

A study of Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Fantasy in the Soap Operas of New Era Indian Television

Apoorva Shrivastava¹,
Sudhir Kumar²

¹Apoorva Shrivastava¹Amity School of Communication, Amity University, Jharkhand

²Sudhir Kumar, Amity School of Communication, Amity University, Jharkhand

¹shrivastavaapoorva7@gmail.com

²sk.ascoamity.rnc@gmail.com

Abstract— With the entry of the black and white T.V in India (1957), it brings the expectations and opportunities to now see what we used to listen to on the radio. Slowly and gradually new programs were added and then, new channels. From farmers to Businessmen now have programs serving their needs. And then daily soaps were introduced, starting from Hum Log (1984) to present-day shows. But these shows have some twists or add-ons which we call Fantasy. “‘Fantasy is a pleasant situation or event that you think about- Collins Dictionary’”. It was quite interesting at the beginning with shows like Karishma ka Karishma, Shararat, fear files, aap beeti, etc., but then the daily soaps included this separate genre in their scripts, creating unrealistic and senseless scenes and stories. The need for fantasy and sorcery in soap operas is relevant to what extent is only the first part of the research paper. Some shows serve original and informative content but are suffering avoidance. Thus the researcher in the second part of the paper discusses shows that set some good examples and are best of imaginative creations. But why are such shows made which have no relevance and are completely baseless? And why are we still watching such shows? The researcher in the latter part describes the responsibilities of the soap operas and the perspective of viewers through a survey report. Following the same, the researcher would try to know how these fiction shows immersed in fantasy are going to bring a new era in Indian Television.

Keywords— Fantasy, Fiction, Daily soaps, New Era, Indian Television

1.INTRODUCTION

As Fantasy and supernatural dramas grow on Indian Television, it has been a long time since a good, engrossing, entertaining series has been telecast. The shows continue to get TRPs and the participants receive acknowledgment and awards. But in general, the audience can sense a void and nostalgically look back and reminiscence about the shows of the past. If we take a recent example, Ramayan was re-aired by Doordarshan. And this popular Ramanand Sagar’s serial went on to become the world’s most-watched show with 7.7 crore viewers. It has to be borne in mind that this was the show’s second innings.

The daily soaps are hurriedly floated with lavish sets, beautiful female characters, and a sprinkling of entertainment, love triangles, and loads of family drama. Shows showcasing magic, sorcery, and witchcraft have made their entry in the recent past and are struggling to grab the viewer’s attention. As fantasy and supernatural dramas grow on Indian television, it has been a long time since any good shows coming up. Despite being some of the highest-rated shows on TV, today's shows lack the spark and quality that older shows had. A few of these shows are also in talks for remakes and would be big hits in today's time as well.

The daily soaps that provide some knowledgeable content and shows having entertaining concepts are the ones to be promoted:

Fiction has been a popular genre on Indian television. From the era of a single national broadcaster to the time when a plethora of General Entertainment Channels (GECs) has crowded the Indian telescreen, fictional programming has seen an exponential ascent. TV serials have become one of the most popular offerings. In the age when narrowcasting seems to be taking broadcasting head-on, the genre of television serials, however, seems unperturbed. TV serials have also weaved socio-cultural patterns through their content. The content of Indian television soaps has seen an evolution of sorts. They have made vociferous cultural representations in the process. (Jaggi 2011)

The issue now arises with the overcrowding of programs related to magic, sorcery, and witchcraft that certainly does not provide any of the following but still, several other shows are having either of these or

both. Through this research, the researcher tried to make people understand what people should be choosing and abandoning fulfilling their desires.

