

Examining the Media Consumption Behaviour of females in India

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to examine the media consumption behaviour of females in India. The understanding of the media consumption behaviour of females in terms of why, what, when, and how they consume different media options will enable various stakeholders to identify their interactive effects on females' overall well-being, access to affordable and quality health care, educational opportunities, empowerment, decision-making skills, development, and social status by effectively including their media consumption behaviour. This is an empirical study carried out through a cross-sectional web survey of 383 Indian females in the age group of 11-50 years. This study contributes to the understanding of the emergence of females as media consumers in patriarchal Indian society and provides cognizance for the marketing practitioners, governments, policymakers and researchers to take note of the copious opportunities in this area.*

Keywords – Uses and Gratification, Digital Divide, Media Consumption, India

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the foundation of any society. Communication facilitates information and knowledge sharing, socialization process, entertainment, and creating a common understanding of issues (Schramm, 1977). A human being starts communicating as soon as he starts producing his first noise in the act of drawing his parents' attention. It is quite hard to imagine a life without communication. When the communication is targeted to disseminate information to a mass audience in a short time some media technologies are used. These technologies are collectively called mass media. In short, mass media refers to a diverse array of media technologies such as television, movies, advertising, radio, the Internet, magazines, and newspapers that reach a large audience via mass communication (Capriotti et al., 2020; Camilleri, 2019). Companies use mass media to reach customers, create awareness

about the products/services, build brand image, boost brand engagement, improve sales and develop brand loyalty (Hair et al., 2020; Dolan, 2019; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016). Mass media has also been an active socialization agent for all (Capriotti et al., 2020; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016). Television shows, movies, ted-talks, YouTube content, music, newspapers, radio, magazines, social media, websites, and other numerous aspects of mass media influence our views, perceptions, beliefs, and practices about politics, religion, culture, gender biases, lifestyles, clothing, and food-habits (Gamage et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2020; Kaur et al., 2020).

The evolution of media, from traditional or non-digital media (television, movies, advertising, radio, magazines, and newspapers) to new digital media (the Internet), has transformed the way we understand the world around us. As

compared to traditional media, the new digital media is an interactive, customized, and diverse user-oriented way of communicating (Haridakis and Humphries, 2019). Media expose us to various viewpoints that shape our understanding and knowledge of the activities around us. Both, the content and the medium through which information is shared with others play a significant role in creating an understanding of that information (Gamage et al., 2022; Capriotti et al., 2020). With the emergence of new forms of media and media technology, the pattern of media consumption is also undergoing rapid changes. The Internet represents a great prospect for both kids as well as adults (Dolan, 2019; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016). Substantial research has been undertaken to assess how the different media has been consumed by people across generations, countries, and age groups (Livingstone 2003). After the spread of Internet connectivity and smartphones, although the research on mass media consumer behaviour has grown multi-fold, it remains a relatively small body of literature (Joo et al., 2018; Kim and Weaver, 2002) in economically emerging countries like India.

Media, if used appropriately, has the potential to be the guiding force behind the policies developed, or to be developed, for the betterment of female health issues (Hair et al., 2020; Dolan, 2019) which are not yet been discussed openly in India, i.e., what to inform (the content), who to inform (the beneficiary), and how and where to inform (media), how much to inform (depth). Removing the ambiguity, misinformation, and unawareness around available options will help marketers,

policymakers, and females to make more informed choices for their well-being. However, there is hardly any research that may confirm the media consumption habits of females, particularly in India, hence this study aims to fill this gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have identified long-term implications of media used for human behaviour in terms of philanthropic behaviour (Haridakis and Humphries, 2019), inclination towards violence (Hair et al., 2020; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016), eating habits, sexual experiences, absorption of values (Dolan, 2019), development of worldview, perception of gender equality, political attitudes, career aspirations, spiritual values, stereotypes, and cognitive skills (Lemish, 2015). Media expose us to various viewpoints that shape our understanding and knowledge of the activities around us. The evolution of media, from traditional or non-digital media (television, movies, advertising, radio, magazines, and newspapers) to new digital media (the Internet), has transformed the way we understand the world around us (Camilleri and Camilleri, 2019; GWI, 2019). As compared to traditional media, the new digital media is an interactive, customized, and diverse user-oriented way of communicating resulting in exponential growth in the time spent with digital media by everyone on a daily basis. People are not only using the media but also doing media multitasking (Hair et al., 2020; Herrero and Martín, 2017).

