



The Digital Journey of Regional Linguistic Identity

Rahul Mhaiskar

Abstract: *Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi, key varieties spoken in the Vidarbha region of the State of Maharashtra, are thriving in the digital space, bridging traditional oral culture with modern technology. This study examines the representation of variety across various platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, as well as contributions from regional cinema and mobile apps. Data analysis highlights content categories such as comedy, lifestyle, tourism, education, and political discourse, with creators like Neha Thombre, Shashank Udakhe and Karale's Phoenix Academy Wardha gaining significant traction. Films like Naal and shows like Fu Bai Fu, Chala Hava Yeu Dya, and Maharashtra Hasya Jatra showcase the authentic Varhadi Marathi character played by Marathi Actor Bharat Ganeshpure, while apps like the Varhadi Bible cater to cultural and religious contexts. Messaging platforms further enhance variety presence, enabling informal communication and cultural exchange. This research highlights how regional languages utilise digital media to preserve linguistic identity, foster cultural richness, and engage broader audiences, underscoring the potential of regional varieties to thrive in the era of digital transformation.*

Keywords: *Varhadi Marathi, Nagpuri Marathi, Digital Media, Regional Varieties, Vidarbha, Linguistic Identity.*

Abbreviations:

National Education Policy (NEP)

I. INTRODUCTION

Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi are two significant regional varieties of the Marathi language spoken in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. According to the 2011 Census of India, Marathi, as a broader linguistic entity, is the mother tongue of over 83 million people, and 23 million speakers from Vidarbha speak in regional languages. Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi, as prominent regional languages, are predominantly spoken in the Akola, Amravati, Nagpur, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Gondia, Bhandara, Yavatmal, and Wardha districts of Maharashtra. These varieties are recognised for their distinctive linguistic features, including unique phonetic, syntactic, and lexical characteristics, which distinguish them from Standard Marathi.

The geographical distribution of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi aligns with the cultural and linguistic identity of the Vidarbha region. While Standard Marathi has gained prominence as the language of education, administration, and media in Maharashtra, these varieties continue to retain their distinct characteristics.

vitality in everyday communication, folk traditions, and regional arts.

At the same time, speakers are often multilingual and also speak Hindi in the Market and professional discourse [6]. This grassroots presence is starting to find expression in the digital space, where regional content creators are increasingly using Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi to engage with their audiences.

The promotion of regional languages and mother tongues has gained renewed focus under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 [3], which emphasizes the importance of preserving linguistic diversity. The NEP advocates for primary education in mother tongues and regional languages, reinforcing the cultural and linguistic identity of children. For Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi speakers, this policy highlights the importance of documenting and promoting their varieties in educational resources, digital content, and mainstream media. This approach not only aligns with the cultural heritage of Vidarbha but also creates opportunities to introduce these varieties to a broader audience.

The entry of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi into popular culture has been evident through television shows, films, and online content [9]. Shows like *Chala Hava Yeu Dya*, *Fu Bai Fu* and *Maharashtra Hasya Jatra* have become platforms where regional varieties, including Varhadi, are celebrated. Actors like Bharat Ganeshpure, a prominent face of Marathi comedy, have popularised Varhadi Marathi through their performances, adding humour and relatability to the dialect's portrayal. These shows bring the essence of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi to millions of viewers, creating a connection between urban and rural Maharashtra.

Similarly, Marathi cinema has embraced the cultural ethos of Vidarbha in movies like *Naal* (2018). This critically acclaimed film, set in a rural Vidarbha backdrop, captures the linguistic nuances of the region, with characters speaking in authentic Varhadi. The success of such films demonstrates the audience's appetite for stories rooted in local cultures and languages.

The digital space has further amplified the reach of regional varieties. Content creators on platforms like YouTube and Instagram are utilising these formats to produce relatable and entertaining videos, which resonate with younger audiences. Podcasts, memes, and blogs are other avenues where Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi are finding new relevance.

