

More than News: Viewing Habits of Television News Satires

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Abstract

There have been satire in every social and political life of Kerala since ages. The tradition started from the time of Chakyarkooth and Ottanthullal where the artist dared to mock even those in the power. This is the day when this role has been adopted by the anchors of Television News Satires. It is a kind of sword that keeps audience cautious and involved in political developments in recent days when other sources of traditional mass media fail to communicate politics effectively. This study attempts to throw light on the viewing habits of the selected satirical programmes in Malayalam News Channels. Structured questionnaire were distributed among 200 samples and the responses were collected. The samples were selected using simple random sampling method. The study shows that there is difference in viewing behavior of satirical programmes in Kerala gender-wise, age wise, income-wise and education-wise. Male respondents of above 35 age group prefer satires more. The majority of the respondents said that they choose satires to gain information through fun. They also admit that satirical shows are sources of political information. This study employs Uses and Gratification Theory to explain the reasons for choosing satires.

Keywords: News, Satire, Viewership, Television, Gender, Age, Income, Education

1. Introduction

Keralites are always known to take laughter in their stride in life. Their love for satire is as similar to their passion for literature. Satire remains ever-present in their life. Their tolerance to sarcasm is not a new thing. We can trace these love since the age of Chakyarkooth and Ottanthullal where the artists dared to mock even those in power. This trait can even be identified in our TV sets when we surf through channels. We can see a handful of politics-based-programmes lined up with satire and humour. They cater to our interest and love towards sarcasm through a handful of news satires. Ironically, this category of TV programmes even attract the reclusive viewer who hates watching news and politics. Programmes like Dhim Tharikida Thom, Chithram Vichitram, Thiruva Ethirva, Vakradrishti, Push Pull, Democrazy, Politrics etc. have evicted prime time news over a time. Some studies on the viewership behavior show that TV news satires shows hold a distinct relationship with their audience and have a momentous influence on the viewers' political perception, engagement and knowledge. [1][2].

News Satire shows presents the humor side of the soliloquys of the current events, hypocrisies and flaws of the daily news and even present their take on the hilarious side of the newsworthy events. Most shows open similarly to the hard news by emphasizing the date to give a contemporary and immediate sense to the programme. The graphic and narration almost imitate the hard news bulletins format. This is a strategy to give authority and prestige to the show. At time, we may find the some of these shows interweave the formats of the traditional newscasts with the programming techniques, content, tropes and archetypes of an entertainment programme. Beginning with a serious tone and look, they swiftly twist the programme into an entertainment show with more upbeat music, and film clips. Baym [3] was of the

opinion that although we might feel the satirical programme emphasize more on entertainment, the two discourses are complementary to each other instead of binary opposition. Even then, we have to keep in mind that when analyzing a satirical programme, it should neither be treated as a comic show nor should it focus on the journalism and news content solely. These programmes are meant to be humorous by adopting current events as the theme.

The audience takes TV news satires programmes as a combined source of information and entertainment. Here viewers receive information. They get updated. But, they are not overloaded or fed up with the information flow. The news is served as entertainment, which we can call '*newsetainment*'. Interestingly, in all the news satires in television shows in Malayalam news channels, the anchors have a good grip and hold in both the politics and film. They have the power to analyze and interpret the current events and bring in some humour touch to them. The film clips and dialogues intertwined with the news make them interesting and captivating.

Here is the point where the questions of viewership rises. The research attempts to throw light on the viewing pattern of the selected satirical programmes in Malayalam News Channels.

1.1 Research Questions

1. Is there any difference in viewership preference of news satires in television gender wise and age wise?
2. Does the news satires in television replace the traditional function of providing information of news channels?

2. Related Works

The review of literature focuses on the existing studies on news satires and its effect of public perception and opinion building.

According to Schutz's [4]

"Satire is a form of comedy, ranging from drama through poetry to prose narrative. It must be amusing or humorous, but satire is essentially an attack on someone or some social institution. It may ridicule, parody, or caricature its target, but the purpose of satire with its negative approach is positive change" (1977: 50).

Patrick a Stewart [5] also conducted a study on news satires through a web based experiment just before 2008 American President Election. The video excerpts of the candidates hurling humorous and derogatory comments on themselves and others were shown to the respondents. The study found that these comments in turn influences the perception of the respondents about the candidates. In a research by Kristy Harris [6] states that satiric shows inform the public *"through their use of exaggeration, irony and imitation"*. Research by Jason Peifer [7] states political humour must be conferred with some responsibilities and ethics. He argues that Ethical humour is essential for every news satires.

