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Towards a Mass Media Campaign: Analysing the relationship between target audiences and mass media

4.1 Introduction

The reach of mass media in India is growing exponentially. But access remains uneven, with the chief discriminator being the place of residence – major cities versus towns and rural versus urban areas. In order to assess the feasibility of using mass media on the issue of sex selection, this study examined secondary data¹ on media access and habits in the four target states. Following this assessment, the primary research component of the study assessed the relationship between the identified target audiences and the dominant mass media platforms and programming genres.

4.2 Media Habits in the Target States

Television dominates in all the target states and therefore suggests itself as the mass media campaign driver. Television is followed by print and radio. The following sections detail the media habits in the four target states.

4.2.1 Television

TV Ownership

Of the four target states, television ownership² is highest in Delhi, with 90.3% of households owning a television. Punjab follows with 77.5% television households and Haryana with 70% television households. Rajasthan has the lowest television connectivity, with less than half of its households (45.7%) owning a television.

Cable and Satellite

Cable and satellite connectivity in the four target states follows a similar pattern to TV ownership. The highest cable and satellite connectivity is in Delhi, with 74% (out of 90.3% TV households) having access to cable and satellite channels. Haryana

¹ National Readership Survey (NRS) 2005 was used to determine TV and radio ownership and access to cable and satellite channels, while Television Audience Measurement (TAM) was used to determine most watched shows and TV genres, according to TV ratings.

² NRS 2005: TV ownership, radio ownership and cable and satellite households are based on household data. Frequency of watching TV, listening to radio, frequency of reading, top 10 most watched channels, top 10 most read newspapers, magazines, and top genre of magazines, languages read and spoken, are based on individual data.

follows with 40% (out of 70% TV households) and Punjab with 33.8% (of the 77.5% TV households) having access to cable and satellite. In Rajasthan, only 16.9% of TV households (45.7%) have access to cable and satellite channels.

Rural/Urban divides in TV ownership and cable and satellite connectivity

Apart from Delhi, which does not have a rural population segment, there are significant rural/urban variations in the remaining three states. The differences are sharpest in Rajasthan.

TV Ownership / Cable and Satellite Connectivity		
State	Urban %	Rural %
Punjab	89.9 / 66	71.2 / 17.5
Haryana	86.9 / 65.1	62 / 27.8
Rajasthan	78.6 / 39.9	34.8 / 9.3

NRS 2005 household data

Given that each of these states is largely rural the rural television consumption patterns are important. For the most part, as expected, both television ownership and cable and satellite connectivity drop in rural areas (in rural Rajasthan, it drops to as low as 9.3% of TV households have access to cable and satellite channels). For rural households with television access, the viewing pattern becomes Doordarshan dominated.

Data from the National Readership Survey (NRS) 2005 suggests a domination of Doordarshan and Star Plus. Doordarshan (DD1) is first among the “normally watched” channels in rural Punjab, rural Haryana and rural and urban Rajasthan. In urban Rajasthan, popularity of Star Plus appears to be growing, with 29.8% of viewers listing it as their most normally watched channel, just behind the 43.2% who mentioned Doordarshan. Star Plus is number one in the list of ‘normally watched’ channels in urban Punjab, urban Haryana and Delhi.

This data does not conclusively mean that there is a complete takeover of cable channels (notably Star Plus) even in cable and satellite dominated markets such as Delhi. For example, even though Doordarshan does not show up in the NRS list of top five ‘normally watched’ channels in Delhi, Television Audience Measurement (TAM) data tells a different story. According to TAM 2006 data for two weeks,³ the top 10 programmes in both Delhi and Rajasthan were on Doordarshan.

Preferred Programme Format

Across the target states and bridging rural and urban and gender divides, there is one single genre of programming that dominates TV viewing habits – the fiction drama serial.

³ TAM data is given for the weeks January 1-7 and January 8-14, 2006.

