



## Television viewing habits among rural women in Bangladesh

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2582-7138

**Volume:** 05

**Issue:** 06

**November-December** 2024

**Received:** 09-09-2024

**Accepted:** 11-10-2024

**Page No:** 329-334

### Abstract

This article examines the television viewing habits of women in the Rangpur division, located in northern Bangladesh, through a survey of 800 randomly selected respondents. Findings reveal that television is a dominant leisure activity, with 82% of women watching TV daily. Viewing patterns vary by time of day: 67% of women prefer prime-time (evening) programming, while only 4% watch in the morning due to busy schedules. Over half (56%) of respondents watch TV for more than three hours daily, indicating high engagement, whereas only 6% watch for about an hour. Films and music are particularly popular among rural women, with 95% and 93% watching them daily, followed closely by Indian Bangla serials (89%) and news and talk shows (90%). The study highlights the strong role of television in these women's lives, shaped by cultural preferences and genre interests. This high consumption rate suggests further research opportunities to explore television's impact on lifestyle and the potential for alternative leisure activities.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2024.5.6.329-334>

**Keywords:** Television, women, viewing habit, lifestyle

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### Introduction

The introduction of satellite television in Bangladesh, marked by the 1992 broadcast of CNN on state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV), opened up a new realm of media exposure for Bangladeshi audiences. By 1995, the number of foreign TV channels available in the country had expanded, providing more than ten options. Today, viewers can access a plethora of programs across hundreds of channels, including over 50 local channels with 40 currently on air. This proliferation of television content has made the medium a significant part of daily life, with television emerging as a crucial platform for delivering information on social, economic, and cultural issues. Television programs, including news, commercials, documentaries, and entertainment, wield substantial influence over various demographics, particularly women. As "active media users," women in Bangladesh engage significantly with television content, spending considerable time viewing, which in turn shapes their perspectives, opinions, and roles within society.

Despite the growth in media content and its broad influence, limited research has focused specifically on the television viewing habits of rural women in Bangladesh. Understanding the viewing patterns of this group is essential because rural women often face unique social and economic conditions that influence their access to and engagement with media. Rural women are not only consumers of media but also crucial contributors to social and economic development, and the impact of television on their lives whether by shaping their roles, informing their choices, or influencing their social perspectives remains largely unexplored.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the television viewing habits of rural women in Bangladesh, considering the type of content they consume, the time spent on television, and the perceived influence of television on their lives. As the media landscape continues to evolve, this research will provide valuable insights into how television content affects rural women, shedding light on the social and cultural implications of their viewing habits.

The study's findings could further help inform content creators and policymakers, contributing to a more inclusive media environment that better addresses the needs and interests of rural women in Bangladesh.

### Research objectives

- To understand television watching habits of rural women.
- To find out favorite television programs watched by the rural women

### Review of literatures

A thorough review of literature regarding women's television watching behaviors reveals a range of influences, trends, and effects noted across various demographic contexts. In Bangladesh, rural residents still make up a significant portion of the population, with approximately two-thirds (64.2%) living in rural regions (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2017). While TV executives and advertisers often focus on the purchasing power of their audiences, they should not neglect the substantial purchasing power of the vast rural female viewer base. For 84% of people in Bangladesh, television serves as the primary medium for news and current affairs, whereas only 25% prefer newspapers (The Asia Foundation, 2016, p. 82).

Adnan and colleagues (2018) <sup>[2]</sup> undertook a study to investigate women's television viewing habits, examining factors such as frequency of viewing, preferred programs, and reasons for watching TV. Through a survey approach, they discovered that most female participants watched television daily, typically for up to two hours each day. Notably, many respondents expressed that they had the freedom to choose the programs they viewed, reflecting a personal investment in their viewing decisions. When researching children's television habits, Rubenkig and others found that in the U.S. children aged 2 to 7 averaged 2.5 hours of TV watching daily, a figure that increased to 4.5 hours for those aged 8 to 18. It was noted that children spent over 25% of their waking hours in front of screens, highlighting how significant screen time begins at an early age. Although the focus was on children, the study provides valuable insights into household viewing dynamics that may influence women's viewing behaviors, particularly for mothers who juggle family TV time.

