

Panels or Manels?

Desperately seeking women in TV news debates

Although women constitute around half of the human population, their voices and opinions are not proportionately heard in the public sphere. Women are seen, heard or read less than men almost everywhere in the world.

The representation of women and men in the news media, in India as in much of the world – as news-makers, sources of news, news analysts/commentators and even news presenters – is far from equal, as the [Global Media Monitoring Project](#) (GMMP) has consistently shown. The under-representation of women as experts, in particular, is a global trend even though it has been clearly established that there is today no dearth of female experts in multiple fields in most countries.

Television news channels in India regularly feature panel discussions with spokespersons and experts to analyse and debate current events and issues. Women are invariably under-represented in these forums.

Over the past few years the issue of ‘manels’ – men-only panels – has come to the fore internationally, with a popular [blog](#) (‘Congrats! You Have an All-Male Panel’) calling attention to the all-too-common phenomenon and several other [initiatives](#), such as @genderavenger and manpanels.org, attempting to raise awareness and encourage corrective action. In India, too, several panels on important platforms and conferences have been called out for being all-male panels or manels, as they are now called.

Vasanthi Hariprakash @vasanthihari

Debating a woman's entry in politics, is the mother...father of all manels. #PriyankaInPolitics
#UP #NetaPriyankaGandhi @INCIndia @republic
@NWM India



7:53 AM - 23 Jan 2019 from Bengaluru, India

63 Retweets
183 Likes

Having observed and experienced the gender imbalance in news media in general, and the poor representation of women in debates and discussions on news television in particular, members of the Network of Women in Media, India ([NWM](#)) from across the country decided to conduct a systematic monitoring of TV news channels in the summer of 2017.

The research exercise aimed to collect and collate information on the participation of women – as anchors/interviewers and as discussants/respondents – in panel discussions during prime-time news bulletins and popular talk shows on TV news channels broadcasting from different parts of the country. Conducted over one full month (22 April to 21 May 2017), the study examined programmes aired by 28 channels in 12 languages: six in English, four in Hindi and 18 in various other Indian languages (Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bangla, Odiya, Asamiya and Marathi). One prime-time news show and one top weekly talk show were reviewed for each channel.

Eleven NWM members volunteered to monitor Indian TV news channels in the summer of 2017. Researchers were based in several locations across the country: Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Delhi, Dhubri (Assam), Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune. Channels were selected by the researchers based on their own linguistic backgrounds and knowledge, but care was taken to ensure that the study covered languages spanning the country's various regions: North, South, East, West and North East.

A total of 390 hours of programming was viewed by the 11 researchers over the one-month period. Out of the total number of programmes monitored (506), 69% were prime-time news programmes and the rest were talk shows, both daily and weekly. The study findings are based on 506 completed forms submitted by researchers.

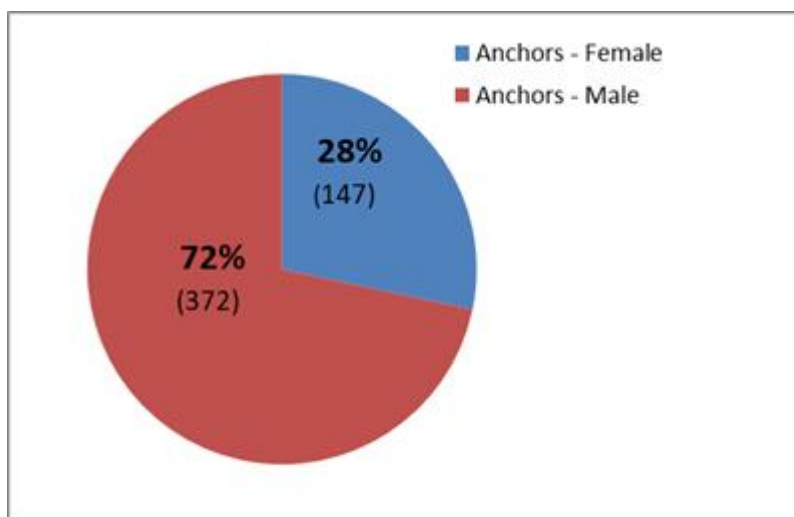
Politics dominated news panel discussions, accounting for 45% of the programmes surveyed (229 of the total of 506). The second most discussed topic were Crime and Agriculture but both accounted for less than 6% of the total surveyed time (29 and 28 programmes respectively).

