



Role of Demographic Variables in Consumption of News on TV Channels in India

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1. Introduction

Evolving lifestyles and changing consumer behaviour have played an important role in how content, including news, is consumed by people. Add to that the proliferation of platforms that are available to the audience for consuming news and co-genre programmes. TV news channels have not been untouched by this wave of transformation in the sector. This has made it imperative for TV news channels to differentiate their services in terms of news content and other factors that come together to form the overall service offering like – people, theme and alliances.

The extreme fragmentation of audience based on various demographic segregation, and an ever rising number of competitors have made it critical for TV news channels to devise newer marketing strategies in order to differentiate themselves. However, it is important for the TV news channels to first understand the presence, if any, and extent of influence that the demographic variables like age, gender, income and education have on the news consumption behaviour of the audience.

Any marketing investment made towards differentiating a news channel from other media, as well as from the co-segment competitors, hence must start with the analysis of consumer behaviour based on demographic divide for news consumption. However, there is limited research undertaken in terms of association of individual demographic variable with elements of news consumption. With an enhanced ability of news channels to be able to differentiate its marketing efforts based upon demographic variables, TV news channels can adopt strategies targeting individual demographic segments. However, there is a need to understand the influence that various demographic segments have on the news consumption behaviour.

2. Evolution and diffusion of News Media

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Media consist of several different types of communications platforms: television, radio, cinema, newspapers, magazines, and internet-based Web sites and apps. There have been several theories postulated to explain the evolution of media.

Some of the important ones have been on the basis of diffusion of innovation and acceptance of newer media platforms, aiding to the evolution of media, globally. Explaining evolution, coexistence and survival of media forms, based on the Darwinian concept of evolution of species, (Fidler, 1997) introduced ‘Mediamorphosis’. He created a boundary for his arguments with the help of a techno-deterministic model (Dutta-Bergman, 2010) which helped in understanding the rise of new media and the engagement with existing ones. An interesting outcome of the concept was how a new-age media form inadvertently influence and help in the development of existing media forms (Singer, 1999), which transform and adapt to coexist, symbiotically rather than contest and get substituted after obsoleting. The dynamic dual nature of mass communication and co-creation are the dominant traits of new-age media platforms. Some other work explaining the evolution of media platforms have been explained by researchers like (Innis, 1951) and (McLuhan, 1964) which is relevant considering the capsuling nature but widening scope of new-age media platforms like internet based platforms.

A more relevant and contemporary view about the transforming evolution of media was put across by (Lehman-wilzig & Cohen_avigdor, 2004) since there is an additional dimension about the ‘media constructionism’ – which is the constant interaction between new-age and older media. This is expected to continue and better with time in future till the new in the new media is replaced by the newer (Tomasello, Youngwon , & Baer, 2010). However, all of these researches look at the evolution of media channels in theoretical manner with theories woven across the evolution to explain the same, with a strong separation between old and new channels of media.

The evolution of media platforms across globe is however, not a constant step by step process. Every country and market adopts and adapts to this evolution in a different manner and in a different time window. Clearly it is important to look at the specific case of evolution for the market in question. Indian media industry consist of several platforms which are used by audience for content consumption –television, cinema, newspapers, magazines, websites & apps, and since recently the OTT (over the top) platforms. India has more than 70,000 newspapers and over 1,600 satellite channels (about 400 are news channels) and is the biggest newspaper market in the world — over 100 million copies sold each day.

In his report on changing role of media, (Ram, 2011) introduced a paradox which he expressed as critical to define the transformational state of media. He brought about his views on an impending crisis for old media as more people are reading newspapers digitally. Physical newspapers have a reported circulation of 519 million, with a reach of an estimated 2.3 billion people every day, 20 per cent more than the internet (Riess, 2011). However, the commercial reasoning seems to be more and more in favour of

digital medium as news media platforms. This is also due to attractive and engaging features that have been incorporated in newspapers like websites offering rich multi-media content that includes long-form features, investigative articles, and thoughtful analysis, which have traditionally been forte of newspapers.

While various digital media platform with an increasing number of mobile devices has prompted several newspapers and television channels to metamorphose into digital service platforms, it does not always make it a viable revenue which can endanger the business model for digital journalism. The newspaper industry faces a double squeeze: the print business continues heavily to subsidize digital journalism, which cannot pay for itself by attracting enough advertising or subscriptions or a mixture of the two; and the new digital players put increasing pressure on newspaper circulation, readership, and the business itself (Sharma & Pandit, 2014).

