

What do real-life men think of men on-screen? An empirical investigation of Hindi TV soaps

Shilpi Madaiyar & Dr. Nidhi Shendurnikar¹

Abstract

In India's diverse, multi-cultural, multi-lingual landscape, General Entertainment Channels (GEC) offering a multitude of programming content are an important medium for the representation of India's collectivist culture, traditions and value systems (Grewal & Bhatia, 2021). In the GEC category, Hindi TV soaps that focus on family drama, emotions, customs, relationships, and lifestyle attract considerable attention from Indian audiences. Contemporary Hindi TV soaps are usually women centric, catering to the family oriented female audience. These soaps telecast in the prime-time slot are referred to as 'prime time soap operas' (Munshi, 2010). Despite the centrality of women in terms of portrayals and subjects, male characters occupy a significant position in the narrative and men watch these soaps with utmost interest. This study investigates opinions of real-life men about men on screen in context of popular Hindi TV soaps. A mixed method, descriptive approach with non-probability -- purposive and snowball sampling was used to conduct a survey with 120 male viewers to understand what they think about male role portrayals, attributes of male characters, stereotypes, expectations and pressures induced by such portrayals. Results reveal that men, like women, are subject to societal pressures, and on-screen portrayals among other factors, are responsible for this. While the skewed, unrealistic, glamorous, and stereotypical portrayal of women is acknowledged and critiqued by academics, industry and audiences themselves; same is not true for male portrayals. Men who watch these TV serials believe that on-screen men should be closer to real life and creators should present humanized avatars of Indian men. The study assumes significance since visual representations contribute to shaping, reinforcing and challenging ideas about gender norms, roles and expectations in the Indian socio-political landscape where TV remains a mass medium with extraordinary and unprecedented influence as well as reach.

Keywords: gender, Hindi TV soaps, male role portrayals, men on-screen, pop culture, real-life men, stereotypes, visual culture

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Introduction: History and Viewership of Hindi TV soaps

Post the debut of television in India in 1959 (Sen, 2019), television services evolved from experimental transmission to a one-hour news bulletin to the setting up of television stations in Mumbai (1972), Calcutta, Chennai, Srinagar, Amritsar, and Lucknow in 1975. The birth of *Doordarshan* (DD) in 1980 and its broadcast at an all-India level in 1982 revolutionized the Indian television scenario (Mehta, 2008). Popular soaps like *Hum log*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* were telecast on DD in the same period. India's first ever Hindi TV soap 'Hum Log' was aired in 1982. Pre-economic reforms, Hindi TV soaps focused on India's culture, traditions and values. They were relatable to audiences and had them involved in the protagonist's happiness and sorrows. In this era, soaps were characterized by simplicity, familial themes, addressing societal concerns while promoting positive values. Thereafter, a shift in narrative trends and thematic representation of soaps was seen (Munshi, 2020). The advent of economic reforms in 1991 ushered in the era of private channels, disrupting the traditional format. Particularly noteworthy was the impact of 'Tara' (1995), which introduced feminist ideologies and advocated for equality, thereby charting a new course for the industry. The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the emergence of diverse fiction genres with Balaji productions and K-series dominating household conversations. As the industry progressed, TV content diversified across genres such as comedy, action, crime, and mystery; captivating Indian audiences with productions like *Byomkesh Bakshi*, *Shrimaan-Shrimati*, *Hum Paanch*, *C.I.D.*, *Sarabhai v/s Sarabhai*, *Shaktimaan*, and *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* (Singh, 2017).

Moreover, western influences began to shape Indian television programming, leading to adaptations like *Kaun Banega Crorepati* derived from the Hollywood series 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' while retaining relevance and appeal to the Indian audience. Thus, television content reflected changing realities of an aspiring, modern, forward-looking and globalized Indian outlook demonstrated by a radical change in values, lifestyles, struggles of protagonists, lavish sets, high-end costumes and female centric storytelling. Both TV viewers and producers benefitted immensely from technological advancements such as introduction to colour TV sets and Direct to Home (DTH). This transition meant that there was a remarkable progress in the quality of soaps being produced, resulting in enhanced viewer experience (Roy, 2008). In terms of the popularity and pan India viewership of Hindi channels, even advertisers are attracted to them due to their extensive viewership leading to substantial ad revenue, expected to reach Rs 394 billion in 2024 (Economic Times, 2022). The average time spent watching TV increased

by 8% in 2020, mainly driven by the Covid-19 lockdowns that led to a 50% growth in viewership for General Entertainment Channels (GECs). Star Plus emerged as the channel with the largest number of views in 2021. One of its popular shows, 'Anupamaa', recorded an impressive 12 million views in January 2021 (Basuroy, 2023). Hindi TV soaps which have still kept people glued to the small screen, have thus traversed a long way.

Masculinity in TV soaps

Hindi TV soaps predominantly focus on female-centric themes, particularly during prime-time slots. While their aim is to highlight empowered women, their portrayal often seems tokenistic, as they project a working woman's family life over her professional achievements. The role of fathers is notably marginalized, with little emphasis on their involvement in parenting. Motherhood remains a central narrative, leaving the role of fathers apparently passive. The onus of ensuring a good upbringing of children primarily falls on mothers, raising questions about the absence of fathers in these storylines (Munshi, 2020). Masculinity represents a set of characteristics attributed to males within the socio-cultural framework, including strength, power, decision-making ability, opinion shaping, and emotional resilience. While notions of masculinity have evolved over time, the presentation of men as breadwinners remains a constant in society. Bhasin (2004) argues that the depiction of men and masculinity in Hindi TV serials, where male characters, though important, typically orbits around the life of the female protagonist rather than being the central focus of the narrative.

