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Children's Television Media Experiences in Contemporary India: Contextualized in the Framework of Social, Economic, and Technological Changes

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Children's Television Media Experiences in Contemporary India: Contextualized in the Framework of Social, Economic, and Technological Changes

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Preface: Building bridges

1. The Starting Point

In 2017, when I joined the PhD program at IEAS, the focus of my work was crystal clear for me. I was a media professional specialising in commercial films and TV series work who had hoped to learn more about the child audience. I needed to understand the child audience comprehensively because I wanted to be a better content maker for my audience. Up until 2017, I had spent a decade in the film business with over 70 credits in my filmography which included Indian and international films & series titles. I was well versed with the business of content generation, but my understanding of the child audience was shaped mostly by discussions that took place in the context of a profit driven ecosystem. This understanding was not comprehensive for the work I wanted to do ahead in my career, which was to be a content maker who was tuned in to the sensibilities of her audience. Young children in the age group of 7 – 12 years being the audience of interest.

What led me to the decision of taking up a focused research program was a shift in my understanding about the audience. This came about during the course of delivery of a film. In 2014, I was working on a Bollywood film which I will codify as VNL[1]. During the final delivery of the film, I realised two things. The first being that what I knew about the audience was inadequate and second being that the quality of content that is largely offered to the mass audience is sub-par. These realisations came because of feedback from the censor board and eventually became the starting point of changes in my professional and personal journey.

Before a film is released for public viewing in India, it is presented to the Central Board of Film Certification which is a statutory body under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. In media parlance, this board is referred to as the censor board (because it censors content). The board regulates public exhibition of films. It gives a certificate which allows broadcast of content based on the rules laid out in the Cinematograph Act 1952, guidelines issued by the Central government u/s 5 (B) and the Cinematograph (certification) Rules of 1983. It gives four types of viewing certificate which are as follows (CBFC INDIA):

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[1] It has been a conscious choice not to name the film or provide any specific identifiable references in line with non-disclosure agreements I had signed for the film project.

U - unrestricted public exhibition
U/A - unrestricted public exhibition with a word of caution to use discretion when showing such content to children under 12 years.
A - restricted to adults
S - restricted to a special class of persons

These ratings mean that the board can recommend parts of a film to be deleted or certify that the entire film is unsuitable for public viewing, or give it a limited audience viewing certificate, or allow for the entire film to be exhibited as it is. For most producers, the aim is to get a U or a U/A rating as it allows for a larger audience reach, hence more sales via box office and television broadcast.

We had been working on VNL, the film mentioned above for over a month. After the end of an approximately 45-50 days long visual effects delivery schedule, the first version of the film was sent for censor review. We received news that the board had recommended 8 cuts to the film before it could be released publicly in theatres. We were asked to alter the shots with blood splatter by way of either removing them, reframing them, or reshooting them so that gory visuals would not be shown to families with children.

Eventually, the work on these shots was done in line with the censor board's recommendations. This film received a U/A certificate in India and was well received both domestically and internationally. It grossed $1,278,108 on the box-office worldwide. For most of the team who worked on this film, it was a successful project but for me it changed the course of my career and life.

This film drew my attention to a few key aspects. I found a missed opportunity in terms of how content makers continue to understand the audience and it led me to question the quality of content being dished out 365 days a year globally. A commercial screen production, be it a film or TV series, can take as little as 7 months to as many as 8 years before it is made available to the audience. Through this dynamic timeframe, many changes take place in social, economic, political, and technological settings in which the content is broadcasted and received by the audience. This context became a point of enquiry regarding how content makers account for the dynamic, ever evolving preferences of the audience. What do we as content makers really know about the audience? Or is it just the quest for creativity & profitability that we pursue in our craft?

Working on this film made me realise that there was a difference between what we thought we knew about the audience, what the regulatory bodies wanted us to show to the audience and what the audience may have wanted. It also made me wonder about the societal impact and the real worth of 12-15 hrs a day that film professionals including myself spent on the job every day, every week year after year. It made me think about the responsibility that we as content makers hold and what our contribution to the society is at large.

Across the globe, for most of media professionals who work on short or long format commercial productions such as advertisements, films, and series; a 70+ hour work week is a norm which can sometimes go up to over 100 hours as well. There remains an invisible side of the media industry characterised by extreme pressures, excess work, and extremely long working hours behind the Friday releases available in theatres and on popular streaming services which audiences enjoy over the world. Such a state of industry is very concerning. An equally concerning situation is that despite the long hours spent in making content, the understanding of the audience remains limited and continues to be stereotypical for most part.

The contemporary media ecosystem which comprises of linear television, Internet-based web content and streaming services is characterized by niche markets, niche content and content personalization among other features. Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a part of the media industry. In such an ecosystem a stereotypical understanding about the audience is inadequate and skewed at best. There remains a great deal of difference between what creative teams sitting in a production office looking at TRP (target rating point) ratings assume about what the audience want/think and what the audience want/think. This is a gap that needs to be bridged. The quest to build a bridge between audience and the media industry eventually led me to a formal full time research program.

2. Position of the researcher

Undertaking this research journey within an academic setting was of paramount importance for me as such a setting has presented the possibility of being driven by a pure sense of enquiry backed by wisdom of countless scholars and researchers before me in place of profit agendas as it happens with commercial work.

I wanted to focus on India as I come from India. It is a demography that is highly under researched when it comes to the topic of children and media. Interestingly, India is also one of the fastest growing economies of the world and is the world's second biggest democracy. Contemporary India has a population of over 1.42 billion people who represent a

robust mix of cultural practices (Mariner 2024). For a wider context, the Republic of India comprises of 28 states and 8 Union territories, each of which boasts of a unique demography, history, culture, attire, festivals, and languages (Census 2011, Language: India, States and Union Territories). Census of India 2011 lists 19569 mother tongues spoken in India of which 121 are identified as languages (4). In this list of 121 languages, 22 mother tongues are recognized as languages as per articles 344 (1) and 351 of the constitution of India while 99 mother tongues remain un-recognized as languages. The list of recognized languages includes Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Meitei (Manipuri), Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhal, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu. Additionally, PART XVII of the Constitution of India states that Hindi and English are its two official languages (2). The mix of the population is heterogeneous and so are media preferences.

The complex layers of Indian culture are deep. In addition to the above stated regional diversity, Indian culture represents an amalgamation of contemporary cultural practices that align with global culture while existing alongside ancient cultural practices that date back to 4th century Indus Valley civilisation. Modernity and old traditions co-exist here. India boasts of a highly digitised technologically savvy society that exists within a framework of traditional cultural practices. It is in India's vibrant, booming, and globally oriented media economy that my own identity and understanding about audience are rooted.

My background as a media professional with a strong international body of work and equally strong connections to India affords me a unique position to speak to and about Indian culture, society, and media industry as an insider. My work experience has given me first-hand knowledge and on ground experience of how popular content is created and broadcasted globally. This experience provides me subject matter expertise on content generation aspects related to children, media, and society.

Additionally, before embarking on a formal research program, I had also spent two years working with children as a schoolteacher while continuing my media work parallelly. This experience gave me insights into how children in the age group of 7 -12 years operate in their everyday life. It enabled me to engage in informal participatory observation where I was able to engage in discussions with children on various topics relevant to them. The school where I worked was a senior secondary school and I engaged with children in the age group of 4 years to 17 years on a regular basis. My time of teaching exposed me to working with at least 800 - 1000 children over a span of two years in total.

My experience as a media professional and a teacher positions me at the junction of two intersecting worlds that place children as the point of focus. Such a position has given me a deeper understanding about my research topic and enabled easy access to children and media professionals who have been an instrumental part of this work. Such a position seldom becomes available to researchers solely coming from an academic setting. I am also aware that it is a rather rare occurrence for a media professional to engage in fulltime academic research with a hope of creating better content or for an academic researcher to carry on media industry work. However, it is at this point of intersection between media and the academic world that we can hope for true change in storytelling to come about as our choices become more informed on both sides as researchers and media professionals.

With the above stated considerations, this research work has been conceptualized as a bridge that brings all stake holders such as the audience (children and parents/teachers), content makers and academic researchers to a common ground to arrive at a comprehensive understanding about the media ecosystem surrounding children in India.

Given the state of rapidly evolving media experiences and media ecosystems surrounding children, it has been prudent to approach the work as exploratory research to develop a wider and comprehensive view on the subject. It is on purpose that no pre-defined thesis was assumed at the start of the work. No definite or absolute conclusions or claims about media being good or bad for children have been made either. I have approached my work from a position of observing how different stake holders relate and connect with the media ecosystem. Analysis of these observations and the varying aspects about the media ecosystem and society have been presented even if they may appear contradictory on occasions.

For instance, through the study of programs I found that gender stereotyping continues to remain prevalent in the shows that were analysed. In the same space of research, I also discuss the interviews with content makers of these programs and their desire to break away from these stereotypes. This desire does not always become visible in programs. In bringing these opposing positions, my intention has been to bring in focus the work that continues to be done, even though painfully slow, in bringing a shift in the story telling processes.

Another example that I discuss is about children spending over 10 hours a day with devices which is not healthy by any stretch. I also present a positive perspective in sections where I discuss about media learnings, a term which I propose to indicate how children look up to media to learn about important life skills, deal with life and many other things in

absence of a joint family system. These are contrasts that co-exist in the contemporary media ecosystem surrounding children in India. Occurrence of one does not negate the presence or validity of the other aspect.

Much like the culture of India which is full of juxtapositions. Uncovering a comprehensive view has been a focus of my work in this dissertation to present an informed layout of the land on aspects that surround scholarship on children and media. There are no absolutes. Context is crucial in understating these discussion points.

The findings presented in this research are based on a small-scale study which examines the experiences of a particular demography. Such a work provides great depth and an intimate understanding about the child audience and their everyday experiences with media, which are not available in case of mass research done by corporations. The findings of this study can help break stereotypes in corporate research which forms the basis of programming strategy at several international broadcasters and channels. However, it is prudent to note that these results pertain to a specific population and by no means are suggested as a generalized opinion about all children in India, which stand at a population size of roughly 480 million people (Chandrakant 85-6).

Given the importance of the topic and the current state of limited availability of scholarship on this topic in India, this research is hoped to be a conduit for further research. It is hoped that the findings will provide a roadmap to understand the dynamic nature of the media industry, to understand the audience intimately yet comprehensively and to find ways by which different stake holders of the media ecosystem can come together to create a better world for children.

3. Further research influences

The experience of researching within a university setting has allowed me to learn about various academic theories and works through which media has been studied globally. I have learnt a lot through the courses I did in addition to the classes at university. These additional courses include a qualitative and quantitative research methods workshop conducted by Indian Council of Social Sciences Research which gave me an overview of the research approaches that are most suitable for work in interdisciplinary studies.

Further on, I went on to complete a course titled Qualitative Research Methods: Conversational Interviewing offered by Massachusetts Institute of Technology through edx.com and another course titled Qualitative Research offered by Michigan University

through edx.com. Both these courses were very helpful in understanding how I could conduct my field-based research best. My time at the School of Arts and Aesthetics of Jawaharlal Nehru University where I was a visiting research fellow helped me in structuring the finer details of the field work which I conducted in India. Finally, I took up a PhD workshop titled "Researching transnational television: research challenges and matters of translation" conducted by the Faculty of Arts of University of Arhus, Denmark. This workshop proved very useful in structuring my arguments in a global context.

In addition to the study opportunities at the university, I benefited greatly from various conferences, workshops, and seminars that I participated in. Between 2017 and 2023, the time that I spent as a PhD candidate at the IEAS, I participated in 21 international conferences, sometimes as a speaker and sometimes as a participant. These conferences allowed me to test my findings in a closed user group setting and learn from the valuable feedback that I received during discussions. I found various industry professionals from prominent media organizations deeply interested in the topic and findings of the work. This experience further indicated to me that the need for the kind of research I was undertaking was felt by other media professionals as well. The opportunity of listening to professors and seasoned media professionals at industry and academic forums has brought many insights to my own research. These interactions have encouraged me to look beyond what I already knew at the start of my PhD and find an openness in my mind to frame my research questions from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Interactions with media experts who are involved with content available on prominent channels and streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Disney, and several others helped me in mapping academic arguments with industry trends. Conversations with many of these individuals have touched me deeply as I found many executives at prominent media organisations who continue to rally to make better quality content away from stereotypical representations often at the cost of professional risk of going against corporate mandates and against profit driven agendas. Such individuals have inspired me and given me great strength to continue my research work through the long duration of this dissertation.

It has never been my intention to belong to one subfield of academic research as it does not serve the purpose with which I entered research work. As such scholarly works from various fields have been studied in addition to field work which has involved interactions with the media industry. It has been my endeavour to find ways in which results of academic

explorations can translate to industry practices. I have hoped that the analysis done through such research conducted under the scope of a university program can lead to better content generation. I hope that my research work will help international scholars, media professionals and those like me who stand at a point of intersection between the two worlds of academic research and the media industry, to arrive at a better understanding about India, its children, culture, and media.

Chapter 1 : Overview

1. Introduction to the research problem

The contemporary media industry in India has witnessed a rapid and pervasive transformation in its ecosystem over a long period of time. The said media ecosystem includes multiple stake holders such as content makers, content distributors, content aggregators, advertisers, media professionals, regulatory bodies, and the audience. Transformation can be seen in methods of television content production, distribution, and consumption. One of the most striking changes can be seen in the case of the media ecosystem that focuses on children as the audience. This is especially evident in case of the audience in the age group of 7 to 12 years from urban middle income households.

There are three key interconnected aspects that form the foundation stone of this evolving state of contemporary media landscape. These aspects relate with the socio-cultural environment, economic development, and policy & technology changes that have taken place in the country between 1990s to the present day (Krishnan 73-84; Chaturvedi and Srinivas 83-97). To understand the emerging media culture surrounding children from urban middle class homes in India, this research examines the contemporary media experiences of children in the age group of 7 to 12 years from this section of the society within the framework of socio-cultural, economic, and policy-technology aspects. These aspects have been studied from a position of interconnectedness between historical events and contemporary trends. Works such as *Children's Television in India: A Situational Analysis*; *Sociology of Indian Society; Structure and Changes in Indian Society; Structure of Indian Society, Society in India: Concepts, Theories and Channing Trends; South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts; Children and Media in India: Narratives of Class, Agency and Social Change; Media and Child Development; The Impact of Television Advertising on Children; The Indian Media Economy; Mass Communication in India: a Sociological Perspective; Communication, Development and Civil Society: Essays on Social Development and Civil Society; India after Liberalisation, Political Economy, Growth and Liberalisation in India, Becoming a Global Audience, An Indian Personality for Television - Vol 1; Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India; Television Industry in India: Market Structure, Conduct, and Performance; Television in India: Satellites, Politics and Cultural Change, Television in India: a Sociological Study of Policies and Perspectives, Gandhi Meets Primetime: Globalization and Nationalism in Indian Television; Satellite Invasion of India; Broadcasting in India; and Liberalisation and Globalisation of Indian Economy* have

provided the relevant framework to build arguments on. Interconnectedness found in historical perspectives about various subjects has provided an India-specific context for understanding the contemporary trends in children's media culture.

Changes on the policy front such as the implementation of the New Industrial Policy of 1991 served as the starting point of transformation that ensued in the socio-cultural, economic, and technological sphere of life in India. It led India towards globalization, privatization, and an increase in foreign direct investment in the local markets (Ministry of Commerce and Industry 2, 3; Naik et al. 3-6). Consequentially, technological advancements such as developments in the telecommunication industry, the rise of Internet technology and innovations in media technology were instrumental in ushering changes in the media ecosystem (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry 2018, 14). From a socio-cultural and economic standpoint, the rise of the middle class, economic growth, increase in employment opportunities, urbanization, changes in family structures are some of the key aspects relevant to this discussion (Roy 32-7).

It is in the context of these developments that a new media culture for children in urban areas has emerged. It includes media engagement experiences that are situated in a hybrid model of content distribution and consumption. This hybrid model includes media exposure through cross platform services which comprise of free to air (FTA) content on linear broadcast, paid video on demand (VOD) service and subscription-based VOD services that use Internet (Parks, Velkova and Ridder 1-22). Features such as these have changed the location, methodology and definition of what constitutes media engagement in contemporary India. Foremost, the term television which was once referred to a physical hardware has now evolved.

Screen experiences that are mobile, location independent and personalised have given birth to individual-specific media rituals (Couldry 4; Hepp 3-4; Livingstone 1). For instance, with the advent of smartphones, watching television has become a location independent activity. With the changes in the size of the viewing device and availability of Internet, media can be experienced in a personalised setting whereas in the past it was typically a family-based activity with everyone watching programs on a television set. In a country like India which is rooted in the ethos of community and family, a move from communal media experiences to individual-focused experiences points to a burgeoning change in the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Subsequently, in case of children in the age group of 7 – 12 years from urban middle class homes, a newfound media culture is emerging as this generation is

witnessing transformation in their media ecosystem that is unprecedented in its pace and methods.

2. Dissertation structure

This dissertation aims to contextualize contemporary media experiences of children in India in a historic framework to provide India-specific findings. To this effect, the first chapter serves as an introduction to the research approach and methodology used for this work. The second chapter provides a review of literature and key discussions. This is followed by chapter three which provides a detailed historical context of how media has grown in India and how children's entertainment genre is positioned in India in contemporary times.

Chapter four introduces the readers to historically interconnected factors that have shaped contemporary media engagement experiences of children. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of policy, technological, social, cultural, and economic changes that pertain to the rise of children's television in India. The connection between policy changes and technological developments establishes how the relationship between the two has led to the creation of a hybrid media ecosystem and brought the audience closer to content makers. Further on, analysis of changes in the social and cultural aspects shines a light on the new media culture that has emerged for children.

The interconnectedness of these chapters serves as a point of departure and provides the right framework to contextualize the discussions in the next chapters. In the context of the above discussions, chapter five engages with media experiences of children that include patterns of engagement, themes of content and the relationship between children and media. Chapter six presents' findings from the field work where children report about their experiences with media, parents/ teachers share their understanding about how media operates in the lives of children and media experts provide insights about the state of the industry. Chapter seven presents a summary of relationship between children and media in contemporary urban India in the form of concluding remarks.

3. Research framework

The framework of this research includes the study of academic works, program analysis and an exploratory study which includes ethnography. Study of academic works from various interdisciplinary fields has been found useful in arriving at a deeper understanding of factors that impact media experiences of children in contemporary India. Analysis of two programs has helped in mapping the crucial themes that make the agenda of children's television in India. The exploratory study considers perspectives of different stake holders such as children, parents/ teachers, and media experts. An approach based on a method of triangulation has been found appropriate for this work. This has enabled an in-depth analysis of how children engage with media in an Indian context.

Platt (9), states that over the last few decades, research into childhood has emphasised that child research subjects should be treated as agents. This means that children should be regarded as active participants in the research process rather than as those on whom research is done. They should be respected as being able to report on their own lives, behaviours, and experiences. This has been reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which stresses the importance of children expressing their views on matters that affect them (Lansdown 112). In line with this approach, children are one of the key stake holders who report on their experiences with media. Their experiences and their media ecosystem have been studied within the setting in which they are situated. Observing participants and recording data in their natural setting has allowed for an analysis which is free from pre-determined results. Keeping in mind the nature of this topic where changes are rapid as technology and consumption trends are constantly evolving, it has been found fitting to use a framework which allows continuous flow of literature review, data collection and analysis.

3.1 Academic Framework

As far as engaging with topics related to children and media are concerned, works of Shakuntala Banaji, Sonia Livingstone, Dafna Lemish, Maya Götz, Patti M Valkenburg, Henry Jenkins, Nick Couldry, Norma Pecora, Sandra L Calvert, Barbara J Wilson, Ellen Ann Wartella, John P Murray, Gordon. L Berry, Barrie Gunter, Jill Mcaleer among others have provided relevant foundation to build further scholarship. Additionally, research by Arvind Rajgopal, Arbind K Sinha, Bhaskar Ghose, Daya Kishan Thussu, Binod C Agarwal, Maya Ranganathan, and Usha M Rodrigues has been very helpful in understanding various interrelated aspects especially in context of India.

The methodology and the approach to work which many of the researchers mentioned above follow was found to be extremely useful in the context of research in India. Banaji's work (2010, 2017) and a conversation with her after the first year of starting this research served as a north star to keep the course both in terms of research framework and approach. Much needed direction came from an informal interaction with Livingstone and her work on the project EU Kids Online and others (2015, 2016). Discussions with Dr Veena Hariharan from Jawaharlal Nehru University in India supported in deciphering complex layers of analysis pertaining to children and media in India. Susan Silbey's approach to qualitative research provided much needed understanding of empirical research methods (2). Taking a leaf from Lemish (xvi), I too have followed the approach of applying theory to field work. I present findings that are India-centric and evaluate the relevance of western studies in the context of India to enhance understanding and meaning making in the empirical world.

3.2 Choice of programs

Programs were chosen for analysis based on the following four considerations. These are as follows:

- These programs were a part of a list of programs that children watched, based on the results from a survey questionnaire administered as part of field work for this research in 2017 (Hooda 137-141. Through the survey it was found that animation was the most popular category in entertainment for children (see Appendix C and D).
- They were specifically made for children as the target audience, irrespective of the specific age group of children as long as the respondent group watched them.
- These were television shows for which it was possible to connect with the creators of at least one show to triangulate the findings between the discussions with the audience (children) about their experience, analysis of the program and discussions with the creators of these programs.
- They were chosen as they could demonstrate the developments in the content industry, and they matched the viewing preferences of the children who were a part of the respondent group.

Based on the above stated four considerations, two programs *Chhota Bheem* and *Doraemon* were chosen. These programs were popular with children from the respondent group. This conclusion was drawn based on the findings of the survey conducted at the start of this research which included 201 girls and 249 boys. Children were asked about their favourite programs in this survey (Animation was the most popular

Children listed a total of 197 different programs that were available on the Indian television with presence on the World Wide Web (Hooda 137-141). The top ten programs that children listed included live action programs as well. One of the most popular live action programs was *Tarak Mehta ka Oolta Chasma* which is targeted at a general population which includes adults and children both. Such programs have not been analysed as they do not fit the purview of this research.

The next two popular shows that children listed were both foreign language shows that are localized in Indian languages. These shows are Japanese language cartoon programs that are titled *Shinchan* and *Doraemon*. Between these two, *Shinchan* is a program that is culturally understood to have negative impact on children due to the use of derogatory language in the dialogues. In the year 2008, this program was banned in India for this reason (Jain 2022). Since the findings from analysis of the program were to be mapped to findings from participatory observation and discussions with children, this program was not included in the list of programs to study to safeguard the interest of children.

As a result, Doraemon was chosen instead, which is an equally popular show for children. The analysis of this Japanese program brings to focus technological developments in content strategy such as localization which is a crucial part of the Indian media ecosystem for children. The next program that children listed as a favourite was *Chhota Bheem* which is an Indian program made available to the international audience. Additional factors such as access to content makers of the program and the global success of the franchise were reasons to choose this program to study as part of this research.

Chhota Bheem led to the creation of the first Indian original animation franchise that proved that Indian content for children had a global audience. It was the second most watched kids' animation show on Netflix globally in June 2019 with an approximate viewership of 40 million viewers world-wide (Laghate 2019) (Balakrishnan). The original language of the show is Hindi. This popular program has been created by Rajiv Chilaka who is one of the respondents of the expert interview group. As such, this program was included in the research.

Both *Chhota Bheem* and *Doraemon* are available on linear television through private broadcast channels and private streaming services. Language of programs chosen for analysis is Hindi as it is one of the official languages of India and widely spoken in North India where the respondent group of children come from. Programs on the public broadcast channel were not included in this research as they were not reported by the respondent group as preferred programs in questionnaire A administered during the first survey (see Appendix A, B & C).

3.3 Exploratory Ethnographic Study

Taking a leaf from Davies' work on research methodology, mixed methods of research with a strong inclination towards qualitative research have been used for this work (13). Tools such as participatory observation, interviews, focus group discussions and surveys have been found appropriate. Survey method has been used purely to give a context to the qualitative discussions that follow the work. The work has been iterative in nature with formal field work conducted in phases and spread over years between 2017 to 2022. The work took longer than expected due to restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Field work considerations**

Through the course of the field work, due importance was given to keeping children safe during interactions. Parental consent in writing was obtained before involving children as respondents (see Appendix A). All discussions and observations took place as per regulations of the school which was the location of field work concerning children. These included holding sessions in rooms that had the doors open with a teacher nearby. If children did not feel comfortable or expressed disinterest in any aspect of the discussion, they had the freedom to leave the room. This information was shared with them before each session began. No inappropriate questions were asked about sex, family income, religion, cultural habits, or anything else that the children felt uncomfortable about sharing.

It was ensured that appropriate seating was available for all respondents and social distancing was maintained when field work resumed after COVID-19 lockdown. During discussions, the seating was organized in a way that the interviewer and interviewees were all at the same eye level. This helped in dispelling the perception of power and control that exists in a school environment between students and teachers or children and adults. Such a seating plan ensured that children felt unrestricted in sharing their views and describing their experiences with media in a relatively informal style of discussion.

In case of interviews with media experts and parents/ teachers, prior consent was obtained before recording the sessions. In cases where media experts did not want to be quoted on record due to their professional obligations, their insights were taken as part of the overall framework but excluded from the process of transcription. In cases where interviews could not be done in an in-person setting due to travel restrictions during the pandemic, the method of interview was changed to online discussions.

- **Location of field work**

The location of the field work concerning children and parents/teachers was kept consistent over the years. This location was a senior secondary school which was chosen based on convenience sampling. Furthermore, the demography of the participants at this school fit the research mandate very well. Due consideration was given to the possibility that interactions in a formal setting such as that of a school may lead children to give responses that were tailored to make them appear smart. However, it was more important to ensure that they felt comfortable and familiar with their environment while participating in discussions as such the location of their school was chosen. To circumvent the smart-answer situation, time was spent with children with the idea of breaking ice through simple discussions about their everyday life and playing quiz games. This technique was adopted on all occasions before any research task was carried out with children. Paraments of the field work such as the interviewer, duration of each interaction, atmosphere of the discussion room was kept as constant as possible through the course of years of this work to ensure familiarity for the children. This helped children feel comfortable and free enough to answer in a way that felt most authentic to them.

Interviews and discussions with industry experts were conducted in person in India in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune and in Germany in Berlin and in France in Cannes. Sometimes these interactions took place in the offices of the experts and sometimes at industry conferences such as Berlinale Film Festival, European Film Market and MIPCOM Cannes.

- **Sampling plan**

Respondents were chosen based on convenience sampling. Three categories of respondents were included in this work. These are children, parents/ teachers, and media experts.

- Children: The respondent group of children comprised of boys and girls between 7 years and 12 years of age. An approximate ratio of 50:50 between boys and girls was targeted. In line with the data protection policy, the names of children and the school have been concealed. The choice of respondent group was derived based on thorough analysis of factors relevant to this research that will be explained in the next section. A link to recorded interviews can be found through Appendix D.
- Parents / teachers: The respondent group comprising of parents / teachers was identified as per the respondent group of children. Comparing the perspectives of children and parents from the same family and socio-economic setting has been helpful in producing

comprehensive findings. In line with the data protection policy, the names of the respondent and the school have been concealed. Discussions done with them were recorded on video during the stage of focus group discussion. These can be reviewed through Appendix D.

- Media experts: The respondent group of media experts was chosen based on three considerations –expertise within the media industry, being a creator of the program being discussed in the dissertation, and possibility of having access to them. Details of respondents from the expert interview pool, interview questions and transcripts are available in Appendix E - J respectively.

- **Respondent group of children**

Children are the most important respondent group for this research. Traditionally, children have been assumed to be voiceless, passive, lacking in capacity and in opposition to adults (Smith & Taylor ix-xiii; Mittal 2005; Freeman & Mathison 2009; Robinson and Jones-Diaz 2016). With such a conceptualisation children become objects rather than subjects of research (Dobson 28). In recent years, a shift has come in the academic understanding of children and childhood. A stronger conception of children is coming about as researchers are beginning to recognise children as partners and collaborators in research about them (Dobson 28; Dunn 395-408; Robinson and Jones-Diaz 2016; Britt and Mc-Lalchan 2015). This dissertation positions children as collaborators. For the research method to be effective, the work required a sample group of children that would:

- be from an area which had an average to favourable literacy rate, since media consumption in urban middle-income homes relates to literacy and aspirations of a better life.
- be from a region that would be close to the national average percentage of child population to provide for generalization and replication to some extent and provide validity of results.
- be from an urban area because past academic literature has revealed that content makers assume urban children to be their target audience (Banaji 90).
- be located within the framework of an organization which would support research in the field of children and media.

With the above considerations in mind, at first, a state was chosen, then a city within the state and then a school from this city was chosen from which the respondent group was derived. As many of the readers of this dissertation may not be familiar with Indian states geographically, Map 8 from the Indian Census survey 2011 has been given in figure 1 for reference (61-76).

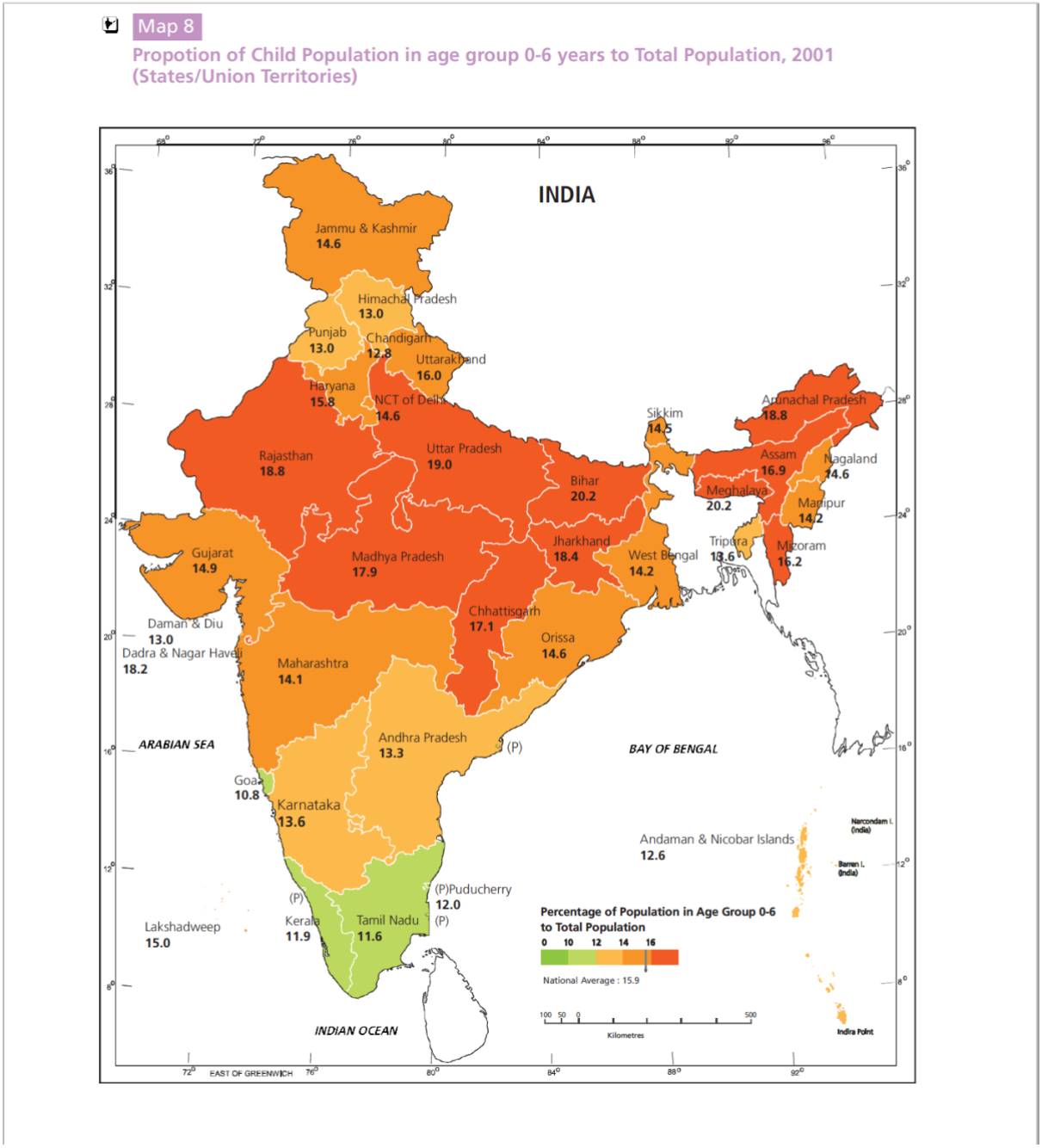

Figure 1: Census 2011. Size, Growth Rate and Distribution of Child Population.

Choice of state: From 28 states and 8 union territories in India, the state of Haryana was chosen, which had an effective literacy rate of 76. 6% in 2011. The state was close to the average rate of effective literacy in India which stood at 74% as per the last census of 2011 (Census 97-136).The percentage of child population to total population stood at 13% in Haryana which was close to the national average of 13.1% (Census 61-76). The Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India maps the population in India across two age groups which are 0-6 years who are classified as children of 7 years and over. Since specific population size was not available, the age group of 0-6 years has been taken as indicative of

the children between 7 to 12 years. The state of Haryana forms the northern, western, and southern borders of Delhi, the capital city of India. A large area of Haryana is included in the National Capital Region (GOH Districts). Being adjacent to the capital city ensured that this state had all the relevant makings of an urban area that are targeted by commercial content makers when they look for their target audience. As such it was appropriate to choose a city from Haryana.

Choice of city: Within Haryana, the choice of city was based on convenience sampling and the level of literacy in the urban area. For this small-scale study, the respondent group has been derived from Panipat, which is classified as an urban city (GOI, Classification of India Cities 4). As per Census 2011, the urban area of Panipat (a city in the state of Haryana, near New Delhi) had an approx. population of 4,42,277 people with a literacy rate of 81.75% (DA Fact File). The city constitutes an urban area since the population is over 1,00,000 people (Census 2011, 1) comprising of large middle-income households.

Choice of school: An English medium senior secondary school in northern India was chosen from where the respondent group of children and parents/teachers was derived. The school was found to be supportive of the general framework of this research which made long term field work possible. The average population of this school belongs to middle-class income group and has various religious and caste identities.

- **Data set**

The materials that form the data sets for this research include the following:

- Survey questionnaire
- Focus Group Discussions
- Participatory Observation
- Interviews
- Two children's programs
    - *Chhota Bheem* – presented as a case study and discussed with children.
    - *Doraemon* – Discussed in detail with children.

- **Field work timeline**

Phase one: Survey - The first part of field work comprised of administering an open-ended questionnaire in November 2017 to children and parents/teachers. The purpose of the questionaries was to arrive at a general understanding of what children did with media and how

it is situated in their lives. The results from this survey provided an understanding of the local context, program preferences and a glimpse into the day-to-day life of children. The respondent group comprised of 201 girls and 249 boys and 70 teachers (Hooda, 137-141). It helped in listing out the 5 programs that were their favourite shows. Children were asked about their television program preferences, the relevance of these programs and media usage habits.

Phase two: Focus Group Discussions and Interviews - The second part of field work comprised of focus group discussions with twenty children, ten teachers who were also parents for children of the same age and belonged to the same socio-economic setting and seven media experts. The field work was conducted between 2017 – 2022. This process helped in engaging in a deeper conversation with children about topics and issues that were relevant to them. It was in this stage that children shared their motivations for using media the way they did. The discussions brought out some compelling observations from the perspective of children about their media use.

Expert interviews were conducted with seven media professionals in a semi-structured protocol. Additionally, twenty more media professionals provided their valuable insights during media conferences and seminars. These discussions further opened conversations about media and children in India. These experts are still actively engaged with media production work. In certain cases where the experts were working at big corporations such as Warner Bros., Discovery, or Netflix, they requested for anonymity for professional reasons. As such, they have not been named or quoted. These discussions have not been recorded like the expert interviews.

For expert interviews, open-ended questions were designed to allow the interviewees to explain in his/her own words, the rationale, goals, perspectives, problems, and solutions that encompass the media landscape in India. The informal interviews seek information on the respondent's experience and interpretation of their engagement with media. The media experts were asked to describe and contextualize their understanding and experience of content generation in India. It has been a conscious decision to collect information without pre-conceptualizing the categories of analysis to arrive at a broader understanding of key questions and issues relevant for this research topic.

Phase three: Survey, Focus Group Discussion & Participatory Observation - In 2022, the final round of survey was conducted to map the changes in preferences of children and find out if there were any new themes or considerations that had emerged during the research work which impacted the media experience of children. The questionnaire was

administered to 193 children comprising of boys and girls between 7 to 12 years of age. The respondent group was derived based on random sampling of student population from the same school where the first round of survey was conducted. Due to COVID 19, it was difficult to find all the same children to be a part of the survey again. Instead, the focus was on finding children of the same age group who had the same social settings as of those who participated in the first survey.

The last phase of group discussions was done in 2022 with 30 children. This was followed by participatory observation. During participatory observation, the respondent group comprised of 56 children. They were all between the ages of 7 to 12 years and were from the same school where the survey was conducted.

4. Limitations of research

The limitation of this research includes aspects related with use of media industry terms, context of the readers and the writer, impact of the pandemic and the scale of the study. The first limitation concerns the formal aspect of terminology used. This research has been envisioned as a bridge between the media industry and the academic world. Therefore, findings from industry reports and technical terms have been incorporated in this work in addition to findings from previous academic works. For instance, in media, the term used for children is kid's whereas such a terminology may appear informal in an academic discourse. However, the use of terms such as kid's entertainment, kid's genre is required as industry reports consider these to be technical terms, especially where such works are cited. Therefore, the words kids and children have been used interchangeably to preserve the authenticity of this work. Another such term is localization which in media parlance is a technical process. It is different from adaptation. However, in academic terms, some readers may assume it to be same as an adaptation. In case of explanation of global geographies as well, terminology has been used in a way so that it suits the context of the work which is being a bridge between academic research and industry practice. Best efforts have been made to respect the conventions of academic English. However, on occasions where it was appropriate to speak from an industry context, the terminology has been adapted accordingly.

Another limitation may stem from the difference in the cultural and professional context of the readers and the writer of this work. The Indian social system includes in its diversity a monetary class structure and a historic caste structure that dates to 3300 BCE - 1700 BCE to the time of the Indus Valley civilisation, a secular religious framework, 243 languages and dialects among many other things. These historic aspects exist right alongside

technological advancements and play an important role in the contemporary life of India. It is possible that many readers may not be deeply familiar with several aspects of the cultural and social life of India. For instance, caste-based division in society may be confused with monetary class-based division by some readers. Some readers may not be familiar with the joint family system of India while others may be familiar with it. Overall, the demography of India remains an under-studied field in cultural studies in the international arena. It is not always possible to assume which aspects readers may already be familiar with, which may easily lead to a situation of under- or over-explaining concepts. Similar situations may arise in case of technical terms. While some readers may be aware of technical aspects and terms such as OTT services, up linking, downlinking, AVOD, SVOD, some may not know them, as these are not academic terms. Therefore, this aspect of the work runs the risk of over- or under-explaining concepts and terms as there is no certain way to know what the readers know already.

Apart from formal questions of language and context, few limitations exist in terms of field work which deal with the situation of the pandemic and the scale of the study. At the start of the research, it was envisioned that all interaction with the respondent group would be done in person. However, the abrupt onset of pandemic made in-person visits impossible. As a result, the move to the online method made participatory observation impossible on more occasions. During the final phase of field work, the number of children in the respondent group changed from what was planned originally due to adherence to safety measures surrounding the pandemic.

Keeping in mind the sensitivity of topics such as caste identity and religious affiliations, it has been a conscious choice to not speak with children about these topics. The study follows a method triangulation between findings from focus group discussions done with children, parents/ teachers, and media experts. Since, children were not asked questions pertaining to caste and religion identity, the same have not been discussed with parents/ teachers and media experts as well so to keep the framework streamlined. These aspects may present a valid point of enquiry in the academic world about how such factors impact media consumption and engagement habits. In the local Indian context such topics can be perceived as causing social rift and create separation in the society. To include such aspects in media research requires a larger framework at an organisational level which was not possible in case of this PhD dissertation. The focus of this work has instead been on the media ecosystem and how the audience functions in it. Discussions about identity have been a part of this research work but they are not the focus.

The limitation concerning the scale of study relates with the sampling size. The target sample size of the respondent group and number of programs analysed was arrived at based on discussions with media scholars and prior work done in this filed in other countries. No specific mathematical calculation was done to arrive at the specific number of respondents that had to be included in surveys or discussions as the framework of this work is not quantitative in nature. Given the situation of the pandemic, the number of respondents was based on availability. In total, 643 children participated in the survey questionnaire, 50 children and 10 parents / teachers participated in focus group discussion, 56 children participated in participatory observation and 7 media experts participated in interviews. In addition to these 20 media experts also shared their insights. In total, 786 individuals participated in this research. This number may appear to be too large for some readers and too small for some others to justify findings for an entire nation with a population of over a billion. On the question of program count, in total children listed 197 programs that they watched. However, only two programs were chosen based on considerations explained above. Several episodes of these two programs were analysed. Due to the scale of a PhD dissertation, it was not possible to analyse all 197 programs with over 1000 episodes approximately.

While structuring the sampling plan for respondents and the programs, the reports from projects such as EU Kids Online, Global Kids online and Indian Kids Online were referred. These large-scale projects with large scale funding surveyed 867 children and conducted 228 interviews (Mica 3). These large-scale country-wide studies focused on mixed methods of research where large quantity of data was pertinent for analysis as they delve into quantitative research as well. In case of this dissertation, the framework is inclined towards qualitative research, as such the sampling plan was created in a way that the number of participants chosen as respondents and the number of episodes chosen from the programs could provide an opportunity for focused analysis instead of making large scale generalizations.

5. Operational definitions

Operational definitions of this dissertation are as follows:

- Children refers to children, both boys and girls in the age group of 7 to 12 years and belong to the middle-class economic strata of the Indian society.
- Urban middle class homes refer to families living in urban areas of India and belong to the middle-income economic group.

- Joint family system refers to a system of co-dwelling where parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, cousins all live together in the same physical household. Generally, a unit of 4 to 10 family members.
- Nuclear family refers to a family system in which a child lives with his parents and siblings. Generally, a unit of 3 to 4 members.
- OTT: Over the Top
- DTH: Direct to Home
- AVOD: Advertising-based Video on Demand
- SVOD: Subscription Video on Demand
- TVOD: Transactional Video on Demand
- FAST TV: free ad-supported streaming TV
- Media engagement refers to children's experience of watching television/ short format/ Internet content over various devices.

6. Conclusion

Several scholars, like Barker suggest that the study of television should be a multi-dimensional process that delves into the connections between economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of the society (36). These aspects form the basis for understanding the rapid rate at which the media ecosystem concerning children continues to evolve in India. In line with Barker's suggestion, I analyse the interconnected parts of the media industry, technology, economy, policy, and the cultural sphere of society in India from a historical context to bring forth a better understanding about the child audience and their relationship with media.

India is a large nation with over a billion people, a democratic framework, a liberalized economy which ensures that the country stays in a state of evolution in various spheres of life. Developments in one sector have led to changes in another rather rapidly. It is for this reason that the historical context of various interrelated parts forms an important pillar for the discussion about the engagement experiences of children with media. Using a methodology which includes an analysis of these historical developments along with field work that maps the contemporary experiences of children has provided a robust framework to study the media ecosystem concerning children.

It is worth noting that the findings from this small-scale research may not be universally applicable for all children in India. Instead, they point to a newfound

understanding (as this is a under studied field in India) about media culture for children in contemporary India from a specific demographic. The scope of this study, given the limitations of funding and logistics that a PhD program presents, does not cover all experiences of all the children from middle income homes of urban India. As such a large-scale generalization cannot be made based on this work. However, as is the purpose of any exploratory ethnographic research that examines a certain part of the society closely, the findings from this research can serve as a starting point and lead the way in bridging gaps in scholarship that currently exist in case of India on this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature review

1. Findings from literature review

The starting point of this research comprised of analysing various conceptual topics related with the larger field of media and children. Topics included approaches to media research, media theories, children and their engagement with media, use of media, global evolution of content generation process, emergence of new technologies and engagement with the audience. This analysis was further informed by study of various interdisciplinary topics that were specific to the context of India. These topics ranged from the growth of the Indian media industry, economic and policy developments in Indian society to changes in cultural systems, the rise of the middle class, the impact of the joint family system, aspects of urban life to models of media consumption in India, to name only a few. Cumulatively an analysis was done to identify how various scholarships from different fields such as technology, production, economics, society, and culture relate to the way children engage with media in India. As a result of this analysis, three key themes emerged which are as follows:

- The first relates to the corpus and context of scholarship available on the topic of children and media at the international level.
- The second is about the assumption of universal applicability of media-related research done in countries of Europe and USA.
- The third relates to the current stage of research in India on the topic of children and media and the specific demography that is studied.

1.1 Corpus and context of scholarship

Some of the international academic works that are credible do focus on an Indian corpus of programs and audience. However, such works are few such as *South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts*; *Leisure, Learning and Exclusion: Children's Media Encounters in India*; *Children and Media in India: Narratives of Class, Agency, and Social Change.* In the book titled *The Routledge International Handbook of Children, Adolescents and Media,* Lemish notes that gross imbalance in representation in scholarship remains despite best efforts to assemble a global representation of contributors. Lemish states that the book has a substantial presence of US based researchers and the other half belong to 17 other countries such as Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, South

Africa, Sweden, and the U.K (11-12). Research from India does not form a part of such academic work despite India being the world's most populous nation and home to 19% of world's children (Chandrakant 85-86).

In large parts, credible studies that are discussed internationally focus on a western (American, European) context, corpus, and audience**.** Works such as the EU Kids Online project studies Internet habits of children from EU (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). Research from projects such as "Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report"; "The common-sense census: Media use by tweens and teens"; "Kids & Media @ the New Millennium"; "Generation M: in the Lives Media of 8–18-Year-old"; "The influence of new media and family structure on young adolescents' television and radio Use"; "The use and experience of the new video media among children and young adolescents"; "Adolescents, VCRs, and the family environment" focus on children from western world (OFCOM, 2017; Rideout, 2015; Roberts, Foher & Rideout 2005; Roberts, et al., 1999; Roberts & Foehr 2004; Brown, Childers, Bauman, & Koch 1990; Kubey & Larson 107-130; Morgan, Alexander, Shanahan & Harris 83-106). Books such as *Teens talk about dating, intimacy, and their sexual experience; Parents, Media and Public Policy; Use of the mass media by the urban poo* are also examples of a western corpus and context. Findings from such work are not blindly applicable to India.

Additionally, the usual programs discussed in various international academic works include ones like Sesame Street, Peppa Pig, Hannah Montana or several Disney and Marvel productions (Bryant, Thompson, Finklea 259). These programs are watched by children in urban India as well (Banaji 15). However, such content is only a small percentage of content available for children in India as found during field work for this research (Hooda 137-141).

Research originating from the western world such as the book titled *Fundamentals of Media Effects* notes that Disney is noted to have played a dominant role in children's entertainment globally (Bryant, Thompson, Finklea 259). As found during the stages of participatory observation and focus group discussions conducted for this research, it was found that Disney channel makes some programs in India where the stories are of India origin such as *Gadget Guru Ganesha, Bapu, Guddu* (Adgully 2020). However, such programs are not discussed in prominent international academic works. The corpus discussed in most of academic works comprises of American and occasionally European programs which is a non – representative sample from an Indian context. For instance, some of the programs discussed in international academic works such as *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of*

Childhood ; *Kid's Media Culture, Tinker Belles and Evil Queens, Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers: Gender Representations in Children's TV around the World, The Handbook of Children, Media, and Development* includes programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight; Sesame Street* (Hendershot 139 - 150), *Power Rangers* (Seiter 239 - 260), *X-Men, Batman and Robin* (Kinder 23), *Mickey* (Griffin 3-19), *Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid* (Griffin 138), *Bob the Builder, The Adventures of Tintin, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Powerpuff Girls, Kim Possible, Totally Spies!* (Götz and Lemish 7-11*); Sim City, Grand Theft Auto, Baby Einstein, Sesame Street, Reader Rabbit, Reading Rainbow* (Scantlin 51-70); *Teletubbies* (Valkenberg and Piotrowski 21).