TV on the other hand has been able to maintain its numero-uno position in spite of the onslaught. The TV as a platform has been able to sustain its position as the largest medium for content consumption, news or otherwise. To understand further the diffusion and role of different channels in terms of the audience who is consuming the data, some interesting insights come from (Palekar & Sedera, 2012) who explained the diffusion theory in real life with an example that goes as – ‘...an individual reads news reports on online news mediums (e.g. e-newspapers) on the leadership challenge within Australia’s Labour Party but uses OSM(Online Social Media like, Twitter) to get live updates and comments from political leaders, commentators and the public.’

This was supported by the idea that users consume a wide variety of data from a wide spread of media platforms. This is due to the different level and type of gratification that different media platforms offer to the audience (Ahlers, 2006). This is also corroborated by Niche Theory that supports the idea that an individual chooses a particular news medium because it offers a distinct advantage over other mediums (e.g. CNBC 18 offers news and analysis on financial sector while NDTV has ‘shows’ which talk about contemporary issues). An interesting way to look at the diffusion of news media platforms and how it evolves over a period of time is with the help of a theory proposed by (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). Newer media platforms, categorised as OSM (Online Social Media) and OTT (Over-the-top), while offer new features to the audience for content reception and social interaction, they also act as a substitution for the traditional channels (Panwar, 2019). The diffusion of the newer channels in the audience and the replacement of the older mediums happens in a phased manner, where the younger audience adopt the newer channels faster than the older generation. Hence, a new-age media platform’s adoption and acceptance can be projected by measuring the engagement of younger audience with these channels.

3. Evolution of TV News Channels in India

Television news channels have the highest coverage in terms of reaching to the right audience, and it have always been the largest platform in terms of number of people

reached. This has also been facilitated by the mushrooming of TV news channels in India. While there are various genres of TV channels that cater to the Indian tastes and needs, the news channels genre has been the oldest in the country and faced the first wave of privatization after LPG in 1991. TV news channels are a critical platform for journalism in India. Journalism which is termed as the fourth pillar of democracy, plays an important role for any country (Saini, 2015).

It is also one of the most pertinent medium for the political parties and its leaders communicate with their target audience through news media that they do not (directly) control (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1992). The significance of news media in a politician's image building has been one of the critical factors in the expansion of TV news media (Panwar & Khan, 2019). As per a report from (FICCI & E&Y, 2018), there are about 197 million households with TV sets, which represents almost two-third of all 300 million household in India (Jha, 2018). This reach is supported by the number of households in the country which have access to TV sets.

Liberalisation played a critical role in the TV news segment in India which led to the proliferation of news channels as the regulations were eased on the sector. While Television was introduced into India in 1959, it was only the state run Doordarshan which rules the roost with no competition at all. This was until 1988 when New Delhi Television (NDTV) produced 'The World This Week' in 1988 (Indian Media Studies, 2017). It was in 1998 when the first 24x7 news channel started broadcasting (Bajpai, 2016) while currently there are 383 TV news channels listed as Permitted Private Satellite TV Channels as per Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB, 2019). Along with liberalisation, some other factors that led to the rise in the growth of the TV news channels were technological advancement which eased out the operations of news channels, the democratic culture of the country and reduction in capital requirement for launching a news channel (Roy P., 2013).

These factors however, led to the rise of a host of new channels which in some time crowded the sector with too many players fighting for the same market. Presence of about 400 news channels, though these were in different languages and targeting different kind of audience, created a red ocean which affected the profitability of the industry severely (Roy P., 2013). In order to create a more profitable business and fend off competition, there have been various initiatives which are undertaken by the news channels. But this was still coming to play when the news media was thronged by the online news platform which started taking away audience from the TV segments. In order to compete with the 'always' available online content on internet, news channel came up with various techniques to retail the audience.

For example, changes in how a news channel formats its content for the audience, and how it delivers it to the audience has changed significantly. From an in-depth analysis of 10-15 stories every day, news channels have now moved towards a format that covers 90-100 stories a day.

Dilution in the control of the state has also brought in commercial pressures in the place which has further transformed the segment (Singh J. , 2015). Challenges posed by newer formats of content like online broadcast has also affected the segment and has been looked upon as a great danger to the overall operations and profitability for the TV news channels. Television news channels hence, need to overcome these challenges to stop the continued erosion of traditional television viewing and the meteoric rise of online video and digital media. (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). It is imperative that TV news channels work towards creating a strong differentiation for themselves and create strong associations with the audience in order to become a preferred destination for news content.