Often male protagonists are stereotyped as wealthy, handsome, muscular, powerful; possessing other traits associated with traditional masculinity. This exerts significant influence on viewers as they emulate these characteristics in real life. This extends to personal appearance, fashion choices, and even household dynamics, all influenced by favorite serial characters. The impact of TV soaps on societal perceptions is substantial, as viewers attempt to replicate reel-life roles in their real-life situations, solving problems and making choices with their favorite characters in mind. Notably, Indian society maintains traditional gender roles, and TV serials play a powerful role in shaping these perceptions (Shukla, 2015). Male role portrayals remain significant in Hindi TV serials, often reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.

Review of Literature

In *Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective* (Kumar, 2012) discusses how gender specific expectations and norms in a society impact emotional expression. Men are

often made to feel ashamed to reveal emotional distress, particularly within marriage, fearing loneliness, judgment, and loss of respect. The author says that this reluctance stems from a lack of support systems like counseling services and family assistance. The prevailing belief that men cannot be victims of domestic abuse makes reporting such incidents unthinkable. Acceptance of violence against men threatens their social status and masculinity. The research concludes that a significant number of men may be more sensitive to emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, which can also affect their sexual and intimate relationships. A study titled -- *Body Image Dissatisfaction in Young Indian Men: Prevalence, Psychosocial Correlates, and the Impact of Socio-cultural Pressure* (Soohinda et al., 2020) argues that recent trends show an increasing Body Image Dissatisfaction (BID) among men, marked by negative self-perception of their physical appearance compared to ideal body standards. This is partly due to exposure to western and social media promoting unrealistic body ideals like 'six-pack abs.' In India, young men face societal pressure to conform to these standards. Exposure to media images such as magazines, posters, and movies depicting these idealized male physiques, contributes to heightened insecurity and body image concerns among young men. The media play a pivotal role in shaping the body image ideals of these individuals who may unquestioningly adopt such standards. Socio-cultural influences from family, peers, and media play a significant role in Indian men internalizing ideals of muscularity. This is seen in the case of Indian men who tend to idolize film stars with a muscular and athletic male body ideal.

Jain & Pareek (2018) discuss how men are frequently depicted in media as rough, emotionally restrained, and solely focused on material success, while women are often portrayed as shy, academically driven, and easily influenced by men. These portrayals oversimplify the complexities of real-life individuals, yet societal and familial pressures persist, compelling conformity to these media-driven ideals. Their study focuses on gender portrayals of domestic work on Indian TV. In the case of TV soaps, the authors discover that men are often portrayed as emotionally distant, financially stable, and solely focused on career, neglecting social life or love interests. They are consistently depicted as family protectors and breadwinners, facing criticism if they deviate from this role while women are shown as self-sacrificing and passive. Educated and ambitious women are portrayed negatively. The study concludes that men are diverse and can express various emotions, traits, and body types without compromising masculinity. Media stereotypes of men and women often perpetuate unrealistic expectations and traditional gender roles and such portrayals can have profound effects on societal attitudes and individual well-being. In a one of its kind study by Shukla (2015), opinions of men and

women in the Kutch region of Gujarat were studied regarding male portrayals in TV soaps. The study highlights how female viewers of television soaps form expectations of their real-life partners based on the portrayal of male characters. The research indicates that the depiction of males and masculinity holds considerable sway and can drive desired societal changes. The influence of Indian television soaps on viewers' perceptions and behaviors, particularly concerning male roles, should not be underestimated.

Gender objectification in media, spanning advertisements, films, and television series, has sparked concerns predominantly championed by women activists. They consistently oppose the portrayal of women as objects across various media platforms. Men face challenges in establishing a comparable and influential discourse regarding their representation in mass media and how it aligns with their self-perceptions. Rai (2022) addresses how men also grapple with misrepresentation or exaggerated depictions in media that conflicts with their individual selves. In his study – *Mass media and Male body: Decoding the Politics of Visual Representation*, he states that from cinematic productions to prominent advertisements, there's a pervasive promotion of an idealized standard of manhood. This places immense pressure on men to conform to specific physical attributes and behavioral expectations to be seen as authentically masculine. Male celebrities in movies, TV series, and brand advertisements frequently depict men with perfect physiques. Present-day culture emphasizes physical appearance, thereby subjecting men to appearance-centric ideals previously associated with femininity. Rai refers to what Moss Norman called the 'double bind of masculinity'². Sexist dialogues in Bollywood films -- "*Mard ko dard nahi hota*" (A man does not feel pain), "*Mard banne ka itna hi shauk hai toh kutto ka sahara lena chor de*" (If you're so keen on being a man, leave aside seeking help from dogs), and "*Meri mardangi ke bare me gaavn ki kisi bhi ladki se pooch sakti ho, report achi milegi*" (You can ask any girl in the village about my masculinity, you will get a favorable opinion) exemplify the idealized and glamorized concept of masculinity perpetuated through cinema, disseminated for public consumption under the guise of entertainment.

Indian television has portrayed male characters in a stereotypical and disempowering manner. Male leads in popular shows are often underdeveloped characters who lack depth. For instance, characters like Abhi in *Kumkum Bhagya* and Dev in *Kuch Rang Pyaar Ke Aise Bhi* are poorly

² Men face conflicting impulses – one urging them to conform to televised representations of masculinity while simultaneously appearing unaffected by such concerns.

written and do not contribute significantly to the narrative. *Dev* from *Kuch Rang Pyaar Ke Aise Bhi* lacks decision-making abilities and relies heavily on his partner, *Sonakshi*, for guidance. Similarly, *Abhi* in *Kumkum Bhagya* is portrayed as the one making flawed decisions. Characters like *Arnav Singh Raizada* from *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* and *Arjun Sharma* from *Beyhadh* are shown suffering from lack of interest towards life and actions that leave viewers confused. Weak male protagonists make for uninteresting television because viewers typically seek heroes with defining qualities that make them relatable, admirable, or even despised. Indian TV writers have struggled to create strong, well-rounded male characters (Telly Chakkar, 2022). Singh (2017) affirms that it is essential for the industry to project male characters with stronger stories and purposes, allowing viewers to connect with and invest in their journeys. The development of male protagonists should be a priority for TV makers to improve the quality and appeal of Hindi TV soaps. Mistry's (2020) work on *Masculinity in Popular Culture* examines the portrayal of male vis-à-vis female protagonists in select Hindi TV soaps and studies views on masculinity as projected in these soaps. Through content analysis and expert interviews, she concludes that the female lead remains central to the narrative of the soap and even if the male protagonist is depicted as having a strong and impactful personality, he is ultimately overshadowed by the female lead. The study affirms that Hindi TV soaps neither contribute to gender equality nor represent societal realities and yet they leave a lasting impression on the viewer's mind.