In research conducted by Götz and Lemish to study the gender representation in children's programs around the world, they noted that the "biggest export region in children's television is North America with about 60% of domestically produced or co-produced programs, followed by Europe with 27.9% and Asia with 9.3%. The United States is the major "seller" of children's TV followed by Canada…" (17). While such an analysis is correct while reviewing the content being exported out of North America, it still does not define the majority of corpus that the children in India are exposed. This was clarified when a survey was conducted during phase one of field work (Hooda 137-141). Pecora (1998) and Steemer (2004) note in Götz and Lemish that there exists a globalisation in children's television as content created in a few countries travels to other countries. This analysis is supported by Bryant (2007) where it is stated that it is less expensive to acquire ready-made shows than to create own local content (18).

However, as found during expert interviews conducted for this research with several media professionals involved with creating content for a global audience, it was clarified that cost of creating content in India remains lower than elsewhere (see Appendix K-F). The local cultural context was also found to be important for several programmers and content creators, producers who were interviewed for this research (Chilaka, Personal Interview; Amikat, Personal Interview; Verma, Personal Interview; Gupta, Personal Interview). It is with this perspective that at a crucial turning point in the industry at the time of COVID, Indian IPs with local Indian context were launched by prominent media companies such as Warner Media Entertainment (now Warner Bros. Discovery), Disney (Dutta 2020; Laghate 2020).

In case of global media content which focuses on children, Marvel – Disney productions stand out. The contemporary roster of such productions often aims to break stereotypes and address issues relevant to contemporary societies (Brown 32). Olson and Rampaul state that

over the last decade Disney has made steady progress with films such as *Big Hero 6* (2014), *Moana* (2016), *Coco* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018) by showcasing diverse representation of children and adults of colour (28). Such programs often engage with issues of inclusion and diversity with a growing focus on representation of people who identify as BIPOC, have various gender identities, face environmental issues etc. (Turton et al. 2020). For example, in case of the 2018 American superhero movie *Black Panther*, produced by Marvel Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, the studio was hailed for bringing out a film with an African American protagonist (Brown 61-3). Similar accolades have followed in case of *Wonder Woman* (Warner Bros. Pictures 2017), *Black Widow* (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures 2021) and Ms Marvel (Marvel Studios 2022) which are American productions. All these films have championed the cause of women's empowerment and representing women as leading role models (Luttrell 17-20).

Porter notes that character representation of women as done in contemporary films like Black Widow should be understood as Complete Female Characters in place of calling them strong female characters. Porter defines a Complete Female Character as an onscreen female that is fleshed out as any male character with specific features/ characteristics. Such a character is named, has a back story, have a personality with traits and skill that go beyond physical appearance. Most importantly, such a character has agency. The characters have a purpose, aim or a reason for existence. The fifth quality is that the character must have some flaws that give them emotional resonance with the audience (Porter 67-88). *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures 2021) was the first Marvel film production to have a Southeast Asian superhero and to move past a stereotypical representation of a hero from an American context (Chi 2021; Yamato 2021). Yamato reports from an interview with Marvel Studios President Feige that most studio executive who are typically white and male focus on profits and not necessarily on the value of representation (2021).

Beyond the corporate agenda of profit making, it is a milestone in content economy still that such content is seeing the light of day. It is indeed a crucial milestone for the contemporary media industry and academic research to focus on such a corpus and engage in an intellectual discourse at all levels. A process like this can result in behavioural, attitudinal, and cultural changes. Scholarship focusing on such content is very important. Equally important is to study these programs and their impact on the society through a lens of cultural context. Anjirbag argues that much of Disney's work is aimed at extending the corporate view of childhood to the global community by setting the dominating agenda of what the world should be and what childhood should look like (153).

What remains culturally relevant in contemporary societies can vary greatly from South Asia to the Middle East to the West. For instance, while the above stated programs are available to the Indian child audience as well, they do not constitute most programs that children in India view on television screens. As such a corpus is not comprehensive to study the media experiences of children in India. Nor do the themes discussed in such programs mirror the societal make up of India. Olson and Rampaul have noted Anjirbag's analysis (154-156) where it is stated that Disney formula represents non-western cultures in its own image by subsuming childhood images through its corporate lens that enforces a level of sameness to the viewers through its visual style and classic narrative arcs (28).

The societal divide based on race which is reflected in several western media programs does not share the same contextual relevance in India as it does in the west. For example, Scantlin and Calvert et al (2005) analyse diversity through a race-based system comprising of Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic children (54-55). However, in case of India, analysis from such a perspective is not relevant. For instance, in India, we are all people of colour. Therefore, content showcasing racial representation or analysing audience from such a position is not perceived as breaking barriers from a local and social context of India. As given in academic works, western studies have arrived at a conclusion that images of a white childhood have been considered universally desirable, leaving the non-white children subject to stereotypical and caricatured representation or simply being left out of cultural production (Olson and Rampaul 26). Contrary to this conclusion, in case of content generated in India programs showcase non - white children of colour as main characters. The perspective of 'othering' the non-white children that is found in western academic discourse is different from scholarship from India (Olson and Rampaul 27). In Indian content the notion of othering based on race does not hold the same relevance as it does in western media.

The context of diversity in India stems from aspects such as religion, region (northern India, southern India, eastern India, north- eastern India, western India, and central India), economic class, a caste structure which is unique to India among other aspects (Jayal 15; Amikat, Personal Interview). The Indian social system includes in its diversity a monetary class structure and a historic caste structure that dates to 3300 BCE - 1700 BCE to the time of Indus Valley civilisation, a secular religious framework, 243 languages and dialects among many other things (Basham 148; Doniger 186; Stanton 12-13). The class - caste system of India is different from the economic class system which is typically represented in western narratives as rich or poor (Jayal 71-80).

Sharma notes that the term caste has been used synonymously for varna and jati based identity however they are distinct (132). By the end of the Vedic period, Varnas or the hierarchy of social class began to emerge based on birth. *Manusmriti* (Olivelle 18-41), the first ancient Indian legal text which describes how society should run classifies the varnas as follows:

> Brahmins were people who became vedic scholars, priests, and teachers. Kshatriyas were people who became rulers, warriors, and administrators. Vaishyas were involved with agricultural and merchant activities. Shudras were designated to be laborers and service providers/servants (Lorenzen 147-149).

The hierarchy was determined according to birth as the Vedic culture evolved. This meant that a farmer's child could only be a farmer, a warrior's child could only be a warrior. The contemporary Indian society uses a subset of this varna system which is called *Jati* or caste. As such over a period time, those who belonged to higher castes such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas had better access to opportunities in life. Those born into the caste of Shudras had limited opportunities to flourish. The reason this historic caste system becomes relevant to our current discussion is that the spill over effect of this historic system can be felt even today.

In present day India, most people from the higher castes are often found to be financially stable and are categorized as General Category (GC) or the creamy layer. Those from lower castes are categorized by the government as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). People from the SC & ST category are officially designated groups of people by the Constitution of India as per The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 (Ministry of Law India 163). People from these groups are also called Dalits in the present times (Roychowdhury 2018) and were referred to as the depressed class under the British rule (Planning Commission India 1). They are among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 1950) & (United Nations 2021). Each of the states of India has its list of different castes that form the categories of GC, SC, ST, OBC. Oftentimes people from such castes belong to Economically Weaker Section (EWS) of the society. In common cultural terms of India, the poor are referred to as the Economically Weaker Section of the society by the government. Regarding EWS, Rajagopal notes the following in his 7th January 2022 article in the newspaper The Hindu:

> "The Constitution (One Hundred and Third) Amendment Act introducing EWS quota came into force on January 14, 2019. On January 17 the same year, the government released an official memorandum (OM) informing that families earning a gross annual income below ₹ 8 lakh would be identified as EWS for benefit of reservation." (2022).

Level of poverty in India often and not always finds strong ties with the historic caste system of India as it determines access to cultural capital such as education and access to media. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital includes the knowledge, skills, values, and experiences that provide advantage and help an individual to progress (251-8). Harper-Scott & Samson define cultural capital as social assets such as education, intellect, style of speech, style of dress that help an individual to move around in a stratified society (52-55).

Dirks argues that the caste system in India as we know it today is a modern phenomenon that was solidified by the British rule (27). Dirk posits "it was under the British that 'caste' became a single term capable of expressing, organising, and above all 'systematising' India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organisation" (5). Discourses available at international level do not generally discuss aspects of diversity in television program based on such a caste identity for children in India. India Human Development Survey (IHDS) notes that "…. among children aged 8-11, 68% of the forward caste children can read at class 1 level while the proportion is far lower for OBC's (56%), SCs (45%) and STs (40%)" (Desai 9). Solicitor General Tushar Mehta has stated that "…the constitutional term "economically weaker" does not mean those below the poverty line, but people in the low-income groups, who may have small savings, but not enough to reap the benefits of a good higher education in the best universities like others." (Rajagopal 2022). Literacy levels are known to impact access to employment, quality of life and media access.

How these aspects are reflected in programs for children do not generally make up the agenda of research on children and media. Only a handful of international researchers such as Banaji have analysed how politics of caste and economic status impact media experiences for children from different sections of the society (123-186). It is a possibility that many international researchers who study children and media may not even be aware of such an important aspect of Indian identity or the complexities it presents. This can be said based on the frameworks that inform the analysis for several western scholarly works discussed in this dissertation that do not include discussions about the unique caste-based aspects found in

India. For some, it may also be considered a primitive lens to study media engagement habits (De Zwart 235). However, social, and cultural aspects such as regional identity, caste-based identity, religion-based identity are an active part of identity formation for children in India. Even if some of these aspects date back to the time of Indus Valley civilization, much before the world we know today came into being, they still play a role in developing the world view of children and their own life and media experience.

Banaji (xiv-xv) highlights that many western based studies on childhood, media and youth such as *High-tech tots: Childhood in a digital world (*Berson & Berson, 2010)*; It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens* (Boyd, 2014); *The App generation: How today's youth navigate identity, intimacy, and imagination in a digital world* (Gardner & Davis, 2013)*; Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media* (Ito et al., 2010); *Kids online: Opportunities and risks for children* (Livingstone, 2009) explore how aspects of social change relevant to their context and identity impact children's learning through media. A few and rather rare studies from global south also explore how local social aspects impact media experiences for children such as *Instant messaging Shiva, flying taxis, Bil Klinton and more: Children's narratives from rural India* (Arora, 2008)*;* Yizo Yizo: Citizenship, commodification and popular culture in South Africa (Barnett, 2004); Acquisition of computer literacy on shared public computers: Children and the hole in the wall (Mitra et al. 407-426); South African Media Education in the late twentieth century: Rising phoenix or dying swan (Prinsloo 163-188) (Banaji 2017, (xiv-xv).

While studying media programs and how children engage with media, accounting for social aspects that impact media experiences in the context of India is just as relevant for academic research as the issues surrounding the representation of diversity in American programs are. Due to the unique social and cultural context of each country/region, scholarship on media should be built based on relevance to the society being studied. As such, broad generalisations on all aspects pertaining to children and their media experiences do not yield accurate findings.

1.2 Assumption of universal applicability of research

In her book *Children and Media in India* Banaji establishes the imbalance in representation in scholarship and the assumed global applicability of conclusions from western research when she states "…Recollect that were the research in this study situated in Europe or North America, the title of the book would most likely be not British children and media but, merely, Children and Media "(xvii). Factors that determine access to media differ globally. As

such it cannot be assumed that research findings from western part of the world will apply blindly to the India context.

Development classification is an important factor in the discourse about media and children as it determines the level of availability, and ease of access to media content, both in terms of content production and content consumption. Changes in the level of development have a direct bearing on the engagement between the audience and media.

The developmental journeys of western countries and India are different. Countries such as the USA and those in Europe where a possible generalization about scholarly works on the topic of children and media can be made have been classified as developed countries for several decades. On the other hand, India is still classified as a developing nation by United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020 report (United Nations 166). While this status holds true, another article by an Indian daily newspaper of prominence delves into the classification of India as a developed nation reported by the United States Trade Representative (Perumal 2020). Such juxtaposition in status of being classified as a developed as well as a developing nation within the same timespan points to the burgeoning change that the Indian economy and society are facing. The issues that circumscribe media engagement habits in India are different in comparison to those found in countries of Europe and the United States of America.

Basic aspects such as the general standard of living, inflation, dispensable income, cultural context, and definition of middle class are some of the factors that vary greatly between India and developed countries such as the USA and those in Europe. These aspects impact media engagement differently in each geographical location. For instance, Indian middle class income ranges between INR 5 to 30 Lakhs (USD 6200 – USD 37000) per year as per survey done by People Research on India's Consumer Economy (Gupta 2022). Whereas American middle class is estimated to be in the range of USD 48,500 to USD145, 500 IN 2018 as per Pew Research Center (Bennett, Fry and Kochhar 2020). This difference stems from a fact that the cost of living varies between countries. This difference has a direct bearing on the income levels of each section of the society and their classification as poor, middle or rich. An article by PEW Research Centre further notes the following (Kochhar 2017):

> Middle-income households in Western Europe and in the U.S. are in the highest income tiers globally, and the lower-income households in these countries would be in the global middle class.

Given the differences between income levels, access, and the development stage of each nation, a broad generalization about results from different parts of the world does not provide valid findings as the context varies. An assumption that findings from countries that have a different context of growth and social aspects than India will be equally applicable in case of India is not an accurate marker. Even if such works provide a point of reference for theoretical framework, recommendations for methodology, and tools that can be used for research in India, they lack context which is the foundation of research in case of interdisciplinary research about society. As such research about India should be done in its own unique context even if past scholarship from other countries serves as a point of guidance.

1.3 Evolution of children's entertainment and research in developed countries and India

Through the course of literature review another important aspect surfaced regarding the emergence of content industry for children and research on related topics from different parts of the world. Children's entertainment and research on this topic have evolved more in developed countries such as the USA and those in Europe in comparison to India. Recurring concerns about the time that children spend with media have been a focus for researchers from as early as 1880 (Wartella and Robb 8). Concepts of leisure time and discretionary time for children where they could choose with whom and how they wanted to spend their time became areas of interest for interest in western research as early as 70s (Somers 125-47). As early as 1929, Lynd and Lynd studied how movies, radio and automobiles changed how children and adults spent their time. These changes were a distinct break from the patterns of the previous generations as discussed in their book titled *Middletown: A study in contemporary American culture.*

From a perspective of content creation, children's entertainment on screens emerged as a special content category in western countries much before it started in India. For example, animated films appeared in USA in 1900s with the first animated film *Humourous Phases of Funny Faces* made in 1906. Several other works were created thereafter such as *Gertie the Dinosaur* in 1914, *Koko the Clown* in 1918 and the character of Felix the Cat from the original series *Feline Follies* created in 1919 (Lenburg 1,3, 25) (Gordon 2002). Programs such as *Fantasmagorie,* a French animated film created by Émile Cohl which was released by Gaumont Film Company in 1908 and *Little Nemo,* the first fully animated cartoon created by American cartoonist Winsor McCay in 1911ensured the growth of animation for children's entertainment further. *Alice's Wonderland* was created in 1923 by The Disney Brothers

Cartoon Studio. When Walt signed a contract with M. J. Winkler for production of a series called *Alice comedies*, The Walt Disney Company was born in 1923.This series included both animation and live action (Lenburg 18). In 1927, Walt Disney Studio produced *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* for Universal pictures**.** Walt Disney Company made *Steamboat Willie* which brought the characters of Minnie and Mickey mouse to screen (Davis 2019).

The character of Mickey mouse was created for cartoon shorts titled *Plane Crazy* and *The Gallopin 'Gaucho* but Disney did not release these programs (Lenburg 36). On American television, *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* and *Howdy Doody* began broadcast in1947, and *Captain Kangaroo* was aired in 1955 (Hyatt 254, Tibbetts 63, 215). Another show, *Ding Dong School*, aired from 1952 to 1965 (Okuda & Mulqueen 202-3). *Sesame Street* was conceived in 1966 and aired in 1969 (Brooke 1998). Hughes notes that the first program for children in UK was the *Children's Hour* which was first broadcasted in 1946 (1996). Holz posits that the category of children's television is as old as the history of television itself (13-75). However, this is not the case in India.

For instance, in 1923 when the category of children's entertainment was beginning to come into existence in the United States with the formation of the Walt Disney Company, India as an independent country was not even in existence like we know it today. India became an independent nation in 1947 and TV broadcast started in 1959 through Doordarshan, the public channel. At a time when Indian television media industry was born, in other parts of the world many developments had already taken place. In 1972, Bombay Doordarshan began broadcasting four programs for children such as *Magic Lamp* in English, *Santakukadi* in Gujarati, *Kilbil* in Marathi, and *Khel Khilone* in Hindi. These programs had limited hours between 6:30 pm and 7:00 pm during the week and on Sunday morning. In 1975, *Vad Thi Mota Teta* became the first children's television show targeting the children in rural areas. This program was made after extensive research and was part of the Kheda Communications Project (Das and Kini 335-352). *Our Universe, Nandu Indu* were two other programs that were made as part of Kheda Communication Project. The years of 1970s largely saw the use of television as a medium to provide education to children through the SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) program. This program was operational between 1975- 1976. It was a collaboration between Indian Space Research Organisation and NASA to provide information-based television programs to rural India through satellites. This project was supported by UNDP, UNICEF, and UNESCO (Chander and Karnik 56).

The years between 1980 to early 1990s saw a handful of programs such as *Vikram aur Betaal* (1985), *Malgudi Days* (1986), *Ramayan* (1987), *Mahabharat* (1988), *The Jungle Book* (1989), *Tenali Rama* (1991), *The Stone Boy* (1991), *Potli Baba Ki* (Baba's Tales) (1991) that engaged the child audience. These shows were telecasted on Doordarshan as part of general entertainment programming. The number of programs that were made for children in India were only a handful in comparison to what was available for children elsewhere in the world.

From the perspective of broadcast channels as well, India saw the development of the kid's genre as a definite vertical of entertainment much later in comparison to the western countries. In the 1980's India had only a limited number of children's programs broadcasted over general entertainment channels (GEC). In contrast, in the USA, a channel dedicated to children's content was launched in 1983. This was Disney Channel and it broadcasted content for 16 hours a day (Kidscreen 1998). The genre of kid's entertainment as a specialized category with an independent channel came into existence in India in 1995 with the launch of Cartoon Network with limited hours of broadcast. While in India Cartoon Network had a limitation on the broadcast time, in the United States, Cartoon Network was launched as a 24-hour single genre cable television in 1992 (Carter 1992). Children's entertainment category in India was established in mid 1990s, but it was in 2016 after advent of Netflix and then further of Amazon Prime Video and Disney + Hotstar that this genre further solidified to become an important genre of content in the Indian media market. As a result, the programs available for children have grown. The emergence and growth of children's entertainment category in India is relatively new in comparison to countries where entertainment for children has been around for a much longer time.

A similar situation exists in case of scholarship on media and children as well. Academic research in this area is a well-defined field in developed countries such as United States and several European countries. In her work on the project Global Kids Online, Livingstone highlights the importance of research on the topic of children and Internet use especially in the global south which constitutes two thirds of the world's nearly 3 billion Internet users. She further notes that such research has evolved more in the developed countries than in the less developed countries (6). The situation is similar in case of research that focuses on children and television from developing countries from the global south like India. Academic media research originating from India and focusing on children is still at a nascent stage. The rapid pace with which programs for children have mushroomed in India especially with technological developments requires scholarship to grow at the same pace to bring forth a deeper understanding about the media culture of India surrounding children.

2. State of research in India with a focus on children from middle income households

Through the course of literature review it became clear that there exists limited amount of academic research in India on the topic of contemporary media in relation to children in the age group of 7-12 years, especially from urban middle class households. Fernandes highlights that even though there is enough data and historic scholarship available on the middle class in general, regarding the Indian middle class, the social group has generally been an under studied area in social sciences (2). Banaji posits that "a staggering numbers of children in India remain invisible to national and international policymakers, and to national and international adults. They are not yet significant enough as a 'market' or an 'audience' to warrant consideration by corporate media (xii).

All the same, to say that research on children and media in India is non-existent is not true either. Research that has contributed to understanding the relationship between children and media in India include works such as Agrawal 1999; Banaji (2010, 2017, 2019); Jaggi 2017; Arora 2008, Mitra et al 407-426; Mitra and Rana 221-232; Mitra 367-371, Mitra 2000). However, considering the large size of the India the research is still at a nascent stage. In terms of population, India, is estimated to have a population of approx. 1.4 billion people whereas the continents of Europe and Americas are estimated to have a population of approx. 744 billion and 1.04 billion respectively (Silver, Huang & Clancy 2023). Jaggi argues that there is almost negligible scholarly attention given to the topic of children and television in comparison to the mammoth academic literature available from other countries (Jaggi 153-4)

There are several organizations such as the United Nations, several state governments, non – government organizations and a few academic scholars that conduct research in this area. However, the demography they usually study constitutes the poor economic class and often from rural India. For example, *The Hole in the Wall Project* was an experiment conducted in 17 locations in rural India to investigate and conclude that children can learn to use computers and Internet on their own irrespective of their economic background. (Mitra et al 407-426; Mitra 367-371, Mitra 2000). Mitra and Rana ran a similar experiment in urban areas of Delhi by providing Internet access to slum children in their settlement (Mitra and Rana 221-232). *Children's Television in India: A Situational Analysis* was a report prepared on request of United Nations and Government of Delhi to serve as a blueprint for UNICEF's support for educational television for children in India. The recommendations of this report included creation of a Centre for Children's TV or Children's Laboratory, inclusion of

communication research, specialized producers, educational agencies, NGOs, and children in programming (Agrawal et al. 11-15). Asthana posits that group categories of poor and youth are historically considered subjects of interest for public policy and social scientific research (81). *The Cybermohalla Project* is another case in point. This project began in 2001 and was a collaboration between Sarai project of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Ankur, an NGO working for young people from slums in Delhi (Asthana 95). This project was aimed at user generated content created young people living in slums of Delhi. Researchers have analysed the digitextual nature of media and how such projects create a cyber public sphere through an audio-visual economy and how (Nayar 2; Adajania 369).

One of the three of possible reasons why research pertaining to the poor demography is undertaken is because organizations engaged in development work study these topics with the aim of creating policies. Additionally, accessibility of institutional funds for research which is required for creating policies for poor people makes it possible to focus on this section of the society. Furthermore, media is often considered as a tool for mass development in connection with the poor section of the society in India. This perception is linked to the use of media as a tool for development during the early years of independence and the place media had in the five-year plans of India's national development strategy. These aspects will be discussed in the next chapter in detail.

At the government level, no specific policies are designed for the upliftment of the middle-income group in India in relation to media. Within the private sector, media bodies conduct research on issues that involve the buying and spending habits of the urban middle class or the consuming class as it relates with advertising-based revenue and product sales. The key purpose of such research is to follow the requirements of the organization commissioning such work. For most part, media organizations are focused on profits as they focus on business growth and not necessarily on the audience. Jaggi posits that media organisations and industry professionals perceive audience as consumers for goods and services sold by advertising and the interaction with the consumers is a mere marketing opportunity (154). As such, the position to analyse how audience engages with media content from a social – cultural stance does not find space in most commercial research. This methodology is typically true for linear television and in recent times for free ad-supported streaming TV also known as FAST TV (Lotz 3). As a result, such research focuses on the state of industry and business-centric growth aspects.

The focus on audience experience, relationship between media and society and other such important aspects that are common to academic framework are underrepresented areas of research in case of children from the middle-class section of the society. The middle-income section of society is important for media work as this segment is generally assumed to be the standardized target audience from a private content producer /distributor such as a television channel's point of view (Banaji 90). However, apart from research from media organizations, independent academic research in this area is at a nascent stage. It must also be clarified that the children from backgrounds that form a part of EWS are equally important. However, the framework of this research focuses on the demography of children from middle income homes of northern India due to the reasons given above.

3. Key discussions

The key discussions in this dissertation analyse how children in India engage with media and the position they hold in this ecosystem. This analysis is built on a comprehensive study of evolution of the media ecosystem within the framework of social, economic, and technological changes. The discussions that are presented in this chapter engage with the theoretical framework across two key aspects:

- mapping the evolution of communication models to the developments that have taken place in India and
- studying the position of the child audience in the Indian media ecosystem and research framework.

3.1 Evolution of models of communication

One of the earliest models of communication in the world known as the Shannon-Weaver Model was given by Shannon & Weaver. This model of communication demonstrates a linear flow of information. The sender encodes the messages, and the receiver simply receives it (Fiske 5). This movement of communication is further elaborated through the lens of Magic Bullet Theory. The Magic Bullet Theory or Hypodermic Needle Theory which originates from Harold Laswell's book Propaganda Technique in the World War (1927) assumes that the audience is passive and naïve (Croteau and Hoynes 439). It states that the media injects its messages in the minds of the audience, much like a bullet being shot, and the audience accepts the messages as they are without questioning the content or context (Berger 174). In such a framework, media remains all powerful as the feedback from the audience holds no value. In fact, it is assumed that the audience have no opinion.

Such a theoretical context assumes that the audience is passive, highly impressionable, and lacks agency. The audience are positioned as followers of popular discourse and not active participants in the meaning making process. They are simply controlled by media as if they were 'television zombies' (Morley 16). In such a model, the balance of power tilts in favour of the media makers. The audience is assumed to do things as directed by media messages and lacks agency over their choices.

On the topic of power dynamics of media, Adorno, from the Frankfurt school explains that the power of television works at multiple levels through standardization and repetitive depiction. He argues that the ways in which stories depicts people, and their social actions influences the way in which viewers begin to understand people and social actions. Standardisation leads to the creation of stereotypes (Adorno 229). Lembo (21) notes that Adorno has referred to this process as a psychodynamic response of the people who watch television and establishes this as the power of ideology in action. Lembo asserts that scholarship on television from the early years of the Frankfurt school and the American tradition have been generally assumed to find roots in such cultural pessimism (Lembo 17-53). Many scholars consider such a context which renders the audience powerless to be oppressive in nature as it positions media as an all-powerful entity. In relation to the Indian democracy in the early years of becoming a free nation and rise of media as the fourth estate of democracy, an analysis of media impact presents different findings. The impact of presence of media in society is not rooted in cultural pessimism.

Shannon & Weaver's linear flow of communication, Adorno's analysis of power of television and magic bullet theory provide an apt context to study the relationship between media and society in India during the early years of television. When television media first came to India, the engagement between media and society was based on a linear model of communication. This yielded positive results even though media was an all-powerful entity. Such a difference in perception about media and its relationship with society stems from the historic credibility that media in India has held since pre independence era and the practical utility of media in building up the nation during the early years of independence.

India became an independent nation in 1947 and television came to India in 1959. At the time of independence radio and print media played a crucial role in the freedom struggle against a two-century old British rule. The involvement of media against such oppression has lent historic credibility to media as an industry and is considered as the fourth estate of democracy in India (Kumar 17-20; Kumar and Singh 371-7). Television began with limited

duration programming of one hour per week broadcasted from Delhi Akashvani Bhavan also known as the AIR station (Pande 29). This broadcast comprised of three programs of twenty minutes each and could be received within a radius of 40 kilometers of Delhi AIR station (Mathai 258). Kumar highlights that television started in India with the aim to train personnel and to discover what TV could achieve in terms of community development and formal education (Kumar 296). The years after 1965 saw a gradual increase in programming duration. The news bulletin of five-minute duration became an important part of programming after 1965 (Kohli-Khandekar 80). Instructional programs, agricultural programs, music programs, educational content began to form a part of programming (Mathai 258; Rani 15). Kohli-Khandekar notes that the first soap opera, *Hum Log* came to Indian television in 1984 with an underlying message of maintain a joint family structure and family planning. By the 80s, there were 3.6 million television sets in India and more than 80% of those would tune in to see *Hum Log* every week (82).

During the early years from 1959 to the 1990s, media communication followed a unidirectional approach and moved from top to down that is from the government in the form of broadcast on Doordarshan to the audience. The primary focus of media was to spread information to the public with the aim of nation building. Television media in India was conceptualized as a tool of progress towards the future. This was done through programs which were broadcasted on India's first broadcast channel which was called Doordarshan. Aptly enough, Doordarshan is a Hindi word which means 'to look into the future'.

The focus of television broadcast in early years was to disseminate information about mandates such as family planning, sharing information about health and hygiene, increasing literacy and education for farmers among other with the aim of national development (Mathai 255 – 268). For example, broadcast of the agricultural program *Krishi Darshan* was aimed at educating farmers and a music program called *Chitrahaar* which showcased music videos with subtitles was aimed at increasing literacy along with entertainment. In 1961, the Delhi School Television Project began with broadcasting educational shows with the aim of sharing content with secondary and higher secondary school children. Even though programming was limited in terms of the type of programs, the duration and the frequency, such content was aimed at fast tracking the development of free India. The use of media for development was necessary given the situation in the country.

The years between India's independence in 1947 to early 1990s were marked by a difficult growth period in India's economy (Tyagi 2022). As such, the years after 1990s saw

economic reforms being introduced in India. This resulted in emergence of a mixed economy characterized by privatization, liberalization, and influx of foreign direct investment in the country. Private television companies started operating in India after 1990s. With this change, the media landscape in India began to take a new life. Reflecting on the media ecosystem, Appadurai states that "mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media. These images involve many complicated inflections, depending on their mode (documentary or entertainment), their hardware (electronic or pre-electronic), their audiences (local, national, or transnational), and the interests of those who own and control them." (Appaduari 104).

Appadurai posits that "Mediascapes, whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places " (105). As private and public broadcast began to co-exist, the purpose of television shifted from merely educating to entertaining. General entertainment channels (GEC) became the most important category of content as advertising began to play an important role. The earliest traditions of television viewing in India took the form of mass broadcast for a mass audience. Webster and Phalen explain mass audience as an audience who are a collection of anonymous people who act independently and are united by a common object of attention (7). Unifying this mass audience was a common objective of economic growth, globalisation, and rapid development.

From 1990s to early 2000s linear television was the dominant form of broadcast which constituted of FTA (free to air) content. Public and private channels began to co-exist in the Indian media ecosystem. Public television channel *Doordarshan* remained committed to serving the public without a profit agenda. With privatization, television strategy moved from a not-for-profit public service agenda to profit making. During this period advertising and profits in the hands of private companies played an important role in television strategy. As such, when profits became an important consideration for private media organizations, media communication began to place value on feedback as it was linked to advertising revenue.

In a free to air content model, the audience does not pay for the content they watch. The television channel companies make money by way of selling airtime between programs.

In effect, advertisers pay for the content that the audience watches. During the time from 1990s to 2000s the Indian television media economy was built largely on the model of FTA content. Through this period, feedback about how many people watched a particular program became important part of broadcast content strategy. This feedback about a program was measured by a Target Rating Point (TRP) system. In this audience measurement system meters were installed on televisions in certain households. The greater number of times a program was played in a household, it was assumed to be more popular (BARC 2-17, 30-1). In this method there was no certain way to know who was watching the program and if anyone was even really watching television. The rating was based on how often a program was played. Programs that had the greatest number of people tuning in were given the prime-time slot. This daypart of broadcast cycle had the largest audience size.[2] It was in between these programs that advertising space had highest value.

As advertising became important in India in the context of content generation and distribution, the effect it had on the society became evident. It led to building up of aspirations in the audience. This was also the period when urbanization and middle class in India began to expand. An expanding middle class led to higher consumption of media as people in this section of the society had higher dispensable income. In her book titled *A Never-Before World: Tracking the Evolution of Consumer India,* Bijapur notes that the middle class in India is in effect the consuming class as they form the top 78th -98th percentile of Indian households by income. She refers to them as the consumer class who have enough income at their disposable to spend on goods and services like the middle class in other developed countries does (111). Hedrick-Wong notes that in 2021 the consumer class in India accounted for 62 million households (5). Rise of the audience size that had the ability to pay for goods and services enabled the growth in the media market which was backed by advertising revenue and airtime sales. The growing middle-income section of the society deemed it fit to continue indulging in buying behaviour, often induced by advertising, as such spends have traditionally been understood as signs of prosperity and growth.

In this regard, Gerbner's discussion on the function and effect assumption from cultivation theory and analysis of the socialization power of media are pertinent to understanding the relationship between society and media. Gerbner et al note that the effect of watching television remains consistent even though its gravity may vary (176-207). Though this theory is usually applied to analyse effects of violence on audience, it applies equally well

[2] Dayparting is the practice of dividing the broadcast day into several parts.

to how advertising entered the media space in India and became a fundamental part of the ecosystem. Gerbner et al. have suggested that television enables socialization process for diverse groups of people and moulds their actions into standardized behaviour and roles; thereby enabling enculturation (Bryant and Zillman 17-40). Reflecting on George Gerbner's work on cultivation theory, Riddle has suggested that the more time people spend living in the television world, the more likely they are to find similarity between their own life and what they see on screen (1-29).

Goodwin and Whannel write that "in our daily life, television in constantly 'studied' – in the popular press, on the radio, and in every sphere of our lives where conversation occurs. The study of television is usually anecdotal, sometimes self-conscious, and nearly always atheoretical" (1). This leads to creation of perceptions which are defined as the process of selecting, organising and interpreting messages and information that one is exposed to (Niosi 23). Perceptions formed based on impressions received from the media and surroundings, and the retention of these impressions for future reference becomes an integral part of our internal meaning systems and shaping up life choices. The ad-sales based programming methodology that was the prevalent model in Indian media thrived on this phenomenon where what was seen on television screens was readily becoming a part of real life as well.

Lazarsfeld and Merton in their article titled "Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action" (2007) argue that the mere presence of media by itself in society is not as problematic as thought to be, but the concern stems from the social function of media (233). They elaborate on the work of media as a "structure of social control" which aims to extend the economic and political interest of the elites and corporates into the social psychological experience of ordinary people (556-8). Advertisers being the controlling force in case of the Indian media ecosystem using linear broadcast. Lazarsfeld et al. highlight three social functions which the media impacts. These pertain to social status, social norms, and a narcotizing dysfunction effect.

By social status they mean that the media confers a certain status on people, events, organizations, and social movements. Social norms are reinforced by media when it showcases events or behaviours to expose deviance from usually accepted norms. The narcotizing dysfunction effect of media states that the excess exposure to media messages may serve to narcotize rather than to energize the average reader or listener (235). As a result, people may become very knowledgeable about various societal issues, but they may only take superficial action. (Lazarsfeld and Merton 239).

With the rise of advertising, a new culture of the consuming class began to emerge where the middle class spent freely on goods and services as a symbol of a prosperous life. Social status, social norms and repeated exposure to advertising messages that were embedded in the programs led to the creation of a society that was structured by the mandate of advertisers. Advertisements and television programs that embed advertisements in their story telling format showcased how certain goods, services or activities helped the viewers to achieve a better life. For instance, as shown in Indian advertising around festival times, buying gold jewellery around the time of Diwali festival (festival of lights) or buying a car are symbols of success, progress and care for loved ones which enables one to have a happy family. Such trends aimed at encouraging spends from the audience can be seen across entire ecosystem of FMCG products and services. Lufthansa's Diwali ad created by Mc Cann Worldgroup with the tagline "This Diwali, surprise a loved one like never before! Discover how" is another example. The theme for this ad was "Diwali begins when you join your loved ones" (Campaign live 2015).

In 2022, Coca cola rolled out a technological innovation called 'locked coke' which was a bottle of coke fitted with a Bluetooth coke. Conceptualized by Ogilvy, the product had a 360 campaign covering ad films, digital films, influencer partnerships (Campaign India 2022). In response to this ad, Kaushik Prasad, the marketing director of Coca-Cola India, said, "…the unique limited-edition gift bottle (that is available in India) is sure to inspire social connections, as people come together to meet, greet, connect, and share a (locked) Coke this Diwali." The chief creative officer of Ogilvy India, Sukesh Nayak, confirmed how advertising pushes the agenda of product sales by basing it on emotional aspects during festival time when he said, "…This is an invitation that I hope no one declines. We hope this beautiful merger of tech with humanity that has created the most inviting Diwali invitations, sees people make the effort to go and visit the person inviting them, open the locked bottle of Coke, and enjoy it together." (Campaign India 2022). Advertisers view Diwali as a festival that is celebrated by a non-homogeneous target audience united by an emotional appeal in India.

The advertorial interpretation of this festival in India is aimed at highlighting moments of family, friendship, love, and care across all advertisements. VMLY&R India's group CCO Mukund Olety says, "Diwali celebrations have transcended religious rituals to become more cultural. Themes around families, get-togethers, gratitude, generosity and homecoming resonate with people across religions." One of the most successful case studies in this regard is the Ogilvy and Wavemaker India's Not Just a Cadbury Ad' campaign. This campaign ran

during the Diwali of covid pandemic and used machine learning to promote and support small and local businesses that were on the verge of shutting down in place of merely selling Cadbury chocolates. The ad showed the Indian super star Shah Rukh Khan in different versions of the same ad were created based on the location of the viewer. The local retailers could use this template ad and plug in the names of their shops to promote their business. The uniqueness of this ad based on an emotional appeal of love, care and affection for community at large saw the campaign win the Grand Prix for Campaign of the Year at the Festival of Media Asia-Pacific 2022 (LBB Editorial 2022).

Research has shown that children have strong brand recall when shopping with their parents in cases where they have had heavy exposure to advertisements (Gorn and Goldberg 200-205; Atkin 287-304). Such children demand advertised food products and toys as they walk through the markets with their parents (Veerkumar & Jaiswal 3). Ward and Wackman have noted that age plays a crucial role in learning from advertisements and impacting behavioural change in children with older change more likely to be impacted (316-19). Singh (78-81) and Halan (46-49) posit that children are an important target market with direct purchasing power for food items such as sweets and snack while also influencing their parents' decisions for bigger items. In case of India, focus on advertising began to grow as media industry was privatized.

Advertising began to gain prominence in media content strategy after the liberalisation of 1990s and continues to impact the media ecosystem as an opinion leader as seen in case of two step theory. It encouraged the audience to move towards a way of life that was shown on the screen. Such content, directly or indirectly, was aimed at increasing the size of the consuming class, which led to profits for the advertisers. The control of standardizing aspirations for a prosperous life fell in the lap of advertisers who focused on specific sections of the society to chase profit motives.

Lembo observes in Fiske's work that the audience is understood to be continuously situating themselves with respect to discourse visible on screen and hence with respect to power (65). The middle-income section of the society began to organize their life in reference to content that was visible on screens. In this sense, Robert Craig states that communication becomes the cause of social actions (Littlejohn and Foss 176-7). This consuming culture began to emerge in the backdrop of changing social systems that saw a move from a joint family to a nuclear family system as urbanization became rampant.

Between 1990s and 2000s when private television was introduced in India and before 2000s after which the Internet began to play an important role in content distribution methodology, the programming strategy was limited by the scope of ad revenue. The representation of limited stereotypical images and identities became the reality of the Indian media ecosystem for as long as linear broadcast was the key model of content distribution. As the Internet began to enter the media ecosystem, aspects relating to the position of the audience, content quality and the overall structural functioning of media in India began to change as well. Over the years, as the flow of communication in media messages changed, the dynamics of power relationships and agency between media and society also evolved. This change came into existence as the audience began to participate in the content generation process gradually. As participation from audience became a prevalent norm, a perspective on media shifted to analyses what people did with media (Severin and Tankard 293-4).

The current media ecosystem which comprises of a hybrid methodology of content production, distribution and engagement by audience posits that the media messages are constantly being created, transmitted, received, transformed, feedbacked, and are evolving. These messages travel through platforms of content distribution such as linear television, phone-based applications, laptop, and iPad screens that are connected to the Internet. They are transmedia narratives that evolve based on the platform they exist on. The cross-platform exchange of messages required active participation of the audience. As a result, the audience changes its position from being mere receivers to active participants in the content creation industry.

From a uses and gratification approach, audience activity remains integral to understanding what the audience does with media (Rubin 172). Blumler defines audience activity as utility, intentionality, selectivity and involvement of the audience with media (Blumler 9-36; West and Lynn 392-401). Uses and gratification researchers regard audience to be active variably, that is, they are not equally active all the time (Rubin 172). Rubin suggests that level of activity depends on the social context, potential for interaction and attitude of the audience. Activity has been defined as a more selective, attentive, and involved state of media use (173).

The audience has become empowered as they engage in active participation of their media use. In such a situation, the location of agency is constantly changing between content makers and audience. This change in the location of agency is one of the biggest changes that the Indian media industry has witnessed in the last several decades. Collier suggests that in

the present day highly mobile media environment have afforded unprecedented agency to children as they have opportunities to produce, share, participate and easily find workarounds to content restrictions (259). Given the excessive access to media that is possible for children from middle income groups, Krotz has discussed the synergies of increasing digitisation based on diverse communicative equipment. He posits that it has led to immergence of a new communication system which is based on interactive systems (90-2). Hepp refers to this as virtualised media communication (64).

3.2 Position of the child audience in the media ecosystem and research framework

The discussion about agency that children hold in their media engagement experience in India is relatively new much like the emergence of children's entertainment as a separate entity. As discussed in the previous section, television started in India as an information and general entertainment source in 1959. From 1960 onwards television was used as a medium of instruction for children with a few programs meant for entertainment on public television. It was after the introduction of liberalization that children's entertainment began to emerge as a distinct category when in 1995 commercial channels focused on children began with the launch of Cartoon Network (Das and Kini 2018, 335 – 352). At the start of emergence of children's entertainment category, the understanding about the child audience in India was still developing. During the early years of television for children in India, there was no mechanism for them to engage actively with the content or content producers.

Historically speaking, in case of past media scholarship in relation with children, the connotations have been negative. Past works assume children to be incapable of fully understanding media messages (Dorr). In connection with Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974), Dorr interpreted television viewing experience as a static "framed experience" for children as they could not participate directly (7, 61). As demonstrated by earlier academic research and public discourses, the engagement experience between children and media has typically been viewed through a lens of negative impact.

Pecora et al. note that the early years of television research in the 1960's explored relationships between family and television, violence, aggression (16). Historically, some of the key areas that make the research agenda for children and media range from analysing the content of programs, effects on children, regulations, and policies that concern children's content, issues of advertising, concerns about sex, violence, and race among others. Research done over the 60 years in the field of children and media has presented definite conclusions such as the following noted by Morrisett:

> Most children watch a great deal of television…Many children start watching television as early as 12 months…Children learn from what they watch…Quantity and quality of watching television affect learning and behaviour in important ways…Violence and educational programs both impact children in their learning behaviour…Television often reinforces social stereotypes of gender, race, ethnicity, race, and disability. (Pecora et al xi.)

For many years the above stated context remained the only position to explore the relationship between media and children. Questions about how children could lean on media to find a place for themselves in the world or discover new things about life were not considered topics of prominence in the past. Until the 1970s, academic research did not recognize television as being pro-social (Friedrich & Stien 2) even though the need was felt greatly as noted by Mivalsky in Pecora (19).

The above stated discussion points provided a relevant context to build further scholarship in the past as the flow of content was top – down, from content producers to the audience. As such, the audience was often perceived to be a mere receiver of media effects, meanings, influences etc. The media system of the past which was primarily comprised of linear television in terms of screen-based home entertainment was a classic example of such academic framing. However, with the emergence and progressive rise of Internet usage in media-related activities, the approach to understanding children and their relationship with media has also evolved.

Until the early 2000s, the flow of communication in Indian broadcast media was linear. There was little that the audience could do to engage with the content generation process itself. They were positioned as mere receivers of what was sent to them through television media. With changes in technology and policy framework in the country, the relationship between media and the audience has also changed. The key difference in the way audience is positioned in the media ecosystem between past and present stems from the engagement function.

India's contemporary media ecosystem is characterized by the use of television, radio and newspapers which have an extended presence on the Internet. The Internet came to India in 1986 but it was only meant for research and education purposes. General public use of the Internet began in the year 1995 for banking. The early 2000s saw the rise of YouTube as a parallel platform of content distribution for free to air content. However, it was as recent as

2016 that the Internet began to be used as an established and mainstream form of content distribution with commercial viability. This development was a result of the launch of over the top (OTT) service platforms where content began to be monetized. OTT stands for 'over the top', a method of distributing television content via Internet protocols (Lotz 125).

The balance of power began to show visible changes as OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar began to emerge. As these companies distribute content via the Internet which tracks user data, it became possible to gauge the actual audience experience more accurately.

The current model of media ecosystem represents a continuous and multi-directional flow of communication between all parties involved in the content creation and consumption process. It demonstrates aspects of interaction-based models like the Schramm's model of communication that place importance on feedback except that the interactivity aspect is not in person but over a digital space and the flow of communication is simultaneous. The contemporary media ecosystem is a combination of content strategy oriented towards mass communication and personalised content strategies. The contemporary heterogeneous media ecosystem has some aspects of establishing a sense of commonness like in the Schramm's model (Babe 128). This is done by way of broadcasting common topics that the audience connect with in the GEC genre in addition to catering to needs for niche content by way of content personalisation over streaming services.

The constantly evolving nature of communication and messages have aspects of a non-linear model of communication as discussed by Barlund, where communication in media is constantly creating new social realities (Kastberg 56). These new social realities that are giving rise to new media cultures globally are impacted by social, cultural and relational aspects (Barlund 58). In case of ecosystems like in India that are seeing a rise of Internet-enabled content, audience participation continues to play an important role in shaping content strategy that has a direct impact on how the media ecosystem is constructed. When audiences begin to participate in the content economy, they do so from within and from the social, cultural and relational context of their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships.

Communication is continuous, irreversible and creates newer forms of communication at each successive step (Nicotera 3-5). Media ecosystems cannot be conceptualized merely as message carriers like they used to when advertising revenue was the key controller of the kind of content that was available. The focus of contemporary ecosystems has progressively moved towards creating newer meanings from which newer content is further created. This has given

rise to a new kind of content economy signified by user generated content / audience-generated content / consumer-generated content whereby people outside of media institutions create content (Bolin 267-80). The meaning of the content is generated based on the context it is received in. Since the flow of communication is constantly changing with audience and content makers both involved in the content creation economy, the interpretations about content keep evolving as well (Barlund 47, 57). Communicators co-create the process, outcome, and effectiveness of communication.

The contemporary media ecosystem has led to the emergence of media rituals and user participation in such a way that the audience continues to hold greater agency over their media experience. Levesque states that agency means that one can be generative, creative, proactive, and reflective (92). Giddens defines agency as the ability to influence actions, or affect something casually, or the capability of doing things rather than merely having an intention to do something (9). Buckingham writes that agency refers to the power to produce an effect, to have influence and make a difference (12).

The present time of media engagement has seen the emergence of audiences who engage with media both actively and passively. This includes the child audience as well. In this regard, Jenkins et.al. have discussed emergence of a participatory culture in media. They define it as a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices (xi). This has led to the emergence of new perspectives on media engagement processes which delve deeper into the inter dependence between content makers and content consumers in a circular and multi-directional flow.

User Generated Content (UGC) and a robust system of engaging with media offerings through the Internet have provided for a fertile ground for participatory cultures to grow in India. In place of passively consuming media content, audiences such as children engage with media as active participants. A step further in understanding audience in a contemporary media context and UGC is the work of Axel Bruns who builds on Toffler's (1971) concept "prosumer" to arrive at a combination of producers and users and calls it produsers (Lim & Nekmat 259- 278; Bruns 3, 275-84). Bolin (268) quotes a few other similar concepts such as:

> Pro-Ams–a combination of professionals and amateurs (Leadbeater and Miller 2004; Anderson 2006), or peer production, as discussed by Joshua Benkler in his influential book *The Wealth of Networks*, where

> he positions this production in a new and decentralized "networked information economy" that is replacing the previous stage of industrial information economy with its more centralized production processes (Benkler 2006, 3).

A content strategy that uses "prosumers" enables a robust feedback mechanism to come into existence thereby allowing the consumers to influence the overall production process (Miller 31). Miller further notes that in such a culture where the producer hegemony is broken by consumer participation, the distinction between producer and consumer has been blurring (104). As a result, the media engagement process has become extremely interactive. Jensen (201) has defined digital media interactivity as "a measure of media's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the context and/or form of the mediated communication'.

The contemporary media engagement experiences for children are backed by technological advancements that stem from a context of co-creating where their feedback towards media is considered important. Their viewing preferences are mapped a lot more accurately through the Internet-based methods adopted by OTT services than the ballpark estimates that were provided by TRP ratings of yester years. In this current hybrid media model, when the child audience does not like the content, media makers are bound to pay attention to it. Scantlin asserts that children use media to satisfy their needs and wants, particularly social and emotional needs (64). From a uses and gratification approach, media can help audience (children) to find information, bring social connections to life, help form identity or present an opportunity for relaxation or emotional release (Rubin 168-9). Another approach to media experience is of an instrumental use where a user is seeking a certain content for informational reasons and is backed by selective and purposeful behaviour (Rubin 172-3)

Lembo presents another dimension to the engagement as a viewing experience as he discusses how television viewing provides a conflict neutral environment. He presents an alternate perspective on TV engagement when he notes that TV viewing serves as a bonding activity for the members of the household and becomes a ritual (3). The ritualistic use of media in the lives of children from urban middle class homes is a rapidly growing phenomenon globally. Rubin defines ritualistic use of media as a process of engaging with a medium more habitually to consume time or for diversion (172-3).

