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THE MOST TUNING RADIO FREQUENCIES AMONG TAMIL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS COMMUNITY: A USERS AND GRATIFICATION STUDY ON THE RADIO AUDIENCE

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Abstract

This exploratory study begins by attaining general knowledge about a group of students pertaining to their listening habits while applying uses and gratifications theory and then attempts to gauge whether or not the station meets student preferences. Of the 100 total participants, study in Trincomalee campus thus becoming the target audience for this study. To achieve objectives of this study, survey method has been used for data collection. A questionnaire was distributed among 100 respondents. Findings revealed that majority (90%) of the respondents listen to radio programmes and they prefer to listen to radio at any convenient time (33%), the respondents do listen radio channels mostly through mobile phones (65%), majority of the respondents do listen private radio channels (92.5%), the respondents mostly listen to Shakthi FM (46%), and respondents mostly listen to musical programmes (47%).

Introduction

Radio

“The purpose of broadcasting media is not merely to disseminate plain information or entertain superficially. These are tools, weapons for social development. Hence this medium must be used for public welfare, creative and interactive public tools” (Bora, 2013) Radio is the mass medium that can penetrate the most. “It plays a significant role in informing, educating and enlightening the everyday public life. It also performs entertainment role through music, drama, talk shows, live sports and other soft angles that appeal to such societies” (Ullah and Khan, 2017).

Not only that “Radio was perceived to be an important medium because it was cheap, flexible and able to provide information in local languages” (Yesudhasan & Braine, 1999). Expressing very similar idea to the same statement, UNFPA (2002) defines “Radio is one of the cheapest sources of education and information in underdevelopment countries where people cannot afford to purchase daily newspapers”.

As Bora (2013) explains “Radio continues to be the most widely accessible communication Medium”. Social Communication experts Daniel Learner and Willbur Schramm recognized radio as ‘magic multipliers’ of development which can be a powerful developmental tool for these factors – speed and ease of dissemination of information for development, a capital tool for changing social behaviour, can be of help in developing feeling of nationalism and help faster. Further he explains that, “a realization that technology has made radio into a more two-way medium. And that it can help bridge the digital divide by providing a powerful tool for information dissemination and access, especially for hard-to-reach rural audiences”.

Radio is effective when comparing with other mass media not only informing the people but also in creating awareness regarding social issues and need for social reformation, developing interest and initiating actions. For the above reasons “the listener turns to the radio more often than they turn to any other media” (Ranasuriya, 2015)



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Radio Listenership

Radio programmes can be divided basically into three categories named news, music, and spoken word programs. These program categories cover an enormous range of programming genres.

And also the listeners can be varying depending on their listenership preferences. Many switch on their radio sets and simultaneously involve themselves in various conversations and activities around the house. In this way, these listeners continuously listen to radio program for many hours. By contrast, selective listeners know at what time the radio stations broadcast their favorite programs such as news, film songs, radio drama, & discussions and listen accordingly.

Indian Readership Survey (IRS) is one of the largest readership surveys conducted in India. It also captures listenership for radio. "According to IRS 2012 Q3 findings, the listenership of radio increased from 155 million to 159 million from Q1 2012 to Q3 2012 registering a growth of 6.1% compared to 6.4 percent growth of Television during the same period" (Bora, 2013).

And according to a report by FICCI (2013), "Significantly, majority of radio listenership comes from the age group of 20-40 years. As a result, stations continue to focus on youth by developing youth-centric programmes.

When it comes to Sri Lanka the most obvious change would be in the numbers, given the significant increase in the number of radio stations and that is set to change further in the coming year. As the study focuses on Tamil FM channels, in Sri Lanka, there are about 10 Tamil radio stations and among them Sooriyan FM, Shakthi FM, Vasantham FM, Capital FM, Thendral FM, Warthaka Sevai are considered to be popular among the listeners. These radio channels target almost 11% percent of Tamil population in Sri Lanka.

Radio Listenership of Undergraduates

"It is a fact that university campuses are privileged communities with more than adequate access to media resources" (Pavarala, 2014). As the university students are very much familiar with new communication and technology, the traditional output in terms of 'the radio set' may diminish in appeal, other forms such as the mobile phone, internet and the iPod provide an opportunity to increase the time spent listening. Of course all these new media have their unique advantages. For example the internet and iPods allow us to give the listener 'radio on demand.'

