



Television in Transition: Content Diversification and Audience Segmentation in Post Liberalisation India

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Abstract. This paper examines the transformation of television content in India following the economic liberalisation of 1991, with particular emphasis on the diversification of programming and the emergence of segmented audiences. Drawing upon historical context and policy changes, it traces how liberalisation enabled private broadcasters to challenge state monopoly, resulting in thematic channels and targeted content strategies that reshaped viewing habits across generations. The study also explores the impact of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, which have revolutionised content consumption by offering personalised, on-demand access and encouraging niche programming. By analysing audience behaviour and media market dynamics, the paper demonstrates how capitalist reforms and digital innovation together transformed Indian television from a state-driven, generalist medium into a competitive, audience-centric landscape.

Index Terms- Social Media, Youth Behavior, Adolescent Psychology, Digital Communication, Self-Perception, Online Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

Television broadcasting in India began modestly in 1959, initially conceived as an experimental medium with limited reach. The service was introduced under the aegis of All India Radio and expanded gradually over the next decade, establishing transmission facilities in major urban centres. In its nascent years, television was primarily viewed as an educational and developmental tool, supporting state policies and national integration.

The concept of owning a television set in private households gained momentum during the 1980s, spurred by significant technological and policy developments. In 1982, the Indian government launched national telecasts, enabling programmes to be broadcast across the country rather than remaining confined to select metropolitan areas. The same year witnessed the introduction of colour television, timed to coincide with the coverage of the Asian Games hosted in New Delhi. Together, these innovations transformed television from a scarce communal resource into a desirable household commodity, ushering in what many consider the golden age of state-controlled broadcasting.

Between 1982 and 1991, Doordarshan, the state-owned broadcaster, held an unchallenged monopoly over television content. Without competition from private players, Doordarshan's programming adopted a generalist approach designed to cater to the broadest possible audience. Its content portfolio included family dramas such as Hum Log and Buniyaad, mythological series like Ramayana and Mahabharata, and popular music shows such as Chitrahaar. These programmes not only enjoyed



widespread popularity but also played a significant role in shaping national cultural narratives during this period.

However, the landscape of Indian television changed irrevocably with the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1991. Aimed at liberalising the economy and integrating India into global markets, the policy relaxed regulatory constraints and allowed private and foreign broadcasters to enter the Indian media space. This marked the beginning of a transition from a state-dominated, single-channel environment to a dynamic, multi-channel ecosystem characterised by competition and content innovation.

The entry of private broadcasters in the early 1990s brought with it significant shifts in content strategy. Channels such as Zee TV and Star Plus introduced programming that targeted specific audience segments rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all model. This strategy aligned with the imperatives of a liberalised economy, where content production and distribution were increasingly guided by market demand and advertising revenue rather than state policy alone.

In subsequent decades, technological advancements further transformed viewing habits. The proliferation of satellite television expanded access and choice, while the more recent emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms has enabled audiences to consume content on demand, often via mobile devices. This shift has accelerated the fragmentation of audiences and reinforced the move towards personalised content delivery.

This paper seeks to analyse the historical evolution of television content in post-liberalisation India, the diversification of programming driven by market segmentation, and the profound impact of digital disruption. By situating these developments within the broader socio-economic context, it aims to offer an integrated perspective on how economic reforms and technological innovation have collectively reshaped Indian television.

