

A REVIEW

## TV viewership and rural women

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### ABSTRACT

Media plays a crucial role in our society with the purpose to inform the public about current and past events and issues of public significance. Television has become one of the most important mass media in the recent years. Originally, seen as a means of entertainment for the young and old, television in the twenty-first century is practically watched by all age groups, including infants. Television has immense capability to substantially benefit all when it is used for awareness generation and for learning purposes. With fast changes in today's life style, changes are seen in TV-viewing habits of women. It is observed that the duration of TV-viewing 'in general' and the 'duration of watching TV alone' have increased for an average audience. The paper is an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of TV viewership and rural women.

**Key Words :** Rural woman's TV viewing pattern, Rural women, TV viewership

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Indian audience research indicates that men prefer to watch sports content while women prefer soaps, particularly family dramas, other than reality shows and music videos. Rural women constitute a major portion of India population, India being an agricultural economy. However, there is very little study on the media habits of rural women. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to review the material available on TV viewership among rural women in India.

Four sections of the reviewed literature were formed for easier comprehension.

### General TV viewership studies :

Television programmes contain much more violence and chaotic relationships and show many more affluent people and more luxury than exist in real life (Lichter *et al.*, 1994). People who spend a lot of time watching TV therefore, tend to overestimate crime rates, to show more anxiety

(Gerbner *et al.*, 2002) and less trust in others (Gerbner *et al.*, 1980 and Signorielli *et al.*, 1995). They overestimate the affluence of others (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997), report higher material aspirations (Bruni and Stanca, 2006; Richins, 1987; Sirgy *et al.*, 1998; Shrum *et al.*, 2005) and rate their own relative income lower which is related to lower subjective well-being (Layard, 2005). Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) found in their study that about 48 per cent upper class and 62 per cent middle-class Indians watch Television for more than two hours per every day.

Fatima (2000) suggests that TV has a long-term effect on people's thinking. Therefore, instead of glamorization, portrayal of crime and commercialization, positive trends need to be introduced on the TV channels in order to save our values. According to Bruni and Stanca (2008) TV viewing has been found to have a negative effect on life satisfaction due to reducing time spent in relational activities.

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Martin and Robinson (2008) concluded by making a comparison with addiction: “Addictive activities produce momentary pleasure but long-term misery and regret. People most vulnerable to addiction tend to be socially or personally disadvantaged, with TV becoming an opiate.” Unhappy people were also more likely to have unwanted extra time on their hands (51%) compared to very happy people (19%) and to feel rushed for time (35% vs. 23%). Of the two, having extra time on their hands was the bigger burden. These conflicting data suggest that TV may provide viewers with short-run pleasure, but at the expense of long-term malaise, said Professor Robinson. He also noted that earlier general satisfaction surveys also showed people rating TV below average as a significantly less satisfying free-time activity in general. “What viewers seem to be saying is that while TV in general is a waste of time and not particularly enjoyable, the shows I saw tonight were pretty good.” Unhappy people watch more TV, while happy people read more newspapers and socialize more.

Becker (2013) stated that too much watching television results in disillusionment about what to expect from the world around us. This can most commonly be seen in people’s expectations of love, romance, and sexuality. It is influencing the spending habits. If one thinks one is immune (or too smart) to be influenced by the power of advertisements, one is wrong. Corporations do not spend trillions of dollars in advertising hoping to influence people. They spend trillions of dollars because they know they will influence people. TV viewers report lower life satisfaction, higher material aspirations, and more anxiety.

Freeman (2013) showed that seven in ten Canadians with a smartphone, tablet or computer surf those devices while watching television. More than a third of respondents with access to two screens used a second screen to look up information; one-fifth did so to monitor social media activity and another fifth texted friend while watching TV. More than 80 per cent of respondents who use Rogers’ on-demand service admit to marathon or “binge” viewing – watching three or more episodes or two or more movies in a row, with the longest sessions averaging up to seven hours on a weekend, and 71 per cent of respondents said they watch shows on their smartphones, tablets and laptops. Nine out of ten of those under 34 said they watched content on those second screens.

