



Religious television viewing and its impact on religiosity of people

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Abstract

Globally, television has been playing an important role as a medium of information transmission to majority of the people. In this regards, the media has tremendous impact and influence on the society and its thinking and behavioural aspects. Developing nations such as India also having huge population with an amalgam of various races, castes and economic background, this television and media has become a habitual aspect in people's daily life creating a continuous impact and influence on their thought, behaviour and actions. One major aspect of media generating such influence in India is the religious television which has grown tremendously since early 90's. The major objective of the religious channels is to raise and propagate respective religious awareness among various religious groups such as Hindu, Muslim, Christians or others. Over the years, the viewership for these channels has risen and their influence on the people is impeccable. These channels are also considered as one of the major drivers in terms of influencing the lifestyle and behaviour of people in aspects such as rituals, dressing sense, voluntary service, social communication and responsibility. Many times, such channels have positive influence however, there are some negative aspects too which are mainly but not limited to increase in consumption patterns leading to commodity price surge, religious unrest and hate propagation. Also, it is known that the viewership increases with age and also majority women viewers. One such research survey study is presented in this work which quantifies the number of women watching various religious channels, viewing time and also association between religiosity and respondent's viewing of religious TV. The research survey is conducted in Hyderabad, Telangana considering 400 women from Hindu, Muslim and Christian groups. It is found that considerable number of respondents watch religious television on weekdays and Sundays. The mean viewing time of religious TV on weekdays is 3.04 hrs and the mean viewing time of religious TV on Sundays is 4.28 hrs. The most watched religious TV channel is Bhakti TV, SVBC Telugu (HINDU); Peace TV Urdu, Paigham TV (MUSLIM); GOSPEL, SUBHAVARTHA (CHRISTIAN) are the most watched religious TV channels among the three religious groups of respondents. The paper also found a positive correlation between amount of religious television watched by respondents and their religiosity.

Keywords: television, GOSPEL, television, globally, Christian

Introduction

Television has a tremendous impact on people. In developing countries like India, television is the main medium of information and entertainment for a majority of people. The audio-visual nature of television, combined with its ability to combine various media formats including the story telling formats, puts a tremendous influence on people. In a comprehensive study of media use found that by the end of 2010, the average world citizen was spending 4 hours with the television each and every day. 40% of the time that people spend with media was found to be spent watching television (Rodney, 1996) [10]. Scholars believe that like religion, television determines the worldview of its viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980) [4, 5]. It also codetermines what the viewer's think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [7]. Television viewing is a ritual, almost like religion, except that it is attended to more often (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, 1980) [4, 5].

As people spend so much of their time with television, the media has a continual influence upon people without even their realization. They follow their television watching routines day after day and therefore this medium has a tremendous influence on how viewers think, what they think and believe and how they act. While some of this influence is easy to notice, most of it shapes their mental codes

unconsciously. Many people have a habitual use of media, they turn on television or radio as soon as they get up in the morning, or reach home after work in the evening. In most Indian homes, people eat their meals in front of the television. News, movies, serials are the most favorite programs of people. Television remains the most popular medium owing also to it being inexpensive. With a subscription of Rs 300 or less a month, people are able to watch more than 100 channels, movies, songs, news, sports programs, serials and dramas etc. More often television also forms a major family activity. Family members watch television together and it also forms a part of their conversations.

The growth of religious television in India has been spectacular. Earlier too, there were religious programs on television such as mythological or religious based movies, songs, serials and dramas. The soap operas of Mahabharatam and Ramayan in Hindi as well as their translated versions in other languages in the 1980s and 90s only led to the growth of these programs in the later years. India being a secular country, channels that featured programs of various other religions also soon began to be broadcast along with the Hindu base channels. These channels have the sole purpose of religious propaganda and raising the moral and social culture of the people. They also

have a huge viewership. The programs have been successful in creating a feeling of deeper religiosity in people, one that goes beyond mere belief and simple forms of worship. Religious TV channels broadcast programs that dwell upon the various festivals and forms of worship that is especially true to Hinduism. Every festival is preceded by programs that elaborate on how to worship, the rituals and the benefits associated with it, with religious gurus and pundits drawing upon references in the scriptures. This has seen a surge in people trying to follow the ritualistic forms of celebration, gathering the materials that are used to worship, the food associated with every festival, dressing up in colors and materials related to every festival and trying to diligently follow the ritualistic methods as prescribed by these channels. This has also seen a surge in commercialization, with the goods and materials associated with festivals in much demand during festivals and also a surge in their prices.

