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ARTICLE

Gender disparity in mass media exposure in Uttar Pradesh, India: an analysis of the NFHS 2019-21 data

Ananya Singh[1], Mayank Kumar Singh[2], Raj Narayan[3], Alok Chauhan[4], Nitesh Kumar Adichwal[5], and Rohan Mishra*[5]

[1]Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, 221005, India.

[2]International Institute of Population Sciences, IIPS Govandi Station Road, Deonar East, Mumbai, 400088, India.

[3] Department of Community Medicine, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya Institute of Medical Sciences (Dr.RMLIMS), Lucknow, India.

[4]Department of Geography, Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, 324010, India.

[5]Symbiosis Centre for Management and Human Resource Development (SCMHRD)Symbiosis International (Deemed University) (SIU),Hinjewadi, Pune, Maharashtra, India

*Corresponding author. Email: rohan_mishra@scmhrd.edu

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Abstract

Mass media refers to any communication platform that reaches large audiences and is used to inform, entertain, and educate people. Ideally, access to mass media should be distributed equally across all sections of society, regardless of gender, caste, economic status, religion, place of residence, or level of education. Yet, only a limited number of studies—particularly those using recent data—have examined this issue. The present study specifically investigates exposure to mass media among individuals who reported using at least one of the following—radio, television, newspapers, or magazines at least once a week. The data for this study was obtained from the National Family Health Survey (2019–21) among 15–49 years age group. Logistic regression model was performed to assess the gender differences for men and women. In hierarchical regression model, background (age, caste, religion and marital status) were entered on the first step, place of residence (urban/rural) on the second, education on the third and wealth index on the fourth step. Analysis reveals that only 41.7 percent women and 52.1 percent men aged 15–49 years were regularly exposed to the mass media in Uttar Pradesh, India. Majority of the respondents (39.1 percent of women and 42 percent of men) were exposed to television in the age group 15-49. The finding indicated that regular media exposure is significantly less among women as compared to men (AOR = 0.71, 95% CI:0.68–0.74). Women who received twelve or more years of education were 2.8 times (AOR = 2.80, 95% CI:2.67–2.93) more likely to be exposed to mass media as compared to the category of no education whereas men were about 5.4 times more likely to be exposed towards mass media (AOR = 5.43, 95% C.I:4.69–6.30). Furthermore, women in the rich wealth index were 5.4 times more likely (AOR = 5.38, 95% C.I:5.2–5.6) to be exposed but men were only 3.4 times (AOR = 3.31, 95% CI:2.96–3.70) exposed to mass media compared to the poor wealth index. However, rural women had lower odds of mass media exposure than urban (AOR=0.66, 95% CI:0.63–0.69), rural men had lower likelihood of mass media exposure than urban men (AOR=0.67, 95% CI:0.60–0.76). The study demonstrates that men are more likely than women to be exposed towards mass media in Uttar Pradesh, India. The findings of this paper provide evidence that education level and wealth index were the main significant predictor variables for gender differences towards overall mass media exposure. It suggests that greater focus must be placed on the marginalized population, especially women.

Keywords: Mass media exposure, Gender differences, Television, Newspaper, Radio

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1. Introduction

Media has always played a crucial role in people's lives and has now become an integral part of everyday existence. In the current era of globalization, individuals rely on information for a variety of purposes, and the media connects us to the world by providing news, history, entertainment, and more, helping us remain updated and well informed. The primary functions of mass media are to inform, educate, and entertain the public (Arisukwu *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, mass media plays an important role in educating people about their constitutional rights and duties, as well as their ethical, social, and religious responsibilities. It also acts as a watchdog of society (Agbo & Chukwuma, 2017; Ruth *et al.*, 2020), is widely recognized as the fourth pillar of democracy, and serves as one of the most powerful channels for information dissemination (Tyagi, 2022).

