

Role of Television in Economic Empowerment of Rural Women

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Abstract

Television as a powerful mass medium has a profound impact on society. It has tremendous capacity of attracting both literate and illiterate people. It can influence the life of people in a number of ways. It influences the social, economic, political and behavioural aspects of life. It helps in acquiring information about current issues and provides exposure to outside world. The researcher, in the present study has made an attempt to explore the impact of television on economic empowerment of women residing in Kari Village of Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan. The study was conducted on 300 women of Kari village in the age group of 18-40 years. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling method. The study reveals that majority of women have been economically and socially empowered due to exposure to television. The present study provides an in-depth understanding of how television is shaping the opinion, attitude and behaviour of rural women. The study will contribute in enhancing the understanding the social and economic implications of television content on women thereby paving the pathway for designing of programmes which can result in positive social change and enhancing empowerment of women in rural areas.

Keywords: Mass Media, Rural Women, Empowerment

Introduction

Mass media includes all forms of written, spoken and audio-visual forms which transmits information to people on a large scale. It brings changes in the lifestyle of people and also brings unconscious changes in the behaviour of people. In contemporary society television is found even in lower class households and multiple television sets are found in middle and upper class households. The widespread availability of televi-

sion makes it one of the most popular medium of mass communication. Along with entertainment, television also provides information about social, cultural and political issues. In a developing country like India, all forms of media have to be used to for mass participation of women in the development interventions. It is essential that women are also included in the development process and participate in the economic growth as active partners. Proper mechanisms have to be established for creating awareness among women to realise their potential. Women empowerment is essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development. It is imperative that women are empowered in economic, social, political and cultural spheres. Women empowerment is the process through which women gain control over their lives. They acquire the ability to make their own choices and become competent to take informed decisions. In this context, awareness raising is an important aspect which can help in transforming structures that reinforce gender discrimination. Awareness raising through media is an important mechanism which can help women in claiming their rights. Chakraborty (2014) states that television is a potent medium for dissemination of knowledge about various societal issues. Women have been influenced by television in a variety of ways. The changes in women's awareness and lifestyle make the impact of television clear. Television has made a name for itself as an affordable and informed form of entertainment for women from low-income backgrounds, as well as those who lack education. Jukariya et al. (2018) opine that mass media is the most important source of information in society because of its wide reach to audiences through mass communication. Women's empowerment is very important for the social and economic development of society. Mass media has influenced many aspects of women's lives. It is an important aspect of democracy and has certain obligations to follow for the betterment of society. Education about values and other social issues can play an effective role in transmitting information to women. Media can play a role in increasing women's participation in decision-making through a balanced portrayal of women in media. Priyakumari (2020) conducted a study in Kanyakumari district and explained the impact of television on females. Television is a part of daily life, and it plays a very important role in the lifestyle of common people. Television programmes have high acceptance among their viewers. All television programmes, especially commercials, news, documentaries, and cartoons, regularly affect people of all ages in different ways. Women constitute one of the groups in society that spend a lot of time watching television. At the same time, they gain a lot of information through television programmes and advertisements. Watching television regularly has impacted the social and cultural lives of women. The study concludes that positive change can be

seen among rural women due to television. Rahman (2022) opines that television has proven itself as a low-cost source of entertainment. It is easily available for all women and for low-income families, as well as uneducated women. In his study, he revealed that all the respondents agreed that television plays a crucial role in enhancing knowledge related to social rights. It has created awareness among women about social rights like rights to property, human rights, active participation in politics, prevailing gender discrimination dowry system and disparity in wages. Thus several studies prove that television affects the opinions, attitudes, and ways of living of people. Women's life is mostly limited to the private domain of houses. Television is the medium of linkage with the wider society. The role of television as source of information is significant. It intensifies the effects of other forces of socio-cultural changes. It is shaping public opinion. Television programmes play a vital role in motivating and educating people to adopt new ideas and incorporate changes in life for upgrading the standard of living. The role of television is important in women's empowerment because of the visible effects in every sphere of life. With this background the present study has been conducted to explore the role of television in economic and social empowerment of women residing in rural areas.

Theoretical Framework

The present study utilizes Social Learning Theory propounded by Albert Bandura (1986) as framework. This theory is also known as observational learning theory. According to this theory people learn through observation, imitation and modelling. The media has the potential to be a powerful force that can influence people's behaviour. The media actively teaches the audiences about the world. Television is said to be able to teach viewers a variety of both positive and negative social behaviour and attitudes that they might not personally encounter. This theory highlights that people can mimic the behaviour they see in the media in the most basic ways. According to this theory, "learning takes place in terms of an individual's social behaviour and development from what one observes and experiences in the environment" (Bandura, 1986). The exposure to media results in behavioural changes and their perception about social issues also changes.

Research Method

The study is exploratory in nature. The study was conducted in Kari village of Jhunjunu district of Rajasthan. The village was selected through

lottery method after obtaining the list of all villages in Jhunjhunu district. Purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents. Data was collected from 300 women in the age group of 18-40 years. For the purpose of collecting data, Interview schedule was used. The researcher visited either the homes or farms of the respondents during afternoon. The schedule was translated in hindi. Local language was used to communicate with the respondents so as to have a better understanding of their lifestyle changes due to exposure to television.

Results and Discussion

The schedule comprised of questions related to economic and social empowerment of women.