The number of people visiting temples and other places of worship during festivals has also seen a tremendous increase in recent years. Religious TV channels show these places of worship and other holy places associated with one's religion, a kind of religious tourism programs that has led to the popularity of these places. Religious tourism has received a boost owing to these TV channels and programs, with people thronging places of worship in hundreds and thousands. For one, religious TV channels inculcate a feeling in the people that religion is important and mainstream in their lives. From simple forms of worship to more elaborate rituals, these channels explain everything in detail that is related to ritualistic worship. This influences people to adopt these practices as worship is also associated with gaining material or other benefits in life or removing the problems that come with life and living. Most channels suggest remedies such as performing specific poojas, rituals, wearing gemstones or other materials, eating and offering specific kinds of food to people and animals, etc to gain good luck and get rid of problems in life. On one hand, this has led to an intensification of religiosity in people, on the other it has also led to consumerism and an increase in consumption patterns. Several studies have concluded that watching religious television does increase the religiosity of people (Abelman, 1984; Graham, 2013; Schwartz, 1992)^[1, 6, 9]. Researchers have also found in numerous studies that television programs impact the cultural position of individuals and groups. It also impacts the life style of people and their religious understanding. Many people shape their religious understanding by watching television. Most religious television programs also present some of the most conservative views especially regarding the role of women, the manner of their dressing and behavior and relationships with other members of the family and community. It is then to be seen if religious television programs and channels will lead to the formation of an increasingly conservative society and whether it is in conflict with the more modern ways of living. Research has shown that people who watch religious shows take them seriously. What leads people to consume religion on television is a sense of social responsibility: that they are doing it not just for themselves, but also for others, be it their families or communities (Biberman *et al*, 2006)^[2].

There are also social and familial impacts of watching religious television. When people tend to become more religious by internalizing the religious messages that they view on television, it also affects their worldview, including

family dynamics and their relationships in the community. Household activities may become more traditional and conservative, adhering to their religious and cultural practices. The amount of time that the family spends in religious activities such as worship, preparing for worship and conducting rituals and visiting holy places and temples might increase. Reading religious texts may also increase. The market of religious books, materials related to worship has also grown proportionately in recent times. There is also a danger of superstitious beliefs that might be propagated by these channels in the name of religion. For e.g. most channels have a regular horoscope reading, encouraging people to contact the host for a more detailed analysis and predictions of their horoscope. This is in addition to the daily forecasts that are read out for each zodiac sign on television. The wearing of specific gems for remedies and the subsequent selling of them by the sponsoring agencies has also been on the rise. Such programs also rise in the wake of natural events such as eclipses for instance, where programs tell people elaborately on the practices that they need to do during the eclipse. While this is in contradiction to the mainstream scientific findings, it is still believed and put into practice by people.

A survey by Nielsen (2016)^[8] found more women viewers per. Household than men for religious television viewership. The average for women viewers was 74% as compared to 42% men viewers. The survey was conducted across 5 counties in the USA. The survey suggests that the main reason for this is that most programs are broadcast at times when women are at leisure to watch them. However, on Sunday mornings, when most religious programs are telecast, the audience is equally male and female, compared to evenings, when the audience is mostly women. The Nielsen survey indicates that only three (Out of 52) religious programs in which men equal or outnumber women as viewers. These three are comparatively small programs: "What Does the Bible say?" (Audience = 20, 100: 45% men and 45% women); "Tree house Club," (audience = 20,100 19% men and 9% women); and "Missionaries in Action," (audience = 16,060 44% men and 38% women). There are individual differences for each program as far as men as women viewers are concerned. Some programs have more than 61% audience of women viewers. The study also found that viewership of religious television increases with age. It is especially found to be true for women above 50 years and above. Older women watch more religious television than older men. Younger men watch the least as compared to any adult group.

The present paper presents findings of a research study from a survey of 400 women of which 150 were Hindus, 150 were Muslims and 150 were Christians. The survey was conducted in the city of Hyderabad in Telangana. The city of Hyderabad has Hindus, Muslims and Christians in its population. A questionnaire was used to elicit the data. A religiosity index was used to gather test the religiosity of people after establishing its reliability and validity.

The sample was selected using the stratified random sample selection method, dividing Hyderabad into strata based on Municipal corporations and choosing the respondents of each religion randomly from the strata.

The paper addresses the following research questions

RQ 1: What are the religious TV channels watched by respondents?

