



## Reeling the Reality: A study on contemporary Reality Shows and their Influence on other Entertainment Program Genres

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### Abstract

Every General Entertainment Television channel irrespective of its geographical presence appears to be largely depending on Reality Shows to capture and retain the eyeballs of the audiences for their survival. The struggle to secure high TRP rating though has changed the definition of reality shows, with the time- it is obvious that reality shows have remained a popular program format ever since the day they were conceptualized for telecast. The program genre, which started in quiz format on Indian television today, appears in various formats with the sole purpose of entertainment. Reality shows appear to earn maximum revenue by virtue of either providing a platform for film celebs to publicize their work or by trapping the emotional quotient of the viewer through scripted scenes, thus becoming a must go program for GECs. A closer look at the 'shows' that are being telecast reveals that, these shows are not only formulated, developed and structured on a borrowed western concept but are further translated tailored to suit the budget and technical availability of the regional channel. With many social groups expressing their displeasure against some of the concepts that are being incorporated in Reality shows, there arises also a situation to study on the influence of these 'Shows' on other entertainment program formats particularly teleserials. As both teleserials and reality shows appear to be locking their horns not only from business perspective of the channel but also on emotional quotient of their audience.

**Keywords:** Reeling reality contemporary shows entertainment genres.

### Introduction

Entertainment factor has proven to be pivotal in visual media, especially in television. The non-fiction programs and the 13 episodes serials and to the present year long running daily soaps, the change in television content is huge in terms of concepts, narration, production qualities as well as the distribution. Western influence has established connect in the Indian minds since globalization the mid 1990's. We are all familiar with TV reality shows such as The Apprentice, Survivor, or Big Brother. But what exactly is a reality show? What elements are common to all of these programs? Their shared characteristics are what define the reality genre<sup>1</sup>.

The content in the International television channels attracted the then youths and has continued till date with minimal efforts for its sustainability. The trend in the content followed for over a decade and a half by all the national and regional channels across India, nevertheless are inspired by the reality shows on the International television channels.

Reality-based programming has a history that spans 60-plus years. However, in recent years, reality television has become the most popular form of entertainment<sup>2</sup>. Reality shows became the USP of every television channels in earning huge revenue. TRP gambling competition among the channels in terms of

viewership resulted in producing similar content with slight modifications in the concepts and the narration.

The race gave way for the film fraternities and other celebrities to the television space. Indian Reality shows are today wide spread in talent hunt of the participant and catering viewers of all ages across all genres; while the business has various perceptions in entertaining the audience and satisfying the advertisers, on a mutual win-win situation. The popularity of Reality shows has reflected on sloping down the serials viewership and hence on the business says industry sources.

**Objectives:** i. To critically examine the reason behind viewer's preference on watching reality shows. ii. To analyze the influence of reality shows on teleserials.

### Methodology

**Locale and Samples:** Study intends to critically examine the influence of reality shows on teleserials among the television viewers situated in Bangalore. The study inculcated the methodology of analysis by means of collecting data through questionnaire published online as the primary data among the sample size of 100 respondents. To satisfy the objective, the study critically analyzes as to what is the impact on the present

day viewers expectations and preferences in watching the television programs.

**Characteristics of Indian Serials and Reality Shows:** Reality shows are the trump cards of the producers of the television Industry. Common audiences have become bored watching the never-ending melodramatic daily soaps. From the urge for something new the idea of reality shows sprang up<sup>3</sup>. While, Reality shows are not only the revenue grabber for the television channels, but a platform for the talented to be recognised. Creating stardom to a participant is humongous, while the audiences find the real characters performing to their abilities, which are more believable. Reality shows are conceived with emotional quotient in place and replaces the only alternative melodramatic serials. The content in these shows are fresh and live when compared to other programs. The content of teleserials, which absorbed the viewers once upon a time, resemble to be fake at present. Acting in today's serials/ daily soaps is much easier if the person delivers is capable of delivering small sentence fluently, says Mr. Surendranath, at the recent seminar by FICCI at Bangalore. Content on the daily soaps caters with wide range of genres, while reality shows flourished in various genres like singing, dance, and stunts and adventurous, comedy, quiz, modelling and the reality.