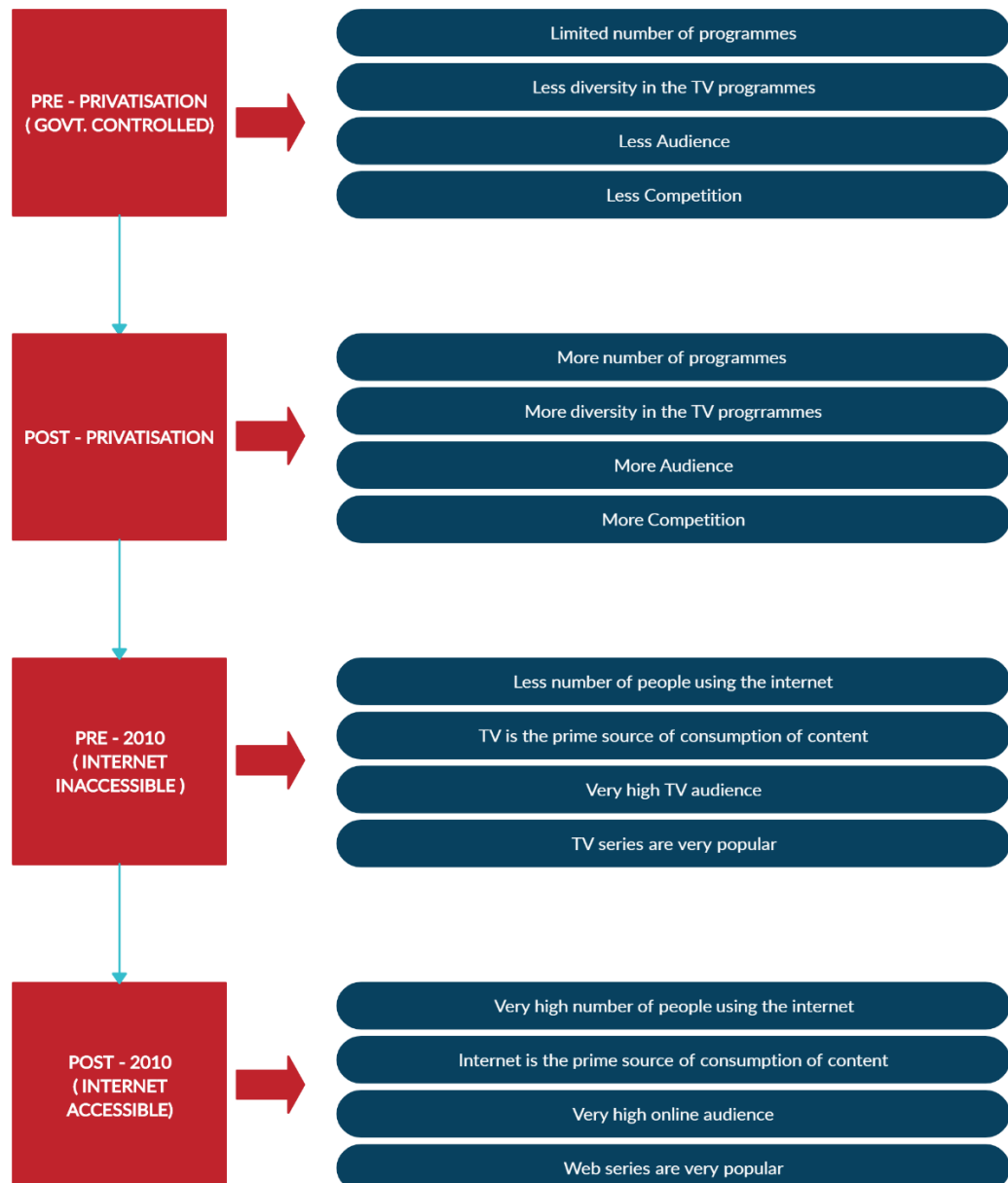
II. OBJECTIVES

- The objectives of this paper are as follows:
- To examine audience behaviour across different generations in the context of evolving media consumption habits.
- To analyse the transformation of television content in India following the economic liberalisation of 1991.
- To explore the shift in viewing patterns from traditional broadcast television to digital and Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms.



- To understand how content strategies have adapted to cater to increasingly segmented and niche audiences.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK





IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The advent of visual media worldwide generated both enthusiasm and scepticism among scholars and the public alike. Early proponents regarded television as a powerful instrument of social change. Morley (2006), in *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, observes that many families embraced television not merely as entertainment but as a means of learning and remaining informed about national and global affairs. In the Indian context, when television first appeared in urban markets, it was largely a luxury item affordable only to the affluent. Nevertheless, even those without direct access attributed significant cultural value to the medium, perceiving it as a modern asset capable of influencing daily life and worldview.

Conversely, a substantial body of critical scholarship questioned television's role within society. Kellner (1990), in *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, synthesises radical critiques that conceptualise television as part of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser), a 'mind manager' (Schiller), the cultural arm of the industrial social order (Gerbner), and as a propaganda tool that manufactures consent (Herman & Chomsky). This perspective posits television not as a neutral medium but as an instrument reinforcing existing power structures and capitalist interests.

