

Analysing Media Dependency of Rural Population during the Times of COVID Pandemic

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Abstract

The era of Corona pandemic has brought various changes in the way people live. It is not possible to claim those changes to be temporary or permanent as only time will tell about the changes that people will cling to and the changes people will disown. One such change in the habit has been the one pertaining to the media habits and consumption during the testing times of corona. The subsequent lockdown and the looming uncertainty is believed to have been the altering force. The objective of this research is to find out the media consumption and dependency during the lockdown period. The research is done to find out the levels of engagement of the people and survey is used to collect the primary data. The population comprises of the people living in the villages of district Moradabad. Later the data is subjected to rigorous data analysis using SPSS. The findings suggest an increased dependency on media during these times with greater use of the social media for information specific needs and other needs.

Keywords: Communication, Media usage, Social Media Usage, Corona Times, Rural Population

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1. Introduction

The media dependency has been a much contested topic and has been at the core of hundreds of researches conducted across the world. Media dependency is believed to be a constant variable with people from different socio-economic backgrounds possessing it in varying degrees. The immeasurable literature suggests that people have varying degree of interest in media during different times and conditions. A politically and economically stable times call for different media attention in comparison to a politically and economically wobbly times. Negative occurrences attract people more than the positive ones. There is enough scientific and research backing to this claim. When all goes well, then people distance themselves from the media and news and develop habits that keeps them happier, more content and engaged.

The recent times of the pandemic saw the world turning upside down. The lives changed, the expectations changed. In fact, using the word 'change' doesn't do justice with the kind of metamorphosis the world has seen in the recent times. The expectations and lifestyles have undergone severe transformation and so has their media habits. The rise of OTT media platforms is an evidence of how the media habits too have been altered. The lockdown phase saw people binge watching anything and everything coming their way. The news full of the data showing the daily death tolls was consumed by people in order to find out some silver lining in the plethora of bad news hitting us like a sniper every time.

The studies and news regarding this changed media behaviour and the data by agencies showing the shift in the media consumption has been mostly confined to the urban population.

2. Review of Literature

Bogart (1972) tried to study the lives of African population and their media habits. He opined that age plays a major role in deciding the nature of media consumption. The ageing population faces multiple types of issues ranging from poor health to other issues. Since the study has taken place in Africa, the mentioned problems are graver in nature and hence the outcome of study focusses highly on the age being a determinant of the media habits. It would be interesting to see if the same applied to the Indian rural population or not.

Doolittle (1979) studied the media habits amongst the people of different age group and especially the older adults and found that they spend more time engulfed with print media in comparison to TV watching or radio listening. The lack of popularity of TV amongst the older adults was primarily due to the weakening eyesight and other health issues. Again this study was not based in India or even Asia for that matter and belongs to the west where literacy and the ability to read the newspaper was on a high. Under such circumstances, it would be imperative to find out the behaviour in the Indian context where literacy and the ability of the people to read and write is low.

Allen and David (1980) studied the media usage from the racial perspective and found the media habits to be different for the educated Latinos and Afro-Americans. While the educated class in one race read more newspaper while the educated ones in the other racial community watched more TV, it could be argued that the content development needs to be taken care of and it should be designed in such a way that it caters to the needs of all people irrespective of the race. Now this study too has been based in the west. India also has people of multiple ethnicity living together but if we confine a study to the north or south or east or west of India, then the racial segregation of the society is not so easily visible. It is mainly about the caste division, religion basis division and class based division. So if one is serious about the fair and equal consumption of the media content by people of all age groups, irrespective of the differences, the only way is by creating a more heterogeneous content.

Korzenny and Kenndorf (1980) found out in their studies that the TV programmes generally cater to the younger generation. Every kind of content broadcast over television had nothing for the adult population.

