

WHO'S WATCHING THE WEB SERIES IN INDIA AND WHY? – A VALUES BASED SEGMENTATION OF THE GRATIFICATIONS DERIVED

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Abstract

This study delves into a very popular phenomenon; the web series- in an environment of increasing media fragmentation and the battle for viewer attention. Through this study, an attempt has been made to understand these viewers better, going beyond their pure demographics and delving into their identities in terms of their value orientations. It has been proved through various studies that personal values have an effect on the viewing behaviour and the gratifications that a person desires to derive from that experience. Therefore it is also attempted to match these gratifications with the value sets of people. Thus, leading to a segmentation of the viewers of web series soaps on the basis of their values and linking each of these segments with the gratifications derived by each of them respectively. Thus, the proposition of moving the concept of uses and gratifications beyond causality to a tool of segmentation and beyond has been underscored. Also the study attempts to help in providing the OTT platforms and the advertisers, a glimpse into the mind-sets of the various sets of their target groups when they are consuming their 'brand' and thus help to build a better connect with the consumers.

Key words: Segmentation, Uses and Gratifications, Values, Web Series

Introduction

The September of 2016 brought a tsunami in the world of telecom services when Reliance launched its most affordable and lucrative telecom and internet services in India under the brand Jio. This propelled the rate in which India has seen digitization. From a journey which is not so old, till date, India has taken a big leap to a digital world. One of the ways in which this leap has contributed is by changing the landscape of media in India. Especially, when it comes to entertainment media, digital is the fastest growing segment of all. Envisioning the growth in Indian market, online streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon prime made inroads with their entertainment offerings. Homegrown players such as Hotstar, Voot, Sony Liv, Zee 5 also joined the league with their unique positioning and offering in order to catch up with the changing consumer behavior and consumption. From appointment viewing to streaming on demand, there came a change in the way entertainment is made available and the way it is consumed. The rich content library with international and regional shows, movies and platform produced originals along with smart and appealing user interface has brought a change in which people are interacting with and getting immersed with the content. The consumer can curate their own choice of content and select the time when they would want to watch it. OTT platforms are employing technologies in order to learn their consumer's choices better and make them stay on the platform even longer. This is unlike what a traditional TV offers to a consumer. Engaging narratives with such convenient platforms have made consumers spend hours over hours on the platform by playing one episode after the other. The rapid growth and adoption of handheld devices has brought about a cross fertilization of web and TV (Braun & Callay, 2009). As opposed to "scheduled and synchronized" traditional television (Jenner, 2017), online video platforms offer audiences a continuous access to many TV series and movies. This has paved way for all different kinds of platforms to serve to such large digital base of consumers be it in the form of transport options at the door step, food delivery or entertainment. Further to this, within this digital savvy base of consumers, there is a constant need to gratify their needs on the go. Ruggiero talks about the three key aspects which demarcates the online and traditional media. These are choice, control and authority so as to when to consume (Ruggiero, 2000). Though this number goes up to as high as approximately 40% of the millennials' population of India (Deloitte, 2016), another study published by Facebook states that 71% of Indian millennials

are already watching streaming content and 48% of them prefer a combination of TV with streaming video (Hutchinson, 2017). While multi-screening and Digital over-the-top (OTT) platforms may still be at a nascent stage in India, they are growing at a humungous speed and platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar etc. are expanding their content libraries significantly. Interestingly, this growth is not limited only to the metros or the affluent class – thanks to the increasing penetration of smartphones, 4G development and the Government of India's Digital India initiative. As per Segjin et.al., (2017), there are majorly two sets of reasons for which audience pay attention to the content, which have been grouped as "Bottom-up processes of attention" and "Top- down processes of attention". The former are stimulated by features of the media content itself for example, the sound effect, camera changes etc. These are characterized as being automatic processes where they attract people's attention even when people are not actively seeking that content. On the other hand, Top down processes are guided by personal factors such as interests and goals of the viewers. This study attempts to understand the top down process looking at their values as a person and linking them to the gratifications they derive from consuming specific content over the internet- in this case – web series.

