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### Filling a void with a wireless; The radio listening behavior of the Undergraduates: A case study

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#### Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the radio listening behavior of undergraduates, especially Sinhala-speaking students of Trincomalee Campus, to identify their preferred device for listening to the radio, the frequency of listening to the radio as well as their preferred timings, the most popular stations among the Sinhala-speaking students and the most popular radio programme category/format. Further, the study investigated on motives of Sinhala-speaking students of the Trincomalee Campus to listen to the radio and the gratification they receive by listening to the radio programmes. A quantitative approach was applied during the study and data were collected through the survey method. 100 questionnaires were distributed and the findings indicate that the majority of the respondents listen to radio programmes from their mobile phones because they can listen to radio programmes while they do some other work, such as studying, cooking, and doing exercises. The study also points out that the majority of the respondents

prefer private radio channels over state-owned radio channels and among the private radio channels, FM Derana is identified as the most popular radio station of the respondents. The Sinhala-speaking students of the Trincomalee Campus listen to news programmes and next to that, the majority prefer musical programmes from their preferred radio channels. The findings also conclude that the respondents listen to radio programmes because they provide good entertainment, are good companions when they feel lonely, offer educational programmes, and offer timely news. The respondents prefer to listen to these types of radio programme because they are interesting and entertaining, enhance their knowledge, keeps them updated on current information, releases their stress, and help them to worship in the comfort of their home. Political, health, cultural, environmental, family, economic and work-related issues are addressed by their preferred radio channels.

**Keywords:** Radio, Listenership, Undergraduates

#### 1. Introduction

The quality of life that we enjoy at present has been made possible to a great extent by the informative, educative and persuasive role played by modern mass media. Their services enable the masses to take themselves from known to unknown. Radio, being a medium that can be afforded to almost everyone, plays a vital role in mass communication. It's no longer news that radio, with its unique features, is still the most powerful and potent medium of communication (Lustig, 2019). "Radio has been used widely as a medium for education in developing countries like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, South Korea, Mali, Guatemala, Zambia, Uganda, Mexico, Botswana, South Africa, and the Philippines and also proved its impact and efficiency in health, agriculture, and other development issues. Radio remains an important source of information and knowledge over generations and cultures, inspiring us with the wealth of humanity's diversity and connecting us with the world through the different radio stations with their rich array of programmes.

The Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova (2017) defines radio as it is uniquely positioned to bring communities together and foster positive dialogue for change. And by 'listening to its audiences and responding to their needs, radio provides the diversity of views and voices needed to address the challenges we all face'.

In Sri Lanka, the rapid rise in the number of FM Radio Stations as per the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) is vested with full powers to determine and allocate the use of FM frequencies among radio broadcasters within Sri Lanka. At present, there are about 45 FM broadcasting channels that operate within the 87.5 – 108 MHz frequency range (TRCSL, 2014). The Census in 2012 counted 5,251,126 households in Sri Lanka and found that 68.9% (3.6 million) owned a radio. For planning purposes, the media industry estimates Sri Lanka's cumulative broadcast audience at around 14

million persons. These figures alone are enough to tell us the popularity of FM or any other kind of radio among the population.

Even though many consider radio an obsolete medium in this generation, still has its use. People may not hear it to receive news or to send signals, but they hear it without even realizing it (Niveditha, 2014) [6]. Many broadcasters thought that maybe the time for radio is over with the introduction of the iPod and MP3 players; however, with the beginning of online radio, it is safe to assume that the radio is making a comeback.

### **Radio listenership of University Students**

Radio listenership can best be described as audience measurement which measures how many people are in an audience of radio, usually concerning television viewership, newspaper and magazine readership, and increasingly, web traffic on websites.

Radio is effective when compared with other mass media, not only in informing the people but also in creating awareness regarding social issues and the need for social reformation, developing interest, and initiating actions. It seems that the emergence of a considerable number of FM radio stations in the country has expanded students' access to programmes of their choice, and specifically it can be identified that radio programmes borders on informing, entertaining, and educating to which students are the most listeners.

