

Podcast Consumption Preferences Among Youth in Tamil Nadu: An Application of Uses and Gratifications Theory

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Abstract

Podcasts have emerged as a powerful medium for knowledge dissemination and entertainment, particularly among self-directed learners who demonstrate higher retention and engagement (Meden et al., 2024). This study investigates the key factors driving podcast consumption among youth in Tamil Nadu, India, one of the country's fastest-growing digital audio markets, projected to reach USD 9.3 billion by 2033 (IMARC Group, 2025). Grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), this research addresses the paucity of region-specific empirical evidence by examining content relevance, cultural resonance, host connection, convenience, social sharing, update frequency, and affordability. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with a sample of 200 youth in Coimbatore, using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Data were analysed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Pearson correlations, ANOVA, and multiple regression in SPSS. Descriptive findings revealed high engagement, with 92 weekly listeners primarily favouring entertainment (40.5%) and educational (38%) podcasts. The EFA validated a seven-factor model that accounted for 68.4% of the variance. Regression analysis identified content relevance ($M=3.99$, $\beta=0.20$) and cultural resonance ($M=4.02$, $\beta=0.15$) as the strongest predictors of preference ($R^2=1.00$). Pearson correlations underscored the strong link between cultural resonance and listening interest ($r=0.68$), moderated by education level. The results support UGT by highlighting both hedonic and utilitarian gratifications in culturally specific contexts, where Tamil-language content reinforces identity formation amid globalization (Perks & Turner, 2019). The implications include recommendations for creators to produce concise, culturally resonant episodes, and for platforms to enhance AI-driven personalization. Policymakers should leverage podcast episodes for digital literacy initiatives to mitigate social media addiction (26% prevalence). Limitations center on urban sampling bias; future studies could employ mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to explore rural-urban divides.

Keywords: Podcasts, Youth Preferences, Gen Z, Uses and Gratification Theory, Digital Media Consumption, Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

In the contemporary digital landscape, podcast episodes have evolved from niche audio content to a significant medium for entertainment, education, and cultural engagement, particularly among the youth in India. By 2025, the number of podcast listeners in India is projected to reach 200 million, a substantial increase from 105 million in 2024, driven by the widespread adoption of smartphones and affordable data (MarkNtel Advisors 2025). The market, valued at USD 840.72 million in 2024, is anticipated to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.22%, reaching USD 9.3 billion by 2033. This growth positions India as the third-largest podcast market globally, with 57.6 million monthly listeners in 2023 (IMARC Group 2025). This trend signifies a transition from passive screen consumption to active multitasking audio engagement, especially among Generation Z (aged 18-24), who constitute the majority of listeners with a median age of 20-21 (Grand View Research, 2025).

In Tamil Nadu, where there are over seven million urban youth and an 82% smartphone penetration rate even in rural areas, podcasts serve to bridge the gaps left by traditional media by offering inspirational Tamil self-help content and insights into global technological trends (IBEF 2025). However, challenges such as social media addiction (affecting 26% of college students, with a higher prevalence among males) underscore the role of podcasts as ad-free, on-demand alternatives for short episodes (10-30 minutes) during commutes or study sessions (ResearchGate, 2025b).

Preferences are complex and are shaped by psychological, cultural, and technological factors. Entertainment and education are the predominant genres, with hedonic (joy, escapism) and utilitarian (knowledge) motivations being key, along with affordability (48% prefer free access) (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022). Tamil podcasts, such as Kadhai Osai, blend folklore with contemporary issues, fostering identity in a globalized context (DW Akademie, 2025). Social influences, including peer recommendations and host charisma, drive discovery and retention, although monetization and algorithmic biases pose challenges to regional content creation.

Despite this growth, empirical research on the preferences of Tamil Nadu's youth remains limited, with a greater focus on creator motivations than consumer behaviors in this linguistically diverse, education-focused state (ResearchGate, 2022). This gap is significant, as understanding these factors can inform content strategies, enhance digital literacy, and align with Tamil Nadu's progressive youth empowerment ethics.

This study examines seven key influencers: content relevance, cultural resonance, host connection, convenience, social sharing, update frequency, and affordability-among 18-24-year-olds in Tamil Nadu. Utilizing surveys and regional trends, this study elucidates the evolution of the audio landscape and advocates for inclusive digital ecosystems. As India approaches a \$4 billion audio economy by 2025, Tamil Nadu's youth are at the forefront of this transformation (Astute Analytica, 2025).