Bryant, Lucove, Evenson, & Marshall (2007) <sup>[7]</sup> examined the methodologies employed in television viewing studies and remarked that most relied on self-reported surveys without much direct observation. They pointed out that the precision of TV viewing measurements is essential, as self-reported data may not always be dependable. This observation emphasizes the significance of methodology in research on women's television habits, where subjective aspects such as program selection and viewing motivations might benefit from more detailed and observational techniques.

Hopkings, Nancy, Mullis, & Ann, (2015) <sup>[9]</sup> investigated family co-viewing behaviors, emphasizing interactions between parents and young children. By focusing on triads of mothers, fathers, and children, they discovered varying degrees of agreement in viewing selections among family members, suggesting that family dynamics play a crucial role in individual viewing habits. For women, particularly mothers, co-viewing practices may influence their television routines since viewing decisions are frequently made in conjunction with other family members. During the COVID-

19 pandemic, (Shaikh, Shazia, Younus, & Sadia, 2023) <sup>[20]</sup> studied how female viewership changed due to an increased demand for health-related information and stress relief. Women showed a greater tendency to watch morning programs centered on COVID-19 prevention and health topics. Additionally, entertainment and drama shows became more popular as a means to alleviate stress, underscoring how external crises can alter viewing motivations and preferences. In Belgium, (Backer & Hudders, 2016) <sup>[5]</sup> noted gender differences in the popularity of educational versus edutainment cooking shows, finding that male viewers of educational content tended to cook more frequently. Their results suggest a possible connection between the type of television content consumed and its influence on behavior, indicating that different program types may affect women's household tasks, including cooking, which relates to their television viewing habits. Lastly, (Bridget, Bracken, & Campanella, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup> analyzed transformations in viewing behaviors, such as binge-watching and serial viewing, from 2015 to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results showed a marked increase in binge-watching and serial watching during lockdown periods, with traditional "appointment viewing" decreasing as audiences moved towards more flexible viewing options. This shift may indicate a change in how women, as part of a larger audience, engage with television in response to lifestyle changes and improved access to on-demand streaming services.

Nekmahamud & Rahaman, (2016) <sup>[14]</sup> carried out a study focusing on audience perceptions of satellite TV programs and advertisements in Bangladesh, as well as assessing viewers' program preferences. The research included 505 respondents from various geographic areas in Bangladesh, covering seven distinct audience categories. The results revealed that 90.9% of participants regularly watched private satellite TV channels. Among them, 20% expressed a desire for more programming on Indian Bangla channels. Additionally, 36% preferred consuming news and dramas on Bangladeshi television, while 40.7% indicated a stronger preference for movies on Indian channels.

Nekmahamud & Rahaman (2016) <sup>[14]</sup> in their research examined audience attitudes towards satellite TV programs and advertising in Bangladesh, while also exploring program preferences among viewers. The study encompassed 505 respondents across seven audience categories situated in diverse geographic locations within Bangladesh. Findings indicated that 90.9% of participants watched private satellite TV channels. Furthermore, 20.0% were inclined to see more TV programs on Indian Bangla channels, while 36.0% preferred watching news and dramas on Bangladeshi networks, and 40.7% had a greater affinity for Indian movies. Collectively, these studies offer a comprehensive perspective on women's television viewing behaviors, illustrating how elements such as family dynamics, personal preferences, health emergencies, and changes in media accessibility influence viewing trends and choices.

A swift rise in television audiences has been apparent since the mid-1990s, with "TV viewership escalating from 31% in 1995 to 42% in 1998 and 61% in 2002" (Andaleeb *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[3]</sup>. Data from a survey called the "National Media and Demographic Survey (NMDS)" conducted by Nielsen in 2009 revealed that television had reached 87% of the urban population and 62% of the rural population, with the Chittagong division exhibiting the highest viewership at 75%, followed by Dhaka at 72%.

Considering the growth rate in TV viewership, as it was estimated to be 15-20% a year (as cited in Andaleeb *et. al.*, it won't be an overestimation that by this time TV viewership has reached nearly to the saturation level.

### Methodology

A survey method was followed using a questionnaire, which covered basic demographic details, including age, occupation, and educational background, as well as perceptions of television viewing habits of rural women. Responses were evaluated using various scales to gauge television viewing experiences. The survey utilized printed questionnaires in Bangla which is the national language of Bangladesh. For illiterate individuals, an interviewer assisted by asking questions and replies were written on the recorded in the questionnaire.