RQ 2: For how much time do respondents watch religious

TV on weekdays?

RQ 3: For how much time do respondents watch religious TV on Sundays?

RQ 4: Is there an association between religiosity and respondent's viewing of religious TV?

The study found that

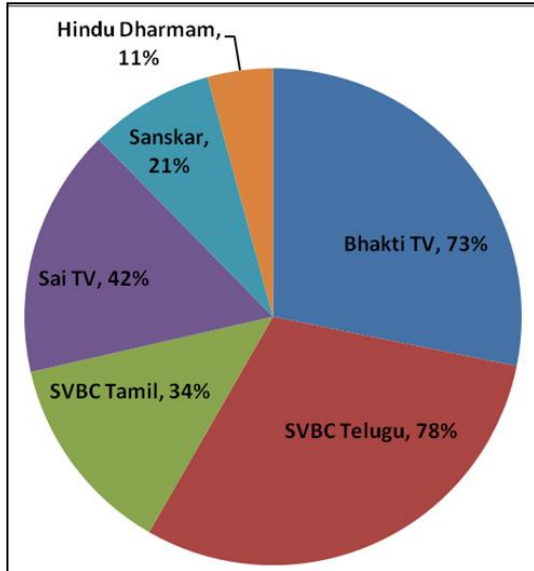


Fig 1: Religious TV Channels watched by Hindu respondents

The above figure shows that among the Hindu respondents, maximum number of respondents watch SVBC Telugu (78%), followed by Bhakti TV (73%), Sai TV (42%), SVBC Tamil (34%), Sanskar TV (21%) and Hindu Dharmam (11%). Respondents were asked to write down all the TV channels they watch, therefore there were multiple answers to the question.

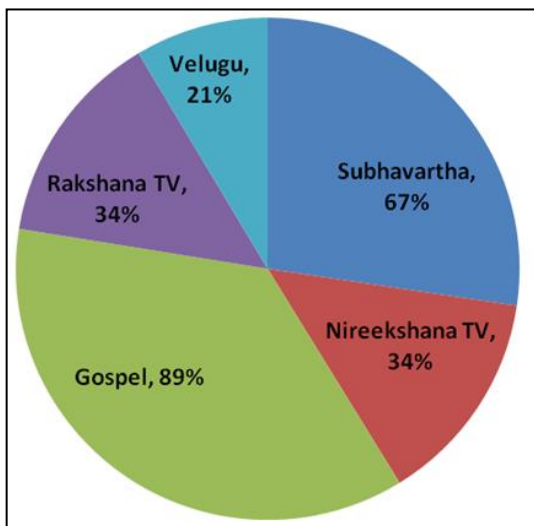


Fig 2: Religious TV Channels watched by Christian respondents

As per the above figure, maximum number of respondents watch Gospel (89%), 67% of Christian respondents watch Subhavartha, 34% watch Nireekshana TV and Rakshana TV, 21% watch Velugu.

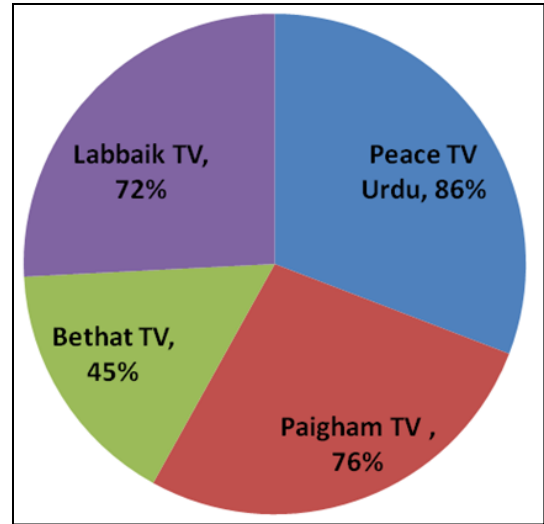


Fig 3: Religious TV Channels watched by Muslim respondents

As per the above figure, among the Muslim respondents, maximum number of respondents watch Peace TV Urdu (86%), followed by Paigham TV (76%), Labbaik TV (72%) and Bethat TV (45%).

Table 1: Duration of watching religious TV programs

	Duration	Religion of respondents	
1	One year or less	Hindu	12 (08.00%)
		Muslim	16 (10.66%)
		Christian	02 (01.33%)
2	One to two years	Hindu	25 (16.66%)
		Muslim	31 (20.66%)
		Christian	21 (14.00%)
3	More than two years	Hindu	113 (75.33%)
		Muslim	103 (68.66%)
		Christian	128 (85.33%)

As per the above table maximum number of respondents in all the three religious categories have been watching religious TV for more than two years = Hindu: 75%; Muslim = 67%; Christian=85%.