The term "mass media" is an umbrella concept that encompasses all media platforms capable of reaching large audiences through mass communication. It provides a strong platform for the multidirectional flow of information and serves as a tool for promoting awareness, education, and entertainment for the improvement of public welfare (Asp *et al.*, 2014; Igbinoba *et al.*, 2020; Meulemann *et al.*, 2009). Effective exposure to mass media encourages public participation and supports the production of constructive news. It also fosters communication among people by strengthening their opinions and decision-making abilities (Zhao *et al.*, 2023).

Ideally, mass media exposure should be accessible to all segments of society, regardless of gender, caste, economic status, or religion. It should be equally or more evenly distributed across genders. However, previous studies have shown that men are generally more exposed to mass media, while women tend to have lower levels of media exposure, particularly in terms of newspaper readership, compared with men (González *et al.*, 2014). Regular exposure to mass media can be especially beneficial for women, enhancing their decision-making power, increasing their autonomy, and serving as a strong predictor of their attitudes and behaviors (Seidu *et al.*, 2020; Aboagye *et al.*, 2021). In this study, mass media exposure is defined as respondents reporting exposure to radio, television, newspapers, or magazines at least once a week (International Institute for Population Sciences, 2021; Croft *et al.*, 2020). To date, only a limited number of studies have examined gender differences in regular mass media exposure, both overall and by specific media components such as newspapers, radio, and television.

Earlier research has highlighted the significant role of mass media in promoting women's empowerment (Seidu *et al.*, 2020), educating them, and raising their awareness about the world beyond their households, in addition to providing entertainment. Media exposure can be viewed as a source of empowerment for women, similar to education (Dasgupta, 2019). It influences women's empowerment, including their capacity to participate in household decision-making (Jensen & Oster, 2009; Ting *et al.*, 2014). To address the existing research gap by emphasizing gender differences in mass media exposure while accounting for other demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the present study aims to investigate gender differences in regular mass media exposure. The findings may help in identifying strategies to enhance access to and use of different mass media channels among both men and women.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study used data from the latest round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) conducted between 2019-2021 under the supervision of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The NFHS is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey that collects data

on the various demographic, socioeconomic and health related aspects. Such survey datasets have been widely used in empirical and methodological research due to their robustness and representativeness (Hayatu *et al.*, 2024; Mishra, Singh, & Adichwal, 2025).

The NFHS-5 sample is a stratified two-stage sample. The 2011 census served as the sampling frame for the selection of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). PSUs were villages in rural areas and Census Enumeration Blocks (CEBs) in urban areas. A total of 30,456 PSUs were selected across the country in NFHS-5 drawn from 707 districts from 28 states and 8 UTs as on March 31st 2017, of which fieldwork was completed in 30,198 PSUs. NFHS-5 fieldwork for India was conducted in two phases—Phase-I from 17 June 2019 to 30 January 2020 covering 17 states and 5 UTs and Phase-II from 2 January 2020 to 30 April 2021 covering 11 states and 3 UTs and gathered information of 724,115 women aged 15 to 49 years, and 101,839 men aged 15- 54 years from 636,699 households (International Institute for Population Sciences-IIPS, 2021).

The most populous state of India, i.e., Uttar Pradesh (contributes to 16.2% of India's population) has been chosen for the present study. 93124 women and 11126 men of age group 15-49 years from Uttar Pradesh were considered for the analysis. Rational for selecting the Uttar Pradesh is that it is the most populated state of India, which can portray the real picture of the India.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study used secondary data in which consent from each respondent was obtained. Data for the present study is available in the public domain without any specific identifier. Therefore, ethical approval is not required for the data.

Conceptual Framework

The analysis in the study is based on the framework adopted from existing literature towards mass media exposure that which factors contribute towards mass media exposure in gender differential. Various socio-economic and demographic variables in relation to the gender differences towards mass media exposure were also analyzed. It was hypothesized that the exposure to mass media is equally distributed in male and female and all the predicator variables have equal contribution towards mass media exposure in reference to gender differences.