Among the top 100 programs viewed by females 15 years and older, this is how the fiction serial stood in the four states:⁴

- Punjab/Haryana: 71 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.
- Delhi: 76 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.
- Rajasthan: 53 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.

Among the top 100 programs viewed by men 15 years and older, the fiction serial was not as high as among females but remains significant:

- Punjab/Haryana: 56 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.
- Delhi: 55 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.
- Rajasthan: 41 of the top 100 shows were fiction serials.

Preferred Language

Both NRS and TAM data concur that Hindi language programming is preferred in all four states. In both Punjab and Rajasthan, the regional languages surface only occasionally in particular genres of programming.⁵ For example in Punjab, the following genres of Punjabi language programmes appear in the top 100: news, feature film, and drama serial. In Rajasthan's top 100 programmes, three programmes on Doordarshan's regional Kendra (DD Rajasthan) use some amount of Rajasthani – *Gorband*, *Cheermi*, and *Sanskriti*. Of these, *Gorband* is a regional music programme and the other two are arts and culture based programmes.

4.2.2 Print

Frequency of reading at least once a week is relatively high across the four target states and close to the all India average of 45.6%.⁶ Delhi, with its average literacy rate of 82%, leads with 69.8% of its population reading once a week. Haryana follows with 53.1% of its population reading once a week. Rajasthan, despite a low average literacy rate of 61% (Census 2001) has 44.7% of its population reading once a week. Punjab, despite a relatively higher average literacy rate of 70%, has the lowest readership among the target states with 43.1% of the population reading at least once a week.

News, current affairs and women's genres are the most popular formats to read. Hindi is the preferred language among both newspapers and magazines. Among newspapers, English is the second most popular language in Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan. In Punjab, Punjabi is the number two language among newspapers.

⁴ Data is based on TAM data taking an average over a four week period from 28 May to 24 June, 2006. Note TAM data for Punjab and Haryana is combined with Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh.

⁵ Based on TAM data for the week of May 14-20, 2006.

⁶ This section is based on NRS 2005 (individual data).

4.2.3 Radio

Delhi and Haryana have higher frequency of listening to radio⁷ – described by NRS as “heard at least once a week” – than Punjab and Rajasthan (Delhi 36.8% and Haryana 25.3%). This is due largely to the increasing popularity of FM radio. Delhi lists Radio Mirchi, Radio City and Red FM as its top three radio channels. Haryana is somewhat similar with Radio Mirchi, Radio City and AIR (National) occupying its top three slots. Punjab and Rajasthan have a relatively low frequency of listening to the radio, with only 7.3% of Punjab’s population and 15% of Rajasthanis listening to radio.

4.3 Reaching Rajasthan

Data suggests that large parts of Rajasthan are outside the purview of any mass media platform – television, radio or print. Rajasthan is also the largest of the four target states with a population of 56,507,188 (Census 2001).⁸ NRS data reveals that 54.3% of Rajasthan’s households do not own a television set and of the 45.7% that do, only 16.9% have access to cable and satellite channels. Frequency of radio listening is also low. Print consumption, though high relative to literacy, is clearly not enough to compensate for the low reach of other mass media platforms. Also, given that female audiences are particularly important in the context of sex selection, Rajasthan’s low female literacy of 44% suggests that print may not be the best media platform.

Although beyond the purview of the present feasibility study, it is critical to highlight the problem of finding an alternative, effective (mass) message delivery system to reach Rajasthan’s hinterland. Community radio could be a possible strategy, which could involve NGOs in developing content for local broadcast. While Rajasthan may not be saturated with mass media, it does have a large number of committed non-government organisations through which social messaging and communication strategies could be developed.

4.4 Relationship between Target Audiences and Mass Media

Television is a vital, intimate part of people’s lives, across states, regions and socio-economic groups – slightly more so in cable and satellite dominated markets (Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab) than in Rajasthan, which was the only Doordarshan-dominated study region. And, more so for women than men. It is perhaps false to think of television as just another mass media platform, for it occupies a space quite unlike print or radio. It influences everything – decisions, fashions, perceptions, attitudes, conversations, consumer choices and life aspirations. The sections that follow are the media habits of the respondents of the study’s primary research.