In this study, simple random sampling method was utilized to select 800 women participants from Rangpur division of Bangladesh. These women were selected as respondents who used to watch television regularly or sometimes. The

questionnaire used a mix of structured and open-ended questions to gain comprehensive insights into the television viewing habits of the respondents. Finally, a quantitative analysis was made for this study.

### Results and discussions

#### 1. Demographic profile

Table-1 reveals that the majority of respondents are in the 21-30 age group, representing 34% of the sample, indicating that younger women in their late teens to late twenties are the most prevalent demographic. The 31-40 age range follows with 30%, while the 41-50 group makes up 20%, and those aged 51-60 constitute just 6%. The 11-20 age group accounts for 10%, showing limited representation among younger respondents. This distribution suggests that television viewing habits among rural women in Bangladesh are primarily shaped by younger to middle-aged demographics, highlighting their potential influence on media preferences and content tailored to their needs.

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	80	10%
21 to 30	272	34%
31 to 40	240	30%
41 to 50	160	20%
Above 50	48	6%
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	80	10%
Primary	128	16%
Secondary	128	16%
Higher Secondary	192	24%
Higher education	272	34%
<b>Profession</b>		
Homemaker	320	40%
Service holder	192	24%
Student	176	22%
Entrepreneur	112	14%

Source: Field survey

The Table-1 says that 34% of respondents hold Hon's or Master's degrees, indicating a strong presence of higher education among rural women surveyed. Following this, 24% have Higher Secondary education, while Primary and Secondary education levels each represent 16%. The smallest group, at 10%, consists of illiterate individuals. This distribution highlights a relatively high educational attainment among respondents, suggesting that their viewing habits may be influenced by their educational backgrounds. Women with advanced degrees are likely to engage more with educational or complex content, emphasizing the need for television programming that caters to diverse educational experiences within the rural female population in Bangladesh.

Data also show that the largest group within the sample consists of homemakers, accounting for 40%. This reflects a significant portion of the rural women surveyed who are primarily engaged in managing household responsibilities. This high representation suggests that television viewing habits among homemakers are a major focus of the study. The next largest groups are government employees (24%) and students (22%). Government employees, while fewer in

number, likely engage with television content in relation to current affairs, news, and possibly educational programming. Students, representing 22% of the sample, might be more inclined towards educational and entertainment content that aligns with their academic interests. Entrepreneurs make up the smallest group at 14%. This segment may include women running their own businesses or small enterprises, who might use television both for relaxation and to stay informed about business-related news. Overall, the distribution of employment status among respondents reveals a diverse range of roles, with homemakers being the most prominent. This variety provides a nuanced understanding of how television viewing habits might differ based on occupation and daily responsibilities.

#### 2. TV viewing habits

Figure-1 shows that the majority of respondents (82%) confirmed that they watch TV regularly, indicating that television is a prevalent activity among the surveyed group. This high percentage underscores the significant role that television plays in the daily lives of most respondents. 18% of women indicated that they watch TV "sometimes,"

suggesting a more intermittent engagement with the medium. The distribution of responses indicates that while the majority

of the women are regular TV viewers.