With the rise in pervasiveness of media in our lives, Couldry and Hepp write about mediatisation and define it as the relationship between the transformation of media and

communication on the one hand and culture and society on the other. They note that mediatization has qualitative and quantitative aspects. Quantitative observations are concerned with media's ever-increasing proliferation through society. Qualitative aspects relate to understanding how social and cultural changes emerge because of media saturation (197). Hepp (4) explains that mediatisation can then be understood as a process of sensitizing us toward the transformations that are experienced in the context of contemporary media engagement.

In making of deep mediatization processes, Hepp (2019) discusses supra-individual actors which he defines as individual actors with their own agency. He notes that "this includes 'corporate actors' such as companies and state agencies, and 'collective actors' such as social movements and pioneer communities" (2019, 4, 18). Media organizations such as Amazon are an example of such supra-individuals. With the rise of media organizations and services that dominate all aspects of like, there is a likelihood of a select few determining the media agenda. This remains a serious concern globally. In case of India, where media is considered as the fourth estate of democracy, plurality of media remains an important feature of the policy framework. In line with this thought, on 12th April 2022, TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) published a consultation paper titled "Issues Relating to Media Ownership'. The paper cautioned that:

> "…consolidation of large corporations can reduce media pluralism by undermining the diversity of new age portals and online media.," (16).

As such, government regulatory bodies in India are in the process of formulating policies that will ensure that technological developments do not lead to market dominance to keep the balance of power in check.

With changes in the overall media frameworks globally, a shift in the understanding of childhood has also taken place. Therefore, several points of analysis and conclusions from the past do not remain applicable to the contemporary situation, as television extends to Internet-enabled platforms and has become interactive in several ways. For instance, Dorr's understanding of children being incapable of understanding media messages (7) is a narrative that needs to be reconsidered in the contemporary technological context, as the children born in digital times understand the world differently. The methods and means of situating children in the society have also changed.

This change pertains to a positive shift. Contemporary scholarship acknowledges the active role the audience plays in the media-making and meaning-making processes. It recognizes that media-related experiences, like all other sources of experience in the child's environment, are integrated in the process of their developing selves, their relationships with their peers, family members, educators, and even researchers (Götz and Lemish 16). Television opens a larger world for children and helps them to socialize (Deodhar 10-1). Childhood itself is not considered as a stage in mere passing anymore. The contemporary discourse credits children as being socially competent individuals who actively participate in meaning-making processes, in much the same way as adults do in other stages of the life cycle (Götz and Lemish 16-17).

4. Conclusion

In contemporary times, there is an increased focus on engagement with media content rather than just watching television. The move of the audience from being a mere receiver of information to becoming an active participant in the content generation process as given in theories about participatory culture, prosumers form an important line of enquiry. Children make conscious decisions about how and when they use media, the programs they like and dislike, the platform through which they prefer to engage with media. Children born in digital times connect and interact with the world (digital and physical) differently.

Overall, the last decades have witnessed a change in the kind of content being watched by millions of middle-class children from small towns and urban dwellings in India. In a country like India with a population of 1.35 billion, the market has never seen such an endless supply of content that ranges from mediocre to excellent in quality (Personal Interview, Gupta). The hybrid model of media content distribution and consumption has become the new normal. Contemporary audience uses cross platform services which include free content on linear broadcast, paid video on demand service and connected television services that use the Internet. This interaction takes place in a rapidly changing ecosystem of social, political, economic, and technological developments These discussions, which form the basis for understanding the media experiences of children, will be discussed in the next chapters.

Chapter 3: Television in India: Overview

1. Television in India – a historical context of credibility and growth

Media has been an important part of life for people in India since early years when India was formed as an independent nation. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was set up in 1947, right after independence. At the time of independence, print media and radio were already in use and television came to India a few years after independence. When India became free from the British rule in 1947, the country had no experience with democracy. India suffered from problems such as illiteracy, child marriage, untouchability, female infanticide, poverty, unemployment, famine, malnutrition, low life expectancy and poor economic growth (Tyagi 2022).

For nation building, the use of Five-Year Plans was deemed fit to put India on the path of rapid transformation. Prof. Mahalanobis, a leading economist, and statistician designed the initial five-year plans along the lines of the Soviet model (Rothermund 61).

A planning commission was set up in 1950 to execute the five-year plan development program (Pellissery and Geall 156-160; Agrawal 676). The first five-year plan was presented by India's first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru to the Parliament of India and was set in motion in 1951. The key objective of this plan and the ones that followed was to rebuild the nation after independence. This was to be achieved by laying the foundation for agriculture development, provide affordable healthcare and education at the lowest possible price and support industrial development. Aghi notes that television was introduced to reach and teach people (20).

The political mandate of using the five-year plan system, which was introduced after independence to support nation building efforts, ensured that the media had a befitting place in the political framework as a tool for mass change. Television in the form of the public channel Doordarshan, the public broadcasting service of India, became a particularly important tool to spread information to people and educate them on matters that the government seemed necessary. As Kumar highlights, television was introduced in India in 1956 to "…discover what TV could achieve in community development and formal education" (2012, 296).

Terrestrial television began in India as an experiment on 15th September 1959 in the form of Doordarshan (DD). DD was established as a public broadcasting service of India and was founded by the government of India. In the early years, television was set up within the

government run department of All India Radio (AIR). The technicians from the radio division were responsible for running television. Daily transmission began in 1965. By the year 1975, television services had reached seven cities in India. When television first came to India in 1959, only a few neighbourhoods had a television. Over the years, more households in acquired television sets.

In 1975, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was launched with the collaboration between Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of America (ISRO 2015). This program was an experimental satellite communications project to reach the rural masses and share important information. The content was produced by Doordarshan (DD) which was then a part of AIR.

Television began to be used as a medium to reach 2400 villages across six states of India. India has 29 states and 8 union territories. The programs that formed the broadcast agenda included educational and instructional material. The Education TV (ETV) was aimed at educating children through creative and interesting programs. During the holidays, this segment was used for broadcasting teacher training programs. Approximately 100,000 teachers were trained through the course of the SITE program. The Instructional TV (ITV) module was used to share information about agriculture practices, family planning, health, hygiene, nutrition, and events of national importance. Programs were telecasted twice a day for a total of 4 hours. Music, dance, and drama programs were also added to the roster of entertainment (Chander and Karnik 56).

In 1976, Doordarshan was separated from AIR and a new autonomous body was formed. Kasbekar notes that in 1980, when Indira Gandhi returned to power as Prime Minister for the second time, she ensured that television was given due importance in government policies and was determined to control the entire country using television through a central government-controlled mechanism (147). A sizeable allocation of funds to the tune of US$22.2 million was earmarked to this purpose under the Sixth Five-Year Plan that ran between 1980–1985.

In 1982 national telecast of the DD National channel began in India. Colour television was also introduced in the same year with the live telecast of Prime Minister Indra Gandhi's speech on Independence Day. By 1990, the Prasar Bharati Act was passed by the Parliament of India to set up the public broadcasting units of Doordarshan and AIR as autonomous bodies which would be free of the government's control. This act became operational in 1997

and Doordarshan came under the aegis of Prasar Bharati, a statutory autonomous body set up by an Act of Parliament.

Doordarshan maintained monopoly until early 1990. The beginning of the 1990s saw the country undergo an economic crisis which led to the introduction of economic reforms as part of The Industrial Policy 1991 (Ministry of Commerce & Industries 3; Rangarajan 25). India witnessed rapid changes in the social and political systems, technology, and economy after the economic liberalization of 1991(Goldar 31-2). Mathai (255-268) notes that liberalisation began a period of deregulation of government control over industries and enabling of private and foreign investment across many sectors such as media. As a result, corporations from other parts of the world began to enter India to set up private broadcasting driven by profit motive. From one television channel in the pre-1991 period, media channels grew to 800 by 2012 with over 740 million viewers (Kohli-Khandekar xxv). As per TRAI reports of 2021, there are at least 901 television channels in India (7) see table 1.

Table 1

Broadcasters in India

Broadcasters in India as per TRAI report on 31st Dec 2021		
1	Total No. Of permitted channels	901
2	Number of Broadcasters (approx.)	350
3	No. Of Pay broadcasters	40
4	No. Of FTA (free to air) broadcasters (approx.)	310
5	No. Of Pay channels	327
6	No. Of FTA (free to air) channels	574

The workings of private and public broadcasting come under the purview of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The official Government of India website states the following:

> "The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is one among the early Ministries set up after India's Independence and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was India's first Minister for Information and Broadcasting…. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is one of the vital Ministries that represent the face of the government in reaching out to the masses. The Ministry is entrusted with the task of disseminating information about government policies, schemes, and programmes through different mediums of mass communication covering radio, television, press, social media, printed publicity like booklets; posters, outdoor publicity and through traditional modes of communication such as dance, drama, folk recitals, puppet shows etc. The Ministry is also the focal point as regards policy matters related to private broadcasting sector, administering of the public broadcasting service- Prasar Bharati, multi-media advertising and publicity of the policies and programmes of the Union Government, film promotion and certification and regulation of print media." (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2023)

2. Contemporary Indian television media framework

The Indian TV media industry framework can be contextualized in three ways based on area of operation, operational motive, and content delivery method.

2.1 Area of operation: National vs regional

National media channels are the channels that are broadcasted pan India, whereas regional channels are limited to a certain region and use regional languages. Both national and regional language media channels have strong markets. National media channels mostly use Hindi as the language of content transmission. These (national) channels also use English language content like in the case of news and sports. In everyday practice, many Indians often use a combination of languages. The programs that form the corpus of this research are broadcasted on national media channels and use Hindi as the language of content transmission.

2.2 Operational motive: Profit vs Public Service

There are two broad kinds of categories based on ownership. They are public and private. Prasar Bharati Corporation is India's public broadcaster which runs Doordarshan. It operates 8 national, 35 regional and one international channel. The focus of public channels is public services.

Private media channels are run by private media corporations that are driven by profit and market forces. Disney Channel India, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Discovery kids are some of the examples of channels that represent the private media channel market in India for children. This research focuses on programs that are available through private media corporations.

2.3 Content delivery method

Currently, there are two important methods of content delivery in India – satellite and Internet. The third method of delivery known as terrestrial broadcast has been phased out between 2021- early 2022.

- **Terrestrial broadcast:** Terrestrial transmission uses earth-based transmitters broadcast content. This was the first model of content broadcast in India much like in other parts of the world. The early years of television saw analogue terrestrial transmission. It was used by the public broadcaster Doordarshan. Over time, this technology gave way to satellite broadcast and Internet-based content distribution. On March 24, Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha stated that more than 1200 Doordarshan Analogue Terrestrial TV (ATT) transmitters had been shut down in a phased manner between 2021 and 2022 as they became obsolete and lost their relevance (All India Radio 2022).
- **Satellite broadcast:** Direct-to-home (DTH), HITS and cable services use satellite transmission method. While cable networks use cables, DTH is wireless. DTH requires set-top- box to receive satellite signals. The viewers pay a monthly subscription fee and can choose which channels they want to watch. The content by itself is free but the delivery mechanism has a fee attached to it. As of Dec 2012, there were 6 major DTH operators in India and 54 million subscribers.
- **Internet:** Internet-based entertainment is also called non-linear TV. Examples include IP TV, connected TV, OTT (Over the top) TV that provide engaging media experiences for the audience who have the means for such entertainment. Some of the most popular OTT platforms in India are Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney Hotstar (FICCI 2021).

3. Satellite television and Internet-enabled entertainment in India

The private television broadcast industry in India has witnessed a steep rise since the 1990s to the present day because of the use of satellite and Internet technology in the content distribution ecosystem. This research work includes programs that are available through satellite as well as Internet-based services.

3.1 Cable television in India

Technological developments around the world helped the cause of the media industry in India. From the mid-1990s to the first decade of the 2000s, the media market grew based on the developments in satellite technology and the entry of private media companies which broadcasted content to the masses. Kasbekar states that in India commercial satellite broadcast began in the 1990s with the help of ASIASAT 1 satellite, a private satellite, which was owned by a consortium comprising of the Hong Kong-based Hutchinson Whampoa, Britain's Cable & Wireless, and China's CITIC Technology Corporation. Entire India was within the reach of this satellite (154).

With this development, cable operators became an important part of the media industry. They installed dish antennas to receive satellite transmission and then further distributed such content using cables at a monthly subscription. Cable television became one of the most prominent methods of content distribution to the audience. The audience now had the possibility to watch content broadcasted by public and private channels both. The initial years of cable-based transmission remained a largely informal and unregulated industry.

In 1995, national estimates provided by the Indian Readership Survey suggested that there were about 8.4 million urban homes and 3.4 million rural homes with cable television in India (Kumar 5). The consumer base also grew as the economy grew. As per FICCI 2005, between 1995 to 2000, approximately 100 million people became part of the consuming class, as middle-income groups and the rich class continued to grow (8)[3].

3.2 Direct to Home television in India

[3] In India, the term upper caste/class refers to the social hierarchy caste system of Bhrahmins, Kshyatriyas etc. Whereas the term rich class is a monetary classification which is generally understood as the section of society above the middle-income group. These are two distinct classifications that may or may not overlap.

The years following 2000 saw a further change as the government permitted DTH (direct to home) broadcast. Dish TV launched the first DTH service in India in October 2003. TRAI 2012 report noted (29):

> …The broadcasting and cable TV services sector has shown consistent growth spanning last two decades. The sector comprises of analogue and digital cable TV services, DTH services, terrestrial TV services, IPTV services, and radio services. The major component of the sector i.e., pay television services sector, which emerged in the early 1990s, has experienced rapid growth, with the number of subscribers increasing from just 410,000 in 1992 to around 142 million (Cable + DTH+ Other Platforms) by March 2012, an average growth rate of more than 34% every year for the last 20 years (see fig 2).

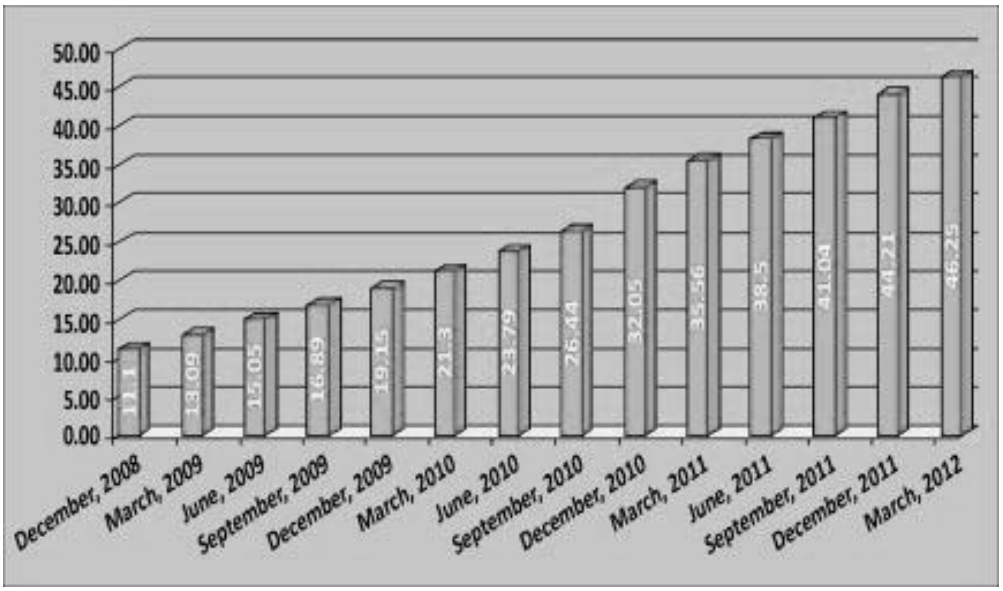

Figure 2 Growth of DTH sector in terms of the registered subscriber base (TRAI 2011-12, 30)

By 2010, India became the world's third largest TV market with close to 138 million television households, 600 million viewers and 550 channels broadcasted through various methods (FICCI 2011 16) (see fig. 3). By December 2017, there were 67.56 million active

DTH subscribers in the country. By the end of 2019, there were 918 private satellite channels in India (TRAI 2019 7).

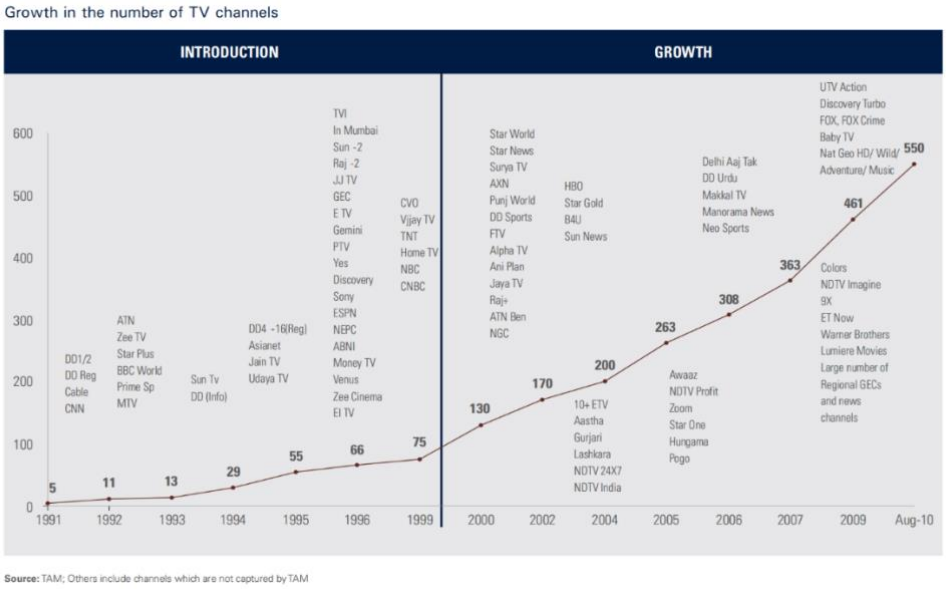

Figure 3 Growth of television channels in India as reported in FICCI 2011 (25).

The industry size of television grew from INR 329 billion in 2011 to INR 588.3 billion in 2016 and to INR 660 billion in 2017 (FICCI 2017, 9 and FICCI 2018, 11) and continues to expand alongside streaming services that use the Internet. As per the audit reports by global organizations like KPMG and Ernst & Young, television shows promise of rapid growth through the coming years. In 2018, television stood at INR 740 billion and grew further to stand at INR 787 for the year 2019 (FICCI 2020, 11-14) (see fig. 4).

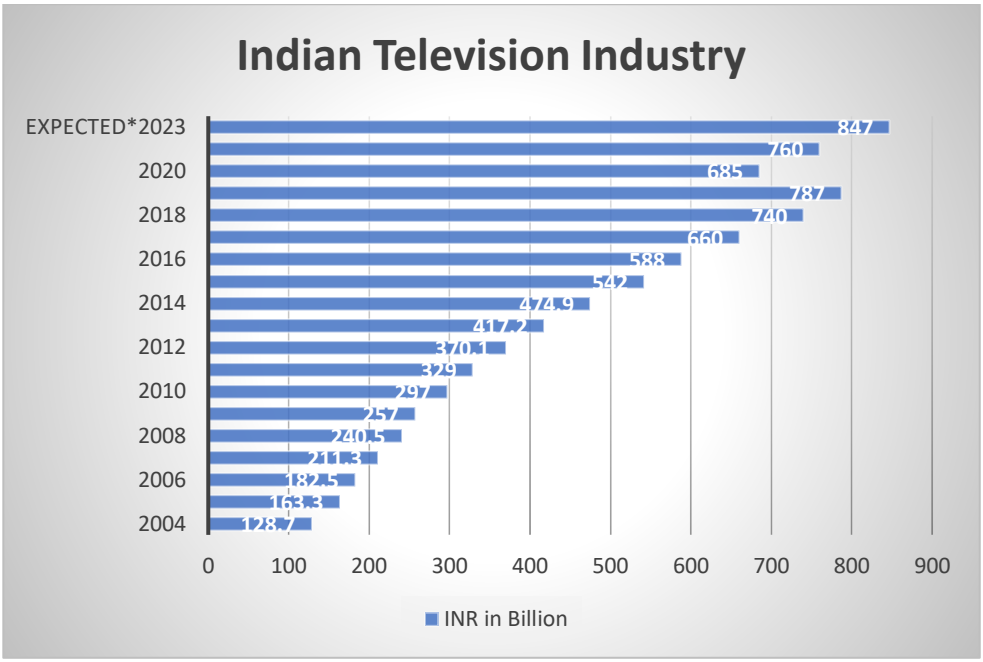

Figure 4: Growth of Television in India in the last few years. FICCI 2020.

3.3 Internet-based TV services in India

The decade of 2010 also saw a progressive increase in the number of people using the Internet as the Indian government announced the auction of 3G spectrum in 2010. In a 2014 statement, IAMAI-IMRB stated that:

> The Internet in India took more than a decade to move from 10 million to 100 million and 3 years from 100 million to 200 million. However, it took only a year to move from 200 to 300 million users. Clearly, Internet is mainstream in India today (PTI).

With such phenomenal rise in the use of the Internet, digital books, mix media content, use of short format video clips on YouTube to learn alphabets through rhymes, numbers and much more became commonplace. The Internet became cheaper, more accessible, and emerged as part of the broadcast framework. In recent years, Indian telecommunication giants like Jio offer data packs that provide 1.5 GB per day for around INR 5 enabling viewers to watch their specific and preferred content at ease, on their smart phones. This would include content that they otherwise would not be able to watch on a common television set in the house, or content that they can now consume while on the go (FICCI 2017, 33). As a result, the media market witnessed a rise in the number of Internet-enabled content creators and content distribution platform providers. It was in this time frame that the Indian audience started to play an active role unlike before in the media economy.

The line between content makers and content consumers began to get blurred. Availability of smart phones and affordable Internet made it possible for a large part of the audience to make simple videos and upload them at the touch of a finger (PWC 13).

Barriers to entry broke down for content makers, for amateurs and professionals alike. In this period, broadcast television along with Internet-based screen experiences came together to form the digital experience and the hybrid Indian media experience was born. Around 2016, streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime video came to India spearheading a new era of content production and content consumption. The experience on these portals was very different from the YouTube or linear broadcast experience.

Netflix and Amazon Prime Video represent Subscription-based Video on Demand (SVOD) content distribution methodology in which the audience pay for the content by way of a monthly subscription fee (Lotz 1). YouTube on the other hand represents Advertising-based Video on Demand (SVOD) service which provides free content which is monetised by advertisers. The emergence of niche platforms that provide services like personalization of content like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have raised the bar in terms of content quality as well.

In its 2018 report, FICCI had predicted that India would become the second largest online video viewing audience globally (22). As per TRAI 2019 report, there were 718.74 million Internet subscribers in India by the end of 2019 of which 450.31 million subscribers were classified as urban Internet subscribers (9). Estimates as given in the FICCI 2021 predicted an upward graph for Internet-based TV media consumption as follows:

> "…Smart connected TVs will exceed 40 million users by 2025, thereby ending the monopoly of broadcasters on the large screen...Screen count will almost double to near a billion by 2025, of which around 220 million would be television screens and over 750 million would be smartphone screens. This could lead to a massive increase in content creation (news and entertainment) as personal consumption (as opposed to group consumption) increases to over 50% of total video time, across a wider set of genres and niche content types. User generated content would continue to grow by 25% a year to exceed 100,000 hours by 2025 (15)."

From this size of the industry, television constituted INR 787 billion in 2019 and INR 720 billion in 2021 (see table 2).

Table 2

Media & entertainment industry growth trends as reported in 2021.FICCI 2022, 10

Indian M&E sector grew 16.4% in 2021 to reach INR1.61 trillion

	2019	2020	2021	2022E	2024E	CAGR 2021-2024
Television	787	685	720	759	826	5%
Digital media	221	235	303	385	537	21%
Print	296	190	227	241	251	3%
Online gaming	65	79	101	120	153	15%
Filmed entertainment	191	72	93	150	212	32%
Animation and VFX	95	53	83	120	180	29%
Live events	83	27	32	49	74	32%
Out of Home media	39	16	20	26	38	25%
Music	15	15	19	21	28	15%
Radio	31	14	16	18	21	9%
Total	**1,822**	**1,386**	**1,614**	**1,889**	**2,320**	**13%**

All figures are gross of taxes (INR in billion) for calendar years | EY estimates

As per EY estimates (FICCI 2022 10) in the year 2021, the Indian media and entertainment industry which comprises of television, digital media, print, online gaming, filmed entertainment, animation, live events, out of home media, music and radio stood at a value of USD 21.5 billion or INR1.61 trillion after the COVID 19 pandemic (see fig. 4). Before the pandemic, the industry stood at a total value of INR 1.81 trillion.

Currently, this INR1.61 trillion industry caters to the entertainment needs of a population of 1.38 billion people in India. The Broadcast Audience Research Council of India estimates the television audience in India to be around 183 million homes and growing. The growth in television happened across genres. Over the next few years, the television industry is expected to grow to the tune of INR 826 billion by the year 2024, and the overall size of the media industry is expected to rise to reach a level of INR 2.3 trillion (10).

While General Entertainment Channels (GEC) have shown consistent growth since the beginning, the children's television genre has also grown steadily at 4-6 percent since 2015 (FICCI 2017, 82). The rise in children's entertainment has had a substantial impact on the media industry in India. As Ernest and Young (EY) estimate, the growth in children's

entertainment category has led to a 24% growth in the overall size of the animation industry in India which has helped the industry to rise to a level of INR 30.5 billion (FICCI 2022 167).

Though during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, television as an industry witnessed a decline in growth, the children's content category still grew (FICCI 2021, 162). BARC reported a 39% growth in consumption of children's content during the pandemic (FICCI 2021, 164). In the year 2021-22 alone, children's television comprised of 2% of a total of approximately 155,000 hours of television content produced in India (FICCI 2022 232). Additionally, the kids' channels category (as called by industry reports) has maintained a steady average of 3-4% of the overall television-based advertising revenue in India over the past few years (FICCI 2022 47).

Valkenburg (2008) has also noted that over the past few decades, media content aimed specifically at children has developed at a staggering rate. Not only has the number of television channels for children multiplied, but also computer games and the Internet have become an increasingly important part of children's leisure activities (1).

4. Children's entertainment category in the Indian media market

As a result of the liberalisation of the 1990s, there was a surge of American companies setting up distribution mechanisms in India. The year 1995 saw the arrival of some shows such as *The Yogi Bear Show, Top Cat, The Flintstones, Scooby-Doo, Tom and Jerry, The Jetsons, SWAT Kats: The Radical Squadron, The Mask: The Animated Series, The Addams Family, The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest, Captain Planet* and *Dexter's Laboratory.*

However, it was in the early years of the 2000s that the genre of children's entertainment began to gain a prominent place in the Indian media market. The early years of the 2000s saw global entertainment companies such as The Walt Disney Company, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Warner Media, MTV Networks India, Viacom 18, enter and scale up their operations in India. They did so by setting up their wholly owned subsidiary companies and launching new channels. Channels such as Disney Channel, Toon Disney, Hungama TV, Pogo TV, Nickelodeon, Baby TV, Animax were launched in this period. Sony's Animax, Turner International's POGO, and UTV's Hungama started broadcasting in January 2004 (Kasbekar 167). Disney channel was established in India in December 2004.

The years following 2000 saw foreign-made programs like *The Power puff Girls, Batman: The Animated Series, The New Batman Adventures, Batman Beyond, Superman: The Animated Series* and *Justice League* come to India. From 2001onwards, a steady flow of East

Asian content also began to emerge on the Indian media map. There was a rise in the availability and acceptance for Japanese cartoons such as *Dragon Ball Z, Doraemon, Crayon Shin Chan, Pokémon.* Such shows were localised for the Indian audience, which means that the language of the content was changed to suit the local audience.[4] Though there were programs made in India as well, such as *Adventures of Chhota Birbal* (2003-04), *Akbar and Birbal* (2006), *Adventures of Tenali Raman* (2003-04), it was only around 2008 that the rise of programs made in India or Indian IPs began to solidify as an industry trend.

From 2008 onwards Indian IPs (intellectual properties) started to grow, such as *Chhota Bheem* (2008 – present), *Chacha Bhatija* (2016 – present), *Krishna* (2006 -07), *Chorr Police* (2009-12), *Roll no. 21* (2010 – present), *Shaktimaan: The Animated Series* (2011-12), *Motu Patlu* (2012- present), *Shiva* (2015 – present), *Gaju Bhai* (2016-18), *Gattu Battu* (2017-20), *Paap -O- Meter* (2017 – Present), *Selfie with Bajrangi* (2017 – present), *Super Bheem* (2017-20), *Little Singham* (2018 – present), *Rudra: Boom Chik Chik Boom* (2018 – present), *Golmaal Jr.* (2019- present), *Guddu the Great* (2019- present), and *Mighty Little Bheem* (2019 – present).

Such programs are available over Internet-enabled streaming services as well as linear broadcast channels. Across various video on demand (VOD) services like those of streaming platforms one of the biggest concerns that continues to come forth is about content restrictions for children and the legal mechanism that governs the content. Between 2016 and 2020, the policy framework to regulate content on streaming and online services was non-existent in India. In February 2021, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India brought out the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and defined access control mechanism as:

> ...any measure, including a technical measure, through which access to online curated content may be restricted based on verification of the identity or age of a user...The rule defines children as any person under the age of 18 years (19).

Even though the government is working in the direction of protecting the interest of children, a lot more needs to be done. This becomes even more crucial in the wake of extremely long hours of media engagement that came into being after the COVID pandemic. Wartella and Rob assert that historically speaking children have been early adopters of

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[4] Localisation is a process in media industry by which foreign made content is made relevant for the local audience. It is different from adaptation.

technology (8). It has also been highlighted by Wartella and Reeves that the aspect of time children spend with media has always been a cause of concern and debate for researchers, parents, and policy makers alike (118-33).

4.1 Children's entertainment category in India during and after COVID-19

Currently Warner Bros. Discovery (Carton Network, Pogo), Walt Disney Company India (Disney channels), Doordarshan, Hungama TV, Viacom 18 (nickelodeon channels) are the key linear broadcasters with presence over the Internet. Streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar are popular streaming services out of over 40 OTT service providers in India. Some of the most popular children's programs (in no particular order) are *Chhota Bheem, Little Singham, Jungle Book, Pakdam Pakdai, Motu Patlu, Rudra, Shiva, Tarak Mehta Ka Oolta Chashma, Oggy and the Cockroaches, Doraemon, Shinchan, Motu Patlu, Grizzy and Lemmings, Little Krishna, Roll no. 21, Golmaal Junior, Ben 10, Guardians of the Galaxy.* As for the characters, *Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, Shin-Chan* and Jethalal from Tarak Mehta ka Oolta Chasma are some of the prominent characters that children love well into their early teens. This generic list mostly boasts of shows that are either produced in India or are localized.[5] Esselink describes localization as a process that involves combining language and technology to produce a product that can cross language and cultural barriers (21).

The market for children's entertainment has grown steadily even through the time of the COVID pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19 time of 2020 onwards has seen the biggest and the most dynamic shift in the content consumption process. The pandemic led to schools being shut for close to 1.5 years with drastic limitations being imposed on maintaining social distancing. The average screen time for children from urban middle class homes went up from 3 hours per day to over 8 hours per day (Mishra, Personal Interview). By accounts derived from focus group discussions and interviews conducted with parents during field work for this research it was found that often this engagement with media was unsupervised as children use smaller devices like smartphones to access content. The viewing time as observed in India through participatory observation and interviews is higher than that reported in studies from United States.

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[5] Localization is an industry work process where the language of the content is changed to suit the locale of the audience being targeted. The original content remains the same except for the change in language. It differs from adaption.

Wartella analyses in the book titled *For fun and profit: The transformation of leisure into consumption* that from the earliest studies on media and children, the amount of time children spend with media has been considered a barometers of their health and welfare (173-194).Data from western research suggests that in United States, children in the age group of 0-8 years spent 3:15 hrs per day between 2011 and 2020 whereas children between 8 to 12 years spent almost 6 hours per day with media between 2015 and 2019 (Rideout and Robb 13). In the western world the recognition of children's needs and interests became a topic of importance in mid 80s as regulations to monitor health and safety for children and public education for children was institutionalized (Hawes & Hiner 1985; Hawes & Shores 2001; Cravens 415-88). Jha states in her 2021 report titled "TV news doubled share, non-primetime kids viewing grew 31% in peak lockdown":

> … viewing for non-prime time for GEC (general entertainment channels) grew by 16% over the year, of news by 26%, and kids by 31%, as compared to 2019. Share of non-primetime viewing in total TV viewership rose from 51% in 2019 to 53% in 2020.

On the content side, new broadcast strategies emerged during the pandemic. These included a strategic partnership between Warner Media's Pogo TV which is a private channel and public broadcaster Prasar Bharti to simulcast the popular show *Chhota Bheem* (Laghate 2020). To meet the growing demand, some shows were even launched ahead of schedule. These include shows on POGO such as *Titoo – Har Jawaab Ka Sawaal Hu* in the month of July and Smashing Simmba to coincide with Diwali (ETBrandEquity 2020).

Cartoon Network, which is another Warner Media channel, acquired and launched *Bandbudh aur Budbak* ahead of schedule in April instead of the original launch scheduled for May 2020. Keeping abreast with this trend, Disney launched 3 shows *Guddu, Bapu*, and *Gadget Guru Ganesha* over the summer. Similarly, Viacom 18 owned Nickelodeon and Sonic stated with *Ting Tong*, and *Pinaki & Happy – The Bhoot Bandhus* (Mahendra 2020). Towards the end of 2020, Cartoon Network also introduced the international favourite *The Tom and Jerry Show* with Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu commentary (Dutta 2020). Content generation for the kids' genre has had the most significant rise in India even during COVID. The problem of content restriction on streaming services has been reported by parents as an acute concern through this time.

5. Conclusion

From the time when television first came to India in 1956 to the mid 1990s when the economy was liberalized to the early 2000s, the flow of communication in entertainment media was mostly one way with the stakeholders on the content generation side ruling the roost. However, such a flow of communication has changed over a period. Kumar notes that we are witnessing a digital convergence of traditionally distinct technologies such as satellites, cable television, telephones, computers, and fibre optics. The convergence of these technologies has enabled media networks to broadcast globally, narrowcast locally and simulcast for multiple viewers (1).

The rapid rise of the kids' genre in India in a short period of time has been a direct result of rapid changes in the socio-cultural, economic, technological and policy related aspects in India. A key aspect of this rise is associated with the ability of the Indian media ecosystem to move towards self-sufficiency as far as crating content is concerned. The early years of television focused on children, and saw American programs being imported for the Indian audience. These programs were entertaining for children but were removed from the local context of the audience.

Localisation of programs did further the cause of addressing the needs of the audience to be able to relate to the content they watched. The Internet continues to make the world a smaller and a better-connected place. It has also helped in taking Indian content to international shores. Indian content can be seen on premier global media services such as Netflix. This is a massive journey of transformation that the Indian media ecosystem concerning the kids' category has undertaken in a short time span of 15-20 years. With the recent geopolitical developments of pandemics and wars, the world looks to India as a hub for development and growth. This change points to how India is rising on the world map as a rapidly growing economy, media sector included. The next chapter engages with socio-cultural and economic aspects that form the basis for the contemporary robust media economy concerning children in India.

Chapter 4: The historical context of evolving media engagement experience for children in India

1. Overview: the historical context of children's entertainment

The children's entertainment genre in India came into existence largely due to the socio-cultural, policy, economic and technological changes that are attributed to the liberalization of 1990s. In many parts of the world, globalization and economic liberalisation may have been assumed to be a beneficial tool for economic growth and development. In case of India, it became a 'must-have' as it was perceived to be a solution for the crisis that the Indian economy was going through before the 1990s (Ghosh 1175-8; Srivastava 66). As such, the New Economic Policy of India was introduced in 1991 by Manmohan Singh who was the union Finance Minister of India under the government of Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao.

Changes in the country's economic policy led to widespread change in the social, cultural, technological, and economic context (Mohan 44-9; Government of India 1-20; Jadhav 2119; Singh 11; Akrani 2020). These included a rise and expansion of the middle class, rapid urbanization, better employment opportunities, and a progressive change in family structures from a joint family system to nuclear families. Srivastava notes that between the two census of 1991 and 2001, two million men left the state of Uttar Pradesh and over 70% of them did so to find employment with Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi being the preferred urban areas of migration. Mills states that urban employment opportunities result from economic development and are a source of rural-urban migration (173). Such movement has greatly influenced income levels, lifestyles, cultural preferences of such families where emigration took place. Such families have experienced significant changes in socio-political, cultural, and economic aspects (76 - 77).

Patel posits that with the introduction of the liberalisation policy "the narrow caste, ethnic, and language base of the business community that India inherited from the colonial times was slowly dismantled with new first- generation players from artisan, agricultural, and bureaucratic families entering the market leading in turn to the growth of new business and political party networks" (6). Varma highlights that the growth of economy, expansion of educational infrastructure and job mobility are a few reasons that have resulted in the move of the middle class section of the society away from their birth place (11). Despite the differences in family specific cultures based on religion and caste identity, the middle class of post liberalisation era has common denominators of aspirations, attitude, consumerism, and exposure to media which brings it a unique class identification (13, 38).

The impact of the post liberalisation middle class on the society is exponentially enhanced by telecommunication and media revolution (Verma 25). On the technology front,

the use of satellites in addition to collaboration between the telecommunication and the broadcast sector ensured the creation of a hybrid, Internet-enabled multi-platform and multi-directional media ecosystem which empowers the audience. Gerbarg and Noam highlight that Internet television is a perfect example of convergence of mediums as it has brought television, Internet, telecommunication, computer applications, games and much more into its fold (xxi). These developments form the basis of contemporary media engagement experiences for children in India.

2. Policy changes and technological context

The New Economic Policy was built on three key pillars referred to as LPG. These were liberation, privatization, and globalization. They were adopted with the target of boosting the Indian economy (Kumar 101-6). Foreign direct investment (FDI) in high priority industries was already permitted in India as per the Industrial Policy of 1973, but it was riddled with bureaucracy up until the introduction of policy change of 1991. The Industrial Policy of 1991, which was a result of the New Industrial Policy saw the removal of restrictions on FDI, abolition of industrial licensing for 80 industries except 18 key areas, abolition of the Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act which required prior approval by large companies for capacity expansion or diversification. This led to the opening of the Indian economy to global investors. As a result, the early years of the 1990s witnessed several international companies enter various industrial sectors in India, the media sector included. This milestone in the Indian economic development broke the monopoly of the government and enabled an environment for markets to grow in private hands. Once the 1991 policy came into effect, it paved the way for rapid development and changes in various spheres of life.

A liberalized foreign direct investment policy led international companies like CNN and STAR TV to Indian shores. In addition to foreign media companies, private Indian companies like ZEE TV, SUN TV, ETV also came into existence. Today, India is home to several international companies that have set up operations here through the FDI route. FDI has been perceived as a necessary tool for growth in India. It's importance in the media sector has continued to solidify after the 1991 policy. This can be seen in the actions of the government in the form of increase in allowance limits for international investment. The FICCI 2022 reported that:

> …FDI limits for the telecom sector were eased in 2013 while those for the media and entertainment sector were eased in 2015 and 2016. In June 2016,

> FDI limits in teleports, DTH, cable networks, mobile TV, head-in-the sky broadcasting service, and cable networks were completely lifted, allowing 100% FDI through the automatic route. Further, there were no express provisions in relation to digital media in the FDI policy until 2019, however, in December 2019, FDI up to 26% has been permitted under the Government approval route for uploading/ streaming of news and current affairs, through digital media. (275)

Without the developments that took place in the economic policy of India, the contemporary media culture in India would have never seen the light of day. Changes in technology and the telecom sector were also introduced subsequently, which greatly impacted the media landscape. These key changes included introduction of satellite-based broadcast, which was eventually followed by use of Internet for mass distribution of content and reaching the audience.

2.1 Introduction of satellites for content distribution

The New Economic Policy of 1991 gave rise to private media companies in India. It also led foreign companies to the Indian media market. Doordarshan's monopoly was broken, and private channels began to operate. These media houses used satellites to broadcast content. Use of satellites to broadcast content was a game changer in the early years. This development enabled content to be broadcasted through a network of cables in the early years. While private international companies were allowed to operate in India, they were not permitted to uplink content to satellites from India. It was a common practice for content tapes to be flown to a close by foreign country, for instance to Singapore, from where content could be up linked to a satellite (Goswami 2023). This content was then downlinked in India from satellites by cable operators through large size dish antennas.

At the start of this development, in the 1990s, the use of cables was the prevalent method of content distribution. However, the cable industry was an unorganised sector. In the year 1995, The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act was introduced to regulate cable-based method of transmission (Information and Broadcast Ministry 4). In the same year, national estimates provided by the Indian Readership Survey suggested that there were about 8.4 million urban homes and 3.4 million rural homes with cable television in India (Kumar 5).

Until the early 2000s, cable television based on a monthly subscription system was the rampant method of content distribution and consumption. In 2000, the Government of India

permitted the reception and distribution of satellite television signals directly to the consumers using a set - top - box. As a result, Direct-to-Home (DTH) television came into existence. Direct-to-Home (DTH) television is a method of receiving satellite television by means of signals transmitted from direct-broadcast satellites. The first DTH service in the country was launched by Dish TV on 2 October 2003. DD Free Dish, the first free DTH service in India, was launched by public broadcaster Prasar Bharati in December 2004 (TRAI 2012). This methodology eventually overtook the cable-network based satellite content distribution. As on 31 December 2017, there were 67.56 million active pay DTH subscribers in the country. With changes in technology, policy developments also followed. Goswami in his article in the Indian daily The Hindu notes the following:

> "In 2022, the Union Cabinet approved the policy guidelines for the uplinking and downlinking of television channels from India.…The amended Cable Television Network Rules bring in a strong institutional system for redressing grievances and make broadcasters and their self-regulating bodies accountable and responsible. The policy guidelines for uplinking and downlinking are aimed at making India the hub of uplinking as they allow Indian teleports to uplink foreign channels" (Amesar, Gaonkar, Shamim 2023; PIB Delhi 2022).

The boost in the Indian television media economy was enabled by the developments in the telecom sector as well. From being a public sector enterprise at the time of inception to transforming into a privatized sector with public sector participation, many changes have taken place in Indian telecom sector. Much like in other sectors, the New Economic Policy of 1991 has played a significant role in this direction as well.

2.2 Growth in the telecommunication sector

A key aspect of the Industrial Policy of 1991 was to break the monopoly of government and introduce private players in the economy (Naik et al. 3-6). In 1994, The National Telecom Policy 1994 was announced by the government to allow participation by private entities in the telecom sector (TRAI 2017, 3; TRAI 2020).

With privatization came the need for a body to regulate the work of private service providers. Thus, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was established on 20th February 1997 by an Act of Parliament. The act was called the Telecom Regulatory Authority

of India Act, 1997. In the year 2000 this act was amended and came to be known as The TRAI (Amendment) Act, 2000. The 2017 report of TRAI noted about this amendment that:

> The TRAI (Amendment) Act, 2000 revised the definition of "telecommunication service" to add that the Central Government may notify other services to be telecommunication services, including broadcasting services…In exercise of this power, the Government, vide a Notification dated 9th January 2004, added broadcasting and cable services within the definition of telecommunication service in terms of Section 2(k) of the TRAI Act. (4)

In addition to use in the media, the use of telecommunication services was perceived as a necessary tool for national development as well. As such, a National Task Force on IT and Software Development was set up by the government to enable India to emerge as an IT Superpower over a period of ten years. The taskforce was headed by Shri Jaswant Singh, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission as chairperson. In this regard, the Ninth Five Year Plan of the Government of India which ran from 1997 to 2002 noted the following (NIC 1998):

> Govt. Of India has resolved to make India a global IT superpower and a front runner in the information revolution. Towards achieving this objective, a National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was set up in May1998 with Shri Jaswant Singh, Dy. Chairman, Planning Commission as Chairperson. The Task Force submitted its first report on IT Action Plan on Development and Export of Software and Data Communication on 25th July 1998 and the second report on Development, Manufacture and Export of IT Hardware on 3rd November 1998. The final report concerns the citizen's IT interface, content industry and strategic policies...The technological convergence of IT, Telecommunication and Entertainment Electronics have opened new vistas in the life of the common man. A National Information Infrastructure (NII) is evolving as a network of networks including such nation-wide computer networks as NICNET under the Planning Commission, ERNET under the Department of Electronics, HV Net and I-Net under the Department of Telecommunications in addition to an

> extensive Fibre Optic Telecommunication Backbone being set up by DOT. From the 40,000 route kilometres of fibre optic laid by the end of the Eighth Plan, the backbone is expected to be strengthened to more than 1,00,000 route kilometres through not only the efforts of DOT, but also Railways and the private sector. (923-4)

To strengthen the telecommunication field, government reviews the progress periodically and creates policies that support large scale growth. Examples of such policies are the New Internet Policy 1998, the New Telecom Policy 1999, the Information Technology Act 2000, and the Communication Convergence Bill (Wolcott 560-81).

2.3 Internet for public use

The developments in the telecom sector were accompanied by the introduction of the Internet to the public. In recent years, the availability of the Internet has transformed the Indian media culture for children. The key reason is that the new framework of media engagement is dependent on the use of phones and broadband connections that provide high speed Internet.

Between 1986 and 1995, Internet was primarily used by government, research, and industry undertakings. INDONET, NICNET, ERNET, VSAT were some of the examples of projects that were set up in this regard (TRAI 2017, 256). In the framework of these programs the Internet was not accessible to the public. In 1995, the Internet first became available to the public through VSNL (Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited), the first commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) in India. It was a government undertaking and had 75000 Internet subscribers (Wolcott 560-81).

Though the Internet became accessible to the public in India in 1995 under control of state led Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited, it was in the year 2004 that the government formulated The Broadband Policy 2004 which made high speed Internet using 3G and 4G technology accessible to people (GOI 1-7). The period from the year 2000 to present has seen a rise in Internet platforms that are progressively being used for multi-way media-enabled communication that encourage participatory media culture.

In 2006, MTNL (the public telecommunication company) launched the first IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) to share content on television through Internet (FICCI 2007, 15, 25). Competition for the traditional television programming approach has come from new

content distribution methods available on the Internet. A 2007 position paper of TRAI on IPTV has noted in point 1.2.3 that "while IPTV is considered as a good business model for telecom operators, cable industry views launch of IPTV by telecom operators as an encroachment into their area of operation and a threat to their business model" (6). As telecommunication systems have developed rapidly in India, the Internet has become the 'go-to' medium for communication, information, and entertainment. In a report titled *Internet in India* 2016 it was estimated that there were 432 million Internet users in India for whom entertainment was the main driver and accounted for 50% of usage (IAMAI 1-6). The TRAI 2021 report noted the following:

> …number of Internet subscribers increased from 795.18 million at the end of December 2020 to 834.29 million at the end of September 2021.Total telecom subscriptions were 1,189.15 million in September 2021 as compared to 1,174 million in December 2020…The tele-density number in India is now 86.89% but is heavily skewed towards urban areas with tele-density of 138.72% in urban areas and just 59.33% in rural areas. (24)

The introduction of 5G Internet in recent years has further pushed the limits of possibilities both for the telecommunication and the media industries. Devusinh Chauhan, the Minister of State for communications stated that as on 24th November 2023, 5G Networks rolled across 738 districts of India and had a subscription base of 100 million users. He attributed this growth to:

> …healthy competition, infuse liquidity, encourage investment, reduce regulatory burden on telcos and protect interests of consumers and that 100% foreign direct investment had been permitted to further accelerate this growth (ET Telecom 2023).

As the Internet became cheaper, it led to a rapid rise in the number of people using it. Telecommunication and media companies have been quick to realize the opportunity in the form of Internet-based content distribution and consumption processes. As such, the telecommunication industry has started to play a crucial role in media production, distribution, and consumption with the use of the Internet. This has also resulted in a shift of consumer preferences.

The rise of the Internet in broadcasting has resulted in the emergence of new platforms for content distribution. Over the top TV or OTT platforms use Internet to share content and connect with the audience. Platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Disney Hotstar, Voot

Kids, and Netflix are examples of how the latest developments in technology are changing the dynamics of the media industry and serve the audience at a more personal level. Growth of the Internet and developments in the telecommunication have a direct impact on the overall growth of the media and entertainment industry. As Ernst and Young (2023) state, "5G will increase content production efficiencies, and enable production of never-imagined content and treatments, while increasing the lifespan of talent indefinitely" (35).