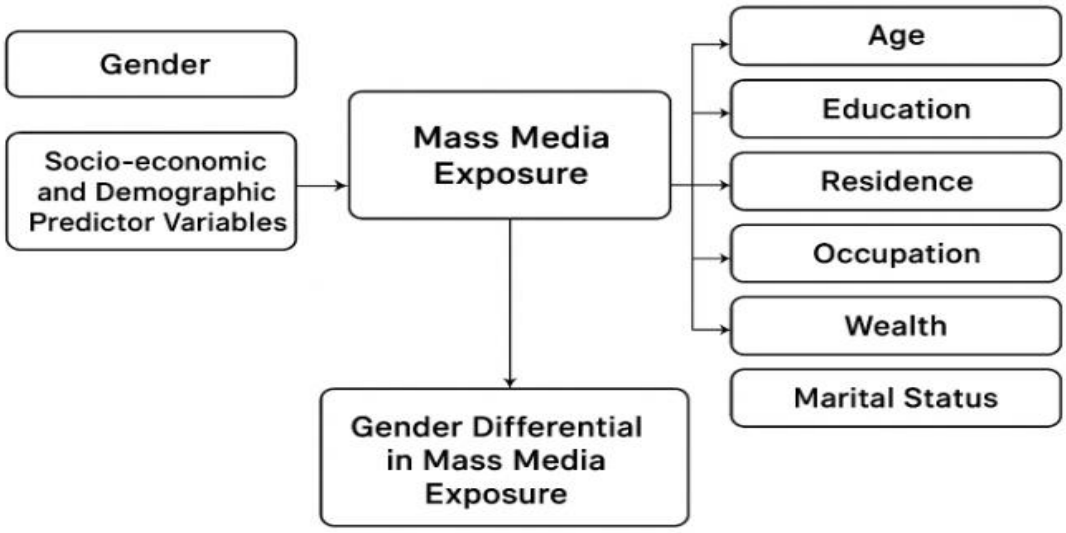

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for mass media exposure in gender differential.

Variables

The study employed several kinds of variables**.** The broader classification may be described as independent and dependent variables**.**

Dependent Variables

NFHS-5 asked a multiple-response question to eligible women and men respondents about mass media exposure. Response options included three categories- (i) At least once a week, (ii) Less than once a week and (iii) Not at all. This variable was categorized into two/binary groups as regularly exposed to mass media (at least once a week) and not regularly exposed to any media (including not at all and less than once a week). Regular exposure to mass media is technically defined as who usually read a newspaper or magazine, watch television, or listen to the radio at least once a week (Croft *et al.*, 2020). Visits to cinema/ theatre at least once a month, this question was dropped while considering the regular mass media exposure as the study consider only print media (newspaper and magazine) and broadcast media (radio and television).

Independent Variables

Several relevant socioeconomic and demographic predictors (including respondent's current age, current marital status, religion, respondent's education, caste, place of residence and wealth index) were considered for the analysis.

Statistical Analysis

First, the distribution of respondents' background characteristics was described. Logistic regression was then used to examine factors associated with regular mass media exposure. For overall gender differences in exposure (odds ratios), data for men and women were combined in a single model. Subsequently, separate logistic regression analyses were conducted for men and women to assess eight potential determinants (including gender) of mass media exposure. In the hierarchical regression model, background variables (age, caste, religion, and marital status) were entered in the first step, place of residence (urban/rural) in the second, education in the third, and wealth index in the fourth step. All analyses were carried out using SPSS.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 represents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in Uttar Pradesh. It is evident from Table 1 that 67.3 percent of the women and 56.1 percent of the men are currently married. It was observed that 28.4 percent women and 12.8 percent men do not have any education. Table 1 also shows that majority of the women (46.1 percent) and men (47.7 percent) belong to poor wealth Index. About 74.9 percent women and 79.6 percent men belong to rural areas. While considering the religious background it was observed that Hindus were in majority and Muslims comprise the largest minority group in both the gender.