As regional varieties carve their space in mainstream media and digital platforms, Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi exemplify how linguistic diversity can thrive in a connected world. By blending traditional cultural expressions with modern digital tools, these varieties continue to enrich the Marathi linguistic landscape.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of language, identity, and digital transformation has garnered substantial academic attention in recent years, particularly in the context of regional languages. Kaul (2013) examines the intricate relationship between linguistic diversity and cultural identity, highlighting that language loss results in cultural erosion [5]. In this analysis, Kaul highlights the broader socio-political and ecological factors, including globalization, migration, and language suppression, which aggravate the decline of minority languages. His work aligns with the growing body of research advocating for language preservation and the promotion of multilingualism, particularly in the face of increasing digitalization.

The impact of digital spaces on linguistic identity is further explored by Singh (2024), who examines the evolving linguistic practices in India, a linguistically diverse nation [10]. Singh highlights how digital platforms offer new opportunities for self-expression, particularly through code-switching, online slang, and the use of fluid language. By employing Social Identity theory and Goffman's dramaturgy, Singh discusses the complexities of constructing linguistic identities in digital spaces, shedding light on how social media and online forums contribute to linguistic innovation and the preservation of regional languages amidst the challenges of language domination and the digital divide.

Bíró (2019) extends the discussion of linguistic identity in digital spaces by focusing on bilingual university students in Romania [1]. She investigates how students utilise digital platforms, particularly Facebook, to construct and negotiate their linguistic identities, drawing on their multilingual practices. The study illustrates how digital multilingualism enables students to shape their online identities by their audience and self-expression, providing insights into how minority speakers navigate identity conflicts in digital spaces. The research highlights the significance of understanding the interplay between offline ethnic identities and online linguistic practices, particularly for individuals with multilingual repertoires.

Darvin's (2015) exploration of "Language and Identity in the Digital Age" highlights the transformative impact of digital technologies on language use and identity formation [2]. Darwin discusses how digital communication platforms, such as instant messaging and social media, create hybrid linguistic structures and foster cross-cultural interactions. The study highlights the flexibility of language and identity in the digital era, emphasising the need for further research on digital literacies, inclusion, and exclusion in educational contexts. Darwin's work contributes to the ongoing conversation about how technology shapes social participation and linguistic practices in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Saroa and Singh (2020) focus on the challenges involved in digitising regional languages, discussing the linguistic, technical, and socioeconomic hurdles that impede their digital adaptation [11]. The paper identifies issues such as font and keyboard layout inconsistencies, which hinder the integration of regional languages into the digital sphere. Despite these challenges, Saroa and Singh stress the critical role of digitization in preserving cultural heritage, enhancing

communication, and ensuring the sustainability of regional languages. Their work serves as a reminder of the importance of regional languages in maintaining local identity and cultural continuity, while also addressing the complexities of digital adaptation.

Together, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital spaces reshape linguistic identity, particularly for speakers of regional languages like Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi. As digital technologies continue to evolve, they present new opportunities for regional languages to thrive; however, significant challenges remain in ensuring equitable access and preserving linguistic diversity.

III. OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of this research is to examine how digital creators contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural linguistic identity through their digital content. The study specifically focuses on the role of digital media in shaping and sustaining Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi. The key objectives are:

- A. To analyze the demographic reach and representation of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi in digital media, assessing their presence across various platforms and audience distribution.
- B. To study the content strategies and audience engagement employed by digital creators using these linguistic varieties, exploring how they sustain interest, foster community interaction, and enhance visibility in the digital sphere.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Data collected from online platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, regional cinema, and mobile applications. And were analysed for their content focus, audience engagement, and representation of these varieties. The analysis focused on two main aspects: linguistic and content. Linguistic analysis identified phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features unique to Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi. Content analysis evaluated audience metrics, such as views and subscriber counts, and examined the themes and authenticity of the variety's representation.

A comparative approach highlighted the distinctiveness of these varieties compared to Standard Marathi.

This methodology offers a comprehensive understanding of how Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi are adapting and thriving in the digital era, emphasizing their cultural and linguistic identity.

V. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF VARHADI AND NAGPURI MARATHI:

Although both regional varieties, Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi, are spoken in the Vidarbha region, they exhibit distinct linguistic features. One of the geographical markers for their distribution is the Wardha River, which serves as a natural boundary separating these varieties. Linguistically, the retroflex lateral sounds in Standard Marathi generally



transform into a glide in Varhadi, whereas in Nagpuri, they tend to become a tap/flap sound.