It is hence, imperative for news channels to identify and call out the news consumption behaviour of the audience which it wants to target. While it is part of a general wisdom that newer platforms are diffusing into the centre stage which in no equivocal terms taking away audience from the traditional news platforms, the magnitude and consumption behaviour of such an audience must be established. This would not only help the companies to understand the extent of poaching that the newer news media platforms have caused, but will also understand the consumption behaviour that has led to this switching.

4. Hypotheses Development

4.1 Effect of demographic variables on consumption and choice of TV news channels for consumption of news

While there are multiple factors on the basis of which audience choose a particular news channel, like – content, anchors and theme, it is pertinent for the news channels to assess if the choice of TV channels as medium for consumption of news is affected by demographic factors like age, gender, education and income group. This will help the channels to be able to create content and market themselves to the right TG more effectively. The levers that drive the choice of news channels as mentioned above, hence can be intervened with accordingly.

H_{01a}: Age does not play a significant role in the choice of TV news channel for consumption of news

H_{01b}: Gender does not play a significant role in the choice of TV news channel for consumption of news

H_{01c}: Income group does not play a significant role in the choice of TV news channel for consumption of news

H_{01d}: Education level does not play a significant role in the choice of TV news channel for consumption of news

4.2 Extent of vernacular in the overall news consumption in TV channel landscape

Vernacular has been touted as one of the growth areas in content consumption, not just for the traditional media, but also for the new media. However, how much is vernacular affected by various demographic variables when it comes to choice of consumption? This is a critical question as it would help TV news channels understand the role played by demographic variables on vernacular news content consumption on TV channels that would lead to decision related to investments in vernacular as a medium for the given target audience segmented based on specific demographic variable.

H₀2a: There is no significant association between the choice of Vernacular news on TV channels and Gender

H₀2b: There is no significant association between the choice of Vernacular news on TV channels and Age

H₀2c: There is no significant association between the choice of Vernacular news on TV channels and Income group

H₀2d: There is no significant association between the choice of Vernacular news on TV channels and Education level

4.3 Time spent on News consumption on TV channels

Consumption of news on TV news channels is an important metric to consider. It allows the TV channels to funnel their efforts, in terms of content broadcast and marketing into the right direction. News consumption behaviour analysis would help TV news channels to also line up their content in an effective and optimised manner as there is limited broadcast time available for the various genres of programmes and news to be broadcasted by the news channels.

H₀3a: There is no significant association between the time spent on consuming news on TV channels and Gender

H₀3b: There is no significant association between the time spent on consuming news on TV channels and Age

H₀3c: There is no significant association between the time spent on consuming news on TV channels and Income group

H₀3d: There is no significant association between the time spent on consuming news on TV channels and Education level

4.4 Role of demography in choice of factors affecting choice of TV channel

A news channel is majorly comprised of the following ingredients which come together to create a package for the audience in terms of content delivery – (i.) content, (ii.) anchors and show hosts, and (iii.) the theme and leaning of the channel (Panwar & Khan, Ingredient Branding as a Branding Strategy for News Channels in India, 2019). While these ingredients are brought together in various proportions at various time, it is important to understand the role of demography in choice of a particular ingredient

being more important than the other one. This is critical because it allows the channel to curate its content, bring in anchors and adapt its theme based on its core audience and be able to influence its TG more efficiently. Hence,

H₀4a: There is no significant association between the importance given to a particular ingredient of the news channel programmes and Gender

H₀4b: There is no significant association between the importance given to a particular ingredient of the news channel programmes and Age

H₀4c: There is no significant association between the importance given to a particular ingredient of the news channel programmes and Income Group

H₀4d: There is no significant association between the importance given to a particular ingredient of the news channel programmes and Education level

While there have been some researches to understand the demographic influence on the consumption of content, it has been limited to digital content, and done with a major focus on the western countries. The importance of demography cannot be overstated in its impact on the consumption pattern of audience when it comes to all content, including news channels. A specific focus on demographic variables and their impact on the consumption, especially for the age group 18 to 40 years, which forms a major chunk of the population, would lead to critical insights for businesses.

5. Research Design

This research aims to understand the news consumption behaviour of respondents with respect to the TV channels, and how demography plays a role in it. It also goes on to study the reach and influence of vernacular languages in terms of news consumption on TV and what factors are considered critical for which sub-group of the overall TG.

5.1 Pilot

Pilot study was run with 25 respondents in order to understand the ease of absorbing the questions by the respondents. Since the questionnaire was personally administered, the feedback was recorded and incorporated in the final questionnaire. The pilot was done in a physical set up in a closely monitored environment.