2.4 Rise of Internet and OTT services

OTT (over the top) entertainment services have witnessed the most spectacular growth with the rise in number of people using Internet in urban areas. Driven by the exponential growth of video consumption over digital media, video OTT platforms have been a key focus area for the leading media conglomerates and start-ups alike. The market is also observing the entry of large global digital video players as noted in the report *titled Digital Opportunity - Indian Media & Entertainment* (Ernst & Young 2017).

FICCI 2018 (1) report stated that by 2020, India was expected to become the second largest online video viewing audience globally. Ernest &Young estimated that by 2020, there would be around 4 million people who will primarily depend on OTT platforms for their content (FICCI Frames 2018). By 2025, it is estimated that there will be over 40 million active daily users on connected TV and this growth will be driven by OTT aggregators (Ernst & Young 2023).

With the arrival of OTT players in India such as Netflix in 2016, the dynamics of the industry have changed manyfold. With the rise of OTT content, a new breed of content makers has come into being who benefit from a wider and interactive engagement experience with the audience. The market for content offerings over OTT has grown significantly. The Ormax OTT Audience report 2021 suggests that 25.3% of the Indian population is engaged with content over various OTT platforms.

One of the biggest advantages of the on-demand service provided by the OTT platforms is that the viewers are not limited by the programming timeline of broadcasters as they are in case of the linear broadcast method. Griffin, Ledbetter, and Spark note that present day media culture is encapsulated by technological developments that have made content available in a mobile manner which can be recorded as well. The choices this ecosystem provides are several (478-91). The archival facility of Internet-enabled content gives the audience the ability to engage with content as and when they need as per their schedule (Katz

36). Ellis notes that when content began to be distributed using Internet on OTT services, it was delivered to devices with the possibility of viewing later (28). Such method of content viewing has provided a highly personalised user experience in comparison to appointment viewing of broadcast television (Lotz 128). This feature has been found to be one of the key takeaways for the child audience as demonstrated by the ethnographic research conducted for this dissertation (Hooda, 137-141).

3. Socio-cultural Context

Closely tied to the changes in policy and technology are the aspects of social and cultural life of India that have undergone a drastic change as the Indian economy has liberalised. Social aspects such as a rise of the middle-class section of the society, rapid urbanisation, and changes in family structure have had a very strong impact on the media ecosystem concerning children in India.

3.1 The rise of the middle class in India

The most visible effect of liberalisation on the social structure came in the form of the emergence of a strong middle class in independent India. Between1995 and 2002, nearly 100 million people are said to have joined the consuming and rich class[6] as given in research reports. Jodhka and Prakash assert that middle class became a buzz world after liberalisation as this section of the society acquired strength and visibility (6, 9). About the identity of middle class, they write:

> "…the idea or identity of middle class is invoked in everyday life in contemporary India in a variety of different ways and contexts: urban and educated with a salaried job; qualified and independent professionals; enterprising, mobile, and young women and men; consumers of luxury goods and services; a housewife of an urban family struggling to keep her domestic economy going with a limited income in times of rising prices; an agitated and angry office-goer who always envies his/her neighbour for managing to keep ahead...Temperamentally, they are conservative and tradition bound…Even though being middle class in contemporary India is, in many ways, a matter of privilege, those located in the middle class tend to also view themselves as

[6] Reports specify the use of the terms such as consuming and rich class as such the terms have not been changed.

> among those with a fragile sense of security…The middle class creates barriers and boundaries to keep the poor out of its sphere of privileges. …the middle class is not as homogenous as it may appear at the first instance. Diversities within the middle class are many, of income and wealth as also of status and privilege. Middle classes are often subclassified into the 'upper', the 'lower', and 'those in between' segments, depending upon income, education, occupation, and so on. Similarly, those who call themselves 'middle class or are classified as such, do not abandon their other identities, particularly those that have been sources of privilege—of caste, community/religion, and region/ethnicity. Thus, we have notions such as the 'Bengali middle class' or the 'Muslim middle class' or the 'Dalit middle class'. Invariably, the rise and consolidation of such a class within an 'ethnic' or cultural group works to sharpen those identities. Identifying who belongs to the middle class appears to be quite simple: those in the middle, in between the poor on one end and the rich on the other, are all middle class."

Within the monetary class framework of India, it is the middle class which has acquired a comparatively stronger voice in the private sector media landscape. The middle class of India comprises of people from different castes and religions. Varma refers to Max Weber definition of social class as people who have the same social, economic, and educational status. Caste on the other hand is a prescriptive categorisation based on birth which has prevailed in India for over a millennium (10,11). This system of social organisation is not based on equality as posited by the Webers's definition of class. On the contrary, it creates a societal divide. Jodhka and Aseem analyse that many researchers who study the complex layers of Indian social Identity may argue that rise of middle class is evidence of a fundamental change in social relations between caste communities. Once mobilized, as analysed by some researchers, the Indian middle class can 'dislodge the corrupt political elite and incompetent bureaucracy; thereby turning the country into an 'efficient and modern nation-state' (6). It is also argued by many researchers that the Indian middle class works to serve its own interest.

The rise of the upwardly middle class has had an exclusionary tendency which keeps the identities of caste and community alive. It has also kept the weaker section of the society and minorities on the margins (Jodhka and Prakash 6). This complex system of caste finds its way into the economic stratification of rich, middle, and economically weaker sections of society in India. Yet, some researchers argue that with the changes in the Indian economy,

since 1990's the stronghold of caste on middle income group has loosened (Varma11). He furthers states that cast based identities have not ceased to exist in India, but the intensity of their hold has loosed to some extent.

The middle class in India with its intricate makings of caste, religious and regional identities clubbed with monetary stratification makes the social workings of India very complex. This section of the society continues to grow and so does the need for consumption of various goods and services which is embedded in the identity of middle class (Jodhka and Prakash 6-9). The middle class in India was estimated to be at 50 million people in 2005 which was about 5% of the total population of the country (Narayanswamy and Zainulbhai 2007). NCAER estimated India's middle class to be 153 million in 2010. By the year 2025, the middle class is expected to rise to 583 million people to form 40% of the population (Beinhocker et al 56).

Given the fact that advertising strategies focus on the middle class as the target audience, a consensus has emerged among content makers as well about who their target audience is. It is the urban middle class. India's National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) defines the middle class as those with household incomes between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 10 lakh per annum (Shukla 101) (see table 3).

Table 3

Evolution of Indian Middle Class: NCAER Estimates

NCAER's definition and income cut-off (Annual household Income at 2001–02 prices)	Estimated households and population (million)			Share to total population/ households (per cent)			Annual growth (per cent)	
	1995–96	2001–02	2009–10	1995–96	2001–02	2009–10	1995–2001	2001–09
Middle income households (Rs 45,000–Rs 180,000) (US$ 900–US$ 3,600)	89 (499)	109 (612)	141 (788)	54.1	58.0	61.6	3.4	3.2
Consuming class (Rs 90,000–Rs 400,000) (US$ 1,800–US$ 8,000)	25 (140)	39 (211)	70 (352)	15.2	20.7	30.8	7.7	7.6
Middle class (Rs 200,000–Rs 10,000,000) (US$ 4,000–US$21,000)	5 (25)	11 (58)	28 (153)	2.7	5.7	12.8	15.5	12.9

Within the large group of the middle class, further class subsets can be found, such as lower middle class, middle-middle class, upper middle class. Irrespective of the subset, people from this section of the society are essentially the consumer class who are responsible for building contemporary India's relationship with global economies in terms of symbolic practices of commodity consumption and are beneficiaries of liberated economic policies. Fernandes) notes that:

> …Images of mobility associated with newly available commodities such as cell- phones and automobiles, for instance, serve to create a standard which the urban middle classes can and should aspire to. In this process, the new (urban) Indian middle class becomes a central agent for the re- visioning of the Indian nation in the context of globalization (90-91).

FICCI 2005 report has noted a pattern of higher consumption associated with rising income in the middle class. This is the section of the society which invests heavily into cultural capital. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital includes the knowledge, skills, values, and experiences that provide advantage and help an individual to progress (251-8). Investment in cultural capital is a sign of growth in the Indian middle class. Fernandes has written that the middle-class section of the society has special characteristics such as socioeconomic resources that enable access to English education and modern forms of professional employment (2). Jodhka and Prakash state "…the poor aspire to join the middle class and work hard to achieve it. Even when they cannot afford to provide wholesome food to their children, they send them to private English medium schools in the hope that education would help them move out of poverty, to middle-class locations" (2-9).

Most people who form the middle-class section of the society in India are engaged in office jobs or are entrepreneurs or small business holders. Spendings on music systems, television, mobile phones, and other such goods are significantly high for them (Shukla 8).

This section of the society uses Internet-enabled services every day, leading to overall growth of the economy. Access to media devices and technology for children in the middle-class income group continues to be high. Minister of Finance of India, Nirmala Seetaraman states that "…The proliferation of Internet connectivity and smartphones in India, coupled with rapid urbanisation and the rising influence of the middle class, have propelled the e-commerce market" (Kumar 2024; Department of economic affairs 18-30).

3.2 Growing economy, inflation and working parents.

During the 1990s the Indian economy grew at an average of 5.7%. During the first decade of the new millennium the growth varied between 7.8% to 9. 6% (Ahluwalia 88-105). While the Indian economy grew with changes in policies, inflation also remained a constant feature during this time (IMF 16, 30, 98). Inflation has continued to show an upward trend over the years.

Given the demands of modern lifestyle and inflation, often both parents are required to work long hours. Better paying jobs in post-liberalized India have translated into a higher level of dispensable income in comparison to the past despite levels of inflation. Since work and household chores take up a lot of time, parents let media play the role of a babysitter or a responsible adult looking out for children. Deodhar notes that the power of media and its manipulative nature or its inexhaustible appeal to children are so unique that some studies have indignantly labelled it as a 'third parent' (10). In case of a busy lifestyle where both parents are working, media indeed plays a role of a parent keeping the children busy.

The combination of higher dispensable income and less time for children often leads to parents giving gifts like smartphones, laptops, and other devices to compensate for their lack of presence. Such presents are sometimes aimed at encouraging children to do better at academics. This phenomenon is very prominent in urban middle-class homes. Since parents are aware of global competition, they want their children to be well-informed, smart, and knowledgeable. As such, tolerance for media consumption is far higher in this section of the society. Such aspects of media consumption behaviour are not a stand-alone phenomenon but reflective of a much larger change that has happened in the social, cultural and the economic growth story of India. It has a close relationship with urbanisation and changes in family structures.

3.3 Urbanization

Urbanisation in India took place parallelly to the changes in the traditional family structure. At the time of independence, most of the Indian population lived in rural areas. India was an agrarian society in the early years before 1990s and as the economy opened, a shift began to emerge towards industrialisation and urbanisation. Rapid changes in the economic environment in the country after the 1990s saw many people move to urban areas in search of better economic and employment opportunities. Khan and Rizvi highlight that urbanisation and industrialisation brought about changes in family structures as people left villages to work in cities. Large scale migration to cities lead to conversion of joint families to nuclear families (154-6).

Since the purpose of urbanization was mostly to earn more money than the agricultural opportunities provided, only a part of the family (one or two members) would move to the city while the rest of the members remained in the rural areas. As a result, joint families began transforming into nuclear families when some members of the household moved to the cities. According to the 2011 Census, Bhagat (2017, 7) notes that urbanisation grew at a rate of 2.1% points during 1991 – 2001. Between 2001 to 2011, the overall urban percentage grew from 27.7% in 2001 to 31.1% in 2011. In economic terms, at the time of independence, 70% of India's GDP came from agriculture. This meant more people lived and worked in the rural economy. In the recent years, this share has reduced to approximately 15% which signifies that more people are engaged in economic activities in urban areas. This clearly reflects the influence of economic growth in bringing about faster urbanisation.

3.4 Changes in the family structure

In traditional Indian society, life used to be organised around a joint family system which has given way to a nuclear family system in past few decades. Agarwala (141-3) states that the shift towards nuclear families can be attributed to rapid urbanisation. Lamb (32) notes that although a "joint family" technically refers to a family consisting of two or more brothers living together along with their parents, spouses and children, the phrase is more loosely and popularly used in India to refer to any multigenerational household including at least one senior parent and one married adult child (generally a son) with spouse. In a joint family system, all members have certain responsibilities towards the household and focus on learning to live (hopefully) in harmony with everyone. A nuclear family typically comprises of parents and a child or children (Chakravorty et. al. 9). Several researchers like Niranjan et.al. have noted that the number of nuclear families is on the rise over the years in most parts of India (287-300).

With changes in family structures, there has been a change in the sociality that surrounds children in urban middle class homes. This has influenced their media engagement habits as well. Traditionally, in an Indian joint family system, a child lives in the same house as the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and siblings. In the past, for children it meant living with several playmates of the same age group. This traditional definition of family unit in India is different from what is observed in research from the west. For instance, Alexander writes that in United States of America, nuclear family system is no longer the norm indicating that the traditional family structure was that of a nuclear family. It is highlighted that households comprise of complex units due to divorces, remarriages, multi-generational setups (122). The definition of the family systems in India and USA clearly establishes the difference is societal makeup. In USA, where a multi-generational family unit is considered a newly emerging trend; in India in contrast, a multi-generational household is the traditional definition of a family unit. Andreason defines family as: "a systems bound by ties of blood, law, or affection and, like all systems, they require cohesiveness and adaptability for their survival (10)".

In reference to Indian family system Chaddha and Deb state: "Indian families are considered classically as large, patriarchal, collectivistic, joint families, harbouring three or more generations vertically and kith and kin horizontally. Such traditional families form the oldest social institution that has survived through ages and functions as a dominant influence in the life of its individual members (300). Mullati asserts that "…Indian joint families are considered to be strong, stable, close, resilient and enduring with focus on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity at expense of individuality, freedom of choice, privacy and personal space." (11-25).

In such a family, the members consumed mass media together. Media experiences included television, radio, and newspapers in addition to folklores, like bedtime stories which were told by grandparents. Access to personalised and individual television time was limited and highly mediated. Valkenberg, Kremar, Peeters and Marseille have outlined three key mediation strategies concerning television viewing. These are restrictive mediation, instructive and social co- viewing (52-66). In case of Indian joint family system, restrictive and co-viewing strategies ensured that the screen time for children was highly controlled as long as the joint family system was the prominent family setup. Such a way of life was and for some families continues to be an everyday method of functioning. This societal framework also ensured that children had an adult from the family to look after them and supervise them every day, even if parents were not available. This system provided a good

foundation for children to learn several life skills that were not necessarily taught in school as part of the academic curriculum. As such, a part of learning happened at school and a part happened at home preparing a child for the adult life. In such a system, the time children spent with media devices exclusively was very limited.

The family system as discussed in western studies also suggests the role of grandparents in bringing up children and impact of such interaction on media use (Elias, Lemish, Nimrod 96). However, the frequency of interaction between grandparents and children varies greatly between the joint family system of India and the family system of western countries. Western research suggests that in western countries grandparents look after at least one grandchild typically once a week (Di Gessa, Glaser and Tinkeri 867-979; Hank, Cavrini, Di Gessa and Tomassini 225-235; Horsfall and Dempsey 1070-1084). In case of India, the interaction between children and grandparents is often an everyday occurrence as they live together in a joint family system. However, with the changes in family system, such interaction has changed.

The time post liberalisation of the economy in the 1990s has witnessed a shift towards a nuclear family system which comprises of parents living with their children without the extended family. Such a shift has been supplemented with a transformation in contextual understanding of what constitutes as important for an urban lifestyle. Change in family systems have impacted media engagement for children greatly. The shift from a joint family system to a nuclear family system has meant absence of grandparents, adult relatives, cousins that were playmates in a child's life. This shift has also created a void in the family-based learning system, entertainment, education, and support opportunities as parents are often busy at work for long hours and there are no grandparents to look after the children.

This change in family system has given rise to a higher level of media consumption by children. Bryant and Bryant have noted that "much of what children know about the world outside of their immediate family and community comes from media" (204). It is in this environment of changing social structures in India that media often fills the void for communication and emotional needs created by the pressures of urban life.

Television viewing has traditionally been a family or community activity in which everyone sits together to watch programs. In present day India, households may generally have more than one television set and several other devices capable of projecting television content using the Internet. As family sizes have become smaller and buying capacity of the

people has increased, a change has started to emerge in the concept of television-based media consumption.

4. Conclusion

The last two decades have witnessed the role of media content undergoing a massive change, where it does not only aim to entertain and inform children anymore, but also equips them with important life skills that enable them to face everyday life challenges like finding their place in the world, understanding relationships, power equations and ways of the world. Contemporary urban life in India has become a technology-driven life, especially for the middle-class families. This has also given rise to a strong dependence of children on TV screens in India. The most prominent changes in Indian media culture have been observed with the rise of the Internet.

Chapter 5: Children In India and Screen Based Media Engagement

1. Introduction

India is a country with a population of over a billion people of which 13.12 % constitutes the child population as per the 2011 census. The Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India noted in the 2011 findings that "out of the absolute increase of 181 million in the country's population during the decade 2001-2011, 88 percent has been contributed by the child population in the age group of 0-6 years" (61). The sheer size of the population in India and the dynamism which exists in the Indian economy have resulted in a rapidly growing demand for media content. Niche content from all over the world, made available to the masses with Internet-based telecommunication technologies has been responsible for this growth (FICCI 2018 14). Within the media industry, the consumption of children's television content specifically which caters to middle-income households has grown. Even during the deadly COVID pandemic, when economic growth in general slowed down, the media sector relating to children's entertainment grew. Financial Express reported a rise of 40-47% in the kid's genre from March 2020 to June 2020 during the first phase of the COVID-19 lockdown in India. The same article also reported that the kid's genre was one of the few entertainment categories that ran original as well as new content (Mahendra 2020).

Not only has the availability of screen-based content grown, the methods of consumption have also evolved. Television has come a long way from being regarded as an immobile piece of hardware that broadcasted only time regulated content. Today it provides unlimited screen experiences which are enabled by Internet bandwidth and mobility. The on-demand archival facility that the Internet provides has presented an opportunity for endless supply of content.

Developments in technology sector and the changes in socio-cultural sphere of life have resulted in a new form of hybrid media engagement experience for children. Television has now become a subset of what can be called screen experiences as classical television-based entertainment is now spread across various screens, such as phones, laptops, computers, classical analogue television sets and smart televisions. Content has become portable and interactive. This aspect is one of the prime hallmarks of contemporary media engagement practices where the audience can make active choices about their media preferences and even participate in the content creation process. On the aspect of interactivity, uses and gratification approach posits it as the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse (Williams, Rice, & Rogers 10).

The contemporary media systems enable participants as young as children in the ages of 7 to 12 years to interact with content and showcase their individual preferences. The contemporary media system goes a step further from the framework of exploring utility that media has for the audience. It extends to aspects of engagement with media and the process of co-creating content and changing the balance of power, thereby giving rise to a hybrid media engagement experience.

2. The hybrid media engagement experience

In terms of media consumption trends, we are witnessing a digital convergence of traditionally distinct technologies that include satellites, cable television, telephones, computers, and fibre optics. This has resulted in a system where media networks can broadcast their content globally or focus on a narrowcast, and even share content simultaneously for multiple viewers in a closed view setting (Kumar 1). All these developments have shaped the media landscape in such a way that the audience enjoys greater agency over their media experiences today in comparison to the past. With the change in position of the audience in the media content generation cycle, a change can also be observed in the degrees of power, control and agency that content makers and audience had historically. This means that while the content makers may still have larger capital and control to produce content, they are to serve the audience too. Due to the availability of large amounts and diverse content offerings, the audience holds the power to reject media programs that they do not like. This has become possible due to the hybrid nature of the media industry. In terms of television screen media, the current ecosystem comprises of a hybrid model of content production, distribution, and consumption with three key aspects which relate to a) platform/medium b) device size c) audience preferences.

2.1 Platform

The first key aspect is related to the choice of platform/ medium. Contemporary media distribution and consumption methods make use of various platforms simultaneously to share content. This includes the use of traditional linear broadcast television services along with Internet enabled services such as CTV (Connected TV) and OTT (Over the Top).

Traditional linear broadcast television generally provides free content to the audience which is supported by advertising revenue. In the case of traditional linear television, content schedule is pre-programmed by the broadcasters. Sometimes, paid content can be found on

linear television also through TVOD (Transactional Video on Demand) services where the audience purchases content on a pay per view model.

Internet-enabled content is shared through SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) and AVOD (Advertising Video on Demand) services (Lotz 15, 18, 34). Content on Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are examples of SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) where the consumer pays a subscription fee to watch content (Suárez-Cousillas, Martínez-Fernández & Sánchez-Amboage 3). Content over websites and apps such as YouTube is categorized as AVOD (Advertising Video on Demand). For content consumed through AVOD services, advertisers pay for the content like in the case of traditional linear broadcast television. Both SVOD and AVOD content can be consumed through CTV (Connected TV). CTV uses the Internet to stream digital content either through pre-installed applications in the Smart TV or by external devices such as a firestick (Soursos & Doulamis 582). Furthermore, content provided by OTT (Over the Top) services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hotstar can be accessed through CTV (Connected TV) and additionally over mobile devices such as a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer. Internet-enabled content provides greater flexibility with schedules and options of personalisation to the audience.

Content shared through the Internet enables a multi-directional flow that encompasses broadcast and personalized cast. Such content distribution strategy requires transmedia narratives. Henry Jenkins calls transmedia narratives as those narratives which operate dynamically across platforms when content is made once and then slightly altered to make it available on other platforms (3). To ensure maximum and impactful reach, the main content and its collaterals are simultaneously distributed across the traditional platform of broadcast television and on the Internet through sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. This process goes further as content eventually can then be consumed through OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Video, Hoot etc.

Content available on the Internet attracts relatively low barriers to distribution and access. This has resulted in a rise of user-generated content (UGC). One example of UGC content creation is the *Cybermohalla Project* created in 2011 in Delhi, India. In literal terms, cybermohalla means cyber neighbourhood. This is an experimental project aimed at enabling access for young men and women to create content. As part of this program, three localities in Delhi were chosen when access to labs was provided to young people where they could use free software to create media content. This program has targeted young men and women in the age group of 15-25 years (Asthana 95-6; Asthana 11).

Content available on services such as YouTube is an example of UGC where the audience becomes content maker and uses Internet to distribute this content (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright 16). This framework enables many content makers to offer their work to a global audience. For the audience, it translates into wider choices in terms of the type of content they want to watch and when they want to watch it. The experience of content consumption over Internet platforms is almost like going to a library and reading a book of one's own choice amidst endless options to choose from. Over the Internet, the audience can customise their viewing experience or even revisit it as against being constrained by the choices given by the traditional broadcast methods (Lotz 44-5). Whittle states "…Internet is many different things at the same time: a cross between an information exchange, a library, a chat line, a shopping mall or banking hall, a post-box or an entertainment center." (182).

2.2 Device size

The second key aspect of the contemporary media ecosystem pertains to the device size used for media engagement. A drastic change has taken place in the hardware used for media consumption. Media content is distributed and consumed over different devices that vary in size and mobility. For example, content is distributed over a television set which is bigger and immobile and over a smartphone / laptop/ iPad which is mobile and smaller. This feature of content adaptability to the screen size and mobility is one of the key features that the audience factors in while consuming media. As reported by children from the respondent group of this research, the screen size and portability aspect of the device was a crucial factor for them while making decisions about their media use (Focus Group Discussion, 7th Sept 2018).

2.3 Audience preferences / content personalisation

The third key aspect deals with the understanding of audience preferences. With the rise of OTT, content personalisation has become a crucial element of distribution strategies (Neyah and Vijaykumar 115). This enables a targeted reach for the advertisers and content makers alike. In yesteryears broadcasting content through general entertainment channels was the most prominent method of programming and advertising strategy. This strategy has been supplemented by including narrowcasting content based on audience preferences and content personalisation matrices that are derived from Internet-enabled usage of media.

FICCI 2009 defines narrowcasting as segmentation of the target group and generating target group specific content to help advertisers reach a targeted audience (19). Maybury et.al.

have noted that unlike traditional broadcasts, which are created in a standard format and delivered from a single source (broadcaster) with general content to address a wide range of audience and interests, a personal cast is defined as a custom created, interactive sequence of stories that are selected based upon specific, individual user interests from a variety of sources and presented in a form which is tailored to user preferences (5).

3. Media and children in a hybrid environment

The media environment surrounding middle-class children, even in small-town India, has altered almost unrecognizably in the last two decades. The usual roster of programs that are made specifically for children includes shows that are created in India in various Indian languages and international shows that are localised for the Indian audience. Indian programs include shows such as *Chhota Bheem, Chacha Bhatija, Krishna*, *Chorr Police*, *Roll no. 2*, *Motu Patlu*, *Gattu Battu, Paap -O- Meter, Selfie with Bajrangi*, *Little Singham, Guddu the Great, Mighty Little Bheem* and many others. There is a wide variety of international programs available for children as well. Banaji notes that millions of urban children can watch *Peppa Pig* or *Hanna Montana,* dubbed in Hindi or in English, or programmes in several vernacular languages (15). Collectively, these programs form an important part of children's everyday media experiences beyond the point of immediate consumption. Children in the age group of 7 to 12 years actively use media as a point of reference to find their place in the world, understand themselves and establish their identity (Focus Group Discussion, 7th Sept 2018). In the past children mostly learnt from the home environment and the one at school. Today, the learning process is constant, unlimited by geography and global in approach for a section of society, as media becomes a doorway for children to understand the world around them.

3.1 Stereotypes and themes in children's programs in India

Researchers argue that there is a patriarchal bias within television-as-discourse as well as in media content, which amplifies patriarchal norms and naturalizes male power and privilege throughout the culture. In most programs that are available for children in India over broadcast television, aspects of patriarchal structures can be seen very clearly. Women and girls in such programs mostly remain at the fringes of the story. Witt highlights that female children are less likely to develop as sense of independence, autonomy, confidence, and industriousness if similar traits are not reflected in representation of women and girls on screens (322-4). Disproportionate representation of women leads to them being marginalised and appearing less important than men (Tuchman 3-38). This further leads to reinstating

stereotypes. Tuchman et al. have called relative absence of women in media as 'symbolic annihilation'. Witt argues that if children are exposed to gender bias and gender stereotyping frequently then their future perceptions will be impacted by them (322). A similar trend in American television has been observed by researchers where it has been found that representation for males continues to dominate screen spaces in children's commercial television (Dobrow & Gidney 105-19; Graves 61-86; Greenberg & Brand 132-42; Weigel & Howes 109-12; Thompson and Zerbinos 651-673).

In interviews that were conducted with content makers during field work for this research, it was pointed out that the agenda of women empowerment in media is tied to the revenue market and general social acceptability (Personal Interview, Rajiv Chilaka). Various content makers are wary of pushing this agenda too forcefully to remain relevant to the larger audience sensibility which is tuned to a patriarchal setup. In a case like this, a stereotypical representation is very likely to impact the audience, especially in case of children, much like Magic Bullet Theory or Two Step Theory posits, unless this representation is countered by an active discourse or change in representation. The aspect of representation of gender roles on television in India remains a delicate act of balance between the portrayal of accepted social norms and pushing the boundaries for enabling women in empowered roles.

Television programs act like building blocks for children based on which they begin to understand how social norms and culture operates around them. In this sense, television continues to hold a place of power in the lives of children. The discursive power of television comes from the constant imagery it broadcasts and the social norms it represents in the story world that the characters inhabit. When the audience situates itself both within and outside of the dominant discourse that is represented through screen images, the reading of such a text is said to be negotiated. An example of such a reading would be the portrayal of gender roles in media texts which enables the audience to understand the role men and women play in everyday life. And yet, many viewers may distance themselves from such a portrayal. In such a case when the audience accepts some aspects of the discourse and rejects others, the reading is negotiated. In connection with negotiated decoding of media messages, Hall states:

> "…Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule."(137).

Hall assumes in 'Encoding/decoding' that television programmes are mostly encoded within the dominant ideology (Ross 6). Ross modifies Hall's typology of the encoding/decoding model and suggests a new dimension to this model when he establishes that media institutions can encode texts in a negotiated framework in place of a dominant-hegemonic framework (Ross 7-8). As such, the audience can engage in a negotiated reading of this negotiated text. Wu and Bergan (23) propose a further revision to Hall's model as they conceptualize encoding strategies and decoding strategies which suggest that the audience have an awareness about the 'constructedness' of the media text. The constructed nature of such a text becomes visible to children as they begin to evalute their screen experiences against the life they experience outside of screen time as found during the course of field work (Focus Grroup Discussion, 7th Sept 2018). The ages of 7 to 12 years are a time when children begin to understand the sociality of the world around them with the help of television programs they watch.

As noted by Cunningham, childhood is not only a biologically determined stage of life, but also a social construction that is influenced by historical, social, and economic factors (Valkenburg 7). Jaglom & Gardner state that by the time they are 3 years old, children start to make statements indicating identification with television characters (Valkenburg 25). The time between 5 and 14 years of age is a crucial one: this is when children learn to make sense of the world around them. When children are about 7, they can differentiate between fictional story telling and real life (Valkenburg 26). An integrative review of the literature on children and media (Gunter, & McAleer, 1997; D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer, 2001; van Evra, 1990) has suggested that after the average age of 7, children have some of the crucial cognitive abilities that allow them to understand mediated contents (once again, mainly television) (Götz and Lemish 21).

Through the field work this analysis was further confirmed by children when they shared their views on programs they watched. The next section presents a case study of one such program called *Chhota Bheem* that children watched frequently. This is followed by findings from the field work which also include discussions with children about *Chhota Bheem* and another children's program called *Doraemon.*

4. Case Study

Chhota Bheem (छोटा भीम) is an Indian animation series created by Rajiv Chilaka and produced by Green Gold Animation. It is a story set in the fictional kingdom of Dholakpur village in rural India. The story revolves around Bheem, or Chhota Bheem (little Bheem) who is a young boy about 9 years old but very intelligent and is stronger than even grown-up men. He, along with his friends Chutki, Raju and Jaggu go about the village solving problems, helping people, unravelling mysteries, and fighting evils that seek to harm their village.

The character of *Chhota Bheem* is based on Bheem from the epic Indian text Mahabharata. Folk tales originating from Mahabharata and Ramayana form an important part of everyday culture in India and find their way into children's entertainment as well. These texts are assumed to be written during the period from 400 BCE to 400 CE (Brockington 21; Sharma 137). Mahabharata is considered as the longest poem ever written and is a crucial part of Hindu culture which serves as a framework for Dharma (moral law) (Thapar 31). The scared text of Bhagavad Gita is a part of Mahabharata. The characters aspects that are reflected in Mahabharata, can be found in the characters of *Chhota Bheem* as well as stated by the program creators.

Such stories glorify virtues such as honesty, righteousness, helping others, protecting the weak, and respecting elders. Children's programs such as *Chhota Bheem, Little Krishna, Arjun* have characters that originate from the great epics such as the Mahabharata. The stories of such characters in children's entertainment do not always follow the same story plot as of the namesakes in the religious and cultural texts. However, the character sketch finds a strong resonance with the virtues of the said figures as given in these texts. On part of content makers, it is a conscious effort to name the lead characters after mythological texts. This is done to establish positive role models for children and influence parents. In the early years of media engagement, parents function as a catalyst to introduce children to media. Since mythology is a respected genre and an extension of cultural history in India, parents encourage children to watch programs that relate with ancient Indian texts (Chilaka, Rajiv. Interview. Conducted by Neha Hooda. Sept 2, 2020).

Chhota Bheem began as a television series in the year 2008 and has 16 seasons with a total of 663 episodes. Each story has a runtime of 11 minutes. One episode comprises of two

stories. The series was originally released on Pogo TV[7]. Presently, four seasons can be viewed over Netflix while Voot kids[8] previews certain other seasons as well. Programs available on Netflix have been analysed for this research (see table 4).

Figure 5 A still from the TV program *Chhota Bheem*

Table 4

Summary of the total number of episodes available on Netflix is as follows:

Season	Episode Count
4	26
8	26
13	13
14	13
Total	**78**

A total of 30 stories have been analysed from this data set of 78 episodes. The program selection was based on random sampling (see table 5)

Table 5

Program list

[7] Pogo TV is an India cable and satellite channel for children. It is owned by Warner Brothers. Discovery as part of Cartoon Network India

[8] VOOT Kids is an exclusive kids' edutainment OTT platform from the house of Viacom18 Media Private Limited.

Season	Episode	Title	Created by
1	1	Wheer is Bheem?	Rajeev Chilaka
1	2	Babban Sher	Rajeev Chilaka
1	25	Magic Broom	Rajeev Chilaka
2	4	The Talking Tree	Rajeev Chilaka
2	7	Genie Out of A Bottle	Rajeev Chilaka
2	26	Jungle Trail	Rajeev Chilaka
4	1	Yeti	Rajeev Chilaka
4	1	girls vs girls	Rajeev Chilaka
5	119	Drawing Fun	Rajeev Chilaka
5	119	it’s a fat world	Rajeev Chilaka
5	120	Dushera Dhamal	Rajeev Chilaka
5	121	Babban's little sher	Rajeev Chilaka
5	121	Mumbai se fir aaya mera mama	Rajeev Chilaka
8	4	Rani ki Manmani	Rajeev Chilaka
8	4	sea lion	Rajeev Chilaka
8	10	Magic Cube	Rajeev Chilaka
8	10	Kalias Tattoo	Rajeev Chilaka
8	18	Rakshabandhan	Rajeev Chilaka
8	18	Khatarnaak Challenge	Rajeev Chilaka
13	12	Bheem's city birthday	Rajeev Chilaka
13	12	Raunak Sheher	Rajeev Chilaka
13	2	Dhanrakshas	Rajeev Chilaka
13	2	Daandiya and Dawat	Rajeev Chilaka
14	1	Shakkar ka Chakkar	Rajeev Chilaka
14	1	Koyla Rani	Rajeev Chilaka
14	13	ulta pulta	Rajeev Chilaka
14	13	Manthan Mahotsav	Rajeev Chilaka

5.1 Story Plot

The story is set in rural India in the fictitious village of Dholakpur. The timeline of the story is not determined clearly. The village is ruled by Raja Indraverma who is a benevolent king. Presence of a king is indicative of a possibility of the story being set in medieval India, but the timeline still appears to be very fluid as modern devices, buildings, festivals show up in the program occasionally. Bheem and his friends – Chutki, Raju, Jaggu, Kalia, Dholu and Bholu are young children from the village. In each episode, the villagers are troubled because of various serious problems such as robberies, attack from other armies, poaching etc. Bheem comes to the rescue of the entire village using his intelligence, strength and help from friends. He is created as the saviour – the hero.

5.2 Characters

Bheem, Chutki, Raju, Jaggu, Kalia, Dholu and Bholu are the main characters of the story. Raja Indraverma (King Indraverma), Indumati (the princess), Tuntun Mausi (Chutki's mother), Buri Jadugarni (The Evil Sorceress), Acchi Jadugarmi (The Good Sorceress) are other supporting characters. A visual reference of the characters has been given in this section to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characters for the readers who may not be familiar with this program.

Figure 6 Image of Bheem from the program Chhota Bheem, Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd

Bheem (see figure 6) is also known as *Chhota Bheem* (little Bheem). He is nine years old and is the central character of the story. He has superhuman strength that he gets from eating laddus (Indian homemade sweetmeat).

He is very brave, intelligent, strong, good natured and courageous. He is always ready to come to the rescue of those who are in need. Even though he is just a child, the king trusts Bheem to find solutions for problems that the village faces.

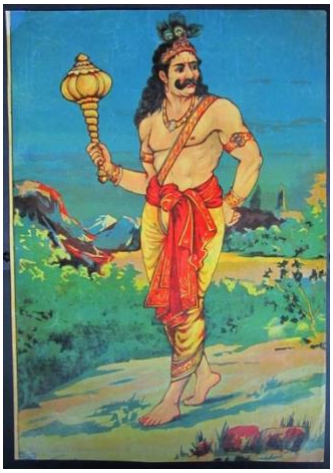


Figure 7 An oleograph of Bhima by Ravi Varma Press

The costume of the character is based on Bheem as well (see figure 7). The superhuman strength that the character of Bheem possesses in the program *Chhota Bheem* is like the strength that Bheem from the Hindu epic Mahabharata possesses. Bheem from Mahabharata was considered to have physical

strength of approximately 10,000 elephants. During the Kurukshetra war, Bheem singlehandedly killed 1000 people according to the epic saga. Both *Chhota Bheem* and the Bheem from Mahabharata fight evil forces. The strength of Bheem is glorified in the title song of the series. The English translation of the title sequence song (originally in Hindi) as available on Netflix is as follows:

> Bheem! Bheem's powers are immense! He in invincible!
> Chhota Bheem! Bheem! Chhota Bheem! He is a cheerful person; he is a foodie! He is fond of Laddus. Bheem! Chhota Bheem! He is a friend to everyone. He helps everyone. Yes, he spreads love wherever he goes. Bheem! Chhota Bheem! Bheem is so powerful; no enemy can escape him…Bheem!

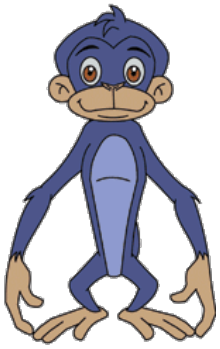
Bheem is the protagonist of the program, and all the other characters are organised in relation to him. The story of *Chhota Bheem* revolves around Bheem. Other characters of the program have been described further on.

Chutki (see figure 8) is Bheem's close friend who assists him through various adventures. She is the main female lead of the program. She is seven years old. She is gentle and often involved with household chores. She often advises him as well. Her mother, Tuntun Mausi makes and sells laddus that Bheem often steals.

Figure 8 Chutki - A character in the 'Chhota Bheem' TV show. Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd

Raju (see figure 9) is four years old and revers Bheem. He is very strong for his age just like Lord Arjun from Mahabharata. He is very courageous. When he grows up, he wants to lead the army one day like his father does. He always wears a blue underwear and tends to get very angry when he sees something wrong.

Figure 9. Raju, a character in Chhota Bheem. Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd.



Jaggu (see figure 10) is a talking monkey who is a good friend and a pet of Bheem. He teaches Bheem how to climb trees. He has a good sense of humour and often helps Bheem in stealing laddus and pulling various tricks. A parallel point of connection between the characters is from the epic of Mahabharata. In the story of Mahabharata, Bheem finds a spiritual guide in the form of Lord Hanuman (see figure 11), the monkey faced God.

Figure 10 Jaggu, a character in Chhota Bheem. Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd.

Figure 11 Lord Hanuman in a print from Ravi Verma Press, 1910s

Kalia (see figure 12) is a ten-year-old strong and muscular child who wants to beat Bheem whenever a task requires show of strength. However, Bheem always emerges as the stronger one. Kalia likes to call himself the strongest and the most courageous person of the village. Though a playful rivalry exists between the two, Kalia always helps in rescue efforts for the village that are initiated by Bheem.

Figure 12 Kalia from Chhota Bheem

Dholu and Bholu (see figure 13) are identical twins who are sidekicks of Kalia. They follow Kalia and are projected as being cowards.

Figure 13 Dholu and Bholu from Chhota Bheem

5.3 Analysis

Based on the theme of slapstick humour, adventure and imagination, the animated children's program *Chhota Bheem* presents a vivid picture of Indian culture and social framework that operates at a mass level. It is the first Indian original IP to have succeeded globally. As such, the use of story settings and props that project Indian identity appear as mascots of the culture. As confirmed by the creator of the show, this has been a conscious creative choice while creating the story world of *Chhota Bheem* and its characters (Rajiv Chilaka, Personal Interview).

Historically speaking, Indian society is based on a collectivist approach. A collectivist culture focuses on a group's collective well-being whereas an individualistic culture focuses on the wellbeing and aspirations of an individual over a group (Hofstede 11). The relevant group in the context of India is the family and the society. In general, the needs and goals of the family unit are emphasised over and above an individual's aspirations. In such a culture, a community-focused outlook is considered valuable whereas as an individualistic outlook is looked down upon as being selfish.

In *Chhota Bheem* we see that this spirit is the overarching theme across stories. In every episode, Bheem risks his life to save the village from unthinkable dangers such as those posed by bandits, witches, genies, magic creatures, powerful evil kings etc. Even magical creatures such as a unicorn and a flying dinosaur look up to Bheem to be rescued.

Bheem embodies the spirit of a collectivist culture as he puts everyone before himself and acts accordingly. On the other hand, characters such as Kalia who look out primarily for their own interest are not considered heroes in the society. Similarly, other characters such as the Evil Witch, Bandit Mangal Singh are portrayed as villains and are categorized as negative characters because they pursue their own interests at the cost of others (see table 6-8 in appendix A)

Bheem always comes to the rescue of the powerless and needy. Power and lack of power are two important factors that surface repeatedly across all episodes. Power is demonstrated in two forms in the program such as monetary power and physical power. This subject points to a deeper societal divide in India which runs deep. Chasing monetary power is looked at as being selfish and is an attribute of the villainous characters in the stories. Physical power on the other hand is an asset and is reflective of the positive characters in the stories. Having power or lack of it positions characters differently in the story world. Those who are powerful (monetarily or physically) and follow a collectivist approach are positioned as a hero. They enjoy an elevated societal status, credibility, and respect. To highlight this aspect of social order, the villains are positioned in such a way that they are seen as being greedy and unkind. The background story of what leads the characters to become villains in the general social framework of wide social inequality is not discussed in the story.

In the story titled "Drawing Fun" we see that Kalia's desire for power is so acute that he makes a lion his slave. He then uses the lion to threaten people and extort money. He does this to rise in the social structure and be perceived as more important than Bheem. However, what motivates Kalia, who is a young child, to rise in the social order or be better than Bheem

is not discussed in the story. Bheem counters Kalia's chase for monetary power by showcasing his physical strength. In saving the village, he (Bheem) relies on the magical power of a laddu which is an Indian homemade sweet. In the story world of *Chhota Bheem,* Chutki's mother, Tuntun Mausi, has a sweet shop from where Bheem often steals laddus. However, the act of Bheem stealing food is considered as innocent. Since Bheem is glorified throughout the series, even after stealing he continues to be celebrated as a hero. We also see Chutki covering up for him whenever he does this. Chutki always remains ready with a stash of laddus which she tosses to Bheem whenever he is about to enter a situation that will require physical strength.

The gender imbalance and a patriarchal framework in the story are strongly evident. Power is positioned differently vis a vis male and female characters. The physical strength of male characters is glorified as we see that all the three boys – Bheem, Kalia, Raju are always up for a physical challenge. When boys display their physical strength or talk about it, girls are shown as being in awe of them or worrying about their safety. Girls are positioned in softer and delicate stances. They rarely enter physically demanding situations. In particular, the story in the episode titled "Girls vs Girls" (12:17) from this series is an important case in point. In this episode, the program creator does acknowledge that there exists a gap between opportunities for boys and girls by way of the narrative. We see that King Indraverma is sitting in his royal room with this daughter Princess Indumati. As they are sitting there, Bheem walks in with a trophy. The episode opens with the conversation as follows (subtitle translation taken from Netflix, Season 4, episode 1, part 2, 12:17):

> Raja Indraverma (to Bheem): I was sure you'd win the Udham Nagar event. I believe the competition was rather tough this time.
>
> Bheem: Yes, King. Players from several states had come.
>
> Raja Indraverma (to Bheem): I see!
>
> Bheem: It had many rounds. Climbing tall trees and swimming across deep waters.
>
> Raja Indraverma: I am impressed Bheem. You have brought us pride.
>
> Princess Indumati: I have been hearing about such events. I want to take part in one.

Why don't we have similar tournament for girls?

Raja Indraverma: You make sense.

Bheem: Yes, King. Now that I think of it, we have never held a competition for girls in Dholakpur.

Raja Indraverma: Alright then. I'll make an announcement. We'll host a

competition for girls in Dholakpur soon. Bheem, I want you to organize it.

Bheem: Sure, King.

At the start of this conversation, Princess Indumati is seen sitting quietly next to her father, Raja Indraverma. When Bheem talks about the difficult competition which he has just won, Indumati is seen looking at him intently in awe. At the mention of "climbing tall trees and swimming across deep waters", she is portrayed as blushing while paying close attention to what Bheem is saying. Suddenly, she becomes uneasy as she talks about the lack of similar opportunities for girls. When Bheem agrees with her, she is shown smiling again. She becomes happy when her father announces that there will be a competition for girls also. In the above conversation all the male characters are shown as being action oriented and involved with doing things, whereas the female character is shown as witnessing and observing the actions of the male characters. The visibility and narrative line of the female character remains dependent on what the male characters say. The imbalance in representation in the way children's programs construct masculinity and femininity has been noted by Gotz and Lemish as well in their book *Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers: Gender Representations in Children's TV around the World* (9). Lemish also states:

> "On the whole, like adult males, boys are identified with 'doing' in the public sphere that is associated with characteristics such as action, rationality, forcefulness, aggressiveness, independence, ambitiousness, competitiveness, achievement, higher social status, and humour. Girls, like adult women, are associated with "being" in the private sphere and are characterized, generally, as passive, emotional, caregiving, childish, sexy, subordinate to males, and of lower social status." (Lemish 1,2).

In the story Girls vs. Girls, when the competition is organized, the event includes a running race, a dance competition, a fight match, and a match of target hitting. As seen in the

conversation given above, Bheem's coveted competition comprised of climbing tall trees and swimming across deep waters are not a part of the competition for girls even though the children are of the same age. The last round of the competition "match of target hitting" included the girls throwing laddus in Bheem's mouth. The competition was supposed to put the girls of the village on the centre stage. However, even in this competition, Bheem takes the centre stage as he gobbles up the laddus in a humorous manner when the girls aim for his mouth as the target to throw laddus at. The girls again become secondary to Bheem.

Season 5, episode 120 has a story titled "Dusshera Dhamal". This story includes celebratory sports meet competition on the festival of Dusshera. The teams are comprised of boys and girls from the village. In this story as well, boys are seen as doing all the hard work while girls take part is lighter games. In one segment, when a girl lifts and carries a boy out of the cave to finish the race in time, all the characters laugh. The strength of the girl is not laughed upon in this case. It is the absence of strength in the male character to pull his weight that becomes the centre of joke. Such representation again enforces stereotypes that always mandates male characters to project strength.

Across stories in this series, when boys want to enjoy a competition, they do not wait for it to be organized for them. The competitive streak can be seen in various tasks they undertake through various episodes. Contrary to this, the characters of girls are restricted. For one, the number of women seen on the screen are negligible. When they are seen, their actions are not as free flowing as those of male characters. This analysis lines up with Streicher's 1974 study of Saturday morning cartoons which highlighted that females were pictured less than males and were portrayed as being less active than male characters (125-129). Similar findings have also been highlighted by Carter in the 1991 article titled "Children's TV, Where Boys Are King" where it was stated that children's Saturday morning programs showcase males in dominant roles and female in peripheral roles (1).

Girls operate in relation to the male characters and are dependent on them very often to fulfil tasks. They believe themselves to be helpless as said by Sheri Unicorn in the story titled "Shakkar ka Chakkar" (the case of sugar). Sheri unicorn is portrayed as a female character and has a magic wand that fulfils desires which has been taken away by the sugar monster. Sheri calls herself helpless when she meets Bheem and states that she must steal sugar to pay sugar tax to the sugar monster. She says that the sugar monster forces her to steal sugar but never returns her magic wand. She finds herself unable to use her magic wand. Sugar monster who holds power over Sheri unicorn is portrayed as a male character.

Throughout the series, male strength is valorised as we see male characters fight lions, demons, snakes, and dacoits. In season 14, episode 1 titled "Shakkar ka Chakkar" (9:40), Bheem introduces himself as follows when he beats the sugar monster.

> Sugar monster: who are you?
>
> Bheem: I am a friend to my friends, a saviour to Dholakpur, and the end to your atrocities! Bheem!

There is a stark difference in confidence exuded by male and female characters. Male characters such as Bheem are projected as strong, confident, vocal, "doing things", "finding solutions", emerging victorious over evils. While strokes of patriarchy remain palpable throughout the course of stories, Bheem does recognize the value of ideas that Chutki shares with him as she advises him through various adventures. He gives her credit where it is due yet remains the focus of the story in all episodes. Chutki plays an advisory/ thinking role while Bheem plays a doing role.