According to Sri Lanka Educational Network (2017), more than 86,000 students study as internal students in 15 government universities. It represents considerably a large percentage of educated, young generation in a country and as youth is the high consumers of mass media, it can be considered that university youth are high end users of radio.

The study was taken place in Trincomalee Campus, where 1650 students study in two faculties that consist of 5 departments. Out of this total population, 354 students are Tamil speaking students. Identifying their radio listening preferences was the objective of the study.

Problem statement

Broadcasters design radio programmes to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse and culturally heterogeneous audience. Listeners listen radio programmes to gratify their needs for relaxation, entertainment and also to express their talents in writing and singing through variety of programs. The radio programs also help them to improve their performance skills in singing, acting, writing, and conversation, and also to enhance their general awareness. However, at present listeners, especially the undergraduates demonstrate a very low listenership with radio channels and it is considered that their radio listenership is decreasing. Hence, this study is designed to investigate the level of interest to radio channels and their programmes and the gratifications that the Tamil listeners get from those radio programmes, with special reference to the Tamil speaking students of Trincomalee Campus.

Objectives of the study

01. To investigate the level of interest to FM Radio channels among the Tamil listeners at Trincomalee Campus.
02. To explore to what extent the contents of FM Radio channels satisfy the needs of the Tamil listeners at Trincomalee Campus.



Theoretical framework

The study was conducted based on Uses and Gratification Theory. It considers that audience are active consumers of mass media. Unlike other theoretical perspectives, the theory holds that audience are responsible for the selection and utilization of mass media to fulfill their desires and certain needs to achieve gratification. The main question of the theory is, why do people use specific media and what do they use them for? “Theory also highlights that a media consumer takes an active part in finding out a source that fulfils and satisfies his/her desired needs and gives support to increase knowledge, education, social interactions, and escape from tension” (Severin and Tankard, 2010).

Literature review

Literature review is the critical analysis of a part of work done by the researchers in the concerned field or a portion of the published body of knowledge available through summaries, classifications, and comparisons of previous research studies, reviews of literature by others, journal articles, scholarly articles, books and other sources relevant to a particular area of research.

This study aims to find out the audience satisfaction with FM radio channels. The previously done research in connection with the topic at hand have also been discussed in detail and critical view is given thereof.

When it comes to radio listenership, it is obvious that people listen to radio in order to gratify different needs of them. In a study done by Thomas J. Y. and Shoesmith, B. (1999) in India, it is mentioned that “people demand morning transmission from Ooty radio station so that they could listen to locally relevant agricultural programs. Agricultural families still expect a lot information on farming from radio and they listen to "Thottamum Thozhilum", an agricultural program which is broadcasted in the evenings. However, most of the agricultural families still consider radio as a morning medium, indicating their preference to listen to radio at that time”.

And in the same study, they mentioned further that “it is also important to consider that rural audiences need entertainment. Film songs, drama and short stories from radio are highly preferred program formats among rural audiences. “The cultural programs, village profiles, folk songs, tribal songs, and devotional songs are also considered as useful and interesting programs by rural communities” (Thomas and Shoesmith, 1999). Not only that but also women also like to listen to radio dramas, which provide them with much entertainment while they do their household chores. Important issues relating to women are depicted through radio dramas, hence their popularity.

There are few researches have been carried out on students’ radio listenership and in a study conducted by C.A. Onyebuchi (2019) on Assessment of Radio Listening Habits of Undergraduate Students of Imo State University, Nigeria, the findings revealed that 63% of the respondents listen to radio often. It was also revealed that over 70% of the respondents prefer listening to news programmes. Result of the chi-square test revealed that at $X^2(4, N=389) = 253.6, p < 0.00$, students’ listenership to radio programme is dependent on the type of programme aired. In a study done by Sivapriya (2019) on mostly listened radio channel by the listeners in Trincomalee, it is shown that majority of the respondents prefer state owned radio channels such as SLBC than other private channels due to its high quality and delivery.

In spite of the excellent efforts of other studies, so far many rigorous researches have been done, but no research has been undertaken in Sri Lankan university community especially with related to Tamil speaking undergraduate students to investigate the level of interest to radio channels and their programmes and the gratifications that the Tamil listeners get from those radio programmes. Hence, this study, the radio listenership of Tamil speaking university students in Sri Lanka will fill that information gap.

