

# Influence of American Sitcoms: A Study on Indian Youth

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## ABSTRACT

Ever since the year 1991, India has witnessed a sudden and unregulated growth of satellite television in the country, which greatly lead to the commercialization of media. Media, an element of promotion of culture and an instrument to promote development and national identity, is now under the pressure of globalization. As a result, foreign television programs attract a huge number of India viewers, especially the urban population.

Though widely popular, these channels and programs have been criticized and called irrelevant to the Indian audience as they promote alien values. The whole issue has been widely discussed and studied by researchers, scholars, academicians, media practitioners and policy-makers at large.

Therefore, it becomes essential to understand the far-reaching implications of foreign media, in the Indian context. This study attempts to find out the influence of American Sitcoms on the Indian Youth. The youth were particularly taken as they are more vulnerable to the effects of media. It is during this phase, that they have a strong inclination to adopt something new and form different perspectives. This study will help analyze the impact of media on the cultural ethos of the Indian youth and will be of use to those who are interested in foreign media effects.

**Key words: American Sitcoms, Attitudes, Cultural Ethos, Cross-border flows, Familial Ties, Cultural Imperialism**

## INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalization, in the early 1980s and majorly mid-1990s, media witnessed a great amount of exchange of world views, ideas, products and other aspects of culture. Commercialization of national television is regarded as an integral part of the economic liberalization programs, throughout the globe. The rapid expansion of global media has been a result of rapid deregulation of national television systems and a reduction in legal barriers to cross-border flow of software products. There was a dramatic

increase in the number of channels available in most nations in the 1990s due to technological changes such as the introduction of direct satellite broadcasting. The number of hours of television watched globally nearly tripled between 1979 and 1991.

*Richards and David (1996)*, summarize the process of globalization in three phases. The first phase focuses on how mass media could be used to speed up development process in a nation. The second phase witnesses' people being suspicious of Western media, in the developing nations. In the third phase, people of these developing nations are noticed to be caught between two conflicting forces, their resistance to Western media dominance and their need to adapt themselves to the globalization of media environment. A major issue of concern in developing nations is the cultural impact due to the flow of information and entertainment programs from the West, especially USA. However, this has been a boon for the US entertainment industry as it dominates the global markets for the production and distribution of television programs as well as films.

*Hamelink (1997)*, states that in response to the trends of globalization, many countries around the globe are revising their communication structures. The commercialization of global media has taken place, to an extent that it has resulted in a marked decline in the relative importance of public broadcasting and the applicability of public service standards.

*Tomilson (1991)*, argues that cultural imperialism is more than media imperialism, since the media are not the totality of cultural experiences; they merely mediate capitalist modernity which is a form of global capitalist imperialism. Therefore, cultural imperialism is a far more complex phenomenon, which needs to be studied from various angles. The cultural imperialism theory also argues that Western values on global media act as a powerful cultural force for the local people. However, the active audience analysts argue that people adopt Western values according to their needs and do not blindly imitate what they see in the media.

### **Entry of foreign channels in India:**

Prior to 1990, Doordarshan was the only source of television entertainment in India, which provided the viewers with a handful of soap operas, news and sports broadcasts, music and a few other programs, as they did not have a choice to switch channels.

Multi-channel coverage in India began in the year 1991, with the live coverage of the Gulf War by the American News Channel CNN.

The cable industry and satellite channels worked mutually and gave a big boost to the private television networks. If one examines the growth rate of cable TV operators over the years, the spectacular rise is evident. The number of cable operators in 1985 were merely 100, which rose to 10,000 in the first quarter

of 1991. By the year 1996, there were about 70,000 operators in the country. The cable operators eventually spread out to many small towns and even some rural areas.

The viewers now have access to an unlimited number of channels and a whole new range of shows from all around the globe, just by paying a nominal amount. These shows vary over a wide variety of genres from crime based-shows to reality television, from drama-drenched soap operas to situational comedies, from news-oriented shows to shows for music lovers. The reasons for the popularity of these foreign channels are many.

However, foreign television has been criticized on various levels in India, primarily for seeming to endanger local traditional culture with unwanted programs featuring sex and violence. The most basic argument in support of the cultural imperialism approach is that there is a wealth of evidence that cultural tastes and practices are becoming global ones. No technology has made such a sudden impact on the public mind as that of cable-satellite television.