Media socialization is an ongoing “mediatisation” process encompassing three basic dimensions: (i) accessibility of media content and devices; (ii) extent of

media usage and exposure; and (iii) liking for a specific variety of media (Livingstone, 2003). In the past decades, as compared to traditional media, there has been an exponential growth in the amount of time spent with digital media by everyone on a daily basis due to the greater availability of cheaper smartphones, cost effective Internet connectivity, and a huge variety of interactive media. People are not only using the media but also doing media multitasking (Haridakis and Humphries, 2019; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016). Collectively, these elements provide an ample scope for an important, spirited, and well-timed field of further enquiry and examination. In the digital era, media permeate all spheres of life at every life cycle stage with its presence in children's rooms, in schools, in families, in offices, and in senior citizens' homes. However, at each stage, depending upon various factors such as one's peer group, professional life, family life, income, social status, and number of children the different types of media will matter.

Technology also keeps evolving over time and gradually offers increasing access to media and media content similarly, new digital devices shape the media habits of people who may or may not have grown up with digital media (Hair et al., 2020). Studies have documented many differences in behaviour of media users both at a global and local levels, and observed that media usage preferences are shaped by various variables such as age, gender, country of residence, educational qualification, social status, income, personality, technical affinity, and cultural background. Researchers have

found children and younger people to be more exposed and influenced by the effects of media. (Dolan, 2019; Dhir, and Torsheim, 2016).

Family households are also becoming technologically equipped and family members autonomous about integrating media in their daily lives. Different media are used to strengthen bonds between family members. Meanwhile, ubiquitous and multi functional devices along with access to global media content have resulted in the individualization of media use. Consequently, some studies have found adults to be more involved with the Internet than children and youth (Herrero and Martín, 2017). People want to be “always on” and regularly update their social media profiles, post pictures, status, and gadgets. In the digital era, societies are becoming hyper connected in which a large number of people have adopted: (i) a digital lifestyles; (ii) learning to use media as a resource for private, educational, and professional purposes; (iii) recognizing the potential risks of over consumption of media; and (iv) becoming aware of distorted media realities, digital distractions, information overload, and privacy risks. Being a networked individual has become essentially an identity in its own right. From a socialization perspective, media literacy assists as a tool in adoption of different processes, cultures, values, beliefs, and lifestyles (Capriotti et al., 2020; Herrero and Martín, 2017).

STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the media consumption behaviour of females in India.
2. To understand the media consumption behaviour of females

in terms of why, what, when, and how they consume different media options.

3. To identify the interactive effects of different media options on females' overall well-being, access to affordable and quality health care, educational opportunities, empowerment, decision-making skills, development, and social status.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Females' consumption of media varies across traditional and digital media.

H2: Females' most preferred media choice varies across the nature of activity undertaken.

H3: Females' frequency of the Internet consumption varies across the activities undertaken.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is an exploratory primary data-based study conducted to provide an overview of the media consumption behaviour of females in India from a digital health marketing perspective. The primary data were obtained through a web survey of 383 Indian females in the Delhi NCR region. A non-disguised questionnaire comprising two sections was used as a tool for data collection. The study sample covered a wide range of respondents from 11 to 50 years of age. The survey's preconditions ensured that all respondents were able to surf the Internet independently. Every possible effort was made to ensure a representative sample of Indian females covering a wide range of age groups across different socio-economic backgrounds.