Humax (2013) found that 9 per cent of TV viewers of UK saying that they send text messages to family or friends about the show they are watching. In comparison, 7 per cent currently use facebook to discuss the TV programme on show and only 3 per cent are using twitter. Less than 1 per cent use dedicated social networking apps such as Zeebox to read comments about shows and join live debates. The type of programmes provoking the most reaction on social channels

are reality TV, sports and soaps. The ability to store and watch back digital recordings of their favourite shows appears to be a big hit with the UK, with almost two-thirds (65%) owning a digital TV recorder, of which 87 per cent of those regularly use to record their favourite TV shows. The average person in the UK has 29 hours of TV recorded and saved on digital hard drives. That’s equivalent to 14 James Bond movies back-to-back or 58 episodes of Eastenders (if you can bear to watch them in succession). Those aged 45 to 54 are more likely to own a set-top box that can record digitally, although it’s the 35 to 44 year olds who are hitting the record button to store their favourite shows most often. Monday to Thursday evenings are the most popular time to watch recordings. Women in UK were preferred drama, soaps and documentaries whereas men preferred drama, documentaries and sports.

#### **TV viewership studies on children and youth :**

Lowery and DeFleur (1988) showed in their research that children tend to watch more television than do adults, prefer to watch adult programs, and usually watch as late into the night as do adults. Despite their emergence from the more limited world of childhood and their increased reliance on peers, adolescents continue to spend a great deal of their time watching television. Brown and Newcomer (1991) opined that viewing more sexual content on television was found to increase the likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse among teens.

Sinichi Shimizu (1993) in her study found that MTV programmes are changing the entire music scene in Asia. Multinational rock music or world music is becoming the mainstream popular music among the youth in Asia, while the traditional style is becoming obscure and obsolete.

Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) stated that watching television varies with the age group of the children in India. As children grow up they watch more television. Most of the children prefer watching programmes with fighting scenes and music. Children often imitate the life style and fashion of their favourite hero and heroine. Children with middle class background are found to be light viewers when compared with the children of higher and lower economic background. One of the findings is that children lacking in parental care are more affected by TV.

Most of the children demand from their parents the products they see or watch on Television. Kamna Raj (2000) opines that these days television influences the lives of young children and it is only going to get worse with each passing year. But there is a different scene in Indian villages. Children are great fan of television. They try to act and copy what they watch on television. During the telecasting of Superman serial on Delhi Doordarshan, many children were injured and hospitalized in imitating their superhero.

Verma and Larson (2002) found that adolescents watch television for 12 hours per week on an average. The study further indicates that television viewing is seen as a major source of stress relieving activity. It was concluded that 29 per cent of viewers watch television for the purpose of learning/education.

Arslan *et al.* (2006) observed that television has powerful effects on children. Though TV gives positive messages to children yet it also can cause children to be inactive and prevent their creative play activities. The study aimed at determining the television viewing habits of school age children between 6–12 years. It was conducted on 100 students who were selected with stratified randomised sampling method according to sex, age and class among 492 students of a school. Mean age of school age children who were involved in study was  $9.1 \pm 1.5$ . It was determined that 43 per cent of children ( $n=43$ ) were watching TV more than 3 hours a day, 54 per cent of them were watching TV to relieve their boredom and 48 per cent of them were watching TV because they like watching. When the spare time activities of children were examined, it was determined that they were spending their time by playing and making sportive activities with the highest rate ( $n=95$ , 26.1%), and television viewing was in the third order ( $n=61$ , 17.3%). In this study, it was determined that most of the children were watching TV under the offered time, children whose mother were not working were watching TV for longer time, and TV watching time of the children was increasing with increasing age.

Goswami and Kashyap (2006) also found that imitating hairstyles, clothing and accessories of actors in popular films was widespread among both urban as well as rural youth. Nowadays children do not spend money on nutrient foods and other important products. But, they like to buy Chips, Kurkure, Chocolate and other electronic devices. Katke (2007) says that there is a positive relationship between time spent with television and its impact on the buying behaviour of a child and its influence on family spending.

According to Verma and Larson (2008), to understand the effects of TV on youth, it is important to know the context in which they view it. Their paper reports findings from an experience sampling study of 100 urban, middle-class Indian families to elucidate the context of use for this group. Mothers, fathers, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders carried alarm watches for one week and provided 13,674 reports on their activities and subjective states at random times across waking hours when signalled. TV viewing occupied 10.9 per cent of these adolescents' time (about 12 h per week). Ninety per cent of this viewing occurred at home, with majority of it, 73 per cent, done with other family members, including 7 per cent with grandparents, uncles, or aunts. This indicates that TV viewing for these youth is typically a family activity, occurring in a context in which parents' supervision and influence is

likely. Adolescents' rates of viewing were correlated with mothers' rates of viewing, with rates for both higher when mothers were unemployed. Adolescents' TV rates were also correlated with fathers' rates and with fathers' type of employment. During TV viewing, adolescents reported lower than average challenge, worry, and paying attention, and higher than average choice, calm, and relaxation. As a whole, the findings indicate that the TV viewing of middle-class Indian youth is typically a relaxed antidote to the stresses of the day that they share with their families.