Almost a quarter of the responses (24%) related to English language channels, while Hindi language channels accounted for 14% and Bangla for 11%. The least number of forms received (1%) were for one Urdu language channel which was part of the study. The maximum number of forms were filled for the English channel, Times Now (37), followed by ABP Ananda (Bangla) with 35 and News X (English) with 33. At the other end of the spectrum, only 2 of the forms received related to DD 1 News (English).

The findings of the study corroborate the under-representation of women in news and current affairs discussions and talk shows across channels and languages.

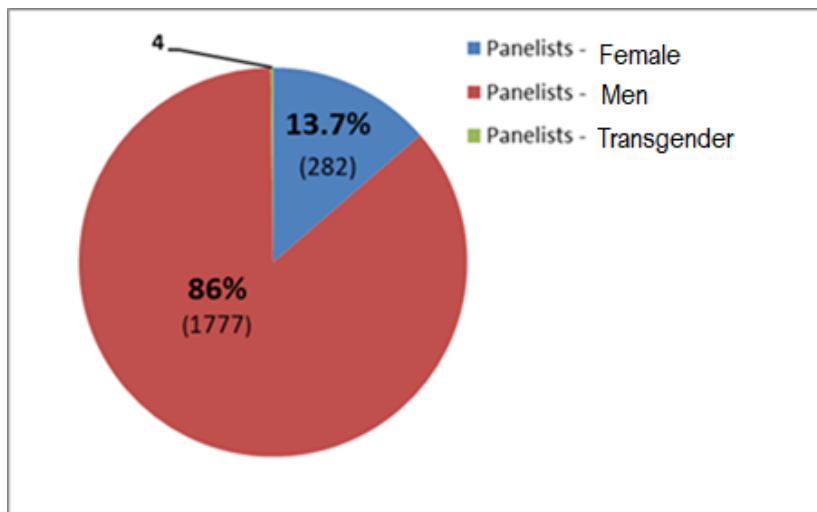
Highlights

Nearly three quarters of the anchors were men (72%). The imbalance was highest in Hindi language channels, where men constituted about 89% of the anchors. English channels fared well with almost as many female as male anchors.



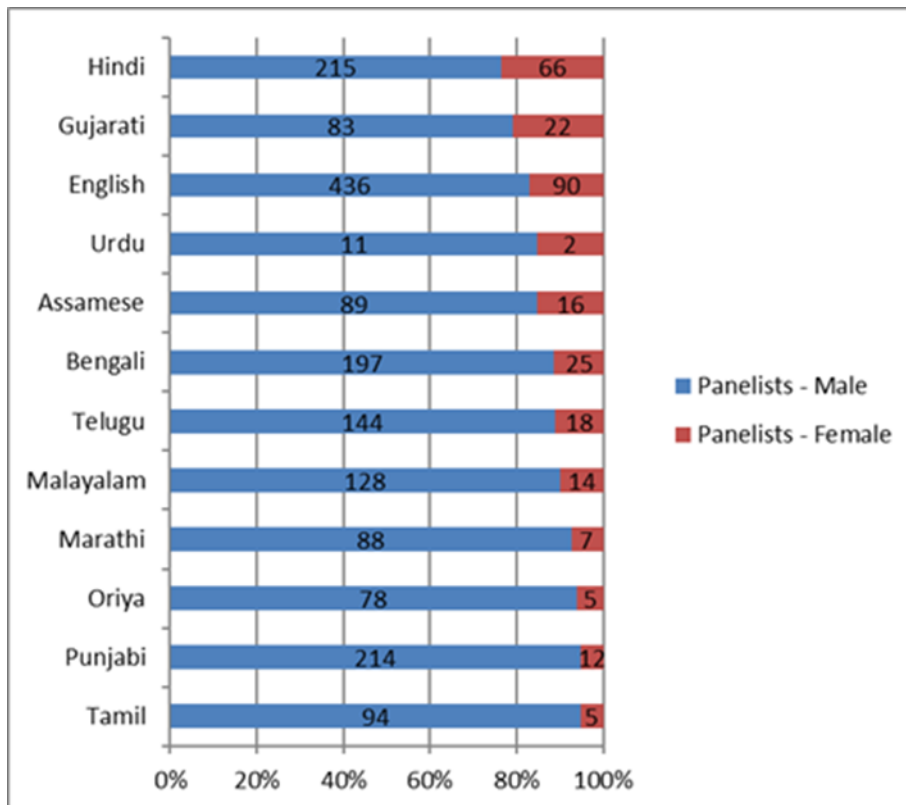
Panellists were also overwhelmingly male at 86%, with women at a little less than 14% and transgender (TG) panellists constituting a miniscule 0.2%. Interestingly, Hindi

channels fared better here, with women panellists at 23.5%, compared to English at just 17% and the average for regional language channels at a dismal 10%.