Thorson and Powell [8] developed a multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale consisting four dimensions: (1) humor production, (2) attitudes toward humor and humorous people, (3) coping, and (4) using humor to achieve social goals. Danelo [9] stated that spicing up news and information with humour would make it easier to imbibe. News satire will help the audience to get informed, incited and persuaded in spite of language and culture. It's a non-traditional way of transmitting information, in a way, a rhetorical tool. It's a communication strategy that combines education and humour where both bucks authority and bring in a special kind of audience engagement.

According to Hodgart [10], social satire focuses on society and its cultural interactions like daily life idiosyncrasies. News satire is mocking at the deeds and decisions of those in the authority and those who are ruled. In the opinion of Stroud and Muddiman [11] news satire tend to reduce the political tolerance level of the viewers. News satire with its aggressive and unflattering tone can be used a tool to criticize the misdeeds of the authority, to reveal how their promises have failed, and depict violations of social norms [12].

In another research by Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton [13] found that positive gratification from the satirical show would enhance the political efficiency. The researchers were of the opinion that when there

is a boost in information flow, the attitude towards politics will also be modified. Dahlgren [14] in his book “Transformation of Democracy” stated that the demand for more personalized and customized genre of media is increasing. This would help them to relate to the media content which in turn would connect them to a larger network of people who have similar outlook. The author argues that this is why younger generation prefer news satire as it is a deviance from the mainstream and it is more often critical than mainstream news.

The study by LaMarre [15] explores how the messages in news satires are processed by the audience taking “The Colbert Report” as a case study through an experimental based methodology. Selected video clips of the satire were shown to the respondents before asking them to fill the questionnaire. The study came with an inference that the satire catered by the programme is interpreted by the audience in a way that would reinforce their existing individual political beliefs.

In another study by Kaid, Mckinney, and Tedesco [16] it was found that the exposure to political content would boost the information efficacy of the youth which may encourage them to pursue more information. Fox, J. R., Koloen, G., & Sahin, V[17] in their study showed that satire shows like “The Daily Show” were roughly equal to network news broadcasts in providing substantial news content in any given episode. Mckain [18] in his research opined that it is not mandatory to provide “fair and balanced” content for the makers of satire shows like news. Duffy & Page [19] argued that as politicians are aware about the satirists and the chance for being mocked, they even change the style of narrative during public appearance. There are chances of being deviated their attention from the policy making to public appearance.

2.1 Significance Of The Study

Understanding media and analyzing its content is essential for understanding the corresponding society. The negative and positive impact of media will have a direct reflection on the members of the society. In the case of television, TV is considered as the mirror of the society and is closely attached to its audience. And, hence, as a mass media, television has a huge impact on viewers. There are a plenty of researches to understand and analyze the impact of television programme and their reach. There are a plenty of studies to measure and analyze the the psychological, social and cultural impact of these programmes also [20]. The rapid change in the lifestyle of the viewers have altered their outlook towards media content. When considering the news satires in Malayalam News Channels, their reach, frequency, time schedule are also to be considered. Creators of these programme consider satire is a tool to inform and entertain audience. This study underlines that news satires have the power to engage audience and make them stay with traditional news channels.

3. Methodology

Research enables us to get closer to the actuality and comprehend the authenticity [21]. This study uses Questionnaire survey as the methodology to find the viewership pattern of News satires in Malayalam News Channels. In-depth Interview with two leading anchors of the satirical programmes are also done to understand the attitude of the content producers. A structured questionnaire is given to the 200 respondents from different areas of Ernakulam and Kottayam and are asked to fill it out. Simple Random sampling is opted to select the sample. Based on this information collected, a qualitative interpretation of their responses were done. Chi square test and Simple Linear Regression test are the method used for the hypotheses testing. IBM SPSS Statistics 20 is used for analysis.

3.1 Hypothesis

- There is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires gender wise, age wise, income wise and education wise
- People watch News satire to get informed

3.2 Limitations of the Study

- The geographical area of the study is limited to Ernakulam and Kottayam Districts in Kerala.
- Sample of the study is only 200
- The study can be extended to find the difference in other demographic variables like education, income, occupation to get an exact viewership pattern. But, there were time and economic constraints.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Embedded in the concept of active audience, *the Uses and Gratification theory* [22] explains what people do with media. It attempts to interpret the motivations and drives that prompt them to use media or some specific media content. It focuses on the dependency on media to achieve specific needs and impetuses by the audience or viewers. These motivations are complementary to each other and produce certain patterns of media gratifications based on the need of the users (Rubin, 1983). Although the gratifications sought and won are the perceived contentment of a need through an activity such as media use, [23], the needs are “the combined product of psychological dispositions, sociological factors, and environmental conditions” [24]. In the present study, the gratification sought by the viewers of the news satires in Malayalam News Channels is assessed.