The literature discussed above proves the point that while Hindi TV soaps have been a long-standing part of people's daily lives and are admired from all quarters, cliché elements such as the portrayal of men has led to disappointment among the audience. Predictability and lack of realism in these portrayals is becoming tiresome. Balance and authenticity in these fictional narratives is the need of the hour. While viewers appreciate the entertainment value that TV soaps bring to their lives, they seek characters with depth, meaning and purpose to enhance their own connection with stories narrated on the small screen. Academic literature in the area points to evident gaps such as – fewer studies addressing men's portrayals in popular culture and entertainment media, especially in the Indian context, little research on opinions of male audiences, focus of the discourse being driven by a feminist standpoint and the general lack of diversity in gender role portrayals as seen in the Indian media and entertainment landscape.

Present Study: Significance and Rationale

Drawing insights from reviewed literature and its implications, the present study was conducted to understand what real-life men in India think about their on-screen portrayals in contemporary Hindi TV soaps. A survey with 120 men watching Hindi TV soaps was carried out across various cities of the country to understand their views about men on screen and the influence these portrayals exert in real life. Six interviews with different experts -- TV industry professionals, gender studies specialists, sociologists, men's rights activists helped understand the social-cultural-psychological impact of popular culture on male audiences.

The significance of this research is underscored by the growing proliferation of visual media and popular culture in modern societies. Visual media is impactful since it employs the craft of storytelling through visual narratives to influence viewers, entertain them and engage in discourse building and persuasive communication that shapes societies and cultures in the long run. Kamla Bhasin (2004) observed that TV is a major source of entertainment in Indian households. A survey conducted by Ormax Media reveals shifts in Indian viewership over the past two decades, including a rise in women empowerment shows. Male viewership during prime time has also increased, with the average viewer age rising from 29 to 33 years since 2012 (Marik, 2021). The media landscape in India has expanded significantly, with television remaining a dominant platform. Both men and women consume media content, which is why accurate, diverse and balanced gender representations are important. TV soaps play a significant role in the daily lives of viewers, eliciting various emotions and fostering deep connections with characters, which in turn influence viewers' approaches to real-life situations. Viewers often look to their favorite characters and emulate not only dress, lifestyle, behaviour and expectations from future partners but also seek guidance on navigating challenges and dilemmas in their own lives.

Research Questions

1. What do real-life men think about reel-life men as seen in contemporary Hindi TV soaps?
2. What opinions are held by experts in the TV industry, academia and gender studies about the portrayal of men in contemporary Hindi TV soaps?

Methodology

The research approach adopted for this study was exploratory and descriptive because of the lack of sufficient academic literature on the theme, especially in the Indian context. A mixed method design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative aspects of data collection was used. To understand the opinions of male viewers of Hindi TV soaps, a survey questionnaire comprising of twenty-six (close and open-ended questions) was employed. 120 survey responses were collected over a four-month period from various cities such as Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar, Bhuj, Gandhidham, Delhi, Mumbai, Naliya, Pune, Surat, Vadodara and others. Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit male participants watching Hindi TV serials. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with six experts from diverse fields to gain insights into their views on the subject. Informed consent was sought from all respondents and experts prior to data collection. The research tools were validated by an external expert and were subject to a round of pilot testing before being rolled out for the final phase of data collection. A google form was curated and circulated for the purpose of the survey. Open ended responses generated through both survey and interviews were transcribed and coded using descriptive coding to elicit categories and themes from the data. Descriptive coding involves breaking down primary data into precise, short words that reflect the respondent's views in their own words (Saldana, 2021). In the initial phase of analysis, data collected was sorted and filtered. Irrelevant and incomprehensible responses were removed. Emergent codes were grouped to form categories and later themes were derived from these categories. The presentation of numerical results derived from survey data is done in the form of charts and graphs while interview data in the descriptive format is presented using thematic analysis.

Limitations of the Study

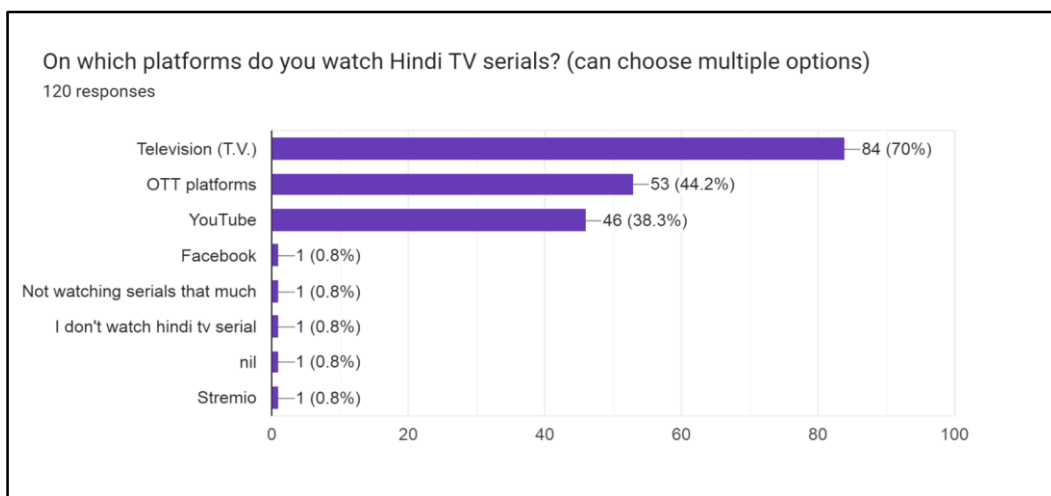
- The study was limited to Hindi TV soaps. Other mediums of pop culture were excluded.
- Only male viewers of Hindi TV soaps participated in the study.
- Sample size was limited to 120 respondents for survey and six experts for interviews.
- This study was primarily qualitative in nature. Quantifiable data obtained was confined to descriptive statistics.
- Variables such as age, educational qualification, income etc were not incorporated in the analysis.

