Media audiences, public knowledge and citizenship: an Indian example

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Abstract

Conceptualisations of the role of the media in democracy have tended to ignore the audience. Public knowledge and its contribution to democratic functioning has mostly been seen in policy or textual terms. Basing its observations on original research comparing interpretations of television documentaries by audiences in India and Britain, this paper attempts to trace the connections between mediated knowledge, interpretive practice, and citizenship in democratic states. It underlines the role of higher education in India, and by extension other developing countries, in terms of access to certain forms of cultural capital, and how this impinges on democratic participation.

Introduction

The surprising results in the recent general parliamentary elections in India have once again confirmed the strength of the democratic functioning of the country. The results, by giving a sufficient majority to the Congress party to allow it to be the significant partner in a coalition government, have confounded both political commentators and doomsayers who had predicted a week coalition at best, or the return of the nationalist Hindu party. Given the complexity of the electoral system in India, with its 700 million voters and a month long election, and the increasingly strident participation of the multiple television and radio channels in the election campaigns, the question of the role of the media in democracy attains a particular relevance and importance. While this issue has been explored from the perspective of media texts and/or policies, this paper’s contention is that the question of the audience has not been sufficiently examined. In addition, in the Indian context the difference created by higher education is particularly germane. The notion of India’s “national” identity, which is under constant threat from the sheer diversity which the political nation-state encompasses has been questioned elsewhere (Das and Harindranath, 1996). The multi-lingual,
multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of the population suggests a multi-cultural state. The current prognosis by researchers such as Kumar (2003) retains concerns regarding the hardening of separate identities: “In the context of India’s pluralism, the new technologies of information and communication can be expected to consolidate linguistic identities, including sub-regional identities. This may constitute a process of localization and regionalization of commitment in the face of the homogenizing influence of the global imperative.” (p.12).

Among the forces instilling a sense of national integration education, particularly formal, higher education, should rate as one of the most important. The role of higher education in interpretations of documentaries and current affairs programming is crucial in this paper’s attempt to explore the links between mediated knowledge and democracy from the perspective of audiences.

It is generally agreed that the media are centrally implicated in discussions of the functioning of contemporary democracies. Most studies on the role of the media in democratic societies have focussed on debates surrounding notions of the public sphere, media texts as the site of contestation and conflict, and the ideals of public service broadcasting as opposed to commercial media (Keane, 1991). This take is not restricted to the Euro-American context, but also incorporate other regions, including developing societies (recent examples include Hackett and Zhao (2005), Kitley (2003)). These are crucial interventions that continue to make very significant contributions to the on-going debates. For instance, Zhao and Hackett’s (2005) preliminary remarks setting out their project on media democratization include an astute observation on the limitations in the fields of political science and media studies: while the former abounds in publications exploring the links between globalization and democracy, these largely neglect the dimension of the media. On the other hand, media or communication studies contain elaborations on media and democracy or media and globalisation, “few combine these problematic.. Moreover, there is little dialogue between cultural and political communication dimensions of the debate about media globalization.” (p.1). While these are relevant and important concerns, this paper attempts to push the argument further, asserting the case for the consideration of audiences as part of the exploration of the role of media in democracy. In particular, it argues that differences in access to cultural resources impinge on audiences” engagement with and appreciation of mediated public knowledge. The question can be raised however, as to what exactly is the role of education in democratic governance and in civil society, in particular in developing societies. The relations between educational capital, interpretive practice, and the media form the main focus of this paper, using as example an original research project on the interpretation of documentaries by audience groups in India. Examining these links, it is
argued, requires a rethinking of the conceptual framework on the relations between media, audiences and socio-cultural contexts.

Interpretive practices of audiences, the frames of understanding employed by them, and how these reveal broader socio-cultural contexts form the main concerns of this paper. It attempts to explore the relations between the media and citizenship from the perspective of audiences, in particular the ways in which discrepancies in cultural capital impact upon citizenship as an active engagement in civil society. This requires, it will be argued, a phenomenological hermeneutic conception of audience participation, that is, an investigation of the nature of interpretive practices of audiences and how these relate to particular socio-cultural contexts.