Ahluwalia and Singh (2011) found in their study that on an average, children watch two hours or less of TV daily and most of them indulged in bedtime TV Viewing. They watched TV primarily for entertainment and for learning. Children's most preferred program was children's shows/serials, followed by cartoon/animated programs.

Kanwal and Sukhmani (2011) conducted a study to make note of various television-viewing habits among youngsters of Northern India and to identify the factors, which encourage television viewership among youngsters. A sample of 750 respondents from 5 states of Northern India were selected for analysis. Factor Analytic approach was applied on 14 statements to find the reasons for television viewership. The study also highlighted the TV program preferences among youngsters.

Hudson and Wright (2011) opined that watching educational television may be an important vehicle for children to get some early learning that can really make a positive contribution. Viewing of educational programming was associated with better school readiness and better academic skills. They found that younger children, especially those aged 2 and 3, who watched a few hours a week of educational programs had higher scoring on academic tests 3 years later than children who did not watch the programs.

Many parents also complain that their children do not help in their household work and children have reduced other social activities because of watching more television. Gladwell (2013) expressed that the time spent with television lead to a decrease in more valuable activities, and that these kids seem to spend less time engaged in activities that encourage cognitive development.

Singh (2014) stated that television has a direct and straight relation with children lives. At early stage of their life, they become familiar with cartoon programmes on television. The early exposure to the television intermingle their lives with the characters they watch on television and affects their later life. It has been researched that television plays a significant role in the development of children's moral formation. But the social and economic dimension of Indian villages is different from cities. Mostly, rural children believe in what they watch on television while urban children are more intelligent in understanding and choosing their

contents. The prime aim of this study was to find out the role of television in children moral formation. A fewer studies have been conducted on television impact in rural areas of India. A sample of sixty students was chosen randomly from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> class according to their availability. The study concluded that there is a deep relation in watching television and moral development of children. Majority of the children behave the way they watch people performing activities on the television screen and follow them in their everyday life.

An immediate problem with mothers watching TV during feedings is that they might miss the subtle cues that indicate their baby is full, and end up overfeeding their babies, says the study by author Dr. Mary Jo Messito (2014). Preschool and school-aged children have shown that TV viewing during meals is linked to a poorer quality diet, a decreased sensitivity to feeling full and a greater consumption of calories. Of the women in her study who watched TV during mealtimes while pregnant, Messito said, "There was a five times more likely chance that she would be exposing her baby to TV while feeding." In all, 71 per cent of the women reported at least some mealtime TV viewing during their pregnancy. A third said their 3-month-old infants were exposed to TV during their feedings. Women who were under age 25 were more likely to watch TV while feeding their babies than were older mothers, and women who didn't breast-feed exclusively were also more likely to turn on the TV while feeding their babies. That may be because it's more difficult to manage TV watching and breast-feeding than TV watching and bottle feeding, Messito said. Excess TV viewing is associated with less physical activity. The more TV you watch, the more likely you are to do it in all circumstances," he said. "To put the findings in perspective, we know that combining eating and TV viewing is bad. It's the primary way TV leads to increased obesity. About one in four households has the TV on during mealtimes, said Christakis, citing other research. Over eating while viewing is common. "It appears that the visual and cognitive distractions from television override the satiety reflex.

Shea (2014) alleged that the quality of TV programmes were not good. He believed that the TV shows were not teaching moral values, or even educating the children. Their main focus is fashion, fighting which encourages crime.

Hamman (2014) pointed out that the television has always been a long-debated medium, particularly its influence on our children – rightfully so now that our youth are averaging only 900 hours a year in formal education, but an inconceivable 1500 hours a year in front of the TV. What a child learns in those precious few years has a direct influence on their thoughts and behaviours for the rest of their lives, yet instead of learning basic skills from the real people around them, they are more engrossed in cartoons, movies and video games with characters that are providing their education for

us. It's a pattern that starts from a very young age too, with 2-5 year olds in the US and Canada 'investing' over 21 hours a week in front of the TV, a situation made far worse when we learn that 70 per cent of preschools have a television playing all day, providing additional exposure. According to a study from the University of Texas, "preschool children who watched a few hours a week of educational programming perform better on achievement tests over time than their peers who watch more general entertainment shows."