The concept is dealt with deeply by the researcher and an attempt has been made to understand the roles that daily soaps play their importance and their influence on the viewer's mind. In the next part of the paper, some examples are ideal and serve content that is informative and inspires the audience. And the researcher in the latter part would try to understand why the television promoting unrealistic events like witch-craft, sorcery, and fantasy is flourishing, the responsibilities these daily soaps have. And finally, introducing fantasy into these shows brought a new era in Indian Television.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE THAT DAILY SOAPS

With the rapid growth of television networks, viewership has increased manifold. As serials started to broadcast, it engaged more and more audience to it. Introducing new themes from, love, life, family drama to saas-bahu shows. And programs like Ramayana and Mahabharata brought a new era in the television. It all became an important part of our lives and we began to worship the characters like actual Rama, Laxman, Sita, and Krishna. These shows knew the essence of Indian culture, customs, and traditions. They portray real-life struggles, inspirations, and beliefs. They also highlight different issues and taboos in our society and raise questions about the same. However, most of these daily soaps revolve around the complexities of society, love, marriage, and life. These serials impact our minds deeply, what we see is what we do. These shows presented women as ideal or villain creating a stereotype. The plots of the daily soaps have one thing in common, the Saas-Bahu drama where the mother-in-law of the new bride puts all her efforts to create troubles and cause her harm. The shows like- *Buniyaad*, *Humlog*, *Shanti*, *Tara* are among the popular shows of the 90s. These dailies portrayed real-life struggles, achievements, and failures. And those shows introduced women of the modern-day, who are independent and take the decision on her self, that could take care of herself despite all odds. And which injured the mindset of patriarchal society.

But recently, Indian Television has been promoting daily soaps like *Sasural Simar Ka* which was a witchcraft program. The program includes supernatural powers, alien characters, animals, insects, etc. The program initially started on some another concept but then it shifted and forgotten the complete script. Even after that, the surprising part about the show was it had a huge TRP.

It is still not known what the reason that people were watching the show was. The main character of the show Simar became an insect-housefly. Later in the show, several scripts changed and the new illogical, insensible, meaningless script was added. The program was a great hit at a time but slowly and gradually after the script was changed completely the show was requested by the audience to go off the air. The program went on Air for nearly 6 to 7 years and after that, it went off. But that was not a full stop to the story. It let start several other shows and daily soaps related to fantasy witchcraft and sorcery to telecast in Indian television. Any program related to fantasy is not at all a problem but the content should serve its audience some message as well, the content is required to have some proper explanation. But nowadays the directors of even the Saas bahu daily soap shifted their stories and concepts to this genre. They tend to include in whichever part they feel like. Recently Zee TV premiered a TV Series named "Aghori" which is recognized to belong to the Thriller Genre (IMDb).Gaurav Chopra on being asked the reason behind floating a serial on Aghoris defended himself:

It seems like that but to be honest, the show is more in the space of a Marvel franchise. Thor's character has superpowers and then he is humanized and sent to earth, where he falls in love with a girl. We don't question that so why are we putting Aghori in the regressive box? This is also on similar lines. We are not showing black magic or chudail in the show. (Web)

Another TV show, 'Haiwan- The Monster' in zee TV is a sci-fi thriller and falls in fantasy genre where they have a monster or a superhuman ready to destroy everything for the feeling of betrayal by his best friend

in the story for love. Bramhrakshas: Jaag Utha Shaitan has an IMDb rating of 4.7/10 and comes under the horror genre. The supernatural show started on a good note with good ratings but has not been faring well in its last couple of months. Under the genre Romance, horror fiction falls a daily soap- Laal Ishq telecasted in &tv.

'Super Cops vs. Super-Villains' was an Indian detective television anthology series on Life OK channel. As the name implies, the show was a battle between Super Cops and Super-Villains'. To present the theme well, the production company shot the serials in Maharashtra, especially Mumbai. Mumbai is known for its cops and as well for under-ground dons. How does then cop arrest them and help the citizens? To tap the under-ground villains, the actors who played super-cops character were trained under martial arts and given a thorough professional training. The program had all unrealistic monsters including the Dinosaur. The program ended in the year 2017.