**Democracy and the media**

Among the various terms that have recently assumed a specific global currency the notion of “democracy” is arguably one of the most slippery, mutating in significance from being coterminous with the” free market”, as a marker of difference between a putative “us” against an alleged “them”, as a lack that undermines development in African countries and freedom in other regions, to being associated with Western or even occasionally Christian sentiments that can be “exported”, not unlike the crusading evangelists of the colonial period. In each of these manifestations the notion adopts a particular set of values. As John Dewey once observed, “democracy” is a word with multiple meanings. In academic literature “democracy” as a concept and a term has been scrutinized and debated over for decades, and this scrutiny has spilled over disciplinary boundaries. More recently the lability of the concept, seen more explicitly as a floating signifier, whose appearance in varied discourses – everyday, political and media – is perceived to represent crucial aspects of the contested terrain of contemporary global politics and culture. In his influential essay on globalization as constituting various “scapes” for instance, Arjun Appadurai (1996) underlines the fluidity of the term and its links with debates on globalisation, identifying it as one of the “ideoscapes” that has “clearly become a master term”, an example of the “globally variable synaesthesia” that characterises the modern “terminological kaleidoscope”. (p. 37). As Munck (2002) argues, the contestation over the meaning of the term is indicative of its centrality to political discourse, and to the fact that it takes on different meanings as it is “appropriated by different social and political forces”. (p.11).

In a useful summary of research on media and democracy, Dahlgren (2004) argues that there have been two productive alternatives to the traditional political science approach to communication, which has “evoked criticisms
over the years, for being too formalistic, too bound to the prevailing political/institutional
arrangements, too wedded to constrictive methodologies.” (p. 15). The first of the two
challenges he identifies to the political science tradition, what he refers to as the “public
sphere approach”, has, as he rightly observes, contributed to examinations of the role of the
media in democratic societies. Influenced mainly by the theoretical edifice constructed on the
philosophical insights provided by Habermas, this perspective engages with notions such as
deliberative democracy and communicative rationality. Using a normative idea of
democracy, this perspective has been used by communication scholars to investigate for
example, the role of public service broadcasting. It is worth noting here Garnham’s (1993,
2000) argument regarding the globalisation of political power and the corollary need for a
global public sphere in the shape of a unitary global media system as opposed to a plural
media public. Intrinsic in this is the notion that a global power bloc requires a system of
accountability of similar scope, and that the media offer the best means of achieving that. “If
the impact [of economic and political decisions] is universal, then both the political and media
systems must be universal. In this sense a series of autonomous public spheres is not
sufficient. There must be a single public sphere, even if we might want to conceive of it as
made up of a series of subsidiary public spheres, each organized around its own public
political sphere, media system, and set of forms and interests.” (1993, p. 264).

As Barnett (2004) has noted, Garnham identifies the lack of a symmetry between
contemporary global politics and a fragmented media system and the consequent lack of
democratic political participation as leading to the emergence of a politics of identity. This
position takes for granted a connection between a common media system and democratic
functioning, in the form of deliberative democracy, without taking into account the sheer
variety intrinsic to the practices of consumption among audiences. In other words what is
emphasised here is the democratic potential of cultural production over the socio-cultural
variables that are characterised in audiences’ appropriation of media material. It presumes a
knowledgeable citizenry possessing the social, political and cultural means to guarantee
accountability from those exercising political and economic power. The differentiated access
to specific symbolic resources and the disproportionate distribution of cultural or political
knowledge – specifically through education – is largely ignored in this formulation. Akhil
Gupta’s (2000) examination of how the state is imagined by the rural populace in India
through their everyday experience of the intermediaries of the state is indicative of a need to
rethink citizenship and knowledge. His argument is suggestive of a new direction of research
on media and citizenship, bringing anthropology as an approach to the study of the political
process, particularly in developing countries.
Dahlgren points to another alternative to the traditional political science approach to media and democracy – the “culturalist” approach – which examines communication and the media from the perspective of citizenship, “which in turn offers frameworks for analysing and assessing features of political communication…. Themes such as meaning, identity and social agency are highlighted” in this approach (p.16). A recent special issue of the *European Journal of Communication* (2006)\(^1\), a collection of essays seeking to explore citizenship in cultural terms, attempts to begin a reconceptualisation of citizenship through an engagement with the ways in which meaning-making, belonging, and the exercise of power are linked in important ways. This includes an emphasis on the everyday rather than on the governmental. As the editors declare, “citizenship can be found both above ground as parliamentary politics …and as the “underground” reflection on what binds us, what we expect from life and of what we are critical. We need to broaden and deepen our efforts to understand this.” (p.260).

For the purposes of the arguments in this paper, the crucial point here is the idea of meaning-making and its relation to citizenship, in particular in relation to the media. If we agree with Hartley (1999) that television plays a pivotal role in shaping the ways in which we consider difference and identity, the centrality of the audience becomes evident.

