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A STUDY OF DECLINING CHILDREN'S TELEVISION CONTENT IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUTH

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Abstract

This study critically analyzes the evolution of children-oriented media in India and its psychological and cultural consequences for adolescents. A mixed-method design was used in this study. Quantitative surveys were conducted on 50 adolescents aged 12–17 years to ascertain platform preferences, while qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with one clinical psychologist, one film director, and one digital content developer. The results show a drastic shift from linear television to streaming and OTT platforms, driven by rapid storytelling and global accessibility. It also shows the disconnection between traditional moral-based Indian content and the day-to-day lived realities of modern Indian adolescents. Expert testimony has pointed to a reduction in attention span, binge-watching behaviors, and difficulty maintaining local relevance within algorithm- driven ecosystems. The study concludes that the revival of Indian children's media is possible only through its reawakening to character-oriented, digital-first formats that meet the psychological and heuristic realities of contemporary adolescents.

Keywords: Indian children’s television, digital media transition, psychological effects, cultural identity, mixed methods.



The Study of Declining Children's Content on Television in India and Its Impact on

Youth

The children's entertainment landscape in India is undergoing significant changes. For decades, traditional television has served as the prime storyteller for Indian households, coupling the communal viewing experience with mainstream cultural narratives. However, with increased and accelerated access to high-speed Internet and affordable smartphones, the so-called "idiot box" is being edged out by the personal screen. This research investigates why traditional content is losing its grip on the younger generation and how this transition toward unregulated digital spaces is reshaping the psychological and cultural fabric of Indian youth.

Background of the Indian Media Landscape

The early days of children's media in India were torn between education and nation-building, with the only predominant source of accessing information being state- owned media outlets, such as Doordarshan. In the 1990s, it was time for the introduction of dedicated kids' channels in their manifestations-the "Satellite Revolution." However, fast- forwarding to the 2010s, there has been a shift to commercialized, repetitive programming devoid of high-quality, culturally relevant content. Today, Indian media is marked by "digital-first" consumption, dominated by YouTube and OTT platforms at the cost of local cultural storytelling and domestic productions.

The Transition from Linear TV to OTT.

The shift from traditional linear television to OTT media represents a paradigm shift from passive to active consumption processes. "Binge culture," which reflects an instantaneous pleasure drive that oversees any traditional broadcasting patterns and represents a reversal of traditional domestic influence by a digital algorithmic influence.



Research Questions and Objectives

This study attempts to dissect the reasons for the dismal fall of Indian children's television content and its repercussions. In particular, this study attempts to do the following:

1. Identify the factors that draw Indian youth away from traditional TV to digital platforms.
2. Assess the impact of binge-watching and short attention spans on the psyche of teenagers
3. This study Discusses the creative and commercial challenges faced by Indian content providers in the digital era.

Literature Review

The shift from traditional television to digital media represents a significant milestone in the media industry in the Indian context. This section synthesizes the findings of various scholars to outline the factors and implications influencing this transition.

Evolution and Trends in Indian Children's Media Content

Scholars have observed that the children's market in India is shifting from value-based stories to a landscape dominated by imported content. The rapid penetration of smartphones and affordable Internet has accelerated this transition, fundamentally altering how young audiences in India engage with media. As domestic productions struggle to keep pace with the production quality and on-demand accessibility of global platforms, the gap between what Indian broadcasters offer and what young audiences seek has continues to widen.

The relationship between children and the media is an interdisciplinary field that has evolved over the past few decades. As a result, the understanding of child audiences, childhood, and their media experiences has undergone a sea change. (p. 2)

Balaji and Lakshmikantha (2020) identify a "content gap" where homegrown content increasingly



gives way to imported animations to meet rising consumer demand. Moreover, representation is a critical concern. In a content analysis of prime-time children's channels, Rozario et al. (2017) found that "the average ratio of male to female characters in an individual programme was 3:1" (p. 207).