Literature review

Why People consume content? - Gratifying needs through media consumption

It was only much later in research that the concept of an active decision making audience member was introduced. One influential tradition in media research is referred to as 'uses and gratifications' (occasionally 'needs and gratifications'). U&G rose originally in the 1940s and underwent a revival in 1970s and 1980s. The approach springs from a functionalist paradigm in the social sciences. It presents the use of media in terms of the gratifications of social or psychological needs of the individual (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). U&G can be seen as part of a broader trend amongst media researchers which is more concerned with 'what people do with media', allowing for a variety of responses and interpretations. The uses and gratifications approach is grounded in psychological explanations. It is a perspective that considers the relationships of the stimulus, one's internal state and the response to that stimulus (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Persons are motivated by social, psychological and socio-cultural influences to use media in order to obtain particular gratifications (Swanson, 1992). A person's conceptual filters, such as values, beliefs, needs and motives, effect behavior such as media exposure and effects (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Generally, the needs which audiences seek to gratify are taken to be as summarized by Denis McQuail (McQuail, 1984), namely: surveillance, personal identity, personal relationships and diversion. A final point relevant to this discussion of the individual's needs, is individual personalities i.e. whether the viewer is an introvert/extrovert, whether they are analytical and so on. The Uses and Gratifications research in 1990s and 2000s stressed on television and new media platforms. Hagerty (2008) conducted a study of YouTube by employing television's uses and gratifications approach. He defined this study as an exploratory study and used TV uses and gratifications as a basic model. In another study Flayelle et al (2017) about the In association with Netflix, he describes how the consumer of today is not just a couch potato who is passively consuming anything and everything but is a much more awakened consumer who controls what to watch and demands for a more compelling storytelling from the content providers. When a focused group was studied in order to understand the drivers of watching a television series, the need of immersion was one of the three drivers for the group apart from social and pleasure needs (Flayelle et al., 2017) Maëva Flayelle, Pierre Maurage and Joël Billieux had identified two other motivations apart from the need of immersion and those are pleasure and social (Flayelle et al., 2017). A high tendency identified among the participants to watch the reruns of an already watched series to rediscover the pleasure experienced previously and to dissect the plot in order to fill in the quest of what could happen in the upcoming season/episode. Even when we look at the distribution of content on Netflix, there is usually a long waiting time between two seasons of a production. The platform also encourages watching reruns and releases recap trailers so that the audience could catch up to the plot and the characters (Firstpost, 2019). This offers a great opportunity to the consumers to experience and relive the emotions they experienced before. This also offers opportunity to the ones who missed out on watching the content during the first ever release and in turn join the bandwagon – a chance to be a part of the conversation in their peers. This is supported by the third aspect of social motivation. As was observed by Maëva Flayelle, Pierre Maurage and Joël Billieux, there was a strong motivation among the participants to keep

up with others in the social interactions and for some even a way to spend some time with their partners (Flayelle et al., 2017). While Maèva Flayelle, Pierre Maurage and Joël Billieux have identified three main motivations, Lisa Perks has encompassed all the three motivations under the term „Media marathoning’ (Perks, 2014). Findings explain that individuals who binge watch, apart from the need of escapism and entertainment, there are positive social factors at play which help these individuals to bond within their community and with their peers (Ramayan, Louise, Estella, & Abu, 2018). Whether it is scheduling to watch a show with the family member – a form of binge bonding or trying out a show to be a part of the next conversation about the show both offline and online, such behavior gives individuals a sense of connection in their social setting and even reasons to connect with others. As was mentioned by Lisa Glebatis, there are certain responses which are not so positive such as forming a parasocial relation with the characters where individuals tend to relate to the problems faced by the characters of the show (Perks, 2014). At worst, this could even spiral down to negative behavior such as withdrawal once the show ends or if there is too much gap between two consecutive shows. The major motivations found for binge watching are recreation which would further stimulate immersion, hedonism – to seek pleasure, develop or strengthen social connections, be a part of social conversations (Sheehan, 2015; Flayelle et al., 2017; Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2018; Castro et al., 2019). The motivations observed above suggest that there is strong elicitation of emotions and though each motivation is different but they are interrelated. Without the need of pleasure there would not be a need of immersion and the need of recreation would again suggest the need of pleasure. It would be interesting to study at this point that how these motivations are helping the consumer in their daily lives. The literature paves a way to see if escapism or the recreation act fulfilled through binge watching help the consumer to cope up with their day-to-day stress, to understand if this behavior helps them to deal with their daily environmental challenges and how exactly does such rich consumption affect them at an emotional level