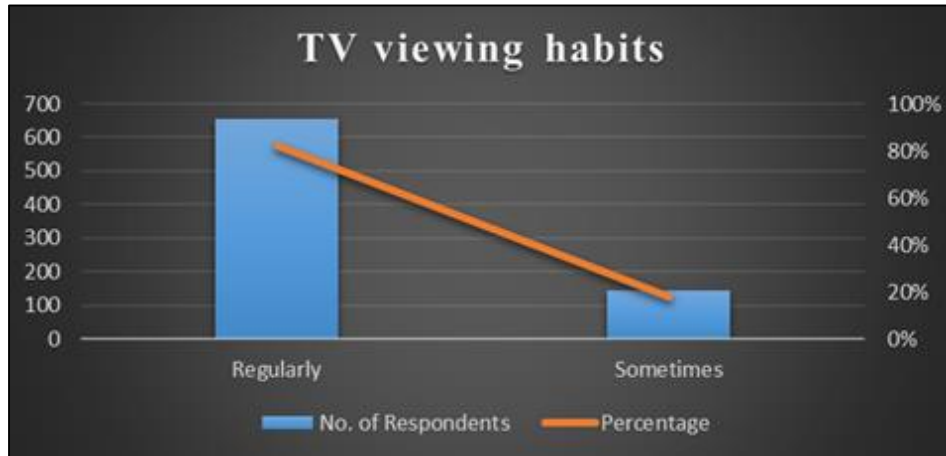


Fig 1: TV viewing habits of respondents

**3. Preferred TV watching time**

Figure-2 shows that women’s TV viewing preferences vary significantly throughout the day. Only 4% prefer watching TV in the morning, likely due to busy routines and the limited appeal of morning programming. In the afternoon, 8% of women, primarily homemakers with flexible schedules,

engage with TV, suggesting that content may align with their interests and availability. Evening viewing attracts 15% of women, serving as a transitional relaxation period, while a substantial 67% prefer to watch at night, reflecting a strong preference for prime-time programmes filled with popular shows and serials.

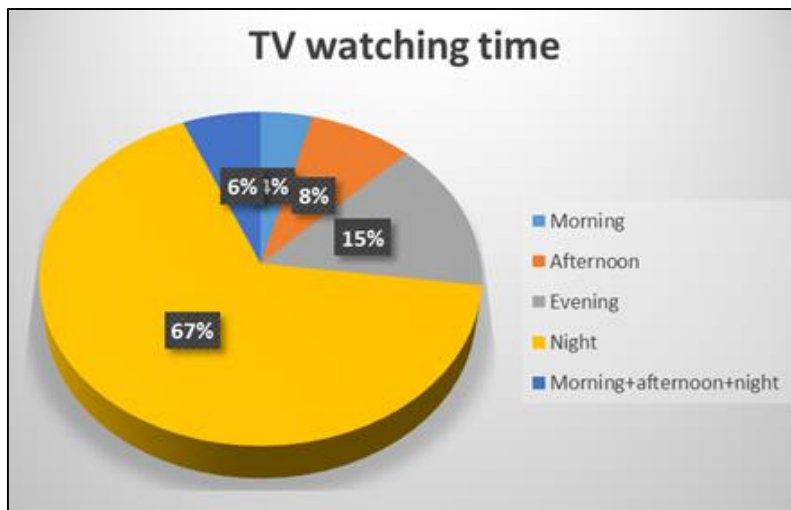


Fig 2: Preferred TV watching time

This peak viewing time indicates a collective desire for quality entertainment that fits into the end-of-day routine. Indicating alternative leisure preferences. Meanwhile, 6% engage with television at various times (morning, afternoon, and nights) showcasing a flexible approach to viewing based

on personal availability and interest. Overall, these trends illustrate how daily responsibilities and preferences shape women’s media consumption habits, with a clear inclination towards evening and night programming.

**4. Time spent for TV viewing in a day**

Table 2: Time spent for TV viewing in a day

Time spent	No. of Respondents	Percentage
About 1 hour	48	06%
1-2 hours	80	10%
2-3 hours	192	24%
3-4 hours	448	56%
More than 4 hours	32	04%
Total	800	100%

Source: Field survey

Table-2 reveals that a significant portion of women spent substantial time watching TV, with 56% of respondents viewing for more than three hours daily and 24% for 2-3 hours. This suggests that extended TV consumption is prevalent among women, reflecting a strong preference or reliance on television as a primary source of entertainment or information. The data highlights a considerable engagement with TV, with only 6% of women watching for about an hour and a minimal 4% more than 4 hours TV at all. This high level of TV consumption among women might indicate a need for exploring its impact on lifestyle and alternative leisure activities.

**5. Highest Consumed TV Programs**

Figure-3 displays the most popular TV programs. Women tend to favor watching films and music, with consumption rates of 95% and 93%, indicating the widespread appeal of entertainment. A significant number of women are viewing drama serials in both Bangla and Hindi. The dominance of Indian Bangla serials is striking, with 89% of women watching them daily, underscoring their integral role in daily entertainment. Additionally, 90% of women watch news and talk shows, while 91% engage with health-related programs.