The country's youth has been exposed to foreign television programs for about a decade now and will continue to have a choice of a wide range of foreign programs in the years to come. What will be the attitudes of the youth to the influence of foreign culture and what will be the shape of the media in coming decades will be decided by the impact that Foreign Television Programs have on the youth of the country today. Therefore, it becomes important to study systematically whether Foreign Television Programs bring about a change in the attitudes and perceptions of the youth towards western values and lifestyle.

## Review of Literature

During reviewing of the literature, the researcher observed that extensive research has been carried out in this area across academic and scholarly institutions in both developed and under developed countries. Through analyzing, interpreting and reviewing the existing articles, research papers and books, it was seen that television shows had a profound impact on its audience. The phenomenon of television and its influence on the youth has been approached from a variety of angles by various researchers.

*James Lull*, an European researcher, has been one of the major contributors to this field of research. His work appears frequently in the footnotes of those writers committed to an ethnographic approach to the study of television and popular culture. In "*Human Communication Research*" (1980), *Lull* generated a typology, through ethnographic investigation, about the social uses of television of more than 200 families representing blue-collar, white-collar and farmers.

In his book, *“World Families Watch Television”* (1988), Lull has collected a number of essays which address various such questions as, the extent to which television affects the political, spiritual and ethical values of individuals and family units and how these effects differ from one culture to another. The book contains various chapters written by authors from Great Britain, India, Venezuela, China, West Germany and the United States. All of them have used qualitative empirical methodology to provide data which is valuable.

*J.S. Yadava and Usha V. Reddy* (1988), in *James Lull* edition, in *“Television in urban Indian Families”* conducted an in-depth interview schedule on Indian families and observed two divergent trends in family interactions as a result of the presence of Television. In some families, there is an increase in the extent and intensity of interaction between the members. However, the inverse was also observed in some other families. Viewers may empathize and identify with characters in programs and may relate more to the programs than to the members of their family during the course of TV viewing. In *“Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television’s Audience”* (1990), Lull explains “the everyday world of social groups, their pattern of interpersonal communication and their uses of the mass media.”

*Muriel G. Cantor and Suzanne Pingree* (1983), in their book *“The Soap Opera”*, provide a comprehensive survey of the history, the means of production, the content and the impact on audiences of soap operas. Their analysis focuses on women’s issues, since the genre is primarily directed towards women (who constitute about 80 percent of the audience), but it is not limited to them. The book analyses the soap opera content and how audience respond to them. It also discusses prevalent views in soap operas on topics such as crime, health and other social problems. They address a very important question through their research, “What effects do soap operas have on the behavior of the audience, and how do they contribute to viewers’ conceptions of reality?” Their research is based on a rather simplistic assumption: The more people are exposed, the more they will be affected.

*G.W. Menton and Galician* (1987), in *“Pop Music and Society”* study the influence of music videos amongst adolescents with Uses & Gratification Theory as their base. They concluded that respondents felt that music videos provided need satisfaction, mood shifting and forgetting about problems. The early study of MTV video suggested that viewers preferred music videos more actively and potently over the audio version of the same song.

*Michel Elasmir and John Hunter* (1997), in *“Communication Year Book, Vol. 20”*, conducted a meta-analysis on impact of foreign television on domestic audiences. The study includes various studies from 21 different countries. The meta-analysis revealed weak, but *positive* correlation between exposure to foreign television and viewer’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values and behavior. The analysis also stated that

exposure to foreign television increases the purchase of foreign products, especially clothing and other consumer products.

*Peddiboyina Vijayalakshmi (2005)*, in “*Foreign Television and Indian Youth: Changing Attitudes*”, focuses on how Foreign Television Programs alter the attitudes of youth. The research addresses various issues like change in family norms, attitude towards role of Indian women, sexual norms, lifestyles and music preferences. Based on Social Learning Theory, the research hypothesizes that the characters in Foreign Television Programmes and their behavior, serves as a model for the viewers of these programmes, which in turn may influence their attitudes.

*Shigeru Hagiwara (1999)*, in “*Asian Journal of Communication*”, attempted to ascertain whether the values, attitudes and styles of behavior imparted by global television were at variance with the values and outlooks of the countries receiving such programmes. The research methodology included a content analysis of global as well as local programmes and a survey. The research stipulated that some values portrayed in global television have a deleterious effect on local cultures. Content analysis results revealed that certain values such as rude manners, premarital sex, skimpy clothing on women and individualism were considered as undesirable. Courage, respect for authority, family togetherness and concern for others were seen as the desirable values.

