

# The Role of Indian TV Serials impact in Shaping Consumer Choices

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## ABSTRACT

TV serials have a powerful influence on people's socio-cultural behaviour. Unlike cinema, which concludes within two to three hours of playtime, TV serials are shown in episodes over several months or even years. This makes the characters more familiar, often to the extent that the viewer subconsciously imitates them. This is why TV serial producers also tend to portray the relatable lives of people, primarily those who fall into middle-class society. In this way, people can relate to the characters and their everyday lives with their own lives. The study's principal objective is to assess and analyse the role of TV serials in bringing about socio-cultural change by influencing the viewers. These issues relate to everyone in our society who regularly watches TV serials. TV serials began transmission on Indian television in 1984 and have made a noteworthy impact on the viewers. This paper aims to understand the role of TV serials in changing the socio-cultural behaviour of the people who regularly watch TV serials and understand how TV productions apply product image-building techniques to influence the target audience. For this study, I have taken the content analysis method. I have taken the six most famous serials into three categories based on the time frame they were aired: early (80s and 90s), middle (2000-2010) and recent (2010 onwards). The degree of influence of TV serials on a viewer and how the style of TV serials has evolved over the years along with the changing society, are to be studied through this paper.

**Keywords:** Indian Television Serials, Consumer Behaviour, Socio-Cultural impact, Product Image building, TV Production

## INTRODUCTION

Serials, also known as Series or Soap Operas are fictional programs broadcasted over TV or radio in episodic installments, hence the name Serial or Series. Painted Dreams, an American radio program premiered on October 30, 1930, is considered to be the first ever Soap Opera in the world, which was broadcasted from Chicago. These programs were popularly known as Soap Operas. Soap refers to soap and detergent commercials played in between the shows and Opera refers to the melodramatic

nature of the programs. In the 1970s and 1980s Mexico extensively used "telenovelas" to influence the minds of the people and successfully planted the idea of family planning in the Mexican society.

TV serials in India began in the 1980s when the only TV channel viewable nationwide was Doordarshan. The very first Indian TV serial to be aired was Hum Log in the year 1984 and it attracted a huge number of audience. Quickly many other Serials were also introduced such as Buniyaad, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Further in the 1990s many more serials joined the list, some notable ones being Shri Krishna, The Sword of Tipu Sultan, The Great Maratha, Jai Hanuman, Shanti, Shaktimaan, etc.

At the same time Indian television was going through a big change with introduction of Satellite Cable TV in early 1990s and private players like CNN, Star network entered the market which brought many foreign programs along with indigenous ones. Shortly after private domestic TV networks also joined the parade, ZeeTV being India's first domestic private TV Channel. These channels brought in a large number of serials to the Indian television and TV serials flooded the market by the turn of the millennium.

TV serials inherently have a higher power in conditioning the mind of the people in comparison to Cinema because the former is shown in episodes for a much longer period of time hence creating a deeper emotional relationship with the characters, their lives and the setting, which is generally similar to the target audience's life. Television has long been a powerful medium for shaping cultural narratives and influencing consumer behavior. As both an entertainment and marketing tool. It plays a significant role in disseminating social norms, values and lifestyle. This power when used responsibly can yield desirable results such as in the case of Mexico. This tool has been extensively used by marketers to sell their products to the viewers. This study is an effort to understand the use of such techniques in Indian TV serials for marketing certain products and how the trends have changed since the beginning of TV serials.

**Aim & Objectives :** The primary aim of this study is to find out how Indian TV serials have changed over the years since the beginning in influencing the minds of the people and how this technique has been used by marketers

to plant the need of their products into the minds of the people. This study aims to:

- Explore the cultural and social messages set in TV serials and their impact on audiences.
- Examine how TV content influences consumer decision-making lifestyle choices and product preferences.
- Analyze the role of brand placement and indirect advertising within TV serials in shaping consumer behavior.