This study focuses on the presence of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi in digital spaces rather than their linguistic characteristics. However, a few distinctive features that differentiate these varieties are highlighted.

Examples have been taken from digitally available content and analyzed in this study.

A. Reduplication

One of the key linguistic features in Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi is reduplication, where the base form of a word is repeated with slight phonetic modification. This phenomenon is observed in forms like *bigad-gigad* 'damage, etc.' ([b~g]), where the initial consonant of the second part undergoes variation, often for emphasis. Reduplication in these varieties functions to intensify or modify the meaning of the root word, making speech more expressive and adding an emotional or emphatic tone.

A notable distinction is that the replacement of the initial consonant with [g-] in the second part is characteristic of Nagpuri Marathi. This suggests that while reduplication is a shared feature across Indian languages, the specific phonetic pattern differs, contributing to the linguistic identity of Nagpuri Marathi.

B. Preverbal Negative Construction

Another notable feature is the preverbal negative construction, which is unique to Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi [7]. The sentence *e potte panyat noko jau uwa padtin doksyat* 'Don't get into the water; your head may get infected with head lice' demonstrates the preverbal negation structure.

This construction involves placing the negating word *noko* 'not' before the verb phrase, creating a syntactic pattern that is distinctive to these dialects. It highlights how Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi speakers employ preverbal negation to express absolute or definitive negation, in contrast to Standard Marathi, which typically uses post-verbal negation.

C. Progressive Marker -rah

The use of *-rah* as a progressive marker is another distinguishing feature [8]. This marker indicates the ongoing nature of an action, similar to the use of the present progressive tense in English. The example *radun rayla asan bhandan gin jhala asan* demonstrates this grammatical structure:

The marker *-rah* (in its variant *asan*) attaches to the verb to signify the ongoing, incomplete nature of the action. This usage of the progressive marker reflects a fluidity in time expression in the dialect, where the action's continuity is emphasized through specific morphological changes.

Table-I: Representation of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi on Digital Platforms

Sr. No.	Platform	Name/Channel	Content Type	Subscribers/Followers	Posts/Videos	Access Date
1	YouTube	Neha Thombre	Comedy, Lifestyle	113K	640	16 May 2019
2	YouTube	Shashank Udakhe	Comedy reels	395K	692	5 Feb 2025
3	YouTube	YFPFilm	Family Comedy reels	164K	119	6 Feb 2025
4	YouTube	Phoenix Academy Wardha (Nilesh Karale)	Educational, political speeches, interviews, and current affairs	1.07M	1.6K	15 Feb 2025
5	YouTube	Vijay N. Khandare	Family Comedy, Rural Lifestyle	1.15M	345	15 Feb 2025
6	Facebook	Vijay Khandare	Comedy reels, lifestyle	491K	Reels	15 Feb 2025
7	Facebook	neha. thombre	Comedy, Solo performance	113K	Reels, Photos	6 Feb 2025
8	Facebook	YFPFilm	Family humor	396K Followers, 71K Likes	Photo, Comedy Reels	6 Feb 2025
9	Facebook	Madhuri Udakhe	Comedy reels, Photo posts	11.5K Followers	N/A	5 Feb 2025
10	Instagram	neha_thombre	Comedy short videos, Lifestyle, Political humour	145K	1174 Posts	6 Feb 2025
11	Instagram	Vidarbh. kida	Local News, Viral videos, Infotainment with comedy	27.2K	673 Posts	15 Feb 2025
12	Instagram	shashank udakhe	Family, Comedy, Lifestyle	603K	1862 Reels & Photos	5 Feb 2025
13	Instagram	shashank_chi_mum_my	Family, Comedy, Lifestyle	37.5K	276 Reels & Short Videos	5 Feb 2025
14	Instagram	kiran_shashank_udakhe	Lifestyle, Comedy	237K	342 Short Videos, Photo posts	5 Feb 2025
15	Instagram	yfpfilm	Comedy	30.1K	1012 Posts	14 Feb 2025
16	Instagram	vijay_khandare_777	Family comedy	252K Followers	1282 Posts	15 Feb 2025
17	Movies	Naal (2018)	Drama	N/A	Box Office Collection: ₹31.3 Cr Worldwide	N/A
18	Movies	Naal (2023)	Drama	N/A	₹19 Lac in 10 Days	N/A
19	Mobile App	Varhadi Bible	Religious texts	50+ Downloads	N/A	Play Store
20	Mobile App	Phoenix Academy Wardha	Educational	1 Lac+ Downloads	N/A	Play Store