Anderson and Bushman (2001) and Gentile and Walsh (2002) in two separate studies have indicated at the impact of violent videogames and media content on the behaviour of the

children. Their studies also confirmed that parents have understood the influence of such content on children and hence there is usual parental control over what the children watch. So the idea of parental control is a must as suggested in the two studies. In India, the idea of parental control exists to a lesser extent and the parental control is also limited to the verbal warnings and vigilance. The technological aspect is missing. So no matter what the situation is and whatever degree of dependency exists, the parental control plays a role though to a very limited extent in the Indian context.

Michael Cohen Group and U.S. Department of Education (2007) and Grabe et.al (2008) in two separate studies have talked about the use of media and specific image formations amongst the viewers. Studies suggest repeated use of media leads to certain image embedding in the thoughts causing change in perceptions and ultimately behaviour.

McLaren (2008) and Nielsen Company (2009) in its study has talked about keeping a track of media usage which can be further used to gauge behaviour. Any desired behaviour change thus can be introduced through deliberately altering the media exposure.

Polver (2009) has focused on an experiment conducted on a popular TV series and its children viewership focusing on how positive values can be inculcated amongst the students through such content. It kind of highlighted that not all content is negative. It can also bring good positive changes if planned and delivered properly.

While the studies in past few years had shifted the gauntlet from media usage to the impact of media content, a study in 2010 by Melki again brought the focus back on the media habits. This study is most close to what the study of this specific research aims at. This study was conducted in three countries and it suggested that media habits had a lot to do with the age, acquiring education, financial might and much more. So by this logic, there would not only be a difference in the media consumption of Indian audience and the audience from other parts of the world but also within. The society within India is so diverse that there may be significance different in their media habits and consumptions.

Much of the literature has been based in countries outside India especially in the developed west. The summary of the literature review suggests that the various demographic factors play an important role in the media choices people make. Since there is a huge variation in the various demographic factors leading to a very diverse and heterogeneous population. Thus the study of media habits and media dependency becomes more imperative.

3. Research Objectives and Methodology

The study aims at studying how the rural population spent their Covid-19 lockdown phase with the media. The title has the term media dependency, however the focus is on the media habits during the lockdown phase.

The population under study is the population residing in the rural belts of western UP and a few villages of the Moradabad district to be specific.

It is a survey based study with structured questionnaire being the tool of primary data collection. It is a descriptive study with the following research questions.

RQ1- Which is the most preferred medium amongst the rural population?

RQ2- Is there any significant difference in the choices of males and females?

RQ3- Who amongst males and females spend more average time with media?

RQ4- Is entertainment the primary motive of the rural population when consuming media content?

4. Data Analysis and Tabulation

Table 1: Age-wise respondent breakdown

18-35 Years	36-45 Years	46-60 Years	60 Years and above	TOTAL
37	28	12	5	82

Source: Author's Compilation

A total of minimum 100 respondents were expected during the research design planning stage but surveying the rural population was a difficult experience with not many respondents willing to take part in the survey due to many unsaid reasons.

A total 82 people of different age group responded to the survey. Out of the total respondents 37 respondents belonged to the 18-35 years age bracket, 28 belonged to 36-45 years age bracket, 12 to the 46-60 years and only 5 above 60 years.

Table 2: Preferred media platform during Covid-19 Lockdown

TV	Print	Radio	Mobile Streaming Platforms	None	Total
37	6	0	31	8	82

Source: Author’s Compilation

The table above shows the respondents’ preferred platform during the Covid-19 lockdown phase. Majority of the respondents preferred TV as a platform for media consumption over other mediums with Mobile Streaming Platforms emerging as the second most preferred one. Radio had no takers with zero respondents calling it their preferred platform with print being opted by a relatively smaller number of people (6). Eight (8) respondents could not decide and said that none of the mentioned platform was their preference.

Table 3: Preferred Choice during Covid-19 Lockdown

Entertainment	Information	Both	None	Total
41	24	12	5	82

Source: Author’s Compilation

The respondents were asked about the media specific priorities during the Covid-19 lockdown with entertainment, information, both and none being the categories. Majority of the respondents (41) sought entertainment during the lockdown phase. 24 respondents said that their priority was information. 12 respondents said that they looked for both while 5 said that they either can’t say or they did not have any such priority.

