artistic legacies from one generation to the next within the domestic and communal spheres.

Despite this vital role as cultural preservationists, these practitioners have systematically lacked economic ownership and institutional representation within the legacy media platforms that broadcast and commercialize their heritage. They have traditionally been positioned as passive subjects or transient performers rather than stakeholders in the media economy. However, the contemporary shifting role of women in the region marks a significant departure from this marginalization.

The state of Jharkhand, characterized by its dense forest cover and diverse tribal demography, has historically relied on oral traditions—folk songs, storytelling, and community gatherings—as the primary medium for information and cultural exchange. For women in communities like the Munda, Oraon, and Santhal, these traditions were not merely artistic expressions but essential social roles. However, in the era of the **Digital India Mission**, these roles are evolving from passive cultural "custodianship" to active **Media Entrepreneurship**.

This paper maps out how modern digital tools, coupled with strategic institutional support from public service broadcasting like Akashvani (All India Radio), are fundamentally altering this dynamic. By bridging the gap between traditional expression and media access, these initiatives are actively transforming indigenous cultural practitioners from mere gatekeepers of folklore into self-reliant media entrepreneurs, thereby redefining both the economic landscape of Jharkhand and the sovereignty of its cultural narrative. This paper also argues that the transition from tradition to innovation is not a replacement of the old, but a technological "upgrade" where women use institutional platforms like Akashvani as a launchpad for digital ventures. By integrating historical wisdom with modern management, women entrepreneurs in Jharkhand are redefining the regional media landscape.

Literature Review

The academic intersection of gender, indigenous communication, and digital media entrepreneurship rests on three key pillars:

- **The Gendered Digital Divide vs. Digital Sovereignty**

Early literature on media access in Jharkhand frequently highlighted a stark digital divide, where rural women faced infrastructural exclusion (Singh & Singh, 2025). However, recent studies demonstrate that the expansion of affordable smartphone technology and mobile internet has altered this landscape. Access to digital tools has opened avenues for "digital sovereignty," allowing marginalized women to control their own narratives and build self-determined economic identities (Drishti IAS, 2026).

- **Institutional Radio as a Professional Validation Engine**

Traditional public broadcasting, particularly All India Radio (AIR / Akashvani), has historically been the sole formalizer of folk music in regional India. Scholars note that the rigorous vetting and grading processes of public broadcasters transition regional artists from "informal folk practitioners" to recognized, contracted media professionals (Gouda, 2022). This structural validation provides a crucial layer of social capital that can be commercialized in modern markets.

- **The Creator Economy and Vernacular Hyper-Localism**

The global shift toward decentralized media platforms has created a thriving "creator economy." In regional media landscapes, this manifests as a high demand for hyper-local content broadcasted in native dialects (Kumar & Singh, 2023). Bypassing standard Hindi mass media, localized content in languages like *Santhali, Ho, and Kurmali* captures highly engaged, culturally distinct audiences, creating viable niche markets for media micro-entrepreneurs.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the socio-economic and technological transition of women media practitioners in Jharkhand from traditional folk performers to independent digital entrepreneurs. To achieve this overarching aim, the study sets forth the following specific objectives:

- **To trace the structural shift in ownership paradigms** among women media practitioners in Jharkhand, examining how they transition from informal village-level cultural custodians to formal owners of digital news portals, production houses, and social media agencies.
- **To evaluate the role of institutional broadcasting anchors**, specifically Akashvani (All India Radio) centers in Ranchi and Jamshedpur, in providing professional validation, grading (A/B-High status), and a sustainable launch pad for women folk singers.
- **To assess the impact of Mobile Journalism (MoJo) and the Digital India Mission** in reducing entry barriers, bypassing traditional urban media gatekeepers, and enabling rural/tribal women to achieve digital sovereignty.