Psychological and Academic Impacts

Viewing behavior significantly influences the social and academic performance of youth. Studies examining media consumption patterns among school-going children in India have consistently highlighted a negative correlation between excessive screen time and foundational academic skills, including reading comprehension, written expression and mathematical reasoning. While television has long been acknowledged as a potentially valuable educational resource, the increasing prevalence of aggressive and violent content in modern animated programming has raised serious concerns among child psychologists, educators, and parents across the globe (Siraj & PG, 2023).

Binge-Watching and Behavioral Changes.

Digital platforms have popularized a "binge-watching" culture, which Siraj and PG (2023) describe as an increasing source of addiction among young adults in India. The autoplay features Algorithm-driven content recommendations on OTT platforms are specifically designed to maximize viewing time, creating consumption patterns that mirror behavioral addiction. When children face screen time restrictions, they often exhibit irritability and poor self-regulation.

Prolonged exposure to curated digital content further distorts an adolescent's perception of reality, as the idealized and dramatized portrayals of people and situations on screen bear little resemblance to their actual lived experiences.



Research Hypotheses

The researchers formulated the following hypotheses based on a synthesis of existing communication research. These hypotheses provide a framework for the statistical evaluation of shifts in audience behavior and media consumption patterns.

- Preference and Dependency. Null Hypothesis (H0): Indian adolescents (ages 12–17) demonstrate no significant difference in preference between traditional linear television and digital Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Indian adolescents demonstrate a significant and measurable preference for digital Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms over traditional linear television, driven by the "Uses and Gratifications" of on-demand content accessibility

Methodology

The research design followed by the researchers is a mixed methods research design for conducting the study on the reduction of children's content on television in India and its impact on youth. This research design involves the collection of data on the topic using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Research Framework

The researchers adopted a descriptive and analytic research frameworks. Through the combination of the two, the researchers is able to meet the demands of the "Uses and Gratifications" research perspective, which focuses on studying the way media is sought by people to cater to their needs. The quantitative method measures consumption, whereas the qualitative aspect delves into the motivations related to this consumption.



Data Collection Procedure

The researcher took a field-level person-to-person method for data collection. Instead of sending a link for the survey via remote access, the researcher had a personal discussion with each of the 50 participants. The researcher made the work of entering the data even easier by encouraging the respondents to complete the Google Form “by hand” via a mobile phone in the researcher's personal presence.

Data Analysis Plan

The researcher employed descriptive statistics to examine the quantitative data to produce pictures and bar graphs that demonstrated the trends in modern media. In addition, the researcher employed theme analysis to examine the qualitative data, which was generated from interviews were performed. Finally, the researcher triangulated the findings to complement relevant research in the field of communications, such as the works of Kumari et al. (2024)

Results and Analysis

The researcher analyzed both quantitative data obtained through a survey and qualitative opinions of experts to draw conclusions about the state of communication for India's youth. The results show a paradigm shift in media production, consumption, and psychology.

Quantitative Data: The Adolescent Perspective

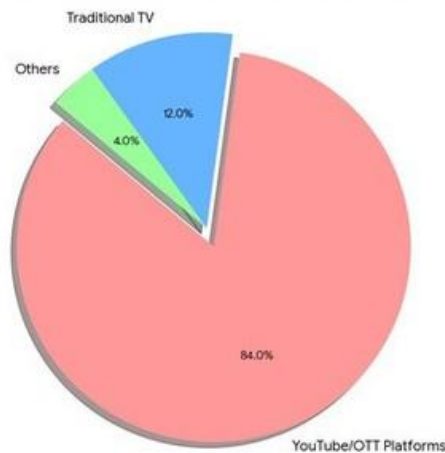
The researcher presents the following statistical evidence from the 50-student sample.

Preference and Dependency.