#### **TV viewership studies on men and women :**

Lowry (1997) revealed that women were more than twice as likely to mention dramas among their favourite forms of programming, while four times as many men chose sports. In the broader strokes, women tend to be more story-oriented, men more action- and comedy-oriented. Women appear to be more willing to watch programs that traditionally appeal to men than the other way around, including those that contain violence.

Vasan (2005) reported that young men watched significantly more films in a month than did young women and differed significantly in their film and TV preferences; while both young men and women reported enjoying films with love themes, more young men than women preferred films with sexy scenes and rowdiness, and more young women than men preferred films with family themes. Qualitative findings supported these preferences, suggesting that differing issues of interest, situations that paralleled their own, and/or familial concerns guided young men and young women to select the kinds of films they viewed and the content/messages they sought from them. Indeed, the findings highlighted that young women's keen awareness of family and social expectations, and their internalization of their families' apprehensions about the potential 'harmful' influence of films, apparently affected the selection of the kinds of films they watched as well as avoided. Influence on behaviours related to dressing style and mannerisms; while peer influences dominated those of the media in effecting changes in all four behaviours related to dressing style and mannerisms among young women.

Dare and Drogell (2010) found that more than 9 out of 10 Canadians have a TV in their living room or family room – the most common room in the home for a TV. Women are more likely to watch prime time programs than men. Catching up on soaps while soaping up – TVs are even showing up in the bathroom! One per cent of Canadians report having a TV in their bathroom. That's the equivalent of more than 128,000 Canadian TV owners! Other popular types of programming are movies, sports and reality TV. Canadians over 55 are least likely to watch prime time but are mostly likely to watch talk shows and news most often. French Canadians are more likely to watch soap operas most

often and least likely to tune in to the prime time programming. Men are more likely than women to place a high importance on screen size. Men spend more time than women being sports enthusiasts (either watching live sports or playing sports). Men are more likely than women to watch movies at home or sports. Women are more likely than men to place a high importance on environmentally friendly features. On average, women spend more time than men talking on the phone. Women are more likely than men to watch reality TV and soap operas.

According to Nielsen (2011), women of all ages spend more time than their male counterparts watching TV: 16 hours of more TV watching per month among these women compared to the viewing habits of men of similar ages. Females between the ages of 18 and 49 watch more than 151 hours of TV each month on average. African-Americans watch about 213 hours of television per month on average – more than twice as much as Asians and roughly 57 hours more than Whites.

Jamila (2012) found that males and females prefer to watch Comedy genres on TV, however, action and horror are more likely favourite with males and romance with females. Males and Females mostly watch T.V. between 8 pm - 8:30 pm, which is also the peak of when people are watching T.V. Males, however, watch television between 6 pm - 9 pm and 10.30 pm - 11pm and females watch between 6pm - 10 pm the number of hours is varied among both males and females. Despite that, both males and females would never watch T.V. in a week. But males are more likely watch T.V. either for a long period of time like 20 hours or a small amount of time like half an hour. Females will only watch T.V. up to 4 hours a week, however males will continue to watch up to 20 hours a week. Most males prefer watching the advertisements compared to females, their reasons for why are :

- “It gives me a break to do other things”
  - “It provides me with the latest trend and products”
  - “It informs of new shows and products etc.”
- However, more females prefer not to watch the T.V. ads compared to males, their reasons for why are :
- “They are boring and very repetitive”
  - “It’s a waste of time and very annoying
  - “It interrupts the shows that I am watching”

### TV viewership studies on women :

Television has been heavily criticized in the popular press for the way it depicts women. Narrow and stereotyped portrayals of women may, according to some writers, cultivate misconceptions among the public about the way women are or should be. In an investigation of this issue, a survey study was undertaken with a large British sample in the London ITV region in which data were obtained on TV viewing

behaviours and perceptions of the way women are portrayed on TV and beliefs about how they are or should be in real life. Results showed that only weight of action-drama viewing was significantly related to respondents’ perceptions of women. Heavy viewers of action-drama content were more likely than light viewers to perceive women in reality as self-reliant, not quarrelsome with other women, not dependent on attractiveness to get on, and not preoccupied by romantic affairs. However, heavy action viewers also tended to believe that most women actually want to become mothers, and do not want careers, and more importantly that women ought to be like this. Only in some respects were these relationships consonant with those inferred by content analysts (Gunter and Wober, 1982).