The respondents were ensured confidentiality and their right to freedom to refuse to respond to any

particular statement. The questionnaire link was shared with the prospective respondents via WhatsApp groups and e-mails, resulting in the collection of data from 549 females out of which few were discarded (being incomplete) and consequently, the final sample comprised 383 females (response rate 71 per cent). The response set was one response-one person, with a time limit of two weeks; i.e., the third, and fourth week of August 2022. The surveyed sample of 383 comprised 52 per cent rural (N = 200) and 48 percent urban (N = 183) females. The respondents were spread across four age groups, with the maximum being 21-30 (36 per cent) years old. All were educated, and about one-third (35 per cent) working.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that females' consumption of media varies across traditional and digital media. In this direction, all the available media options, for different possible activities that may have been undertaken by respondents on an average daily bases, were identified and categorized into two types of media, one that needs the Internet for execution herein termed as digital media that includes studying/working online, messaging on phone, and Internet surfing including social media usage, and another for whom the Internet is not needed herein termed as traditional media that includes studying/working offline, reading, watching television, and listening radio. Table 1 summarizes the corresponding data. The results show that about three-fourths of the respondents spend more than one hour on studies/working both online (43.1 percent + 32.1 percent = 75.2 percent) and online (42.8 percent + 30.8 percent = 73.6 percent). The

next most utilized option is Internet surfing, on which the respondents spend about 1.75 hours daily followed by reading (M= 1.54), chatting/messaging (M = 1.45), watching television (M = 1.33), and listening to radio (M = 1.22). Among all the listed activities, listening to the radio emerged as the least preferred activity of females 80.4 percent of them spent less than one hour. Minute observation of analysis results also revealed the higher indulgence of females in digital media-based activities as compared to traditional media-based activities. The results, thus, supported the first hypothesis.

Type of Activity	Low Consumption	Moderate Consumption	High Consumption	Mean (SD)
	0 to 1 hour (%)	1 to 3 hours (%)	3 to 5 hours (%)	
Digital Media Based				
Studying/working (online)	24.8	43.1	32.1	2.07 (0.75)
Surfing Internet	42.6	39.7	17.8	1.75 (0.74)
Chatting/messaging on phone	62.9	29.2	7.8	1.45 (0.64)
Traditional Media Based				
Studying/working (offline)	26.4	42.8	30.8	2.04 (0.76)
Reading (books/magazines/newspapers)	53.0	39.2	7.3	1.54 (0.63)
Television viewing	70.0	26.6	3.4	1.33 (0.54)
Listening to Radio	80.4	17.5	2.1	1.22 (0.46)

Analysis of data reveals that out of the five media options (Internet, magazines, newspapers, radio, television), the Internet is the most preferred media, whereas radio is the least preferred media used by the respondents across the three types of activities. Within the activities, the use of the Internet is most popular for work-related information (4.5 percent), non-food shopping (94.3 percent), food shopping (88.8 percent), travel and tour-related information (86.7 percent), and

information on health issues (80.4 percent) followed by rest of the activities. Television is the next most preferred media option by respondents for entertainment (33.4 percent), news/current events (24.5 percent), and weather forecast (17.8 percent) followed by newspapers for news/current events (18.0 percent), magazines for entertainment (12.0 percent), and radio for health issues (4.4 percent). The results (Table 2) thus confirmed the assertion made in the second hypothesis.

Table 2: Factor analysis of media choice across activities

Type of Activity	Factor Loading ^a	Internet	Magazines	Newspapers	Radio	Television
		%	%	%	%	%
Factor 1- Consumption						
New products' information	.75	88.0	1.8	4.7	1.0	4.4
Food shopping	.75	88.8	6.0	2.3	1.0	1.8
Non-food shopping	.63	94.3	3.4	0.5	0.5	1.3
Factor 2 - Entertainment	.78	52.5	12.0	1.3	0.8	33.4
Factor 3 - Information						
News/current events	.81	44.4	11.2	18.0	1.8	24.5
Weather forecast	.67	66.8	6.5	7.6	1.3	17.8
Travel and tour	.54	86.7	7.0	3.4	1.0	1.8
Work related	.45	94.5	2.9	1.8	0.5	0.3
Health Issues	.43	80.4	5.7	6.0	4.4	3.4

^a – Extraction Method: Principal Component; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; Eigen Value > 1.