It was Ekta Kapoor, who made a serial *Naagin* that became a big hit on colors tv. The Indian Audience watched Sri Devi in and as *Nagina*, a Bollywood film back in the year 1986. The film when released gained success grossing ₹13 crores at the box office. A sequel to the film was released; *Nigahen: Nagina Part II* (1989), which made the former the first Indian movie ever to have a sequel. Ekta Kapoor with Balaji Telefilms made two more sequels to *Naagin*. Ekta Kapoor confessed that she enjoyed creating content for audiences of different demography:

I think we have to celebrate every form of art and storytelling. Whether you like it or not, both kinds of stories are art, and it has a different impact on different people. For the mass audience, television is an escape and for others, a love story like "Broken But Beautiful" is a connection. For still others, watching "Game of Thrones" is about living out the gladiator in you,"(Web)

THE PROGRAMS THAT SET GOOD EXAMPLES

The 90s kid had watched programs like Son Pari which was the story of a girl named Fruity who was troubled with a lot of life problems. She acquires a gem that summons Son Pari and her friend Altu who help her with her problems. Their journey is not restricted to earth as many times, Fruity is pulled into the magic realm. Karishma ka Karishma, another show where a small robot girl is made by a scientist and the adventurous story that revolves around the family. Hatim, this was the first time an Indian show was based during the Middle Ages. Set in the Gulf, Hatim had to solve seven questions to defeat the evil magician Lord Dajjal. His quest for the answers used to take him on a lot of magical adventures across different parts of the world. *Shararat*, the show was a perfect balance of fantasy and comedy and amazed the audience with its situational comedy, *Shaka Laka boom boom*, this show was a completely new concept back in the day. Whatever Sanju sketched with his magic pencil would turn into reality and many times lead to big problems. The show also collaborated with Son Pari a few times where Sanju and Fruity had to face bad guys together. *Hero-Bhakti Hi Shakti Hai*: Back in the day, there was a time when a lot of children started praying to Goddess Durga to give them the powers that she gave to Joy. *Hero- Bhakti Hi Shakti Hai* told the story of Joy who was held back in school for many many years because his mental state didn't permit his school to promote him.

With his devotion towards Goddess Durga, Joy attained superpowers and a new identity. This series spent a lot of time on character designs and plot points. It is one of the best projects India has put out in the Superhero genre. Vikraal and Gabral are one of the most iconic duos of Indian TV. The story revolved around the duo that caught and defeated all sorts of ghosts and demons. What we loved about the series is the artistic creativity that the makers put in on the show back in the day, Shaktimaan is considered as the original Indian superhero. His transition from Gangadhar to Shaktimaan is what we Indians can never forget. The show was ahead of its time and informative. This made the show one of the most influential shows of that era. Those programs were fascinating and also had a concept and story. Though those programs were also related

to sorcery and witchcraft they managed to entertain their audience and interest them to watch more and more.

Even programs like Balveer that was premiered in 2012 used to be very entertaining. Good shows will attract audiences, whatever the genre. If soap is real and honest as most shows are when they start then people relate to the characters. Good soap has to make people cry with it, a comedy has to make them laugh and a reality show has to provide those edge-of-the-seat thrills. Whatever happens to the soap, there is no denying it has changed Indian television forever. If a story begins with a girl wishing to become a doctor, does that mean that she will never get married and will never have a saas? Marriage is a natural progression of things in a girl's life and the same is simply depicted in soaps, so why is this progression (marriage and Saas-Bahu drama) looked upon as a 'change of zone'?

In 1984, the country's first soap, Hum Log, dealt with the trials and tribulations of a North Indian lower-middle-class family. Then it was the turn of Buniyaad and Nukkad to capture the imagination of middle-class India. But times change, and a generation that had learned the meaning of disposable incomes started looking for something new. Enter the K serials, which raised the bar for production values and introduced catchy title songs and the opening montage. They brought in inspirational lifestyles, stylized sets, and an upmarket look that hadn't been seen before on TV.