- Factors that impact men’s opinions about Hindi TV soaps were not under study purview.

Results

Majority of respondents i.e. 65.8% fell in the age group of 18 to 30 years, i.e. young adults. 37.5% of the respondents worked in the service sector while 29.2% were students. Entrepreneurs and artists were also a part of the sample. 50% of the respondents were graduates. The responses to the survey questions are presented below.

Fig 1: Major platforms chosen by viewers to watch Hindi TV soaps



Even with the advent of internet, the popularity of TV is still intact. 70% of the total sample size watched soaps on TV. OTT platforms (44.2%) and YouTube (38.3%) were other major sources for watching TV soaps.

Fig 2: Time spent by viewers on TV serials

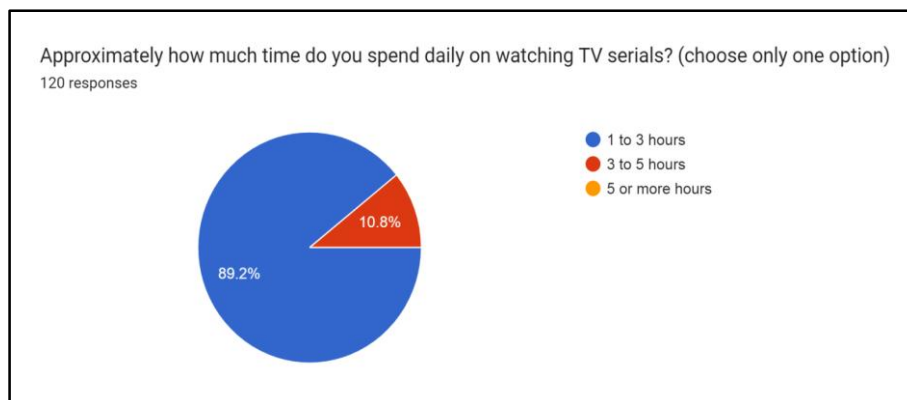


Fig 3: Viewers' involvement with Hindi TV soaps

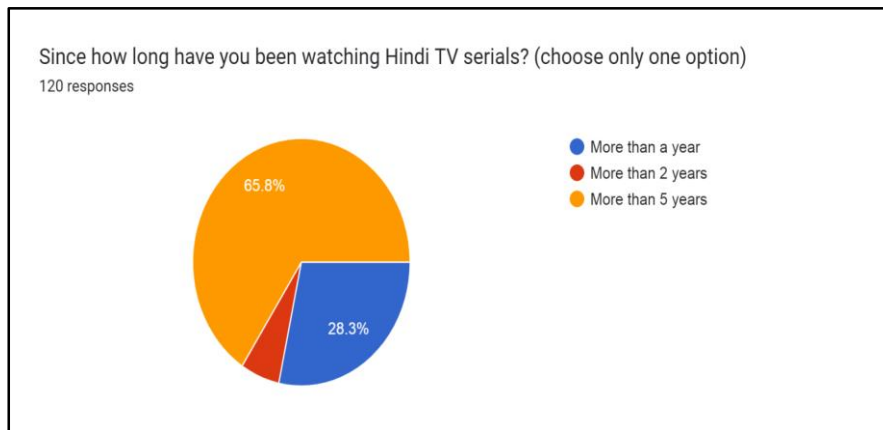
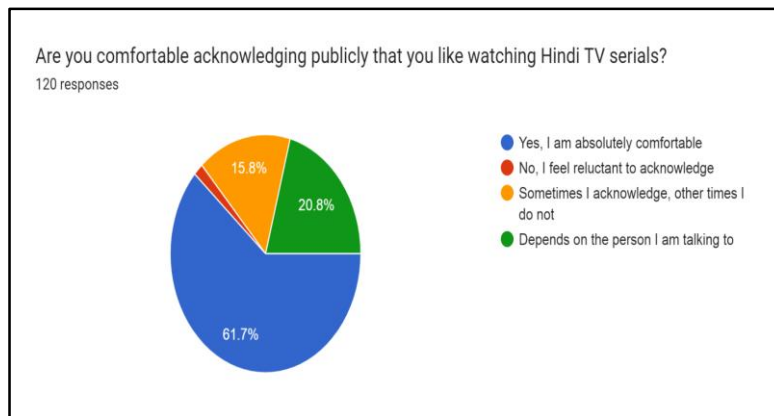
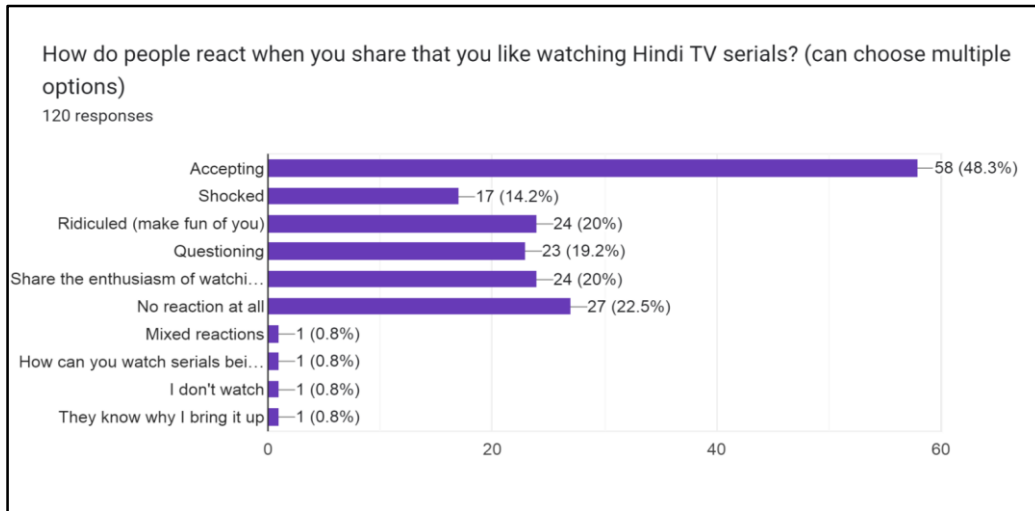