**Significance of the Study:** Insights from this study will help more effective advertising strategies. The research findings will offer guidance on how storytelling elements in TV serials shape societal perceptions and consumer habits. This study contributes to media and consumer behavior literature. It provides an understanding of how entertainment content influences audience psychology. By highlighting the ways in which TV serials shape consumer choices this research will encourage media literacy. In an era where entertainment and marketing are expend. This study of the socio-cultural influence of TV serials on consumer behavior is essential for understanding modern trends. This study aims to bridge the gap between media narratives and consumer psychology.

### **Theoretical Framework & Literature Review**

Television has a powerful influence on how people see the world through long-term exposure to TV serials. Cultivation Theory and Cultural Hegemony Theory suggests that frequent viewing shapes perceptions of reality. Bandura's Social Learning Theory adds that people learn behaviors by observing and imitating TV characters which can affect their lifestyle choices. Similarly the Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that viewers actively choose media to fulfill personal needs. The Theory of Planned Behavior further highlights how TV content can shape consumer intentions. By applying these theories researchers can explore how TV serials impact consumer behavior. They can analyze whether frequent viewers have different shopping habits, how TV shows reinforce materialistic values, and how product placements influence brand preferences. Understanding these effects can provide insights into media-driven consumption trends and the broader role of television in shaping societal behaviors.

The following are reviews of already existing works on the topic and related topics: TV serials have displaced popular among least one-third of India's population (K. Gokulsing, 2004). In 'family serial melodrama' often through representations of family and womanhood (Raghavan, 2008). Indian TV soaps have moved from mythological themes to more contemporary 'pseudo-social' narratives. These serials continue to influence socio-cultural patterns through their content (Jaggi, 2011). Indian TV serials have an influence on fashion and lifestyles.(Sandhu, 2020). The

fashion choices in these programs create style icons out of actresses and fashion-conscious consumers out of audiences (Warner, 2014). Many serials strengthen beauty biases to body shaming (Chatterjee & Rastogi, 2021).

Laskar, (2023) points out how TV serials are changing the mind of the people, making them imitate the actors which is pushing them away from the roots of the society and selling ideas that are causing problems in the society.

These studies found that a large number of women idealize the women portrayed in TV serials and tend to imitate their dressing styles and accessories. The researcher has pointed out how TV serials are transforming the image of an ideal woman into someone who dresses up in very beautiful clothes and is always decorated like an artificial doll. Robert Jenson (2008) found in his study "Cable Television and Women's Status in India" that the introduction of cable TV has led to a decline in acceptability of domestic violence against Indian women, son preference and fertility, and has boosted women's autonomy.

**Research Data:** This study takes the Qualitative approach of research and the method used is Descriptive and Content Analysis. The researcher has divided the timeline into three major eras, Early (1980s and 1990s), Middle (2000-2010) and Recent (2010 onwards). Six most popular TV serials have been chosen taking two from each era.

The list of TV serials chosen for analysis is given below:

### **Early Era (1980s and 1990s)**

#### **Ramayan**

A historical drama epic TV serial created, written and directed by Ramanand Sagar, based on the Hindu epic of the same name. It was the first Indian TV series to be based on an Epic and opened ways for future epic series such as Mahabharata. Ramayan was originally aired on DD National during 1987 and 1988 and was one of the most successful TV serials of that time, in fact it broke the record of viewership of any Indian TV series of the time and was broadcasted in 55 countries. This serial had such an effect on the viewers that many perceived Arun Govil, the actor who played the role of Lord Ram as Lord Ram himself, and worshipped him! It was a national classic and retained its popularity in the years to come.

#### **Byomkesh Bakshi**

A Hindi TV serial based on Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's series of novels of the same name. The series takes the viewer through the adventures of a Bengali detective Byomkesh Bakshi, played by Rajit Kapur, who solves cases with his assistant Ajit Kumar Banerji, played by K.K. Raina. Byomkesh Bakshi stands out from other detectives as he is interested in finding the truth above all and identifies himself as "Satyanweshi" or the truth seeker. The series was directed by Basu Chatterjee and is one of the

most celebrated adaptation of the novels. The series had a two seasons with a total of thirty-four episodes, with season 1 having fourteen and season 2 with twenty episodes. It was aired between 1993 and 1997.