University students are young people in Sri Lankan society with distinct backgrounds in terms of lifestyle and value system. Furthermore, university students as individuals have different interpretative processes in making sense of radio programmes in terms of content and form and on which the principles of selectivity (listening to choice of radio programmes and programming); utilitarianism (functionality of programmes genre to listeners or audience); intentionality (decision on programmes on radio listening is driven by interest and needs for such programme) and involvement (programmes listening and consumption involve individual interpretation to arrive at a definite meaning for self-fulfilling gratifications in terms of benefits to the listeners) becomes the critical factors of individual listeners activity (See Biocca, 1988). Especially concerning media students who have adequate knowledge of the media field, they have learned to experience consciously the above, identifying the differences between public and private broadcasting stations and the diversity of programmes, their programme schedules, and access to a choice of programmes of the stations.

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Radio has been challenged by many innovative technologies, each drawing listeners and forcing radio to update its programming to remain a competitive media option. As a result of the heterogeneity of the audience, various people listen to the radio for different reasons and thus have an interest in various genres for their own reasons. The audience' listening to the radio is driven by motives and gratifications in deriving the benefits of the medium noting that sociodemographic variables play an interventionist role in audience listening behavior of radio (Cordeiro, 2017).

Many media houses in Sri Lanka know very little about their audiences and few have the competencies to gather the necessary information that could help them produce relevant

audience studies. While the two-state broadcasters have audience research units for just that purpose, their work does not seem to feed into content planning. Audiences, it seems, are often presumed to be one large and amorphous entity and recent industry research in the United States suggests younger audiences are leaving terrestrial radio for new technologies like MP3 players, Internet radio, and satellite radio.

Therefore, this study is geared at ascertaining radio consumption and listenership habits of Sinhala-speaking students in the Trincomalee Campus and the study intends to contribute to the research thread by ascertaining students' preferred device for listening to the radio, the frequency of listening to the radio as well as their preferred timings, the most popular stations among the Sinhala-speaking students and the most popular radio programme category/format, motives of Sinhala-speaking students of Trincomalee Campus to listen to the radio, and their gratification receive by listening to the radio programmes.

### **1.2 Research objectives**

1. To identify Sinhala-speaking students' preferred device for listening to the radio.
2. To find out the frequency of listening to the radio among the Sinhala-speaking students as well as their preferred timings.
3. To explore the most popular stations among Sinhala-speaking students and the most popular radio programme category/format.
4. To investigate what motivates Sinhala-speaking students of the Trincomalee Campus to listen to the radio.
5. To determine the gratification, they receive by listening to the radio programmes.

### **1.3 Theoretical framework**

The study was conducted based on the Uses and Gratification Theory. It considers that audiences are active consumers of mass media. Unlike other theoretical perspectives, the theory holds that audiences 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 fulfills and satisfies his/her desired needs and gives support to increase knowledge, education, social interactions, and escape from tension" (Severin and Tankard, 2010).

### **2. Literature review**

Radio in South Asia has been studied for years over various issues. Among them, many studies have focused their attention on radio listenership and the radio stations which have been broadcasting for years in different demographical scenarios.

The majority of people listen to the radio on their own. According to the Radio Advertising Bureau (2013), most listeners are actually doing something else while listening to the radio. Typically, this will be a routine task for example; driving, house chores, office work, and others. Even if they are listening when other people are around, it is very rarely a group experience; they have their own experience of the output which is not shared with other people. Their inner

eyes and their feelings are doing the work (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2013).

Further research evidence on the relations between critical research and audience radio listening behaviors are therefore cited and discussed. According to the latest report by the Radio Audience Measurement Survey (RAMS), about 90% of youngsters in South Africa tune in to the radio at least once a week. The statistics show that youngsters over the age of 15 follow this kind of listening habit. Hence proving that many young people still regard the radio as an effective mass communication means from which they derive individual satisfaction.

Other studies evaluating the radio listening habits of individuals such as University students listening habits conducted at Delta State University by Ojobor, Uyi, and Osazee-Odia (2017) categorized listeners as 'Once in a while, Occasional listeners, 2-3times a month, frequent listeners, 2-4times a week, and regular, everyday listeners.