Fig 4: Acknowledgement of being a Hindi TV soap viewer



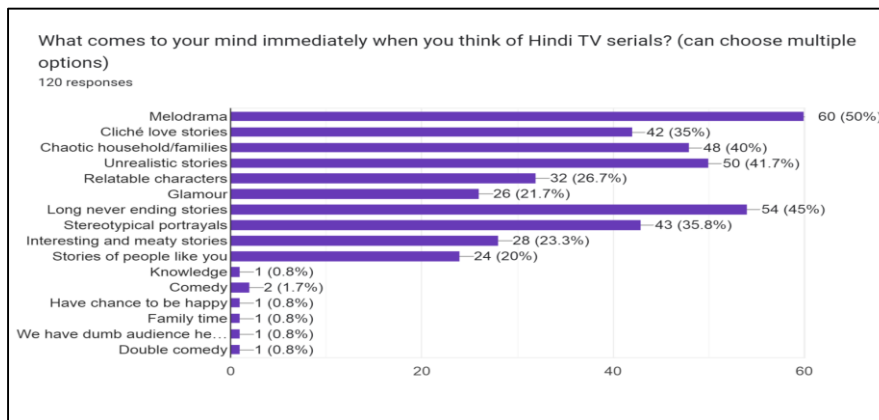
61.7% respondents felt absolutely comfortable in acknowledging that they watch Hindi TV soaps while only 1.7% of respondents felt reluctant to admit the same. 20.8% shared that they decide to acknowledge based on whom they are talking to and 15.8% moved between sentiments of acceptance and non-acceptance. This demonstrates that more and more men are not shying away from expressing and publicly acknowledging their liking for Hindi TV soaps.

Fig 5: People’s reactions



Among the various reactions that respondents reported to receiving from people about them watching Hindi TV soaps, 48.3% were of acceptance, 22.5% said that people did not react at all, 20% encountered both ridicule and enthusiasm and 19.2% respondents faced questions on the subject.

Fig 6: One word to describe Hindi TV soaps



When watching Hindi TV soaps, men think of these as melodrama (50%), long and never-ending stories (45%), unrealistic stories (41.7%), chaotic households and families (40%), stereotypical portrayals (35.8%) and cliché love stories (35%). Only 23.3% respondents found TV soaps full of interesting and meaty stories while a mere 20% found them relatable to their own lives. This means that male viewers of TV soaps recognize the motives behind the creation of these soaps and they also examine their content critically.

Fig 7: Significance of male characters in Hindi TV soaps

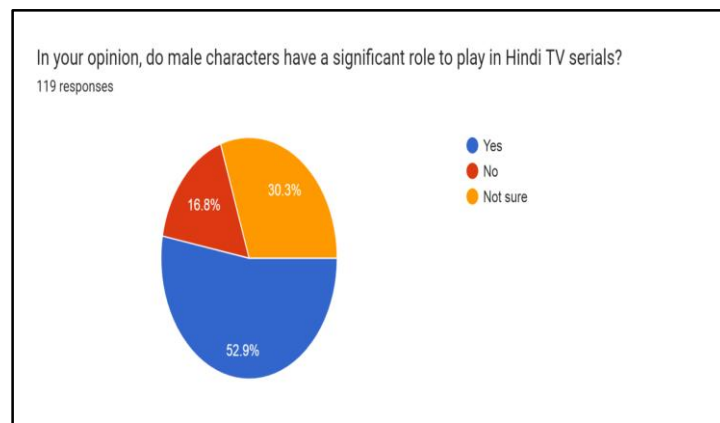
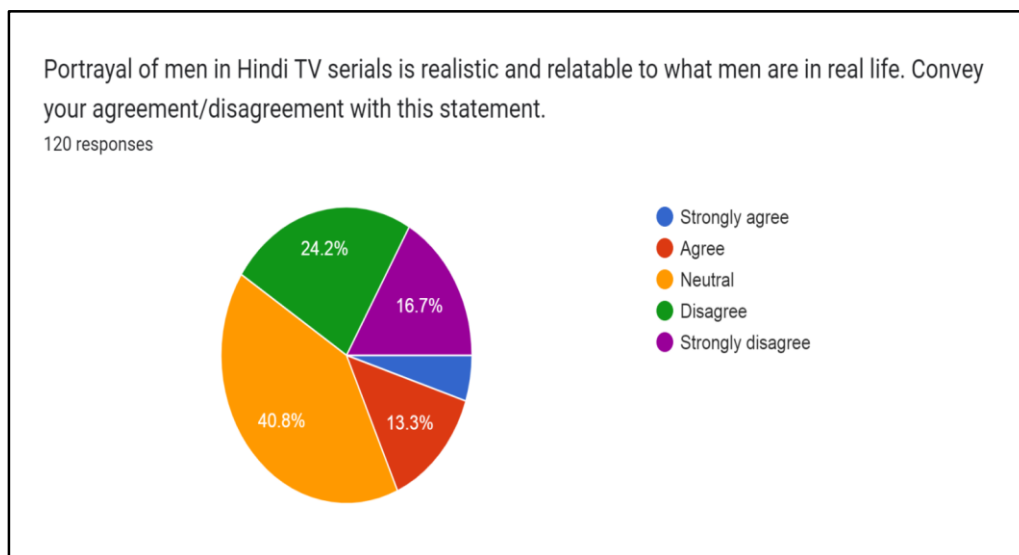