From the data, 84% of the respondents valued digital platforms (OTT and YouTube) more than traditional TV. This significant migration toward streaming services . as shown in Figure 1

Figure 1

Primary Entertainment Source Preference Among Adolescents (N=50)



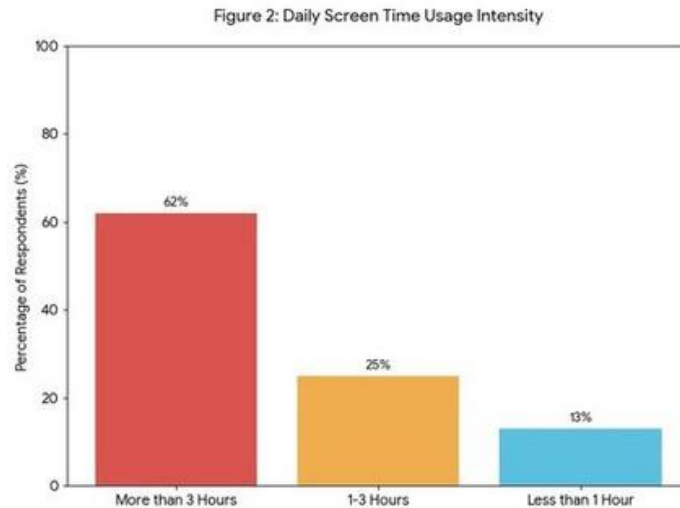
Note. The data confirm a paradigm shift from linear broadcasting to on-demand digital consumption.

In addition to platform preference, the researcher observed high-intensity usage.

Over 62% of the respondents claim to have spent more than three hours a day on these platforms, as shown in Figure 2

Figure 2

Daily Digital Screen Time Intensity



Note. High usage intensity suggests a growing dependency on digital entertainment for daily leisure activities.

Qualitative Analysis - Expert Thematic Synthesis

The scholar has picked three main themes emerging from the interviews conducted with Sankalp Meshram, Bokuwa Harshit, and Vikas Sharma.

The Institutional Collapse and "Children's Cinema.

One of the major setbacks observed by filmmaker Sankalp Meshram after the integration of the Children's Film Society, India (CFSI) and the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) is the halt in domestic productions. According to the filmmaker, "children's films are practically dead," since there is no 'specific demand for children's films' being generated by the productions. The film maker recognizes that international



groups, such as DreamWorks and Pixar, have 'high budgets and freedoms for creativity,' whereas Indian children's productions have 'fixed budgets, which restrict technology enhancement.' The film maker claims that until the government introduces necessary amendments favoring the preservation of Indian culture through children's programming, there will be a 'content void.'

The Anime Boom and Cultural Disconnect:

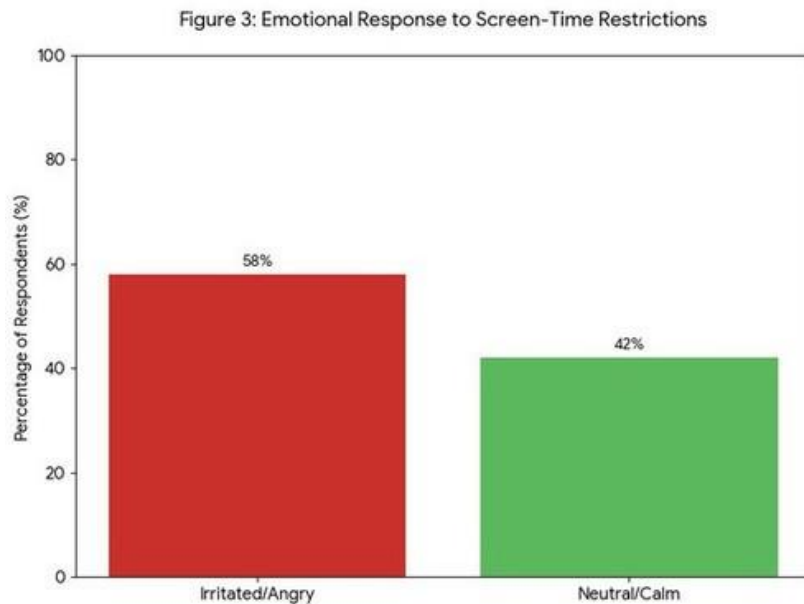
Video content creator Bokuwa Harshit also points out the growing trend of anime being the most common theme among the youth in India. The researcher observes that a "reliability gap, " exists where school-going students tend to opt for foreign looks only because the local content appears outdated. Harshit laments the "cultural disconnect," but he proposes that the "Anime aesthetic" should be adopted by future generations to narrate the legends and God symbols from Indian mythology.