In its attempt to present a theoretical frame with which to examine media audiences in relation to the diversity of their responses to media, and how that might reflect on participation in practices of deliberative democracy, audiences as publics is a central concern. Crucial to this are the ideas of mediated knowledge and representation, and inequality of access to symbolic resources and cultural capital, both of which are essential components to the conception and nature of democratic dialogue and debate that constitute public spheres. The premise underlying the argument in this paper is that, while debates on the role of the media in democracy continue, the audience perspective remains relatively under-explored in such studies (one of the exceptions here is Madianou (2005)). Thus there is a need to the discussion the audience, by way of refocussing the arguments on media and democracy along the lines of citizenship, the audience-public, and public knowledge.

Exploring the wider implications of forms of governmental and disciplinary power for media audiences, Barnett (2003) sees the media as “crucial sites for contested struggles over the conditions for the formation of new subjectivities” (p.102), and argues that a crucial component of this politics is “the production of knowledge through which audiences are made knowable.” Significant for him is the knowledge of audiences, however spatially dispersed

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\(^1\) This issue of the *European Journal of Communication* (vol.9 [3], 2006), edited by Joke Hermes and Peter Dahlgren, contains essays examining the notion of cultural citizenship from different perspectives such as political philosophy, the politics of the everyday, gender, and the sociology of news.
they may be, which challenges the notion of them as completely autonomous, and presents them as “objects of policy in public and private media institutions.” (*Ibid*). The knowledge of audiences contributes to the governing of media audiences, “characterised both by an acknowledgement of a high degree of autonomy of dispersed subjects, and by a countervailing imperative to protect audiences, not least from their own worst inclinations.” He argues that in contemporary neo-liberal socio-cultural contexts this ambivalence is demonstrated in the dual treatment of audiences: on the one hand as embodying consumer sovereignty that underpins privatisation and commercialisation and media liberalisation, and on the other hand a simultaneous attempt to resuscitate conservative values and regulatory regimes that promote the “protection” of citizens from the perceived excesses of media representations. The implied or overt moral imperative that drives such conservative agendas, in particular those relating to sex and/or violence, has been explored in other studies, for instance Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2001). What is significant in the present context is Barnett’s concern regarding the governance of audiences in neo-liberal moral regulation that seeks to simultaneously celebrate their perceived autonomy as evidence of consumer “freedom”. Implicated in this formulation is the idea that consumer sovereignty is directly related to identity formation. The knowledge of the audience consumption practices therefore becomes crucial for both commercial enterprises as well as governmental organizations. Accordingly, research data on audiences is seen as contributing to their governance and regulation.

**Media consumption and citizenship**

The two fundamental requirements for audiences to function fully as participating citizens are access to material and symbolic resources, and public knowledge, including knowledge of the functioning of the state. Murdock’s (1999) thesis regarding the proliferation of identities and the mediation of difference is particularly relevant in the current, post 9-11 political climate, in which citizenship in multicultural societies, both in the West and elsewhere, is in complex ways being negotiated alongside concerns regarding national security. The politics of difference involves, consequently, much more than the expressions of diverse cultural and moral discourses, as it entails perceptions of and by ethnic minorities in relation to dominant discourses on terror. This underlines even more strongly the centrality of the media and the contestations over public knowledge. The idea of audiences as active participants in democratic discourse therefore, assumes a particular resonance. In this respect Murdock’s argument regarding state intervention becomes even more important: “[I]n addition to guaranteeing basic material conditions for participation, full citizenship also required access to relevant symbolic resources and the competences to use them effectively.” (p. 11).
The contemporary political formations in the subcontinent is a case in point. Examining this demands the acknowledgment of its cultural, religious, linguistic diversity and the multiple loyalties these inspire. Both historically and currently, separatist politics within India, drawing on such loyalties, has continued to threaten the notion of national cohesion and state authority. While India’s cultural diversity is often commented upon and included in analyses of its political and social processes, the role of disparities in state provisions such as education are less often recognised as relevant to discussions of citizenship and political participation. It is worthwhile making a slight detour here to include in our contention regarding the media, audience participation, and public knowledge. The notion of participatory or deliberative democracy is a central component of discussions of the media and the public sphere, in which the media are envisaged, in an ideally functioning democracy, to contribute to public participation and deliberation. Benhabib’s (2002) formulation, her plea for dialogue as fundamental to democratic practice, can be seen as crucial specifically to nations constituted by as much diversity as India. Allegiances to essentialist notions of identity privilege the local and the particular, and consequently conceive of collective identity as a unitary whole – what Appiah (1994) has referred to as “tightly scripted identities” - thereby dis avowing the possibility of change through encounters with other groups.