Other themes that are prominent in the series include adventure and magic. Magic is normalized and overlaps with the everyday life of children from the village. It is central to all the stories of the program. From flying cows to magic mirrors, to upside down worlds, magic unicorns, angles, and witches; all kinds of magical themes are available in abundance across the stories. Children have easy access to the good angel and the evil witch. They take help of the good angel to advise them when they are unable to solve problems. The co-existence of a fantasy world alongside the real word works as a bridge for children to transition from being kids to young adults. Appadurai's line of thought suggests that fantasy has become a social practice as it enters the social lives of many people in many societies. He reflects that one of the major changes in the global cultural order created by television and cinema has come about due to the role of imagination in social life (155-6). He states that, "…More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms" (Appadurai 155). Important aspects of society are explained through stories that are filled with fantasy & magic. Global warming, the importance of forestation, living in harmony with wild animals, negative virtues such as stealing, the importance of good health, introduction to health issues such as obesity and its effect are just some of the concepts that children are introduced to using the theme of magic.

While magic and adventure remain integral to the story world, another aspect of the stories of the show pertains to connection with Indian roots. In various episodes, the food

items that are discussed are of Indian origin. Most of the characters have an affiliation with Hinduism which is a majority religion in India. There are several episodes in which various Hindu festivals are celebrated and mythological stories about the festivals are explained. Some of the festivals that are explained and celebrated in the story world include Dusshera, Diwali, Raksha Bandhan. Most Hindu festivals have an underlying theme that enemies should make up on auspicious days of festivals and celebrate virtues such as victory of good over evil, kindness, forgiveness, love, sharing and caring. This can be seen in several episodes of the story as Bheem forgives the enemies and often helps them or tries to include them in celebrations as well.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the series of *Chhota Bheem* can be said to use humour, magic, and adventure to introduce children to the larger world. In doing so, the male child characters on screen are placed in a position of empowerment and positive reinforcement. While such a representation presents strong role models for the male child, the female child audience still finds a lack of role models. Issues of representation are visible in the program. The content creators of the series who were interviewed for this research project reported that they hoped to do more to correct this imbalance, however the change is slow (Chilaka, Rajiv Personal Interview; Varma, Shilpa Personal Interview; Jadhav, Deepak Personal Interview).

Ch 6: Findings of Exploratory research study

To bring forth a comprehensive perspective on the contemporary media engagement experiences of children, it was deemed necessary to supplement theoretical scholarship with findings from an exploratory study as part of ethnographic research. It must be noted that this study is qualitative in nature where in addition to qualitative methods such as interview and analysis, quantitative methods such as survey, questionnaires have been used for the context.

1. Field work timeline

The field work was conducted over a period which started in Nov 2017 and concluded in 2022. Based on convenience sampling as discussed in chapter one, a school from north India was chosen from which the respondent group was derived. The respondent group included children in the ages of 7 to 12 years and comprised of both boys and girls.

Part One: The first part of field work comprised of administering an open-ended questionnaire in November 2017 which was administered to 201 girls and 249 boys. The purpose of the questionaries was to arrive at a generic understanding of what children did with media and how it was situated in their lives (see appendix B, C & D)

Part two: The second part of field work comprised of focus group discussions with 20 children, interviews with their parents, teachers, and expert interviews with media experts. This work was conducted majorly between 2017 – 2019. Some of the expert interviews continued to take place until 2021. It was in this stage that children shared their motivations for using the media the way they did (see appendix E - K).

Part three: The final phase of the field work comprised of group discussion with 30 children, a questionnaire-based survey and participatory observation (see appendix L - M). This work was completed in 2022. A questionnaire was administered to 193 children, comprising of boys and girls of different ages between 7 to 12 years. The respondent group was derived based on random sampling of student population from the same school where the first round of survey and group discussion were conducted. See fig 14 & 15.

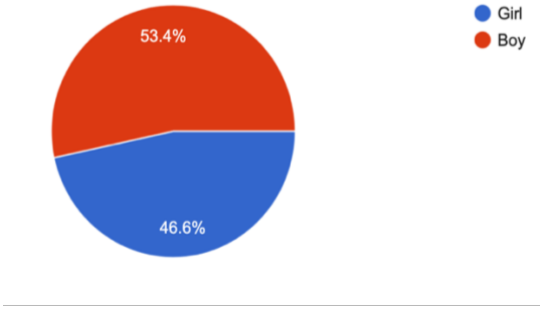


Figure 14 Composition of girls and boys in the respondent group

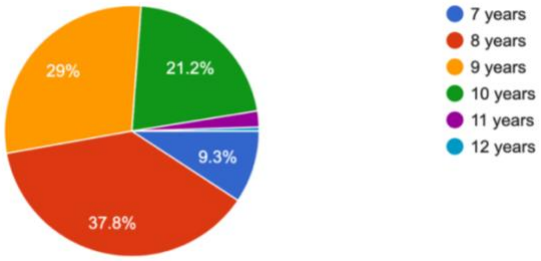


Figure 15 Ages of members of the respondent group

2. Findings from survey

The results from the first phase of survey provided an understanding of the local context, program preferences and a glimpse into the day-to-day life of children. The respondent group comprised of 201 girls and 249 boys. It helped in listing out the most favourite programs that children saw regularly. They were asked about their television program preferences, the relevance of these programs in their life and media usage habits. Children listed 197 TV shows in total that are available on the Indian television with presence on the World Wide Web as well (Hooda 137-141). Children reported having favourite shows in live action as well as animation category.

The top favourite program in live action category was *Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chasma* (Tarak Mehta's inverted glasses). This program is a story about families living in a community setting. The story unfolds from the point of view of Tarak Mehta, the protagonist. The world that Tarak inhabits introduces the workings of the real world to children. Children learn to understand that adults negotiate, take decisions, help each other, and sometimes lie for the sake of the larger good. They learn how to manoeuvre their way around the adult world much like characters in the program. Children noted that the tone of the program was somewhat comical and without profanities. This observation indicates that children observe the content they are exposed to critically. They understand what they are comfortable watching and what they classify as appropriate or inappropriate. Since *Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chasma* is categorized as a general entertainment show which includes children and adults alike in the target audience, this program has not been studied for this research. The programs discussed in the next section target children as their key audience, as such they have been studied in detail.

In the animation category, four programs came out as favourites. These include *Shinchan*, *Doraemon, Pokemon* and *Chhota Bheem*. *Shinchan, Doraemon* and *Pokemon* are

programs that have a Japanese origin. These programs show stories about children going to school, their troubles and joys that revolve around school, homework, friends, parents and proving themselves. What is interesting to note is that these programs may be reflective of Japanese culture but have been received very well by Indian children for over a decade.

As seen in these programs, content production can occur from a global context, but content reception takes place in a local context. The cultural mediation and audience reception of such text stems from a local context. It is not always necessary for the global and local contexts to overlap the same way in different geographical and cultural frameworks. This understanding about content and context in media industry has given rise to the localization industry. Localization of content considers various cultural and local sensibilities of each geography where content is received. To make the stories relatable, the dialogues are dubbed in Hindi. Such translation is context specific and not exact transliteration of the original language. Havens and Lotz write the following about localisation:

> "…Localization is the term that most people in the media industries use to describe this process of unmooring media texts from their immediate cultural surroundings and securing them in another locale… Localization stems from the recognition that all media products, even those designed by global conglomerates, have to compete with a different and unique mixture of rivals in every local market." (220, 235, 255)

The need for localization is felt specifically in case of episodic content such as a series that run for many episodes and seasons. When the audience see familiar aspects in the content they watch regularly, it leads to a deeper engagement process for them. This has been demonstrated in Japanese programs such as *Doraemon* and *Shin-Chan.* Both these programs are Japanese cartoons that are made available in India through the process of localization. Another example of context specific localisation is the case of French program *Grizzy & the Lemmings.* This program is received differently in France than in India. This show is broadcasted in 42 countries without any dialogues as in its original format. However, in India alone, this show is broadcasted with dialogues. For instance, Season 2, episode 10 (Weightless Bear) on Netflix has no dialogues however when this program is broadcasted on Pogo channel in India, it has dialogues throughout the show (Grizzy and the Lemmings in Hindi weightless bear). This method of localization is true for all episodes of the show. A similar localization strategy can be seen in another French cartoon *Oggy and the*

Cockroaches created by Xilam animation which is available globally through Netflix. Success of localised content points to the requirement of context specific story telling. Relevance of context for the target audience remains paramount as seen in the case of Indian IPs such as *Chhota Bheem* as well.

Based on the survey results, two programs, *Chhota Bheem* and *Doraemon*, were chosen for review as part of this research. A case study for Chhota Bheem has been presented in the previous section. From the list of three Japanese programs, *Doraemon* was chosen as it has been deemed appropriate for discussion with children as explained in chapter one.

Doraemon, is a cartoon series which was originally written as a Manga comic in Japan in the year 1969 (Schodt 217-8). The key characters of this series are Doraemon, Nobita, Shizuka, Gian and Suneo. It is a story about a cat called Doraemon who travels back from the future to take care of Nobita Nobi. He travels back on the behest of Sewashi Nobi, who is Nobita's future grandson so that Nobita can do better at school and future generations can have a better life. Nobita is a school-going boy who has a few friends. Doraemon has a four-dimensional pocket which stores gadgets which he uses to help Nobita. Nobita finds joy in the company of Shizuka, the only girl in the group. He is often bullied by his friends Gian and Suneo. The story is set in a city and revolves around schoolwork and everyday life of young children.

Written by Fujiko F. Fujio, the series is close to 50 years old and one of the most popular programs in Asia. In 2002, Time magazine chose Doraemon as one of the 22 Asian heroes for the special issue of Asian Hero. It was the only anime character in the list and was described as "The Cuddliest Hero in Asia" (Xingjian 2016). The character has been so popular that in the year 2008, Japan appointed Doraemon as nation's first "anime ambassador" (Japan Today 2008). The Fujiko F. Fujio Museum in Kawasaki showcases Doraemon as the key hero and the key attraction of the museum. All this points to the fact that Doraemon is culturally significant in Japan and has reach across the world.

The series was originally aimed at children in the ages of 3 years to 8 years. The story of Doraemon was first published as a manga comic in the year 1969 and broadcasted as an animated series in the year 1973 for the first time on Nippon TV in Japan. The 1973 edition had 26 episodes. It was followed by a newer version broadcasted on TV Asahi in 1979 which had 1787 episodes in addition to 30 special episodes and lasted till 2005.The third edition

started broadcasting on TV Asahi in 2005 and has been going on since. Currently the 14th season of the 2005 version is going on with over 531 episodes having been telecasted until 2020.

Doraemon in India - The *Doraemon* franchise came to India in 2005 with localization of language on Hungama TV and continued to run through Hungama TV's sister channel Disney Channel India. The Indian audience has seen dubbed versions of the 1979 as well as the 2005 editions. Since 2010, 24 *Doraemon* films have also been released in India with the latest one on 19th October 2018. In Late 2016, Amazon Prime Video India announced a partnership with TV Asahi to be the exclusive streaming partner for *Doraemon* (First Post 2016). The show is known to be of the highest rated kid's show with close to 500 million viewers. Distribution through Internet platforms like that of YouTube and Amazon Prime Video has been instrumental in increasing the viewership.

Analysis of Doraemon - The website doraemon.fandom.com describes Nobita as someone who is absent-minded, whinny, timid, naive, clumsy, dependent, gullible, cowardly, idiotic, forgetful, sloppy, curious, needy, reckless, foolish, mischievous, troublesome, annoying, slow, and weak among other things. It is these elements of his character that several children can relate with easily. Nobita is not an academically bright student and always hopes that *Doraemon* can give him a gadget to fix all his problems. Nobita is lazy by nature and procrastinates studying and *Doraemon* always helps Nobita through all his problems.

Some of the key phrases that describe the program *Doraemon* include 'life is changed forever', 'legendary tragic life of Nobita', 'endless supply of futuristic gadgets', 'Doraemon's fourth dimensional pocket' etc. These catch phrases work as points of attraction for children. On taking a closer look, we find that the program discusses several issues like differentiated gender roles, stress of academic life, problem of body shaming, social-economic systems, a desire to learn, need for friendship, lying to parents, running away from home, emotional insecurity, unhealthy eating, bullying, harassment by friends and taking responsibility for mistakes to name a few. These are the issues that children in India face on an everyday basis. It is through these life experiences that they learn to find their place in the world.

Contemporary life in India has seen such massive developments in infrastructure and change in lifestyles that most children (7-12 years) do not go out and play anymore. For one,

there may not be many playgrounds available to them anymore and when there are, parents do not consider it safe for them to go and play (Personal Interview, Chitra Mishra). The character of Doraemon is known to be intelligent, kind-hearted, helpful, friendly, talkative, and heroic. Such a character provides children a sense of aspiration for the kind of person they want to become irrespective of the viewer's gender.

Figure 16: A still from *Doraemon* with his friends. (Disney India, 2019)

Analysis from the survey indicated that boys and girls preferred stories of the same kind. Children were interested in stories that opened a world of wonder to them which is full of magic, hope and inspiration. Irrespective of their gender, children who participated in the study found humour, adventure and problem solving as areas of interest. Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout have analysed that programs that have comedy attract children irrespective of their age, gender, or race (25).

These finding was contrary to the stereotypes popularly held by content makers in India as reported in one of the expert interviews according to which girls prefer romantic and soft stories that are high on emotions, drama, while boys prefer out and out action stories that leave no room for boys to experience softer emotions (Personal Interview, Deepak Jadhav). While talking about the kind of programs they liked, children stated that they preferred humour and magic over other genres. They also liked shows where they could learn to apply what they were watching. This included shows like *Doraemon* or *Shinchan* from which they learnt how to play

pranks and shows like *Tiny House Nation* or *Art Attack* helped them to acquire new skills and do things by watching them on television. This indicates the new ways in which the method of education has also changed.

3. Findings from participatory observation

During participatory observation, the respondent group comprised of 56 children. They were all between the ages of 7 to 12 years and were from the same school where the survey was conducted. Children were shown one episode of *Chhota Bheem* from season 7. The episode was titled *Chhota Bheem - The Unbeatable Warrior*. The premise of this episode was that Bheem goes in search of bandits who had been looting the village for a while. Bheem beats up all the villains. The bandits realize that Bheem gets his power from laddus that Tuntun Mausi makes. As such they decide to abduct her. Chutki gets very upset on seeing her mother taken away and Bheem rises to the challenge of saving her.

At first, as a test, children were shown the program using a projector screen in which the colours were not clearly visible. However, the audio component could be heard loud and clear. In this session, most of the children appeared to be distracted from the story. This experience validated the response from an animation content maker where it was stated that children are attracted to the colourful world of animation (Chitra Pandey, Personal Interview).

When the same program was shown in another session using a projector which showcased bright colours and clear audio, the children watched the program with laser sharp focus. The audio and visual component of the program caught their attention. On occasions, they narrated the dialogues of the characters as well. When the characters called out funny names such as “Mangal Singh”, “Ulta- Pulta” the children laughed and repeated the funny sounding names even when the visuals were not very clear. They bobbed their heads when background music came in certain parts of the story. They chit-chatted during the program and exchanged notes with each other about characters. When Bheem came on screen to fight the villains, one girl from the respondent group showed her muscles in a power pose. This aspect showcased that irrespective of their gender some children could relate with the character Bheem who is the protagonist of the show *Chhota Bheem*. When Ulta Pulta, a character of the story in the shape of an egg is broken down, children broke into a laugher. Slapstick humour came as a natural favourite for them. They found the fight sequences to be exciting.

The title song of the program was played at the end of the program. This gave in enough room to the children to ease into the viewing process and engage with the musical aspect of the show. In both sessions, the children sang the title song of the program with a lot of joy and at full volume, especially the chorus. These sessions were conducted in a school setting in presence of their teachers. In general, these teachers were responsible for keeping the children organized and disciplined. Through both the sessions, teachers were present as guardians of children. When fight sequences came in, children self-moderated their laughter so as not to disrupt the viewing and mostly to maintain a favourable impression on their teachers. However, when the title song played, children in both the sessions sang along full heartedly in unison. This part of the viewing was a stark contrast to the disciplined viewing that was held otherwise.

4. Findings from focus group discussion

Once key themes were identified that children find interesting, it provided a context for an engaging conversation with them during the stage of focus group discussions. During focus group discussions it was uncovered that children were learning to form opinions about life in general, get informed about the latest trends and find a sense of identity by exploring their likes and dislikes through their media experiences. Oftentimes, these media interactions remained unsupervised by adults, giving children the freedom to access any kind of materials they wanted. Buckingham posits that children are increasingly gaining access to adult content and being empowered as consumers in their own right (192).

Nixon highlights that in the age of personal viewing devices enables children to access mature content and circumvent restrictions while doing so. She suggests that such content appeals to the younger audience as it encourages transgression of childhood boundaries (101-2, 116). Lack of control over what children watch continues to be a cause of concern for parents. As a policy framework, media organisations abide by a moral and ethical code of what may be considered appropriate for children, yet these measures remain inadequate. In case of content viewing options over streaming services, parents can exercise parental control. However, not all parents know how to use these methods.

Some of the children interviewed emphasized their tech savvy skills and their capability to unlock smart phones and other media devices that their parents had locked. The study brought out an interesting insight. A child can access much of media content using a smart phone while quietly sitting in a room full of adults and find a sense of privacy and anonymity.

Such media experiences remain supervised and unsupervised at the same time. While on one side of the coin a very small device holds the power to open a new world of information, entertainment, and communication for children and on the other side this power holds the potential to jeopardise safety and well-being of children when they are exposed to unsuitable content. What remains suitable for children in the Indian cultural context continues to be different for what is acceptable for children in Scandinavian regions or in the United States of America for instance. For example, discussions about gender orientation, sex, or life choices have different contexts in India and western countries. In this sense, how children engage with media and how it shapes up their lives varies between different countries.

In case of India, reliance on media content has been growing significantly. Children do not rely on their traditional environment alone to acquire new skills. They lean on the Internet about issues that they may not find in traditional learning set-ups. Entertainment also leads them to new information and knowledge. They can store any kind of information they want on devices and come back to it later. The learning opportunity and options that the Internet opens for them are greater than the traditional framework of a brick-and-mortar school environment.

What children liked the most about watching content through streaming platforms was that they did not have to waste time watching advertisements. This helped them save time and unlike TV, they did not have to sit through entire 30 minutes of program time which includes advertisements to know what happened in the story. It was an important consideration for them that they could find snippets of about 10 minutes or shorter duration on the Internet. This is a content programming concept that television channels are well aware of and they use it to their advantage by uploading edited portions of the program online in order to grow the audience base.

Another great advantage that children found in watching shows like *Doraemon* on streaming services using Internet was that the device was much smaller than a fixed screen. They could carry the device anywhere they wanted or use headphones while sitting with other family members and see their favourite shows without disturbing anyone. They found the recommendations through Internet-based content personalization system to be of great value. This is a feature they did not find on the traditional television. With this feature where a website can suggest similar content to the viewer, they can access content from all over the world even if they have never heard about it before or seen it on television.

The focus group interviews brought to light additional observations. While choosing a program to watch, children factored in aspects like the title and description of the show and the number of ad breaks along with the story plot. Television channels like Disney pay sharp attention to these aspects to attract children. They use phrases like ‘Brand New’, ‘Heroic Tales’, ‘Enthusiastic Hero’, ‘Warm Heart’, ‘Ready for a Challenge’ and ‘Save the Day’ to describe a program and these catch phrases resonate well with the minds of the young audience.

Talking about the differences that the children found in Indian and foreign animated characters, they reported that characters like Nobita from *Doraemon* as being a negative influence and characters Bheem from *Chhota Bheem* or *Little Krishna* as being a positive influence. They stated that they perceived Nobita as a ‘cry baby’ who is always ‘dependent’, ‘afraid’ and ‘stressed’. They further stated Nobita’s lack of academic achievement to be a negative influence. When they watched programs like *Chhota Bheem*, they felt encouraged to help their peers and be a good citizen. They felt a sense of positive reinforcement with the animated spin-offs of Indian mythological stories that was completely missing in the foreign made animation shows. However, they stated that they had the ability to understand that eating laddus like Bheem does in *Chhota Bheem* would not make them powerful. They reported being aware of the constructed and fictional nature of the stories they saw on screen.

While talking very briefly about *Shinchan,* which is another Japanese animated character from the series with the same name, they said they felt encouraged to play pranks. They spoke about imitating *Shinchan* in thoughts, actions, and words. They did so in the hope to generate the same level of humour in real life as they saw on screen. However, when asked about which of the Japanese characters they aspired to be, they chose *Doraemon*. They hoped to become like *Doraemon* and use his magical powers and devices to enter a fantasy world where they would not have to study, where nobody would hurt animals, where they could help people, eat good food and travel to new places using magic doors. When asked about the key issues in their lives that troubled them (children), they unanimously spoke about academic pressure, parental pressure, peer pressure, body shaming, cyber bullying, bullying in person and corruption. They felt that they had more access to media content in the form of programs such as *Doraemon*, *Chhota Bheem* on these issues on the Internet than on television.

Children spoke about deeply enjoying the adventurous unknown journey that *Doraemon* took them on through his Anywhere Door or Bamboo-Copter. In this fantasy world, that *Doraemon* provides to the children, reality can change completely as the framework of the real life of what the world looks like, the rules of physics etc. are not applicable. The desire to experience the unknown where the world is without limits and anything is possible, keeps children coming back to programs like *Doraemon*. It is a similar journey that the use of the Internet provides them. At the click of a finger, children in India can connect with peers in Japan, Brazil, America, Australia, Russia, Germany etc. all at once. This provides them an immensely wonderful opportunity to learn beyond classrooms, learn about other cultures without having to leave their location physically.

Fan pages, fan groups and websites dedicated to characters gave them a virtual place for conversation where they could find acceptance and meet children with similar tastes. In this way the technological change has not only given more touch points for media consumption, but also changed how children communicate. One respondent from the research group stated that she had noticed how her younger brother had changed during a period of 1 year as he began to spend more time using a smart phone. She stated he had become quieter, less communicative, and barely had any friends in real life. This was an odd occurrence for the 7 years old boy who had many friends the previous year with whom he would go out to play. His new media consumption preference did not give him time to interact with children from his class or neighbourhood in person once he returned from school. This was true for most of the respondents who spent their time between studying at the school, tuition centres and being glued to the screen (of a television/ laptop/ smartphone) for more than an hour or two every day.

The research conducted suggested that children often go back to the online portals to find out more information about the shows and related aspects. The abundance of information about the program across different websites helps building and solidifying a character's franchise, like in the case of *Doraemon.* The children who were interviewed stated that sometimes they found incorrect information meant to misguide them about the story line. This encouraged them to research more about the topics they were interested in and validate the information from the Internet with the show on the official channel or television. They spoke about clearly understanding that not everything on the web was reliable which points to a certain amount of media literacy that the children have in this digital age.

In the second round of focus group discussion children were asked questions about their favourite characters, what they thought about programs such as *Chhota Bheem*, what kind of stories they would hope to see apart from what was already available. Some of the questions that formed a part of the discussion are as follows:

- What do you think about the character of Chutki? Is she stronger than Bheem?
- If you had a chance to make this program, would you make both Chutki and Bheem equally strong?
- Do you like a program when it has a funny story or when it is about adventure?
- What do you think makes Chutki strong?

Children presented insightful comments on all these questions. They agreed that Bheem was a physically stronger character than Chutki. However, they did not perceive Chutki to be a weak character in comparison. They reported that they recognised her to be mentally strong and intelligent. They did not necessarily need the female characters to display physical strength. The context of gender imbalance as being problematic for children did not surface in the discussions though children did recognise that female characters were positioned differently in the narratives than the male characters.

When asked if they would have liked Chutki to play the role that Bheem did, some of the girls from the respondent group shared that they didn't think it would have the same impact. This perspective from children pointed out how repeated stereotypical representation on screen affirms gender roles in real life for children. Hust and Brown write that gender socialisation is a process by which children learn about expectations that arise from different gender identities of male and female in their culture (98). Rideout, Vandewater and Wartella have highlighted that in the recent years' media serves as an early window to the world for children through their screen experiences (2-8).

When asked if children were happy about the quality of content that was available to them, they shared that they felt the need for better content. However, they confirmed that programs such as *Doraemon* and *Chhota Bheem* have nostalgic value for them, and they continued to see them out of habit. They remembered these as being the first shows that they had seen and continued seeing year after year. On the question of what they preferred between humour and adventure; children wished both the elements to be a part of the story telling process for them.

5. Findings from expert interviews

Expert interviews were conducted with seven media professionals over a period. The interviews brought about an understanding of the media ecosystem from a content maker's point of view. The respondent group included professionals who either work in the corporate studio structures of broadcast television or were from production houses that create content for linear broadcast as well as Internet-enabled television, i: e- OTT services. Each of the content makers had their distinct perspectives on the current state of the media economy surrounding children based on where they stand in the content creation and distribution process. An analysis of these perspectives has presented a bridge between distinct touch points of the media economy. Additionally, the analysis of these interviews has presented findings that connect with the results from focus group discussions and survey, thereby making this research comprehensive. Transcripts of the interviews can be found in annexures C-F.

In case of children's entertainment, growth of content has been rapid especially after year 2000. This period saw Internet-enabled entertainment and learning pathways in the form of content available on YouTube. This was a result of developments in the telecommunication industry that made cheap Internet available to the audience. Up until 2000 the primary economic model was selling advertising space in media. With the rise of Internet-enabled content, the market for children's entertainment became more competitive in comparison to the previous years where only broadcast content was available. With the emergence of Internet-enabled content gave the provision to the audience to interact with content. As a result, it became possible to monetise content as well since the measurement of audience preferences became more accurate. With this development, content makers were able to recognise the need for Indian stories and understand how foreign language content performed in India.

Even though Indian content makers distinguish between Indian stories and western stories, the technological advancements of the western world are fully imbibed on the production side, as talent from India and different countries of the western world collaborate to bring Indian and western stories to life. The aspect of such collaboration dates to the early 2000s when IT outsourcing grew in India as an Industry. Animation industry, being like the IT industry, benefited from similar workflows. Such a global production strategy has brought talent from different parts of the world on a common ground to create content.

In contemporary times, the animation industry in India is comprised of creating Indian IPs that are available on linear television and OTT's and service jobs for international cartoon programs that outsource work to India. In both cases, the final distributors of content are often channels and companies such as Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Nick Jr, Pixar, Walt Disney, and their subsidiary organisations, in addition to streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video etc. The production side of the media ecosystem concerning children in India is geared to support creation of content which is made in India for the Indian audience and support creation of children's programs that are broadcasted in the USA, UK, France, Germany, and many other western nations. This model of production is a result of socio – economic and technological changes that have opened the Indian economy to international trade and upskilled media professionals to perform at par with global standards. In terms of audience reception of animated shows, a key difference between India and other global geographies is that in India animation as a technique is predominantly assigned to the kid's genre.

In India, animation shows equate with cartoons for children. The possibility of using vivid colours while creating animated images backed by engaging background music to create stories about fantasy, wonder and adventure makes animation a useful tool for children's programs. However, in other countries such as Japan, animation is understood as a tool of storytelling for children as well as adults. An example of such reception is the case of Japanese anime. As a media economy, while Indian regulations are liberal to allow foreign made content to be shown to the Indian audience the same is not the case in Europe and other South Asia countries where broadcast regulations do not permit entry of foreign players in the market easily. As such, animation continues to be the main method of content creation for children in India.

The start of the children's content genre in India began with imports of Disney cartoons that were reflective of a western society and culture. In this light, content being created in India plays a key role of providing representation of Indian children and their culture in global content market. Representation of a familiar way of life on the screen enables children to feel more confident. By showcasing India-centric aspects in children's programs, it enables content makers to tap into a larger audience base. For example, by showing content which features Indian festivals such as Holi, Diwali, Eid or talking about food items such as daal, chawal in place of hamburger or hot dogs, Indian content makers can

reach a larger market. Many content makers are of the opinion that growth of Indian content helps to break the perception that western content is better than the locally made shows. As such, content makers aim to provide a local and Indian context to the programs they create.

Connecting programs and characters with Indian folklores has been an instrumental part of the success story of several Indian IPs. By representing aspects of Indian life in respect of food, festivals, clothing on screen, content makers can clearly distinguish between Indian storytelling and western story telling formats. Indian story telling formats use mythological epics as a reference for building elements of the story world. However, the representation of these elements is done in the form of fantasy, adventure, and magic. For instance, programs such as *Chhota Bheem* take the character reference from *Mahabharata* however the story is set in the genre of fantasy and adventure. Politics of religion in India run very deep and alteration to the depictions and representation of characters from mythological epics is not acceptable. As such, it becomes imperative to present Bheem from *Chhota Bheem* as an extremely strong individual physically and as a person with strong morals like depicted in *Mahabharata*. However, the story worlds on *Mahabharata* and *Chhota Bheem* are completely different. Even though Bheem and all his other friends such as Kalia are in the same age bracket, the attributes assigned to Kalia cannot be assigned to Bheem as part of his character sketch due to the above stated cultural and religious conditioning.

Deep roots of religious and cultural sentiments provide two possible situations to content makers in this regard. At first, such references help content makers to create long lasting popularity of the characters in the mind of audience. Such strategy assumes that parents would influence their child's viewing habits like in the case of two step theory. The second situation that affiliation to mythological epics presents is that it restricts the stories. As such, content makers take references of characters, costumes, locations and in some cases even anecdotes from the epics and place them in a world of fantasy freeing them of any obligations of preserving public sentiments.

During the stage of expert interviews, it was confirmed by some of the leading content makers in India that while creating content for children they factored in aspects such as socio-economic and technological developments that have happened in the country. The present generation of young children in India is living in a drastically developed and evolved state of socio-cultural settings and media landscape as compared to previous generations. Focusing on the urban middle income section of the society in which both parents are

working, content is created in full awareness that media experiences for children are aimed at filling cultural voids left by the changes in family structures. The hope being that even if urban parents do not have time to engage with children, the media would take up this role and enrich children with stories about Indian culture and traditions.

Children in the age group of 7 to 13 years rely heavily on media representations to form their views about the world. However, no specific content is made for this specific age group. The content available in India is created specifically for children in the age group of 3-7 years. The age group of 8 -14 years essentially receives spill over content. This means that content made for a 5-year-old can be watched by a child of 7 years. Content made for a 7 year can be watched by children who are 10 years old. Likewise, content make for a 15-year-old child is watched by an 11-year-old child. The target audience in transitionary phase of viewing preference is called kidalts (kid + adults) by some of the content makers as reported during interviews. The deficit of content needed specifically for the age group of 8 to 13 years presents further opportunities for the Indian IP market to grow.

Along with the aspect of audience age, gender specific content is another consideration that points to the direction in which the Indian media industry can grow. The old system of TAM ratings did not support content specific for the girl audience as it was assumed that the girl child audience was not interested in children's programs around the ages of 7 years and beyond. This system of analysis has led to a widespread disparity in the representation of children of different genders on the screen. It has further enabled the solidification of stereotypes and patriarchal notions that disempower women. However, audience rating systems provided by Internet-enabled OTT services have demonstrated that there is a need for content that targets the girl child. As such, content options on OTT are varied in comparison to what is available on linear broadcast channels. The audience research data provided by OTT services has been a key enabler to move in the direction of bringing parity in representation by showcasing that each kind of audience is important. The technology that supports content personalisation has been a vital component in shaping up narratives that provide women stronger roles and opportunities. Such representations on the screen have a direct bearing on how the social and cultural systems of the country evolve and create new media cultures.

Production companies have now started making a business case for creating content for the untapped market of children in the ages of 7 to 12 years in general and specifically for

the girl child audience. This can lead to the creation of a new stream of revenue through merchandise sale and advertising. However, this strategy aligns more with the research data of streaming services that use Internet-enabled methods of audience tracking and content personalisation. In case of broadcast channels that have presence on streaming services, they are beginning to adopt such strategies as well.

6. Media Learnings

When children see their favourite characters behave in a certain way, they learn how to respond to situations around them at an emotional level. When they observe the challenges that different characters in a program encounter, they learn how to maintain and build their psychological capabilities. Bryant and Bryant refer to television as a potent agent of socialisation and state that children view reality according to what they see on screens (204).

Doraemon shows stories about children going to school and learning new things, working with gadgets, and exploring the neighbourhood with friends. These learnings help the young Indian audience to develop their abilities to think, analyse, learn new things, and grow. One of the parents from the respondent group reported that her 8-year-old daughter gave her first aid using acupressure while learning to do so from *Doraemon.* From the interactions between different characters in the program, children understand the meaning and function of the society. They can relate to the characters and understand their own place in the world when they see Nobita or Gian exploring their relationship with their parents and a new-born sibling. When the characters take responsibility for their actions and call out bad behaviour, it inspires the young audience to be better people. The aspiration to be like *Doraemon* or learn a quality of another of their favourite characters impacts the behaviour of the audience. During discussions children reported that they understood the value of academics based on what they had seen in the program. They understood it was bad to procrastinate studying as it would land them in trouble much like in the case of the characters in the program. When the audience maps and compares the stories, they watch on-screen with their own life, they learn many things that satisfy their need to know about emotional, psychological, developmental, societal, existential, and aspirational aspects. This entire process of learning is what I propose to call ‘Media Learnings’. Media learnings happen through content being consumed online/ offline and through digital communities that get created around digital content. In a growing system of nuclear families in India, many people find media learnings to be a support system to their parenting method.

As stated by Kim (47), the impressions that we receive from our environment become an important part of our meaning making process, both internally and externally. Media rituals and the methods of contemporary media engagement are a part of such impressions. Götz, et al., 2008 state:

> ….media-related experiences, like all other sources of experiences in a child's environment, are integrated in the process of their developing selves, their relationships with their peers, family members and educators. (16)

Due to the support function that media plays in the life of children in contemporary India, media is progressively becoming a part of life like a ritual. Couldry explains rituals in relation with media as:

> ….actions organised around key media related categories and boundaries, whose performance reinforces, indeed helps legitimate, the underlying 'value' expressed in the idea that the media is our access point to our social centre. Through media rituals, we act out, indeed naturalise, the myth of the media's social centrality. The term 'media rituals' encompasses a vast number of things: from certain 'ritualised' forms of television viewing, to people's talk about appearing in the media....'Media rituals' refers to the whole range of situations where media themselves 'stand in', or appear to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, connected as members of a society (3,9).

With the rise of pervasiveness of media in our lives, Couldry and Hepp write about mediatisation and define it as the relationship between the transformation of media and communication on one hand and culture and society on the other. They note that mediatization has qualitative and quantitative aspects. Quantitative observations are concerned with media's ever-increasing proliferation through society. Qualitative aspects relate with understanding how social and cultural changes that emerge because of media saturation (197). Hepp explains that mediatisation can then be understood as a process of sensitizing us toward the transformations that are experienced in the context of contemporary media engagement (4). This process unfolds at three levels such as the historical depth of the

process of media-related transformations, the diversity of media-related transformations in different domains of society, and the connection of media-related transformations to further processes of modernization (Lunt & Livingstone 465).

7. Conclusion

The rise of digital media and Internet streaming in the 2000s has broken the monopoly of advertisers and enabled global content to be made available locally. The process of information dissemination has become multi-dimensional as the number of touch points for content consumption have grown. As the field study done for this research project clarified, children acquire new knowledge from the media content they consume through various avenues. They also learn to apply critical thinking in the process of learning to use new media services and devices (Focus Group Discussion 2018). This learning process has empowered them with digital skills that are necessary today.

The study conducted with children, as well as media professionals who are involved with making content for children, parents, mentors, and analysis from previously done research on the global topic of children and media have clarified that as the evolution of technology, social and cultural changes continue, children are progressively relying on media for everyday use.

Chapter -7 Conclusion

1. Research Framework

To uncover the underpinnings of media culture surrounding children in India and their media experiences, a combination of analysis of existing scholarship and an exploratory field study were undertaken. From a methodology perspective, this work has been informed by previous global studies and experiments that have aimed to understand how audience engage with media and how their relationship unfolds. The "Hole in the Wall project", a project that presented zonal findings from North, South, East, West India. The project had a sample size of 250 children, boys and girls included in the age group of 8-14 years (Mitra et al 407-426; Mitra and Rana 221-232; Mitra 367-371, Mitra 2000) and served as a point of reference for this study. Jaggi's interpretative study that explores the idea of understanding rather than the idea of effect in relation to "Children's Perceptions of Gender Images in Indian Television Cartoons" (153-162) has also informed analysis from a position of research framework.

The 2005 study titled "Generation M: Media in the lives of 8–18-year-olds" by Donald Roberts, Ulla G. Foehr, Victoria Rideout and published by Kaiser Family Foundation used methods such as survey, sampling, questionnaire administration, interviews. These tools were found useful for this study. The "Young and Online: Children's perspectives on life in the digital age**:** The State of the World's Children 2017 Companion Report" by Amanda Third, Delphine Bellerose, Juliano, Diniz De Oliveira, Girish Lala, Georgina Theakstone included workshops as part of the work. In these sessions, adolescents reflected on how and why they use digital technologies via a series of youth-centred, participatory activities including surveys, short-answer questions, creative exercises (e.g., drawing), scenario-based exercises and small group discussions (15). While drafting the research questions, an exploratory approach was followed. The aim was to find out more details about the research topic from the respondents as such no prior assumptions were made. This approach was verified with similar approach as found in *Children's Television Worldwide: Gender Representations.* This study analysed children's programs from 24 countries with the aim to understand what children's television is about. Key questions like those found in *Children's Television Worldwide: Gender Representations* that formed a part of field work for this dissertation included questions about the main protagonists, roles played by the protagonists play and differences seen between male and female characters? These tools were found valuable for this work as well.

Livingstone's work on EU Kids Online, a study funded by the European Commission's Safer Internet plus Programme aimed at identifying, evaluating and comparing various studies from Europe was one of the key works that informed this research (7). Livingstone's larger body of work on the topic of children and media has provided a perspective of positive framing on the abilities of children and opportunities available to them in different parts of the world. Her analysis has brough an empowered understanding about children in the general framework of my work. Works by researchers like Patti M. Valkenberg and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski such as *Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth* have provided an additional knowledgebase to build further research on. While the field work conducted for this research has used qualitative methods, Valkenberg's scholarship which is quantitative in nature has provided useful insights.

Most importantly, Banajis' field work which has included working with children from poor as well as middle class section of the society in India has had the most profound impact on the methodology of this research. Perhaps, Banaji's work stands out as one of the most credible scholarships in this field as her own positionality as an Indian researcher working in an international arena afford her the position to uncover the complex layers of childhood in contemporary India all the while keeping in line with global standards of leading edge qualitative research.

2. Theoretical findings

Given the large size of India as a nation and the complex socio-cultural underpinnings, a standard model of theory cannot apply to India because of variables of economic, cultural, and technological aspects. Through the course of literature review, analysis of empirical works done in other countries about children and media and the field work conducted for this dissertation several observations were made. There were instances where it could be said that certain findings apply to children from middle class globally such the use of Internet by children. Just as much as certain findings had a global applicability there were several differences as well. For instance, there remain vast differences in the definition and formation of the family unit between India and other western countries. Such aspects remain extremely vital for mapping points where global scholarship can be applicable to India and where it differs. Formation of family deeply impacts the level of access children can have to media and devices. What remains common globally is that television has now extended to Internet. However, the reach of screen entertainment over Internet between

various parts of the world varies due to technological and socio-economic differences. The definition of middle class and the income factor that defines middle class varies between India and western countries such as United States of America.

From a theoretical standpoint there are similarities and differences alike. For instance, analysis of agency remains subjective as the contemporary media ecosystem affords higher degree of agency to some consumers and negligible to others. Researchers such as Valkenberg and Piotrowski condemn theories like magic bullet theory as being sheerly obsolete in today's world (29). However, in case of India, applicability of magic bullet theory and two step theory can sometimes still be seen. Stereotypical representation of gender roles in children's programs perpetuates traditional gender roles and impacts the minds of children much like a magic bullet as found in some cases during the field work (Focus Group Discussion 2018). Bandura has stated that children and adults learn by watching others (Mare, Palmer, and Sullivan 269). The impact of constant images that reinstate patriarchy and traditional gender roles appears even stronger we analyse the situation from Bandura's lens, thereby strengthening the analysis of magic bullet theory in relation to children.

Reflections from what children see on screen can be found in everyday life that children lead. Earliest researchers have aimed at focusing on the negative effects of media exposure for children given the impact of stereotypes on children (Wartella & Reeves 118-32; Wilson 237-61). The positive impact of media on children is a relatively newer field of exploration. Mares and Woodard have indicated 4 key aspects that are an indicator of prosocial behaviour. These are positive interactions such as friendly play or peaceful conflict resolution, aggression reduction, altruistic actions such as sharing, donating, offering help, comforting and lastly, reduction of stereotypes in attitudes, beliefs which results in behaviours that counters stereotypical portrayals of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (301-22). On the aspect of understanding children and their media experiences Mares, Palmer and Sullivan have stated "… Much of the emphasis in research to date has been on verifying that prosocial content can, in fact, encourage imitation. Rather less research has focused on investigating the features of the content that would maximize imitation." (270).

Globally what remains true for most children is that Internet has become an integral part of their screen media experience. Field work done for this dissertation has clarified that children use both traditional linear television as well as Internet-based entertainment as well.

They lean more towards Internet enabled screen entertainment as it provides opportunities for personalisation based on the schedule of children in addition to access of ease with devices. Horst and gaspard state that Internet has replaced television for children by becoming the go-to medium for entertainment, leisure, homework and many other activities (39).

3. Program Analysis

One of the key findings from the ethnographic research relates with children's understanding about gender representation and their perception about characters and stereotypes. Witt highlights that when children observe female characters as passive, indecisive and subordinate to men on screen and then see this behaviour reinformed in their environment, they will consider this to be the appropriate way to behave for boys and girls (322). Through the analysis of focus group discussions done in 2018 and 2022, it became clear that for children, they did not perceive the characters based on gender affiliation alone. Children analysed the traits of the characters they saw on screen and irrespective of a male or female character, they could find parallels in their own life (Focus Group Discussion 2018). Though the discussion on the aspect of gender representation is extremely deep rooted guided by inherent social practices, the finding that children could distinguish between physical and mental power as displayed by characters on screen fills gaps in our understanding about children and their media experiences in India.

Several research findings have stated that male characters are portrayed as strong, smart, competitive, and powerful whereas female characters are created with a focus on beauty and being desirable (Witt 322-4; Davis 325-332). Findings from global scholarship are crucial indicators of how gender representation evolves on the screen. An equally valuable insight came through field work done for this research. During program analysis and discussions with children, it was found that children recognized male and female characters as having different types of strength. For instance, in *Chhota Bheem,* Bheem is considered to have physical strength while mental strength is attributed to Chuttki. The program showcases that Bheem often relies on Chuttki's ideas. Bheem continues to play the lead character in the program, but value of Chuttki is not diminished in comparison to Bheem. Children highlighted during discussions, that the difference is strength types did not make Bheem better than Chuttki as characters. Character of Chuttki was also described as 'smart' and 'mentally strong'. Chuttki's attributes of being caring and kind did not have a negative connotation for children in the respondent group.

Concerns about unbalanced representation for male and female characters remain crucial points of enquiry in children's program in India as well much like elsewhere in the globe. The creator of *Chhota Bheem,* Rajiv Chilaka pointed out that as a storyteller, the focus on bringing empowerment to female characters was important for the program. However, aspects such as programming and advertising strategies, social constructs about traditional gender representations have made the progress slow (Chilaka, Rajiv Personal Interview).

Children who were a part of the respondent group were between the ages of 7-12 years. Media experiences of a similar age group of Dutch children were studied as part of a longitudinal study by Valkenberg and Piowtski. The findings given in the book *plugged in* state that themes of fantasy and visuals that have special affects do not engage and impress children in this age group. It was highlighted that boys and girls prefer different themes. It has been said that boys have a stronger preference for action and violence and like cartoons more than girls. It was also noted that children in this age group place high value on production quality (21, 29, 70,73,75).

The field work done for this dissertation provided contrary findings. Children who were a part of this small-scale study found fantasy filled tales of *Doraemon* extremely engaging. Episodes of *Chhota Bheem,* another children's program that was analysed, that had aspects of fantasy, humour, adventure, and magic were extremely entertaining for both girls and boys in equal measures. As clarified by numerous expert interviews as well, the vibrant colors and possibility to delve into fantasy were some of the most important aspects that content makers considered in relation to children (Chilaka, Rajiv Personal interview; Amikat, Alban Personal interview; Verma, Shilpa Personal interview, Mishra Chitra Personal interview).

On the aspect of production quality, an experiment was conducted to determine how children responded to content. During participatory observation, children were shown some old episodes of *Doraemon*. The same group was shown newer episodes with visibly better production quality as well of the same show. In both the cases, children enjoyed watching the program as the narrative was engaging despite variance in production quality.

Likewise, for *Chhota Bheem*, in one screening children were shown one episode which had inherent audio errors, but the context of the story was clear and in another screening of the same episode, all audio and visual elements functioned properly. Children

found the second screening more engaging and enjoyable that had audio and visual elements functioning fully. This analysis also differs from Valkenberg and Piotrowski's findings where it was noted that children in this age group rely less on visible information but more on the context.

Mares, Palmer, and Sullivan state that children are more likely to imitate behaviours by characters that are rewarded (269). The discussions with children done for this research presented another perspective. Children were asked about who their favourite characters were and what did they like about them. They were also asked if they wanted to follow any of the characters they saw on screen. Children responded saying that they liked characters that brought about humour and liked copying them. They spoke about instances where they already knew that acting like their characters on screen would not bring them any appreciation or awards. However, they placed great deal of importance on the ability to create humour and a sense of adventure that led them to imitate their favourite characters like '*Doraemon'* or *'Shinchan'*.

4. India specific findings

India, as a country with one of the youngest populations in the world, is facing a situation where there is endless supply and demand for content. The situation remains paradoxical. Due to the scale of the country and the demand for content, the variety of content available in the market ranges from high quality work to mediocre shows (Gupta, Gaurav Personal Interview). While the supply of content is continuous it poses a problem as well. The rush of content in the market has equally provided a point of saturation where content lacks uniqueness, is available in excess, and yet not adequate to service the needs of the child audience.

On the aspect of content that children prefer, animation programs are the favourite category. The colourful world of animation continues to attract children in the age group of 7 to 12 years as it allows imagination to flourish. Fantasy, humour, adventure, magic and stories about day to day life are themes that engage children. However they do understand that everything that they see on screen is not true. Additionally, it was found that there is a strong preference of content made in India also known an Indian IPS. This finding was triangulated through discussions with children, media experts and industry research findings. This development has led to wider exposure for Indian content as streaming services such as Netflix invest in acquiring Indian IPs. A case in point for the emergence of Indian IPs on

global platforms is a program called *Chhota Bheem*. This program went onto become one of the most watched children's program globally on Netflix.

The rise of India IPs in the global market is a very new phenomena that has gained prominence in the last few years due to the rise of OTT services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney + etc. Furthermore, differences have been found in research methodology followed by OTT services and linear broadcasters. As a result, the findings from internet enabled services have supported content that breaks away from stereotypical representation of gender roles. The programs that are available on linear television hold the view that the girl child is not a key audience category for them. Streaming services however, do find the lack of content specifically for girls as an opportunity to target this segment more closely.

Another key aspect of representation deals with socio-economic conditions. Story telling rooted in Indian culture continues to reach children across socio-economic backgrounds. A case in point being *Chhota Bheem,* which is loved by children coming from various socio-economic backgrounds. The possibility of having choices enables children to impact how content economy functions. Given the rapid pace of developments in the industry, it is a widely accepted understating in content creation ecosystem that there remains no fixed strategies or formulas for storytelling that can confirm the success of the program (Amikat, Alban Personal Interview). The needs of the audience are constantly evolving in the wake of technological developments and the possibilities that become available to the audience continue to grow. Such change requires content makers to constantly find ways to create better that can address the ever-growing needs of the audience.

On the part of the child audience as well, there is a visible change in their media engagement experiences, patterns and environment. In the past broadcasters presented content they deemed fit, and the audience could only choose from what was presented to them. The audience had no way of sharing their likes, dislikes with the content makers that would enable better content to be generated. As a result, the power of content was centralized in the hands of the content makers. Broadcast of content using Internet has changed this power equation as it gives the audience the ability to critique the content they see. Hence, the power of media has started to get decentralized.

Additionally, the process of content consumption has become more interactive and participative than it had ever been in the past. It is in this time frame that the Indian audience has started to claim greater agency over the content consumption process. With the help of technology, media industry has grown steadily.