S. Arulchelvan and D. Viswanathan, (2006) [3] researched the 'Pattern of usage of various electronic media by higher education students and they mention in their paper that, 'while the growth of the electronic media of radio and TV in terms of reach, popularity, and variety has been phenomenal, there has not been a corresponding growth in their education-related usage. Lack of publicity about the contents and timings of the programs, the inability of one's electronic equipment to receive the signals, and the lack of interactive nature of their programs have contributed to the under-utilization of these educational media. To ascertain the purpose of listening to the radio, respondents' listening patterns were further enquired about. It was found that 37.06% listen to the radio for education, 84.30% listen to the radio for entertainment and 29.07% listen to the radio for science. 5.23% listen to the radio for purposes other than those mentioned above. Analyzing the data on the purpose of listening to the radio, there seems to be scope for improvement as the majority of respondents have reported that they do not listen to the radio for education or Science programs.

Further, in the same article, it is mentioned the approximate time spent listening to the radio. While 30.36% listen to the radio for less than 30 min., 27.74% listen to the radio for 30 – 60 min., 18.10% do not listen to the radio, and 13.57% listen to the radio for 60 – 120 min. and 10.24% listen to the radio above 120 min. Concerning the time spent listening to the radio, the emergent data shows a divergence among respondents, with respondents' time ranging from nothing to two hours a week, which could be interpreted to be offering considerable scope for increase'.

In terms of U&G studies specific to radio, Mendelsohn (1964) identified several motives for radio listening: companionship, filling a void created by daily routine, altering mood, relieving boredom, providing news and information, allowing active participation in events, and overcoming social isolation. Killing time was the only listening motivation identified in a survey of college students conducted by Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983).

Moreover, Plummer, (2017) explains that mobile media (smartphone) is providing many options for listening to FM radio stations, and Reyes *et al.*, (2012) mention in their study of FM radio listeners in Cagayan De Oro City that today's younger generation expose more to new technologies, with radio becoming possessive to them or radio on their phones to listen to their preferred radio

station/programs. Albarran *et al.*, (2007) [2] found from their study of radio listening of undergraduate students in the USA aged 18-24 that majority of the respondents listen to the radio, at least 2 or more hours a day noting MP3 was the main usage device for listening, with the flexibility of musical choice of entertainment programmes.

Despite the excellent efforts of other studies which have been done so far by many rigorous researchers, no research has been undertaken concerning the Sri Lankan university community especially with related to Sinhala-speaking undergraduate students to investigate the level of interest in radio channels and their programmes and the gratifications that the Sinhala listeners get from those radio programmes. Hence, this study on the radio listenership of Sinhala-speaking university students in Sri Lanka further elucidates what functions and satisfactions students derive from radio listening. Therefore, this study will fill the information gap that exists in Sri Lankan academia on the same.

### 3. Methodology

To probe the research areas and to achieve the research objectives, the audience study was designed with a quantitative component.

The study on radio listening behavior of the undergraduates lies on quantitative setup and survey procedure to gather data from the university students referred to as the audience of radio broadcasting stations. As Burton (2007) explains, a survey enables data to be collected from the individual, usually from large samples of a population for descriptive statistical interpretation and analysis. The author then adds that survey method asks a representative sample of people the same questions about opinions, values, and beliefs noting empirical data, standardization, highly replicable, ease to score, and cheapness as the main advantages of survey practice.

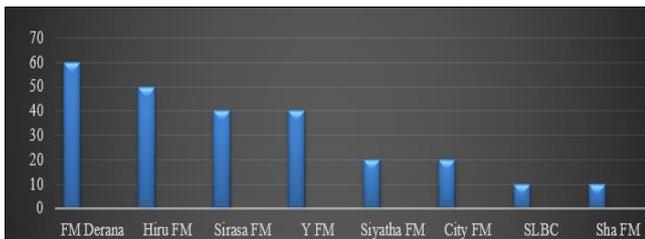
The samples were selected from the undergraduates of the Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Trincomalee Campus. Out of the 844 total numbers of students, approximately 700 students are Sinhala-speaking students and only 100 students were selected as the sample. To achieve the objectives of this study, a questionnaire was distributed among 100 respondents, 25 participants from every 4 academic years. The sample consists of 90 female students and 10 male students ages ranging from 21-23. Data analysis was done using SPSS Package.