Twenty years or so since Radway’s (1988) call for “radical contextualism” in audience research and the subsequent reconceptualisation of audiences as “actively” engaged in meaning construction, and the consequent re-thinking of the text-audience relationship, particularly through the investigations of internet users and participants in MUDs and CMCs, there has recently emerged a more direct engagement with the politically constitutive role of audiences. In her attempt to transcend the unproductive binarism of “audiences” and “publics”, Livingstone (2005) argues that audiences “sustain a modest and often ambivalent level of critical interpretation, drawing upon – and thereby reproducing – a somewhat ill-specified, at times inchoate or even contradictory sense of identity or belonging which motivates them towards but does not wholly enable the kinds of collective and direct action expected of a public.” (pp. 31). She suggests that a third concept – the “civic” – allows for grounded, empirical research on phenomena such as gender politics and the relevance of talk show debates. Crucially, it enables the re-conceptualisation of audiences as “citizen-viewers”, as Corner (1995) has argued.

In an exploration of media and citizenship, Dahlgren (1995) underlines the significance of the concepts of civil society and citizenship to the analysis of the role of the media in democracy. Central to linking these two concepts, for him, is the process of television reception. Civil
society offers for him “a way to conceptually gather up the sites of reception and recontextualize them to a larger theoretic horizon which has relevance for both democratic theory and the public sphere.” (p.120). On the other hand he argues, the category of “audience” alone is far too media centric and consequently inadequate for the examination of the public sphere: “the public sphere requires “publics”, in the sense of interacting social agents. The category of audience becomes too constricted in this regard. We need to move, in our theoretic vistas, from audience members to citizens.” (p.120). While reception research continues to provide useful insights into the socio-cultural aspects of television viewing, he recommends the reformulation of audience activity and viewership as a “potential moment of citizenship,” as it allows the productive exploration of media reception in its everyday context and thereby its relation to civil society. Dahlgren’s thesis raises several issues that are pertinent to the recasting of audiences as “publics” and citizens, crucial to which are the concept of public knowledge, and the centrality of the access to symbolic resources, of cultural capital.

Public participation in deliberative democracy presumes a knowledgeable citizenry. As demonstrated in Harindranath (1998, 2000), the other complicating factor, in particular in developing societies, is education, which acts as a conduit to certain kinds of knowledge, predispositions and expectations in relation to the media, as well as to perceptions of democratic rights and the role of the state. Education is significant in this context not only in terms of literacy, but also relates to processes of imaginings of the state, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, the in-built hierarchies that characterise everyday life in both rural and urban areas, and in terms of social mobility. The notion of “experience” and how it informs identity, agency, and resistance has been much debated, particularly in relation to the significance accorded to “immediate” or “raw” experience. This privileging of allegedly unmediated experience as providing a unique perspective runs the risk of essentialising cultural identity and thereby providing the basis for ethno-nationalist assertions of uniqueness. And therein lies the dilemma: recourse to allegedly prediscursive, concrete experience, while it provides the vocabulary for cultural and collective identity, is simultaneously susceptible to the vagaries of fundamentalist politics.

Audience evaluations of what constitutes valid knowledge become crucial when public knowledge is seen as a constituent of democratic participation, and knowledge and interpretation of the media as the arena of public discourse are related to experience. Livingstone’s (1999) assertion that what audiences gain from specific media genres derives from what is considered valuable and how that locates them in relation to the text is significant here. This underpins one of the research questions in the project that she describes,
“‘Whose knowledge is being (re)produced?’” (p.94), which is an indispensable component of the exploration of the functioning of media in democratic states, in particular issues concerning mediated knowledge and its regulation, as well as its relations with the private and the public, with the public sphere, and with cultural and political elites and marginalized communities. In news and current affairs programming, as well as in the documentary genre, the role of experts and their perceived credibility are centrally implicated in audiences’ response to the programme. The veridicality of the documentary genre, its truth claims that sets it apart from fictional genres, is in most forms of the genre linked to the knowledge of the experts that is provided as part of the evidence constituting the argument.