Personality and Values Based Segmentation of Viewers

Values are cognitive representations of universal human requirements; biological needs, social interactional requirements, and social institutional demands on the individual (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Further, several studies have investigated the relationship of values to media consumption. Becker and Conner (1981) showed that values relate to television viewing. Domzel and Kernan (1983) postulated that a significant determinant of program selection is to be found in viewers’ expectations of content. The addition of viewer expectations to existing TV segmentation schemes therefore should render the medium more tractable as an advertising medium. (Domzel and Kernan, 1983). According to Rubin (1991), ‘personality, attitudes and experience influence audience perceptions and outcomes of media content. Therefore we need to examine elaborated models of media effects that consider social and psychological attributes, motivation, attitudes, behavior, and outcomes.

Research Methodology

Research Objective

Through this research, an attempt has been made to understand the gratifications which drive the web series viewership among Indian audiences and try to segment them beyond their pure demographics, on the values of their viewers. Apart from the basic enquiry on the segmentation of the gratifications derived from the web series based on the values and attitudes of their audiences, the study aims to answer the below questions:

- Who all are actually watching these web series? Can we group/segment them on the basis of their values and attitudes
- Why are the people in general watching them (the major reasons, motivations and gratifications)?
- Is there a difference in the gratifications acquired by these various segments? If there is such a difference, then which group is deriving what use/gratification out of watching the web series.

Research Tool and Sampling

The study was conducted using a survey questionnaire containing two scales, viz., the Gratifications scale () and the Values scale () consisting of twenty five statements each. The survey received a 107 responses of which 7 were found to be invalid, hence a total of hundred responses were analysed. The sample consisted a mix of gender and age groups, it had 44 males and 56 females across multiple socio economic sections and cities in the country.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using a multi-step process. First of all the statements in the values and gratifications were factor analysed. The factor analysis was done to reduce the 25 statements in each of these scales to a few groups i.e. a smaller set of salient variables. The Principal Component matrix method was used for extraction, so as to consider the total variance in the data.

The Values scale was reduced to 5 factors, which explains 61 % of the variance. The factors include;

1. Hedonistic materialism
2. Apprehensive affiliation motivation
3. Education driven Achievement
4. Idealism
5. Materialism

The gratifications scale was reduced to 5 factors, which explains 63% of the variance. The factors include;

1. Integration and social interaction
2. Information and social relationship
3. Diversion
4. Social excitement
5. Personal identity

After that the respondents were clustered on the basis of their values' orientation. For that K- means clustering was used and finally the 6 cluster solution was accepted, out of which two of these clusters, which had only 2 cases each were considered as outliers. So, finally there are four clusters to be considered; Number of Cases in each Cluster

Table 1: Number of Cases in each cluster

Cluster Number	# Cases
1	17
2	24
3	2
4	2
5	36
6	19

Therefore, clusters 3 and 4 are considered as outliers. Cross Tabulations were done for the other four clusters, to get their demography and characteristics. The results of which are discussed below

The clusters being considered for our discussion are thus four;

- The Philips people (The Run of the Mill materialists)
- The Close- up people (The Career and network Builders)
- The Lalita ji' s (Climbers)
- The Raymond's people (Idealists)