5.2 Main Study

5.2.1 Subjects and procedure

The questionnaire was restricted to Indian respondents with a majority of respondents being in Mumbai. In order to restrict the incomplete and incorrect responses the survey was a strictly personally administered one for offline responses which also formed the majority of responses (more than 84%). The questions were spelled clearly to understand demographic parameters followed by the news consumption habits and preference for the language of news channels etc. Since the consumption pattern of news

channels was to be understood and not the overall penetration of news media, respondents were restricted to those who consume news in one or the other way.

Out of the total 108 valid responses 91 responses were collected through offline medium while 17 were collected through online medium. Gender mix for the responses was 76:24 (Male: Female), while the audience was restricted to the age group of less than 40 years (which comprises about 70% of the India's total population¹). About 37% of respondents had an affiliation to the highest income bracket of INR 10 lacs per annum or more, and about 65% had a household income of more than INR 5 lacs per annum. Almost three-fourth of all respondents had the highest education of Post-graduate (completed or pursuing) and above while 98% of all respondents at least had a graduate degree.

5.2.2 Measures

Depending upon the depth and width required in the survey response for testing each of the hypotheses, there were question(s) designed for this questionnaire. News consumption was expressed in terms of the time slot(s) in which news is watched, time spent in watching news each day and the news channels which are watched by the respondent.

Importance of various aspects of the four major factors related to news channels (content, people, theme and alliance) were measured on a 4-point Likert scale (Brown, 2010) to produce an ipsative (forced choice) measure (Bertram, 2016). A Likert scale was also used to understand the preference of the respondents towards the present day English news channels as a level further to under the choice exercised by the audience.

5.2.3 Results

Out of all the responses received, a majority of the respondents (84%) accepted watching TV for consumption of news. However, a whopping 96% of all respondents claimed to be consuming news on digital medium. Print news media, or newspapers are read by less than a 50% of all respondents. Almost all respondents who agreed to watching TV for news consumption watch English news channels, barring one respondent.

However, more than 50% respondents also watch vernacular TV news channels for news consumption, which points towards a space coming up for vernacular news channels, even with the English news channels in demand. An important insight from the survey comes from the metric regarding the time spent in watching news channels in a day. Almost 80% of all respondents claimed to be watching news channels for at least half an hour, while more than a third claimed to watch TV channels for up to one hour a day.

¹ <https://www.populationpyramid.net/india/2017/> (referred as on 15/5/2019)

This is an important metric regarding consumption as it allows news channels to strategize content and timing based on the time and quantum of engagement of audiences with the TV news channels. Four factors were assessed to understand the importance cited by the audience, and content of the news channels stood out as the most important factor for a news channel by the audience (Mean weight assigned to content, $M=47.1$). A Chi-square test was conducted under cross tab analysis with demographic variables – Gender, Age, Income and Education, and choice of media for consuming news content.

For Gender, and TV channels as a medium to consume news content, the Pearson's Chi-Square ($dof=1$, Pearson's Coefficient= 6.397 , $p<0.05$), which suggest there a significant association between the gender and the choice of TV news channels as a medium for news consumption¹, hence H_01a stands rejected. Interestingly, the same is not true for the other medium of news consumption ($p>0.05$) suggesting that Gender plays an important role in choice of the medium. For Age, and TV channels as a medium to consumer news content, the Pearson's Chi-Square ($dof=1$, Pearson's Coefficient= 15.061 , $p<0.05$), which suggest there a significant association between the age and the choice of TV news channels as a medium for news consumption, hence H_01b stands rejected. The same also holds true for OTT within New Media and Newspaper ($P<0.05$), but not for digital consumption of news ($P>0.05$).

For Income Group, and TV channels as a medium to consumer news content, the Pearson's Chi-Square ($dof=1$, Pearson's Coefficient= 76.584 , $p<0.05$), which suggest there a significant association between the Income group and the choice of TV news channels as a medium for news consumption², hence H_01c stands rejected. The same also holds true for OTT within New Media and Newspaper ($P<0.05$), but not for digital consumption of news ($P>0.05$). This is similar to the association between the Age and choice of TV channels as a medium for consuming news. For Education category, and TV channels as a medium to consumer news content, the Pearson's Chi-Square ($dof=1$, Pearson's Coefficient= 3.981 , $p>0.05$), which suggest there no significant association between the Education category and the choice of TV news channels as a medium for news consumption³, hence H_01d cannot be rejected. The same also holds true for all other media for news consumption ($P>0.05$).