Within India, television's initial phase was characterised by strict state control. As Mehta (2008) notes in *India on Television: How Satellite TV Has Changed the Way We Think and Act*, Doordarshan maintained a statist approach, with programming intended to serve developmental goals and promote cultural nationalism. Content diversity was limited, and the state determined the ideological boundaries within which television operated.

The introduction of satellite television in the 1990s, following economic liberalisation, marked a significant departure from this model. Audiences were, for the first time, exposed to global cultures, English-language films, music, and varied entertainment formats. This exposure broadened cultural horizons and redefined the notion of community, as viewers began to identify beyond linguistic or regional lines. Lull (1980), in his work on interpretive communities, suggests that shared media consumption creates flexible social groupings shaped by common media experiences rather than traditional markers of identity.

Technological advancements continued to reshape content consumption into the new millennium. While Berners-Lee introduced the World Wide Web in 1990, widespread internet adoption in India took nearly two decades. The emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms brought about a transformative shift from scheduled television programming to on-demand digital content. India's first significant OTT platform, BigFlix by Reliance, set the stage for later international entrants such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, both of which launched in India in 2016.

This digital transition coincided with a dramatic rise in internet users, growing from approximately 260 million in 2015 to over 565 million in 2020, an increase of more than 100 per cent. The proliferation of affordable smartphones and data plans



accelerated this trend, reshaping media consumption habits, particularly among younger demographics. OTT services, leveraging algorithm-driven recommendations and subscription models, have further deepened audience segmentation and encouraged the creation of niche, original content catering to diverse tastes.

The reviewed literature thus illustrates a historical trajectory from optimism about television's educational potential, through critiques of its ideological function, to its commercialisation and digital transformation. These shifts are deeply intertwined with broader economic reforms and technological developments, which together have redefined the relationship between content producers and audiences in India.

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is confined to the analysis of Indian visual content and audience behaviour from the period following the economic liberalisation of 1991 onwards. The research encompasses television broadcasting as well as digital and Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, with a view to understanding shifts in content strategies and consumption patterns over time.

To ensure balanced and representative insights, data have been collected from respondents across different regions of India, encompassing a variety of cities and ethnic backgrounds. The study deliberately includes participants from a wide age range, starting from 18 years to over 50 years of age, to capture generational differences in viewing habits and attitudes towards content. This diversity allows the research to explore how historical, cultural and technological factors influence content preferences across demographic segments.

In designing the scope, no discrimination has been applied to participant opinions; each viewpoint has been considered equally valuable in forming an integrated understanding of audience segmentation and content evolution. By focusing on post-liberalisation trends and by including a cross-section of Indian society, the study aims to present a comprehensive perspective on how the transformation of the media landscape has affected different audience groups.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given that this study focuses on examining audience behaviour and identifying patterns within a defined population, it adopts a descriptive research design. To gather empirical data, the survey method was employed, making use of both online and offline approaches to ensure inclusivity and breadth of response.

A structured questionnaire was developed to investigate differences in content consumption habits among diverse demographic groups. The questionnaire was designed in accessible language to enable participation from individuals with varying levels of educational background and technological familiarity. For online respondents, the survey was distributed via Google Forms and circulated through popular social



media platforms such as WhatsApp, Gmail, and Facebook Messenger. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey link within their own networks, thereby expanding the reach and improving response rates.

In total, responses were collected from 100 participants, representing a broad cross-section of Indian society. The sample includes individuals aged 18 and above, from different cities and cultural backgrounds, to capture generational and regional variations in viewing behaviour. For participants without regular internet access, face-to-face interviews were conducted using the same set of questions, and their responses were manually recorded to ensure their perspectives were equally represented.

The data gathered through this mixed-method approach has provided the basis for analysing trends in audience segmentation and content preferences. By combining online dissemination with direct interviews, the methodology aims to reduce sampling bias and present a more comprehensive understanding of evolving media consumption patterns in post-liberalisation India.

VII. HYPOTHESES

- Individuals aged above 30 are more likely to watch traditional television than those below 30.
- Individuals under the age of 30 prefer to watch films on Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms rather than on television channels or in cinema halls.
- Respondents below 30 years of age show a greater preference for consuming content in English.
- Respondents aged above 30 display a stronger inclination towards consuming content in Hindi.
- Individuals under the age of 30 are more likely to be aware of foreign-language films and associated cultural contexts.
- Respondents below 30 are less likely to have viewed popular Indian television content broadcast on traditional channels.
- Individuals aged above 30 are less likely to have watched popular English-language television content.
- Respondents under 30 are more inclined to use modern technologies and digital platforms for content consumption.