**Growth of Indian Serials and Reality Shows:** The perception of looking at teleserials by the Indian audience, changed its dimension after the mid 1990's when mega serials on social concepts like "Kyu Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi" and "Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki", which continued to be on television for over a decade and half, crossing the broadcast time of earlier mythological mega serial "Ramayan" and "Mahabharath" on Doordarshan in mid 1980's. Serials with various concepts across all genres saw its space in catering to audience among all the national and regional channels. While the first reality show on Indian television was "Meri Awaz Suno" on Doordarshan, way back in the late 1980's. The private players followed the same for over a decade in genres like singing and dance. The milestone, which broke from these two concepts, was "Kaun Banega Crorepathi", quiz program hosted by Amithab Bachan. Producers ventured in producing other genres like the situational comedy (Sitcoms), stunts and adventurous and concepts based on matrimonial, suspicion, guilt and the nature and behaviour of a person. The growth took the leap when "Bigg Boss" grabbed the audience time to watch the behaviour, nature and the acts of known personalities.

**Popular Indian Reality Shows:** Most reality shows on Indian television, have successfully headed for numerous seasons — Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (17 seasons), Comedy Circus and Roadies 10 seasons, Indian Idol, Bigg Boss (7 seasons), Kaun Banega Crorepathi (6 seasons), Khatron Ke Khiladi and Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa (5 seasons), Splits villa, The Big Switch and Emotional Atyachaar (4 seasons), Dance India Dance and India's Got Talent (3 seasons).

Even though they seldom score high TRPs, reality shows continue to be accepted season after season by audiences, as they spice up weekend TV viewing.

Shows in the pipe line are Indian Idol 7 seasons, Fear Factor 6 seasons, Splits villa 4 seasons, Emotional Atyachaar 4 seasons, The Big Switch 4 seasons, and Master Chef India 3 seasons, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa 17 seasons, Roadies 10 seasons, and Comedy Circus 10 seasons.

**Impact of Reality Shows on Serials and Other Genres:** "Reality shows may seem like just entertainment... But their impact can be devastating," The contemporary phenomenon of reality TV found on many cable television networks is becoming a "widely recognized, cultural form" of accepted television programming<sup>4</sup>. Ormax Media, which tracks the audience preference share of programmes through its monthly popularity study called Characters India Loves, said the story of a middle-aged couple's romance and their family dramas topped the charts, followed by a serial on child marriage titled Balika Vadhu. Both shows held on to their viewership even as many others were being abruptly wound up as studies indicated audience preference for non-fiction programming.

Simultaneously, at least 10 new serials and an equal number of reality shows premiered on Indian television last year (FICCI-KPMG, 2013). The Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report for 2013, jointly published by the federation of Indian chambers of commerce and industry (FICCI) and KPMG, indicates the estimated Indian television industry, worth 370 billion rupee (\$ 21.79bn) last year, is expected to grow at 18 per cent over the five years through 2017, to reach 848 billion rupees<sup>1</sup>.

Yet the trend among the viewers shows that the trend to watch serials have slopped with the increase in reality shows viewership.

**Finding:** Demographics of the respondents give wide scope to analyze the study. The majority of the participants in the survey are 67% of women and 51% of working professionals of both genders with 43% of them falling in the age group between 25 years to 30 years who are 39% graduates and 27% post graduates.

Viewers preferred watching National (43%) and Regional (40%) channels, with their first choice being Films and Reality Shows (20% each) and fiction programs (16%) along with other programs, spending between 4 hours to 6 hours per day. The prime preference to watch Reality Show among the respondents is (88%) of various genres. The other genres of programs preferred to by the viewers are music (79%), comedy (78%), Commercial (71%), Women (67%), Family and Psychological (66% each), Educational/ quiz programs (59%) and least being the adventure/ action (38%) based reality shows.

The reason to why reality shows are preferred to watch gets 17% each by viewers opining celebrity and competitiveness/ Talent, while 15% each chose participants and emotional dramatization. Content and concept with 13% and 10% respectively are the factors to watch reality shows. Respondents watching reality shows summed up to 98% while 86% agree that reality shows has its impact on serials being less.