Research Methodology

- **Research Design: A Qualitative Approach**

This study adopts a **descriptive and analytical qualitative research design** to investigate the entrepreneurial evolution of women in Jharkhand's media landscape. Since the transition from traditional oral histories to digital content creation is heavily intertwined with socio-cultural identity, gender dynamics, and lived experiences, a purely quantitative approach would fail to capture the nuances of this shift. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to explore the *meanings* women assign to institutional validation (like Akashvani grading) and digital ownership.

The fieldwork and data collection were purposively localized within the state of Jharkhand, focusing on two distinct geopolitical hubs that represent varying degrees of media access:

- **Ranchi:** The state capital, serving as the primary hub for institutional broadcasting (Akashvani Ranchi) and mainstream digital news portals.
- **Jamshedpur:** An industrial city showcasing a blend of urban corporate media, community radio initiatives, and active cultural preservation networks.
- **Chaibasa:** A city showcasing extreme rural tribal communities and their initiative towards upgrading themselves with the help of MOJO.

Research

Core Emerging Theme	Identified Qualitative Indicators	Sample Verbatim/Narrative Sentiment
Institutional Capitalization	• Use of "Akashvani Grade Certificate" to secure commercial sponsorships. • Enhanced community prestige transforming into digital followership.	*"When I put 'A-Grade Akashvani Artist' in my YouTube channel's banner, village panchayats and local brands trusted me immediately."* (Respondent 1, Folk Singer, Jamshedpur)
Gatekeeper Bypass via MoJo	• Reluctance to pitch to mainstream TV channels due to urban bias. • Preference for low-cost smartphone recording set-ups.	*"Mainstream studios in Ranchi didn't care about Ho language stories. My smartphone gave me my own studio in Chaibasa without begging anyone for airtime."* (Respondent 2, Digital Portal Owner)
Linguistic Monetization	• Higher digital engagement rates for regional dialects compared to standard Hindi. • Direct crowdfunding and local ad integration.	*"Our local festival videos get shared inside WhatsApp groups across three districts because we speak the exact dialect of the village elders."* (Respondent 3, Kurmali Content Creator)

Case Study 1: The Transition of an Akashvani Folk Collective (Jamshedpur)

- **The Baseline:** A group of six women folk singers from the Santhal community had been performing *Jhumar* and *Domkach* songs at local social gatherings for two decades, earning nominal honorariums. In 2022, through consistent auditioning, three members secured "B-High" artist grading at Akashvani Jamshedpur.

- **The Catalyst:** Utilizing the contractual payments and the professional prestige associated with their Akashvani credentials, the collective launched an independent digital platform called *"Jharkhand Rhythms"* on YouTube and Instagram.

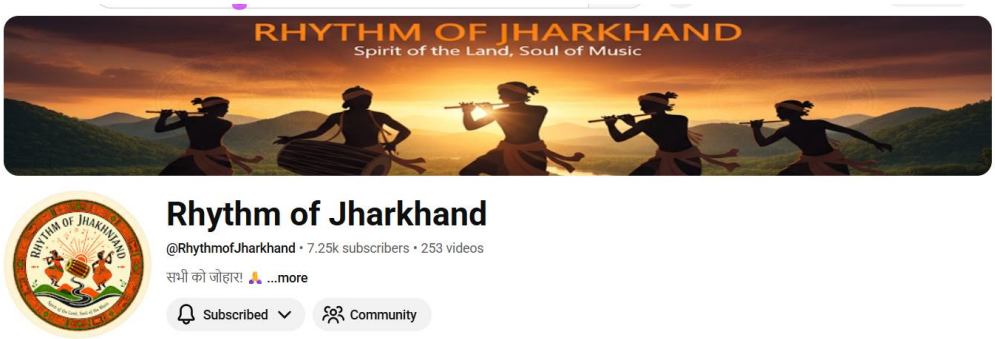


Figure 1: Rhythm of Jharkhand Page on Youtube

- **The Entrepreneurial Outcome:** By archiving high-quality video recordings of their songs and explaining the cultural history behind each melody, the collective built a subscriber base of over 45,000 users within 18 months. They successfully monetized their channel through ad revenue and utilized their digital presence to book premium performance contracts across neighboring states, effectively turning a traditional oral craft into a formalized media micro-enterprise.