VIII. OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH

Age

100 responses

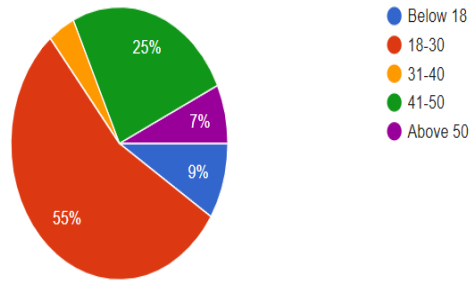


Figure. 1.1

Gender

100 responses

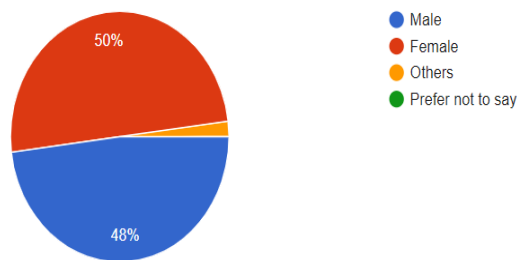


Figure. 1.2

Figure 1.1 illustrates the age distribution of respondents who participated in the survey. The sample successfully captured a wide age range, including individuals younger than 18 as well as those above the age of 50. This diversity was intentional, enabling the study to examine whether viewing patterns and content preferences vary significantly across different age groups.

The largest proportion of respondents (55) belonged to the 18–30 age group, reflecting the demographic that is often most engaged with digital content and OTT platforms. This was followed by 25 respondents aged between 41–50, a group likely to have experienced both the era of state-controlled broadcasting and the growth of private channels. Participants younger than 18 accounted for 9 responses, while 7 respondents were aged over 50. The smallest segment comprised 4 respondents from the 31–40 age group. This varied distribution offers a meaningful basis to compare generational differences in media consumption.



Figure 1.2 depicts the gender composition of the survey participants. Among the total respondents, 50 identified as female and 48 as male, demonstrating near parity in representation. Additionally, 2 respondents chose not to identify within the binary categories of male or female. This balanced gender representation strengthens the reliability of the findings by ensuring that the analysis reflects perspectives across different genders.

Together, these demographic insights form the foundation for analysing patterns in content preferences, language choices, and the adoption of new technologies, as explored in subsequent sections of this paper.

How many hours do you watch T.V. in a day? (approx)

100 responses

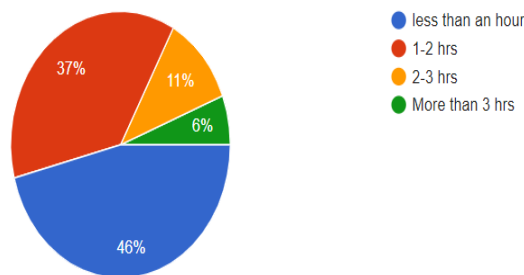


Fig 1.3

If you were to watch a movie, what would be your most preferred option?

100 responses

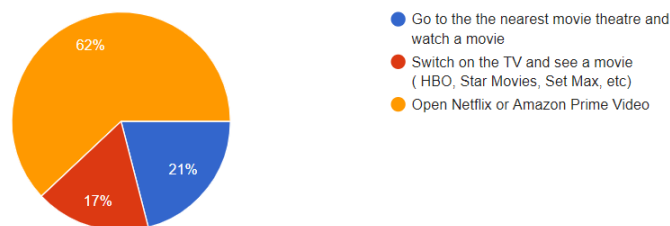


Fig. 1.4

Figure 1.3 presents data on the average time respondents spend watching television each day. The largest segment, comprising 46 respondents, reported watching television for less than one hour daily. This was followed by 37 respondents who watched television for one to two hours, 11 respondents for two to three hours, and a



small group of 6 respondents who watched for more than three hours per day.

A closer analysis of the demographic data indicates that the majority of individuals who watched television for less than two hours daily were under the age of 30. Conversely, among those who watched for more than two hours a day, the majority were aged above 30. This generational divide suggests that younger viewers tend to spend less time on traditional television, aligning with broader shifts towards digital and on-demand content. These findings support the first hypothesis, which posited that individuals above the age of 30 are more likely to watch traditional television compared to younger respondents.