Cognitive Impact and the Dopamine Loop Psychologist Vikas Sharma provides a clinical explanation with regard to the findings from the survey on the changes in behavior. According to Sharma, digital platforms offer "easier gratification," generating a "Dopamine hit" that results in shorter attention spans.

The survey findings support this clinical observation, revealing a high incidence of behavioral changes when media access is restricted, (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Emotional Response to Digital Media Access Restrictions



Note. This figure illustrates the prevalence of irritability and anger among adolescents, providing empirical evidence for the "dopamine loop" dependency described by experts.

"A one-sample chi-square test confirmed that the 84% preference for digital platforms was statistically significant ($\chi^2= 38.72$, $df=1$, $p<.001$), indicating the result is unlikely due to chance."

According to Sharma, "controlled and monitored content has become essential in today's parenting with growing anger issues in adolescents." The researcher observed that the 58% irritability rate (Figure 3) underscores the need for immediate intervention in digital consumption habits to protect the emotional well-being of the youth.

Rejection of the Null Hypothesis (H0)

Based on the evidence that 84% of students like digital media and that there is verification that the



"death" of home content exists, the research rejects the Null Hypothesis (H₀). As evidence that streaming services are favored significantly because of the lack of good home content that appeals, the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁) is accepted.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm a seismic shift in the media consumption patterns among Indian adolescents. The 84% preference for digital platforms documented in Figure 1 is not merely a technological choice but a reaction to the "content void" identified by filmmaker Sankalp Meshram. The data suggest that as the Children's Film Society, India (CFSI) merged with the NFDC, the halt in domestic production left a vacuum. This vacuum has been filled by YouTube and OTT platforms, which offer the "on-demand" satisfaction that traditional television lacks. The preference for these platforms is a direct consequence of the industry's failure to provide culturally relevant, high-budget domestic content for youth.

The Psychological Toll and the Dopamine Loop

A critical concern emerging from this research is the high intensity of media usage: 62% of respondents spend over three hours daily on digital devices (see Figure 2). This empirical evidence validates Psychologist Vikas Sharma's warning about the "Dopamine Loop." Unlike traditional television, which has fixed schedules and natural "end points," digital platforms employ algorithms designed for infinite scrolling and autoplay. This leads to "easier gratification", Sharma noted, to which the 58% irritability rate correlates in direct proportion, as represented in Figure 3.

When this flow of dopamine is disrupted by parental controls, the adolescent feels this as a withdrawal-like irritability, and it certainly proves that the consumption of media has moved from being a leisure activity to behavioral dependency.

The Relatability Gap and Cultural Identity



The rise of anime and foreign content indicates a "reliability gap" in Indian media. As Harshit observed, school-going students are opting for foreign aesthetics because local content feels outdated to them. The researcher observes that if the "anime aesthetic" is not adopted to narrate Indian mythological legends, there is a risk of a complete cultural disconnect between the two. The youth are effectively becoming "global citizens" at the cost of their local cultural heritage, as they find more reliability in foreign characters than in the limited Indian offerings currently available on broadcast television.

Verification of Hypotheses

The cumulative evidence from the primary survey and expert testimony builds a case for rejecting of the Null Hypothesis (H₀). The Alternative Hypothesis (H₁), which states that streaming services are favored because of the lack of quality home content, is accepted. The results of this study lead to the "death" of domestic children's cinema, which has created a generation of viewers who are digitally dependent and culturally disconnected from traditional Indian broadcast media.

Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of survey data and expert testimony from Sankalp Meshram and Bokuwa Harshit, the researcher proposes the following interventions for the Indian media industry:

1. Integration of Modern Aesthetics: The Indian production companies should shift away from "Flash"-animated productions with low budgeting and instead go for "Anime-style" aesthetics. In this way, they could fill the gap of reliability for today's youth, who prefer foreign



productions to local ones.