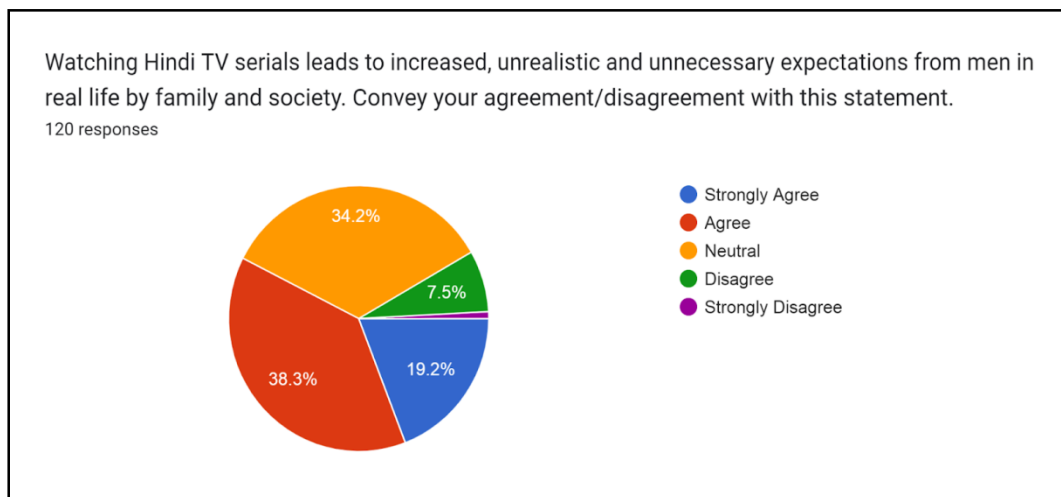
Fig 8: Real life men vs men on screen



When asked about how realistic and relatable is the portrayal of men on screen, most respondents chose to remain neutral (40.8%). However, 24.2% expressed disagreement, 16.7% expressed it strongly while only 13.3% found portrayals to be similar to real life situations and experiences of men. This could be inferred as an expression of dissatisfaction with the way men are portrayed on screen which corresponds with the responses in figure six where TV soaps are characterized as unrealistic, stereotypical and cliché. When asked about the portrayal of men in Hindi TV soaps in terms of physical attributes such as skin colour, hair colour, height and weight; 47.5% respondents observed that it was unrealistic and stereotypical while 31.7% found it realistic and true to life.

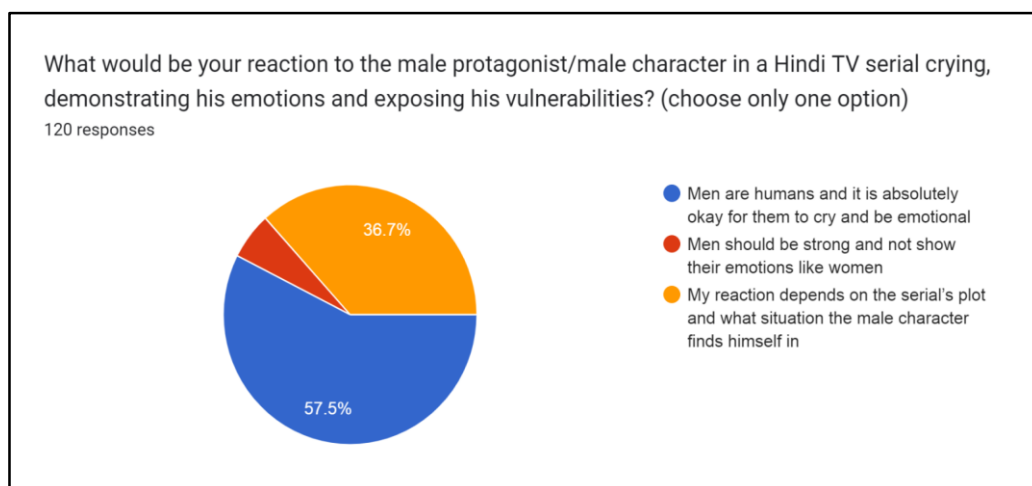
When asked about expectations from family and society that men on-screen generate for real life men, 38.3% respondents agreed with the expectations being unrealistic and unnecessary, 34.2% remained neutral and 19.2% strongly agreed with the statement.

Fig 9: Expectations from real-life men owing to on-screen men



When asked about their reactions to a male protagonist in a Hindi TV serial crying, expressing his emotions, and exposing his vulnerabilities; 57.5% conveyed acceptance, 36.7% stated that their reaction would depend on the serial’s plot and the situation in which the male character finds himself. Only 5.8% respondents opined that men should be strong and not show their emotions like women. This indicates a growing sense of awareness among Indian men regarding gender norms and roles validated by society and their willingness to challenge these in their own behaviour and that of others.