VI. INFLUENCER'S PROFILE

A. Neha Thombre

She is a solo presenter, social media influencer, and digital creator who promotes Varhadi through her YouTube channel,

Nehagiri. She creates short videos on lifestyle, humour, politics, family, and education, incorporating comedy in Varhadi. For example, her video "*Budget Navachi Komdi*" humorously comments on the Union



Budget. Since joining YouTube, her content has received 31,621,898 views, with one video reaching 5.2 million views. Originally from Pulgaon, she now resides in Nagpur and actively creates digital content.

YouTube Joining Date: May 16, 2019

Link: www.youtube.com/@nehathombre

B. Shashank Udakhe

An engineer from Amravati, Maharashtra, creates family-oriented content infused with humour, primarily in Varhadi Marathi, for platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. His channel has garnered over 362 million views (as of the last access date), reaching a broad audience through relatable family situations and regional humour.

By using Varhadi Marathi, he connects deeply with the Vidarbha region while also appealing to a broader digital audience. For example, phrases like "*kamare var hath nahi theu shakat*" add authenticity to his content.

He creates content alongside his wife, Kiran, and mother, Madhuri, whose Facebook and Instagram posts also feature similar content created by Shashank. Together, they produce videos targeting Marathi audiences, particularly those from Vidarbha and Maharashtra. Many viewers from these regions watch and subscribe to his channels.

Joined YouTube on October 25, 2019.

Link: www.youtube.com/@shashank_udakhe

C. YFPfilm

YFP Film focuses on family humour and relatable content in Varhadi, a dialect of Marathi. The channel features lifestyle videos and daily routine comedy. The creator produces both long and short videos, with the longest video clocking in at around 25 minutes and the shortest at about 1 minute. Most videos typically range from 5 to 15 minutes in duration.

The content is well-scripted and follows a complete storyline, incorporating comedy and humour in Varhadi. The characters are portrayed by ordinary people and friends, who act naturally, making the performances more authentic. The video content revolves around family relationships, including husband-wife dynamics, friendships, and interactions among family members. It highlights everyday Marathi relationships, showcasing how they are managed with a mix of comedy, humorous musical elements, and expressive facial gestures.

This style of comedy is commonly found in Marathi cinema, where humour is seamlessly blended with realistic storytelling.

Joined YouTube on December 30, 2019

link: <https://www.youtube.com/@yfpfilm>

D. Phoenix Academy Wardha (Nilesh Karale):

Phoenix Academy Wardha covers a range of educational topics, including Economics, Grammar, Mathematics, Science, and Current Affairs. The academy provides content not only for regular academic education but also for students preparing for civil services exams.

Nilesh Karale conducts polls and interviews on various topics, including student interviews and public opinions on political issues. Being politically active in the region, he creates videos that promote political awareness and share his political aspirations. Some people upload their videos, either

modified or unmodified, which receive significant viewership.

His use of the local language adds an element of fun, and his teaching style, which incorporates local dialects, makes the content both engaging and humorous for viewers. His videos have collectively garnered over 14.72 million views, making his channel a popular platform for educational and political discussions.

He is also present on Telegram and has launched a mobile app, Phoenix Academy Wardha, which has over 1 lakh downloads. The app provides civil service exam preparation materials, study resources, test series, and interactive sessions to help resolve doubts. He also offers personalized mentorship through the app.

App Launch Date: May 19, 2021 (on Play Store) YouTube Joining Date: March 31, 2014

Link-

<https://www.youtube.com/@phoenixacademywardhanitesh6253>

E. Vijay N. Khandare

An actor from Amravati, Vijay Khandare, creates family-oriented humorous content, primarily featuring his wife. His videos showcase the rural life of Vidarbha, highlighting its culture, traditions, and everyday experiences. In addition to storytelling, he also promotes farming products and supports local branding through his content.