### 4. Results and discussion

The study was carried out among 100 participants and all of them are Sri Lankan Sinhalese. The respondents include 90 female and 10 male participants and their ages ranged from 21-23. The respondents were inquired about their preference for radio channels, radio programmes, and the nature of the gratifications they receive from their preferred radio programmes. The study found that all of the respondents (100%) listen to radio programmes and they prefer to listen to the radio at any convenient time (36%), morning (27%), in the evening (27%), and in the night hours (10%). The findings point out that, as the respondents are undergraduates of Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University Sri Lanka they listen to radio programmes whenever they get free time and most of them do listen to radio programmes while they stay in their accommodation in the evening. The results also indicate that the respondents rarely listen to nighttime programmes on their preferred

radio channels.

As per the findings, the respondents do listen to radio channels mostly through mobile phones (75%), radio sets (15%), and internet radio (10%). The majority of the respondents prefer to listen to radio programmes through mobile phones as they can listen to radio programmes while they do some other work (57%) such as studying, cooking, and doing exercises. Some other respondents replied as, these audio technologies offer them the best convenience (29%), it is the cheapest technology that they can afford (7%) and some other respondents preferred it as it is a healing companion when they feel lonely (7%).



**Chart 1: Preferred Radio Channel**

The above chart shows the statistics on the favorite radio channels of the respondents. The respondents do listen to both state-owned (SLBC and City FM) and private radio channels (FM Derana, Hiru FM, Sirasa FM, Y FM, Shaa FM, and Siyatha FM) that are operative in Sri Lanka. However, the majority of the respondents do listen to private radio channels (88%) than state-owned radio channels (12%). As per the findings, the respondents mostly listen to FM Derana (24%), Hiru FM (20%), Sirasa FM (16%), Y FM (16%), Siyatha FM (8%), City FM (8%), SLBC (4%), and Shaa FM (4%). The findings also indicate that the respondents listen to the news, political programmes, educational programmes, hygiene and health programmes, sports, religious programmes, entertainment programmes, and gossip shows from their preferred radio channels.

The findings of the study show that the respondents listen to both state-owned and private radio channels because they provide good entertainment (34%), radio programmes are good companions when they feel loneliness (19%), offer educational programmes (11%), offer timely news (11%), the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere (7%), radio programmes offer phone-in comments (7%), radio is comparatively cheap (7%), and the content of the programmes helps them to solve social issues (4%). The results point out that, among the respondents, 4% of them listen to the state-owned radio channel Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation because it offers timely news (10), programmes provide good entertainment (10), the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere (10), radio programmes enable phone-in comments (10), and radio is comparatively cheap (10). 8% of the respondents listen to City FM, a state-owned radio channel because it offers timely news (10), programmes provide good

entertainment (10), the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere (10), radio enables phone-in comments (10), radio is comparatively cheap (10), and the programmes are good companion when they feel loneliness (10).

However, the respondents who preferred to listen to private radio channels have various objectives for listening to radio programmes. As per the results, among the total respondents, 24% of them listen to FM Derana and they stated the below as the reasons for why they listen to the programmes that are broadcasted via FM Derana. They are as follows, programmes are good for entertainment (70), they broadcast educational programmes (30), programmes are good companions when they feel loneliness (30), they broadcast timely news (10), and the content of the programmes helps them to solve the issues that they face in their lives (10).

20% of the total respondents listen to Hiru FM, another private radio station. The reasons for the selection are as follows, programmes are good for entertainment (50), they broadcast educational programmes (30), programmes are good companions when they feel loneliness (30), they broadcast timely news (10), and the content of the programmes helps them to solve the issues that they face in their lives (10). 16% of all respondents listen to Sirasa FM, a private radio channel and the reasons are as follows, programmes are good for entertainment (40), they broadcast timely news (30), programmes are good companions when they feel loneliness (20), the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere (20), radio enables phone-in comments (20), radio is comparatively cheap (20), they broadcast educational programmes (10), and the content of the programmes helps them to solve the issues that they face in their lives (10). Among the respondents, 16% of them listen to Y FM, another private radio station. The reasons for the selection of these radio channels are as follows, programmes are good for entertainment (30), they broadcast timely news (30), programmes are good companions when they feel loneliness (20), the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere (20), radio enables phone-in comments (20), and the radio is comparatively cheap (20). 8% of the respondents listen to Siyatha FM, a private radio station. The respondents answered that they prefer these radio programmes because, the programmes are good for entertainment (20), programmes are good companions when they feel lonely (10), and they broadcast educational programmes (10). As per the findings, 4% of the respondents listen to Shaa FM, another private radio channel, the reasons are as follows, programmes are good for entertainment (10), they broadcast timely news (10), programmes are good companions when they feel lonely (10), they broadcast educational programmes (10), and the content of the programmes helps them to solve the issues that they face in their lives (10).