Fig 10: Opinions on male leads expressing emotions



Respondents were asked to share instances where the portrayal of men in Hindi TV soaps was un-accepting, stereotypical, and demeaning along with reasons. The most stereotypical representation of men, in viewers’ opinion, was to be seen in family dramas (29.8%). At the same time, when asked to name male characters that they admire in Hindi TV soaps, 30.5% named characters from family dramas (see table 2). This reflects a clear lack of diversity in

male role portrayals in Hindi TV soaps because of which there is limited choice offered to viewers in terms of who they like, emulate and on-screen male characters that they can relate to.

Table 1: Instances in Hindi TV soaps where men's portrayal is stereotypical

Genre	Instances
Family drama	Anupamaa's ex-husband portrayed as an evil and stubborn man, the younger brother in <i>Yeh Rishtaa Kya Kehlata Hai</i> is shown as a spoilt brat, Ahem in <i>Saath Nibhaana Saathiya</i> orders his wife to bring him green tea while she is lying on the bed unconscious. He is shown as an unrealistic, stereotypical husband as well as son as he never shows his emotions.
Comedy	Champaklal from <i>Tarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chasma</i> (TMKOC) is partial. He never scolds his daughter-in-law when she commits a mistake but when his son is wrong, he gets disappointed and scolds him; Sodhi in the same soap is shown as hyper energetic individual. He must be shown as rational, normal and non-dramatic; Both husbands in <i>Bhabhiji Ghar Par Hai</i> are shown flirting with each other's wives and even though the wives are aware of this, they don't bother. Jethalal in TMKOC makes racist jokes on Iyer's character; he is shown as typical Gujarati businessman with poor English skills.
Mythology	All characters in <i>Mahabharat</i> are shown with perfect physique and abs which is untrue. Real-life men don't have such attractive bodies.
Kids	In the serial <i>Son Pari</i> , the male character had no value. The show focuses only on Frooty and her relationship with her friend Son Pari. Altu is shown as good for nothing.
Others	The male character is deliberately shown as demeaning and sometimes less importance is given in front of the female lead; men are seen dealing with family issues all the time. Lot of family drama serials show a typical Gujarati family. Almost every serial is prejudiced against and stereotypes men; even in urban families, men are shown as less intelligent beings who need to be more mature.

Respondents were asked to share names of male characters whom they admire.

Table 2: On-screen male characters admired by viewers

Genre	Reasons
Family Drama	Nakuul Mehta in <i>Bade Acche Lagte Hai</i> (Part II) as he is a perfect family man with no arrogance; Ram Kapoor in <i>Bade Acche Lagte Hai</i> (Part II) as he is emotional. Ravi Dubey is admired for his acting skills. Vikrant Massey in <i>Baalika Vadhu</i> is admired for breaking stereotypes by marrying a widow. Dev in <i>Kuchh Rang Pyaar Ke Aise Bhi</i> for handling his love life and mother efficiently; Anuj in <i>Anupamaa</i> for dedicating his life to improve his lover's life.
Comedy	Jethalal in <i>TMKOC</i> for his comic timing and how he handles the problems life throws at him; Abdul from <i>TMKOC</i> for being loyal and faithful to society members; Taarak Mehta in <i>TMKOC</i> for teaching the importance of neighbours and other important life lessons; Roshesh from <i>Sarabhai V/S Sarabhai</i> ; Sumeet from <i>Sarabhai V/S Sarabhai</i> because he plays a character who has to strike a balance between his wife and his mother.
Mythology	Mohit Raina as Mahadev in <i>Devon ke Dev... Mahadev</i> for his acting skills, sense of maturity, and responsibility; Shaheer Sheikh as Arjun in <i>Mahabharat</i> and Sourabh Jain as Lord Krishna in <i>Mahabharat</i> for their on-screen chemistry, archery skills, dialogue delivery, and their charming looks.

Fig 11: Acceptance of non-mainstream portrayal of male leads by viewers

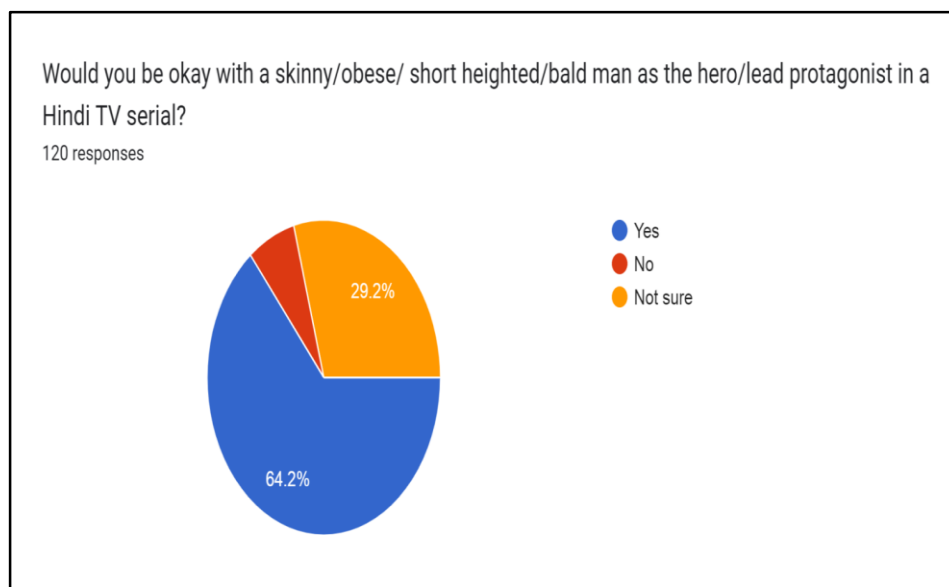
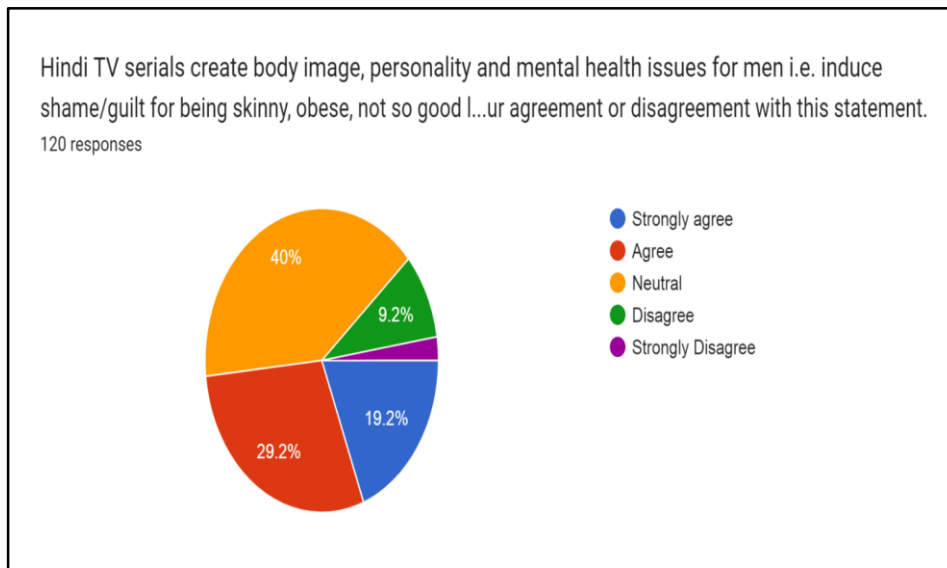


