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# Preference of Fantasy Soap Operas among Female Audiences: Motivations and Perceptions

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**Abstract.** Television has espoused several memorable incidents throughout its journey since its inception. A dissection of the body of works grouped under soap operas convinces us of the huge audience love that fantasy dramas have garnered. Hence, the present study tries to (i) find the motivations and perceptions for preference of soap operas with fantasy characters rather than non-mythic ones among female audiences, and (ii) understand if age, education and income impact the preference for soap operas with fantasy characters over non-mythic ones among female audiences. Using a cross-sectional survey of 468 female audiences of Kolkata, we find that the audience actively selects a particular show, given the plethora of other entertainment genres that support the 'selection pattern' concept while they seek to escape. Further, age, education and income are significantly related to motivations and perceptions of the preference for mythic characters in soap operas.

**Keywords.** Indian television, soap opera, mythic, audience analysis, uses and gratifications

## Introduction

The Indian economy experienced a revolutionary upheaval in 1991 with a new economic policy helmed by former Prime Minister of India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, seeing the light of the day (Munshi, 2010). As multi-channel broadcasting took place, the 'small screen adventure' set to explore new and exciting avenues. Naturally, a 'stiff competition' (Vijayalakshmi, 2005) was very much on the horizon as a slew of channels rose replacing the single-channel monopoly (Vijayalakshmi, 2005). This led to a sharp rise in the growth of cable television, multi-channel programs, and programs from foreign television (Vijayalakshmi, 2005). Hence, the Indian mediascape witnessed a drastic rise and popularity of soap operas broadcast during prime time for years (Ahmed 2012; Jaggi, 2011). Laskar (2015) identified that these serials transformed the melodramatic imaginations of family drama and the way female audiences watched them. The banal elements of religious rituals and superstitions were heavily infused within these serials to grab the eyeballs of the female audience (Laskar, 2015). The Balaji Production as one of the key players has transformed the genre of family drama from the year 2000 onwards (Lalwani, 2003; Munshi, 2010; Roy, 2011). Bakshi (2018), too, posits that Balaji Telefilms also started experimenting and reaping the benefits of transfusing supernatural elements with mythic and fantasy characters into soap operas.

## Fantasy soap operas with the supernatural and mythic concepts

Among all the other genres, the fantasy genre of soap opera has received prominence along with the horror genre in recent years in India. Fantasy genre soap opera is a kind of television offering to the audience that incorporates different types of mythic stories with visual effects. It has been