Rather than relying on exaggerated comedy, his videos focus on simple life hacks and relatable narratives, which naturally engage the audience. His Varhadi-language content resonates with viewers, making his storytelling both authentic and entertaining.

His YouTube channel, launched in 2017, has accumulated over 494 million views, demonstrating his widespread popularity. He is actively engaged on multiple social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, where he shares similar content and interacts with his audience.

YouTube Joining Date: April 12, 2017

Link-

http://youtube.com/channel/UCtFogk2zTQsi_W3ke4xlXNg

Instagram- [instagram.com/vijay_khandare_777](https://www.instagram.com/vijay_khandare_777)

Facebook

page

<http://facebook.com/vijaykhandareofficial?mibextid=ZbWKwL>

F. Vidarbh.kida

Vidarbh. Kida creates infotainment content, covering a variety of topics, including local news, viral videos, historical places in Vidarbha, Vidarbha tourism, dance edits, and lifestyle content. His videos often include comedy elements, presented in Varhadi and Marathi languages, making them both engaging and culturally relevant.

He primarily operates on Instagram, where his content has gained significant traction. One of his videos has received 3.9 million views, reflecting his growing popularity. He mainly produces short reels, typically around 5 minutes in duration, which cater to an audience that enjoys quick, entertaining, and informative content.



- Instagram- <https://www.instagram.com/vidarbha.kida/reels/>
- Movies** - Naal (2018) and Naal (2023) highlight the emotional bond between a child and their mother, incorporating the authentic Varhadi dialect.
 - Varhadi Bible** - The Bible written in the Varhadi style, catering to the region's religious readers.

VII. CONTENT ANALYSIS

The rise of digital platforms has enabled Varhadi, a dialect of Marathi, to thrive beyond traditional oral communication. Influencers like Neha Thombre and Shashank Udakhe utilise humour and relatable family content to engage their audiences, making Varhadi accessible and entertaining. Channels like YFP Film and Vijay Khandare emphasise family dynamics, rural life, and regional humour, creating an authentic cultural representation.

Beyond entertainment, Phoenix Academy Wardha integrates Varhadi into educational and political discourse, making complex subjects engaging for local audiences, similarly to Vidarbha. Kida merges infotainment with regional storytelling, covering tourism, history, and local events through social media reels. These creators leverage digital media's audiovisual format to sustain and popularize Varhadi.

Additionally, Varhadi's presence in films like *Naal* (2018, 2023) enhances its cultural depth in mainstream cinema, while projects like the *Varhadi Bible* signify its adaptation into formal domains. Despite the dominance of Standard Marathi in education and administration, social media fosters the visibility and continuity of Varhadi. The growing influence of these creators ensures the dialect's relevance among digital audiences, preserving its unique identity while making it more accessible across different demographics.

A. Notes On Emerging Trends

The increasing use of messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups, has contributed to the growing presence of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi in digital communication. These platforms are widely used to share jokes, cultural anecdotes, poetic expressions, and conversational messages in these varieties.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The digital presence of Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi highlights the evolving role of these varieties in bridging traditional oral communication with modern technology. While Standard Marathi remains dominant in formal domains, such as education and administration, Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi have carved out a niche in informal and creative spaces, including social media, regional cinema, and messaging platforms.

Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram play a pivotal role in amplifying the reach of these varieties, with creators producing relatable content that resonates with diverse audiences [4]. Comedy and humour dominate, while lifestyle, tourism, educational, and political content showcase the cultural and intellectual depth of the Vidarbha region. Films like *Naal* and mobile apps like the *Varhadi Bible* further reinforce the cultural authenticity and linguistic significance of these varieties.

Emerging trends on WhatsApp and Facebook groups suggest the increasing relevance of these platforms in everyday digital communication, while preserving their identity in informal exchanges. Varhadi and Nagpuri Marathi exemplify how regional varieties can thrive in the digital era, emphasizing their cultural richness and linguistic diversity while creating pathways for wider recognition and preservation.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

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