As for audience fatigue with saas-bahus sagas, channels are trying to ensure that they don't dish out the same old stuff. Many are adding teenage characters and plot lines that appeal to Gen Y. s Radha Ki Betiyaan Kuch Kar Dikhayengi, for instance, tracks the story of three young girls from Meerut to Mumbai. It is a simple story about stuff like jobs and ambitions rather than marriage and divorce. What is more, the characters are playing their age; not a 19-year-old playing for a mother of two, says Kejriwal about the soap, which has been climbing the popularity charts. Other soaps with good TAM ratings are Balika Vadhu on Colors and Bidaai on Star Plus.

Kyunki was a show that made history. Everything that came after it was a clone. Kyunki was also, arguably, the defining point of change for Indian television, making stars of small screen actors. Till then, Bollywood was everything. But this show gave a small screen the recognition it deserved. But the K serials had their critics, who slammed the way they portrayed women. Particularly because they were undeniably influential. In a 2007 study, Robert Jensen of Brown University and Emily Oster of the University of Chicago found that soaps had a profoundly positive effect on rural Indian women. Tracking women in 2,700 households in Bihar, Goa, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Delhi from 2001 to 2003, the researchers found that their attitude to decision-making (shopping, health and whom to visit), abuse and preference for male children had changed substantially in villages that had cable TV.

As soon as Television made its entry in India, soap operas followed too. The shows from those times, like 'Hum Log' and 'Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi', won the hearts of all the viewers. Be it the naivety of people and zest for seeing colored television for the first time or the impeccable performance of the cast, these TV shows won accolades and became the benchmark for upcoming television serials. TV serials, like Malgudi Days, Dekh Bhai Dekh, Shrimanji Shrimatiji, Office Office, and Yes Boss are forever engraved in hearts. But as time passed the quality of TV shows only degraded, confining stories to saas-bahu melodrama, in which the mother-in-law always hates her bahu and gets the support of another vamp and the innocent bahu tolerates all evils and wins their hearts in the end! 'Tu Tu Main Main' was a show that was an exception! Repetitive stories or shall we say 'no story at all' has only reduced the interest of people in watching Indian Television shows. But even today some shows are raising the bar of Indian Television and will rivet the audience interest. These are some mind-blowing shows with new stories that will make everyone fall in love with Indian Television all over again.

Stories by Rabindranath Tagore. This show was launched on July 6, 2015, on the 'Epic' channel. This show covers different novels and short stories written by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. Directed by Anurag Basu and characters portrayed by talented actors like Radhika Apte, Amrita Puri, Sumeet Vyas, and many more. This show is a better translation of Tagore's works. Sarabhai vs. Sarabhai, Sarabhai vs. Sarabhai

transformed the way one receives the comedy series earlier. This show first aired in 2004 and enjoyed a 2-year-long run. It alleviated the low expectations of comedy to a high-class comedy. The story revolves around an upper-class family, their daily hum-drum. The 2nd season of this show, Sarabhai vs. Sarabhai: Take 2 made a comeback in 2017 as a web series. Devlok with Devdutt Patnaik, Based on Indian mythology, and this show takes viewers on a journey of exploration of age-old life. In this show 'Devlok', Devdutt Patnaik debunks myths, folklore, fiction, non-fiction, and traditions that are related to the Indian mythology. The best part of this show is Devdutt Patnaik's manner of conversation, which helps a layman understand those unfathomable texts. The TV show 'Chandrashekhar' is based on the early life of the brave freedom fighter of India, Chandrashekar Azad. Along with the details and information on revolutionary activities of him in the books of History, the show gives an understanding of their life from the beginning—their childhood stories, demeanor, and their thought process.