Fig 12: Impact of male role portrayals in Hindi TV soaps



29.2% respondents agreed that male role portrayals create body, image, personality and mental health issues for real-life men. 19.2% expressed strong agreement whereas 40% respondents demonstrated neutral opinion. Thus, what is shown on-screen is not limited to entertainment but percolates through society and culture, manifesting itself in terms of ways of life, expressions, behaviours, attitudes, and conception about one’s sense of self both physically and mentally.

Table 3: Themes derived from In-Depth Interview Analysis

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme-6
Evolution of TV soaps	Various sources of media consumption	Attributes of on-screen males vis-à-vis real life men	Comparison vis-à-vis women's portrayal	From the professional's perspective	Miscellaneous
The content of TV serials has adapted to changes in society and its customs, norms and ways of work have also been affected by pop culture portrayals.	TV is not the only medium of entertainment. Audience watches OTT and other platforms too. TV being the most convenient option, content on TV is consumed by the large population	Society often expects men to be strong, protectors and providers, overlooking their vulnerabilities This pressure can be a setback for makers/producers TV soaps	Women are the major audiences of Hindi TV soaps, hence focus is on female centric portrayals and this is loved by audiences. Women are portrayed as ideal/perfect.	TV professionals should encourage nuanced script writing that portrays men beyond stereotypical 'hero' qualities. This includes showcasing their vulnerability. Skilled actors can effectively portray these aspects.	TV has played a pivotal role in displaying social stigmas efficiently. Eventually TV was a significant medium to alter people's perceptions towards social issues.

In interviews with TV actors and actresses, it was noted that these soaps fulfill the audience's desire for something different from their routine, offering a dreamlike experience. TV soaps are believed to reveal hidden desires and societal expectations, particularly for women. They have evolved from storylines that focused on kitchen politics to romantic love stories with love-hate relationships, thereby shaping the ideal partner image for the female audience. Female interviewees expressed a desire for balanced gender portrayal, highlighting the need for gender equality and avoiding stereotypes. In contrast, the four male experts believed that TV soaps often portray women as perfect while depicting men as flawed, contributing to skewed gender portrayals. All interviewees agreed that there is need for diverse and non-traditional storylines such as -- male friendships, stories of real-life accounts of men as victims, which they felt are lacking in the current TV entertainment landscape in India.

Conclusion

Contrary to the common notion that men do not watch or like TV soaps, the results of the study reveal that men are an important segment of viewers who consume TV soaps and watch them ardently, often as a habit formed due to the influence of female family members or as a matter of personal choice. TV soaps are aired during the prime time -- 7 to 11 pm slot -- where women control TV remotes and hence are the target audience of soap makers. Both men and women watch these soaps primarily for their glamorous and extravagant depictions, providing viewers with an escape from everyday life. However, viewers find on-screen men to be stereotypical and portrayed as 'perfect' in all spheres of life which pressurizes them to stand up to these expectations. Lack of realistic portrayal is a pertinent issue with Hindi TV soaps as their storylines tend to overlook pressures faced by men that include body-shaming and emotional suppression. Viewers also strongly believe that while these soaps address a wide range of social issues, they continue to focus more on female-centric narratives, while neglecting men's issues. Encouraging acceptance of men regardless of physique or emotional expression is crucial and popular culture must play a significant role on this front. The popularity of content driven soaps is appreciated by viewers but they think that the portrayal of male characters needs to move away from cliched generalizations, demeaning caricatures to more balanced and humane. This will go a long way in promoting diversity, equality and inclusion in society.

Recommendations

For future studies in the domain:

- Survey with female viewers about their opinion of male role portrayals in TV soaps.
- Studies on soaps in other Indian regional languages owing to the market for and impact of regional pop culture.
- Large sample size to incorporate opinions of a cross-section of viewers.
- Using data collection methods such as content analysis, focus group discussions and ethnography.
- Study on male friendship, parent-child relationship, sibling bonds, romantic affiliations etc in context of male role portrayals.

For Television industry:

- Female oriented soaps are popular but producers should tell male centric stories.
- Balanced and realistic gender portrayals must be encouraged and institutionalized by all stakeholders.
- Subjects that are topical and relevant to the modern Indian man must be addressed by TV soaps (e.g., male camaraderie, societal expectations from men, body image issues, men as victims of domestic violence, marriage and divorce, alimony, emotional issues faced by men, gender biased laws in India and others).

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