Contemporary child audience in India has grown to understand that the quality of content being offered to them can be better. Children are quick to share their feedback through various options available through Internet. During the field work it was found that children felt that enough content catering to their needs and preferences was not available. Children in India realise that the reason they watch the current available roster of programs such as *Chhota Bheem* or *Doraemon* due to past habits. In this sense, Hepps' formulation of deep mediatisation and its effects can be seen in children. Many of the children who were interviewed shared that they had been introduced to programs such as *Chhota Bheem* by their parents as early as 5 years old. As watching such programs become a habit for children, it carries on as they grow older. The problem surrounding lack of age specific content for the age group of 7 to 12 years was felt by several content makers interviewed for this research. It was found that there is not enough data available to ascertain which specific content would provide profitable returns when content is made for children in the age group of 7 to 12 years. As such, this section of the audience is essentially exposed to spill over content which is made for pre-school and teens.

Children also confirmed realising fully well that not all aspects shown in the programs they watched were realistic or indicators of healthy choices. For instance, in the program *Chhota Bheem,* Bheem often eats 'laddus' which are nothing more than a mixture of dough and sugar. Even if the dough is made of chickpea flour, the frequency at which he eats 'laddus' every day is extremely unhealthy. Children who were part of the respondent group recognised this aspect fully well and understood that sweetmeats of such kind would not give any power like suggested in the program and would be harmful for them.

On the contrary, on discussing this aspect with media professionals and the creator of the show Rajiv Chilaka, it was found that the focus of content makers was to provide references that were specific to the Indian context (Rajiv Chilaka Personal Interview; Gaurav Gupta Personal Interview). Bringing forth such differences in perspectives between audience and the content makers points to the fact that there is a need for better communication between the two spectrums of the media ecosystem.

The methodologies of content personalisation introduced by OTT services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime video, Disney + etc are aimed at facilitating such feedback mechanism. However, to be effective, such work requires open and multiway communication as Indian audience continues to become a part of participatory culture as described by Jenkins. It is crucial for the audience to be heard by the commercial content makers so that the overall media ecosystem can be served better by addressing the needs and preferences of the audience. Such a bridge becomes possible through the lens of academic research which has a long way to go in India still.

5. Conclusion

Media-based entertainment forms an important part of life for the people in India. Media impacts and engages audiences differently based on a variety of factors that stem from the social, cultural, emotional context (Griffin et al 467-70). The current state of media in India is going through a booming and transitionary phase. Several factors make India a unique media market, such as the availability of over 900+ private channels on satellite television, 46+ streaming services, endless hours of content across platforms being produced locally, ease of importing and localizing international content, an evolving regulatory framework, cheap Internet, a democratic political system, a growing economy, and being the most populous nation in the world. These factors exist because of a larger ecosystem comprising of social changes, culture, technology, politics, economic policy changes among others. Media programs exist within the local context of these societal changes. They cannot be isolated from the discussion on media as they all come together to form the media ecosystem. A crucial aspect of this ecosystem also involves analysis of the trends, ecosystem and the audience from an India centric position that is not rooted merely in profit or commercial frameworks. Academic research on children and media focusing on children in the 7 to 12 years age group is expected to grow. As content makers begin to fill gaps in the content ecosystem by creating user specific content for the age group of 7 to 12 years, it is hoped that works like this dissertation will serve as a bridge between academia and industry.

Appendices

1. Appendix A: Coding table

Table 6

Chhota Bheem code sheet 1 for thematic analysis

Program Theme	Gender aspects	Magic elements	Activities
Bheem beats an octopus and a sea lion. Then saves them from poachers.	Bheem acknowledges chuktis contribution	attack by evil witch	children tease each other
angry queen who wants to uproot homeless people to make her palace	boys are assumed to be strong	children transition to an upside down world through a magic mirror	Dhanteras celebration by villages
Bheem saves the king from a deadly disease.	boys do physically intensive work	demon who charges sugar tax	Diwali celebration by villages
Big vs. Small size character conflict	girls are assumed to be in advisory roles	demons	Dussera celebration by villages
challenge	girls are shown an giving ideas to solve problems	flying cows	Friendship day celebration
Chase for money	girls look at boys to save the day	kind angel	Gardening by main characters
difficulty in walking due to excess weight	Hardly any women on screen	Koyla Rani - evil witch who is freed from entrapment. Malefecient lookalike	physical fights
duel	woman rescuring the male character is a point of laughter	Magic book and pencil	Raksha Banshan celebration by villagers
global warming	women in supporting games.	magic broom	right vs wrong
Helping othets - even those who are bad	Women shown in homemaking related activties	magic gas to make people fat and thin	ritual of eating maplua in rains
importance of plants		magic words - abra ka dabra	slap stick humor
obesity		magical creatures	taunting each othe on being lazy
physical show of strength		Magical pond,	
rain, helping a unicorn fairy,		*Manthan* pearl that gives gifts	
Respect for elders		one horned demon	
robbery		planting trees magically	
Saving the village		Tattoo Geenie	
Strong sense of responsibility towards community		unicorns	
Uncovering mystreis		walking bids	

Table 7

Chhota Bheem code sheet 2 for thematic analysis

Food	Animals	English Language	English Language	Personality of characters
Ladoos	Lion	April Fool	lottery	reliance on intelligence
chocolate	Elephant	birthday party	master	Bheem- Savior of Dholakpur, calm, courageous, always accepts challenges
chole bhature	Monkey	bottle	orchid,	Kalia-desire for power
ghee	Sea lion	cake cutting	orders	Raju - angry and upset over book being stolen by kaiia. Ready to pick up a fight
Jalebi	shark	Challenge	papa	Chutki - calm, intelligent, homely, giving ladoos to Bheem before every fight
Malpua	Snake	contestants	Pocket	
paratha	Unicorn	cup cake	puppy	
Ras malai	zebra	dark room	round 1	
Samosa		disco,	round 1	
		doggy	scientist	
		exit	sea lion	
		fail	shark	
		golden	sir	
		good witch villa	special	
		Group	table	
		happy birthday	tattoo place	
		happy diwali	Tension	
		happy dussera	Thank you	
		Hero, Ouch	unicorn	
		ice cream	winner	
		ice cream cones	yeti	
		idea	zebra	
		kick	friendship day	
		lamp	salute	

Table *8*

Chhota Bheem theme sheet for thematic analysis

Themes of analysis from *Chhota Bheem*				
Collectivist approach	Social power structures	Gender imbalance & patriarchy	Magic as a bridge to real world meaning making process	Cultural Context

2. Appendix B: Consent Form

6th September 2018

I,_____, give my consent for my daughter/ son _____, aged_____to participate in a video interview. I understand that the interview is being done as part of research being conducted in the area of media and children by Ms Neha Hooda. I give my consent for this interview to be presented in public domain as a stand-alone body of work or in conjunction with other materials.

Signature of parent

---

3. Appendix C: Questionnaire A for children

What is your name?

How old are you?

Are you a super girl or a super boy?

Which class do you read in?

Which are your top 5 favourite TV shows?

What do you like about them?

Do you think these programs help you in your life?

If yes, pls explain with an example.

Which is your favourite film?

What do you like the most about it?

Which actor/ actress do you like the most?

What do you like the most about them?

Is there any character in the films or TV shows that you would like to be like or have in your life?

Which film did see today/ yesterday/ day before?

Did you like it?

What themes caught your attention in the film?

What issues, theme do you think are important for your age group?

Which kind of content would you like to see that is currently not so easily available?

How long do you spend every day:

Watching a TV show:

Watching a film:

On a video game:

On smartphones:

Do you think that your decision making is impacted by what you see in media?

4. Appendix D: Findings from questionnaire A for children

Table 9

Category/ Genre	**Program Count**	**Viewer Count**
NON- FICTION	42	255
ANIMATION	29	285
GEC - DRAMA	17	32
GEC - COMEDY	9	133
GEC - MYTHOLOGY	8	12
GEC - PERIOD DRAMA	1	19
GEC- SUSPENSE	1	7
KIDS - COMEDY	1	1
GEC- HORROR	1	3

5. Appendix E: Focus group discussions

Title of research video playlist: Children and Media: Research interviews from field work

Title: Children & media research: focus group Interview

Discussions and interview with children in the age of 8 -13 years

Discussions and interview with children with parents/ mentors

Link: Children and Media: Research interviews from field work

6. Appendix F: Respondent list for expert interviews

Respondent 1: Deepak Jadhav

Date: 9th November 2017

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Founder, Rocksalt Animation

Venue: In person at Children Film Festival, India / Park in, Hyderabad

Respondent 2: Shambhoo Phalke

Date: 5th January 2019

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Animation expert, Vice President, Anibrain Studio.

Method: in person, Anibrain Studio, Pune.

Respondent 3: Animation expert (Shilpa Varma)

Date: 14th January 2019

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Associate Director - Animation development and production at Disney India

Venue: Walt Disney Studios, Mumbai

Notes: No text notes or transcript or recording was permitted for this session.

Respondent 4: Animation expert (Amikat Alban)

Date: 14th January 2019

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Senior Producer at Disney India

Venue 1: Walt Disney Studios, Mumbai

Notes: No text notes or transcript or recording was permitted for this session.

Respondent 5: Gaurav Gupta

Date: 17th July 2020

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: CEO, futureworks Media Ltd, Mumbai, India

Method: Google meet, Online

Respondent 6: Rajiv Chilaka

Date: 2nd September, 2020

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Creator, Chhota Bheem & Chief Executive Officer, Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd

Venue: online/ zoom

Respondent 7: Amikat Alban

Date: 20th December, 2020

Designation of the interviewee at the time of interview: Senior Producer at Disney India

Venue 2: Online, Zoom

7. Appendix G: Expert Interview Questions

Questionnaire Type: Open ended, unstructured questionnaire

General Notes for the interviewees:

• The interview is aimed at being fluid to explore various new perspectives relevant to the discussion of children and media.

• Audience refers to children in the age group of 7-13 years from urban households with household income enough to provide access to digital devices and media content.

• Due to the logistical limitations, the research project does not take into consideration, the consumption patterns of children from poor and rural households.

• It would be good to get comparative perspective on Indian and International trends om the below listed questions, of course where possible.

Question list:

• According to you, what is the relationship between media content and the audience in present day and time in India?

• Does this relationship differ from global trends in terms of context and impact?

• Does the contemporarycontent address the needs of the audience?

• According to you, as someone on the content generation side, does the content generation process take a linear route where the creatives bring out their ideas alone or do creative discussions factor in the audience needs as well apart from factoring in profits?

• What kind of caution have you witness being exercised in terms of quality control especially when dealing with children's content?

• Are factors like gender representation, sexual representation, socio-economic representation, special needs representation

Adequately given consideration while generating content?

• How do content makers estimate the emotional, psychological, and behavioral impact of content on the audience?

• What are your thoughts on portrayal of violence, discrimination, and representation in children's content?

• Several children's programs have taken the route of humanizing food items, for instance Disney characters like Simple Samosa, Vada, Dhokla, Jalebi. What are your thoughts on this?

• How does content on broadcast TV and OTT? Which is more connected to the audience?

• What are your thoughts on bridging the gap between content makers and content consumers?

• Has the programming changed in the last few months given the pandemic?

• How are immersive technologies expected to impact the target audience that consumes content on television and OTT?

8. Appendix H: Transcript of interview with Rajiv Chilaka, Creator, Chhota Bheem

Designation at the time of interview: Chief Executive Officer of Green Gold Animation Pvt Ltd

Web reference link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajiv_Chilaka

Venue: online/ zoom

Date: Sept 2, 2020

Video file name: RAJIV CHILAKA_SEPT 2_2020.mp4

00:00:01:0 - 00:02:04:7

Rajiv Chilaka: I will discuss what has happened over the last decade and a half. How India is evolving and continuing to evolve in the kids segment.

See India has such a large population. I mean there are a large number of kids.

India has a young population as we know. And then the young population who is much more settled than the previous generations or this thing, which means they are having overall better life compared to what... So basically when the parents, example have most parents are working parents and they have less time for the children.... Not during the COVID times, I am talking (about) normal (time)... Because they have less time for the children now, they're obviously not able to tell the traditionally the stories that our parents or grandparents used to tell us. And today children, many people don't even know who's Raam or who is Krishna or Mahabharata. A lot of people have no clue.

In the villages and smaller towns it's much better than metros... And the majority of the population lives in metros and... We... So the culture, the cultural knowledge is what they get it from television. And traditionally whatever…. And obviously kids watch cartoons and animation content and stuff and....

...Prior to 2000 there was no kids channel in India. Little bit of kids content used to come on Doordarshan and that's about it. (In) 2000 came Cartoon Network and we

00:02:04:7 - 00:02:41:6

Rajiv Chilaka: Started getting content but again the content was pretty much international. Cartoon Network did try to do a few things...ahhh... Like there was "Tenaliraman"... Then they tried, then we did actually Vikram Betal for them. We followed it up with Krishna movie series. Then came Chhota Bheem. So that was in 2008. I think there was one more show, Chhota Birbal also. And there was this Hanumaan movie that came in.

00:02:41:6 - 00:03:23:3

Rajiv Chilaka: So there was experiments being done and people were figuring out what kind of content to be created, mythological, historical or go with the tales based on the Indian mythology. So all these were going on ....And then came in Bheem...which kind of is inspired from the mythological character but is completely original. In the sense it's a totally new story.... Initially...probably if we didn't call Bheem, Chhota Bheem, if we called him let's say Chhota Raju or something else I don't think it would have worked.

00:03:23:3 - 00:03:49:2

Rajiv Chilaka: Calling him Bheem become a very important thing because culturally for Indian parents, they thought it is going to be a story of Bheem...and they all wanted their children to watch. And then once the parents saw that, then they realised, oh! Not Bheem but it is good content there is morals. We are teaching them Hindi. The show is in Hindi....

00:03:49:5 - 00:04:24:5

Rajiv Chilaka :And prior to that, a lot of these shows were in English...and then slowly their dubbing started. But the language of the dubbing also was not very clean in some of the series, especially some Japanese shows and all. So when Bheem came, immediately it was that the the storytelling was Indian. The elements that are used in storytelling are Indian...From the sweets like the laddus to the festivals that happen....everything is Indian.

00:04:24:5 - 00:04:49:5

Rajiv Chilaka : Whereas if you go to western storytelling, they talk about let's say the bigger festival that everyone knows like Christmas, Santa Claus, people know. But if we go and talk about say Easter, or Easter Bunny or the eggs or something like that, the kids don't understand what it is. I mean, because we don't have that...we don't know that culture very well...and when the kids don't understand what it is.

00:04:50:1 - 00:05:19:0

Rajiv Chilaka : So when the kids don't understand that culture or what is a hamburger, I mean, at that time, mcdonald's also wasn't there. So when they hear these words, they think they are inferior to the Western world or the other world. And they start to think that they don't know much about this. They start to grow up not confident, but certainly now we are showing a show where they understand... The kids understand, OK, Diwali mein kya hota hai? On Holi what they do.

00:05:19:5 - 00:05:46:1

Rajiv Chilaka : They connect with it. They're talking about parathas, doodh, milk or whatever elements they connect with. Suddenly they find this character. Before there was nobody, they could relate to all these years. And suddenly comes a character and shows that is purely made to entertain them. And that they can connect with them. What I mean, how the behavior of the elders is to everything in that show, they connect and understand. Suddenly they feel much more confident and...

00:05:46:3 - 00:06:13:0

Rajiv Chilaka :....they also have somebody to look up to as a superhero or the super I mean, as the favourite toon character. Prior to this it was only Western characters that they had. So Bheem came and became immensely popular. And... 12 years have passed today and it is still going strong. I mean it is still top one of two shows on a regular basis.

00:06:13:7 - 00:07:03:3

Rajiv Chilaka :And of course, we have to continuously evolve the content. The audience in 2008, 9, 10, 11; the kids were much different from today's kids, you know. A four year old is equal to a seven year old's thought process from ten years ago. And these kids have become so smart that they understand storytelling very well. They are able to anticipate the plot. They are able to understand the setup. So these kids who we are telling stories to, we have to give them twists and turns. It cannot be that simple linear storytelling. You have to give them.....like the earlier generation preferred linear simple story telling. But here if you give them simple story telling...

00:07:03:3 - 00:07:27:7

Rajiv Chilaka :...they laugh at the story storytelling. So you have to give them much more layering of stories, much more detailing, simultaenous things happening. And they're able to catch all this better than any adult. I mean, so like that things started to evolve and Bheem came in India. Bheem became the game changer, not just for our company, but for Indian animation industry.

00:07:28:4 - 00:08:22:5

Rajiv Chilaka : And like then came the other shows, which was more important because if Bheem was the only show that worked then we would have been a little bit more worried. But the other shows came like Motu Patlu or Shiva and our own show Mighty Raju. All these shows became pretty big hits also. So then there's more belief that local content will be consumed by the Indian audiences and that started the trend of more kids channels....So the kids viewership used to be one two percent back in thousand before 2006 -07 and then became 3% by eight, 2008 and today it is close to 10% or even higher actually....Once upon a time

00:08:23:0 - 00:08:55:5

Rajiv Chilaka : Fifty percent of the TV viewing audience were women and that's what Ekta Kapoor capitalised on. But today 50% of the TV viewing audience is children below the age of 14 but still unfortunately there's no content being produced for them. The content that is being produced is for kids below eight and a lot more content has to be produced for kids above nine and around 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

00:08:56:1 - 00:09:34:2

Rajiv Chilaka : So these kids are ending up.... Because they're neither kiddish nor are they adults.... So they are in between and....they are going ahead and watching regular movies or they're watching... Based on where they are in India they're watching the national shows. If they are in the metros then they have exposure to the national shows and they're watching CID and those kind of shows, crime patrol, those kind of shows that they are not supposed to be watching for that age..but since they don't have any content curated to their age group... These kind of things are happening.

00:09:34:2 - 00:09:59:3

Rajiv Chilaka : Second still no content is being made in India in spite of so much noise being made...There is still no content being made for girl audiences. Which is really sad... And i've been trying to do that for a long time now. I've been talking to... But everyone just says no no, boys control the remote..... Girls watch boys shows but boys don't watch girls shows.

00:09:59:3 - 00:10:54:0

Rajiv Chilaka : And that becomes very difficult for us to convince people because ultimately we need buyers and somebody to (host) the show. But now came OTT platforms. OTT platforms are...they have their specific target audience. It is private viewing. You watch single. So then immediately... The girls who have ipads in their hands, they are the audience immediately... And hence there will be shows that they can be made specifically targeting them... So the basic change and evolution is happening in India. And the first step was to create content for kids which is basically targeted at 4- 8 (years). Why is it being targeted at four to eight years old audiences.

00:10:54:2 - 00:11:44:0

Rajiv Chilaka : So there is always a spillover audience. A two year old can always watch a four year old content. Obviously they will not understand it as well as a four year old...but he watches it and then sometimes kids who are nine or ten years old also watch content which is for an eight years old. And hence, this is how basically this group is targeted. In preschool also there's not yet a show produced for television because there used to be no measurement done for kids below the age of four. Earlier time there was TAM ratings which used to measure 4 to 14. Now...(inaudible) measuring 2 to 14 which is better than before but they are...

00:11:44:0 - 00:12:27:7

Rajiv Chilaka :Not able to still give more detailed reports of pre school, kids and tweens and teens. That kind of break up they're not able to get. It's just a matter of time now after

digitisation that they will be able to get that. So I mean...so... I mean so these these things are important factors on how things are evolving and stuff. And now I know that channels are ok to look at content which is kind of curated towards girls... Or curated towards younger audiences... They are ok to experiment.

00:12:28:4 - 00:13:06:7

Rajiv Chilaka :They have enough library for this content. So the next kind of content that you will see will be different from the kind of content which we saw earlier . So those kind of things have gone so far. But the new content that will be made for the future will be much more engaging, engaging for the younger audiences and in terms of quality as well India has come a long way in the last decade or so. And the budgets also have become much, much better because it has proven success.

00:13:06:7 - 00:13:57:7

Rajiv Chilaka :And also there is more viewership now compared to long time back. So I mean, I think... We are... For content generation for kids... I think this is kind of like a golden time in India. Majorly because still there is lot more content that needs to be produced because it has still to be consumed. And with the advent of OTT platforms and stuff, content creators and content owners are the beneficiaries..... And people like us who own the IP, of our own characters. We've been able to monetise because of these kind of new OTT'S and stuff which basically encourages us to do more IP's.

00:13:58:4 - 00:14:11:7

Rajiv Chilaka :But it also is very tricky because now in Indian market, they're all saying that, OK, we will only take this show if you give us the IP. So again that is a challenge we have to fight… (audio file corrupted)

9. Appendix I: Transcript of interview with Deepak Jadhav

Venue: In person at Children Film Festival, India / Park in, Hyderabad

Date:9th November 2017

Video File name: MVI_1990.MOV

0:00:00:
Neha Hooda: So, we will begin with your introduction. You tell us about your company, the shows that you are doing and what kind of content, the trends that are there in the industry right now. How does India compare to the rest of the world? Talk about the business model and more so in terms of the content generation side. And then I will keep asking you questions.

0:00:22
Deepak Jadhav: I started my company in 2007.

0:00:25
Neha Hooda: Yeah, but let's just have your name first. I'm going to be showing this to our international audience.

0:00:29
Deepak Jadhav: One thing, my company had my name. I had a partner called Raj. So it was Deepak Raj Entertainment and Multimedia Solutions.

0:00:37
Deepak Jadhav: So it's DREAMS.

0:00:38
Neha Hooda: Okay.

0:00:39
Deepak Jadhav: And he knew, this comes with the flow, and we liked it. So me, Deepak, my partner Raj, together we formed that company in 2007 and 2007 was actually a good year you know because Indian economy was booming. People had extra money, so they wanted to invest somewhere. So, animation was like one of the fields in which they liked because many

investor who used to put money they were like little afraid of putting money in entertainment sector like Bollywood or any industry. Animation they felt it's like more like IT business you know, and it was like that before. So 2007 we had an idea of doing our own ips. With that idea we started a company. We had a plan like you know of doing research and trying to create something pure Indian. Like many people had the same idea but we had like little mix with taking guidance from European companies or from the American companies So I contacted one fellow in North Carolina and he was like our, what you can say, he was like our one of the guiding persons who used to write for Disney, Nickelodeon, all those channels. And when I met him in one event, I liked his thoughts. And he stayed in India for almost 2 years, so he wanted to write for the Indian companies. Surprisingly, he was not a greedy person, he wanted to co-develop things, so we joined hands with him. And we came up with this feature film called Kutty Chetan. The script was really nicely planned. The only thing, the next challenge was to go to production, you know, like animation takes a long time to finish compared to live action. So we moved to the Philippines because in the Philippines, there's a lot of manpower available there, good art talent. We finished our feature film in 2010, but by the time when we finished the film, the industry was a little shaky - recession. In fact Reliance had offered us to buy the complete content and we signed the documents, but it all went to toss. Luckily Cartoon Network, they liked my feature film, they offered me good money. I was not in losses, but they gave me almost 80% of my production cost. And it was a subject based on one old feature film called Chota Chetan. It was the first Indian 3D stereoscopic film with a ghost being the central character of the whole film. So my idea was very clear. I was making a film for kids. And I wanted some fun in that. Not going in mythology because mythology I just... Before that I finished... As a director I finished three films, you know, three mythological films and I saw there are challenges. We can't play with the sentiments. We can't play with these characters. Like if there is Krishna, he is blue. That's it. If there is Ram, he should have the genuine look. There is no... No changes.

Neha: So, these films were in animation?

Deepak: Yeah, in animation. As an artist in my career I did a first feature film called Buddha. That was with Singapore and Indian government, some collaboration was there. And we did the first feature film called Legion of Buddha. Hanuman, I worked on as a layout artist. After that, Ghatotkach. So these are all like mythological films. And I felt we should think beyond mythology. Because mythology as a subject is good. Even kids want to watch it. But there are

many restrictions from this different, different regional communities. Communities, they used to create some kind of ruckus, that Hanuman can't do this, this is wrong, why did Rama show himself like this? We had those issues.

0:04:57
Neha Hooda: So, would Bahubali fit in the category of mythology in some sense?

0:05:01
Deepak Jadhav: No, Bahubali is not a mythology, that's the beauty. It's like all together it's a different world. Rajamouli Sir has created this world, he has written all these characters, his father in fact. So they are not into any mythology. Though there are some gods and temples, culture is there but it is not mythology. It's pure, pure fiction and he has written it. We can take advantage of mythology you know like reference for those weapons, magical weapons which we used to see in Ramanand Sagar serials, a little bit like that, but not much. So, 2010, we had a real bad year. We jumped back into services because we wanted to survive. By that time I had a staff of 22 people and again it's a situation where I have to balance my IP and my people. So we jumped into doing service jobs. Luckily for me, being from this industry, I had an experience of 8-9 years that time and my friend Sarmanan, who was working with us as a general manager, we had few clients….. So we contacted them and they gave us the service jobs. So 2010, we all jumped in the service business.

0:06:24
Neha Hooda: What exactly do you mean when you say services?

0:06:26
Deepak Jadhav: Services like working for these companies in Europe and US.

0:06:31
Neha Hooda: Can you elaborate on the departments that you were working on specifically and what kind of work was coming to you?

0:06:37

Deepak Jadhav: Yeah, it's like a skilled job not like a machine job. So even in US or Europe they always had this man power crunch issue you know. And they used to outsource work to countries like China, Philippines, Vietnam but there they had a technical issues. And India was really good in technology side so the approach of Indian artists was better than these people. So we were like tech savvy guys. So, India started getting a lot of IT jobs. Because of IT jobs India came on the global map and because of that it helped in animation

0:07:32

Neha Hooda: I think it happened in visual effects also the same way.

0:07:35

Deepak Jadhav: Yes, yes, exactly, a lot of work was outsourced. And all thanks to our IT industry. They are the ones who took it to the next level. I remember the first outsourcing job I did for the company called Gaumont. It's a French company. And they had a series called Green Squad. So Green Squad, they did the pilot. It was approved and they wanted to do like 26 episodes. They tried with the Chinese company and they had some issues. So to meet their deadline they split that work, like 13 episodes in China and 13 episodes in India. So that was my first outsourcing job where we did start to do everything. Right from the layout, background, animation, compositing. And because of good manpower availability, we could finish that in time. Though money was not really good, but still my investors were very happy because we saw dollars coming in and investors thought, okay, this is a good thing. Instead of making IP, we should focus more on services. But we were like, you know, Like I was a partner of 40%. So I told him, we have to have both things, IP and services. So we just tried to make a deal with Cartoon Network. They paid us good money and they also gave us an order of making TV series from these few characters of my feature film. And there were a few characters in the film which the channel liked a lot. They felt that using these character, we could make funny TV serials. I was the first person in India who made the first chase comedy TV serial.

0:09:31

Neha Hooda: Really? Which one was it?

0:09:32

Deepak Jadhav: Chatur Chetan. We were the first who started doing animation without lip-sync. There was no dialogue. It was always a narration using different characters like Siddhu. Siddhu was like always talking talking talking. You know like we had two seasons but then Cartoon Network, they felt it's not working. It was an expensive affair. Like we had, for one season we got 1.5 crore, for second season they reduced the budget to only 1.2 crore. So third season they felt no, it will not work, so they stopped. But by that time we had a staff of almost 78 people. Because we had to produce two TV series, plus doing service job, plus our own IP. And then slowly we started expanding ourselves. We started visiting these markets like MIPCOM, MIPTV, Kidscreen, Cartoon Ad Bay in Italy.

0:10:32

Neha Hooda: So, when you travel and you meet all these content generators from across the world, do you notice any change in the sensibility of the content being generated for children?

0:10: 40

Deepak Jadhav: Yes, ma'am.

0:10:45

Neha Hooda: So like you mentioned that when you have this company coming from France and then you have Cartoon Network India catering to a very different target audience and it's the same kind of people working on both the shows. What are the differences in themes or in the specific areas that you can talk about?

0:10:58

Deepak Jadhav: Basically when it comes to Indian content, we had like, you know, we used to discuss a lot with these channels, broadcasters, because they have a dedicated R&D department which, you know, which does the research, ki abhi kya chalega, what will work now. Initially it was all about mythology, because Chhota Bheem was a really big success

and before that there was a first Indian TV series which got good reviews and good money was De Male Ravan, it was done by Toons, Kerala. Again after that, Vikram Betal, which was done by Rajiv again. Indian kids, they started liking it. And after that, he did Krishna. So, TV channel used to tell us that, you know, try to do something in mythology. So, again, they used to give us the idea, basic idea. And then, based on that idea, we used to create content. We used to show them concepts, basic characters, little bit of animation. So if they liked it, then we used to get the orders.

File name: MVI_1991.MOV

0:00:00

So coming to that kind of research, so I am understanding as a production house, you don't really have even the requirements but you get a brief from the client of course. Having said that would you agree or disagree with the point that across the last 10 years that we see the content which has come out, the way children are represented in terms of gender equality and themes that we see. Like lately we had the Me Too campaign going on and I saw a meme about you know how Krishna is picking on these clothes of the girls and Krishna is a very popular Indian series also in animation space. And because we've heard him, we've seen him to be the playful boy, young boy that he is. And that kind of gets translated into some sort of narrative that children start attaching themselves to. And there is a clear gender imbalance of always having a male protagonist. So whether you're talking Hanuman, Krishna, Mahabharat, Ramayana. So there aren't too many you know powerful female characters or playing like a lead character you see that way. So what is your take on that as a content maker?

0:01:05

Deepak Jadhav: See we actually used to develop a lot of own content. I just want to differ here that we had our R&D department always because there is one thing about artists. He'll listen to many ideas, but he'll always create his own content. So whenever I used to tell my people that see this is the requirement of channel and we have to do like that, my people create more content as options. You know some of them they are like, ki ye bhi humne banaya hai, just have a look at it as well. So we used to have a department. Since beginning I always had a R&D department.

0:01:40

Neha Hooda: In terms of the storyline as well?

0:01:42

Deepak Jadhav: Storyline, concept, you know everything. We used to have ideas like why don't we go in this zone. And our kids who are like exposed to western shows, they wanted to see something like Ben 10 at that time. You know like Ben 10 and there was one more show which was like...

0:01:59

Neha Hooda: Bob the Builder was very big.

0:02:03

Deepak Jadhav: These are all Nickelodeon shows, very popular ones.We used to work in that genre. Coming back to your Me-Too things, we never thought any, you know like, we never had a particular reason that we should not make shows on girls or something like that. It is channels who used to tell us that even if we give that thing, like I was working on one feature film called Shakuntala. I couldn't finish it because when I was doing that film, initially I got good reviews, like this is a good subject. But later on I used to see the channel was very reluctant. They would say, No, no, no, this subject will not work. We don't want girl subject.

0:02:20:

Neha Hooda: Why do you think it is like that?

Deepak Jadhav:
0:02:25

I don't know. I don't know what their research team is telling them. Till today, till now, I can bet and tell you, even if we take the shows, like the ones we are already working now, I'm sure they will not accept it. Because somehow their R&D or their research team is not accepting it. Maybe India, this is the thing, you know.

0:03:08

Neha Hooda: So I was reading through a research, it was a research which was backed up by a UN report. And it said that across the world, 40% of people who are glued on to the television sets are children. And a huge majority of that 40% comes from developing nations. And to my understanding, in a place like India or China, you know, we have this forever happening population boom. Generally speaking, when we go to schools , definitely there is an imbalance of the ratio but there is still a very strong population of you know the female child as well. So when you go and you are only addressing issues of like a male child being a protagonist do you somewhere not feel that a large section of the target audience is being missed out?

0:03:55

Deepak Jadhav: Yes we in fact had an argument about this and I remember like once one channel gave me a very surprising research they said this, generally there are girls aged 8 to 10 who are like the main audience is 8 to 10, 6 to 8 or 8 to 10 so let's say 6 to 10 girls between 8 to 10 they tend to move their you know this television watching from TV series like cartoon, sorry, from animation channels or kids channels to the general entertainment channel. That was their research. They say that girls between 8 to 10, they have shifted their interest to the general entertainment channel category. And we thought, okay, maybe they are right because they have done a lot of research

0:04:50

Neha Hooda: But how would they know this? Because what I am aware of they have their own research teams right? You know there are these TRP rating systems and correct me if I am wrong but all it does is it is just going to go and tap on that at a particular time across these number of households a particular program is being watched but I don't think that can tell you that what is the demographic of that audience whether it's a girl, it's a boy, it's a child, it's a grown-up. How do you differentiate that?

0:05:18

Deepak Jadhav: See what you say is exactly right you cannot judge who's the one who's watching that show whether it's a boy or a girl but again there is one calculation they had is

like you know this TV shows, Saas Bahu kind of shows these shows were like as per TRP were really high in the afternoon.

0:05:40
Neha Hooda: Yeah.

0:05:41
Deepak Jadhav: And the prime time like 8 to 9. So, they did the survey, they used to survey like in Mumbai, Delhi, where they would ask questions to these housewives. Maybe that's where they got and even their kids are watching these shows.

0:05:58
Neha Hooda: Okay.

0:06:01
Deepak Jadhav: Okay. That's the only thing I know.

0:06:03
Neha Hooda: But would you agree on a more organized scale, there is no real mechanism to gauge the target audience and their tastes and preferences and needs for that matter?

0:06:13
Deepak Jadhav: See, in an organized way it is not there, that's true. But that's where the things are changing now. Now for animation things are really really good. You know, Internet TV is coming, Amazon, Netflix, they have their different way of calculating the whole thing. And I feel they'll do much, much better than what TV channels are doing now. Like Bahubali, for example. Bahubali, I don't think any cartoon channel will take it. Because for them, this is not a subject, as per them, this is not a subject which kids will like. Surprisingly, Amazon Prime after their first season, they had come up with different calculations. When we saw that we were very happy you know. This Bahubali is covering

from the age of like 8 to 16. So this is not only for kids, this is for the adults. So they call it kidults. And similarly now they have ratings like which show is famous, who is watching it, because of the log-in they understand whether it is a boy or girl, what age and everything they understand. So they have got this different demographics where they feel now the next target area is the girls. And we have been told to think in that line now. So we are now planning to make some concepts for them and let's see how it goes.

0:07:40

Neha Hooda: So what do you think are the key themes that are surfacing now given you know we have this Internet television happening and there's always a seamless movement of content across different media verticals I'd say. So what do you think are the changes that have come in comparison. Let's just talk about the last five years because last five years have had a lot of changes taking place. So in terms of, like this is an example that you gave. So what would be the particular themes that you would pinpoint?

0:08:08

Deepak Jadhav: The best part now is like, now these calculations are very sharp. Like, not we can say sharp, but- But it's a little more reliable, you could say. Exactly, it is more reliable now. And thanks to this small screens, now in one house you have only one television. But you have 6-7 tabs or 6-7 phones. So everybody has their own personal screen where they want to watch the shows. Similarly, even girls now they have their own choices. But the moment they log in, the moment they start watching their shows, they get the idea, who's watching it and what is the demographics. You can see this in youtube. They have done it reall well. Once I think like in 2014 we had a visit from this Google team, youtube team and they came up with this all big graphs and everything. They told us like these are the areas. This area like preschool which is like from 2 to 4 is one market which is gonna be really really big. After that they were saying that next area is the girl content you know like, there are girl watchers and there are Barbie shows and all, they told us like, even in India we have to think that way but I feel we should not restrict only for that area because everyday you have to produce new content, for this channels like for this Internet TV, for them the main challenge is the content. New content. They have to throw good or bad, they have to throw new content. Then only their TV will survive, their Internet TV will survive. So, we are, I

personally don't want to restrict myself only for one target area or one age group. I want to go right from 2 year to 20 year. Or rather you can say like you know 25-40 no problem. Animation should be considered just as a media of you know of entertainment not like in India animation where it is basically a cartoon. Oh you watch cartoon. Yeah it's a preconceived notion. Yeah yeah I have like animation studio I have so many people working for me. Trust me my wife never watches animation she never comes for any animation films because she says, no, it's boring, it's for kids, not for me. So, that's the situation.

0:10:34
Neha Hooda: But would you agree to it, that animation is only for children and not for adults?

0:10:38
Deepak Jadhav: No, because, see, I travel so much, you know, I travel a lot, and when I went to Tokyo, I realized, they have almost equal number of feature films released in animation like live-action.

0:10:52
Deepak Jadhav: They have a very specific genre called animes and themes that they pick up over there are not I think they are equally as good as what you would have for a mainstream live-action. Yes, yes, see again I'm telling you they don't think of animation as a cartoon or you know kids area. They take animation as a media. There is like a very famous director, Miyazaki, if you watch all his films, they are on very serious notes, not like a film made for kids or something like that. They consider animation just as a media where the director controls everything. In live action, this may happen that you have a concept and when you go to the actor, things changes. But in animation, you can control everything. You're the one who's directing, you're the one who's drawing, making storyboard, and you're the one who's doing the animation direction. So everything in your control.

0:11:50
Neha Hooda: So if you look at three markets, let's talk about the section of, you know, we have Tokyo, we have Korea, there's a lot of content being generated, getting generated in

these spaces, Japan and all these places, then you have India and then you have the larger part of Europe and the Americas. What do you think are the differences in themes and content aspects? Because say for instance, Nickelodeon is not an Indian channel, it's not a European, it's an American channel.

File name: MVI_1992.MOV

0:00:00

Neha Hooda: Bob the Builder which has played in America, which has played in Europe, which has played in India and I'm assuming it would be in other countries as well. So there is one kind of content coming into India. Then from the east side you could say you have Shin Chan which has come in, it's entered into Indian homes, you have Doraemon which is a very different kind of work altogether. How do you think globally these themes are interacting with each other and how are they impacting the audience?

0:00:28

Deepak Jadhav: See, first you have to understand one thing. When you say this, you have to take the reverse market. I don't know whether you know this or not. In Europe, you can't really show your content there. They have the body, this broadcaster's body there, where they approve the content. The government there does not allow outsiders content because they want to develop their own industry right similarly in Japan you will never ever see any Indian or any what do you call this French show running on the like prime time they have their own shows on prime time you can't like you know in Europe I think it's only 22% that is allowed to show the foreign content so there is no logic. This is the only thing which is called business. In India this thing has come up in like what in 80s? I remember He-Man. He-Man used to be a very big one? Yeah. Very powerful. It's not about the big or small. It's that was the only available thing at that time. Okay. So that was the show which Dhoordarshan used to play. And i've like recently, not recently, like four years back I understood they used to pay a lot of money to get such shows so when this content started coming more and more content started generating. Why that content has come to India? You see they did their business in their own country now they started selling outside like whatever money they get was a good money so like rightly you said, Nickelodeon is an American channel. So, they'll play more of their work first. Whether it's Bob The Builder or it's like Shin-Chan from TV Asahi. Our kids are exposed to that.

Like, when I remember, for me, Telephone was a big thing. 2000 like all of a sudden pager came. Immediately Mobile came and then mobile had many varieties. I never thought I will have a phone which will scroll down the screen, but it happened. It happened for my father. It was a shocking thing. You know he was really shocked similarly many families in India realized that……Same with content like cartoons…

0:02:50
Deepak Jadhav: There will be so many cartoon channels.

0:02:51
Deepak Jadhav: Initially there was only one channel. Slowly channel increased. It's simple thing of demand and supply.

0:02:57
Deepak Jadhav: Which I believe there is a lot of demand for this kind of content happening today. It's a big market.

0:03:01
Deepak Jadhav: Big country like India where everyone can throw in their content and we'll gobble it up.

0:03:08
Neha Hooda: True.

0:03:09
Deepak Jadhav: Initially it was like you know, kind of more of like a... What do you call that? It was like a... For English speaking kids used to watch this. But slowly there was a big thing happened like you know change that is cable TV. Cable TV came all of a sudden there were like 3 channels before and now 30, 40 channels. This thing is part of globalization you know. We are a developing country. So these things, I will not be surprised if slowly I start seeing

that kids will have their own private theatres. Like I have heard this, I am not sure about it, that youtube is now working with youtube Kids. Where every kid can have his own theatre or own library where he will dump this kind of show he wants to watch or it will be dumped by his demographics that what are the things kids keep on watching slowly those thing will start coming there. This again is demand and supply.

0:04:14
Neha Hooda: So do you think youtube is making our children more intelligent in terms of accessibility to content?

0:04:19
Deepak Jadhav: Their technology is making kids more intelligent now. Means my kids are really good when it comes to playing games. We are a gaming company also, right? I don't know, many of our own artists don't play the game. But my kids are really, really good in games. They are very fast. They are very focused. Technology is making them really smart. Now, I don't know where exactly this will take us, lead us. But one thing is sure is now there is a bigger market and like less restrictions.

0:04:56
Neha Hooda: So when we talk about children's market we're not only looking at television, we're looking at cinema, we're looking at apps, we're looking at online, we're looking at games also, small screen, all of it is included. So if we go back to the times of you know when we had, there's a time we had He-Man and all these things and we had Tarzan and jump from that to the current day Doraemon who has this magical door. There's a drastic change that has come in the content generation themes. So do you think the content which is being generated today is addressing the needs of the children, of the audience? Areyoutube and the online portals are becoming more mainstream than TV is? There's a lot of content but television films still do not have a very clear framework of understanding the target.

0:05:59
Deepak Jadhav: Yes.

0:05:59

Neha Hooda: Do you think somewhere this content generation process of today is addressing the complexities that the child is facing today and addressing those needs and demands?

0:06:09

Deepak Jadhav: See, primarily I will say no because these channels like whatever TV channels we have, none of them are like an Indian channel, Indian origin channel except Zee or something like that. So the main thing is they have to show their own content first and then they have a target of making like a country-centric content.

0:06:32

Neha Hooda: They customize it somehow.

0:06:33

Deepak Jadhav: Yeah, customize. For that they have their so-called research center, etc. So see, now in India it's like always a fever, you know. I remember Slapstick, you said, Slapstick was there way back…And i'll give credit to a lady from Nickelodeon called Anu Sikka. She saw this Oogie and Cockroaches, she bought it to India. She made it Indianized. Oogie Cockroach again doesn't have dialogues. She made like she added Indian dialogues with using this Bollywood style.

0:07:10

Deepak Jadhav: And Oogie and Cockroaches has a very different style of you know talking. They don't talk at all. But there are these dialogues that kind of play in the background.

0:07:20

Deepak Jadhav: That's what Anu Sikka has added. She added this narration to that and again that she has added like famous characters mimic voices. So if you if you ask my kids to watch Oggy and Cockroaches like muting the sound they'll not watch it. They watch it because they like this idea. So see we in India like how we make Indian Chinese. Correct. It's a simple thing , Xilam made the movie cockroaches keeping something else in mind but now

they're focusing on India. So when Nickelodeon started doing this it became a really big show and initial episode was sold for $50 you know. $50 one episode. Like a peanut price. But when Xilam realized, oh this is like a big deal, you know, this has been playing whole day, like a hammering on kids, so they made some changes in their contract. But by that time this requirement became so big, again demand and supply, that Nickelodeon told them, okay, you produce show for us, we will pay. Okay, it's that big. Yeah, that's big. Now there's a fight between Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network. Sometime I heard it's like you can see Oogie and Cockroaches everywhere. So, center, main point is content.

0:08:38

Neha Hooda: Ok, about characters. If you've seen how Nobita speaks, you know, how Nobita is always very critical about the mother, always trying to and there is not a very respectful relationship that we see there. When we see that Nobita is crying about oh you know the mother will come and this is how she will behave and when we even look at how you know people are talking and again cockroaches the way they are talking there's a certain way the way you know the dialogue delivery happens and children are imitating that. So, do you think that's right if as a parent I were to ask you this, would you approve of this?

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Deepak Jadhav: No, obviously not.

0:09:16

Deepak Jadhav: But you have to realize one thing, you know. See, as I told you, we are a developing country and so many things are changing in India right now. So we don't know where we are going. And this will take time. See, right now I feel the whole thing is changing so rapidly, maybe down the line after one decade or two decades, things will be more streamlined. Now, our kids are exposed to content, everything including violence and many other things. The one which you said, the way they talk. I remember there was a show called Mr.Beans. Because they are doing same thing in school like he used to put his finger in the nose and that was a common thing for them. So kids they tend to follow the thing. They like it, they follow it. But slowly this will change. Now Lot of content is coming. My kids if you ask him what show you like? He has 10 shows. Because he has more variety.

0:10:28

Neha Hooda: So what would be the shows that you would recommend as a content producer, content maker and as a parent that you would say, you know, these are good shows that are in the interest of children and what would be those few shows that you would say, you know, these should be definitely taken off the air?

0:10:44

Deepak Jadhav: I see, me being in this business, I really can't say that.

0:10:48

Neha Hooda: Okay, let's talk about as a parent.

Deepak Jadhav:

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As a parent, I feel whatever shows they are watching now are like, okay, fairly good shows. I never saw them watching which you felt, you know, Nobita things or maybe that Mr. Bean thing. I really don't mind that. I feel anything, they can watch anything. You see, when we see everything, when we follow these developing countries like America and Europe, this thing is going to happen here also. There also kids are exposed to watching anything. Though there is a parental control or etc. But for my kids, I have no issues. Let them accept this the side content they can watch everything. There are no... Because they have their own choices. Like my kid he liked this unboxing thing. Which I don't understand. Why he liked that unboxing? But he likes it. He watched many... He started like checking many other unboxings. Now he has got so much knowledge that he can tell you which toy has come in the market. You know and what is the price of that toy, how famous that toy is, etc. This is one thing. This is one thing. There is other, like, they like sports games also, like cricket, football, they follow...

File name: MVI_1993.MOV

0:00:00

Neha Hooda: So again, but they don't want to watch the live action, they want to watch the animation.Why is that? Why is it that live action is so... You know, animation tends to be so much more attractive than live action?

0:00:11
Deepak Jadhav: It's colourful.

0:00:13
Neha Hooda:Okay.

0:00:13
Deepak Jadhav: It's colours, you know, it's colourful, good music which makes them... Like, they have to watch it more and more.

0:00:21
Neha Hooda: Could we say it's more imaginative as well?

0:00:23
Deepak Jadhav: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you can say that, yeah, right. It's more imaginative. Live action, see, slowly things will change. I remember my nephew used to watch these shows, Oggyy and Cockroaches. Now he's in 10th standard. At least since he became 14-15 years. He doesn't watch any of them. Now he likes Bahubali. He's watching shows which are more serious. With the age, this will change.

0:00:49
Neha Hooda: So with the series of Bahubali, what are the key themes? Like in the film that we saw, that women have been projected as some very key people, strong, energetic people. They don't have like a secondary role, per se, as in like, you know, they are not depicted as the bechari, the besahara woman, yeah? They are taken to be very strong, they're fighters, they're warriors, like that. So, is it the same thing that is being translated into the series as well?

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Deepak Jadhav: Yes. You can say it's a continuation or maybe it's like a prequel, you know. They are telling you why this Bahubali thing is there.

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Neha Hooda: I'm assuming you would be sitting with the team as well, so do these kind of things come in the conversation as to what are the themes that should be taken up or should have a change because in India when we talk about representation of certain things, if you talk about live action, there are very few films that will be female led. It is considered to be somewhat a risky proposition still. So mostly we have these male protagonist films that do well. However, in Bahubali we did see a change. So there was Shiv Gami who was the torchbearer of things. And then we had Avantika who was a fighter in her own right. So when the new generation or the new breed of filmmakers are sitting, are you genuinely making a conscious effort to be undoing these kind of conventions that exist?

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Deepak Jadhav: We are doing that because see again we are doing it with the research of like a need of the time now that has to be done because this area like this target segment is increasing… okay… they are watching all these shows but they now want to watch something very serious. We are trying to make a show where we want to show the girl power. Girl power is two things. They spend more than kids, more than boys. And we can sell many accessories with that. So we also want to use that girl power.

0:02:57

Neha Hooda: So there is a marketing strategy built into it.

0:02:59

Deepak Jadhav: Yes, there is a marketing strategy. And I feel that is like a more powerful way of doing business where you see profit and loss. Demand and supply.

0:03:09
Neha Hooda: Great.

0:03:11
Neha Hooda: So what would be the final question for now is that you know what would be your ultimate kind of theme that you as a director would want to make in the animation or the VFX space or the live action space talking about children's content? What would work?

0:03:30
Deepak Jadhav: I don't want to restrict myself only for the kids or children. For me animation is a media. And I would like to follow Japanese way of doing animation. I am working. I am trying to make a short film where I really want to do what I want to do. Not like what I have to do for the market sake.

0:03:52
Neha Hooda: But you know in terms of a theme, what would the themes be? Because the today's generation, whether you are talking a pre-schooler, you are talking about a young child or a young adult or grown-ups, everyone is facing some sort of the challenge because the way we are bombarded with technology and information coming on to us, it's not the most easy space to be in as if it was you know probably about 30 years back. So from that perspective what would be that one theme that you're keen on exploring as a filmmaker?