Table 2 shows that only 41.7 percent women and 52.1 percent men aged 15–49 years were regularly exposed to the mass media. The share of media exposure was consistently higher for men across most variables as compared to their women counterparts. Although this share was high in the age group 20 -24 years for both (45.6 percent women and 55.1 percent men). While considering the role of education it was observed that 60.4 percent of women and 71.4 percent of men, who had completed their twelve or more years of education, were regularly exposed towards mass media.

Table 3 presented the results of logistic regression (odds) analysis of regular media exposure among the men and women belonging to 15-49 years age groups. In the Table 3 Model-2 as an adjusted model represent the results of logistic regression (odds ratio) analysis after controlling other variables (age, marital status, religion, education, caste, place of residence and wealth index). It is clear from the results that regular media exposure was significantly less among women as compared to men (AOR = 0.71, 95% C.I:0.68–0.74).

Majority of the respondents from both the gender (39.1 percent of women and 42 percent of men) were exposed to television in the age group 15-49 (Table 4). The high gap was found in newspaper reading (9.1 percent of women and 29.6 percent of men). A very small number of both groups were exposed to radio (3.3 percent of women and 6.7 percent of men). It was observed that there was a significant variation in the exposure to mass media by other background characteristics among men and women.

While considering the married status of respondents it was found that 37.8 percent of women and 41.1 percent men were watching television while only 3 percent of women and 6.5 percent men were listening radio.

The exposure to television was significantly high among women (55.6 percent) and men (57.1 percent) who completed twelve or more years in education. There were significant differences between men and women according to place of residence (urban-rural). Contrary to this 59.1 percent men were watching television in urban area which was slightly less as compared to their women counterparts (61.8 percent). Percentage of women from rich wealth index was slightly high than men for watching television.

Odds ratios (with 95% CI) for regular exposure to mass media among men and women according to their background characteristics are shown in Table 5. In the multivariable logistic regression, age, education, place of residence, caste, and wealth index were statistically significant predictors of regular mass media exposure for both genders, whereas marital status and religion were not.

Women aged 20–24 years had significantly lower odds of regular mass media exposure (AOR = 0.93, 95% CI: 0.88–0.99) than those aged 15–19 years, while men in the 20–24 age group also had significantly lower odds (AOR = 0.86, 95% CI: 0.74–0.98) compared with the 15–19 reference group.

Marital status was not significantly associated with mass media exposure in either gender. The adjusted odds for married women were virtually identical to those of never-married women (AOR = 0.97, 95% CI: 0.92–1.02), and married men showed no significant difference from never-married men (AOR = 1.06, 95% CI: 0.93–1.21).

Higher education was strongly and positively associated with media exposure in both sexes, although the association was substantially stronger among men. Women with ≥12 years of schooling were 2.8 times more likely (AOR = 2.80, 95% CI: 2.67–2.93) to be regularly exposed to mass media than women with no education, whereas men with the same educational level were 5.4 times more likely (AOR = 5.43, 95% CI: 4.69–6.30) than men with no education.

Wealth showed a strong positive gradient for both genders, but the effect was larger among women. Women in the richest wealth quintile were 5.4 times more likely (AOR = 5.38, 95% CI: 5.20–5.60) to have regular mass media exposure than those in the poorest quintile, compared with 3.3 times higher odds (AOR = 3.31, 95% CI: 2.96–3.70) among richest men relative to poorest men (Table 5)

The hierarchical multiple regression (Table 6) revealed that at stage one, age, caste, religion and marital status contributed significantly to the regression model and accounted for 3 percent of the variation in regular mass media exposure among women while it is only 2 percent among men. When the place of residence was also included then an additional 3 percent and 5 percent variation was seen

among men and woman respectively in regular mass media exposure and this change in R^2 was significant. Adding education to the regression model resulted in an additional 6 percent variation in mass media among women while in men it increased to 9 percent. Contrary to this, after adding the wealth index to the regression model resulted in an additional variation of 7 percent in regular mass media exposure among women but its contribution is only 4 percent among men and this change in R^2 square was also significant. The most important predictor of regular mass media exposure in women was wealth index which solely explained 7 percent of the variation in mass media exposure but it is only four percent among men. The four independent variables (Background, place of residence, education and wealth index) collectively accounted for 21 percent variance in regular mass media exposure to women while for men it is 18 percent only.