⁷ This section is based on NRS 2005 (individual data).

⁸ Census 2001 populations: Delhi – 13,850,507, Haryana – 21,144,564, Punjab – 24,358,999.

4.4.1 Women and television

This study's primary research revealed that female viewers have a deep and emotional relationship with television – far closer than men do. They also exhibit an extraordinary level of identification with television characters, particularly from daily soaps. For women, television does not represent a casual or occasional source of escape or entertainment. It is an addicted or, some would say, committed relationship.

Television provides women with role models. It gives them access to fashion trends – from the cut of a lead character's blouse or the way she has draped her saree, to the kind of bindis she chooses to wear. Women look to television to guide them on life choices relating to conflict and conflict resolution. Television is also the sole source of information on a host of social issues, such as HIV, polio and sex selective abortion. Several female viewers in Rajasthan recalled Doordarshan's *papa mujhe mat maaro* ("daddy, don't kill me") anti-sex selection public service advertisement.

For young unmarried women, whose mobility is otherwise restricted, television is often their only window to the world. Young women in Haryana, pressured by protective brothers into staying indoors even during their summer vacations, had a daily viewing quota of up to eight hours. Thus, given that leisure time for women is generally spent inside the house, television is the primary source of entertainment.

Women's viewing patterns

The television remote control is far more in the hands of women than men. This appears to be one domestic arena in which men willingly relinquish power and control. For example, the young women in Haryana mentioned above are allowed virtually unfettered access to television by their fathers. Even in single television households – which are the norm in rural areas – women have access to programmes of their choice at most times. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law generally watch the same programs. Men make viewing decisions only occasionally; for example, when there are major sports events on air.

Barring the experiences of some upper class respondents from two-television households in Delhi, television viewing is a family affair. So, despite women's intimate relationship with the screen, it is not a 'private' activity, in which they can indulge in isolation. This appears to be entirely a function of space and practical considerations. Given the opportunity, young women do watch television by themselves in the afternoon, but this 'private' viewing pattern is not the norm.

Women watch television primarily in two distinct time slots – in the afternoon, generally with other women in the home, including mothers-in-law, and in the evenings with the entire family, or late night programming, with their husbands. Men, for the most part, watch what the women want to watch.

What do women watch?

Fictional drama, namely the daily soap opera, is by far the most popular television genre among women. These tend to be what are popularly known in India as the

“Saas-Bahu” serials or the “K serials.”⁹ Within this genre, however, there are preferences depending on cable and satellite availability and the age of the viewers.

Younger women (15-17 years) watch a far greater variety of programming. In addition to the Saas-Bahu serials, they watch game shows (e.g. *Smart Shrimati* on DD1 is popular across the target states), health programming, music videos, fashion shows, detective serials, crime reporting, sensational news programmes, and even the odd cricket match.

Reality shows, like *Indian Idol* on Sony TV or Zee TV’s *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Challenge 2005*, appeared to be of interest largely in Delhi.¹⁰ The only well-known competitive reality show to surface in the top 100 shows was *Super Hit Muqabla* on DD1 (Delhi and Rajasthan) and *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge* on Star One (Delhi and Punjab/Haryana). *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge* is viewed less because it is a competition-based reality show and more because of its comedy value.

As women get older (18-24 years), their viewing choices get narrower. They tend to become less eclectic and more woman-centric in their choice of programming. The family soaps continue to be the most popular. They might watch the odd reality show or the sensational crime story, but not as committed or regular viewers.

By the time women reach the ages of 25-35, they become focused on the Saas-Bahu serials. To this limited repertoire, devotional programming like the Aastha Channel and health-based programming is added, with Baba Ramdev’s yoga programmes being particularly popular in Haryana.