Research methodology

Survey research method is one of the most common quantitative research methods used in the field of social science. In this method, the researcher selects a sample of a target population and manages a standardized questionnaire to that sample of target population. The questionnaire, or survey, can be a written document that is completed by the person being surveyed during the research, it should be a telephone interview, a face-to-face interview, social media or an online questionnaire.



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In the present study, the researchers developed a questionnaire and used it as a tool for the data collection from the target audience.

The samples were selected from the Tamil undergraduates who follow their degree programmes at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Among the 354 total Tamil undergraduates who follow their degree programmes at Trincomalee Campus, the study has selected only 100 students as the samples. To achieve the objectives of this study, a questionnaire was distributed among 100 respondents, 20 participants from each 5 departments of the campus. The sample consists of 50 Tamil students and 50 Muslim students. Data analysis was done using SPSS Package.

Results and discussion

The study was carried out among 100 participants and this includes 50 Tamil and 50 Muslim respondents. Among the respondents, there are 60 men and 40 women and their age ranges from 23-25. The respondents were inquired about their preference to radio channels, programmes and the nature of the gratifications they receive from their preferred radio programmes.

The study found out that, majority (90%) of the respondents listen to radio programmes and they prefer to listen to radio at any convenient time (33%), evening (33%), night (22%) and in the morning hours (12%). The findings indicate that, since the respondents are undergraduates they listen to radio programmes whenever they get leisure time and most of them do listen to radio programmes while they study in the evening and night hours. The results also indicate that the respondents rarely listen the morning programmes in their preferred radio channels.

As per the findings, the respondents do listen radio channels mostly through mobile phones (65%), radio sets (25%) and through internet radio (10%). Majority of the respondents prefer to listen radio programmes through mobile phones as they can listen radio programmes while they do some other works (50%) such as studying, cooking and doing exercises. Some other respondents replied as, these audio technologies offer them best convenience (30%), it is the cheapest technology that they can afford to (10%) and while some other respondents preferred it as it is the latest technology (10%).

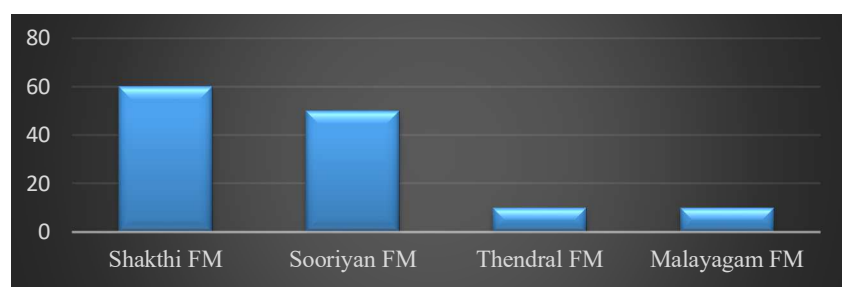


Chart 1: Preferred Radio Channel

The above chart illustrates the data on the preferred radio channels of the respondents. The respondents do listen both state-owned (Thendral FM) and private radio channels (Shakthi FM, Sooriyan FM, Malayagam FM) that are functioning in Sri Lanka. However, majority of the respondents do listen private radio channels (92.5%) than state-owned radio channels (7.5%). As per the findings, the respondents mostly listen to Shakthi FM (46%) than Sooriyan FM (39%), Thendral FM (7.5%) and Malayagam FM (7.5%). The findings also indicate that the ethnicity of the respondents do influence their preference to radio channels and programmes. As per the findings, Tamil students mostly listen to Shakthi FM, Sooriyan FM and Malayagam FM, while Muslim students mostly listen to Thendral FM and Shakthi FM.

The findings of the study indicate that the respondents listen to radio programmes as it is a good entertainment (35%), it is a companion when they are lonely (30%), It has educative programmes (15%), it offers timely news (15%) and it helps to solve social issues (5%). The results point out that the respondents listen to state-owned radio channel (Thendral FM) as it is a companion when they are lonely (35%), it has educative programmes (33%) and it is an entertainment for them (32%). The respondents also listen to Shakthi FM as it is an entertainment for



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them (38%), it is a companion when they are lonely (31%), it has educative programmes (15%), it helps to solve social issues (8%) and it offers timely news (8%). The respondents listen to Sooriyan FM as it is an entertainment for them (31%), it is a companion when they are lonely (23%), it has educative programmes (23%), it offers timely news (15%) and it helps to solve social issues (8%). And the respondents listen to Malayagam FM as it is a companion when they are lonely (100%).