3.1 Tables

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents, Uttar Pradesh, 2019-21

Background Characteristics	Female		Men	
	%	N	%	N
Respondent's current age				
15-19	21.0	19514	22.0	2443
20-24	18.5	17250	17.1	1902
25-49	60.5	56360	60.9	6781
Current marital status				
Never married	30.1	27998	42.4	4720
Married	67.3	62675	56.1	6243
Widowed/divorced/separated	2.6	2450	01.5	163
Religion				
Hindu	82.7	76981	85.1	9466
Muslim	16.9	15784	14.7	1634
Other	00.4	359	00.2	26
Respondent's education				
No education	28.6	26634	12.8	1426
<5 years complete	02.3	2178	02.7	301
5-7 years complete	11.9	11067	11.8	1317
8-9 years complete	17.9	16676	25.1	2795
10-11 years complete	11.7	10849	15.1	1681
12 or more years complete	27.6	25720	32.4	3606
Caste				
SC/ST	26.4	24595	25.7	2863
OBC	53.2	49514	54.3	6041
Other	20.4	19015	20.0	2222
Place of residence				
Urban	25.1	23408	20.4	2269
Rural	74.9	69716	79.6	8857
Wealth index				
Poor	46.1	42927	47.7	5304
Middle	18.9	17595	19.3	2146
Rich	35.0	32602	33.0	3676
Uttar Pradesh	100.0	93124	100.0	11126

Table 2. Gender Differences in Regular Mass Media Exposure According to Selected Background Characteristics, Uttar Pradesh, 2019-21

Background Characteristics	Female			Men		
	%	N	χ^2 test	%	N	χ^2 test
Respondent's current age						
15-19	42.9	19514		49.9	2443	
20-24	45.6	17250	χ^2 = 250.12,	55.1	1902	χ^2= 10.61
25-49	40.2	56360	p = 0.000	52.1	6781	p = 0.005
Current marital status						
Never married	46.9	27998		54.0	4720	
Married	39.8	62675	χ^2= 478.85	50.9	6243	χ^2 = 17.47
Widowed/Divorced/Separated	33.9	2450	p = 0.000	41.4	163	p = 0.000
Religion						
Hindu	42.2	76981		52.6	9466	
Muslim	38.7	15784	χ^2= 169.76	49.1	1634	χ^2= 7.78
Other	71.7	359	p = 0.000	78.0	26	p = 0.020
Respondent's education						
No education	22.2	26634		26.0	1426	
<5 years complete	30.2	2178		30.7	301	
5-7 years complete	36.2	11067	χ^2 = 8506.95	35.9	1317	χ^2= 1236.19
8-9 years complete	42.8	16676	p= 0.000	46.7	2795	p = 0.000
10-11 years complete	51.8	10849		56.1	1681	
12 or more years complete	60.4	25720		71.4	3606	
Caste						
SC/ST	35.0	24595		44.2	2863	
OBC	39.4	49514	χ^2= 2088.9	50.7	6041	χ^2 = 206.95
Other	56.7	19015	p = 0.000	65.3	2222	p = 0.000
Place of residence						
Urban	65.3	23408	χ^2= 5003.4 p =	69.8	2269	χ^2 = 367.16
Rural	33.8	69716	0.000	45.5	8857	p = 0.000
Wealth index						
Poor	20.1	42927		32.4	5304	
Middle	44.8	17595	χ^2= 66.75	55.4	2146	χ^2 = 1386.2
Rich	68.6	32602	p= 0.000	74.0	3676	p = 0.000
Uttar Pradesh	**41.7**	93124		52.1	11126	

Table 3. Results of logistic regression analysis examining the effects of gender on regular mass media, Uttar Pradesh, 2019-21