3. SOAP OPERAS AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITY

So far in this research, many previous and present time shows have been discussed and now it turns to talk about their duty. Rightly said by Uncle Ben from the fictional movie- Spider-Man- With great power comes great responsibilities. Television has the power to influence and shape the thinking of the people. It's the responsibility of the directors and scriptwriters about what they show to their audience. It would be nice to see something more relatable, a picture closer to reality, and more realistic roles. In daily soaps, everything is not negative as there are some positive aspects also which can even help you in some way. While watching a show, if we learn good things and values from our favorite characters and bring change in our life it is something really good. But imitating the stunts without any supervision can lead to injuries and is not suggested at all. As there are some motivational shows and informative shows also which helps a lot in understanding the reality of life and such shows sometimes encourage the people a lot. The daily life shown in serials and dramas does not vary much until a concept of witchcraft and dracuals are added. The stances are taken from real life and misinterpret and portray as something very different. It is assumed that, in the long term, the media contributes to building an image of reality. Several authors have studied this issue. Tim Worner, CEO of Seven Network Television, said:

Viewers are changing the way they watch TV and we've changed the way we produce shows to cater to this. Social and interactive elements aren't an afterthought anymore; we are integrating them into the making of our shows. (Web)

And in fictional genres, this allows the creation of a universe that does not correspond with reality. As this is an explicit feature, the receiver does not perceive it as a deception, but as a product of imagination. However what a reader or viewer is receiving is fantasy but in recent years, the fantasized fiction shows have gained popularity. And is a well-celebrated tool to bring imaginations to reality. And in an era of Web Series, Television shows struggle to give a tough competition to those programs that have a huge fan following, great directors, and amazing concepts. So it becomes more important for Television shows to promote its stance and move ahead with good competency.

With this, the researcher understands that the reach of television is vast. It has been observed that television shows are popular and when it comes to fantasy, they just need some directions. So instead of promoting unnecessary drama, they would come up with real content providing a taste of the virtual world to the viewers.

4. Theoretical Framework: The uses and gratifications theory

The uses and gratifications approach to media research tries to explain how people use the media to satisfy their needs. Also, uses and gratifications help in studying why do people become involved in one particular type of mediated communication or another, and what gratifications do they receive from it?

First, let us see what is the uses and gratifications theory?

The uses and gratifications are a social/psychological theory that focuses on why do people use media and what do they use them for? The theory focuses on the audience's perspective in selecting media to fulfill their needs based on the appeal of media contents. Unlike other media effect theories that focus on "what does media do to people?" the uses and gratifications theory focuses on "what do people do with media?" The uses and gratifications theory helps in understanding how people or audiences use the media to satisfy their needs and goals. In other words, uses and gratifications explain how and why people use the media rather than how the media influences people. (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974; Klapper, 1963; McQuail, 1972; Windahl, 1981)

The strength of uses and gratifications theory lies in its ability to define, elucidate, and anticipate the uses and consequences of media usage. Baran and Davis define uses and gratifications theory as, "an approach to media study focusing on the uses to which people put media and the gratifications they seek from those uses." (Baran & Davis, 2012)

Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch defined uses and gratifications as, "the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974)

Littlejohn in his book "Theories of Human Communication" stated the uses and gratifications approach focuses on the consumer – the audience member – rather than the message. Unlike the powerful - effects tradition, this approach imagines the audience member to be a discriminating user of media. The basic stance is summarised as compared with classical effects studies, the uses and gratifications approach take the media consumer rather than the media message as its starting point, and explores his communication behaviour in terms of his direct experience with the media. It views the members of the audience as actively utilizing media contents, rather than being passively acted upon by the media. Thus, it does not assume a direct relationship between messages and effects but postulates instead that members of the audience put messages to use and that such usages act as intervening variables in the process of effect. (Littlejohn, 2002, Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974)