The data also reveals that all four radio channels play the role of a companion when their listeners feel lonely. Thendral FM, Sooriyan FM and Shakthi FM provide entertainment to their listeners and also they offer educative programmes to their listeners. However, only Sooriyan FM and Shakthi FM help their listeners to solve social issues through their programmes and offer timely news to ease their day-to-day activities.

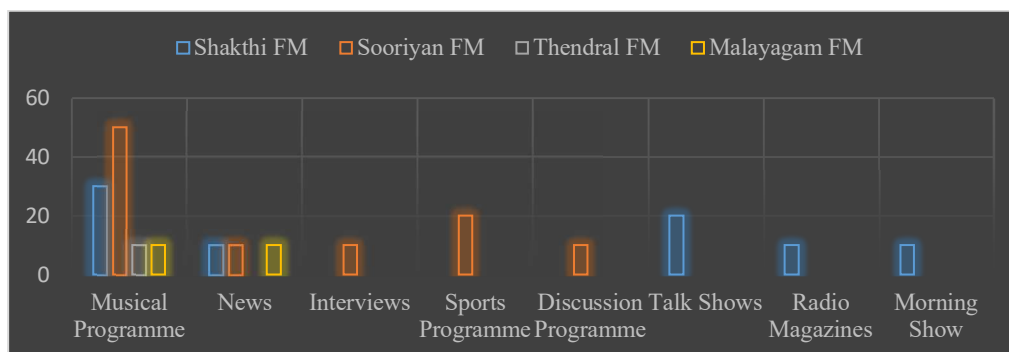


Chart 2: Mostly Listened Radio Programmes

The above chart illustrates the data on the mostly listened radio programmes of the undergraduates of Trincomalee Campus. As per the findings, respondents mostly listen to musical programmes (47%), news (14%), sports programmes (9.5%), talk shows (9.5%), interviews (5%), discussion programmes (5%), radio magazines (5%) and morning shows (5%). It is also apparent from the findings that the respondents those who listen to Thendral FM, listen only the musical programmes. The findings also point out that the respondents listen musical programmes and news from Malayagam FM and musical programmes, talk shows, news, radio magazines and the morning shows from Shakthi FM. The respondents also listen musical programmes, sports programmes, news, interviews and discussion programmes from Sooriyan FM.

This signposts that the respondents listen state-owned radio channel to gratify their musical needs as they listen only musical programmes from Thendral FM. As per the respondents 7.5% of the respondents listen “Hello Thendral” a musical programme from Thendral FM.

However, the respondents listen variety of programmes from private radio channels to gratify their needs for information on current affairs, sports, politics, economy, culture and art and also to fulfill their musical needs. As per the findings 39% of the respondents those who stated Sooriyan FM as their favourite radio station mostly listen to “Sooriyan Pirathana Seythikal (33%)”, “Gnayiru Santhosam (17%)”, “Kummalam (17%)”, “Isaich Chamar (17%)”, “Potrkaalap Puthan (8%)” and “Ithyaththodu Ithayam (8%)” programmes.

46% of the respondents those who listen Shakthi FM, mostly listen to “Nilaachchoru (45%)”, “Vanakkam Thaayakam (33%)” and “Shakthi Seythikal (22%)”. And 7.5% of the respondents who listen to Malayagam FM listen only “Little Entertainment” programme through this radio channel.

As per the respondents, they prefer to listen these types of radio programme because these programmes are entertaining (30%), interesting to listen (26%), releases the stress (18%), enhances the knowledge (15%), these programmes keep them updated on current affairs (7%) and these programmes help them to live a healthier life (4%).

Radio listeners listen Sooriyan FM because it is entertaining (33%), it is interesting (20%), it releases the stress (20%), it enhances their knowledge (13%), it keeps them updated on current affairs (7%) and it helps them to live a healthier life (7%). Similarly, the listeners listen Shakthi FM because it is entertaining (31%), it is interesting (31%), it releases the stress (25%), it enhances their knowledge (6.5%) and it keeps them updated on current



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affairs (6.5%). Respondents listen Thendral FM because it releases their stress (50%) and it is entertaining (50%) and they listen Malayagam FM as it enhances their knowledge.