4. Results

4.1. Hypothesis 1-There is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires gender wise, age wise, income wise and education wise

For testing this hypothesis, we use Chi square test for goodness of fit is used. Chi square test is used for finding significant relations and to determine whether the categorical data shows dependency or the two classifications are independent [25]. This test can be used to make comparisons between theoretical populations and actual data when categories are used.

4.1.1 Gender Wise Comparison

The Chi square value of 35.00^b [df(degrees of freedom) =3, N(Total Number)=200], $p < 0.05$ is significant at 3 degree of freedom, showing that there is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires between male and female (Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Gender-Wise Comparison

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
GENDER	200	1.5000	.50125	1.00	2.00
WATCHTIME	200	2.0750	1.10702	1.00	4.00

Table 2. Test Statistics of Gender-Wise Comparison

	GENDER	WATCHTIME
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	35.000 ^b
df	1	3
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.000

4.1.2 Age Wise Comparison

The Chi square value of 35.000^a [df(degree of freedom) =3, N=200], $p < 0.05$ is significant at 3 degree of freedom, proves that there is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires age wise (Table 4).

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Age Wise Comparison

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
WATCHTIME	200	2.0750	1.10702	1.00	4.00
AGE	200	2.5000	1.12084	1.00	4.00

Table 4 Test Statistics of Age Wise Comparison

	WATCHTIME	AGE
Chi-Square	35.000 ^a	.000 ^a
df	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	1.000

4.1.3 Income wise comparison

The Chi square value of 35.000^a [df(degree of freedom) =3, N=200], $p < 0.05$ is significant at 3 degree of freedom, proves that there is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires income wise (Table 6).

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics Income wise comparison

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
WATCHTIME	200	2.0750	1.10702	1.00	4.00
INCOME	200	2.4000	1.12074	1.00	4.00

Table 6 Test Statistics Income wise comparison

	WATCHTIME	INCOME
Chi-Square	35.000 ^a	.000 ^a
df	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	1.000

4.1.4 Education wise comparison

The Chi square value of 35.000^a [df(degree of freedom) =3, N=200], $p < 0.05$ is significant at 3 degree of freedom, proves that there is a significant difference in giving preference to News satires education wise (Table 8).

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics of Education wise comparison

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
EDUCATION	200	1.4000	.50025	1.00	2.00
WATCHTIME	200	2.0750	1.10702	1.00	4.00

Table 8 Test Statistics of Education wise comparison

	EDUCATION	WATCHTIME
Chi-Square	.000 ^a	35.000 ^b
df	1	3
Asymp. Sig.	1.000	.000

4.2 Hypothesis 2- People watch News satire to get informed

For proving this hypothesis, Simple Linear Regression analysis is used. In creating a regression analysis to compare News satire shows and the gratification achieved, age, gender, income and education are categorized as the independent variables and the satire enjoy is categorized as the dependent variable. R denotes the correlation between predicted and observed enjoyment of satire programmes. In our case, R = 0.852. Since this is a very high correlation, our model predicts satire enjoyment rather precisely (Table 9).

Table 9 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.852 ^a	.725	.720	.25323

a. Predictors: (Constant), INCOME, GENDER, AGE, EDUCATION

b. Dependent Variable: SATIREENJOY

The unstandardized coefficient indicates how much the dependent variable varied with an independent variable when all other independent variables are held constant. Here, consider the independent variable gender. The coefficient (b) for gender is -.138 and $p=.001$. Here, $p<.05$ and it is statistically significant (Table 10). Hence we can conclude that there is significant difference gender wise in the enjoyment achieved while watching News satires in Malayalam News Channels.

Table 10 Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound

(Constant)	.725	.077		9.371	.000	.572	.877
AGE	.070	.021	.096	1.921	.028	-.001	.083
GENDER	-.138	.040	-.144	-3.405	.001	-.218	-.058
EDUCATION	.003	.023	.010	.148	.883	-.043	.050
INCOME	.257	.025	.774	10.459	.000	.209	.306

a. Dependent Variable: SATIREENJOY

Next, let us take the independent variable age. Here, the coefficient (b) =-.070, p=.028 which means it's statistically significant (Table 10). Hence, age is a significant factor in achieving difference in enjoyment while watching News satires in Malayalam News Channels.

While considering the independent variable Education, the coefficient (b) =.003 and p= .883 (Table 10), here $p > .05$, which means, it not statistically significant. Therefore, education is not a significant factor in achieving difference in enjoyment while watching News satires in Malayalam News Channels.

Last, let us consider the independent variable income. Here, the coefficient (b) = .257 and p=.000 (Table 10) which means it's statistically significant. So, income is a significant factor in achieving difference in enjoyment while watching News satires in Malayalam News Channels.