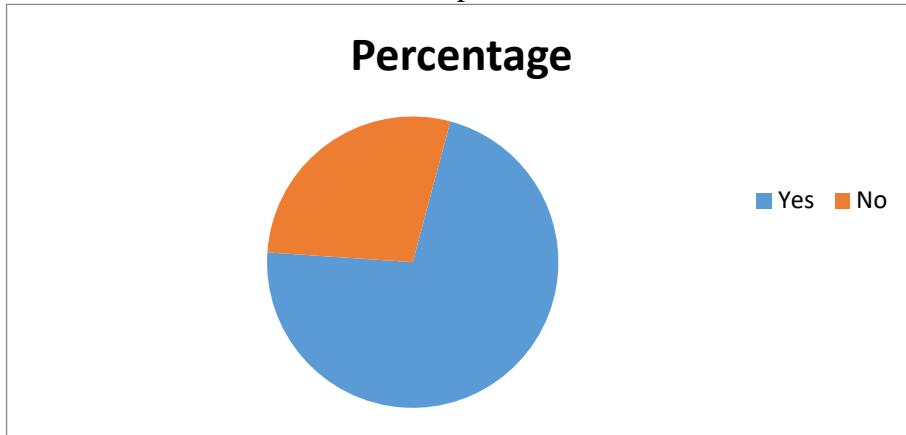
5. SURVEY

The researcher surveyed to understand what preferences people have when they watch a television program and how they get attracted to watch programs related to fantasy. The survey will also help in the future to improvise the current structural setups. This survey is useful in portraying the qualities and this is the inspiration driving why pro decided to coordinate examination as no other research procedure can give this wide limit, which ensures an inexorably exact guide to amass concentrated knowledge on realizes which to make conclusions and to choose critical decisions. Studies guided subtly give a street to more genuine and unambiguous responses than various sorts of research techniques, especially if it is communicated that survey answers will remain completely secret.

The Survey Questions are: -

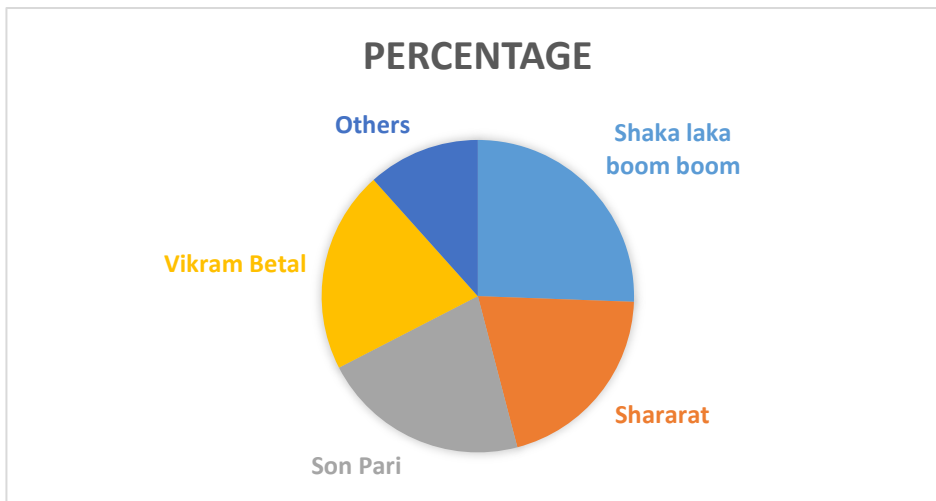
QUE 1. Have you watched any Television show related to fantasy and imagination recently?

The researcher found that 71.9% replied in affirmative while the remaining 28.1% denied.