The existing literature available surrounding this topic provides an interesting viewpoint and insight of the whole scenario. The literature on impact studies indicate that the more people are exposed, the more likely they are to get influenced on various parameters. This study, therefore, attempts to look into the social learning theory and the cultivation theory to study the levels of changes in relationship to their exposure to American sitcoms. In view of the research done on television and its impact on audience, the present study raises questions and formulates hypothesis.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Mass media has a profound effect on the way media consumers process their thoughts. A number of theories have evolved over a period of time that revolve around this concept.

The Social Learning theory proposed by *Albert Bandura* is perhaps one of the most influential theories of learning and development. This theory added a new social element to the concept of changes in behavior by arguing that people can learn new behavior and information by observing other people.

“Social Learning Theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement.” -*Albert Bandura, Social Learning and Personality Development, 1963.*

"Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." -*Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977.*

Even though the Theory is general in nature, "Social Learning Theory is particularly relevant to the study of impact of mass communication because the description and portrayal of social life is frequent subject in media content. An individual observes a character, identifies him/her as a model and remembers the actions of the model and performs them when confronted with similar circumstances." – *De Fleur & Sandra, 1989.*

In the frame work of the Social Learning Theory, the researcher seeks to study how American Sitcoms can influence the behavior of the Indian Youth, through a process of cognitive learning.

Another important theory, developed by *George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976)*, the Cultivation Theory examines the long-term effects on television on the viewers. The central idea behind the theory is that exposure to television content has small but measurable effects on the perceptual worlds of audience members. The theory suggests that television "cultivates" people's beliefs about how the world works more through the sum total of interactions, behaviors and values presented in television content than through finite attempts to persuade.

"Cultivation Theory concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of growing up and living with television: the cultivation of stable, resistant, and widely shared assumptions, images, and conceptions reflecting the institutional characteristics and interests of the medium itself." -*George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976).*

Cultivation theory in its most basic form, suggests that television is responsible for shaping, or 'cultivating' viewers' conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole.

"The primary proposition of cultivation theory states that the more time people spend "living" in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on television." - *Communication Report, 2000.* Since the Cultivation Theory relates to the measurable effects on the perception of audience, it becomes important to understand the changing cultural paradigm of the Indian youth with the exposure to American Sitcoms.

## Formulation of the research Problem

The manner in which a family, particularly the children and the youth, is affected by Television has been the subject of research ever since Television was introduced. Numerous studies have been conducted to study the consumption of Television by the youth. These studies help us gain a systematic understanding of youth's way of defining Television.

Exposure to different ideologies and cultural norms being showcased in various television shows create a cultural paradigm amongst the viewers. Numerous media researchers conclude that the youth which consumes foreign media content is confused with the values projected in these shows and the one prevalent in the society. They generally prefer the foreign programs to indigenous programs. This research tries to address the cultural paradigm and study the influence of these Western Television shows amongst the Indian youth.

### The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the demographic profile of American Sitcom viewers.
2. To analyze viewership patterns of the respondents.
3. To understand the preference of American sitcom programs.
4. To study the attitudes of the viewers towards the American Sitcoms in terms of:  
(a) Familial ties (b) Spending Behavior (c) Sexual norms

### Hypothesis

Heavy viewers of American Sitcoms show a significant change in their attitudes and perspectives regarding the cultural ethos of the society as compared to the light viewers of these shows.

A number of terminologies and variables have been used in the research, which are described below in detail.

### Cultural Ethos

Ethos refers to the characteristic spirit or attitudes of a community. Our ethos defines who we are, what kind of people we are, and how we may be expected to behave. Studying ethos in respect to culture gives us an understanding as to how people behave in their native cultural setting or how they are expected to behave. Cultural patterns are normative to the extent that they represent the fundamental values and practices accepted by the whole society. There are certain differences between the Western cultural ethos and ethos guiding the Indian society. These differences are particularly visible in areas such as marriage as an institution, sexuality, gendering of roles in the family and so on. A number of different variables combined together make up the cultural ethos of that particular society. However, the definition of Cultural Ethos for the purpose of this study, is restricted to only to these three variables.