2. Supporting Children's Content Policy: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting must promote the production of films exclusively for kids, as was done previously by CFSI, to keep domestic content from disappearing because of global OTTs.

3. Application of "Slow-Media" Ideas: In order to counter the "Dopamine Loop" as

identified by Vikas Sharma, media producers need to enhance learning programs that emphasize "slow media" concepts, such as focusing on storylines over brief "clickbait" videos that decrease focus spans.

Conclusion

The decline of the children's television industry in India is a complex issue that requires further research. The data, showing an 84% preference for digital platforms, confirm that the stagnation of local television content is a driving factor behind this shift, demonstrating how young viewers have increasingly abandoned traditional broadcast media. The industry must focus on innovation to avoid permanent cultural disconnection.



Limitations of the Study

Although this study contributes to many aspects, it has a few limitations.

1. **Sample Size:** The study involved a sample of ****N=50**** students. Although representative of an urban demographic, a more generalized sample from across the nation would provide more representative results for a larger population.
2. **Access to Data:** Data from the private OTT service were not disclosed by the service.

Consequently, this study is dependent on survey responses from respondents.

3. **Geographic Scope:** This report focuses on urban youth, as rural areas may consume media differently based on Internet penetration.

Author Contributions

Aniket Bhardwaj contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing. The authors approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. For participants under the age of 18 years, consent was obtained from their parents or guardians. The confidentiality and anonymity of all the respondents were maintained throughout the study.



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Appendices A

Survey Instrument: Digital Media Consumption and Behavioral Impact Instructions: The following questionnaire was administered to a sample of 50 adolescents

(Aged 12–17) to gather quantitative data regarding their media preferences and psychological Responses to digital consumption.

1. Age of the respondent: _____
 2. Gender: Male Female Non-binary/Prefer not to say
 3. Which device do you primarily use for entertainment? (Smartphone/TV/Laptop/Tablet)
 4. Which platform do you prefer? (YouTube/Netflix/Amazon Prime/Traditional Cable TV)
 5. How many hours per day do you spend on screens for non-educational purposes?
 6. Do you watch "Linear TV" (channels with fixed timings) at all during the week?
 7. Rank your preference (1 to 5) for Indian animated content versus foreign (anime/western) content.
 8. What is the main reason you prefer OTT platforms? (No ads/Better quality/Convenience)
 9. Do you feel that Indian television shows are relatable to your life?
 10. Have you ever felt "anxious" if you misplace your phone or lose internet access?
 11. How do you react when your parents ask you to turn off your screen? (Calm/Irritated/Angry)
-



12. Do you eat your meals while watching content on a digital device?
13. Has the time you spend on outdoor sports decreased in the last two years?
14. Do you prefer "Short-form" content (Reels/Shorts) to full-length movies?
15. Do you feel that digital media helps you relax or makes you feel more fatigued?
16. Have you noticed a decrease in your ability to focus on long books or tasks?
17. Do you follow any "Influencers" more closely than traditional Bollywood celebrities?
18. Do you think there is enough "good" content for your age group on Indian TV?
19. Does "Binge-watching" affect your sleep schedule?
20. Do you find foreign animation (anime) more visually appealing than Indian animation?
21. Would you watch more Indian content if it were made in an "Anime" style?
22. Do you feel "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out) if you have not seen a trending video?
23. Do your parents monitor the content you watch?
24. Has digital media changed the way you talk or the slang you use?
25. Do you feel that you are "addicted" to your digital device?

Appendices B

Expert Interview Guide

The following qualitative questions were used as a framework for the semi-structured interviews conducted with industry and clinical experts:

- **Sankalp Meshram:** To what extent did the merger of CFSI into NFDC impact the volume of domestic children's cinema?
- **Vikas Sharma:** Which clinical markers of the "Dopamine Loop" are most prevalent in adolescents



today?

- **Bokuwa Harshit:** How can Indian mythological storytelling be adapted to meet the aesthetic demands of the "anime-literate" generation?

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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