Figure 1.4 illustrates respondents' preferred medium for watching films. The majority, numbering 67, indicated a preference for Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. This was followed by 21 respondents who preferred attending cinema theatres and 17 who chose to watch films on broadcast television channels.

Further demographic analysis reveals that among those who favoured OTT platforms, the majority were under the age of 30. In contrast, respondents aged above 30 were more represented among those who preferred cinema halls or traditional television channels for film viewing. This pattern aligns with global trends where younger demographics show a marked preference for digital and on-demand media consumption. These results lend empirical support to the second hypothesis: that individuals under 30 are more inclined to watch films on OTT platforms rather than via traditional media or cinema halls.

By connecting viewing duration and platform preference to age, the analysis underscores the significance of generational differences in shaping contemporary content consumption habits. Younger viewers demonstrate a clear shift away from linear television in favour of flexible, personalised media, while older audiences remain more consistent in their engagement with traditional broadcast content.

Do you watch daily soaps/ TV series?

100 responses

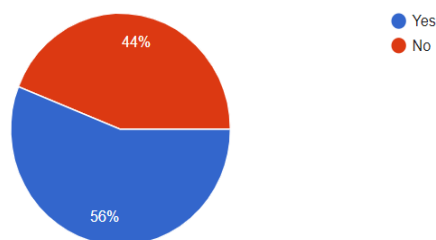


Fig. 1.5

What kind of daily soaps / TV shows do you watch?

100 responses

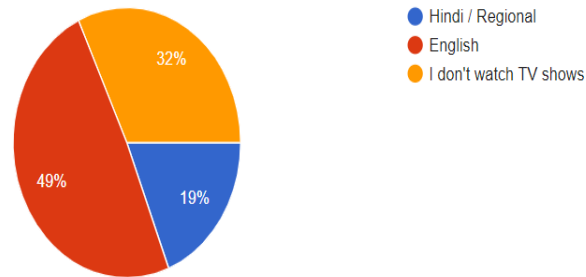


Figure. 1.6

Figure 1.5 illustrates the proportion of respondents who watch television series or daily soaps on any platform. The data show that over half of the participants (56) reported regularly viewing such content, indicating that serialised programming remains a significant part of media consumption, even as formats and platforms diversify.

Figure 1.6 depicts the preferred language of television series and daily soaps consumed by respondents. The largest group, comprising 49 participants, indicated a preference for English-language content. This was followed by 32 respondents who reported that they do not watch television series of any kind, and 19 who preferred watching Hindi-language serials.

An analysis of demographic patterns reveals that among those who favour English television series, the majority are under the age of 30. In contrast, respondents aged above 30 are more prominently represented among those who prefer Hindi-language programming. These findings suggest a generational divergence in language preference: younger viewers display a stronger inclination towards English-language content, which may reflect broader cultural exposure and the influence of global media. Older viewers, meanwhile, tend to maintain a preference for Hindi serials, which are often rooted in familiar cultural contexts and traditional narrative styles.

These observations empirically support the third and fourth hypotheses, which proposed that respondents below the age of 30 are more likely to consume content in English, whereas those above 30 are more inclined to consume content in Hindi. The results highlight how language preference functions as an additional layer of audience segmentation in contemporary Indian media consumption.



Have you heard of K-pop and K-drama?

100 responses

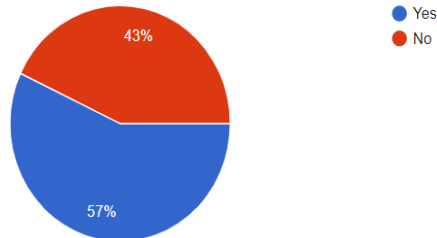


Figure. 1.7

Have you watched the Korean movie - Parasite?

100 responses

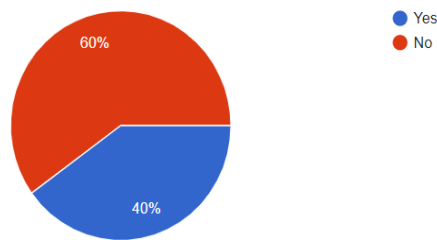


Figure. 1.8

Figure 1.7 illustrates respondents' awareness of K-pop (Korean pop music) and K-dramas (Korean television series). These cultural products are typically consumed by audiences who engage with foreign-language media. The data show that just over half of the respondents (57) reported being aware of K-pop and K-dramas, while the remaining 43 participants indicated they had neither heard of nor watched such content.