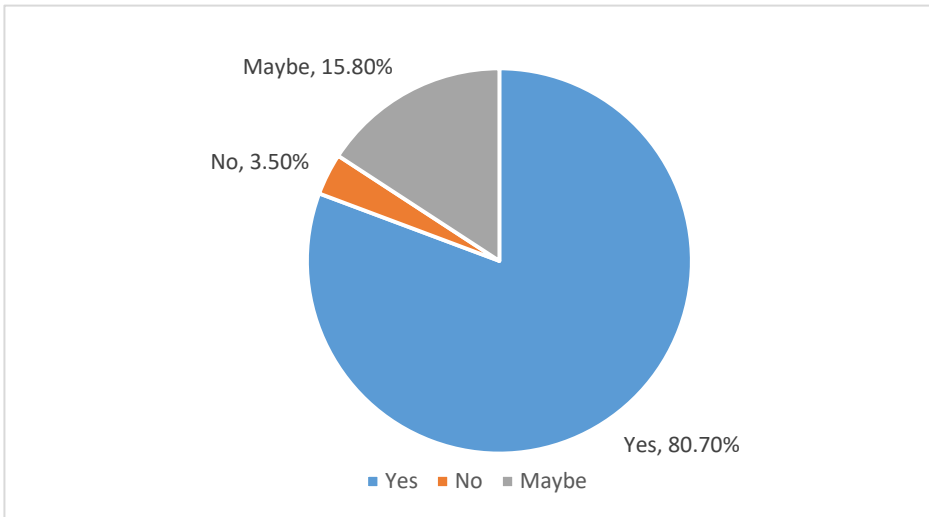


QUE 2. Do you remember any of these shows?

- 1 Shakalaka Boom Boom- 77.2%
2. Sharart- 61.4%
3. Son Pari- 64.9%
4. Vikram Betal- 63.2%
5. Some Other- 35.1%

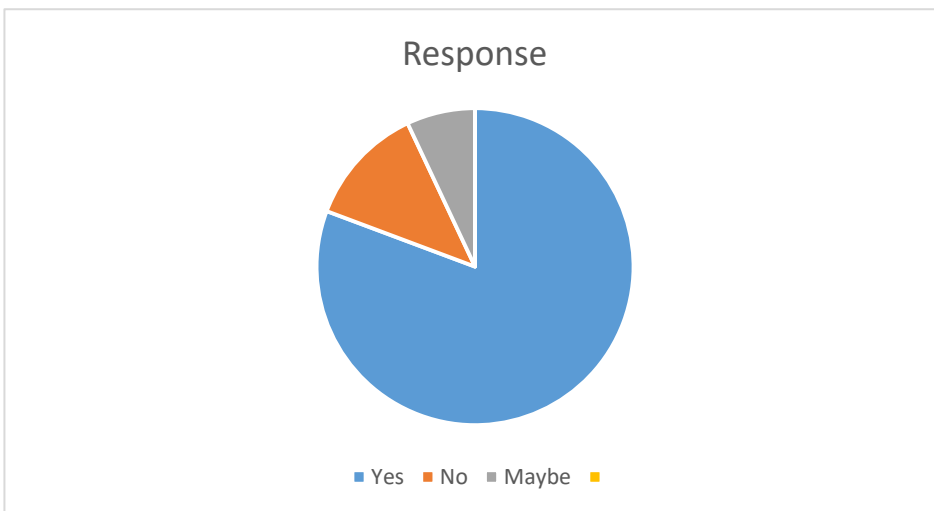


QUE 3. Do you agree that the content creation of these programs was good and entertaining?



The majority agreed to the question.

QUE 4. Have you heard of the Daily Soap named- Sasural Simar Ka?