Further the scope to analyze the statements why reality shows are preferred than serials, 75% strongly agree that serial are monotonous, while 77% opine that reality shows has new ideas and concepts while producing raw talents and 73% strongly agree to the presence of celebrity and fraternities. 74% mention that reality shows are more in real form than the serial drama and 76% strongly agrees that reality shows are being young and fresh and for that they produce better emotional content than serials. 71% of them strongly agree that reality shows connect between the audience and participants are one to one in nature while 81% agree The emotional content displayed in reality shows is effective than serials.

### Analysis

The above findings give the picture of the present trend, preferences and their reasons behind watching reality shows. Concepts on Music and Comedy are the most preferred, while the emotional dramatization is the key and competition, celebrity, emotional dramatization, participants are other factors. The new ideas, raw talents, young and fresh concepts, better emotional content which connects on one to one form are some more factors influenced on the respondent to watch.

The study shows the complexity of the viewer's preference and seems to be clustered in their minds as to know what genre of program exactly they want to watch. Entertainment factor take the priority while the educational quiz programs are preferred moderately and spiritual programs are the least watched among the majority of the respondents.

### Recommendation

The recommendations intended to be made here based on this study are on those programs, which are for the development of the individual and society in terms of information, and knowledge, which have showed the least viewership. Informative programs scores 5%, while science and sports at 4% each and spiritual programs with the least at 2% of viewership.

Reality shows are being more impactful on viewers also impact bringing more morals and values of human life among the viewers of the present generation and expected to increase more in the future years. The content on television exhibits more social responsibilities along with the business and other aspects of revenue generation. Reality shows, which are opined to be of new ideas, should try venturing in those concepts that imparts more of human values of life. The lacking in these kinds of

programs having low scores is due to the entertainment and celebrity factor. Analyzing the viewership results of informative social program "Sathyamev Jayate" hosted by film actor Aamir Khan can prove the above statement. Another informative educational/ quiz based reality show "Kaun Banega Crorepathi" hosted by Amithab Bachan too has set the record. Sports based reality show made its presence with not much of viewership base.

The study strongly recommends conceptualizing reality show programs concepts on information, science, sports and spiritual with the entertainment and celebrity factor, which do not hurt the sentiments of the viewers but rather gives the knowledge and inculcate their cultural and customary practices.

### Conclusion

Participants getting more groomed, confident has improved in their personality as well as achieved recognition among the society, while the impact of these shows has gone beyond altering the life styles which has graphed the negative impact on the present generation viewers.

Television Reality shows has become staple entertainment for young people and adults alike, informs the study. Reality shows have earned popularity among the viewers, who are working professionals between the age group 20 to 35 years and much to an extent that has pull down the popularity of serials and all popular genres.

Reality shows has provided a platform for the people to showcase their talent, begin their career and sharpen their ability to have an insight of their own potential. The shows bring in the talents who have already proved their potential in society. Many a times we find both positive and negative impact on the participant. In reality, the younger generation participants compete at the age close to five and six, which has more impact psychologically when the judges remarks on the performances. 17% of the respondents watch reality shows for the celebrities and fraternities who make impact on the participants and more on viewers in most of the aspects like the lifestyle, attitude, behaviour and being interested in knowing more fantasies are being observed. It would rather be that the celebrities, who contribute to drive the shows commercially, must become the role models for the mass.

Emotional dramatization has made an impact on the viewers and has become the prime reason to watch them. Emotion has become the USP of the reality shows to make the audience stick to be regular viewers. Impact of serial on the viewers in this aspect is much less than to that exhibited on reality shows. This reminds the nature of humans, being emotional when they are alone or feel lonely, than when they are in-group or surrounded by people. While the clustered confusions forms in minds, the need in change of programs and concepts is inevitable, while

music and comedy genres take the top score, which hints the higher level of stress among the working professionals.

The final conclusion raises questions which gives scope for further study are, do the young generation lads living alone connect emotions with the television content, being virtual participants, than to those who are around. Viewers agree that dominating programs have eradicated the space for many value based programs which has resulted also in losing morals and human values, which are never exhibited by any of the reality shows spaced out on any of the channels on television.

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