Further demographic analysis reveals that among those familiar with K-pop and K-dramas, the majority were under the age of 30. In contrast, respondents above the age of 30 constituted most of those who were unaware of this cultural phenomenon. This pattern highlights generational differences in global cultural exposure, with younger audiences demonstrating greater openness to foreign-language entertainment.

Figure 1.8 presents data regarding the Academy Award-winning Korean-language film Parasite. Out of the total respondents, 40 reported having watched the film, while 60 had not. A closer examination shows that among those who had seen the film, the majority were under 30 years of age. Conversely, those who had not watched it were predominantly aged above 30. This further reinforces the trend that younger viewers are more likely to explore foreign-language content compared to older demographics.



These findings support the fifth hypothesis, which proposed that individuals under the age of 30 are more likely to be aware of and engage with foreign-language films and cultural content. This trend may reflect broader patterns of cultural globalisation, increased digital access, and the influence of global media trends on younger audiences in India.

This can be further analysed from the graph below.

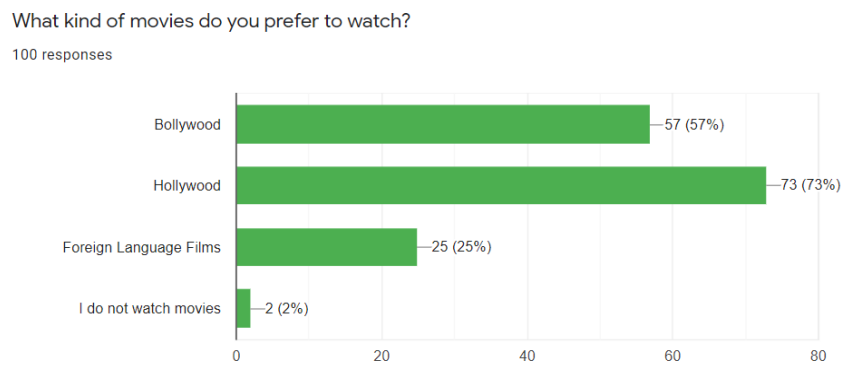


Figure. 1.9

Figure 1.9 illustrates respondents' preferred type of film content. According to the horizontal bar chart, the largest number of participants (73) reported a preference for Hollywood films. This was followed by 57 respondents who favoured Bollywood films, and 25 who preferred foreign-language films outside English and Hindi.

Demographic analysis indicates that the majority of respondents who preferred Hollywood films and foreign-language cinema were under the age of 30. This pattern suggests that younger viewers demonstrate a broader engagement with global media content beyond domestic productions. In contrast, among those who favoured Bollywood films, a larger proportion were aged above 30, reflecting a stronger inclination towards local and culturally familiar narratives.

These findings further support the broader observation of generational divergence in content preferences: younger audiences show a pronounced tendency towards international and foreign-language media, while older audiences remain more aligned with traditional Indian film industries.