Table 4: Average time Spent with Media during Covid-19 Lockdown

0-1 Hour	1-3 Hours	3-5 Hours	More than 5 Hours	Total
20	32	19	11	82

Source: Author’s Compilation

On being asked about the average time spent with media during the Covid-19 lockdown, the respondents gave the response as shown above in table-4. Majority (32) respondents spent around 1-3 hours with media everyday with 20 respondents claiming to have spent 0-1 hours every day. Out of 82 respondents who took part in the study, 19 said that they spent around 3-5 hours every day while only 11 respondents spent more than 5 hours every day.

4.1 Cross-tabulation

Table 5

	Males	Females
TV	10	27
Print	6	0
Radio	0	0
Mobile Streaming Platforms	19	12
None	3	5

Source: Author's Compilation

Out of the total respondents, 44 were females and 38 were males. The table above shows the male and female preference of various media platforms. TV emerged as the most preferred platform amongst the females while Mobile Streaming Platforms were popular amongst the male respondents. Print has been popular amongst a very small population but even amongst the handful who preferred print, all of the respondents were males.

Table 6

	Males	Females
Entertainment	15	26
Information	15	9
Both	7	5
None	0	5

Source: Author's Compilation

The respondents were asked about the reason for which they consume media. Majority respondents chose entertainment and it was seen that more females talked about getting entertainment from the media consumption than males. Media consumption for Information was preferred choice amongst males. A relatively equal number of respondents talked about media consumption for both entertainment as well as information.

Table 7

	Males	Females
0-1 Hour	5	15
1-3 Hours	19	13
3-5 Hours	4	15
More than 5 Hours	10	1

Source: Author's Compilation

The table above shows that the 1-3 hours and 3-5 hours is the most common and prevalent average time spent by the respondents with the media, consuming media content. The media consumption seems to be higher in the 0-5 hour brackets amongst females. Amongst male respondents, a significantly high number consume media for more than 5 hours daily.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The media dependency during the Covid-19 lockdown phase suggested a surged use of media primarily for the entertainment purpose. The media consumption comprised mainly of TV viewing and internet based streaming options. The print and radio was least preferred at least during the times of the pandemic as more free time allowed them to engage more intensely with the medium. The rural economies generally don't allow many mobile sets in the households and the ones available are mainly possessed by the male members of the family as they seem to be more in control of the family and other affairs. The print appears to be no choice for the females primarily because of low literacy and the lesser prevalent ability to read and write. The females tend to be engaged with household chores and the lockdown allowed them to not leave the place at all, meaning their engagement was primarily limited to the work done within the boundaries of the house. Their constant engagement with the work allowed them to engage with TV content more in comparison to other mediums. Mind it, the people did not have amazon fire sticks or smart TVs to watch YouTube, Netflix and Amazon Prime on TV. They were left with limited choices while the male members of the family, who had better control over these resources tended to be more inclined towards internet based streaming options. YouTube was the most popular choice with Amazon Prime being the second most preferred option.

Entertainment was the primary objective and motive amongst females while amongst males it was a balance between information and entertainment. The rural households are generally run by the male members of the family and the lockdown did not allow them to pursue the work for earning the daily bread and butter. They appeared to be more concerned about the economic repercussions of the lockdown and hence there was more inclination amongst the male respondents towards the information aspect of media consumption.

One thing to be observed was that in the rural pockets, the Corona Virus related information was spread mostly in the form of rumours through interpersonal channels. This led to an increased curiosity amongst the people leading to greater inclination towards information

through media consumption. It should be observed that the media consumption, as per the discussion with the people of the rural belt, has always been lower due to different engagements but the Covid-19 lockdown was unprecedented and gave birth to different needs and expectations and hence different media consumption patterns.

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