Another research shows that males are socialized to be instrumental in communication while females are socialized to be expressive, or focused on relationships. The researchers expected this instrumental-expressive dichotomy to emerge in television use. In two studies, the authors found limited support that males had an instrumental viewing style, with goal-directed reasons for watching and intentional, concentrated, and selective use of television. Females had a relationship-oriented approach to television similar to the expressive orientation (Natharison *et al.*, 1995).

Holbert *et al.* (2003) in ‘Political implications of primetime drama and sitcom use: Genres of representation and opinions concerning women’s rights’ found that use of certain type of prime-time entertainment TV programming was found to hold a positive relationship with support for women’s right. The use of content exposing in more conservative values had negative relationship with the criterion variable.

According to Joseph (2004), reporting of gender violence is a global pandemic. Women’s fiery death or burn injuries, gender violence and some other tragic incidents were common on daily news reports. These stories are presented in a careless manner which even does not arouse reader’s consciousness. The way news is reported and projected in the media needs to be tackled. Joseph questions that the magnitude of violence is sure to terrorise women all over the world, then why does it not find a space on front page or on the editorial page.

Prasad (2004) focused on various communication policies and their implications for empowerment of women in India. Indian media portrays negative picture of women. The broadcasting policies should be region based and on gender equity. The role of various mass media can be effectively attributed in agriculture, health, behaviour change and child care. Rural and urban women respond differently to mass media. Rural women are more inclined towards serials, cinema programs whereas urban women watch more

of educative and informative programs. The insights from selected Indian states focus on the role played by mass media in the process of women empowerment. State governments are making efforts to provide equality to women and this can be judged from projects/schemes being launched at various levels. In these states, various SHGs (self help groups) and NGOs aim to achieve economic and social status for women.

Singh (2004) opined that the role of media in development of women is two-fold. (a) Development through exposure to media by way of programs and printed material. This is a consumer-oriented function, and by the consumer, we mean women. (b) development through the active participation of women in the production of media messages by participating in the decision-making process regarding program content, policies and the projection of a balanced image of women.

Joshi (2007) concluded that the contribution of media in social transformation has to be accepted. Radio and television made women aware of their rights and duties. The Indian cinema gave the message of fighting evil and revolt against the injustice. Media introduced women achievers to the society but there has been the other side of the coin also where TV soap operas portrayed elite class and excluded middle and rural segment of the Indian population. They also did not pay much attention to domestic violence and to the working conditions of women in unorganised sector. Also presenting women in ads as a sex symbol and using them for sales promotion hampered their goal towards empowerment. She also pointed out that though there has been increase of women professionals in media but still they are confined to few subjects. Though Indian women are making use of media and removing their unawareness and empowering themselves, still lot more needs to be done collectively.

According to Basu (2007), civil society is essential for building a strong democratic nation as it works towards equity by empowering its weaker sections. New perspectives have to be created in the society, which would eventually lead to fostering of new values. This can only take place with the help of communication. Various forms of both print and electronic media have wired us all over the world. Society can move on a correct track if media projects women related issues. Media can provide the needed space and time to women and men to develop new perspectives and to become empowered. According to Basu, the need of the hour is to promote alternative media.

Findings of another research support the prediction that gender significantly affects viewing preferences. The differences in viewing preferences are consistent with gender stereotypes, with men more likely to prefer programs that are action oriented such as animated sitcoms, and women more likely to prefer reality TV programs, night-time soaps,

and situation comedies (Bagdasarov *et al.*, 2010).

Another study found that more frequency of television advertisement increases the product demand because when they observed an advertisement of a product or brand more and more, then they became inclined to purchase that product. The researchers were of the opinion that TV advertisements helped women to make a better choice during shopping by providing enough information about the products or brands. The respondents also viewed that they preferred to buy the branded products shown in advertisement because they believed that branded products would offer the quality, benefits, ingredients and other facilities promised through advertisement messages. So the sellers should, therefore provide all the messages in that way which would help the women in decision making process (Ashaduzzaman and Rahman, 2011)

### Conclusion :

It can be seen from the various studies reviewed above that most of them dilate upon preferences of men and women while viewing television and some studies also bring forth the image of women as projected by TV. However, there is a dearth of Indian studies highlighting the TV viewing pattern of rural women which can be instrumental in providing a basic framework for designing user - friendly as well as audience-specific content for this large segment of society.

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