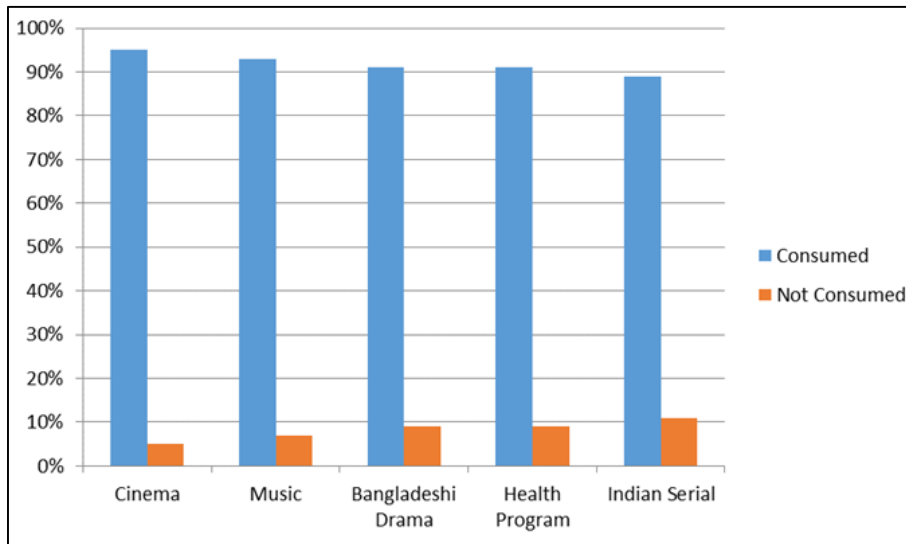


Fig 3: Highest Consumed TV Programs

**6. Preferred Languages**

Figure-4 reveals the language preferences for TV viewing among women, highlighting a clear inclination towards Bengali and other language channels. 24% of women only

watch Bengali channels, whereas a greater proportion, 76%, opts for a combination of Bengali and other languages, mainly Bangla and Hindi.

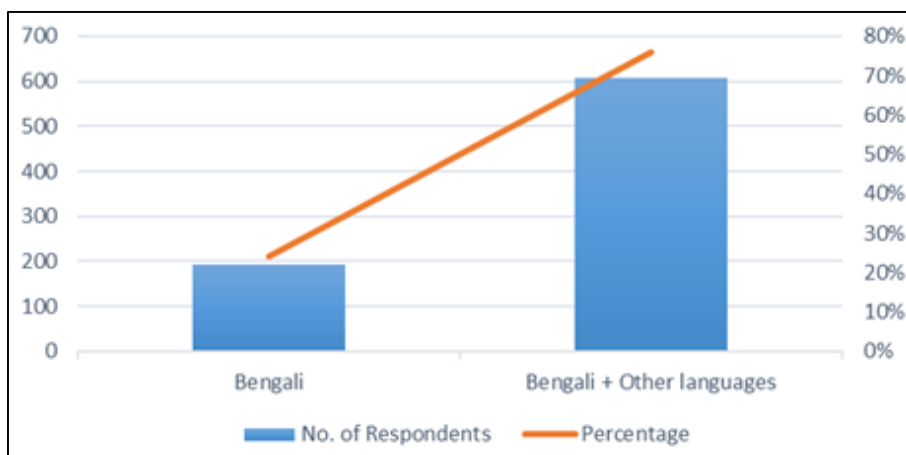


Fig 4: Language preferences in watching TV

**Recommendations**

- Disseminate development communication messages aimed at motivating rural women to participate actively in development initiatives. Increase the number of edutainment programs to support this goal.
- Ensure that television channels provide responsible and accurate content, adhering to ethical standards.
- Enhance media literacy among rural women to improve their critical understanding of media messages,

- empowering them to engage meaningfully with content.
- Develop programs that promote women's lives and livelihoods.
- Make women's health programs more engaging and solution-focused.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of television viewing habits among rural women in the Rangpur division of Bangladesh reveals that TV serves

as a primary source of entertainment and information. It plays a significant role in shaping their education, lifestyle, and social behaviors. The influence of entertainment programs extends beyond mere leisure; it impacts various aspects of their daily lives, including their communication, fashion choices, dietary preferences, and overall attitudes. Furthermore, television acts as an educational tool, raising awareness about societal issues and promoting positive change. Thus, the findings underscore the importance of television as a catalyst for social development and empowerment among rural women in this region. As such, initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of programming could further amplify these positive effects.

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