#### **Middle Era (2000-2010)**

**Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi** (Eng: Because the Mother-in-Law was once a Daughter-in-Law too)

One of the many “K” TV serials by Ekta Kapoor under the banner of Balaji Telefilms, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* was a Hindi TV series that revolves around the life of Tulsi Virani. The series is set in Mumbai, within a Gujrati joint family, where the protagonist Tulsi (played by Smriti Irani), daughter of a Pandit is portrayed as an ideal daughter-in-law married to the grandson of a rich businessman Govardhan Virani.

The series premiered on Star Plus in the year 2000 and ran for eight years before concluding in 2008. The series is one of the most successful Soap Operas in India and maintained its popularity topping the charts at No.1 throughout the eight years it was broadcasted in. It has a total of 1833 episodes, making it the first Hindi TV series to cross 1000 episodes in the history of Indian television.

This serial has been one of the most successful shows on Indian television and has made a big impact on consumer behaviour. Women were drawn to the attires worn by the characters, especially the protagonist Tulsi. She was often shown wearing very beautiful Sarees with long sleeved blouses coupled with beautiful jewelries and accessories that quickly shaped the fashion followed by majority of Indian women of the time. In other words Tulsi was a character aimed at defining what an ideal Indian woman should be like. Also this series had a set design that tempted people to decorate their houses in a similar manner.

**Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii** (Eng: The story of each house)

Another one from the never ending list of “K” serials by Ekta Kapoor, *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* was a Hindi TV series that ran alongside *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* from the year 2000 to 2008 on Star Plus. The setting of the show is a Marwadi joint family where the protagonist Parvati (played by Sakshi Tanwar) is portrayed as an ideal daughter-in-law and her husband Om Agarwal is the ideal son. The story focuses on the struggles in the life of the couple within a joint the family.

This series has a lot in common with previously mentioned *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, in fact the two serials can be said to be the twin sisters. It had a similar effect on the consumer behaviour of the viewers. Women were heavily influenced by the fashion this serial was trying to define, along with home decoration, and overall lifestyle

including moral behaviour preferences of products, and even food habits.

#### **Recent Era (2010 onwards)**

**Kumkum Bhagya** (Vermilion in my Fate)

Yet another entry from the list of “K” serials by Ekta Kapoor, *Kumkum Bhagya* premiered on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2014 on ZeeTV. The series is loosely based on Jane Austen’s 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility*. It follows the story of Pragya, Bulbul, and their mother Sarla Arora who hopes to see them married. The story later revolves around the married life of Pragya and her husband Abhi, who later get separated and the serial jumps to a later time period where the story revolves around their separated daughters.

Speaking of consumer behaviour this series has tried to redefine it like most other series of this era. The dressing sense of the characters has advanced to match the current trends, displaying garments such as sleeveless blouses. The sets have also been updated since previous generation’s houses.

**Naagin** (Female Cobra)

*Naagin* is an Indian fantasy TV series produced by Ekta Kapoor. The series premiered on November 1 2015 and has completed three seasons till date. The fourth season has been scheduled to premiere on November 2019. The story revolves around Shivanya who is an Ichchhadhari Naagin (mythical shapeshifting female cobra which can take the shape of a woman).

This series has also been in line with the current trends that other serials have been following, and being one of Ekta Kapoor’s productions it does share many similarities and has influenced consumer behaviour in a similar manner.