0:04:22
Deepak Jadhav: See again, it's very confusing. If you say as a film maker or as a businessman, there are two things. As a film maker, whatever I want to create, which will satisfy myself. I'm not worried whether people will like it or not, whether it will sell out or not. That's not my area of interest. For me, I want to... I'm really impressed by this Japanese film makers. The one who made Paprika. That is like, you know, it has gone in my mind. So similarly, I want to do the short, i'll see many good short films. Like every week something or other comes up. So, for me, I want to use that as a media, use animation as a media, because I'm an artist. I know how to draw a storyboard, I don't need lights, cameras, action, I can do

on my own. And I have people who can animate for me. I'm working on a short film where I want to focus more on fantasy thing which is like a dream concept you know which you can only imagine you cannot do.

0:05:29

Neha Hooda: So given that most of the education that we have happening in film and media schools is more towards the technological enablement of the student being there. Do you think in your opinion that research in the creative aspects in the content side or these kind of areas that are still very subtle and quite soft in the nature is required and would be beneficial for the society?

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Deepak Jadhav: Yes of course because see in India like again we we do only for like this need sake but if you have a better research, if you have a better planning, if you have a proper education I myself always feel that I would have got to some school where I would have got a proper knowledge. I learned this like you know. As and when it came to me and just to make the business. I learned it but now things are really going good means there are institutes like NID, i've seen your Symbiosis. I was really surprised, you know, the way they are planning. Education is always important. Research is always important. There is no doubt about it. Because that's where you will get the good content. Now there is a lot of c*** content. It's not even worth watching. But still it is there. Still they have got good hits. They are surviving. They are making money. I will not take names of the channels. But some kids channels I have watched, they are shit. They are not good but they're working. They are making money. So you have to see it from the two-perspective - making money or you're just putting a certain kind of stale bread on the shelf. You will consume it (stale content) if you have better options. Now kids are very smart they want to watch only good content…okay… it's not like you know too late for anything. I think down the line in 5 years things will change. No, this bad content or this chalu content will not work.

0:07:24

Neha Hooda: Do you think me doing research is sensible in this area?

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Deepak Jadhav: Yes, of course.

0:07:29

Deepak Jadhav: See, I am doing, a youtube channel. I am working with one company for their youtube channel. And they are like two ladies that are trying to do it. I love their enthusiasm, the way they are thinking. They are like too much, sometimes I feel they are thinking too much yaar. But at the end when the product is finishing, it is looking good. Me, if I take that as a business, i'll try to finish it as fast as possible. But for them, they're taking their own sweet time to make it. And slowly this will happen. Because they have understood one thing, you know, this normal content or unplanned content will not work. So content is king. And you doing research is really good because that's going to work ultimately.

0:09:15

Neha Hooda: Good. Thank you for letting me know. And your time.

10. Appendix I: Transcript of interview with Alban Amikat, Animation professional

Date: Dec 20, 2020

Venue: Online- Zoom

Notes: Interview done in the producer's personal capacity as a professional and not to be linked as an endorsement by and of his organization. This was the second interview with him in which he permitted the recording of the session. During the first interview, it was requested that no notes or recording be done.

00;01;09;23 - 00;01;39;19

Neha Hooda: I'm so grateful, you know, that you've been able to take out to time for this interview. I think it's extremely crucial. I think it's very, very crucial for people who are actually in the process of content generation to be able to, you know, speak out what they say.

00;01;39;19 - 00;02;04;24

Neha Hooda: Because I don't think, you know, the quality changes. I don't think the market changes, and I don't think the audience is able to really connect with the content makers unless, you know, these conversations happen regularly, which is without restriction. Well, you know what your organization may want you to say or not. So, I think that is what the most important driving force is for me to reach you.

00;02;05;05 - 00;02;21;07

Neha Hooda: So why don't you give me a brief introduction about yourselves? Your name & about the organization and what is it that you are currently involved with?

00;02;22;14 - 00;03;10;01

Alban Amikat: OK, so, OK, so I'm Alban Amikat. 28 years old and I started working slightly earlier in life because I had this notion that while I have always topped my class since school, right up to university, I thought that it was not the education, but more like the work experience. The hands-on work, that is what is required in this particular field…I never went for the very specialized animation but more like for a general, a generalist.

00;03;10;17 - 00;03;28;14

Alban Amikat: OK, sort of, like a creative but at the same time a producer who also looks at budgets in the sense, timelines, you know, vendor management, artist management, basically all this sort of work. So, in that space, I started out in short format. This was supposed to be a short introduction.

00;03;35;08 - 00;04;00;04

Alban Amikat: So I started at Cartoon Network when they dissolved. They had a promotions team in Hong Kong and decided to shift this to India because they were catering for the Indian diaspora. And they wanted to have people who are from here so that the ads we make, the promos we make - short format content is for the people know.

00;04;00;16 - 00;04;18;11

Alban Amikat: And that's when I was hired. That was my first full time job. Before that, I did a bunch of stuff, freelance. I worked there for five and a half years. While I was in the promos team. I did that for about three years. I realized that short format, which is the promotion of some long format content, is not really about heart.

00;04;18;11 - 00;04;42;00

Alban Amikat: Heart is more in the creation of the actual product itself. That's how I moved to original productions. I did that for about two years or what….and currently I work at Disney, which is the organization, so I moved from corporate network to Disney because there was more. So, Walt Disney was taking up more projects.

00;04;42;00 - 00;05;01;12

Alban Amikat: I saw that there was more potential for my career to advance, for me to learn most importantly. And that's how this is where I am right now at Disney. I have been doing animation at Disney for…I complete three years now. The show, the last animation show, it is going to get over by the end of this month.

00;05;01;19 - 00;05;34;20

Alban Amikat: So which means two months shy of doing animation for three years in Disney but as of right now, my role has just shifted laterally. And I work in a department called Impact Projects. What we do is we look at ways how we can build live action stuff, which is something that the Indian or young audience, young target audience would find interesting and something relatable, something that they want to watch, something that entertains them.

00;05;34;20 - 00;05;52;08

Alban Amikat: Like, you know, once the show is over, that's what I'm doing. Apart from that, just for the camera, just for the record, whatever I say in terms of whatever it is, my opinion that it is, be mine. Not for any of these organizations but the way it has been for me or in this case. Yeah.

00;05;53;02 - 00;06;27;16

Neha Hooda: Absolutely. There are two key things that I kind of would like to pick on from what you just mentioned. The first would be that you talked about two very big entities that operate in the Indian media market at the moment. So how do you differentiate between Cartoon Network so in terms of the work they do, the kind of programs they bring out and the kind of programing strategies they use versus what Disney is doing that's the first question.

00;06;27;28 - 00;06;58;10

Neha Hooda: And the second question that I would like to have your thoughts on is that you spoke about your move to live action. Traditionally speaking, you know, it's the animation space that was always considered to excite children. But, you know, it's amply clear that that the shift is gradually happening. So, I would like you to elaborate a bit more on that on this aspect, why live action is coming in.

00;06;58;18 - 00;07;13;24

Neha Hooda: And also, you know, if you could just specify the age group of children that you're talking about. So, we could begin with the first question, which is a Cartoon Network versus Disney content. What do you think it is?

00;07;13;24 - 00;07;53;28

Alban Amikat: That's a very that's a very simple answer. Both are amazing, and great organizations. But Disney, in what I have seen is… they are more in terms of…they are the more… they're like a traditional company in that sense. Whereas Cartoon Network was traditional… but around the time that I was leaving, and they were having the whole AT&T merger conversations going on… is when they decided that… hey, we need to start selling and we need to start doing it fast, taking as many risks as possible.

00;07;54;09 - 00;08;18;08

Alban Amikat: So that was happening. There was a lot of disruption happening at that point in Cartoon Network… but that's also when the Disney switch happened because for me it wasn't that Cartoon Network was bad and that's why I was going for Disney. In fact, just before I left, the last thing I had at Cartoon Network was a job offer from Singapore because they loved my work in Mumbai.

00;08;18;08 - 00;08;52;00

Alban Amikat: They wanted me to come and join the bigger team over at Singapore. At that point I was 25 and I thought that I was not ready to leave Mumbai because as for me, Mumbai was and India was the market that excited me more. Whereas I do feel that a lot of the countries that are a bit more developed or rather that developed sooner than us in terms of their broadcasting programing strategies, I do feel that a lot of those markets are a bit saturated.

00;08;52;07 - 00;09;12;01

Alban Amikat: So there's a lot of play in the Indian market. There's a lot that you can still try to do and people will not say to you, arey yeh to dekha hua hai, like we've seen this before. So for me, finding a way to stay back in India and then Disney came up with this hey we want someone, I applied for that. It was an extremely tough fight.

00;09;12;16 - 00;09;34;26

Alban Amikat: I only got in because the final or the final feather granted me my wish and broke the camel’s back was I guess Shilpa Verma. Because she was already at Disney and

she's already been someone I reported to, had been my the leader of the department earlier and that was a good opportunity for me that that happened.

00;09;36;09 - 00;10;17;23

Alban Amikat: Now that I'm in Disney, it's amazing over here. And just to be clear on the current situation with the live action, we haven't stopped making animation. We haven't stopped endorsing animation. There's a lot of it still going on. It's just that we are continuing that. But me personally specifically, I'm moving sideways to do something else in order for this to be more beneficial and fruitful for me as a person…you know to grow….and the fact that I manage to find, to receive this opportunity within the same company, within the same city…

00;10;18;15 - 00;10;23;27

Alban Amikat: It's in a way quite wonderful that I managed to get it.

00;10;24;05 - 00;10;57;00

Neha Hooda: That is truly amazing but I am also trying to gauge, that, you know, that I think it's a very…do you…do you feel that the child audience as such has changed from I mean, you've been in the children's programing for a very long time now. Five, six years. It's a very, very dynamic market. Localization is big. There's a lot of Indian content being put out. There's a lot of Indian content going global as well. So, in that span, how do you see that? What do you think is the trajectory of the content as such from when you started to now…?

00;10;58;06 - 00;11;11;12

Neha Hooda: How is, you know, the process of content creation or being perceived by content makers... In the light of the technological developments that have happened in the light of you know, policy changes that might have happened.

00;11;13;08 - 00;11;42;24

Alban Amikat: Yeah. So when I started seven and a half years back and specifically within the kids genre, which I know, which is like a very tiny slice of the media pie in India… at that point, the entire motive behind making animation, I would say, was to go local. Like we have a lot of stuff and a lot of that has been made ages ago.

00;11;42;24 - 00;12;03;03

Alban Amikat: For example, Tom & Jerry and MGM and the Hanna-Barbera studios and we have all of that and all that is great. But what is it that we have that's local and that was the birth of Chhota Bheem. And then next, then technology came in and said, here we can do a lot more now we can make our characters look a bit shinier, a bit more clean.

00;12;03;03 - 00;12;30;14

Alban Amikat: We can try to not stay in this current level where we are. And probably if we just maybe train our specialized like the animators and the skilled workers, the skilled workforce, we can take that 2D technologically to the next step, which is 3D. And that's when the whole Motu Patlus and the Shivas and all came into the picture. And that seemed like the next step.

00;12;31;09 - 00;13;00;18

Alban Amikat: But in my experience, what is happening is… technologically as we are advancing, we are now also in a very weird sense of term approaching Moore's Law, and the more we are advancing the advancements from one milestone to the other is almost becoming negligible. To a point that it almost feels like the better way is to go backwards…

00;13;00;20 - 00;13;28;13

Alban Amikat: And where I stand today, it seems like as if Tom and Jerry is coming back. Friends is coming back because the 10,000 web series that are being created as of right now are probably a very big ocean. And I am probably a bit perplexed with the amount of options I'm given. And therefore, I want comfort food and I know what that is.

00;13;28;28 - 00;13;36;29

Alban Amikat: And my comfort food is basically me going backwards in time. I don't know if it makes sense.

00;13;37;11 - 00;13;47;16

Neha Hooda: I think to be honest, even now there are times when I wake up in the morning with my breakfast, I will still watch like Tom & Jerry like I would in my childhood.

00;13;47;27 - 00;13;48;18

Alban Amikat: Yeah. See.

00;13;49;24 - 00;14;16;19

Neha Hooda: This one thing I do as a very regular basis, but you know, that's because I grew up on Tom & Jerry. So, it is some nostalgia for me and just some it's it's not just comfort food. It just looks like a security blanket. But essentially, you know, we understand that as Disney, Cartoon Network or Nickelodeon, these kinds of channels don't really have us adults as their key target audience.

00;14;16;19 - 00;14;45;27

Neha Hooda: You know, they're essentially targeting the children. So how do you think our children are kind of relating to this kind of content? Because see, I mean, we as grown-ups, as adults, when we would sit in the decision chair, we would obviously have our own ideas of how we look at content, what works and what doesn't work. So, we have a nostalgia value attached to these old-loving characters we have grown up on. So how do you think it works for the children?

00;14;49;10 - 00;15;20;23

Alban Amikat: Well, personally for me, the way it is working for a child is the way it is working for me, because I don't hold that as my baseline of my thinking process, my thought process. I am in a very subconscious way, having some levels of being condescending to the thought process of another person, even if that person may be 20 years younger or 25 years younger, I'm 28.

00;15;21;17 - 00;15;54;09

Alban Amikat: That person hears something interesting, funny and laughs. Yeah. And my key aim is to find that joke or to find that goofy moment that makes that young adult laugh the same way as I would expect me, a grown-up child to laugh…. So that we are on the same page. So, bearing that in mind, whatever new we do, the format can always be a very loose format.

00;15;54;09 - 00;16;27;12

Alban Amikat: Like you can make another five movies or another 5 million movies with the same basic premise of …aahh, of a guy falling in love with a girl and the girl's parents don't agree. Yeah, but this basic mould can take you in a million different directions depending upon how you want to use it, and…. Who would find it funny and in the who would find that funny or who would find it intriguing… it has to be you first.

00;16;28;11 - 00;16;48;27

Alban Amikat: And if you find it intriguing and you find it funny, the rest just follow because you can either tell yourself you're making this for the child. And if the child likes it, his brother will like it. Or you can tell yourself that, hey, I'm just making this to entertain it or just for it to be good for everyone.

00;16;49;12 - 00;17;18;03

Alban Amikat: And automatically it's going to be a trend and automatically people are going to be following or working on creating what you're cooking. The important or the only point to bear in mind while doing something like that is to be very, very or careful of what is being propagated, because I will see something that's not exactly right. And not think so much of it.

00;17;18;04 - 00;17;49;22

Alban Amikat: I have 100 other thoughts and I'm probably I have also other things to think about. But younger minds or having lesser curves on the brain probably are more malleable, more impressionable. And so that is one very strong... Glowing in their dark neon but thin line that we keep for ourselves, that they're always propagating what's good…

00;17;50;01 - 00;18;19;03

Alban Amikat: And that's also my personal philosophy because it's something that I take from something that Miyazaki believes in also …who's one of the founders of Ghibli. Oh, and, and he also said that I don't want to show like the bad and the gore and the bad that can happen to humans in my cartoons. I want the stories to end happily and to end on a good note because there's a lot of bad around already.

00;18;19;20 - 00;18;39;12

Alban Amikat: So why should I be the one to show it? They are anyway going to get to see it. I mean, if there's a kid in Syria, he can see the refugees walking on the road. So I don't want to be the one to make a cartoon on refugees. I want to make a cartoon on Alps and Heidi and there's cheese and you can run in the fields and there's breeze and the trees and now it feels like they are talking to you and life is amazing.

00;18;39;12 - 00;19;04;10

Alban Amikat: So if in the moment also you can sort of get your peace by looking out of the window, you may find your peace by breaking into a world of fantasy. And that's where animation is perhaps a medium. I would choose over live action when I want to, you know, send someone off to fantasy, calm them down, make them have a good time, and then come back.

00;19;04;19 - 00;19;11;14

Alban Amikat: So, that's the breakout room from the current reality, which as of right now, 20, 20 is not great.

00;19;12;05 - 00;19;41;21

Neha Hooda: And that's true. That's true. I was actually speaking with some of the colleagues I work with, and there's a big OTT platform. It's an international platform which has kind of very clear instructions that no content that comes out needs to have any reference to the covid situation or people writing masks because you know, some people are looking into media as a means to escape the reality, which all of a sudden has become so extremely harsh.

00;19;42;09 - 00;20;06;23

Neha Hooda: So here's my next question. COVID happened…and generally, you know, prior to COVID, it was a very simple understanding that media was often used as a means to educate children about things that were happening in the world and used as a tool to equip them with skills. You know, there are a lot of shows which taught children how to tie laces.

00;20;06;23 - 00;20;39;10

Neha Hooda: Teach children how to eat food, how to make friends, how to do things around in their life. So…So do you find that …what have been the conversations surrounding the content during this time of COVID? Because I'm assuming like other global platforms who are very mindful of the fact that people are essentially looking at content as a means of escape and what's happening around them, especially from time.

00;20;39;19 - 00;20;55;25

Neha Hooda: And yet we would trust maybe sometimes content for younger children to help them or, you know, gain important things like, you know, wear a mask, maybe wash hands or what what's the new normal and content space for children as of today?

00;20;59;00 - 00;21;06;24

Neha Hooda: Oh, did you have any conversations surrounding this or through your time over the last seven, eight months or so?

00;21;06;25 - 00;21;34;02

Alban Amikat: So… our strategy or my strategy in whatever it is that I'm reviewing, whether just for a friend or the company I'm working in or it is reviewing the projects of students in the school or college where I have been an alumni and they're seeking my help, whatever it is that I'm reviewing, I am treating it exactly the same way as I would have in December 2019.

00;21;34;02 - 00;22;02;21

Alban Amikat: So nothing has changed nothing. The only thing that has changed is… back then I would meet the person, probably the person …right now I do it videoconferencing, like this. And the only other thing that's not really a change, but something that benefits the industry and you would probably attest to this being in VFX is that there's a lot more work coming in.

00;22;03;12 - 00;22;46;07

Alban Amikat: So we continue to do what we do, what we do, which is to entertain. And, and of course every, every single global deliverer or outputer, is…is having their own backend

tick marks on whatever parameters that they need to fulfill. Maybe for me it is that I just want to entertain. But through my entertainment, I want to just ask… you know, like, just like give them hummus but put at least one or two herbs in there so that that is something that lingers at the back of their mind after they've eaten a seemingly bland dish.

00;22;48;01 - 00;23;14;22

Neha Hooda: That's an interesting way to put it… Show me with an example. So, you know, say you have a program. Ok, so what's a typical… Now it's a twofold question. What is a typical day for you as of now? And, you know, when you are looking at stories, when you…when you decide that, OK, we need to put a new program together, what is the typical progression of character to come into being?

00;23;14;22 - 00;23;24;02

Neha Hooda: What's the lifecycle? How does it come into being.

00;23;25;09 - 00;24;08;26

Alban Amikat: The situation has become a bit more challenging because the way this process works better is when you have…more variables and you are a variable and these variables are bouncing off…stuff off each other and you have good energy, bad energy, and you're basically just modeling clay and at the end of this brainstorm. This situation that you put yourself into with a bunch of people… at the end of it, you've modeled the something out of the clay… that is a little difficult now because you're doing it over… over videoconferencing.

00;24;08;26 - 00;24;31;05

Alban Amikat: And then when that happens it's also because who speaks when and technical difficulties. I mean we started our meeting half hour late so it's not just us. This happens on every meeting, on every video conference since the last seven or eight months. It's just so common. It is a thing that's the technical side of it. So that's a bit of a drawback though.

00;24;31;22 - 00;24;52;26

Alban Amikat: The, the other side of the typical day is that the effort is renewed that I have to work harder to tell a more positive story because the times are darker. It's like I'm sitting here to compensate for what's outside of the window, VS, what's on the screen. That's the process.

00;24;53;06 - 00;24;54;23 Neha Hooda: Isn't that nice?

00;24;55;12 - 00;25;22;27

Alban Amikat: That's the coolest thing. That's the coolest thing. Because when you're when your sadder it's more difficult to make you happier because you've gone down that end of the spectrum further…So to bring you back there's a lot trouble that has to happen towards the other side of the spectrum so and feeling like someone who not only has the power but the responsibility to do something like that.

00;25;23;07 - 00;25;41;18

Alban Amikat: It makes you feel …mmm…like I have to do this. And I think, yeah, sorry. And I think that apart from the fact that animation is booming now because… hey live action characters, we will have to take them to the set and then we will have to have a paramedic van on the side and people will have to be 6 feet away from each other.

00;25;41;18 - 00;25;58;16

Alban Amikat: And if you are not then I don't know …Tom Cruise will abuse you or whatever… Apart from that animation is so much simpler to now and so it's so much easier. You just do it in your house, you send them to see. They send you some feedback and then you send that back. It feels like that is one of the reasons why animation is booming.

00;25;58;29 - 00;26;31;00

Alban Amikat: But I also personally think that animation is booming right now because more now than ever, we need to feel the fantasy around us because more now than ever, we have been once again boxed to the four walls that we pay rent for and that survive in. Earlier that was not the case. You got what you wanted on television, and if that didn't work for you, you got it somewhere else and you could go out and there was a thousand things that you could do.

00;26;31;09 - 00;27;01;26

Alban Amikat: But now when you're boxed in and your only way of escaping is literally the screens that kind of puts added pressure, added responsibility on the animator. But it is the kind of pressure that you're thankful for. You want that kind of pressure to come onto you,

and you can feel like this is what i've been doing, but now I want to do it even better because now I know that there is a purpose…

00;27;02;13 - 00;27;05;04

Alban Amikat: But for me now the purpose makes more sense.

00;27;05;26 - 00;27;41;10

Neha Hooda: That brings me to think that, you know, that I'm assuming that…I look at my own self, you know, if it ever since the COVID thing has happen, I see myself very often starting my day with 20 minutes of Tom and Jerry and that's non-negotiable on certain days. Absolutely. And I don't think in the normal of world, I was watching so much Tom and Jerry, at least not at the start of the day, maybe middle or the end of the day, but it wasn't the start of the day like nowadays. It makes me wonder if your target audience has also increased maybe?

00;27;42;23 - 00;28;09;03

Neha Hooda: I mean, cartoons are funny and it's a great way to escape. It's a great way to put you in fantasy. Do you have any… I mean, I wonder, you know, if you have any some research statistics or something that points to the fact that maybe your audience size had increased in terms of the age group or has a decreased or maybe the amount of television which is being watched more is more or is it less?

00;28;11;04 - 00;28;37;16

Alban Amikat: So, I do not have a direct statistic to this or to put it a very different way, I have the statistics and the statistic tells me that the pie hasn't changed. But I know why the statistic is saying that. And the reason it is seen that is because for me, my target group majorly comes from single TV households.

00;28;37;29 - 00;29;10;09

Alban Amikat: OK, and the way the single TV household has progressed in India is that it has stayed a single TV household, and the second TV has become a 5000 or an 8000 Rupee mobile phone, something for which we or the telecommunications department doesn't have

an infrastructure in place to record or to monitor. It is being individually recorded and monitored by whoever the OTT provider is.

00;29;10;18 - 00;29;36;13

Alban Amikat: So, for example, Netflix will know who's spending how much time and whether in 2019 they had 500 people and now it's become 5000 people, which it has. I think they've been clear on that and that's across the board for all the players. But even if more kids are watching mobile phones now, they would have to find a different way to do it because the whole progress of single TV households has continued to see a single TV household.

00;29;36;13 - 00;30;18;02

Alban Amikat: And in fact I'm not sure if this is true. I don't have the statistic, but what I would be very interested to know… if newer houses, households that are probably more from lower income groups or from tier three cities at this point would be think that…do I really need to buy a TV and subscribe to a cable operator, be a weekly fee or can I just, you know, have a mobile phone for ₹8,000 and just watch on the kind of platforms that are ad supported.

00;30;18;02 - 00;30;21;00

Alban Amikat: They will not say all these things but that’s the thought process.

00;30;21;00 - 00;30;22;05

Neha Hooda: It is a sub-conscious thought.

00;30;22;21 - 00;30;55;08

Alban Amikat:Yeah I don't mind watching a thirty second ad because whatever comes after that is free and I am not paying 300 Rupees a month for it. And that's the thing I think which defines currently the markets that I function in because it's very different from for example, North America where you are ok to pay $80 to watch characters beat each other up on screen just one time on pay per view. That thing doesn't exist over here yet..

00;31;04;18 - 00;31;17;05

Alban Amikat: Oh definitely the other the other one statistic which is going to be very exciting for you is Tom and Jerry is starting to go up in the rankings.

00;31;17;09 - 00;31;25;23

Neha Hooda: I know the people responsible for it. I am one of them. But then Tom and Jerry is a classic. Would not love Tom & Jerry?

00;31;26;21 - 00;31;52;17

Alban Amikat: Yeah, but the point is that all this time it has been on television, it's the longest running cartoon showing the world. It's been on television all this while. But today is a Thursday. And Thursday is the day that the Indian media council BARC is what they call themselves. So BARC releases its ratings on Thursdays. And as of today's ratings, Tom & Jerry officially in numbers and statistics is going upwards.

00;31;52;17 - 00;31;53;28

Neha Hooda: Oh great.

00;31;54;11 - 00;32;00;04

Neha Hooda: And does it also say that what is the age group of people looking at this content?

00;32;00;04 - 00;32;43;00

Alban Amikat: It doesn't say that, but it is kind of very much tied in for me personally. It is very much tied into my own philosophy, which is initially my options were what the family was watching. So I was, I was eight and I had to like watch like a two weeks notice movie or I just had to go out and play or something.

00;32;43;00 - 00;33;05;08

Alban Amikat: I don't know, like at 8 what do you do? You have toys. Then I was at a point where my options for the options that were listed out in the TV schedule on page two or page three of the newspaper. So I knew, hey this is what I wanted to watch with the family but this thing is going to be repeat tomorrow in the afternoon at 2:30.

00;33;05;08 - 00;33;09;25

Alban Amikat: So, that's when i'll catch it. Yeah. Then that became my option.

00;33;12;13 - 00;33;48;00

Alban Amikat: Now, today it is. So weired…I can watch whatever I want on youtube and then Netflix and then Prime and then that is Sony and Discovery and Zee and MX Player and there's like a thousand things. If I don't like Indian soap anymore, I can watch a Turkish soap. Like, that's where it is today. And I believe in this and that too much or too many options just scares me, just confuses me.

00;33;48;26 - 00;34;19;06

Alban Amikat: And as a result, I remember watching No Country for Old Men almost four years back, so I almost don't remember what happened. Then let me go back and see… that's where I am today… instead of, hey, Netflix just released something new. Let me watch it. An…d and you would have obviously noticed I'm probably not being of much help on this call that everything that I speak and that I speak of has me at the center of that experience.

00;34;19;08 - 00;34;46;28

Alban Amikat: It is probably not of a lot of help, but it is what drives me because like I mentioned earlier, how I see myself reacting to a situation, to a joke more than a song is how I would expect from a first timer or a last timer who's seen it on would react. Because in the sense of feeling and expressing emotion, we're all the same.

00;34;47;06 - 00;35;08;23

Alban Amikat: I mean, there's not one person who feels this one specific emotion that is only felt on Mars and he is different. We are all the same. So I feel like I feel like with a lot of like a lot of people's comfort food now is friends. So they're all going back to friends. And there is there are people who are starting office.

00;35;09;00 - 00;35;34;09

Alban Amikat: And I think I also read an article about how even pretty, you know, office is such a popular thing like the show The American one like it just. Yeah, but people can’t give it up. And it's the same trends that I see in cartoons. I just mentioned like today we realize that Tom & Jerry is starting to spike in terms of its ratings.

00;35;34;09 - 00;36;04;14

Alban Amikat: And then the same thing is going to happen with Oggy & the Cockroaches, which is an older show, but not as old as Tom & Jerry…. When they made that show I think that they thought of it as Let's make something to entertain ourselves… there is no hint of anything that is contemporary, or time based or geography based about that show.

00;36;04;26 - 00;36;14;29

Alban Amikat:It is just so fluid and so open ended that it could very well be something that was made in the thirties or twenty thirties. It just feels so, from anywhere.

00;36;15;02 - 00;36;52;06

Alban Amikat: So that's a very interesting observation because, you know, when I compare my notes with when I'm when I'm looking at either a Tom and Jerry, a story about pets, a family living together and with a dog, I mean, these, these are timeless stories and doesn't matter what time. Oh, they could, they could exist in. But when you compare it with something like a Chhota Bheem or when you compare something like Shiva or various other things… Tarak Mehta Ka Oolta Chashma is another very, very popular show.

00;36;52;13 - 00;36;53;08

Alban Amikat: Exactly.

00;36;53;13 - 00;37;25;09

Alban Amikat: And so those are very fixed in their time. So we understand that that Tarak Mehta, Jetha Lal is existing in a certain time. Or. With Chhota Bheem Being well there's an understanding of what's happening. So there's a very clear differentiation between those the story world in itself. Like Doraemon, for instance, is existing in a very, very different place. It is full of fantasy so what are your thoughts between these two types of story worlds? Also, which one do you think succeeds better?

00;37;26;16 - 00;37;57;27

Alban Amikat: So I think we may have a difference of opinion over here, which is that I don't think these are stories that are timed in a way or that are placed in a way that they

immediately call out to a certain place in time or geography. For example, Doraemon is doing really very today on TV. And the kids who are watching it are not thinking of it as the show which is from 1986, it's.

00;37;57;27 - 00;37;58;27

Neha Hooda: Almost 50-60 years old.

00;37;58;28 - 00;38;25;22

Alban Amikat: Yeah. That it's it is from then and the kids who are watching it today… they are saying wait a second. That's exactly what my younger brother does so for them there is no concept of time or for that matter when they're watching Chhota Bheem and they're seeing that he's punching the guy who's in a spaceship…

00;38;26;02 - 00;39;49;11

Alban Amikat:…they're completely willing to let go of the fact that while he's punching, he's still wearing his orange dhoti. So they're not taking that into consideration. And to do this as an experiment…what I did was I took full stories that are very similar line. And the similar characters, they were basically the same show. But one was 2D and one was 3D. And in that three- or five-minute clip, I could like, you know, get a 5 minutes story that starts in 2D and cuts to 3D…Guess what? The seven, eight-year-olds that I showed it to my three cousins…..

00;39;50;12 - 00;39;50;23

Neha Hooda: Hi.

00;39;51;16 - 00;39;52;07

Alban Amikat: Can you hear me now?

00;39;52;10 - 00;39;56;18

Neha Hooda: Yeah, yeah, I can hear you. I'm sorry I missed the last part. What was their response to it?

00;39;57;23 - 00;40;20;20

Alban Amikat: Yes. So I was saying that by stitching the same characters, the same show, but it was earlier made in 2D and then in 3D. When these 3 kids saw it they were all 8. And they didn't realize while watching that five-minute cartoon, when 2D became 3D. They didn't notice that technical difference.

00;40;20;21 - 00;40;35;20

Alban Amikat: And when I asked them, what is different, what is different, they came up with a bunch of things. It sounded like they were trying to make something up to please me. And then finally one of them said that the characters became plastic towards the end.

00;40;37;12 - 00;40;37;24

Neha Hooda: OK.

00;40;38;03 - 00;41;02;13

Alban Amikat: So for them, 3D was like a plastic. They thought of it as it was like physical plastic balls and squares. And that's that was what had happened. I found that to be very interesting because that's a basic premise for a lot of shows that are on Indian television today… that are doing much better than, for example, an American show that's produced in Korea.

00;41;02;23 - 00;41;28;07

Alban Amikat: And then it comes and is sold at one tenth the price because the price has been spread across the regions and it's put on air on Indian television VS a show which is like you know, locally born, locally rooted, locally grown and nowhere near in comparison in terms of technical skill or technical standing in terms of quality,…they don't match.

00;41;28;21 - 00;41;34;06

Alban Amikat: But the local s*** show is doing way better than this amazingly made show.

00;41;34;26 - 00;41;38;18

Neha Hooda: And why is that? Because it's the connect, or is it something else?

00;41;39;07 - 00;41;55;12

Alban Amikat: Because the idea of a Ferrari vs a Hyundai, is in your mind and my mind. And for someone who wants to feel the breeze while sitting in a car, it's just a car.

00;41;55;14 - 00;41;57;27

Neha Hooda: Aaa…That's sweet.

00;41;59;02 - 00;42;03;25

Alban Amikat: I think. I think it's like that. I could be wrong. That's just my way of looking at this.

00;42;05;06 - 00;42;32;27

Neha Hooda: That's really interesting. And I just I'm just thinking about the Dhoti and the spaceship coming together. Fantasy does seem to play a very, very important role. And I'm assuming that on an everyday basis, to work around this concept of fantasy, wonder, excitement and newness and adventure. It must not be a very, very easy task. So how do you get around it every day?

00;42;35;28 - 00;43;17;00

Alban Amikat: Well, it was easier earlier because we all came to an office to bounce off ideas off each other and it's easy now because there is so much of helplessness around. Like, I just read something about the COVID situation and basically the mass consciousness, the whole world. Oh, someone summed it up in one line and said that as of right now, all of us want more than any one of us can give you and that was the deplorable state that is the state that we are in.

00;43;17;14 - 00;43;40;17

Alban Amikat: So back then, the motivation to do it was that there are fire the people who crack, who I'm going to take my jokes and let's see if they laugh, and then they've come up with theirs and we just laugh at each other's jokes. And that was the energy to create the fantasy and to create the fun and the and what's energizing you today is looking out and seeing grey.

00;43;41;12 - 00;43;58;13

Alban Amikat: So it just pushes you more to put more colors on your own screen and ship that off to someone else's screen so that you kind of tell them that hey…the grey is there and you are anyway deteriorating your eyesight by looking at a screen. So might as well look at this and feel better.

00;43;59;07 - 00;44;08;18

Neha Hooda: And that's interesting. That's true. So let me now come to understanding that what's Disney doing in the live action space now if you can share it a bit. Yeah. I mean, you primarily, you know, when we think Disney, the first thing that comes in the mind is animation. So I mean, that's really been the forte forever.

00;44;25;17 - 00;45;03;06

Alban Amikat: So that has been the inception and that's it. It hasn't stayed that way after that. I mean, I don't even like apart from the fact that I'm not the one to comment on this, it's easier to just see the Investor Day presentation and the slate that they presented. It will give you a sense of what they're looking to, what's what they're looking at, because definitely what they are moving in the direction of is a newer media.

00;45;03;25 - 00;45;35;07

Alban Amikat: It's the Internet and it's connectivity through phones and through the Internet. And so the same guys would have started off by creating comic strips and then small audio sketches on radio and then shows on television, actually making stuff for online media and all sorts of online stuff. There's even stuff that you can just put your phone inside a cardboard box or put on your head, and now you're in a different world because it's AR VR and it's all around you.

00;45;35;28 - 00;46;07;18

Alban Amikat: So, so Disney, I would think, is a company so big that it's making everything is not specifically animation or not specifically live action but when it comes to the smaller companies or the very, very small boutique studios, so to speak, I think if they are choosing to work on a particular media because that's where the money is, they may not be so well.

00;46;08;11 - 00;46;21;18

Alban Amikat: But if they choose to work on a particular medium because for them and there are stories that medium works yeah. Then they'll do well. OK, you know, because you can. Yes.

00;46;22;04 - 00;46;23;08

Neha Hooda: No, go ahead. You were saying.

00;46;23;29 - 00;46;45;11

Alban Amikat: You can't ….it's not that animation is better on live action is better as of today. There is mocap. And you can even get expressions of a person. And we have Avatar as an example, a brilliant movie. You can do the same thing as an animation, but that looks very uncanny, very similar to the real thing,

00;46;45;11 - 00;47;08;04

Alban Amikat: Lion King is now the closest example of it where you have animals that are completely, completely just CGI. There's not an actual animal walking around or for examples the Will Smith movie Gemini Man, the younger Will Smith in that movie is completely not there. It's not like they just acted someone and then just aged him down.

00;47;08;04 - 00;47;34;01

Alban Amikat: It's, it's literally just computer graphics walking around in the frame, which we are convinced is a real human being. So as of today all the media is merging and you can choose what is it that you want to work on. So, my department is a very small, very, very, very small department that is doing the animation that's happening.

00;47;34;01 - 00;47;49;11

Alban Amikat: It's ongoing at the same time, we're also looking at some live action projects for that's just because that's where we are right now. And we have some money and we're like, OK, let's do this. And that's the only reason.

00;47;50;03 - 00;47;53;02

Alban Amikat: It is not a thought that live action is the way of the future or something.

00;47;53;03 - 00;48;18;14

Neha Hooda: I see. That brings me to another question, often at several international conferences that I attend out here, people don't know Chhota Bheem They don't know Motu Patlu, they don't know a lot of these other characters. But because I think…in the in the most widespread sense, the American narrative of, you know, what are these characters that children love?

00;48;18;28 - 00;48;45;11

Neha Hooda: They are typical of things that you would see coming out from a Disney marvel or see maybe you know, from a Universal movie, for that matter. So it's a general assumption that, OK, you know, you have Thor, you have Spider-Man, you have Batman, and these kind of generalizations that happen…. When I look into specifics and details and when I look at, you know, what children are watching, obviously, you know, these Disney Marvel movies are great.

00;48;45;15 - 00;49;11;18

Neha Hooda: I personally work on some of them. And I'm aware that Disney is doing everything they can to break barriers, break studio types and bring out new stories that are there. There's a great effort. Well, when it comes to the Indian context, you know, the reception that they have is great. But in terms of quantity, it is still not the majority content, right, that children are watching.

00;49;11;18 - 00;49;40;02

Neha Hooda: Children are still predominantly spending time watching say a Doraemon, shinchan, Motu Patlu, Chhota Bheem, Shiva these kinds of programs, you know, Simple Samosa or Jalebi…. Things that are… that have a very non-American view of them in comparison to these popular Disney model characters. Essentially, they come from a very American perspective of how stories are being told.

00;49;40;15 - 00;49;44;21

Neha Hooda: Would you agree with this that children prefer the Indian content more.

00;49;46;21 - 00;49;49;20

Alban Amikat: I'm sorry I agree to disagree with a lot of what you are saying.

00;49;49;20 - 00;49;59;09

Neha Hooda: It is perfectly fine. It's good to have you disagreeing with me because it gives me an insight into how things are and also because as in between television versus film.

00;50;01;15 - 00;50;40;02

Alban Amikat: Mm hmm. Yes. Yes. So that is the only difference that it is television Vs film. So it is your it is your CRT versus a silver screen. That's the difference. But apart from that, if you really want to compare the American view versus the Indian way, my way of looking at it is…. You had the superhero movies that were done, the American movie, you had dark nights and that didn't take off into the night in India so well.

00;50;40;02 - 00;51;09;24

Alban Amikat: It only appealed to the intellectuals. And Inception was a movie which you watched only if you wanted to, you know, like just it was like a thing that we i've seen Inception and come here five of you and i'll explain what the movie is. It was more for that. But the minute you get into a situation like Marvel because let's be clear, Marvel didn't just come in say, i'll make something new and everyone's going to be excited by it.

00;51;10;12 - 00;51;34;28

Alban Amikat: I'm sure that a company like Disney when it invests that that kind of money into something super big, all the research and all the risks are calculated. They know exactly what and how much to stretch in certain situations. As a result, a lot of the initial, you know, movies of Marvel didn't even show up blood, because they didn't want to go in that space.

00;51;35;06 - 00;52;04;27

Alban Amikat: A lot of the initial superhero Marvel movies didn't have specific call to action or specific tunes for their characters. That was not a Marvel thing because they just didn't want you to attach on to any one particular aspect of the film, but to enjoy it as a whole and in

the middle of a very serious situation, where someone's about to die, one of them would suddenly breakout, explode, or suddenly break the mood or create an anti-climax by cracking a joke.

00;52;06;00 - 00;52;52;01

Alban Amikat: So this is from their learnings and from their growth trajectory, from seeing how a very serious movie like Dark Knight did, or how a movie like X-Men did. And then learning from those learnings from the 1970s Superman and learning from Watchmen, movies like that, and slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, making their way to a point today where they've managed to put so much of the good and the bad and the jokein the middle of a situation that it's almost become massy, like in a way, it's become masaledaar, in a way it's become daal, and you give it to any person in the world, they're going to bloody like it.

00;52;52;23 - 00;53;21;02

Alban Amikat: And if that person is like a staunch meat eater, maybe you just put some stock and boiled chicken into the daal but they are going to love it. And today in my view, Marvel has become Bollywood in the way they're making movies and to support this claim Avengers Endgame was, if not the highest, one of the highest grossing films of 2019 in India.

00;53;21;24 - 00;53;54;20

Alban Amikat: Well, it managed to do that because it said it came down its high horse of …we will make these intellectual movies, which is for a very particular…. Forget that it is for a particular type of audience, but we want to tell a very particular story, a very specific story, and with a character who is very, very in one way of doing things…to today where they have made everything so open ended and every character has their good and bad and every person can crack a joke or take a hit or throw a punch.

00;53;54;28 - 00;54;08;27

Alban Amikat: And when you do something like that, basically you are making everyone open-ended and when everyone is open ended, and everyone is multifaceted. You have so many dynamics play that it becomes masala and Indians love masala.

00;54;09;14 - 00;54;38;04

Neha Hooda: You know, I was just analyzing these things about, you know, that Disney often follows the system of tentpoling. You know, this one character which will move into other kind of world and then, you know, it still works well. So, you have an Iron Man, but you still somewhat get a Spider-Man in it. And then, you know, it just it just everybody there like Masala, you said, you know, the line is very, very fluid.

00;54;38;17 - 00;55;11;03

Neha Hooda: And again, I'm looking at it from the point of what children are consuming. So, for me, when I'm coming to you with this question now, is it the bifurcation is not between television vs films, but I'm trying to understand is that when children are looking in terms of, you know, the characters they love. So, if you have a Doraemon in one, Doraemon has this fixed world you know, if you have a Chhota Bheem, I mean, he has this fixed world. Characters are not jumping off from one universe to another.

00;55;11;16 - 00;55;49;26

Neha Hooda: However, the moment it's a character from, say, like a MCU. So, then they're often jumping characters, you know, because it's a universe they are operating in. They are not operating in one limited story world. Also, the boundaries are very porous, you know. So how do you think which characters tend to do better for children in India? The characters which have this world, which is defined and limited, like the story world of say a Doraemon or something like a character from MCU, which is obviously not predictable at all.

00;55;52;09 - 00;56;33;03

Alban Amikat: The only difference between your MCU characters and Doraemon, Chhota Bheem is that the MCU characters have been penned, and worked on and thought of and have been developed for alteast 50,60,70, 80 years. So that's the head start they got. Doraemon started in the eighties and it's been ongoing since then. And Chhota Bheem is from between 2004-2008, so that is the inception space it has, that is the only head start it has. Apart from this, nothing is different about them because.

00;56;34;03 - 00;56;55;19

Alban Amikat: You may think that Chhota Bheem is only in his one universe because you have only sampled a little bit of it and left it at that. But if you are an ardent consumer of Chhota Bheem, even till today, you would know that he goes anywhere, he meets anyone and he's in three different avatars around the world.

00;56;55;29 - 00;57;03;15

Alban Amikat: And as of 2020, he is the number 1 pre school show for Netflix globally.

00;57;03;28 - 00;57;04;16

Neha Hooda: Absolutely.

00;57;04;16 - 00;57;07;06

Alban Amikat: So, he is in a way bigger than MCU for that TG.

00;57;29;29 - 00;59;45;18

Neha Hooda: He sure is. But my question is about do children like the predictability of the world that the character is existing in or do children in India specific to the Indian context, are they happier responding to characters coming from a MCU because, you know, characters meet everywhere. I mean, you look at Ironman Avengers and everything is happening everywhere. So… because that's a universe, the tentpole system is operating in a very different way than it does in the shows in India. So, my question is about the reception. What do you think children feel more secure and comfortable about? If somehow I had a feeling when I was reviewing content, talking to children and going through my work, I had this feeling that maybe the sense of some kind of security and predictability that comes within a sense of adventure that, you know, you can go out through the door, you can appear anywhere. So, this appear as unknown factor it's not something that is an unknown thing. But with a MCU, you don't know where, what will appear where….. Because each of these characters in a Doraemon or Chhota Bheem story, it's a main character. And that is where it is. I don't think that tomorrow, even if Rajiv decides that ok Doraemon is going to come together…you know…the companies come together, I don't think that, you know, that we will see a Chhota Bheem coming in with a Doraemon together. It's a… it's a different thing. I'm not saying that, you know, the ownership is the same, but I'm saying the concept of tentpolling. Do you think that would work in an Indian narrative keeping even the idea that,

you know, there's a trajectory of, say, maybe, you know, 60 to70 to 80 years and there's an elaborate process that goes into deciding that how these characters are going to be spread over different productions. Do you think it would be OK if you brought maybe characters of different universes that are existing in say different Disney programs into one world, or if they were to just move so easily between the story worlds. How do you think would that reception be taken by children?

00;59;47;06 - 01;00;14;25

Alban Amikat: Mm hmm…I would not be able to predict how a child would react to a situation like that. But how I would react to a situation like that is I would find it very exciting if Mr. Chilaka and whoever is running Doraemon. I mean… if the creator decide to do a co-lab some day and if that collab is successful, then that is what has worked.

01;00;15;14 - - 01;01;13;04

Alban Amikat: And if it is not successful, then that is what has not worked because that is what it is today. When you speak of MCU as one thing, it does one thing in 2020 and a little bit of one thing in 2019. Up until 2018 it was another thing. In fact, in 2006, 2007, 2008 around the time when Iron Man started, it was nothing. It was just a chance that Marvel was taking and it was a chance that Marvel was taking, seeing how DC was doing this and was getting away with it. So, some of your chances work - Endgame and some of the chances don't work - Justice League… and you can never really predict because both of these movies took in millions of dollars and had a stellar star-studded cast, yet one work and one didn't work.

01;01;13;22 - 01;02;15;29

Alban Amikat: And the reason why one worked and one didn't ranges from everything …which at one end could also be dependent on the fact that it was released on Chinese New Year ….So, people going out eating food instead of watching movies. What it could also be dependent on that one distributor was not paid enough, so he didn't put it on his theatres so that didn't get counted in the box office. So, the range of variables that affects what does good and what does not is so weird. And so, I mean, after a movie like Avatar, everyone was like, this is so good. It was the highest grossing film only up until the End Game Infinity War guys upended that thing, but it was the number one grossing film…But hey, it didn't win the Oscar.

The Oscar was won by Hurt Locker, which turned to be his own by ex-wife. She was the director of this.

01;02;15;29 - 01;02;17;03

Neha Hooda: It was a good film.

01;02;17;24 - 01;02;52;17

Alban Amikat: It was. It's a beautiful film. And I just watched it again last month. Because it's one of my things. Like…it's like the thing with No Country for Old Men. So, the point over here is when we're talking about tent polling characters …the whole concept of tent polling probably is coming from characters who you have with you, these IP's for so many, so many years. And you can see Rajiv Chilaka take advantage of that in terms of Chhota Bheem because isn't Chhota Bheem Green Gold's tentpole? And isn't Green Gold in ten countries right now?

01;02;53;07 - 01;03;08;23

Neha Hooda: I was actually speaking with him a few weeks back and we had an elaborate conversation about, you know, how Chhota Bheem has grown to be so big. And I mean he has his own thing that from Chhota Bheem you have this junior character and..

01;03;10;06 - 01;03;10;25

Alban Amikat: Yeah, Mighty Little Bheem

01;03;11;17 - 01;03;16;16

Neha Hooda: Yeah Mighty Little Bheem…. So, I have two more questions if you have the time for it.

01;03;17;01 - 01;03;20;07

Alban Amikat: Yeah, well, I said, till nine right...

01;03;20;19 - 01;03;23;09

Neha Hooda: Give me give me a time out, you know, when you think it's...

01;03;23;17 - 01;03;26;03

Alban Amikat: No, I told you nine, it's 830 now.

01;03;26;04 - 01;04;05;01

Neha Hooda: All right. I have half an hour more to go. Two questions… throughout the content which is being produced internationally. Whether we are talking GEC or whether we are talking specific to children's animation, there are certain themes that are quite evidently important to content makers. One is about environment conservation; one is about representation of diversity. So when we're talking about diversity, and inclusion… mostly in American narratives that come, it's mostly they're talking about BIPOC people.

01;04;06;09 - 01;04;17;28

Neha Hooda: But in India, clearly, we do not have people who are of the African-American origin. So those conversations of inclusion on the basis of race…

01;04;17;28 - 01;04;29;02

Alban Amikat:We do. We just don't look at them when we see them. We just keep on walking… It's a surprising fact that not many people know.

01;04;29;09 - 01;04;31;07

Neha Hooda: I have no idea about this.