Each of these clusters has been discussed in detail hence forth;

The Philips people (The Run of the Mill materialists)

Using Philips for these people means that they are almost all over the place looking for materialistic pleasures and status. Demographically, this cluster has no clear cut characteristics, it is a complete spread of age, gender, socio economic sectors, qualifications etc. The only defining factor for this factor is their materialistic value orientation. This cluster loads on the values' factor 5 (0.57330), which is of materialism. So these people subscribe to values like Material possessions are a measure of well being and Material possessions are a measure of social status. So, it is evident that these are people who value materialism and material possessions in life and still know the value of money and education etc. in life. It is almost stated by the heavily negative loading of this cluster on values' factor 1 (-.81015), which is the factor for hedonistic materialism, so although these people are materialists they are not hedonists and do not think that money is the solution to all problems in life. So although, they value materialism, but that is for well-being, social status and show off, it is surely not the be all and end all in life and not for pleasure and comforts of life. Perhaps, the materialists getting towards pragmatism.

The Close- up people (The Career and network Builders)

This cluster consists basically of the educated youth, spread over the various socio-economic clusters. These are highly educated people, mainly in their 20s and 30s. They are in the process of building and enhancing their careers, by using their education. Also they are looking for networking. Moreover, since these people are not yet settled in life, they are a bit insecure, and do not want to get trapped in a group or a job, but want to achieve the most, both professionally and socially. This cluster loads highly on factors 2 (0.55260) and 3 (0.52218). These value factors being those of Apprehensive affiliation motivation and education driven achievement, respectively. Therefore the values that these people subscribe to are mainly

- It is important to be heard in a group.
- It is important not be cornered in a group
- Friendship means trust
- Weekends should not be spent alone.

On one hand and on the other hand they also almost equally subscribe to values like;

- Life is meaningless without achievements
- Education makes the world a better place
- To live is to achieve
- Knowledge is power.

Hence, it can be seen that this is a group of people want to be successful in their careers and hence value education as a means to get there, also they want to be respected socially. They want to be popular and respected in their peer groups, basically they are looking for social networking. Hence, they require all the confidence, ambition etc. as symbolized by the brand Close-Up.

The Lalita ji' s (Climbers)

This segment is very much dominated by lower middle class women, who are educated but not highly and are society conscious hedonists. They want to be doing well and more importantly give the impression of doing well. Demographically speaking, 27 out of the 36 cases in this segment are females and predominantly lower and lower middle class socio-economic group. This cluster loads highly on factors 1(0.65791) and 2 (0.64906). These being the hedonism and apprehensive affiliation motivation factors.

Therefore, the values that these people subscribe to are;

- Life is meant for enjoyment
- Comforts should be the aim of life
- Money is the solution to all problems
- Life is meant to be live comfortably.

On one hand and on the other side they again subscribe to the values of ;

- It is important to be heard in a group.
- It is important not be cornered in a group
- Friendship means trust
- Weekends should not be spent alone

Therefore, these people wish for all the comforts and pleasures that money can provide, which they don't have currently. Hence these are the strugglers, people who are looking up in life, and feel are young enough to aim for big and haven't lost hope. Somehow, they seem to be somewhat dissatisfied with the kind of life they lead and look up to their various reference groups and their lifestyles. And again they want to prove their own worth in these groups and do not want to be looked down upon in these groups. Unlike, the previous group subscribing to similar social values, when these people look for values like, 'it is important not be cornered in a group' or 'weekends should not be spent alone', these people are looking to be included in the group, there is fear of not being left out socially and are looking for affiliation and equal participation, a show of one up man ship in their peer groups. Basically, these are mainly the lower middle class housewives, who'd be worried about, "uski sari meri sari se safed kaise" (how is her dress whiter than mine) or "padosion ne nayi car le li hai"(the neighbours have bought a new car).