	Model 1 COR (95%CI)				**Model 2 AOR (95%CI)***			
Variable	Odds Ratio	P>z	Upper Limit	Lower Limit	Odds Ratio	P>z	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
Gender								
Male	1				1			
Female	0.65	0.00	0.626	0.677	0.71	0.000	0.675	0.739

*Controlled by age, marital status, religion, respondent's education, caste, place of residence and wealth index

Table 4. Gender Differences in Regular Mass Media Exposure According to Selected Background Characteristics, Uttar Pradesh, 2019-21

Background Characteristics	Female				Male			
	Newspaper/ magazine	Radio	Television	N	Newspaper/ magazine	Radio	Television	N
	%	%	%		%	%	%	
Respondent's current age								
15-19	09.6	03.5	39.1	19514	24.4	06.6	40.4	2443
20-24	10.8	04.1	42.2	17250	32.9	07.3	44.2	1902
25-49	08.3	03.0	38.1	56360	30.5	06.5	41.9	6781
Current marital status								
Never married	12.8	04.2	42.6	27998	30.5	06.9	43.5	4720
Married	07.5	03.0	37.8	62675	29.1	06.5	41.1	6243
Widowed/divorced/separated	06.8	02.0	31.2	2450	21.1	06.4	31.2	163
Religion								
Hindu	09.6	03.5	39.4	76981	30.5	06.9	42.5	9466
Muslim	06.1	02.4	36.4	15784	24.1	05.2	38.9	1634
Other	19.1	01.1	70.3	359	50.1	00.0	74.6	26
Respondent's education								
No education	00.1	01.4	21.5	26634	02.6	04.1	22.3	1426
<5 years complete	00.8	02.1	28.8	2178	03.9	03.4	28.0	301
5-7 years complete	02.9	02.2	34.3	11067	11.9	03.7	30.1	1317
8-9 years complete	06.4	02.9	40.3	16676	20.1	06.3	37.3	2795
10-11 years complete	12.7	04.0	48.0	10849	34.1	06.0	44.1	1681
12 or more years complete	21.9	05.9	55.6	25720	52.8	09.5	57.1	3606
Caste								
SC/ST	06.3	02.5	32.5	24595	23.4	06.4	35.8	2863
OBC	07.8	03.3	36.7	49514	28.3	06.4	40.0	6041
Other	15.9	04.4	53.5	19015	40.7	07.7	54.8	2222
Place of residence								
Urban	19.5	05.3	61.8	23408	43.7	07.9	59.1	2269
rural	05.6	02.6	31.4	69716	24.3	06.2	35.6	8857
Wealth index								
Poor	02.8	02.0	17.8	42927	15.8	05.2	22.8	5304
Middle	06.4	03.0	42	17595	29.2	07.0	43.9	2146
Rich	18.7	05.3	65.5	32602	46.3	08.3	64.0	3676
Uttar Pradesh	09.1	03.3	39.1	93124	29.6	06.7	42.0	11126

Table 5. Odds ratios (with 95% CI) for regular mass media among men & women by their background characteristics