**Reconceiving audience-text relations**

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Appadurai, Canclini (2001) advocates the notion that in contemporary liberal societies social relations are constructed more in terms of the struggle over the means of symbolic distinction rather than for the means of production and the mere gratification of material needs. This permits him to reformulate the dichotomy of state and civil society in terms of reconsidering simultaneously both policies as well as forms of participation, which to him requires understanding ourselves as both citizens and consumers. As he argues in his examination of consumers and citizens, research on audiences has contributed to the reconceptualisation of the audience-text relations, which has paved the way to conceiving communication as being not one of domination, but a much more complex “collaboration and transaction between both parties.” (2001: 38; emphasis in the original), as against the earlier conception of media consumption as being determined by corporations and texts. This is a well-known and established conception of audience activity, although, as argued earlier, celebrations of audience autonomy do occasionally go to the other extreme, not taking into account the broader socio-cultural dimensions of audience engagements with the media. His reformulation of state – civil society relations, in turn, involves a reconceptualisation of the idea of the public sphere: “Neither subordinated to the state nor dissolved in civil society, it is reconstituted time and again in the tension between both.” (p.154). He is, consequently, sympathetic to Alejandro’s (1993) efforts to conceive of the public sphere by taking into account not only Habermas’s well-known thesis on it, but also Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia”. Alejandro’s hermeneutic re-evaluation of the public sphere builds on and expands both Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Bakhtin’s assessment of language: the public sphere is “a space of heteroglossia”, “a field of competing traditions and languages”, and “a terrain in which meanings and traditions are enforced but, in the process, new forces can pose different meanings or emphases … thus challenging existing ones.” (p.206).
Alejandro’s exploration of hermeneutics and citizenship, allows for the exploration of audience activity through Gadamerian hermeneutics, as revealed in the phrase “field of competing traditions and languages”. The latter, in particular, enables an assessment of the ways in which cultural capital, access to education, media literacy, the every day, and socio-cultural contexts impact on the ways in which audiences interpret and respond to mediated knowledge as citizens and how that may have consequences for their participation in democratic dialogue and deliberation. Gadamer’s (1975, 1976) hermeneutics emphasises the role of the fundamental “thrownness” of human life – that is, our ordinary, everyday situation – as well as its temporality and historicity, in which understanding and interpretation are inescapably embedded. In other words, the audience-citizen’s historicity, their specific socio-historical and cultural context, is crucial to their engagement with mediated forms of knowledge. Gadamer considers this historicity to be the consequence of both a biographical past as well as a cultural past, which both fashion the “hermeneutic situation” of the audience, that is, the context of audience’s interpretive activity. Crucially for him, understanding involves the anticipation of meaning of the whole text based on prior knowledge of the nature of its constituents, as for instance in its generic features. He refers to this as “the horizon of expectations”, a set of assumptions that we take to the text. These assumptions however, are not fixed, but are modified constantly as we encounter texts. To extend this further, cultural difference can be construed as specific hermeneutic “horizons” that contribute to differences in the engagement of the audience-citizen with mediated and public knowledge. This includes the inequality of resources, cultural and symbolic, that underlies unequal relations in power, and constitutes the difference between the elites and the marginal.

Media and democracy in India

Inspired by the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of their independence in 2007, several analyses of contemporary political and social formations of India and Pakistan have been published recently. Both academic and journalistic accounts have included, among various points of analysis, comparisons between the two countries in terms of democratic governance, which reveal a stark and startling variation. Whereas India, apart from one momentous year of Emergency rule during which democratic rights were suspended, has been celebrated as “the world’s largest functioning democracy”, Pakistan is seen as lurching between fragile democratic rule and military dictatorship. One of the more plausible assessments of this difference between two countries sharing a region, provenance and historical trajectory rests on the divergence in the emphasis on all levels of education. In a recent article in The
Guardian for instance, William Darlymple underlines two related points concerning the continuing problems faced by Pakistan. Firstly, unlike in India, the educated middle class exercises less power in relation to the landowners, which, resulting in feudalistic control of the electoral process, continues to undermine democracy in Pakistan; and secondly, the country’s “desperate educational crisis. No problem in Pakistan casts such a long shadow over its future as the abject failure of the government to educate more than a fraction of its people.” (p.26). One immediate consequence of the lack of schools with the most basic infrastructure has been the rise in popularity of madrasas or Islamic schools, but the long term effect, according to Darlymple and others, has been the undermining of democracy.