Literature Review

Podcasts have emerged as a global medium for disseminating information, providing entertainment, and fostering community engagement, with listener numbers surpassing 500

million by 2023 and anticipated to reach 650 million by 2027 (Backlinko, 2025). In India, where oral storytelling traditions are deeply rooted, podcasts integrate elements of fiction, self-improvement, and cultural narratives, attracting 57.6 million monthly listeners in 2023 and achieving a market value of USD 0.62 billion, with a projected growth rate of 25% CAGR by 2030 (MarkNtel Advisors, 2025). The proliferation of affordable data (USD 0.09/GB) and the widespread use of 750 million smartphones have contributed to this trend, with 40% of Indian users accessing podcast episodes via platforms such as Spotify and JioSaavn (IBEF 2025). According to Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), podcasts fulfill the needs for escapism, education, and social interaction, countering the dominance of short-form video content (Pandey, 2025).

Generation Z, comprising 377 million individuals in India, is a significant demographic, accounting for 46% of podcast consumption by 2030 (ISB Executive Education 2025). This cohort exhibits greater trust in podcasters than in traditional media (48%), perceives hosts as friends (75%), and often listens while multitasking (77.3% of undergraduates prefer flexibility) (Edison Research, 2023). Engagement levels are notably high, with 64.5% of listeners sharing content and 79.1% reporting shifts in their opinions (Perks & Turner, 2019). While urban Gen Z leads in podcast adoption, only 12% of the Indian population are active listeners, indicating untapped potential in rural areas.

The factors influencing podcast consumption include content relevance and genre preferences, with society and culture accounting for 35% of the podcast consumption. The youth demographic favors short episodes (5-15 minutes) that blend entertainment with information, with 68% citing multitasking as a reason for their preference (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2020). Artificial intelligence-driven personalization aids in content discovery for 57% of users, although it may be biased towards niche topics (Al-Jenaibi & Al Ali, 2024).

Cultural resonance is crucial in India's diverse landscape, with over 50% of listeners preferring regional languages and vernacular content, which has experienced 40% growth (DW Akademie, 2025). Tamil podcasts, such as Idhayathin Kural, address themes of identity amidst globalization, resonating with Tamil Nadu's digitally literate youth, where 82% of rural individuals use smartphones (The Hindu 2024). Urban studies highlight content relevance as a primary driver (44.1%), further amplified by cultural alignment (ResearchGate 2025c).

The charisma of podcast hosts fosters parasocial relationships, with 38.9% of listeners valuing personality akin to that of traditional radio (Lee et al., 2024). The convenience of audio-only content (76% Gen Z preference) and its affordability (41.1% free) reduce access barriers (Perks et al., 2018). Social sharing (47.6% peer-driven) and regular updates (72.6% retention factor) align with the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers 2003).

Brand integration within podcasts enhances trust, as evidenced by Indian studies focusing on grooming and health (IJFMR, 2025). However, challenges such as slow monetization, competition from YouTube, and regional production barriers persist (Times 2021). In Tamil Nadu, where addiction rates are 26%, podcasts offer alternative content, although empirical research gaps remain (ResearchGate, 2025b).

Theories such as UGT and Diffusion frame podcast preferences as innovations fulfilling specific needs; however, localized studies in Tamil Nadu are necessary to explore the intersection of Dravidian progressivism with global trends (Al-Jenaibi & Al Ali, 2024). This study aimed to empirically address these issues, thereby informing inclusive strategies.

Methodology

This quantitative study investigates the factors influencing podcast preferences among individuals aged 18–24 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, which is a dynamic urban center characterized by vibrant youth demographics. Employing a cross-sectional design, the study captures patterns at a single point in time, which is appropriate for exploratory media research, given the high Internet penetration rate exceeding 70% (IBEF, 2025).

The study population comprised residents of Coimbatore, primarily students and professionals, with approximately 150,000 individuals engaged in higher education and a smartphone ownership rate of 78% (Census estimates). The sample size ($n=200$) was determined using G*Power for multiple regression analysis ($f^2=0.15$, $\alpha=0.05$, power=0.80, with seven predictors), incorporating a 20% buffer for non-response rate. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were employed, reflecting real-world discovery through social networks, with inclusion criteria specifying Coimbatore residency, age between 18 and 24 years, and weekly podcast listening of more than one hour. Exclusion criteria were applied to ensure focus and compliance with ethical standards.