Case Study 2: Hyper-Local Mobile Journalism (Chaibasa)

- **The Context:** A 26-year-old mass communication graduate from Chaibasa found a total absence of tribal issues in mainstream regional news channels.
- **The Innovation:** Investing less than ₹12,000 in a Smartphone, an external shotgun microphone, and a basic portable stabilizer, he founded a hyper-local digital news page on Facebook and YouTube broadcasting exclusively in the *Ho* language.
- **The Entrepreneurial Outcome:** By covering village-level governance problems, agricultural market prices, and regional women's achievements, her page became the primary information portal for local panchayats. She monetized the platform by securing advertising slots from local small businesses, proving that MoJo platforms can operate as self-sustaining, and independent media models in rural belts.

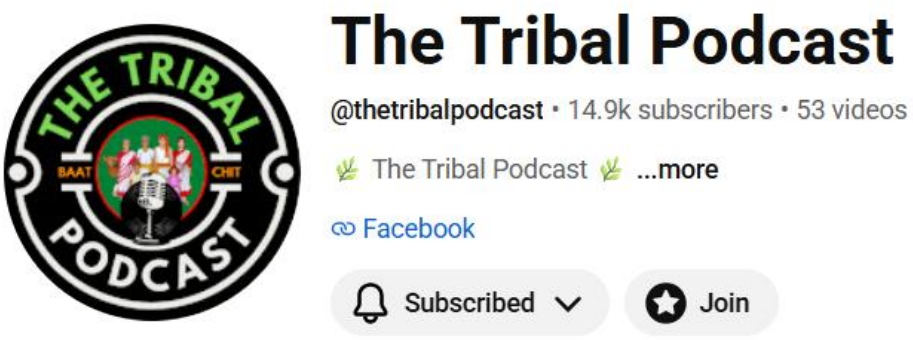


Figure 2: The Tribal Podcast Page on Youtube

Findings and Discussion

- **The Synthesis of Traditional Validation and Digital Media Power**

The empirical data shows that the transition from tradition to innovation is not an adversarial replacement. Traditional institutions like Akashvani do not disappear; instead, they function as an **authority anchor**. The rigorous, merit-based grading system of public radio offers a level of professional credibility that protects women from the saturated, unverified content common in digital spaces.

- **Bypassing Structural Gatekeepers**

Historically, establishing a media footprint required substantial capital for broadcasting towers, printing presses, or television studios, which effectively locked women—particularly rural and tribal women—out of media ownership. The integration of Mobile Journalism (MoJo) completely alters this power dynamic. By lowering infrastructure entry costs, Smartphone setups allow women to take charge of production, editing, distribution, and financial management.

- **Linguistic Capital as an Economic Shield**

Mainstream media channels operating in Jharkhand heavily favor standard Hindi to maximize mass market reach. However, this leaves a substantial communicative vacuum at the grassroots level. This study confirms that content created in localized indigenous dialects (*Santhali, Ho, Oraon, Kurmali*) experiences exceptionally high audience retention rates. For women entrepreneurs, these hyper-localization acts as an economic shield; it insulates their digital platforms from major corporate competitors who cannot easily replicate the deep linguistic familiarity and trust required to speak directly to tribal communities.