It is well known that in the 1990s India liberalised its hitherto regulated market, thereby entering the global economy in such a fashion that it has resulted in a spectacular annual growth rate. Alongside the liberalisation of the economy has been the removal of restrictions in the media sector, in which for instance, the staid state run television channel Doordarshan has had to compete for audiences with privately run domestic and global channels since the early 1990s. To take the example of the complicitous relations between the media, the market, and Hindu extremism, Rajagopal’s (2001) well known study of the complex ways in which Indian television was the site for the revival of Hindu nationalism as well as the espousal of neoliberalism and the apparent merits of globalisation is perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of this seemingly contradictory development in contemporary Indian political culture. In terms of the media, the market, and religious nationalism in the context of globalisation, however, Fernandes (2000) and Chakrarvarty and Gooptu (2000) are exemplary attempts at tracing the complicated lines of connection. Fernandes is interested in shifting the terms of debate on the apparent failures of the state in order to examine “how the nation is being reformed through the processes of globalization to the question of how the production of “the global” occurs through the nationalist imagination.” (p.611). The transformation of national political culture from the post-independence Nehruvian vision that included industrialisation and a steadfastly secular state to the economically liberalised contemporary India is for her marked by the deepening of the culture of consumption.

In the complex multicultural and multi-religious formation of contemporary Indian national imaginary, the construction of the Hindu consumer-citizen is a cause for concern. Related to this is the notion of the state as an imagined community, as proposed by Gupta (2000), whose ethnographic analysis encompassed the practices of lower level bureaucrats in a small town in North India and was complemented by an investigation of representations of the state in the

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mass media. His focus is on “the “multiply mediated” contexts through which the state comes to be constructed” (p.335), which included engaging with the ways in which discussions with villagers concerning the state were refracted through the lenses of both everyday encounters with corruption, as well as with mediated forms of state functions. For our concerns, what is crucial here is the ways in which this impacts upon self-perceptions among his respondents regarding their roles as citizens, and the validity of their claims. What emerges as significant in his study is the continuing marginalisation of certain communities, whose voices are absent in the public dialogues that constitute the Indian state.

While my case study, based on original research on the comparison of the interpretation of documentaries by audiences in India and Britain, supports my theoretical efforts, it does so in a manner I did not expect. Briefly, my finding is that while most respondents across both cultures interpreted the films in similar ways, with a varied employment of “transparent” and “mediated” frames which generated readings which were at times critical of the films’ arguments and representation, the one group which emerged as markedly different was that of the Indian non-graduates. The similarities between the interpretive frames used by Indian groups with higher education qualifications and those used by British audiences, and equally the differences between the frames used by these Indian groups and their compatriots without university education are revealing of the role of education in interpretations and evaluative judgements of media content\(^3\). Evidently, the data undermine the conflation of culture with geographical or national space. What emerged as significant is not racial or national difference but difference prompted by university education. The importance of higher education as a constitutive aspect of a person’s biographical history, with the potential of creating a “culture” of its own, providing a demonstrably effective “hermeneutic horizon” is indicative of a hybrid culture that is simultaneously removed from the local communities without university education, and bridges the gap between indigenous Indian and western cultures. What is pertinent is the issue of how higher education in India contributes to gaining access to specific cultural and symbolic resources that amount to whether or not a person or community has a voice in the contemporary Indian polity.

The importance of higher education as a “sphere” in a person’s life-world, with the potential of creating an intersubjective world of its own, suggests the presence of a hybrid culture which bridges the gap between indigenous Indian and Western cultures. The outcome, however, does indicate avenues for further research into the different interpretive practices.

\(^3\) For more details on this project, and an expanded version of the argument presented in this paper please see Harindranath, R (2009) Audience-Citzens: the Media, Public Knowledge and Interpretive Practice. New Delhi and Los Angeles: Sage.
within India. Primarily, it calls for a more systematic analysis of the decodings of audiences from various sections of the population. Intrinsic to this are debates concerning the global and the local. In the current climate of economic change, where the balance attempted in India’s experiments with “mixed economy” has been rapidly transformed into a market oriented economy, issues of globalization ought to take centre stage. One of the dichotomies which immediately suggests itself is the notion of the Westernized Indian and the non-Westernized Indian. As indicated in this study, higher education appears to play an important role in establishing and maintaining this division.

In this paper I have attempted to present an argument for the refashioning of audience research in such a way that it takes into account questions concerning the media, public knowledge, and the enduring inequality of access to cultural resources that are fundamental to conceptions of deliberative democracy. Existing studies on the relations between media and democracy, with their focus on policy, texts, or ownership and control, present valuable but incomplete arguments, as they largely neglect the audience dimension. This paper is a preliminary effort at tracing the outlines of a conceptual framework with which to redress this lacuna in media research.

References