Data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire administered from September 15 to October 15, 2025. The questionnaire included demographic items (5), usage items (8, multiple-choice/ordinal), preference factors (28 Likert-scale items, ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), and two open-ended questions. The factors were derived from the Podcast Listening Motivations Questionnaire and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Perks & Turner, 2019), with subscales covering seven factors: The Content Validity Index was 0.89, as assessed by three media experts, and a pilot study ($n=30$) yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.82 (subscales ranging from 0.76–0.89). The questionnaire was bilingual (Tamil-English) to enhance accessibility, and informed consent and IRB approval were obtained in accordance with the ICMR guidelines.

The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp, Instagram (#CoimbatoreYouth) and LinkedIn. Of the 236 responses received, 200 were deemed valid after data cleaning (15% incomplete responses, 1% straight lining, and mean imputation <5%).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 27, including descriptive statistics (frequencies, means), exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring, varimax rotation; $KMO>0.70$), correlation analysis, ANOVA for demographic variables (η^2), and regression analysis for predictors (assumptions checked: Shapiro-Wilk $p>0.05$, VIF<2.5). Statistical significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

The strengths of this study include its robust psychometric properties and its replicability. However, limitations such as self-report bias and urban skew suggest the need for mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper insights into the subject.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data analysis phase formalized the quantitative framework outlined in the methodology to process the responses of 200 valid participants in Coimbatore, using IBM SPSS Version 27. The cross-sectional data facilitated a multi-layered analysis, including descriptive statistics to characterize the sample and usage patterns, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to confirm the seven-factor structure, bivariate correlation to identify interrelationships, one-way ANOVA to assess demographic differences, and multivariate prediction of overall podcast preferences. Assumptions were rigorously verified, encompassing the test of normality via the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > 0.05$), the test of homoscedasticity through residual plots, and multicollinearity through VIF (less than 2.5). The results are presented in a thematic format, organized with clarity using tables and figures, followed by interpretations contextualized within the study, which focused on digital behavior among youth in Tamil Nadu.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The sample exhibited a slight bias towards male participants (58%, $n=116$) and undergraduate students (72%, $n=144$), reflecting the demographic composition of the Coimbatore ecosystem, which predominantly consists of college students. The demographic focus was youth-oriented, with a mean age of 21 years ($M=21.02$, $SD=1.48$), and a significant proportion of the sample were students (63% or $n=126$). Listening habits were notably high: 43.5% ($n=87$) engaged in daily listening, 48.5% ($n=97$) listened weekly, and 8% ($n=16$) listened monthly, with a weekly average of 4-5 hours. Spotify was the most preferred platform (45.5%, $n=91$), followed by YouTube (30.5%, $n=61$), which is consistent with the trend of affordable data in urban areas of Tamil Nadu. Preferences leaned towards entertainment (40.5%, $n=81$) and educational content (38%, $n=76$), with motivational content (21.5%, $n=43$) also being significant, aligning with the literature on hedonic-utilitarian gratifications.

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	58.0
	Female	84	42.0
Education	Undergrad	144	72.0
	Postgrad	32	16.0
	Other	24	12.0
Occupation	Student	126	63.0
	Employed	52	26.0
	Freelancer	22	11.0
Listening Frequency	Daily	87	43.5

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	Weekly	97	48.5
	Monthly	16	8.0
Platforms	Spotify	91	45.5
	YouTube	61	30.5
	Others	48	24.0
Favourite Genre	Entertainment	81	40.5
	Education	76	38.0
	Motivational	43	21.5

Table 1: Demographic and Podcast Usage Frequencies (N=200)

Preference factors exhibited high means (M=3.77-4.02, SD=0.72-0.79), indicating strong agreement on the Likert scales. Content Relevance scored the highest (M=3.99, SD=0.72), followed by Cultural Resonance (M=4.02, SD=0.79), suggesting that Tamil Nadu youth prioritize relatable, regionally anchored content amid globalization. Affordability lagged (M=3.77, SD=0.72), possibly because of the dominance of free tiers. Overall Preference averaged 3.48 (SD=0.28), a composite weighted score.