5. Discussion

The research has used quantifiable data to find the viewership pattern of the News satire Programmes in Malayalam News Channels. Gender and age were taken as the demographic variables in this case. The results came into an inference that there is gender-wise ,age-wise, income wise and education wise in giving preference to the News satire Programmes. But the tests also proved that people watch it for gaining information and there is no gender difference in achieving same kind of gratification. But age is a factor when gratification is considered. Majority of the respondents below the age of 35 said that they watch it for deriving entertainment but the other of above 35 years stated that they watch it for gaining information.

The inferences in this study prove that News satire Programmes serve an important role in the society by informing the audience and fostering a greater overall enjoyment of the delivered news. This result supports the study by Mathew Binford [26] who came into an inference that satirical shows' role in the society can never be undervalued. It plays a vital role by not only serving information but also by providing overall enjoyment of the news and information. It also has influence in the viewers' traditional news consumption habits. Although it is assumed that the primary goal of the satirical shows is entertainment, the respondents of the study are of the opinion that they watch it for attaining news and knowledge.

S Lallu, Senior Television Journalist in Kerala who was the anchor of Chithram Vichithram, a news satire show in Asianet News, opined that Malayalis enjoy and appreciate humour.

“This inherent taste makes satire shows more popular acceptable in Kerala. The popularity increases as it exposes the double-stands and misdeeds of politicians through comedy. We found that these programmes get more popularity than traditional news bulletins. Even politicians pay keen attention to such shows and alter their public appearance and speeches accordingly”

Ranjith Manimalakkaran of Manorama News shares similar opinion. He is the producer and Anchor of the News satire show in the channel. “There are two types of audience for satire show. The first group is regular and the second category is temporary. The first group belongs to serious news lovers, who enjoys and analyses news and politics. The second category of viewers find ‘sometime’ to watch it on some days so as to get entertained. Why people watch news satire shows is another question. They got all

information from the day bulletins. They got an in-depth analysis from the news hour discussions. Now what the viewers want is to know the other side. This is what we serve through our programmes”.

Respondent 1-These shows act like a sword against the society. They hurls criticisms against society through irony and satire. Here humour is a sharp and powerful weapon. Previous studies in the genre found that satirical news media intensifies news attentiveness even among the inattentive and uninterested viewers [27].

Respondent 2 – I am a regular viewer of such shows. We could attain all needed news without any sense of boring through satire shows as it is mixed up with humourous dialogues and clippings in the film. Also, these programmes would open up a window to the society and exposes the misdeeds of those in the authority.

Respondent 3 -These programmes help them to connect with the similar issues in the past. It gives a historical analysis with a comedy touch. At least our channel authorities have an archive of twenty five years. So whenever a politician utter a controversial word, the producers can compare it with his past stands.

Respondent 4- In these programmes, reality is evidently projected. It exposes the most hideous happenings in a different angle and perspective, with ample and accurate comments.

This would support the research by Buamgartner and Morris [28], who came into conclusion that satire news viewers show a high confidence in their ability to understand complex politics.

6. Conclusion

News is an integral part of society. The members of the society want to be informed. The demand and viewership for satirical shows are increasing in Kerala. The producers agree that these programmes have got high rating and hence the industry devotes prime-time for such shows. In their opinion, satire can boost culture, appeal to citizen-audiences, trigger public discussion and draw viewers into the realm of politics.

Out of the 200 respondents, 100 were males and 100 were females. 58 percent of the males participated in the survey responded that they like watching News satire Programmes and try to watch daily. Of these majority were above the age of 35. While, only 29 per cent of the female respondents agreed that they like viewing these kinds of shows. 42 percent of the women respondents said that they never watch News satires. Another 11 percent said that they watch them ‘sometimes’. From the responses of the participants of the survey, we came to an inference that males above the age of 35 prefer viewing news satire programmes in Malayalam News Channels. Interestingly, 51 percent of the total respondents who like watching news satires irrespective of gender stated they watch it for gathering information. Another 46 percent said that they watch it to derive entertainment. Hence, we can conclude that there is no gender difference in achieving gratification from the News satire programmes. But, from the data it is found that when the respondents below the age of 35 watch it for deriving entertainment more while as the age increases, they watch it for gaining information.

News satire Shows cure the information and entertainment needs of the viewers. It is a kind of medicine that keeps the audience alert and interested in the daily developments and issues. This plays a significant role in the news media when traditional news bulletins fail to serve the information function.

We like seeing others mocked, criticized and questioned. Every channel has its own agenda and editorial policy. This will in fact influence the way the content is presented, the way a politician is laughed at, the manner in which an issue is discussed (or not discussed). There is little option for non-conformity.

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