4.4.2 Men and television

Men have a markedly different relationship with television than women – less addicted and less intimate. Both younger and older men have other outlets and fewer restrictions on mobility. Television is not their only source of information, entertainment, or their only window to the changes going on in the world, although it remains an extremely important lens through which they view modernity and social transformation. Younger men watch television generally in the afternoon and at night. Older men tend to watch primarily at night, along with their wives and the rest of the family.

Given that television sets are physically located in the domestic space, which is less a male domain, television watching and access to the TV remote control is less male controlled. In a context of single television households, men do not by and large dictate programming choices. However, left on their own, young men indicate preferences for Fashion TV (which consists primarily of scantily clad models walking up and down on a host of international ramps), detective serials (*Jasoos Vijay* was often mentioned in Rajasthan), news programming (DD News, Aaj Tak), music

⁹ K serials refer to the popular TV daily soap operas produced by Ekta Kapoor for Balaji Telefilms. Their titles begin with the letter ‘K’ – *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, *Kasauti Zindagi Ki*, *Kahin To Hoga*, *Kusum*, *Kasamh Se*, etc.

¹⁰ This was confirmed by TAM data for Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab/Haryana for the week of 14 May 2006.

videos, National Geographic, Discovery, and comedy shows such as *the Great Indian Laughter Challenge*. Older men appear to have less interest in Fashion TV or reality shows such as *Indian Idol*, and more interest in sports programming. As with women, the reality shows (*Indian Idol, Fame Gurukul, Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa*) were mentioned far more often in Delhi.

Almost all male respondents in this study, across the states and age-groups, watched Saas-Bahu serials with considerable enjoyment. Some admitted to this, others did not, although those who claimed to be reluctant watchers demonstrated high levels of information about characters and storylines. Young men in particular, and quite unexpectedly, turned out to be staunch votaries for the Saas-Bahu serials. They were open and unabashed about watching them, liking them and declaring that these serials set important morality standards for Indian women.

4.4.3 The Saas-Bahu serials

Who are the dominant role models?

The list of serials in the Saas-Bahu genre is long. Heading the list are the long-standing daily Star Plus classics with each of the lead female characters holding sway over the hearts and minds of millions. These characters appeal to viewers across the board with a particularly devoted following among older women:

- Tulsi from *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* is loved because she upholds the truth at all costs.
- Parvati from *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* is a devoted to her husband and trying to keep the family together at great cost to herself.
- Prerna from *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* is strong, working, and therefore slightly more contemporary, but for her family always comes first.

Younger women today have other favourites, including the following:

- Nimmo from *Kya Hoga Nimmo Ka?* (Star One) is a young woman who enters into a contract marriage to save her family. She is also a bit of a comic and a rebel.
- Saloni from *Saath Phere* (Zee TV) is a dark-skinned woman who attracts a handsome, wealthy man and then proceeds to handle the family with grace and gentility.
- Bani from *Kasamh Se* (Zee TV) is one of three sisters who sacrifices herself for her sisters vis-à-vis their relationship with a wealthy tycoon, upon whom they become financially dependent.
- Kashish from *Kahin To Hoga* (Star Plus) not only epitomises the virtue of sacrifice, but manages to look great. Kashish is known for the clothes she wears and the style standards she sets for young women – from the cut of her kurta to the neck designs of her blouses. But Kashish generates both envy and hostility because of her independence and her glamorous looks.
- Sneha from *Thodi Khushi Thode Gham* (Sony) is a young daughter-in-law who challenges the decisions of family elders.

There are a host of others serials in this genre across channels. Some are lighter, with more comic elements thrown in. Others are more serious and family-focused. The prominent serials in this genre include *Woh Rehne Wali Mehlon Ki*, *Kumkum*, *Kaavyanjali*, *Sindoor Tere Naam Ka*, *Pyaar Ke Do Naam: Ek Radha, Ek Shyam*, *Hari Kaanch Ki Chudiyaan*, *Sapne Saajan Ke*, *Woh Hue Na Hamare* and *Main Banoongi Miss India*.