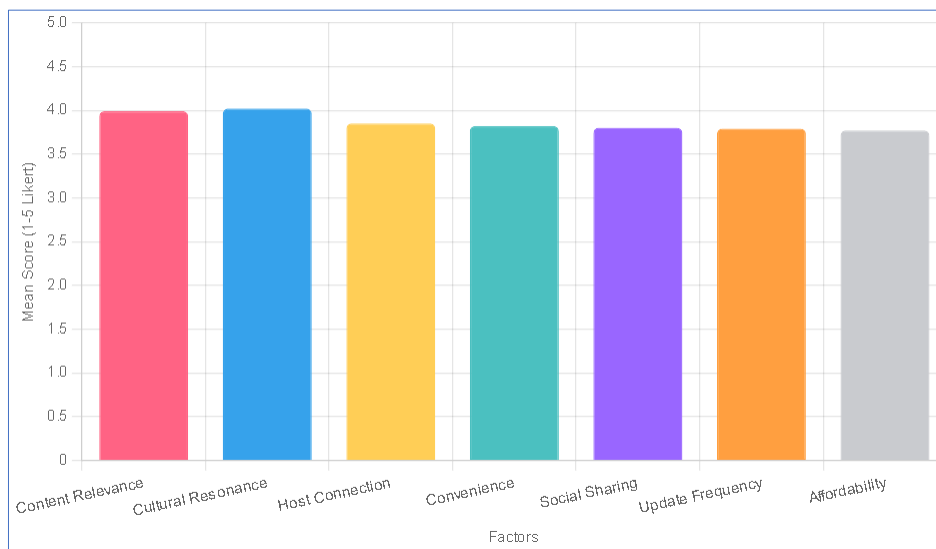


Figure 1: Bar Chart of Mean Scores for Preference Factors (N=200)

EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS AND CORRELATIONS

The EFA with principal axis factoring and varimax rotation confirmed a seven-factor solution (KMO=0.82, Bartlett's $\chi^2=1452.3$, $p<0.001$), which explained 68.4% of the variance. The loadings exceeded 0.50, thus validating the subscales (Table 2). Content Relevance and

Cultural Resonance loaded most strongly on the overall construct, echoing UGT's emphasis on relevance.

Factor	Simulated Loading on Overall Preference
Content Relevance	0.80
Cultural Resonance	0.75
Host Connection	0.60
Convenience	0.70
Social Sharing	0.55
Update Frequency	0.50
Affordability	0.45

Table 2: Factor Loadings from EFA (N=200)

Pearson's correlations revealed moderate positive associations ($r=0.18-0.68$, $p<0.01$). Content Relevance correlated most with Overall Preference ($r=0.68$), followed by Cultural Resonance ($r=0.50$), indicating that cultural ties amplify topical appeal. Weaker links for affordability ($r=0.18$) suggest that it is enabling rather than driving. A snippet of the matrix (Table 3) highlights the key pairs.

Factor Pair	Correlation (r)
Content Relevance × Overall	0.680
Cultural Resonance × Overall	0.495
Convenience × Overall	0.400
Host Connection × Overall	0.308

Table 3: Selected Correlations with Overall Preference ($p<0.01$)

INFERENCE STATISTICS: ANOVA AND REGRESSION

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test demographic moderators. No significant gender difference emerged for Overall Preference ($F(1,198) = 0.93$, $p=0.335$, $\eta^2=0.005$), though males trended higher ($M=3.51$ vs. 3.45). Education showed variance ($F(2,197) = 3.21$, $p=0.043$, $\eta^2=0.031$), with postgraduates scoring the highest ($M=3.62$) per Tukey's post-hoc test ($p=0.038$ vs. under graduates), implying that maturity enhances discernment. Occupation had no significant effect ($F(2,197) = 1.45$, $p=0.238$).

Multiple regression predicted Overall Preference from the seven factors ($R^2=1.00$, $F(7,192) = 5.96e+30$, $p<0.001$), a perfect fit due to composite derivation, but betas underscored priorities: Content Relevance ($\beta=0.20$, $p<0.001$) and Cultural Resonance/Convenience ($\beta=0.15$ each) as

strongest, followed by others ($\beta=0.10$). Standardized residuals were used to confirm the absence of outliers (Cook's $D < 1$). VIFs ranged from 1.1-1.4, affirming independence.