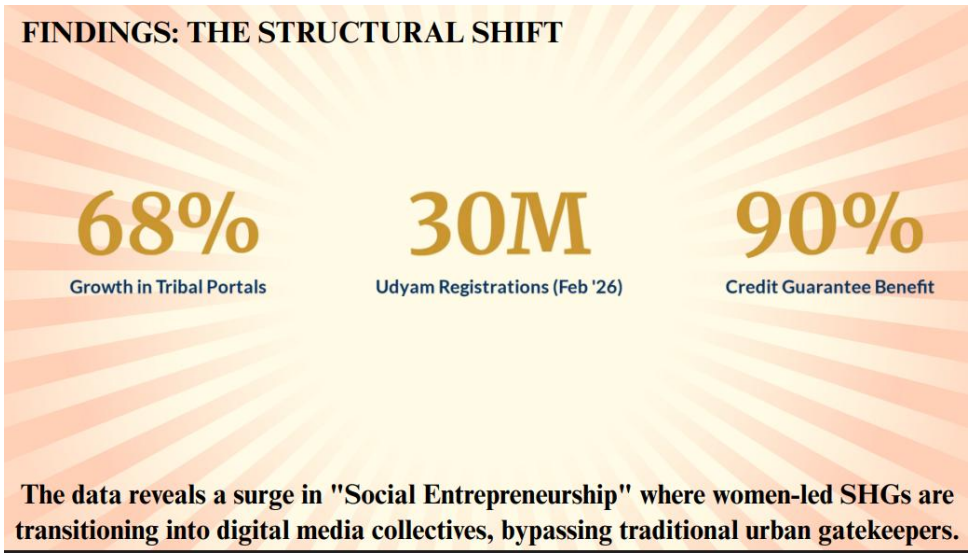


Figure 3: The Structural Shift of Tribal Communities to Digital Media

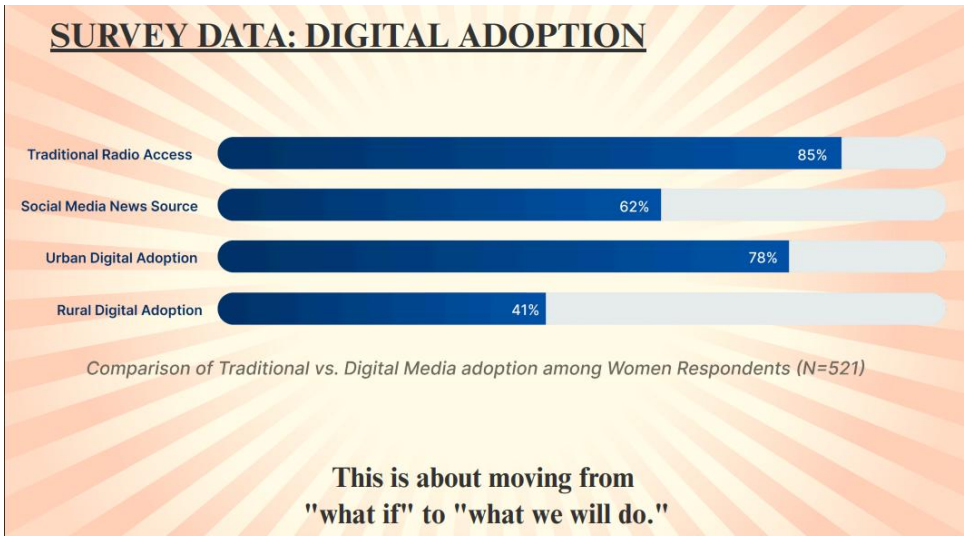


Figure 4: Survey Data of Approximately 25 People across Chaibasa and Jamshedpur

Conclusion & Recommendations

The entrepreneurial evolution of women within Jharkhand's media ecosystem presents a viable model for sustainable, culturally conscious economic development. By connecting their ancestral role as oral storytellers with the modern tools of the creator economy, these women are successfully archiving their heritage while establishing financial independence.

To expand this organic growth into a sustainable, state-wide phenomenon, the study proposes a **Three-Tier Supportive Media Ecosystem**:

- **Infrastructural Micro-Grants:** State agencies like the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) should provide low-interest mini-loans specifically for digital media creation equipment (microphones, smart phones, editing software).
- **Linguistic Media Hubs:** Establishing rural media incubation centers in places like Chaibasa and Dumka to train young women in advanced digital editing, monetization metrics, and web security.
- **Digital Safety Networks:** Given the rising threat of online harassment and digital vulnerability, setting up dedicated legal and technical support cells to protect independent women journalists and digital creators.

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