16% of Hindu respondents, 31% Muslim respondents, 21% Christian respondents have been watching religious TV for one to two years.

8% of Hindu respondents, 10% Muslim respondents, 1% Christian respondents have been watching religious TV for the past one year only.

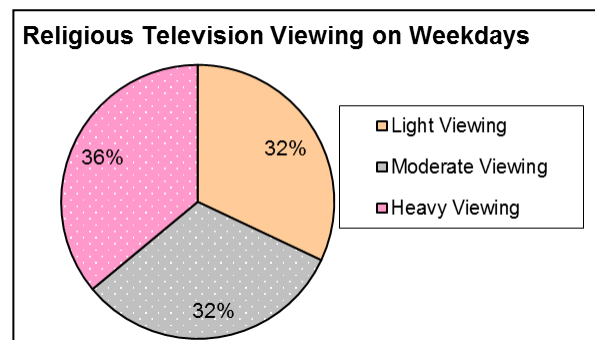


Fig 4: Respondent's viewing of religious TV programs (Hours in a day)

Table 2

S. No.	Description	Mean	S.D
1.	Viewing time of Religious TV on Weekdays	3.04	1.111

Light viewers: watching for 2 or less than 2 hrs. a day.

Moderate viewers: watching for 2 to 4 hrs. a day.

Heavy viewers: watching for 4 or more hrs. a day.

The Pie-Diagram shows that 32% of the respondents in this

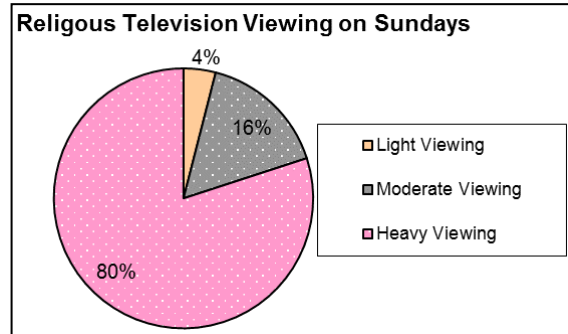


Fig 5: Religious Television Viewing on Sundays

Table 3

S. No.	Description	Mean	S.D
1.	Viewing time of respondents on Sundays	4.28	0.878

The pie-diagram reveals that on Sundays, the figure changes dramatically from that of religious television viewing on weekdays. A majority of the respondents (80%) are heavy

study are light viewers of religious TV, viewing two or less than two hours of religious television a day. An equal number of respondents (32%) are moderate viewers, watching religious television for two to four hours a day. Compared to these two groups however, 36% of the respondents are in the heavy viewer’s category, watching religious television of more than 4 hours a day. The mean scores of religious TV viewing per day is 3.04 hrs.

viewers on Sundays, watching more than four hours of religious television per day. This is a considerable increase from their viewing on weekdays. This is followed by 16% of respondents who are moderate viewers (two to four hours a day) and very few (4%) are light viewers, watching two or less than two hours of religious television a day. The mean viewing time of respondents on Sundays is 4.28 hours.

Table 4: Correlation between Amount of Religious Television Viewed and Their Religiosity

		Religious TV Viewing Hrs.	Religiosity
Religious TV Viewing Hrs.	Pearson Correlation	1	.146**
	P Value	.	.004
Religiosity	Pearson Correlation	.146**	1
	P Value	.004	.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that Pearson Correlation Coefficient is equal to. 146** with p value 0.004, which is significant at 1% level. Hence we can say that there exists a positive correlation between amount of religious television watched by respondents and their religiosity. This shows that as the time of watching religious television increases, their religiosity also increases. This finding is important as it indicates that the more women watch religious TV, the more religious they become.

Conclusions

It is found that considerable number of respondents watcher religious television on weekdays on Sundays. The mean viewing time of religious TV on weekdays is 3.04 hrs and the mean viewing time of religious TV on Sundays is 4.28 hrs. The most watched religious TV channel is Bhakti TV, SVBC Telugu (Hindu); Peace TV Urdu, Paigham TV (Muslim); Gospel, Subhavartha (Christian) are the most watched religious TV channels among the three religious groups of respondents. The paper also found a positive correlation between amount of religious television watched by respondents and their religiosity.

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