**Findings :** The researcher analyzed the content of six most popular TV serials in India taking two each from three eras, as well studied the general trends in the content of TV serials. The key findings from the study are mentioned below:

During the early era (1980s and 1990s) TV series were mostly based on historical characters, religious epics, novels, and other existing literary works. There were a few original content as well, but the ones that made the most viewership were the epics and historical classics. Most of the people watched these shows on a black and white TV set as colour TVs very expensive and only the wealthy could afford it. This had a clear disadvantage for demonstrating fashion related products to the viewers compared to serials that came later. However it does not mean that those serials had little impact on the behaviour of the viewers. TV serials such as *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata* had such an impact on the viewers that many of them subconsciously believed that they are actually

looking at the Gods themselves and not actors on screen. Back in 1984 TV serial Hum Log successfully advertised and introduced Maggi 2 minutes noodles, which became one of the most loved instant food in the market. Shaktimaan also introduced Parle-G biscuits which became the favourite biscuit of many children watching the series.

In the middle era (2000-2020) TV serials became more focused on original content, especially those that portrayed a married woman's life as an effort to attract middle class homemakers as the target audience. Ekta Kapoor's "K" serials have portrayed the ideal Indian married woman as someone who wears very beautiful clothing and is always decorated. These serials have had a very deep influence on Indian married women and this boosted the sales of Fashionable Sarees, jewelries, makeup and fashion accessories. Also in the middle era viewers especially married women became more emotionally connected to the characters of the serials as they roughly portrayed their everyday lives, and even if they did not, they did feel sympathy towards the characters and were drawn to the serials giving them high TRPs. Many viewers imitate their clothing, living style, home decor, among other aspects of everyday life. Clothing manufacturers took advantage of the demand of clothing and fashion accessories by launching products such as Tulsi Sarees (based at Surat) named after the protagonist of Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi in order to attract customers. Looking at the demand for clothing inspired by TV serials Ekta Kapoor launched her own garments and jewelry brand named Ek in 2015.

In the recent and current era (2010 onwards) TV serials are focusing on fantasy as a result of Computer Graphics and Visual Effects becoming more and more affordable and easier to perform. Serials based on historical characters and religious epics are also coming back for the same reason. These shows still continue the trend of influencing the people's mind for boosting the sales of a variety of products.

Throughout the timeline advertisements that accompanied the serials have played vital role in consumer behaviour, but it became more intense during the middle era and has continued since then. In the current scenario Indian fashion has had by far the most influenced area by Indian TV serials. The trend continues as shows introduce newer ideas to the people and plant the need of the products into the minds of the people.

### **DISCUSSION**

TV serials construct aspirational lifestyles. Lavish homes, designer clothing and ultra gadgets are commonly creating an illusion of an attainable reality. Viewers often seek to emulate these lifestyles. This "halo effect" plays a role where admiration for a character extends to the products

they use. It is making them more desirable. Gender representation in TV serials also impacts consumer behavior. Women are often depicted as primary consumers of fashion and household products. Conversely, male characters are linked to technology and financial products.

This gendered marketing strategy aligns with cultural stereotypes. TV serials use both direct and indirect brand integration strategies. In Direct marketing products are openly mentioned and demonstrated. In Indirect marketing brands blend into storylines. TV serials create emotions through dramatic plot and character. It is leading to spontaneous purchasing decisions.

**Future Research Directions :** Expanding studies to digital streaming platforms. Conducting cross-cultural comparisons to analyze TV serial influences across different regions and cultural contexts. This study underscores the profound socio-cultural impact of TV serials on consumer behavior, providing valuable insights for marketers and media strategists.

### **CONCLUSION**

Indian television series have come a long way since Hum Log was launched back in 1984. Trends have changed drastically along with advancement in technology and opening up to more sources of content over time. However the concept of advertising and using TV serials a tool to influence the minds of people hasn't changed. It is in fact a very effective tool for planting the need of a product into the minds of the viewers which in turn will subconsciously want to buy it, or prefer one over the other.

Another aspect of this technique is influencing the people with ideas that alter the behaviour of the viewers in their daily lives. Since viewers connect emotionally to the characters of a TV serial, they tend to imitate them. This behaviour of viewers has been harnessed by many TV shows and have transformed the lifestyle of the viewers over the years in various aspects.

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