Although none of the 'younger' family soaps comes close to the popularity of the Star Plus shows, the family soap genre in India is undergoing interesting variations and innovations. New storylines are being attempted, with many producers trying to cater to younger tastes and come up with new role models and less conventional central characters.¹¹ Primary research shows that they are at least partially succeeding in attracting younger viewers.

Why do men watch these serials?

Given that a large number of male respondents admitted to watching the Saas-Bahu serials, their relationship with these serials was probed in both the focus group discussions as well as in individual interviews. Male respondents were directly asked why they watched these serials. They were not prompted as to whether they thought the serials were good or bad.

While men for the most part watch and enjoy these serials, it is noticeable that they fail to identify with most of the male characters, quite unlike the level of female identification with the female characters. Instead, many lead male characters appear to set impossible standards of heroism, nobility and wealth. Several male respondents said that they felt threatened and resentful that their wives expected them to behave like Mr. Bajaj (one of the leading male characters in *Kasauti Zindagi Ki*).

There was a strong although a minority male view, expressed in both Rajasthan and Delhi, that these serials were regressive and were taking women back many centuries by teaching them to obsess about family disputes and remain embroiled in petty domestic quarrels. However, a majority of the male respondents felt that the serials were good because the serials:

- uphold family values;
- show 'ideal' women;
- teach women how they should behave;
- uphold male control over family life;
- highlight the sacrifices made by women;
- teach family unity; and
- enforce good cultural values in women.

Male respondents also shared several possible story ideas in the Saas-Bahu serial format that they believed would reduce sex selection, including serials that show:

¹¹ *Viraasat*, a daily drama on Star Plus, is currently raising the bar for bold love-making scenes on television.

- women taking care of their family until the bitter end;
- daughters taking care of parents even after her marriage;
- sacrifices made by women, thus enhancing women's value; and
- how a competent, qualified daughter makes her parents feel proud.

Why do women watch Saas-Bahu serials?

With a majority of the female respondents, there was little need to specifically probe into their relationship with the Saas-Bahu serials. It is such an organic relationship (between the respondents' lives, their regular consumption of television and their engagement with these serials) that it made itself apparent naturally. In both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the very first series of questions posed by the facilitators asking respondents to describe their day or describe what they like, invariably elicited a direct reference to these serials.

A majority of the female respondents liked the Saas-Bahu serials for a number of reasons. For example, they have a strong sense of identification with characters: "they are like 'us' or like members of our family." They also appreciate the sense of intimacy these shows provide: "we know their deepest fears and anxieties." The serials are a part of their daily lives and demonstrate how they can make change possible in their own lives. The show how they can handle conflict and offer an alternative reality that opens a world of new possibilities.

The Saas-Bahu serials and the concept of modernity

The Saas-Bahu family serials appear to construct a perfect dichotomy between the 'good-traditional' and the 'bad-modern.' The heroines are all 'good-traditional' to be loved and emulated. The female characters that the primary research respondents labelled 'modern' were disliked. The very word 'modern' has a pejorative meaning in these serials. There appeared to be little room for a 'good-modern' character. Characters who are labelled 'modern' are constructed in a very particular way with several constitutive elements: women who do not conform to expected behaviour (some abandon their own children), have their own ideas, dress glamorously and try to use their glamour to entice men, and scheme and lie, break homes, manipulate men and destroy families. These modern characters are etched as excessively individualistic and selfish.

Among the characters mentioned most often as 'modern,' 'hateful' and 'home breakers' were Komolika from *Kasuti Zindagi Ki* and Mohini from *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. It remains an open question whether this construction and overlap between 'modern equals bad' versus 'traditional equals good' comes from the producer's/scriptwriter's notions of what is modern or whether the audiences themselves take their existing beliefs about what is modern and then project these defining ideas on to particular characters. A proposed mass media output in the area of fiction drama needs to explore this construction more deeply.