The Raymond's people (Idealists)

These are the people who are more settled in life, having achieved what they had aspired to. Demographically these are dominantly upper socio economic class and a higher age group i.e. 35+, who are highly educated . Their value orientation being idealistic, i.e. this cluster loads on values' factor 4 (0.34). Hence they ascribe to values like;

- Life should be sweet and rosy
- Friendship means complete honesty
- Education makes the world a better place
- Family members should stay together, no matter what.

So, it is seen that these people are now post the struggles and achievements' stage in life and can afford to idealize. They have mostly "arrived in life' and can "afford" to talk of idealistic values. They want their life to be running smoothly now, without a lot of ups and downs, with their family being around them. And of course, being educated themselves, they feel that education makes the world a better place, the people who leisure out with the newspaper and morning cup of coffee and comment on the happenings in the world.

After the cluster analysis, a Discriminant analysis was run on the data. The discriminant was run to discriminate each of the identified clusters on the basis of the gratifications that they derive from watching the TV web series. For this purpose the values of the cluster centers was used as the grouping variable and the regression

factor scores from the factor analysis done on the gratifications scale were used as the independent variables. The results show that

- The first three functions are significant, as they account for 97.8 % of the dispersion.
- The canonical correlation which measures the association between the discriminant scores and the groups is 0.763, 0.616 and 0.339 for the 3 functions respectively.
- The Wilk's lambda, which is the proportion of the total variance in the discriminant scores not explained by the differences among the groups stands at 0.219, being very close to 0, hence indicating that the group means are different.
- Also the structure matrix indicates that the first function loads on the 1st factor, the 2nd function loads on the 4th factor, 3rd one on the 5th, 4th on the 2nd and the 5th function loads on the 3rd factor. (The implications of these are discussed in the findings section).

Further, 3 dimensional and 2 dimensional graphs were plotted on the basis of the functions at the group centroids, to get a better understanding.

Research Findings

From the output of the discriminant analysis, it is seen that only three functions are significant for our analysis, as they explain about 98 % of the total variance. Hence, only these three factors would be used mainly for the analysis of the gratifications that the people of the various segments are seeking to gratify through the TV web series. The three functions under consideration being;

- Integration and social interaction
- Social excitement
- Personal identity.

The findings from the graphs plotted on the basis of the results from the discriminant analysis suggest that;

The 3-D graph (refer appendix) very clearly indicates the following points;

- The first cluster, i.e. the Philips people is definitely positive on social excitement. They are also looking for some integration and social interaction.
- The Close-up and Raymond's people seem to be pretty close to each other on all functions, other than social excitement. Wherein the idealists are somewhat positive on it, whereas the close-up people are almost neutral to it.
- The close-up people are also seeking the personal identity gratification.
- The Lalitajis are looking for Integration and social interaction mainly, whereas they are negative on excitement.
- The idealists are looking for (are positive) only on excitement, that too to a very limited extent.

To study these trends in greater depths, three 2- dimensional graphs (refer appendix) were plotted, for all the combinations of the three functions of gratifications.

Their indications and analysis are discussed hence forth, considering each of our specific clusters separately.

The Philips people (The run of the mill materialists)

As mentioned earlier, these people are definitely positive on the social excitement gratification (0.9669). That means they get social excitement out of watching web series, that is

- They relate with the relationships depicted in the web series.
- They watch web series just because they enjoy watching them
- They can relate their life situations with those of characters in the web series.

Apart from social excitement they are also looking for integration and social interaction (0.515), which means they are looking to gratify the following needs;

- They would like to have the kind of life their favourite web series' character leads.
- They relate with the characters in them
- One of the characters in the web series is their role model
- The web series are their companions
- They love to talk/ discuss the web series with their friends/family
- At times they find themselves talking to the characters.

From all of these, perhaps it could be safely said that these people are using web series in a very manifold way. On one hand, they feel that the web series, their characters, the values in them are related to them and their own lives, as in they themselves are interacting and integrating with the web series on the other hand they feel that the web series are a means for them to interact with the other members in the society, as in they like to talk about web series in their peer groups.