The third hypothesis (H3) proposed that females' frequency of the Internet consumption varies across the activities undertaken. To this end, twelve activities were identified under three headings (consumption, entertainment, and information activities) for which the Internet may be used by the respondents, most frequently daily. The respective data were collected using a 5-point scale (Table 3). The mean Internet usage scores as enlisted in Table 3 are different from each other and the majority of them are well above the scale mid value (2.5) indicating that the frequency of Internet usage varies across activities. The mean

scores also indicate that usage of the Internet is more popular for informative purposes than for consumption and entertainment in this order. Rankings were assigned to the listed activities based on mean usage scores. As per these rankings, the usage of the Internet is highest for gathering health-related information (M = 3.96; Rank = I) and the least for making friends (M = 2.07; Rank = XII). For statistical verification, one sample t-test was applied by taking 2.5 (scale mid-value) as the test value. All the t-values were found to be significant at $p < .001$, and $P < .05$ leading to the acceptance of H3.

Table 3: Internet Usage: t-test

Type of activity	Mean (SD) ¹	Ranking ²	Mean Difference ³	t-value	Sig.
<i>Consumption</i>					
Products' information	2.66 (1.39)	X	0.16	2.30	.022*
Food shopping	3.35 (1.32)	V	0.85	12.62	.000**
Non-food shopping	2.69 (1.23)	IX	0.19	3.10	.002*
<i>Entertainment</i>					
Watching movies/shows	3.14 (1.29)	VI	0.64	9.67	.000**
Listening Music	3.13 (1.32)	VII	0.83	12.07	.000**
Playing Games	2.20 (1.35)	XI	-0.30	-4.33	.000**
Making friends	2.07 (1.28)	XII	-0.43	-6.59	.000**
<i>Information</i>					
Weather	3.42 (1.13)	IV	0.92	15.98	.000**
Travel and tour	3.01 (1.38)	VIII	0.51	7.28	.000*
Work/studies related	3.68 (1.27)	III	1.18	19.32	.000**
Health Issues	3.96 (1.12)	I	1.46	25.51	.000**
Further education	3.74 (1.19)	II	1.24	18.16	.000**
Notes: 1. Five point scale (1= never, 5 = always) 2. Ranking is based on mean scores 3. Mean difference = Mean Scores – Scale Mid value (2.5) 4. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$					

CONCLUSIONS

The study focused on examining the media consumption behaviour of Indian females in terms of why, what, when, and how they consume different media options (traditional and digital). This understanding will guide the stakeholders to work collectively in the direction of taking measures to strengthen females' overall well-being, access to affordable and quality health care, educational opportunities,

empowerment, decision-making skills, development, and social status by effectively including their media consumption behaviour. The mean usage scores for traditional and digital media revealed that females use both traditional and digital media mostly for their studies/official work. Among all the listed activities, listening to the radio emerged as the least preferred activity of females. As expected, the analysis results also revealed the

higher indulgence of females in digital media-based activities as compared to traditional media-based activities.

Study results also revealed that females' most preferred media choice varies across the nine activities that have been chosen for this study. Here also out of the five media options, i.e., Internet, magazine, newspapers, radio, and television, the Internet emerged as the most preferred media option. The most favored reason behind the popularity of the Internet is the speed, secrecy, authenticity, multiple available websites, sources, and options, at which information and insights can be derived apart from the sophistication of actions that can be created to provide compelling virtual product experiences. Via Internet, companies can launch products faster, reach consumers synchronously across demographically segmented beneficiaries, test content in real-time, and respond to the needs, doubts, and requirements of users in a fraction of the time.

Government organizations can make good use of the Internet to spread important messages to families by targeting females by making websites more useful, attractive, and interactive. The digital revolution added to the venues in which marketers can attract increasingly female consumers. The girls also face various kinds of discrimination as well in accessing nutrition, education, employment opportunities, and health services. Sometimes they are forced to marry at a very young age, have a pregnancy, have unsafe abortions, and have childbearing thereby posing grave health issues. For this, the girls from a very young age may be provided with proper and timely sexual and reproductive health

information that too with due protection to their right to privacy, confidentiality, and respect.

The governments at various levels may develop strategies and policies to promote and support women's education, awareness regarding various government schemes, microcredit facilities, small-scale industries, and full and equal participation in economic development. Women must be encouraged to contribute actively to creating content for females which may help them in becoming more empowered. The governments may also promote the balanced, and empowered portrayals of females by the media which may lead to better female participation in the workforce, production, and decision-making. Females may be given training to make use of the available information, risks of cyberbullying and fraud, authenticity and accuracy of available information, etc.

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