Background Characteristics	Women				Men			
	Odds ratio	P>z	Upper Limit	Lower Limit	Odds Ratio	P>z	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
Age								
15-19	1.00				1.00			
20-24	0.93	0.02	0.884	0.987	0.86	0.028	0.744	0.983
25-49	0.96	0.15	0.897	1.017	0.94	0.460	0.808	1.101
Marital status								
Never married	1.00				1.00			
Married	0.97	0.24	0.918	1.022	1.06	0.413	0.926	1.206
Widowed/divorced/separated	0.86	0.01	0.770	0.964	1.02	0.917	0.704	1.478
Religion								
Hindu	1.00				1.00			
Muslim	0.64	0.00	0.616	0.673	0.86	0.022	0.759	0.979
Other	1.67	0.00	1.287	2.162	1.99	0.161	0.762	5.182
Respondent's education								
No education	1.00				1.00			
<5 years complete	1.38	0.00	1.242	1.532	1.52	0.004	1.148	2.023
5-7 years complete	1.71	0.00	1.623	1.805	1.67	0.000	1.405	1.994
8-9 years complete	2.09	0.00	1.990	2.190	2.58	0.000	2.219	3.012
10-11 years complete	2.50	0.00	2.368	2.647	3.27	0.000	2.757	3.867
12 or more years complete	2.80	0.00	2.671	2.932	5.29	0.000	4.519	6.194
Caste								
SC/ST	1.00				1.00			
OBC	0.97	0.07	0.932	1.003	0.99	0.889	0.898	1.098
Other	1.25	0.00	1.197	1.314	1.15	0.040	1.006	1.309
Type of place of residence								
Urban	1.00				1.00			
Rural	0.66	0.00	0.632	0.687	0.67	0.000	0.597	0.755
Wealth index								
Poor	1.00				1.00			
Middle	2.71	0.00	2.604	2.815	1.91	0.000	1.711	2.126
Rich	5.38	0.00	5.171	5.599	3.31	0.000	2.962	3.707

Table 6. Hierarchal regression Model for Regular Mass Media among Men & Women by selected block, Uttar Pradesh, 2019-21

Block	Female							Male					
	Block	F	Block DF	Residual df	P>F	R^2	Change in R^2	F	Block DF	Residual df	P>F	R^2	Change in R^2
Background (age, caste religion, marital status)	1	648.0	4	93119	0.00	0.03		60.4	4	11121	0.00	0.02	
Place of residence	2	5152.7	1	93118	0.00	0.08	0.05	348.2	1	11120	0.00	0.05	0.03
Education	3	6217.4	1	93117	0.00	0.14	0.06	1105.7	1	11119	0.00	0.14	0.09
Wealth index	4	8715.5	1	93116	0.00	0.21	0.07	538.0	1	11118	0.00	0.18	0.04

Discussion

The study provides important insights into gender differences in exposure to mass media among men and women aged 15–49 years in Uttar Pradesh. Regular exposure to newspapers, television, or radio—defined as accessing any of these media at least once a week—served as the basis for examining gender disparities in media utilization. Identifying the specific socioeconomic and demographic determinants of these differences is crucial for designing targeted strategies and policies aimed at

enhancing women's access to mass media and reducing the persistent gender gap.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that a considerable proportion of both women and men do not access any of the three major forms of media weekly. Consistent with earlier studies (Ghosh *et al.*, 2021; Asp *et al.*, 2014; Fatema & Lariscy, 2020), the study confirms that exposure to mass media is essential for developmental programmes and public awareness. The results indicate that men are more likely than women to be exposed to all forms of media. While television is the most widely accessed medium among both genders, the largest gender gap is observed in the use of newspapers and magazines, with substantially fewer women accessing print media. Similar findings were reported by Ratnasingam & Ellis (2011), who observed across four Asian countries that television served as the most common form of media exposure compared to newspapers and radio. This may be because broadcast media enables simultaneous listening and viewing and does not require high levels of literacy, whereas print media requires reading ability and often appeals more to educated individuals.

The study also affirms with the earlier findings—that mass media exposure tends to benefit men more than women—remain valid. Men's higher educational attainment, greater mobility, and stronger participation in the workforce provide them with alternative channels of information, contributing to their higher likelihood of media exposure in Uttar Pradesh. The present analysis found that individuals with higher wealth status, greater educational attainment, and older age groups (20–24 years) are more likely to be exposed to mass media, for both genders. Comparable results from Ethiopia also show that younger women, low household wealth, and female-headed households contribute to lower media exposure (Gashu *et al.*, 2021).

Urban residents—both men and women—have higher levels of media exposure, with smaller gender gaps than those observed in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh. This is likely due to better media accessibility, greater awareness, and the routine integration of media consumption (such as morning news or newspapers) into daily urban life. Given that nearly 70% of India's population resides in rural areas, the limited access to media in rural settings contributes to overall lower exposure levels. This observation aligns with findings reported by Meena & Yadav (2021).