Moreover, since it was seen that the basic characteristic of this cluster is materialism, and the most of the web series, especially the ones in our consideration set are very attuned to satisfying these needs with the posh houses and swanky cars, the life situations and lifestyles of the characters in the web series are definitely what these people value and surely they would like to have that kind of a life. But since these people are negative on hedonism, they have to defend themselves with statements like, 'I watch them just because I enjoy watching them'.

The Close- Up people (The Career and network Builders)

Personal Identity is one factor, which puts these people really apart from all the other clusters. These are the only people who are looking for personal identity gratification from the web series' viewing experience. Looking at the social excitement versus personal identity graph or the integration versus identity graph, this is the only segment that would be found lying totally distant from all the others, on another side of the Y axis. In fact another interesting thing about this segment is that even in the third 2-D graph, this cluster is alone in its quadrant, where it is highly positive(0.516) on the excitement axis, it is also slightly positive(0.25) on the integration part . So it can be safely said that this segment of viewers is completely different from all other groups.

They want to be a part of the society and be heard in it, so they gratify this need through the web series in two ways, one with integrating themselves with the show, so they relate with the characters, make them their companions, their role models, want to have their kind of life and talk to the characters. On the other hand, since they also like to discuss/ talk about the web series with their friends and family, they are using web series as a medium to be heard in the group. And of course, their value of achievement is very well linked with their personal identity gratification and through the characters being their role models, wanting to have their kind of life etc.

The Lalita ji' s (Climbers)

Looking at the 2- dimensional graphs for this segment, it is found that these people are positive only on interaction and social integration. And what separates them from all the others is the fact that they are negative on both excitement and social identity, which puts them away from all the others in a separate quadrant (third) in the excitement versus identity graph. So basically, the gratification that these people are looking for is integration and social interaction. And looking at the characteristics of this segment they are looking for the pleasure and comfort in life, something which they do not have in real life but a need which is being gratified by the web series, in terms liking to have their kind of life, making the characters their role models and aspiring to be like them, have their kind of life, which they readily accept that they would never have in reality, but what's the harm in integrating myself with somebody who has it.

The Raymond's people (Idealists)

These people are positive only on social excitement and negative on all the others. So, they watch web series because;

- They enjoy watching them
- They relate with the relationships depicted in the web series
- They relate their life situations with those of the characters in the web series.

Referring to the characteristics of this segment, it is seen that these people have already arrived in life and as such do not value either achievement or social recognition and affiliation, therefore they are evidently negative on integration and social interaction. So what they are mainly looking for is enjoyment. So, for them, web series are mainly a leisure activity.

Conclusion and Implications

Referring to the analysis and findings, we see that three of our four main clusters are looking for the Integration and social interaction gratification out of the web series, and these clusters as they have been characterized, mainly represent what is called the 'masses' in common parlance. Therefore if the marketers, advertisers or the OTT platforms for that matter, are trying to target the 'masses', then it is the provision of these gratifications and contents that lead to the satisfaction of the connected needs, that they should be doing. On the other hand, if the target group is the high-class segment for example, for the up- market brands then they must consider the value orientations and expectations of these people out of the soap viewing experience. Which incidentally are quite different from the other segments, as we see that these people are looking for social excitement out of the web series and are negative towards the other gratifications' sets. Further, from the study, we also see that there surely is a link between the value orientations of people and the gratifications that they are trying to derive from their media consumption experience, and hence the choice of content, in this case web series. As also Becker and Conner (1981) have showed that values relate to television viewing. In fact other research on television program content also suggests that different program categories do indeed convey qualitatively different value-related messages, which appeal to people with different value orientations. In terms of future research scope, this study uses discriminant analysis as a tool for discriminating between the various clusters, but further it could be used as a tool for forecasting. Where in the individual cases in each of the clusters could be studied and then using discriminant analysis their behavior in terms of their movement from one cluster to another can be studied, which could be effectively used for better targeting.

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