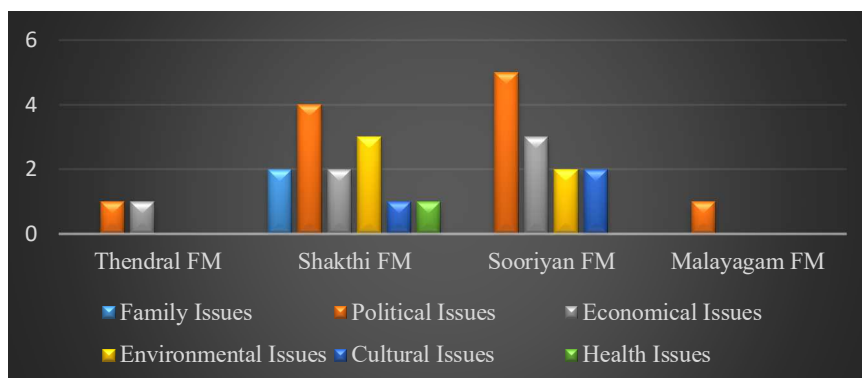


Chart 3: Common issues addressed by the Radio Channels

The above chart indicates the data on the responses of the respondents regarding the common issues addressed by their preferred radio channels. As per the data, political issues (32%), environmental issues (23%), economical issues (18%), cultural issues (14%), family issues (9%) and health issues (4%) are addressed by these four radio channels. Among these, Thendral FM addresses political and economic issues. Shakthi FM addresses political, environmental, family, economic, cultural and health issues. Sooriyan FM addresses political, economic, environmental and cultural issues while Malayagam FM addresses only family issues.

Among these four radio channels, political issues are addressed by Sooriyan FM (46%), Shakthi FM (36%), Thendral FM (9%) and Malayagam FM (9%). Economic issues are addressed by Sooriyan FM (50%), Shakthi FM (33%) and Thendral FM (17%). Environmental issues are addressed by Shakthi FM (60%) and Sooriyan FM (40%). Cultural issues are addressed by Sooriyan FM (67%) and Shakthi FM (33%). Family and health issues are addressed only by the Shakthi FM.

The findings of the study indicate that the respondents seek solutions through their preferred radio channels to solve their problems in different ways. As per the data, 30% of the respondents often seek solutions, similarly, another 30% of the respondents rarely seek solutions and 30% of the respondents very rarely seek solutions through radio programmes to solve their problems. However, 10% of the respondents very often seek solutions from radio programs to solve their problems.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, majority of the respondents listen radio programmes and they prefer to listen radio programmes at any convenient time and mostly in the night times. Majority of the respondents listen radio programmes through the FM radio application that they have in their mobile phones than through radio sets and internet radio. The reason for this are they can listen radio programmes while they do some other works such as cooking, studying and doing exercises and also it is the cheapest technology that they can afford to. The respondents do listen both state-owned (Thendral FM) and private radio channels (Shakthi FM, Sooriyan FM, Malayagam FM) that are functioning in Sri Lanka. However, majority of the respondents do listen private radio channels than state-owned radio channel. The findings also conclude that the ethnicity of the respondents do influence their preference to radio channels and programmes. Tamil students mostly listen to Shakthi FM, Sooriyan FM and Malayagam FM, while Muslim students mostly listen to Thendral FM and Shakthi FM.

The study concludes that the respondents listen to radio programmes as it is a good entertainment, it is a companion when they are lonely, it has educative programmes, it offers timely news and it helps to solve social issues. It is apparent from the study that all four radio channels play the role of a companion when their listeners feel lonely. The respondents mostly listen to musical programmes, news, sports programmes, talk shows, interviews, discussion programmes, radio magazines and morning shows through their favourite radio channels. The study also pinpoints that the respondents listen state-owned radio channel to gratify their musical needs as they listen only musical programmes from Thendral FM. However, the respondents listen variety of programmes from private radio channels to gratify their needs for information on current affairs, sports, politics, economy,



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culture and art and also to fulfill their musical needs. The study concludes that the respondents prefer to listen these types of radio programme because these programmes are entertaining, interesting to listen, releases the stress, enhances the knowledge, these programmes keep them updated on current affairs and health related programmes help them to live a healthier life. Political issues, environmental issues, economical issues, cultural issues, family issues and health issues are addressed by these four radio channels. As per the study respondents often seek solutions through radio programmes to solve their problems.

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