(i) Role of Television in starting Income-Generating Activities

Role of Television in starting Income-Generating Activities	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	220	73.33%
No	80	26.66%
Total	300	100%

Table (i) reveals that 73.33 percent (220) of the respondents started income-generating activities due to exposure to various programmes on television. They also reported that they have started working in groups which has strengthened their position. 26.66 percent. (80) respondents were not involved in any income generating activity.

(ii) Increase in Income from Agricultural Production

Increase in Income from Agricultural Production	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	158	52.66%
No	142	47.33%
Total	300	100%

Table (ii) shows that 52.66 percent (158) of the respondents said that their income has increased from agricultural production due to information gained from television programmes about seeds, crops, fertilizers, and

compost pits. Now they are growing crops that have high demand in the market, which has increased their agricultural production . 47.33 percent (142) respondents denied any such change.

(iii) Increase in Income from Animal Husbandry

Increase in Income from Animal Husbandry	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	165	55%
No	135	45%
Total	300	100%

Table (iii) depicts that 55 percent (165) of the respondents said that their income has increased from animal husbandry as there are few programmes which give information about care of animals in terms of diet to be given and also vaccination. 45 percent (135) respondents were not aware of such programmes.

(iv) Role of Television in Financial Literacy

Role of Television in Financial Literacy	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	259	86.33%
No	41	13.66%
Total	300	100%

Table (iv) reveals that 86.33 percent (259) of the respondents stated that their awareness about finances has been enhanced in terms of savings, banking facilities, insurance, loans, and pensions through television advertisements, whereas the remaining 13.66 percent (41) respondents said television does not play any role in financial literacy.

(v) Motivated by Television Programmes to Avail Banking Services

Motivated by Television Programmes to Avail Banking Services	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	211	70.33%
No	89	29.66%
Total	300	100%

Table (v) reveals that 70.33 percent (211) of the respondents said that they were motivated by television to avail of benefits of banking services by using credit cards and also for loans, while 29.66 percent (89) of the respondents are not availing of any benefit from banks.

(vi) Motivated by Television to Manage Household Expenditure

Motivated by Television Programmes to Manage Household Expenditure	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	155	51.66%
No	145	48.33%
Total	300	100%

Table (vi) reveals that 51.66 percent (155) respondents have been motivated by television to manage their household expenditure whereas, 48.33 percent (145) respondents reported that household expenditure is managed by male members of the family and television programmes do not have any influence on changing their attitude.

(vii) Motivated by Television Serials to Make Independent Purchase Decision

Motivated by Television Programmes to make Purchase Decisions	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	233	77.66%
No	67	22.33%
Total	300	100%

Table (vii) reveals that 77.66 percent (233) of the respondents make their own purchasing decisions. They reported that they have been influenced by television to some extent. While 22.33 percent (67) of respondents always involve their family members in their purchasing decisions

(viii) Motivated by Television Programmes to become Economically Independent

Motivated by Television Programmes to become economically independent	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	248	82.66%
No	67	17.33%
Total	300	100%

Table (viii) reveals that 82.66 percent (248) of the respondents opined that they have been motivated to become financially independent for better life choices and equality at home due to television programmes. 17.33 percent (67) of respondents are not interested in becoming financially independent because they find it a double burden and they want to involve themselves only in household work.

(ix) Motivation to Participate in Schemes for Women

Motivated to participate in Schemes for Women	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	265	88.33%
No	35	11.66%
Total	300	100%

Table (ix) shows that 88.33 percent (265) of the respondents said that they have been motivated to participate in rural upliftment schemes for women. There are regular advertisements of these schemes on television. The repeated telecasts of advertisements has motivated them to know more about these schemes and participate in these schemes. The gram panchayat also facilitates their participation. 11.66 percent (35) respondents said that they do not participate in any scheme.

(x) Motivated to take Individual Decisions as per their Own Choice

Motivated to take Individual Decisions as per their Own Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	210	70%
No	90	30%
Total	300	100%

Table (x) reveals that 70 percent (210) of the respondents said that they take their own decisions as per their own choice, while the rest 30 percent (90) respondents opined that they are either not involved in any decision making process or are dependent on male members of the family for taking decisions.

(xi) Developing Critical Consciousness

Developing Critical Consciousness	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	131	43.66%
No	169	56.33%
Total	300	100%

Table (xi) reveals that 43.66 percent (131) of respondents agreed that their critical consciousness has after watching shows that are based on women's empowerment. There is change in the way they perceive various situations in life and have also developed the ability to face challenges in life. The other 56.33 percent (169) of respondents did not feel any such change.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that there is improvement in status of women due to exposure to television. Apart from entertainment, television also provides information and exposure to different ways of living, especially urban lifestyles. The exposure to urban lifestyles has influenced the attitudes and values of rural women. Television viewing has enhanced the awareness level and autonomy of women. The women have started analyzing their own social position which has led to increased autonomy in terms of participating in household decision making, making choices, moving outside the household and challenging discrimination. Television has also enhanced the awareness of women regarding social and economic issues. Majority of women have been economically empowered as they have started participating in income generating activities and have also improved their existing practices. Television is transforming the traditional mindset of rural women. Public service advertisements are altering the attitude of women and raising their consciousness about social and economic issues. The female centric content has inspired the women and challenged the age old norms. Thus television is complementing the other factors in social and economic empowerment of women. This study is useful for designing development interventions through media. Although

the influence of other forms of mass media cannot be ruled out. It is recommended that in-sync studies with other forms of media can also be conducted for a comprehensive study.

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