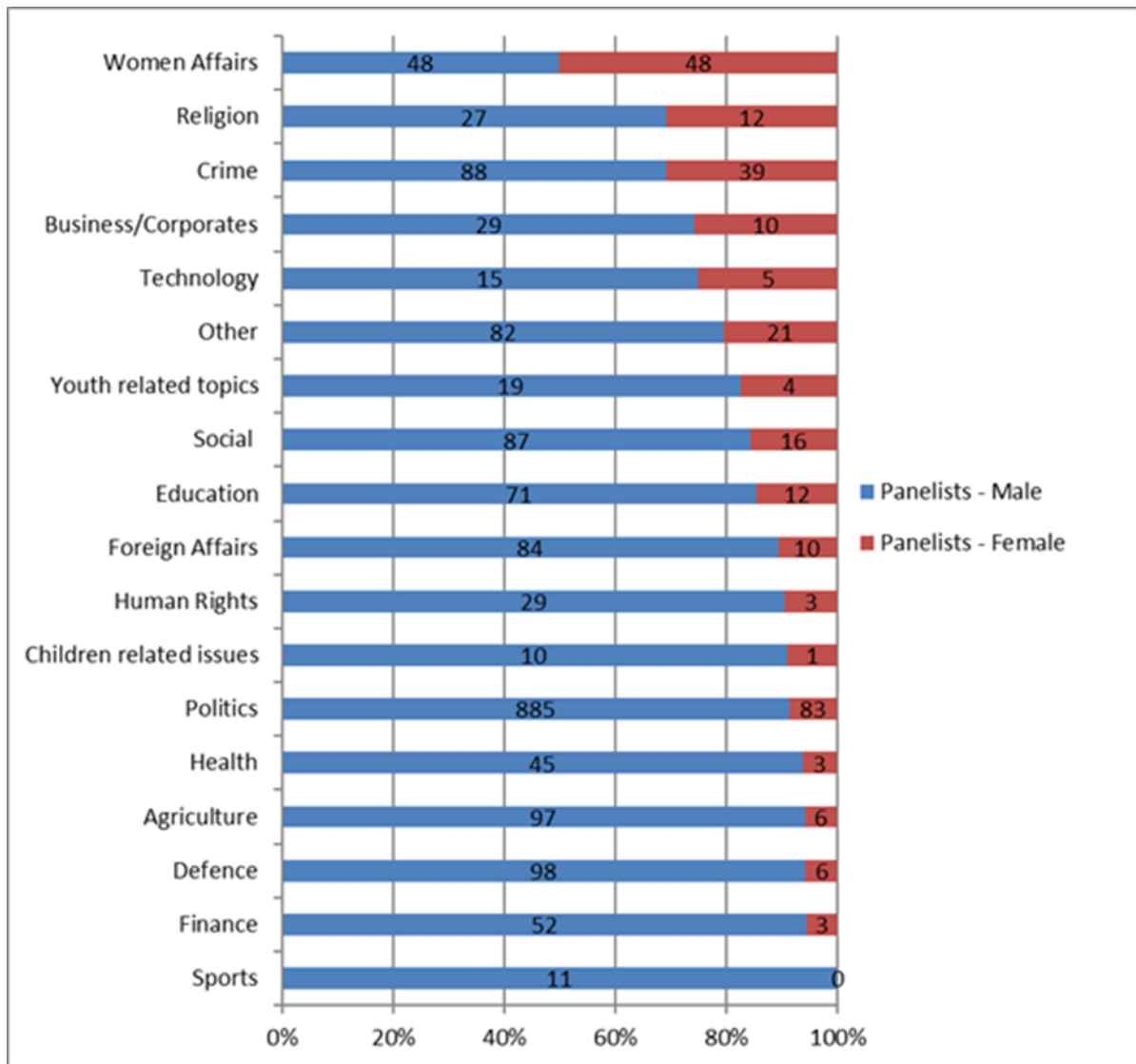
With regard to the professional background of panellists, certain fields were almost exclusively dominated by men: sports, religion, law enforcement and farming. More women were found in the categories of artist and legal profession than among academics, students and journalists.