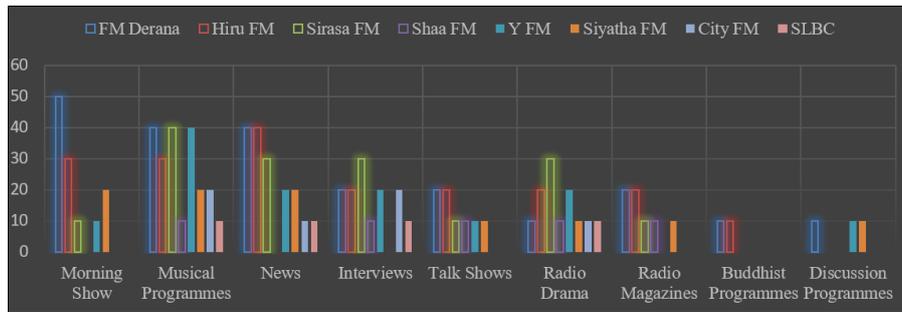


Chart 2: Most Listened Radio Programmes

The above chart illustrates the data on the most listened radio programmes of the undergraduates of the Trincomalee Campus. As per the findings, respondents mostly listen to musical programmes (22%), news (18%), interviews (14%), morning shows (13%), radio drama (13%), talk shows (8%), radio magazines (7%), discussion programmes (3%), and Buddhist programmes (2%). It is also apparent from the findings that the respondents who listen to SLBC listen to musical programmes (1%), news (1%), interviews (1%), and radio drama (1%). The findings also point out that the respondents listen to musical programmes (2%), interviews (2%), news (1%), and radio drama (1%) from City FM. The findings indicate that the respondents listen to state-owned radio channels such as SLBC and City FM to get entertainment (5%) and to get information (5%).

However, the respondents listen to a variety of programmes from private radio channels (FM Derana, Hiru FM, Sirasa FM, Y FM, Siyatha FM, and Shaa FM) 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 the respondents who stated FM Derana as their favorite radio station mostly listen to morning shows (5%), musical programmes (4%), news (4%), interviews (2%), talk shows (2%), radio magazines (2%), radio drama (1%), Buddhist programmes (1%), and discussion programmes (1%). The respondents who listen to Hiru FM, listen to the news (4%), morning shows (3%), musical programmes (3%), interviews (2%), talk shows (2%), radio magazines (2%), radio drama (2%), and Buddhist programmes (1%).

The respondents listen to Sirasa FM for its musical programmes (4%), news (3%), interviews (3%), radio drama (3%), morning shows (1%), talk shows (1%), and radio magazines (1%). Y FM is listened to by the respondents for its musical programmes (4%), news (2%), interviews (2%), radio drama (2%), morning shows (1%), talk shows (1%), and discussion programmes (1%). The respondents listen to Siyatha FM because of its morning shows (2%), musical programmes (2%), news (2%), talk shows (1%), radio magazines (1%), radio drama (1%), and discussion programmes (1%). Shaa FM is listened to by the respondents for its musical programmes (1%), interviews (1%), talk shows (1%), radio magazines (1%), and radio drama (1%). As per the findings, it is evident that the respondents listen to private radio channels to get entertainment (67%) more than to fulfill their information needs (33%).