4.4.4 Television and social messaging

Television is perhaps the most significant source of information on social issues. Several respondents in Rajasthan recalled *the papa mujhe mat maro* (“daddy, don’t kill me”) anti-selection advertisement on Doordarshan in which an unborn female foetus pleads for her life. There was high recall of AIDS messaging in all centres, barring Rajasthan, where there was greater recall of the girl child campaign. However, in Rajasthan, *Jasoos Vijay*¹² was popular across groups and admired for the fact that the lead character takes on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

Respondents also recalled pulse polio advertisements. However, social messaging recall was extremely low among young women in Haryana who said disdainfully that such advertisements were generally found only on Doordarshan, which they did not watch.

4.4.5 Relationship with other mass media: radio and print

Most men read newspapers on a regular basis, but few women in the study were avid consumers of print media. Younger women read magazines for beauty and cooking tips, celebrity gossip and horoscopes. Magazines mentioned in Haryana were *Grah Shobha* and *Meri Saheli*. *Punjab Kesari* was prominent among the newspapers mentioned. Curiously, women in Rajasthan appeared to be the most enthusiastic consumers of newspapers and had an interest in non-gender specific news and information. Even young women (15-17 years) mentioned reading newspapers like *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Rajasthan Patrika* and *Shekhawati Bhaskar*.

Though many households owned a radio, it did not occupy an important space in their lives, apart from occasional bouts of listening to music. In Haryana and Delhi, some respondents mentioned FM radio. In rural Punjab, FM Patiala and FM Chandigarh were mentioned as channels where the respondents often heard Punjabi songs. Respondents in Rajasthan did not mention radio at all.

Importantly, radio and print did not appear to have significant recall of social messaging.

4.5 Conclusion

Television is the clear leader among mass media platforms and would certainly be the preferred mass media campaign driver in Delhi, Punjab and Haryana. Although women have a far more intimate relationship with television than men, television does continue to occupy the number one mass media slot even for men. The favoured genre is the family soap known popularly as the Saas-Bahu serial, and women have a particularly close relationship with this genre. But, television viewing is not a private time viewing for women – there is a constant family gaze giving

¹² *Jasoos Vijay* is a detective drama serial produced by the BBC World Service Trust as part of its mass media HIV/AIDS awareness raising project in India

social sanction to women's programming. It is conceivable that men would not be quite so tacitly supportive if the content were more subversive. So, television is a female dominion but with a male guard.

Men for their part have a conflicted relationship with the Saas-Bahu genre. Little is objectionable about the serials: they support family, uphold male control, keep conflicts and conflict resolution within the controlled domestic space, and yet these serials appear to generate anxiety in men. Many male respondents found themselves unable to identify with the leading male characters, which are larger than life, drive big cars, and derive their primary power, strength and identity from enormous wealth. Given some of the insights into male anxieties that emerged out of the primary research (discussed in detail in Chapter 5) about being the family provider in an unsafe world and by being unable to fulfil the increasing consumer aspirations of the family, it is possible that the ethos, storylines and (male) characterisation in the classic Saas-Bahu sagas could be further feeding these male anxieties.

Rajasthan, as mentioned earlier, is different from the other three states on mass media access. Large parts of the state are outside any mass media net. However, even in those pockets where mass media does reach, there are significant differences between Rajasthan and the other three states in the study. For one, Rajasthan is not television saturated and continues to be Doordarshan dominated. The family serials, though dominant, are less popular than elsewhere.

Audiences in Rajasthan prefer a greater variety of programming. Men protest stronger and louder at being forced to watch the Saas-Bahu serials. Finally, respondents from Rajasthan, including young women, showed a greater engagement with print than elsewhere. Thus, both primary and secondary data suggest a somewhat different potential mass media strategy for Rajasthan than for Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. Given the size of the state and magnitude of the problem, it is recommended that Rajasthan employ all three main mass media platforms for messaging on sex selection. While television continues to suggest itself as the campaign driver in Rajasthan, the choice of television platform would be Doordarshan as opposed to cable and satellite channels.