Select the shows that you have watched - Part 1

100 responses

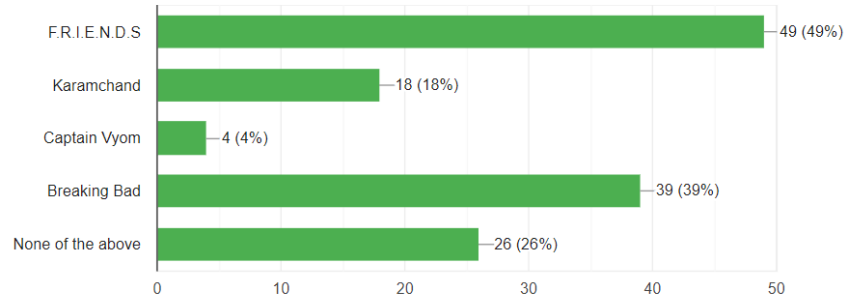


Figure. 1.10

Select the shows that you have watched - Part 2

100 responses

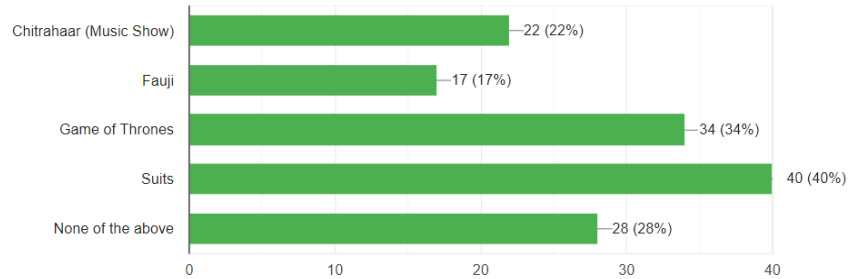


Figure 1.11

Figures 1.8 and 1.9 present data on the popularity of selected television series in both English and Hindi. Survey participants were provided with a list of widely recognised shows and asked to indicate which ones they had watched.

Among the English-language shows, F.R.I.E.N.D.S emerged as the most watched, with 49 respondents reporting having viewed it. This was followed by Suits (40), Breaking Bad (39), and Game of Thrones (34). In contrast, Hindi-language programmes such as Chitrahaar (22), Karamchand (18), Fauji (17), and Captain Vyom (4) received comparatively fewer responses.

Demographic analysis reveals that the majority of those who had watched the English-language series were under the age of 30. Conversely, among respondents who reported having watched the Hindi-language shows, most were aged above 30. This pattern highlights a clear generational divergence in content exposure and preferences: younger viewers are more engaged with internationally popular English-language programming, whereas older viewers tend to have greater familiarity with classic Hindi-language shows that were prominent in earlier decades.

These findings lend support to the sixth and seventh hypotheses: that individuals under 30 are less likely to have watched popular Indian television content, and that those above 30 are less likely to have watched widely known English-language series. This reinforces the broader observation of age-driven segmentation in media consumption habits.

This can be further analysed from the pie chart below.

If you had to choose one artist from the following, whom would you choose?

100 responses

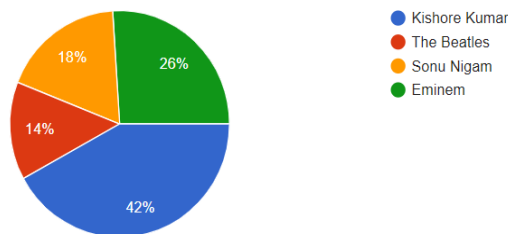


Figure. 1.12

Figure 1.12 presents data on the musical preferences of survey participants. According to the pie chart, the largest group selected Kishore Kumar as their favourite artist (42 respondents). This was followed by Eminem (26), Sonu Nigam (18), and The Beatles (14).

Demographic analysis reveals that the majority of those who chose Kishore Kumar and Sonu Nigam were above the age of 30. In contrast, respondents under the age of 30 were more represented among those who selected Eminem and The Beatles as their preferred artists. Notably, although The Beatles' peak era pre-dates the birth of younger respondents, it is younger audiences who appear more familiar with and appreciative of their music. This suggests that exposure to global music culture, facilitated by digital platforms and globalised media, has had a stronger influence on younger demographics.

These findings provide additional support to the sixth and seventh hypotheses: that respondents under 30 are less likely to have engaged deeply with older, popular Indian content and more inclined towards international cultural icons, whereas those above 30 show stronger alignment with traditional Indian artists. This pattern further illustrates how generational differences, combined with broader access to foreign media, shape contemporary cultural preferences.



Do you watch TV shows while travelling on your phone?

100 responses

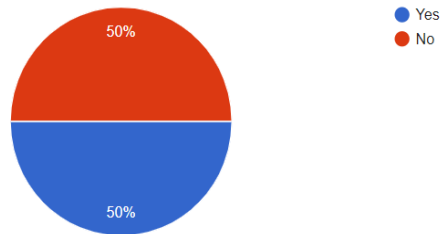


Figure. 1.13

Which of the following methods do you use to keep updated with news every day?