**Chart 3: Reasons for listening to radio programmes**

The above chart illustrates the reasons for the selection of radio programmes by the respondents. As per this, the respondents, prefer to listen to radio programmes because

these programmes are interesting (23%), entertaining (23%), enhance their knowledge (22%), keep them updated on current information (17%), release their stress (14%), and helps them to worship at the comfort of their home (1%). Respondents listen to the programmes aired by state-owned radio channels (SLBC and City FM) because they enhance their knowledge (2%), are interesting (2%), keep them updated on the current news (2%), and are entertaining (2%). While the respondents listen to private radio channels because they are entertaining (21%), interesting (21%), enhance their knowledge (20%), keep them updated on current information (15%), release their stress (14%), and helps them to worship at the comfort of their home (1%).

The respondents listen to FM Derana because the programmes are interesting (5%), entertaining (5%), enhance their knowledge (5%), release their stress (4%), and keep them updated on current information (3%). Hiru FM is listened to by the respondents because interesting (5%), entertaining (5%), enhances their knowledge (4%), keeps them updated on current information (2%), releases their stress (12%), and helps them to worship at the comfort of their home (1%). Sirasa FM is listened to by the respondents because interesting (3%), entertaining (3%), enhances their knowledge (3%), keeps them updated on current information (3%), and releases their stress (2%). The respondents listen to Y FM because interesting (3%), entertaining (3%), enhances their knowledge (3%), keeps them updated on current information (3%), and releases their stress (2%). They also listen to Siyatha FM because interesting (2%), entertaining (2%), enhances their knowledge (2%), keeps them updated on current information (2%), and releases their stress (2%). Shaa FM is listened to by the respondents because the programmes are interesting (1%), entertaining (1%), enhances their knowledge (1%), keep them updated on current information (1%), and release their stress (1%).

As per the findings, the respondents listen to the radio programmes as they address political issues (36%), health issues (16%), environmental issues (12%), cultural issues (12%), economical issues (8%), family issues (8%) and work-related issues (8%). Among these, political and health issues are discussed in the programmes broadcasted by almost all radio channels. However, the respondents hold the view that cultural issues are discussed only by private radio channels. The respondents also said that environmental issues are focused on by FM Derana, Hiru FM, Sirasa FM, Y FM, Shaa FM, SLBC, and City FM, and economic issues are discussed by FM Derana, Hiru FM, Sirasa FM, and Shaa FM. Whereas family issues are touched on by Sirasa FM, Y FM, SLBC, City FM, and FM Derana and Hiru FM focus the work-related issues in their

programmes.

The findings of the study indicate that majority of the respondents (90%) do not seek solutions from their preferred radio channels to solve their problems. As per the data, 50% of the respondents rarely seek solutions, similarly, another 30% of the respondents never seek solutions and 10% of the respondents very rarely seek solutions through radio programmes to solve their problems. However, 10% of the respondents often seek solutions from radio programs to solve their problems.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that the majority of the respondents listen to radio programmes from their mobile phones because they can listen to radio programmes while they do some other work, such as studying, cooking, and doing exercises. All the respondents listen to radio channels daily but the majority of them listen to radio programmes only at the time which is convenient for them. The study also points out that the majority of the respondents prefer private radio channels over state-owned radio channels and among the private radio channels, FM Derana is identified as the most popular radio station of the respondents. The Sinhala-speaking students of the Trincomalee Campus listen to various radio programmes and all of them listen to news programmes and next to that the majority prefer musical programmes from their preferred radio channels. The findings also conclude that the respondents listen to radio programmes because they provide good entertainment, are good companions when they feel lonely, offer educational programmes, offer timely news, the device they used to listen to radio programmes is portable and they can listen to radio programmes from anywhere, offer phone-in comments, and radio is comparatively cheap.

The findings indicate that the respondents listen to state-owned radio channels such as SLBC and City FM to get entertainment and to get information. However, the respondents listen to a variety of programmes from private radio channels (FM Derana, Hiru FM, Sirasa FM, Y FM, Siyatha FM, and Shaa FM) to gratify their needs for information on current affairs, sports, politics, economy, culture, and art and also to fulfill their musical needs. The findings conclude that the respondents prefer to listen to these types of radio programme because they are interesting, are entertaining, enhances their knowledge, keeps them updated on current information, releases their stress, and help them to worship in the comfort of their home. Political, health, cultural, environmental, family, economic and work-related issues are addressed by their preferred radio channels. As per the study, respondents do not seek solutions through radio programmes to solve their problems.

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