Language-wise, Hindi, Gujarati, English and Urdu fared much better in terms of representation of women among panellists than Tamil, Punjabi and Odiya, which registered just about 5% female representation. However, it must be noted that even the better performers had a female representation of only about 22%.



Gender representation among panellists in channels in various languages

The study revealed that while television news channels regularly feature panel discussions with spokespersons and experts to analyse and debate current events and issues, women are usually under-represented in these forums. Their opinions do not seem to matter: their absence is hardly noticed by decision-makers in TV news and even by the audience. Having become accustomed to watching and listening to men pontificate on ‘important’ issues, most viewers do not seem to be aware that women’s voices are rarely heard during crucial debates about vital issues that affect and ought to concern all citizens.



Distribution of male and female panellists in news television by subject areas

The under-representation of women among anchors as well as panellists in most Indian television channels indicates that gender equity in the newsroom remains a distant goal. It is important to note that the scarcity of female experts and opinion leaders sharing their perspectives on current events and issues of concern to society in the media deprives audiences of the knowledge and perspectives of one half of society.

Key Findings

Panellists

- Women's representation in panel discussions broadcast by Indian TV news channels is 13.6%, compared to 86% for men.
- Nearly two-thirds of all panel discussions (65%) did not feature a single woman; in other words, they were manels.
- Hindi channels had the best representation of women in panels: an average of 23% (still less than a quarter).
- English channels lagged behind on women's representation, at 17%.
- Gujarati channels fared relatively better than other regional language channels, with an average of 21% women in their panel discussions, while Tamil and Punjabi channels brought up the rear with only 5%.
- Bangla and Telugu were not much better at 11%; ditto for Malayalam at 10%.
- Most of the women seen on TV news panels were journalists, artists, lawyers, bureaucrats and activists.
- None of the panels featured women sportspersons, religious leaders, police officers and/or farmers even in discussions on related topics.
- Only 5% of the professional and independent analysts featured on panels were women; the corresponding figures for party spokespersons and subject experts were 8% and 11% respectively.
- In contrast, female panellists made up 50% of panels assembled for discussions on so-called women's issues; interestingly, 30% of the panels on events and issues relating to religion and crime were women.
- On the other hand, in discussions on politics, which constituted nearly half (45%) of all panel discussions on news television, only 8% of the panellists were women.

Anchors

- Nearly three quarters of the anchors were men (72%).
- English channels were an exception, with the number of female and male anchors almost equal.
- The imbalance was highest in Hindi language channels, where men constituted about 89% of the anchors.
- Regional language channels surveyed fared much better at an average of 24% of women anchors (nearly a quarter of all anchors).
- Interestingly, however, there was no difference in the representation of women as panellists in programmes anchored by female and male anchors.

Recommendations

1. All television news channels should make a deliberate effort to substantially increase the participation on women in panel discussions and talk shows.
2. Women should not be restricted to discussions on gender-related or “soft” subjects, but must be included in discussions on a range of topics, including politics, economics, international affairs, defence, finance, industry, agriculture and crime.
3. Channels should make conscious efforts to ensure adequate representation of female experts in various fields in the pool of panellists from which they draw participants in discussions so as to enable women from different subject areas, backgrounds and regions to share their knowledge, experiences and perspectives with viewers. The present under-representation of women is not because female experts are not available but because adequate efforts are not made by channels to look for them, due to the prevailing lack of awareness and concern about the need for gender balance in news programming.
4. Women should be invited to participate in panel discussions as subject experts and analysts, not just as victims or relatives of individuals in the news.
5. Hindi and regional language news channels should ensure parity in the number of female and male anchors.
6. Anchors must ensure that female panellists are given due time to speak and that their voices are not drowned out by shouting male panellists, nor silenced with insults and attempts at shaming.
7. Senior female anchors should be retained on air just as senior male anchors continue to appear even as they age.

Credits

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NB The complete report of the study can be accessed on the NWMI website: www.nwmindia.org