100 responses

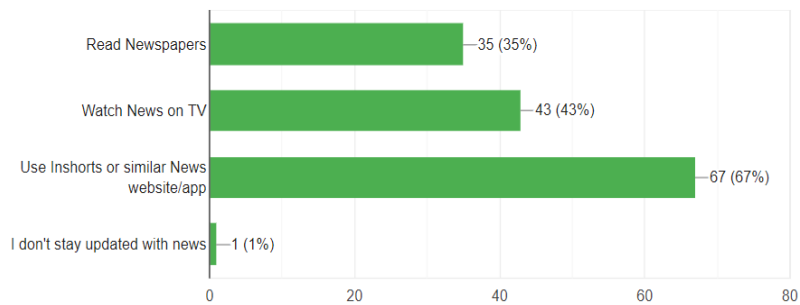


Figure. 1.14

Figure 1.13 presents data on the use of modern technology for content consumption while commuting. According to the pie chart, half of the respondents reported watching or listening to content on their mobile phones during travel, while the remaining half did not engage in such behaviour.

Demographic analysis shows that among those who consumed content while commuting, the majority were under the age of 30. Conversely, respondents who did not watch or listen to content during travel were predominantly aged above 30. This indicates that younger audiences are more comfortable integrating digital media consumption into daily routines, reflecting broader trends in mobile and on-the-go content usage.

Figure 1.14 explores the platforms respondents use to stay updated with news, allowing participants to select multiple options. The horizontal bar chart shows that the largest group (67) relied on mobile applications such as Inshorts and similar digital



news aggregators. This was followed by 43 respondents who preferred watching news on television and 35 who continued to rely on newspapers for daily updates.

Further analysis reveals that the majority of those who favoured mobile apps and online news sources were under 30 years of age. In contrast, respondents above the age of 30 were more inclined to follow news through traditional media, including television broadcasts and print newspapers. This pattern demonstrates generational differences in media habits, where younger audiences prioritise convenience, immediacy and digital formats, while older audiences maintain engagement with established, legacy platforms.

These findings support the eighth and final hypothesis: that individuals under the age of 30 are more likely to use modern technologies and digital tools to consume content, whereas those above 30 show a stronger preference for traditional media. Collectively, these results highlight how age continues to be a significant factor in shaping both the mode and medium of content consumption in contemporary India.

IX. CONCLUSION

This research has provided valuable insights into the evolution of television content in India and the shifting patterns of audience behaviour across generations. Prior to 1991, Indian audiences had access to only a single, state-controlled broadcaster, Doordarshan, which offered a limited selection of programmes focused largely on cultural preservation, national integration and educational goals. The absence of competition meant that content was generalist, designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience without segmentation.

The economic liberalisation of 1991 marked a turning point that transformed the Indian television landscape. The entry of private broadcasters introduced competition, which in turn encouraged content diversification and higher production standards. Indian viewers were exposed to a wider range of programming, including global formats and genres previously unavailable on domestic television. This period also witnessed the adaptation of international formats into Indian contexts, giving rise to popular shows such as Indian Idol, India's Got Talent, and Bigg Boss. Such programmes reflected the blending of global influences with local tastes, reshaping cultural norms and expectations.

The research findings highlight clear generational differences in content preferences and consumption habits. Respondents above the age of 30, who grew up during the era dominated by Hindi-language serials and cultural programming such as Buniyaad, Karamchand, and Chitrahaar, tend to maintain a stronger connection to content rooted in Indian traditions and languages. By contrast, younger audiences, raised in a liberalised and globalised media environment, show a marked preference for English-language series like F.R.I.E.N.D.S, Breaking Bad, and Suits. These choices illustrate the broader influence of Western media and the increasing cultural openness fostered by globalisation.



Technological advances have further accelerated this transformation. The rise of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video has made content consumption more immediate, personalised and mobile. Viewers are no longer constrained by broadcast schedules and can access a vast library of global and local content on demand. As a result, the traditional barriers between national and international content have become increasingly blurred. Today, an average viewer in India has access to the same range of films and series as audiences in the United States or Europe, reflecting the truly global nature of contemporary media consumption.

Overall, this study demonstrates how the interplay of economic policy, technological innovation and cultural exchange has redefined the production, distribution and consumption of television content in India. The findings underscore the importance of audience segmentation in shaping content strategies and highlight how younger generations, in particular, are driving demand for diverse, globalised and digitally accessible media. This evolution points to a media landscape that is not only more competitive and dynamic but also more reflective of the varied tastes and identities of its audiences.

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