80.7% said YES

12.3% said NO

7% said Maybe

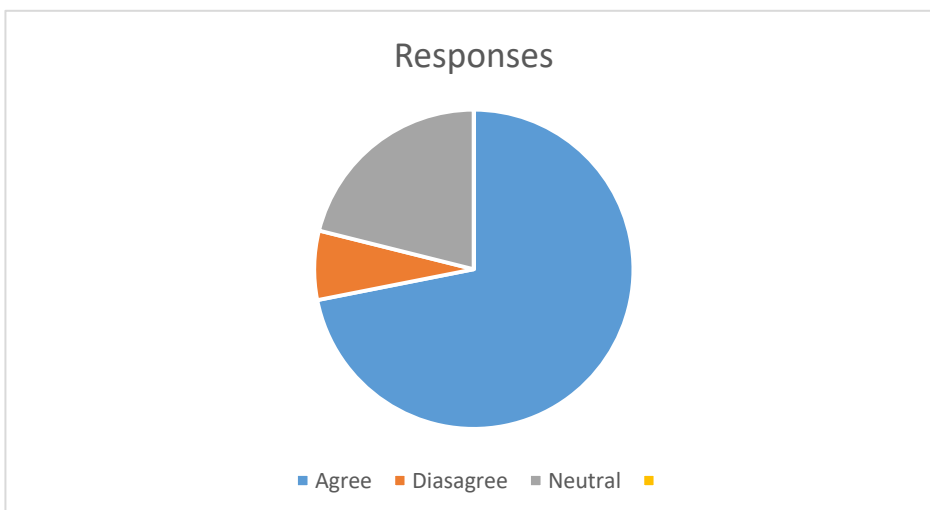
QUE 5. What is the reason that such fantasy shows get high ratings(TRP)?

These shows are entertaining- 43.9%

These shows make sense- 1.8%

The viewers just get habituated of watching the,- 50.9%

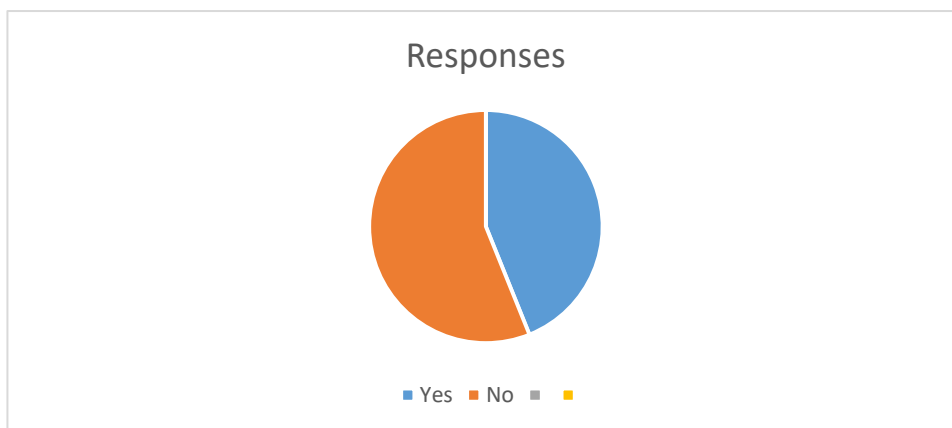
No idea- 10.5%



QUE 6. Fantasy shows to promote some learning, morals, and entertainment should be the choice?

71.9% agreed, 21.1% said neutral and 7% disagreed.

QUE 7. Are you aware of the BCCC?



56.1 said NO while 43.9% said YES.

6. CONCLUSION

After compilation of the survey results, it was found that Due to high influence of daily soaps in people in India they tend to watch it even when the story leaves every single hope to link up to from where they started. So when these shows gain popularity the average days they should be broadcasted simply extend. The lack of original and creative content leads to the mockery and finally the end of the show.

Fiction shows not only have unrealistic content but are creating negative effects on the viewer's minds. Such negative influences lead to immoral and unaccepted behavior, especially in young children and teens such shows are creating adverse effects disturbing their studies and losing focus. Though everything in these soaps is not negative as there are some positive aspects also which can be helpful and guiding Fiction shows opens the door for the world of imagination and it is evident that everyone loves fantasy more than reality. It's also our responsibility to know the difference and not promote bad quality content and baseless shows that keep on airing for TRP. We should be watching programs that inspire us, motivate us, and keep us informed. So the researcher got to know how these have influenced the viewers but if chosen wisely one can always benefit from what the good TV shows serve.

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Conflict of interest

We are unaware of any conflict of interest affecting this publication

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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