01;04;31;16 - 01;05;04;06

Alban Amikat: Yeah yeah... They are the tribals living in the forests of Gir and down south in Kerala, you walk into the forest, you go deep into the forest… it is filled with Africans…. In fact I used to know also what they are called….S something from this, that's the name of the tribe.…not African Americans…just Indian Africans.

01;05;04;20 - 01;05;09;14

Neha Hooda: India African… this is a term I have not even heard of….

01;05;10;17 - 01;05;12;02

Alban Amikat: Siddi… they are known as the Siddis…

01;05;12;18 - 01;05;54;16

Neha Hooda: Siddhis… ok… I'm going to give some time to reading about this. It is a very important thing you brought up for me because, you know, in my entire last week's work, I was constantly thinking that in entire diversity and inclusion conversationa that are happening around driving content today, Americans are talking about BIPOC people but in India we don't have that. So, I mean, I will read about them, but I can very evidently say that generally speaking, it is not a majority that is being considered by content makers or even if you generally go out….are you with me?

01;05;58;16 - 01;06;04;19

Neha Hooda: Hello, hello? Hello.

01;06;12;04 - 01;06;12;22

Alban Amikat: Hello? Hello?

01;06;13;01 - 01;06;13;20

Neha Hooda: Can you hear me?

01;06;14;08 - 01;06;18;24

Alban Amikat: Yes, yes. Now I can hear you. So, I heard what you said before the line got disconnected.

01;06;20;17 - 01;07;15;11

Neha Hooda: So, my line of thought was about this that in India, the sense of inequality might come from a place of caste system that are there or from place of religion or more importantly, from a social economic class that a person may belong to. But we do not have a race based. It's not like, you know, we have Hispanic people who have come into India. We don't have African American people coming into India. So those kinds of conversations, which are kind of dominating the global narrative of what's important to include in content. So, if I were to ask you that, when we talk about India and when we talk about content being

made in India, what are these important aspects that you think are driving the conversations around content as of today?

01;07;17;03 - 01;07;37;15

Alban Amikat: And so you've asked me two questions. I am going to answer your second question first. Currently the conversation around content, especially when we speak of animated content is the content that the audience wants because we make what the audience wants. They will watch it. If they want it, then that's how we make meagre margins.

01;07;38;00 - 01;08;15;03

Alban Amikat: Because in India, animation still hasn't reached that pedestal that people think of it as something that they would like to consume, even if they're not children. Till today that is something that is only something that a child would want. Of course, this is completely changing, but it is changing slowly, and it is changing on Instagram and it is not changing in Meerut…It is changing in Bombay…in Mumbai. So that is what's happening, you know, like in a way of speaking….So… I don't want to make this political, but…

01;08;15;15 - 01;08;15;29

Neha Hooda: No, not.

01;08;15;29 - 01;10;14;05

Alban Amikat: Yeah, no, no, no. It's it's not political. Actually, but somehow the liberals and the ones who've been in an environment of progressiveness are starting to pick up on those things while somehow the conservatives are the ones who have been an environmental …….(inaudible), …….., at least that's how the divide is increasing. This is the reason. And because the liberals are like the minority and the conservatives are the majority, that's where our focus of creating content will then shift because we are chasing profits. I mean, we're not chasing it completely. We're chasing a sense of fulfillment in making something back. We can be put it out there, people will watch, and then we sleep at night thinking that hey I did a good thing… that is the core of…I think what every content maker in India is obviously going to be thinking, and if not one particular person, definitely the boss of the company or the collective consciousness of the company is definitely thinking. That's my answer to the part two of the question. That we are currently in a space where we are making content more

in line of what the audience wants, because….now I don't know who said it… whether it was Chomsky or who spoke about this, but at the end of the day, you have your special class of citizens, that guide the thought of the rest of the citizens….. But then you have a place ….country A and country B… and depending upon the variables of each of these countries in one place, not special but guiding class is completely saying that, you know what, this is good. You watch this… and in country B, that guiding class is saying, you want this….ok so we will give you this. So it's a balance of that.

01;10;14;18 - 01;10;16;20

Neha Hooda: So it is about the masses in a way, right?

01;10;17;08 - 01;10;18;10

Alban Amikat: So yeah, yeah, yeah.

01;10;18;16 - 01;10;27;28

Neha Hooda: What are the themes if you were if you were to say that, you know, these are the most prominent themes that are working for the masses as of today. What would they be?

01;10;29;13 - 01;12;10;08

Alban Amikat: Anything that is… anything that is funny works the best …I'm sorry, I know I'm oversimplifying it. I'm sorry. But what every time anyone comes to us or came to me when I worked across the different companies that i've worked at and if anyone has pitched anything, i've always heard one of the execs say that, hey, you know what? It should be funny or whatever you are presenting should intrigue me or should make me laugh. That's step one. Unless you've obviously come with a Thriller, well, then I should be spooked. Like, if I can guess what your next step is going to be… then I dont what to watch it ….But in terms of themes, it is at the core. But I still want to go back to answering this question from the previous question which is when you mentioned about this, we don't have the conversations around diversity and inclusion. Well, I have two things to say to that. One is, have you heard of that famous Albert Einstein, Ford, where he says… you know, everyone is good at what they do. But if you keep judging a shark by his ability to climb a tree, he's going to keep thinking he's a failure. And that quote leads into my problem with the West and its need for standardization, OK?

01;12;10;22 - 01;13;56;21

Alban Amikat: That if it came up with a wooden ruler. And if it decides that this is the wooden ruler that we will use in America or we will use in …. Sweden…. And we will say, that this is one foot, that same ruler has to go to India and be used there and even they should get the foot by the same mean. But what if the Indian wants to use a string or what if he wants to judge by the way, the shadow of the sun works. It is not allowed. Standardization is the thing. So, speaking from that point of view, when you come to India and you ask the question like, you know what, in America there's a show called Clarence…It's an animated show. And in that one of his friends, he has two fathers…he has no mother…It is really cool…, but something like that, you would never do that in India, because if you do something like that and then all those people will come and start breaking glass outside window or outside your office or start breaking everything. They will set busses on fire…yeh kya sikha rahe hain bacchon ko (Hindi language)…that becomes the conversation. That becomes the narrative that you see narrative for, you know, media to latch on to and be like, what the hell are they teaching our kids? That's true… Yeah, the truth is… on one channel, there's a show about a kid running around in a Dhoti, on another channel there is a kid who is living with a robot in his room and the parents don't take offense to that because this robot is dangerous. He puts a small straw on the kid's head and he is flying to different countries…and on another channel you have the small Muslim kid with a donkey who is following him around…Sheikh Chilli and they're cracking jokes and making fun of people, but no one is asking that hey, this is a major league Hindu country.. Why are we showing Muslim cartoons… because we are not standardized in our way of doing things the way America is.

01;13;56;21 - 01;14;20;15

Neha Hooda: And I appreciate that so much…and I completely you know…that's my take also on it that you know, you can't have these global standards and apply doesn't work because media in itself is quite context related. And as a context I think we're a secular nation so I think there's a lot of beauty in the differences that we may have.

01;14;20;15 - 01;14;45;22

Neha Hooda: So we may be one religion majority nation, but then we're a secular nation as well. So, you know, that's also important. But it's important to see that my personal opinion,

again, not substantiated by any research as such, I think Americans really go crazy over that. This is hot right now. Let's talk inclusion. And they are important. They are important.

01;14;46;04 - 01;16;44;11

Neha Hooda: But I also feel that maybe in India it's not necessarily the same thing as it might be because the context is different when we are looking at empowerment of women empowerment. The last time I met you I remember you mentioned that Disney was proactively looking into having more female leads and working in this direction. I think our country is also one of those where we had a prime minister was a woman who led the country through a war and another nation gained independence and she ruled for a period of about 11 years. That's a pretty long stretch. And even if you were to compare this with the way of how things work in America, America has never had a woman President, a woman prime minister that way. So, I'm not saying that gender problems don't exist in both the nations they do. But in terms of the way they unfold, I think it's a very context specific thing. So, I completely don't agree with this, this whole standardization thing, and I'm glad we're on the same page because this is very personal. You know, you can't I'm not really one for following the popular American narrative. I think there's a lot of pride in what we are doing at home, and it's important to have the voices of our characters being, you know, spread out to the world, which is why…. I definitely… it's important for me to even, you know, talk about this in my research that it's not just Batman, Spiderman and these great Spider-Man, Superman, this kind of character. They are great, no doubt. But, you know, when I have children at home, they're looking at a Chhota Bheem. They're looking at Motu Patlu… they are looking at even on Oggie and cockroaches….

01;16;44;11 - 01;17;32;21

Alban Amikat:….they're also looking at Spider-Man and they're also looking at Batman. And what is one way to bend perspective and try and understand what is being said over here is that there are more millionaires in India than there are in America. When we say hey America likes Batman but India likes Chhota Bheem. Even if 5% of India like Batman, that's more people than all of America. And when you consider that… the entire conversation is out of the window, the population of Finland is 5 million. There are 22 million people living in Mumbai. So weare like five times that country. Whatever is the statistic over there, we can just like decide to upend it by telling Ghatkopar to what's something different?

01;17;33;00 - 01;17;54;04

Neha Hooda: It doesn't apply to India. I was reading the census report of 2011 and according to that 83 percent of India's population is categorized as children in the age of five to six years and that obviously accounts for all kinds of household and gross categories across all categories of.

01;17;54;24 - 01;17;59;08

Alban Amikat: We are also one of the youngest nations on earth. I mean on average is only around 29-30 somethings.

01;17;59;26 - 01;18;21;01

Neha Hooda: The youngest one of the youngest nations, the largest middle class has a rather huge ability to spend and understand that spending on devices, Internet and activities are all means of progress. It is a very different Indian context. I have my last one for you now. Are you a fan of Wolverine.

01;18;22;10 - 01;18;36;03

Alban Amikat: Yeah, you are. I love him. ……

01;18;37;15 - 01;18;46;26

Neha Hooda: I've been a big Wolverine fan, too. And there's a very interesting feature coming out next year…

01;19;09;05 - 01;20;33;08

Neha Hooda: Yeah. So my question is about restrictive reading. So, this is one of these films that came out. I think it's a given thing if you've grown up on, oh a…. OK, these films, X-Men, logan, you know, the films came a little time back. So there was a certain kind of a certain section of the society which again, I'm talking from a time where, you know, it was still class was as a mass thing. And probably there's a lot of people who definitely grew into, you know, the moment you said Disney means children… marvel it means children and children become big. You have fan following and it makes sense to have restricted ratings. It's a simple question that really had me…. You know, pushed for a very long time. The last

film that came out had some very brutal shot. And you remember, you know, this little girl, she rips off the head, the blood stain …..of blood drops and everything…. Is like… if you love Wolverine, if you love Logan, you love the film…no doubts. But again, when it comes to understanding, that it is a brand which is typically considered to be associated with children….getting pirated prints is not a problem.

01;20;33;08 - 01;20;45;08

Neha Hooda: So even if you put a restricted rating on a film like that… do you think that, oh, the responsibility as a content maker is being fulfilled.

01;20;50;08 - 01;20;52;00

Alban Amikat: By putting a restrictive rating?

01;20;52;12 - 01;20;54;04

Neha Hooda: I mean, that's a statutory thing.

01;20;54;24 - 01;21;00;19

Alban Amikat: Yeah, but that is something that's not your choice. It is. There's a board. CBFC requires you to.

01;21;00;21 - 01;22;22;10

Neha Hooda: Know, I mean, my point is completely different. My point is that the film was so brutal, it was not marked as something which was OK for the general population, which means children below a certain age could not watch… but given a restrictive rating thing, which means that…you know… only people above a certain age can see. But Disney Marvel has this entire huge fan following for children and children do get exposed to content like this. So in a case like this. So, what are your thoughts when we talk about responsibility, of content makers and exposing children to what we might want to say is safe? And you started the conversation with being responsible about because they have impressionable minds. I know for a fact that some of my friends worked on this film in visual effects and it never came up in conversations… the only thing that we are focused on is to make it more…like the blood has to look real…. You know, it has to look brutal. So, there's this question about, you know, artistic fulfillment versus your responsibility towards the child audience, given the

fact that the brand which is endorsing this content is predominantly a child-oriented brand. So, what what's your take on that?

01;22;24;26 - 01;22;51;27

Alban Amikat: Aaahhh… there is a part of this question that I probably have some kind of an answer to but I am not sure about it so I would like or choose not to get into it because I don't want to say anything which you will listen later on playback and think he said that…he works for Disney.

01;22;52;07 - 01;22;56;24

Neha Hooda: No, no, no…Nothing like that.. This is just a debate.

01;22;58;10 - 01;27;07;03

Alban Amikat: But it's a small part and I can put it to the side. I have a much bigger, much, much more of a different view on what's my opinion on this is. And primarily to understand …artistic (inaudible) or the fever to do what you want to do… the person who's paying your salary…so you have to align your thoughts to his thoughts….you know..so it is what you want to do vs this is what your company wants to do. All this is what the entity wants to do because it's ….we are no more talking company, though. It's… it's an entity and it's… it's bigger than so many. It's bigger than Iceland, for sure. Disney as a company is because Iceland is a country. So, but so the example to try and gauge this from… or to help the thinking is The Jungle Book versus Mowgli one is made by Disney, one is made by Sony. And they both are rooted in Rudyard Kipling's story. And they both go in very different directions. And when Logan was made, it wasn't Bob Iger, it was Rupert Murdoch. And now when the part two of that movie is going to be made, it is probably you'd know better... You will have the need to carry that brutal….So the thing is, it probably will have to be a balance of how much of part one can we carry and how much of part one needs to fit into the new step family so to speak…you know, because these are conversations…. That is not just difficult for you and I to put into words… but I'm sure top execs at both places are also, you know, trying to figure out how the hell do we do this now? Because it's not just Logan. Logan is just the indication of the storm. You have the entire X-Men, and then how will you fit them into the MCU? And then the MCU goes off on an X-Men where you have, for example, i've never heard Logan crack a joke, but that's not the way Disney does or MCU does. And I'm so

it's going to be interesting to see actually, how that plays out. But if we speak specifically of the ratings or calling a movie restricted oh, what if I was if I was in finance and having to make this decision, not a creative person at all, I would… I would tell the Logan guys that, hey, you know what? It's in our right. A few of the scenes… just mellow it down to just at least bring it to PG13, because at the end of the day, your cost of production is only going to get covered if enough people buy tickets to the movie. And if you make it for a niche, then that's not falling in line with the financial goals of the company that you are working for. So there is a conflict of interest. So, it is a complicated conversation, but… but I am excited to see what will happen next, will he be the person he's become who lost his speed really… or will he turn into Clint Eastwood, who shocked everyone when he was young and making violence movies. Now he's the one who gets shot in all of his movies, the new ones…what is the route creatively? This will be interesting to watch…

01;27;18;13 - 01;28;32;03

Neha Hooda: If I were to talk from a professional point of view, we guys are the last, we are just doing the visual effects and this poses a problem for me also personally, sometimes when we're looking at shots and especially if it is a film, which is catering to children, which is why I had a problem with this film. I've done lots and lots of Disney movies throughout the length and breadth of my career, and they have their set amount of action sequences. They have fair amount of people jumping, doing things and there's just just a whole lot of things where you might want to say that …is this all ok the children or not? But when I look a film where I see somebody starting their day with everyday drinking problems, and that's coming out from, you know, where brutality is so much that it's gory, it's going to put somebody thinking like, OK, like as an adult doing that to me, like, oh, OK, you know, there's just barely seven, eight years or maybe ten year old child. And she, she has a head chopped off, blood dripping down and that doesn't leave my memory as a grown up. What is it doing to the child? So those are the conversations that come to me. And sadly, most guys…we have nothing ….we have no say other than, OK, we will deliver you one more blood. We give you more blood.

01;28;32;17 - 01;28;42;19

Neha Hooda : That is I think more about with people like you who are in the decision making chairs who decide, do we go with this or we don't go ahead with this and that's it.

01;28;43;11 - 01;29;52;19

Alban Amikat: Yeah. It's a funny conundrum because when you say it like I am in the deciding chair and I decide what I am instead going to say, is that fair? I'm putting the label and I'm putting the packet on the shelf because it is the parents decision if they packet or not. Yeah. So, it is it is a conundrum. It is almost like a catch 22 because for example, on Netflix there is this new show or the new movie now, a documentary called Uncovering Saudia Arabia. You know, like there is something of that name which was uploaded recently or something back to Netflix. But in India it has come out now and I watched it the other day and literally on Netflix it wasn't even a movie. It was an actual recording of a guy being beheaded in the middle of the street. It's in a movie on Netflix, right now…but Netflix will put it there with an R-rating saying that the parents should know not to show this to the child, but it's a catch 22 because now the parent has to invariably see everything on Netflix to decide which of the hour he is ok showing to his son and which of the hour, she is not going to show to her daughter

01;29;52;21 - 01;30;46;05

Neha Hooda: What's your take on this whole OTT platforms coming up with this, let's keep it real kind of thing? I mean especially because coming from a business of where we are, especially, you know, if you're working in children's entertainment category or with somebody like me who's spent the entire length and breadth of career working in VFX, VFX films completely targeted at these are heavy intensive films trying to lure in the child audience. So how do you in your personal capacity, not as an organization, how do you feel about this thing that, you know, it's great. So, we have these ott platforms giving it out raw – how it is and what's your personal feeling about this?

01;30;48;12 - 01;32;52;14

Alban Amikat: Oh, my feeling is twofold. The part one of my feelings says that there are different types of emotions that are being attacked online simultaneously, or whether it's online or on TV or however you want to call it, because the lines are so blurred right now. You literally have set top boxes that record shows. So isn't it in a way working like the Internet…. If you can watch it whenever you want and there's no appointment viewing… it's… it's very blurred. And then there is SVOD and then there is VOD, and then there is movie. And there are so many platforms that are literally thousand places you can put your

stuff on.... But the attack of the emotion is …. Is this something that this guy would be really good at. Oh, Quentin Tarantino. But what he does is more like making death look aesthetically beautiful. So that why when there is like bam bam bam (imitating gun fire shot sound) and then you see that scene and there is light smoke and some purple haze and just beautiful people lying dead…. That is a different way of looking at that scene vs a situation where you're literally seeing a shaky handheld camera over the shoulder and suddenly there are five people standing in chanting..and behind them there are 300 people who are screaming like, yeah, yeah, yeah, this is a real scene. And that man is screaming. I didn't do it. I didn't do it…it wasn't me.. It wasn't me, it wasn't me. And kkhachhhhh (imitating the sound of sword) and his head is off.

….. That is desensitization of violence. And that is what, in my opinion, is going back to the age-old adage of the boy who cried wolf if we desensitize violence enough, someday it's not going matter. Someday we see people dead, dead in the cold because of the December degree freeze and we just keep walking past them.

01;32;52;24 - 01;32;53;26

Neha Hooda: And we've seen enough of it. It doesn't matter.

01;32;54;13 - 01;35;07;18

Alban Amikat: We've seen enough of this sort of thing. I mean, this is not even a new conversation. When music videos started having guns shooting and the drugs in them, it already became a thing like desensitization of violence is already a thing. So… so at the end of the day, and I don't know if…. If we as a species are coming full circle. I mean, let's go back to Moore's law.. 70 was the birth of TV or colour television. And then in the nineties you could order stuff on television by calling them up and pressing a button. Fast forward to 2020 when you have more platforms than content and sometimes you have to literally go on Google to understand that I want to watch The Green Mile, but where the hell is green mile and then Google tells you it's on Netflix, so let's go to Netflix. They've got more platforms today than the content you want to watch. You don't know which platform it's on. In a situation like this in in a situation where the see or the pond. Let's move on for the analogy. In a situation where the pond has become bigger, you as a fish automatically become smaller. And when you automatically become smaller and ….the stress that comes from an uncertainty that is creeping in. And immediately you look for your corner, you look for

people, you know, you look for familiarity. And in that search for familiarity, you're starting to hop backwards and go back onto the content that you know. And in this fight of content that you already know, some content existed as a cartoon show and existed as a movie in 1970 but now it's coming up brand new avatar in 2020 with the latest VFX and the coolest visual ways of showing it.. They even have 4D...

Neha Hooda: This is interesting. I will stop the recording now. Thank you.

11. Appendix K: Transcript of interview with Gaurav Gupta

Position: media expert & keynote speaker, CEO Future Works Media

Venue: online / google call

Date:28th July 2020

Audio File name: gauravgupta28 July 2020.m4a
0:00:00
Neha Hooda: …..it's overall that how today content consumers have come together with the content makers and how the dynamics are shifting. And it's not just about that you've consumed content, but what happens afterwards, that today you see that digital communities are being made and media is not so much something that, like in 80s or 90s or early 2000s or so it was something you know outside of your life like optional you know but today I think it's pretty much a very important part.

Gaurav Gupta: Are you comparing it with other countries?

Neha Hooda: No no this is only India specific but just to give a little idea of how it's happening in other countries is just like something on the periphery.

0:00:55 - 0:02:51
Gaurav Gupta: Okay so….to begin with I think… I Think it's changing very dramatically…, you know, it's not the same as what it was last year. Mm-hmm If you say from 2010 2000 2020, yeah You know content consumption is probably trickled slowly. Obviously, the expansion and explosion of the Internet. I think there was never that much audiovisual, except for whatever, you know, little cartoons are available here and there. So I think if you begin with in the year 2000, if you talk about media, I think this is even before things like Peppa Pig and stuff. I think, A, there was no learning as such using media. You didn't exist then. And obviously there were no smartphones etc. Either. You say 2000-2010 which is like the non smartphone period which is you know starting with just purely broadcast whatever network that existed. Whatever cartoons that came on the cartoon network. You know I'm not going to count what Doolarshan is doing because that's for mainstream. Yeah I'm not factoring in the purview of the research is mostly looking at urban middle-class homes and

looking at the private sector nationalized channels so I'm not even looking at the regional. Don't look at Doodarshan because that's you know they have a budget they're just looking at spending the budget. There's no, it's not driven by market demand, or consumption. It's, it has too many things going on. So anyway, so I think, you know, if you take 2000, you know, break this up into two parts, that's three parts, actually, you have 2010, you have 2010, then moving on to pre COVID and then now whatever is post COVID.

Neha Hooda: Yeah.

0:02:52

Gaurav Gupta:So I think the first 10 years would be you know, going from cartoons to youtube. And the next 10 years is going from youtube to smartphone. And then post COVID is a whole different thing. So first 10 years would be, in terms of the private sector, has been purely driven by channels, right? So you're selling things. You're selling as consumerism grows in India, right? You're selling chocolates, or you're selling ice cream, or whatever, right? And that's the way. So the economic model was to actually sell advertising. How do you attract kids? By selling them cartoons. That's when you had channels increasing from just one net cartoon network to probably Nickelodeon and then there's the other channels that grew, Disney channels that came, right? And so just let's just call it heavily cartoon oriented.

0:04:03
Neha Hooda: Okay.

0:04:04 - 0:04:21
Gaurav Gupta: I think as, as you know, and this is probably from 7 to 13 I'm saying, it's only with the growth of the Internet and people are getting Internet access and that grew. And I think it was 2000, 2010, we're still very slow. I think it's only after 2010 that it's accelerated. We had 4G or mobile Internet and smart phone. So when you see in that 10 year period, I think the growth of content and media related specifically for children would have grown very slowly. You know, it, I'm sure they were, you know, people are not using content from a perspective of learning or training. It was more from a, I guess, more from an entertainment perspective, right? And, you know, it's not that you could carry the content in your pocket. So, you know, they were getting exposed to media or consuming media, you know, at a little

later age, five plus or whatever. But purely I think, you know, cartoon oriented. And I think if you take from a movie perspective, you know, there are hardly any movies made in India from a kid's perspective. So kids will probably accompany their parents to see movies that are meant for, actually, teenagers or young adults or adults. Knowing the kind of censorship we have in India, film censorship is great, but there was hardly any. I mean, you can pretty much, I don't know how well film censorship is even implemented in cinemas. So, you know, probably kids at a much younger age were going and seeing movies that were not for that age, not just from a sexual content perspective, but even from a violence perspective.

0:06:19 - 0:08:13
Neha Hooda: Yeah.

Gaurav Gupta: So, cartoons and movies. And then I think people started innovating a little bit, started looking and seeing how we can create digital books, you know, convert, create sort of mixed media content for converting lessons. So I think 2010 onwards, by the end, towards 2010, I think youtube was around. And though not so big but just around so people started using youtube to probably access content. Youtube never had so much content as we have today. We're still growing but I think that's that's when people started looking at I'd see you know and loading uploading anything from learning ABCD to any other kind of musical stuff, to even more learning content. And, journey from 2010 onwards, I think as soon as the smartphone era came about, everyone's got a, you know, screen in their pocket and, you know, I think parents started using the phone to start, you know, distracting a child, or in a way, you know, just put on the phone where the kid's just looking at content, where the parents can go about doing their things, and you know, kids are just fascinated by looking at that screen. And I think, and that screen experience, I think, kids started getting exposed at a much younger age.
Neha Hooda: Mm-hmm.
Gaurav Gupta: And again, I'm talking about urban because they can afford ipads and they can afford smartphones and you know. They probably will be much more exposed to non-Hindi content.

0:08:19 - 0:09:06

Gaurav Gupta: And I think if you see from 2010 onwards with the advent of streaming in the last four years. Streaming has come about since 2016, 2017. Amazon, Netflix… I think what we've seen is just an endless supply. We've never had an endless supply before. Now it's a question of too much. So what do they not see? How are they seeing? How many things are they seeing? I think half the parents don't even know how to use parental controls. I think the channels and everybody do a worse job of not even teaching people how to use parental controls. I think there is just no control. I don't think anybody actually has any controls. Kids are watching all the time. And today, anything that's made for kids, but even things that are not made for kids. So I think if you see the level of violence that you have today available on OTT platforms, it's completely uncensored.

Neha Hooda: Self-censorship, right? And the laws in India don't sort of cover that. For that, and these OTT platforms say, well, we have parental controls, but I don't know how much money they're spending actually teaching parents how to use parental control. So, that's a big gap. But this also highlights a very big gap in our government, how it's structured to manage content and what kind of content. I think our government's too focused on religious and political stuff, not so much as how these things impact a growing mind or children or society in general. I don't think there's enough study done that if you're showing too much violence it leads to people worshipping violence. Not worshipping but hero worshipping in a way. It becomes quite normalised when you keep seeing it and you think this is the norm.

0:10:28 - 0:15:48

Gaurav Gupta: Exactly. I mean, so if you're a hero and if Tiger Shroff is doing it, then why can't I do it?
Neha Hooda: Yeah.

Gaurav Gupta: But I think that’s a sense of responsibility, obviously, some actors do, some actors don't. And I think the problem today, if you come to where we are, is this too much? How do we control this? Because we can't control it. And now it's like drugs, right? Data is cheap. The government probably anyway wants you to be distracted because they want you to sit and watch videos and not think about what they're doing.

Neha Hooda: Correct.

Gaurav Gupta: You're not using your mind to actually participate. You're using your mind to distract. And if you see, it's not like bad, but you know, we, you know, there is no measure of how balanced we're getting at it. So you take different aspects, you take sports and sports, you know, IPL, IPL happened. So they obviously, the big benefits to it, I think, there was a big push towards leagues in India. You can see that's inspired a lot of people to pick up sports. But I don't know if the government has really married that push with actually creating, I mean, virtually, yes, you can watch sports and people. Is the government spending enough on creating enough programs, enough grounds, enough places, enough things to actually take the benefit of that, of that interest that you're developing in a child into the sports area. I think…. What you find in, you know, sports has been a big driver of what people watch online…. I think kids are too. And obviously, you know, that's probably what got them hooked on to watching more and more things on demand.
Neha Hooda: Why do you think that? Why do you think so?

Gaurav Gupta: I think there are lots of issues, right? So you have one TV in a house, right? So somebody's, or this is, sports is something also that the whole family does together, right? So there is more of it as an activity. But, you know, it's a group watching sport or group discussing sport. You might be watching separately, but you're still discussing what happens. So, sports has been, I think it's been mostly positive, I won't call it negative. I think the cartoon stuff is just dealt with even more explosion of more you know More content. But yeah, I mean in that sense, you know what you pose a question about humanizing food… think I don't think there's anything wrong done that way. But see, even the kids' cartoon have all the dishoom, dishoom and action. But that's not necessarily bad. You can't have everybody just dancing and singing. Yeah, I mean…… the….. The context here is you know, I mean all these food items are clearly not something that you would put on a healthy chart list, you know, and There's a lot of samosa. I mean samosa in general, it's sweet. It's very nice and it's interesting but Yeah, but you can't make a character who's called broccoli either, right? I don't think that's interesting. You know, I think that's, you know, you have, I'm sure there are this content Of carrots and peas also. So, you know, you cannot introduce something foreign that they're not even used to. Parents may not eat it. How will you, you know, but I think, but you should see what Kellogg's and these people have done, right? There was no cereal that was a part of our daily diet. And now it is. So I think companies like Kellogg's, etcetera, have spent 20 years of marketing to do it. All their characters are based on animals. Selling you Fruit Loops or whatever it is. There is, I mean, I think the biggest impact of the first decade

and now the second decade, in the end, it's okay. So let's talk about endless choices….India has 1.3, 1.4 billion people, different languages, different economic backgrounds, different exposures in terms of education, right? So, and look at this, you know, you have the youngest population in the world. And average Indian age of 26. So, they will continue to be the youngest population for a while. I think at the end, which I see the biggest opportunity today, and even I see the biggest growth today is all in e-learning. Yeah. And I think India's gonna make rapid strides in that area. I think… I see a lot of people, you know, this era of coaching classes and et cetera, and what we're seeing today, because people understand that, A, people like watching videos to learn content, and B, we have 1.3 billion people to actually sell this stuff to. So why not combine the two and that could be really worth it. And so that's why you should study the growth of companies like Baijyu's and several other companies that have used media as a learning platform. Secondly, even if you take things like youtube or Netflix, etc. Netflix on the whole obviously being a market leader is very thoughtful about what it puts out there. It doesn't have, you know, it doesn't have, you know, completely uncensored and censored and has a lot of really high quality things as well. Which are both entertaining and can be educational as well. You know also spark that sense of, you know, maybe you call it wonderment or you call it imagination. But as young, I mean, if you think this now post COVID time, because every kid is sitting in India and learning, you know, doing classes online for six hours, seven hours. Their whole school is online. I think where it used to be given probably half an hour to watch TV or to watch something on the ipad or something, now you have your own ipad and you're doing this the whole day. That's your way to communicate. That's how you learn. So I think, you know, this, this is going to be a dramatic change in terms of the amount of screen time that kids at a very young age are going to be exposed to. And I don't think that's ever going away. So where we had controlled screen time, now I don't think you can put this genie back in the bottle where, you know, I'm going to have, you're going to have half an hour of screen time.

0:18:51-

Neha Hooda: So Gaurav, here's my question to you. You know, when we're talking about such a huge population and we do have a surge in supply also, there's obviously surge in demand also, given the current situation. So how do you, as somebody on the content production side, identify that, you know, this is my target audience? Because unlike many

other countries, which are smaller in number, we are by no standards small, you know, is the audience overgenized that way. So what do you think when content is going out on these popular platforms? And we'll talk about the education part in a bit, but I just want to understand from you that how is it that we know when content goes out, say like on a Disney or any of these other bigger platforms, how do you think, within, you know, your space of work, how do you think these people are perceiving the target audience?

0:19:41

Gaurav Gupta: You know obviously so ….before it was all driven by Advertising right? Yeah, so you would measure where the audience is and who which advertiser wants to reach those audiences …Yeah…What kind of things that they like to watch…as I said you know it's you know especially cartoon kind of content can be seen over and over again…I think it has a longer shelf life as well…okay… right… yeah… and can be repurposed into several different languages…. Yeah. Live action, I think on the whole in India is very limited. The live action that kids in urban areas are consuming in India is 90% international Hollywood content….It would be Pixar or whatever, the cartoons that are coming from there. You know, in fact, India hardly makes any content which is live action for kids. It is a fact. That's what it is.

0:21:03

Neha Hooda: You know I started my research with a sample group say like about 500 children and I went about interviewing them…. Followed with focus group discussions and questionnaires and was trying to identify that exactly is it that these kids watch and of the top, there were these localized shows… none of them were made in India…. So you had a Doraemon, you had a Shin Chan and everything which is kind of brought into India and not really you know made in India of course…. You know…. Localization happened…it's tweaked to suit the local traditions customs in the language but still if you talk like about a Chota Bheem… it is good, it's a Indian product I'd say but still if you do…. If you compare with a Shin Chan or a Doraemon it still does not reach the popularity that these other two kind of reach….. So what do you think is that ….why do you think is that the reason or do you even agree with that as a content maker?

0:22:02

Gaurav Gupta: I think it's a quality in the end right? Okay because in the end you would see that…I think it's just that those guys have been probably doing it for a much longer time and they do it really well. I mean, Shinchan is, the real age of Doraemon is over 50 years now. I don't know why it works so well. Yeah, but you can't compare markets. I don't think so there's any comparison to be drawn between Japanese and Indians right? You know it's completely different culture. No but they're watching you know it's Doraemon on Indian television on Disney. Yeah yeah so there's no reason why you would say that why does that work then. It works. They like characters, they're funny, they're cute. You know whatever other reasons that they... I mean if you ask audience you would ask them how they feel about it, right? Yeah Yeah, it's about what does it do right… why do these kids you know, why is peppa pig the number one show? Why has that.. There's a green gold company that makes animation and you know, they went on Netflix last year and have done so well… It's…it's just the creative, you know, on how one tells stories. And that telling stories is a universal language. I don't think it's about in a society or a language. So storytelling on its own is, it's a different language. It's a language on its own, right? So it's universal, it breaks through different, it breaks through probably any convention. A lot of audiovisual things that we actually have that power to be, you know, travel places. But you know, Doraemon worked. That doesn't mean everything else is gonna work in a game.

0:24:18

Neha Hooda: That's true.

0:24:19

Gaurav Gupta: Right. So, you know, you have exceptions. And it's, you know, that Chota Bheem, which is such a phenomena, right? It's not an international show. And it's a huge phenomena, even in the most upscale sort of income households in India…So in urban income households, if you take like the top-top, like if you take the top 0.01 percent… even their kids would be into Chhota Bheem.

0:25:06

Neha Hooda: What's about this Chhota Bheem?

0:25:08

Gaurav Gupta:Yeah, so it's just about storytelling. Yeah. So you can't say it's about this or that….it's not like it's the best looking animation that you've ever seen right, so… but they're not trying to do that. They're trying to engage kids for 20 minutes in these characters These characters have these certain kind of quirkinesses that kids like yeah…it's just about that you know… now that's psychology, whether kids identify… whether they identify with the character, they identify with the character's friends, how the writers put it and do it, it is completely subjective. Again, there is no, there's no formula, you know, just because one thing works doesn't mean the other things will..no… But the best part is that India confounds people…because it's such a large market. Yeah You know, it's you know, it's larger than most markets combined, you know, our regional markets are larger than most international country country, country markets. You can't apply the same sort of learning convention. But, but there are definitely some average common factor, right? So, if you study the kind of content that works in India, you'd probably be able to identify trends… Kids in India prefer this. I'm sure there's research already done on that. But it's such a wide variety, right? Going from Doraemon and Peppa Pig to even Marvel now. It's such a huge variety, right? And you can, when you take things like, like, you know, things like Star Wars, which is, you know, live action. It's, you know, kids are going to like that… so it depends on the age group, right? They're going to like stories like this or stories like that, but also depends on the kind of environment that they're exposed to in their household. How they're raised, what their parents ask them to focus on, or what their...how are they consuming also, you know, living in a noisy home with lots of people, or they have their own room, or they won't, you know, they have one common TV which everybody shares, I don't know what it is. A variety of reasons. And that depends on how they're escaping or they're engaging. But you know, this whole mixed media now from, I don't think television per se remains true anymore. So any screen, whether it's a smartphone screen or ipad screen. You know, if you just take from a screen time perspective, now I think gaming is an important part of media. So, you know, the kind of games people play, all this PUBG, et cetera, it's all actions and blowing up people and

killing people or whatever. Yeah. It's, doesn't have gore in it, but still. I think it's important to study the impact of gaming because that is something that you're driving, right? You're making decisions. You're not consuming it passively. You're engaging, right? You're doing it. Though you're doing it in So, more and more kids today, as they learn how to use screens and smartphones and ipads, are engaging in playing a lot of these games online. I think gaming has been up in India more than ever before. Overall, I think there's nothing wrong. I think a screen today is a part of your body now. There's really nothing to understand except for give them more and more content. And I think that's the hunger for content is just not coming down.

0:30:29

Neha Hooda: I think people are consuming more and more and more and more. And truly crazy as to the amount of content people can consume. Well, I think this definitely brings us to this point where I'm more in a circular flow, where unlike the past where the producers could look the other way and just focus on what they wanted to do. But I think the audience has largely become a part of a discussion in a very big way now. I think the process is very, very communicative in terms of some sort of a feedback mechanism, especially if you're on the OTT platforms, the mapping is very accurate of how popular a show is or not in comparison to the trps. So how do you think when people are sitting, when you're talking about making content or just deciding on a storyline, how does this part of consumers claiming agency and saying that you know I like this and I don't like this, how do you think this has shape shifted in a way?

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Gaurav Gupta: You know I'm truly… you know it's not… I don't know how to say it. The problem is that India is such a large market now… Yeah, that you just don't have you know, anything does well. It's made half-wits. It'll astonish you. You'll probably think how the **** could this s*** be working, but it does. You know… you watch some shows and you're like that's atrocious but then you find out that it's been you know… they have just been greenlit for season three and season four and season five. This is truly you know… you can compare it to drugs.

Neha Hooda: Especially I guess it is the binge-watching phenomena that has increased the capacity for us to also not make appointment you know… there's no appointment anymore… you know… so you can just keep looking at the screen and consuming content 24*7… it's endless and you think the audience kind of switches off in terms of… you know… questioning themselves in terms of …you know… do you think the audience kind of at some point just turns a blind eye and just doesn't really bother about the quality of the content that's coming their way?

0:32:54

Gaurav Gupta: No, that's not true. Because there's so much choice…Yeah….So the question about choice, is that, you know, given a choice, if you're given a choice between a, you know, like a Mercedes and a Maruti, you can easily see what the difference is, right? Yeah, correct. So I don't think so. And today information is easy. So you will, you know, something good is happening. You will come to know immediately something good is happening. Right. And otherwise advertising will reach you or messages will reach you or reviews will reach you or your friends will tell you. So I'm saying because of choice, I think the competition mandates that you create good stuff. Even though the worst part is that there's just so much now, and even mediocre stuff does okay. So, A, it's the very good stuff. And then there's the mediocre stuff. But if your stuff is below average, then it won't work.

0:34:13

Neha Hooda: So in a way, can we say that the audience has kind of raised the bar in this whole content generation quality?

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Gaurav Gupta: Audience has become choosy. Yeah. Yeah, I would say that. I would say because there's more choice. And that kind of pushes people to do better. But every part of it, right? So if you use an application like Netflix, which is an amazing app, works really well,

all the functions and things are great. It's also that sticky part, now you try using another s***** Indian app, like **** app or something. You know, it doesn't work as well. And the audience notices that difference as well. You know, it notes that, okay, I'm gonna pay more money for this because it's a higher quality experience. So I think it's all about, well, if you're gonna give things away for free, it's different, but if you wanna get paid, you have to provide better quality. Yeah, I just see the creators as well. Creators will go to platforms where they are getting paid well. Platforms will provide them a good ecosystem to work in. So it's natural selection, you know, survival of the fittest, but also, you know, you're attracting everybody's trying to attract the best of talent.

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Neha Hooda: I was trying to understand that, you know, now with this COVID thing happening and I mean, things are not changing in India anytime. So nowhere for that matter. So I think what I would probably three months back, I would talk about the Indian consumption pattern as more like a hybrid. So you have the broadcast, you have the otts and then you have other peripherals to all of this. How do you think the COVID situation is impacting this content generation process? I mean, we understand consumption is not coming to an end because people are more home now, they have more time and you know the archival system that technology provides us, they benefit out of it now. But in terms of production, what do you think is happening?

0:36:38

Gaurav Gupta: For kids?

0:36:44

Neha Hooda: Generally speaking, and then we can focus on the kids because I think kids is a very small market.

0:36:45

Gaurav Gupta: You know, so what has happened in the COVID situation is that only thing that's prevented is people from going out to shoot something live action. Like everything else

is working, everything else is working in the same speed and flow. So I think even for the guys who are probably working on live action, only thing that's delayed is that they're shooting part of it, right? Or in the sense that the amount of money in this field, the amount of productions, the amount of development, the amount of plans, that's been going up, I don't think it's come down. And I don't see it coming down for the next three, four years by any standard by any chance. I think it's really going to accelerate. Yeah. No, it's also well, it's explosion of digital right? I mean, Jeff Bezos says that when I win a Golden Globe, I sell more shoes. So the way the world is working is, you know, is getting people to use more of their smartphones and screens, right? Whether to watch video or to sell you shoes or sell you anything else or buy groceries, right? They're bringing your world to your screen. So I don't see it slowing down, not at all, not even for a second.

0:38:02

Neha Hooda: Gaurav, there is something that is definitely shifting here. The traditional concept of physical communities, societies, of physically going out and meeting people. And then you have this entire digital...

0:38:16

Gaurav Gupta: Yeah, but COVID has already done that. COVID forced you to do that…

0:38:20

Neha Hooda: I'm saying with COVID, not without COVID. Do you feel that content, because of the way content is being made and the kind of liberty…

0:38:30

Gaurav Gupta:I think then you would have to factor in things like social media right? But those things are connecting you as well?

0:38:38

Neha Hooda: No they are because I am looking at you know how

0:38:41

Gaurav Gupta: Physical interaction or virtual interaction?

0:38:44

Neha Hooda: Can you say that again please?

0:38:46

Gaurav Gupta:
Are we talking about physical interaction, virtual interaction or no interaction?

0:38:50

Neha Hooda: Well, it's a question of communities now. So earlier, you know, children went out to play. So they had like friends and there was an identity concept that they were given, you know, by the social system they were brought up in and which told them that this is who you are and this is what your name is, this is what your gender affiliation is and this is how it is. However, now we see that more and more, so if we take even like some kind of, you know, program, so there's always some kind of translation of this content which goes on to say like snippets say in terms of like you know some snippets on the youtube, something on Twitter, something on Facebook and there's some kind of communities that get formed either bases on you know …..like closed communities which are based on the affiliation that they have to the interest. It's got nothing to do with the socioeconomic setup or anything. And this definitely seems to provide a much wider possibility to people to assume any identity role, any gender role that they have. So do you think that, when you're looking at content and then content is moving to these other platforms and audience engages with them, it's a very different ecosystem that's coming into place and that's taking people away from the physical concept of in-person meeting people and everything is I mean relationships are online today you know so…

0:40:54

Gaurav Gupta: I don't know how to answer it. I think it's, let's talk about two things, right? Why don't we have time to form physical bonds? Or we have time to spend with people? It's not because of anything else. I think the world has brought everything to our screen, right? We're spending a lot more time looking at the screens than we are actually communicating with people. But that's just because the nature of our learning has changed, the nature of our work has changed, the nature of how we consume information has changed, the nature of how we communicate has changed. It's not because of content per se. Content is not doing that to you, right? Because we don't have much, you know, we're spending so much time working on or spending time on these screens, right? That we have less time, not that we don't want to, we just have less time. But…but I think it's both, right? There are people who…Who are sharing that online experience with their friends, yeah, or they're creating new friends as well…. There are people who spend time together having these shared experiences with media… like I said right family watch it together family doing something else together like playing a video game. Yeah, so I think there are a lot of shared experiences as well. So I think the nature even now… what would you… take like Netflix and Amazon have these features now where you can sync up and watch a movie together. You can be in your house, i'll be in my house. We both watch the movie together and we can discuss. Though we might not be physically there but we're still connected. We're talking. Right so is just a new way of communication.… that's not anything necessarily bad. I just think that you know, the whole problem also is that there is so much happening. There's so much content, there's so many things, so many events, so much information, you know, so much going on... You can get lost in all this stuff, man. I mean, you just don't get time, you need to learn how to…., it's difficult today to lead a balanced life. That's the question. You know, difficult for you to actually make time for yourself, because you're just constantly engaged. Right? So I think it's a, the behavioral impact on that is, it just change people's habits, but you know this might be that people will you know will definitely some people might choose to just live online and not step out or whatever or step out really less. Could be any of this stuff. How do you assess what's right, what's wrong?

0:43:42

Neha Hooda: I'm a researcher, so for me I don't have no value judgment for right or wrong. I'm pretty disconnected that way myself too, you know. I mean, no social media, nothing that way, except for what's bare minimum. So I'm a rare kind of person in my time, I think. So which is why, happy to know.

0:50:00

Neha Hooda: You know, it happened to me, I was sitting through deliveries for this film called Ek Villain, 2.30 in the night. Some stupid comments from the censor board came and they were like, do this, do that. I was like, what am I doing with my life? And I do believe in constant learning. So every few years, i'll go and learn something. And I got into this phd after 10 years of my master's. So it was a very conscious decision because I wanted to, at some point in my life, become a better content maker, become a better parent, to be able to understand what goes on. And I really am very passionate about working with children. So before I actually enrolled in this, I spent two years working in a school with children and trying to understand, getting a hang of what is it that they do with this content? How are they using it? You know, how it's shaping up their life. And it's changing all the time. I mean, every six months I go back and I speak to these kids and it's a very different thing. So for me, it's personally blown away lots and lots of myths. I think i've become a better person, have a better understanding of children, I'd say. Also, the way how this content process works, less opinionated. You know, I don't say any more that violence is bad and sex is bad for children anymore. It's just a different learning that i've had, because for me, it's just about, you know, how do we bridge this gap between academia and content makers? When I first came here, when I would sit in these discussion rooms and some very educated people, you know, film professors, and be like, but, you know, this is not how any time this happens in a film discussion room. And there's this huge gap. So I really, really, really hope that what I bring out is simple enough that common people can read, they can understand that exactly what's happening because content generation doesn't stop the moment you switch off a screen, you know. It goes on beyond. It's very subtle. And for people on the content making side to be more aware that, you know, when they put out something very silly and stupid, it stupid it just doesn't end there. So hope to come out a better person once I become doctor. Thank you so much for this lovely chat today. It's been wonderful and I will connect with you soon probably for another round of questions maybe little more focused for the next one. Alright. Okay Gaurav. Bye-bye. See ya. Bye-bye.

12. Appendix L: Questionnaire B for teachers/ parents

What is your name?

Are you a parent, a Teacher or both?

How old is your child?

Are you a parent or a teacher to a super girl, a super boy or both?

How long does your child spend in front of a TV everyday?

Do you find any problems with the content that your child is being exposed to on TV, in films and on smartphones?

Do you notice behavioral changes in your child?

Do you think that the change is in some way because of the exposure to media?

What kind of content would you prefer your child to watch?

What kind of programs would you want your child to have access to?

In your opinion, are the current media offerings of the kinds of TV shows available, enough for your child's development?

Do you see any negative effects of exposure to media and smartphone devices in your child?

What suggestions would you like to give to content makers for children's program?

What are the changes in children's program from the time when you were a child to now?

Do you notice any changes in themes being covered through children's programs across TV and films in the last 10 years?

Which are your favourite programs for your child that you would recommend them to see?

Which children's programs would you prefer would be taken off and not be accessible at all to children?

What are the positive effects of media content viewing on your child?

Do you think youtube is helping your child become smarter?

13. Appendix M: Questionnaire C for children

For the purpose of research dissertation being done at University of Debrecen, Hungary:

Jan 9, 2023

Dear Parent

This questionnaire is being shared as part of a phd research project being done at University of Debrecen, Hungary. The research project maps the media engagement habits of young children in India. The findings of this research are expected to provide the global academic community a better insight into media culture of children from India. It would be wonderful if you can have your child fill out this form.

Kind regards.

Neha Hooda

By filling this form you share your consent for your repsonses to be used in the research.

* Indicates required question

1.What is your name? *

2.Do you have an email id that you can share? Please give if available.

3.Are you a girl/boy?*

Mark only one oval.

Girl
Boy

4.How old are you?*

Mark only one oval.

7 years 10 years

8 years 11 years

9 years 12 years

5.Which is your favourite TV Program?*

6.Which is your favourite cartoon character?*

7.Do you like Doraemon and Chhota Bheem?*

Mark only one oval.

Doraemon Chhota Bheem Other:

8.Do you like adventure stories or funny stories when you watch cartoons?*

Mark only one oval.

Adventure Funny Other:

9.Do you use Internet to watch your favourite programs?*

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

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