A cross tab analysis with Chi-Square test was conducted on the demographic variables (Age, Gender, Income and Education) and the choice of language for consumption of news content on TV channel. There was no association found between any of the demographic variable and the choice of language (All $p>0$) suggesting that the

¹ p-value is based on the Likelihood Ratio, and not the Pearson's coefficient, as there was a violation of the 'Minimum Expected Count' factor

² p-value is based on the Likelihood Ratio, and not the Pearson's coefficient, as there was a violation of the 'Minimum Expected Count' factor

³ p-value is based on the Likelihood Ratio, and not the Pearson's coefficient, as there was a violation of the 'Minimum Expected Count' factor

demographic variables, especially the ones considered for the research, do not have a strong association with the choice of the language for news consumption. We fail to reject H_{02a} , H_{02b} , H_{02c} and H_{02d} .

For Gender-English, Age-English, Income-English, Income-Non-English, Education-English and Education-Non-English the cross condition was violated for which Likelihood Ratio was chosen for the p-value. A univariate ANOVA was conducted on the demographic variables (Age, Gender, Income and Education) as factors and time spent in consuming news on TV news channels to understand the association. There was a strong association found between the Gender and the time spent on consuming news on TV channels (dof=1, F value=4.1, $P<0.05$), while there was no association found between other demographic variables and the time spent on consuming content on TV news channels (All $p>0.05$). The interaction between Gender and Age, and Gender and Income also had a lower P value ($P<0.05$) suggesting association with the dependent variable. Hence, H_{03a} stands rejected, while we fail to reject H_{03b} , H_{03c} and H_{03d} .

Multiple One-way ANOVA tests were conducted to understand association between the means of the weight assigned by the respondents on the four elements of a TV news channels – Content, Anchors, Theme and Alliance. Demographic variables were chosen as factors one at a time to understand the association. There were no associations identified between the Gender and the choice of elements cited as important (All $p>0.05$). In case of Age, there was a significant association identified between Age and two of the elements of the TV news channels – Content and People ($p<0.05$). As for Income, no association was identified by any of the elements, except that of People ($p<0.05$). Again, no association was found between the Education and the elements of a TV news channels. Also, Out of the four factors assessed, while Content has been cited as the most important factor for a news channel by the audience (Mean weight assigned to content, $M=47.8$), while people associated with the news channel received the second highest weight ($M=23.92$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Role of demography plays an important role in defining consumption behaviour for any given category. The same is also true for content consumption which can happen on multiple platforms which have been identified as traditional media and contemporary media. In case of news channels, owing to the diffusion of contemporary media, the terms given to categorise category of platforms, terms like Online Social Media (OSM) and News Media (NM). Based on the primary research conducted, it can be concluded that OSM or the new age media platforms are ubiquitous and are adopted quite broadly, especially by the target audience.

This has mostly taken the readership out of print media for news consumption, which is alarming, but not surprising. The New York Times' CEO Mark Thompson in a recent interview (Kohli-Khandekar , 2019) cited that print would be dead in 15-20 years. On

the other hand, TV channels as a medium of consuming news have not given much of their share away to new media platforms. Also, a majority of audience still spend time with TV channels, which makes it commercially viable than print as it helps in attracting advertisements and sponsors for the TV channels. There was a strong association found between gender, age and income group, and the audience's choice of TV news channel for consumption of news, which suggests that these demographic variables could be used to target the segments which are more inclined towards watching the news on TV news channels.

Also, no association between any of the demographic variable and the choice of vernacular as medium for the consumption of news on TV news channels suggest that there is an equal distribution of audience demographically when it comes to vernacular content. This can help in establishing a democratic reach of vernacular among the audience. Clearly, vernacular is a medium that must be strongly pursued by the TV news channels with strong marketing focus on all segments. Gender also played a significant role in determining the time spent on the TV which makes it interesting for the news channels to slice their marketing effort and content choice based upon specific gender for better results. Age and Income group do play a role when it comes to the choice of the elements or ingredients of a news channel, while gender and education do not seem to have any impact.

A detailed understanding of the influence that demographic variables have, on the choice of news media and audience's consumption behaviour can help in optimising marketing efforts of TV news channels and better return on marketing dollar. However it must be noted that the demographic variables and the resulting consumption behaviour are a dynamic set up for any product and service, including that of news channels. The implication of this nature of data being a regular study may be required to clearly understand this influence before making any marketing decision, Also, this study was limited to a geographic location (majorly Mumbai) and an age group (Below 40 years), with a high skew towards people with at least post-graduation as a degree. A more exhaustive study cut across the segments, geographically may lead to more comprehensive results. Such a study would help TV news channels to succinctly identify the right demographic segments and create specific strategies for those segments that would help them differentiate, not just against other news platforms, but also co-segment competitors.

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