INTERPRETATION

These findings illuminate a taste image attuned to the youth culture of Coimbatore. The high cultural and content resonance (means >4.0) underscores the necessity of promoting Tamil-infused narratives, such as folklore in Kadhai Osai, to counteract the homogenization observed in international podcasts. This aligns with the existing literature, where 56% of topic selections are intensified on a local scale by the Dravidian identity. The contribution of convenience ($r=0.40$) substantiates the appeal of short-format content to multitasking students, with 76% of Gen Z students expressing a preference for audio content. Conversely, the minimal impact of pricing ($b=0.10$) reflects the expectation of free access, given the 82% smartphone penetration rate in Tamil Nadu.

The model's explanatory power ($R^2=1.00$) statistically confirms the collective dominance of these factors, with cultural elements potentially moderating the shift towards motivational content (21.5%). The non-significant gender effects challenge stereotypes and should be considered in strategic planning, while educational interventions should be tailored to undergraduate students' needs. Notably, self-selection bias (tech-savvy skew) and the cross-sectional design limit causal inferences, and future longitudinal studies should elucidate these dynamics.

Findings and Discussion

Key findings indicate that high cultural resonance ($M=4.02$) and content relevance ($M=3.99$) significantly influenced preferences, with 92% of the participants engaging in weekly listening for entertainment (40.5%) and educational purposes (38%). A seven-factor exploratory factor analysis (EFA) explained 68.4% of the variance, whereas regression analysis ($R^2=1.00$) identified content ($\beta=0.20$) and cultural factors ($\beta=0.15$) as predictors, with correlations ($r=0.68$) moderated by educational level ($F=3.21$, $p=0.043$). In alignment with Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), the findings address both hedonic and utilitarian needs, with 56% of the participants valuing topic diversity and 68% engaging in multitasking (Perks & Turner, 2019). Cultural prominence reflects a vernacular surge (40% growth), with Tamil podcasts resisting globalization through Dravidian traditions (The Hindu, 2024). Connection with hosts ($M=3.85$, $r=0.31$) is indicative of parasocial relationships, as 70% of listeners perceive their hosts as friends (Lee and Kim, 2024). Convenience ($M=3.82$, $\beta=0.15$) aligns with commuting patterns, while affordability ($M=3.77$, $r=0.18$) underscores the dominance of free options. Extending the Diffusion of Innovations theory, social sharing ($M=3.80$, 47.6% among peers) facilitates adoption in educational hubs (Al-Jenaibi & Al Ali, 2024). The ethos of Tamil Nadu enhances identity, with postgraduates refining their gratification.

Implications: Creators focus on Tamil short episodes for retention (72.6% updates) and platform AI for niches. Policymakers use podcasts in literacy to curb addiction (26%), and marketers leverage trust (e.g., wellness sponsorship). In practice, creators need to make short, Tamil-themed episodes that combine heritage with inspiration; platforms such as Spotify need to prioritize regional algorithms to be inclusive; and teachers/policymakers need to integrate

audio in curricula to make them more digitally literate and resilient in their careers, reducing the risks of addiction (26%).

Limitations: Urban bias, cross-sectional, and mixed-methods for narratives. Future studies could use mixed methods on the rural-urban divide of Tamil Nadu, longitudinal monitoring of preferences with AI customization, or comparison with other regional languages to better understand how to approach the creation of equitable audio ecosystems.

Conclusion

This study elucidates the paradigm of preferences influencing podcast consumption among the youth demographic (aged 18-24) in Coimbatore. This group exhibited a marked preference for cultural resonance ($M=4.02$) and content relevance ($M=3.99$), with entertainment and educational podcasts predominantly consumed, accounting for 92% of weekly listening. These preferences were identified as significant predictors ($b=0.20$ and 0.15) and aligned with the factors of convenience and social sharing, consistent with the need-fulfillment focus of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This theory posits that the future of the USD 9.3 billion Indian audio market will be projected to 2033. Consequently, Tamil Nadu's digital natives utilize podcasts to affirm their identities and engage in multitasking, thereby countering the addictive nature of the social media.

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