Interestingly, regression results from the present study indicate that adolescent men and women (ages 15–19) exhibit higher exposure to mass media than individuals aged 20–24, a trend inconsistent with earlier work (Sawyer, 2018; 2019; Singh, 2019; Slot *et al.*, 2019; Cobb, 1990). This divergence may reflect evolving media preferences among younger cohorts, who are more socially active and increasingly oriented toward digital or social media engagement.

A considerable gender gap persists in reading newspapers and listening to the radio, although differences in television viewing are relatively small. Earlier work by Frey & Benesch (2008) similarly noted that television and radio remain more accessible and user-friendly, requiring neither literacy nor specialized training—factors that particularly favour populations with lower levels of education.

Education emerges as a strong predictor of media exposure for both genders, with significant differences observed among individuals with twelve or more years of schooling. Education not only enhances individuals' understanding of their informational needs but also increases their likelihood of regular media consumption. The gender differences observed among those with higher education may be attributed to women's greater involvement in household responsibilities as they age. Wealth also positively influences media exposure, as men and women in higher wealth categories display substantially higher odds of media use than their poorer counterparts. Marital status shows differences in odds ratios; however, these results are not statistically significant for either gender. Religion also plays a role, with Muslim men and women exhibiting lower levels of media exposure than Hindus, potentially due to educational and economic disparities.

Global Comparative Perspective

Placing the Indian study's findings in a broader global context shows that gender differences in mass-media exposure are not unique to India, but part of a wider international pattern shaped by socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, several multi-country studies have documented strong associations between mass-media exposure and women's empowerment. For instance, a study of 30 SSA countries using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data found that women who frequently watched television had significantly greater household decision-making capacity than those who did not, controlling for education, wealth, age, and occupation. (Seidu *et al.*, 2020)

Another analysis of DHS data from 29 SSA countries showed that women exposed to mass media (TV, radio, or print) had markedly higher odds of safer-sex negotiation (adjusted odds ratio ≈ 1.94) compared to women with no exposure, even after controlling for key covariates like education, wealth, religion, and residence. (Aboagye *et al.*, 2021)

Beyond Africa, complex patterns of media access and gender also emerge in developing countries. For example, in Ethiopia, exposure to mass media has been shown to correlate with better HIV/AIDS knowledge among women, with both individual and community-level predictors (education, wealth, place of residence) playing a role. (Agegnehu & Tesema, 2020)

At the same time, gender inequities in media representation remain pervasive even in higher-income and European contexts. According to the Council of Europe's gender-equality toolkit, women continue to be underrepresented in European news media—not just as news subjects, but also in media production roles—with persistent disparities in radio, television, and print. (Doukhan *et al.*, 2024)

Taken together, these global studies suggest that the gender gap in media exposure is both widespread and multifaceted. Structural barriers—such as lower education among women, unequal economic resources, and limited autonomy—constrain women's media use in many developing settings, while in more developed settings, representation and access issues take on different forms. This comparative perspective underscores the need for policy interventions not only to improve women's access to mass media (through infrastructure, literacy, affordability) but also to address deeper structural and gender-normative barriers in media consumption and representation.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated the significant differences among men and women for media exposure after controlling other variables and men are more likely to be exposed to the mass media compared to the women among Uttar Pradesh, India. Furthermore, finding indicated that education level and wealth index were the main significant predictor variables for gender differences towards overall mass media exposure. It suggests that more focus must be placed on rural men and women especially women belonging to marginalized population. The study identifies the need to plan and implement specific awareness program for women to achieve gender equality in exposure to mass media.

Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institution.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Data curation**: SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Formal analysis**: SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Investigation** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Methodology:** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Software:** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Supervision:** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Validation** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Visualization** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Funding Acquisition:** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Writing - original draft**: SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.; **Writing - review and editing:** SINGH, A., SINGH, M. K., NARAYAN, R., CHAUHAN, A., ADICHWAL, N. K., MISHRA, R.

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