- **Familial Ties** – Family forms the basic institution in any society and is primarily responsible for socialization of the youth. The values of the family system in India have undergone a majority of changes due to industrialization, urbanization, modern technology, legal system and various other factors. Along with these factors mass media, especially Television has changed the values of family system to a large extent. The satellite technology has given the opportunity to Indian viewers to peep into the lives of Western families and their habits. The study attempts to see how American Sitcoms influence the notions of family amongst the Indian Youth.
- **Spending Behavior** – A person's lifestyle is defined as the integration of decisions made in the realms of his/her personal and private space. The decision could be as small as deciding what to eat for breakfast to something as big as investing in a new property. Various previous researches show that viewing of foreign television could influence the youth's choice of what they consume. The present study tries to find out whether the Indian youth feels the need to buy certain items just because they have seen it in a particular American Sitcom.
- **Sexual Norms** – Norms are rules for behaving. Sexual behavior is also a way of expressing and conveying both individual and social meanings. Examination of sexual norms in Western and Indian societies indicates a clear-cut disparity between the two cultures. Separate moral codes for men and women seem to exist in the India society when it comes to sex. In the Indian society, sex is considered as something very private and personal. However, due to media liberalization, there has been an invasion of privacy of Indian households by the Western media. Sex is no longer a taboo for people who are exposed to media in some way or the other. The research attempts to correlate the viewing of American Sitcoms and change in attitude towards sexual norms, orientations and gender.

## **American Sitcoms**

Also known as a 'Situation Comedy', Sitcom is a genre of comedy that features characters sharing the same common environment, such as a home or workplace, with often humorous dialogue. A situation comedy has a storyline and ongoing characters in, essentially, a comedic drama. The situation is usually that of a family, workplace, or a group of friends through comedic sequences. Sitcom humor is often character driven and by its nature running gags evolve during a series. Often the status quo of the situation is maintained from episode to episode. These episodes are then linked by the overarching storyline, driving the show forward.

The research primarily focuses on American Sitcoms and their influence on the Indian viewers. There are over 1200 sitcoms that have been produced in America till date. Most of these are available to the audience over the internet or through satellite television. A number of Indian channels also telecast these shows. Some of the popular American Sitcoms are 30 Rock(2006-2013), Friends(1994-2004), How I Met Your Mother(2005-2014), Modern Family(2009-present) and Sex & the City(1998-2004) to name a few.

## Attitudes

An attitude is "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols" – *Hogg & Vaughan (2005)*

It is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. It is guided by the acceptance or the rejection of people, events or aspects. The study focuses on the changes in the attitude of the Indian youth, which are influenced by being exposed to American Sitcoms.

## Levels of Viewing

Exposure to Television, Laptop or a Personal Computer has been categorized into 3 parts in the study.

- Heavy Viewers – People watching television, surfing their laptops or PCs for more than 6 hours were placed under this category for the study.
- Moderate Viewers – People being exposed to Television, Laptops or PCs for 4 -6 hours in a day were categorized as moderate viewers.
- Light Viewers – People watching Television or using their Laptops and PCs for less than 4 hours in a day were placed under light viewers category.

## Indian Youth

*S. Eisenstadt*, in 1972, defined "the period of youth as the period of transition from childhood to full adult status in the society". It is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This transitional period in life is particularly vulnerable and dynamic. Youth is the stage of constructing the self-concept. The self-concept of youth is influenced by several variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender, and culture. It is the time of a person's life in which they make choices which will affect their future.

Defining the age category of the youth is a difficult task. There is no fixed age category where the young can be placed as the definition of youth varies with each nation and culture. The present study focuses on people in the age group of 18 – 26 years.

## METHOD OF RESEARCH

The study uses 'Analytical Survey' method to obtain data from the sample population of the Indian Youth. Analytical Survey attempts to describe and explain why situations exist. In this approach, two or more variables are examined to test research hypothesis. The results allow the researcher to examine the interrelationship among variables and to develop explanatory inferences.

Population: Viewers American Sitcoms with a Facebook account

Sample size: 50

Sampling Technique: Purposive Sampling

Online Questionnaires were distributed and administered on the popular social networking website Facebook. A questionnaire was prepared, consisting of a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions. The combination of the two helped the researcher to find out various new aspects of the study and provided a better understanding of the influence of the American Sitcoms on the Indian Youth.

Additionally, the Questionnaire was divided into 4 major parts. Each part focused on a different aspect of the study. In the *First Part*, the information was collected on demographic factors of the viewers like age, occupation, income, family income, hours spent in front of Television or Laptop/PC, etc. The *Second Part* focused on the spending behavior of the viewers of these American Sitcoms and if there is a relationship between the two. The *Third Part* was related to sexual norms in the society and how comfortable the Indian Youth felt regarding their sexuality. The *Fourth Part* consisted of questions regarding the Familial Ties in the Indian Society.

### Method of Sampling

The study adopts '*Purposive Sampling Method*' for the selection of respondents for the Questionnaire. Purposive Sampling Method includes respondents, subjects or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who failed to meet the criteria.

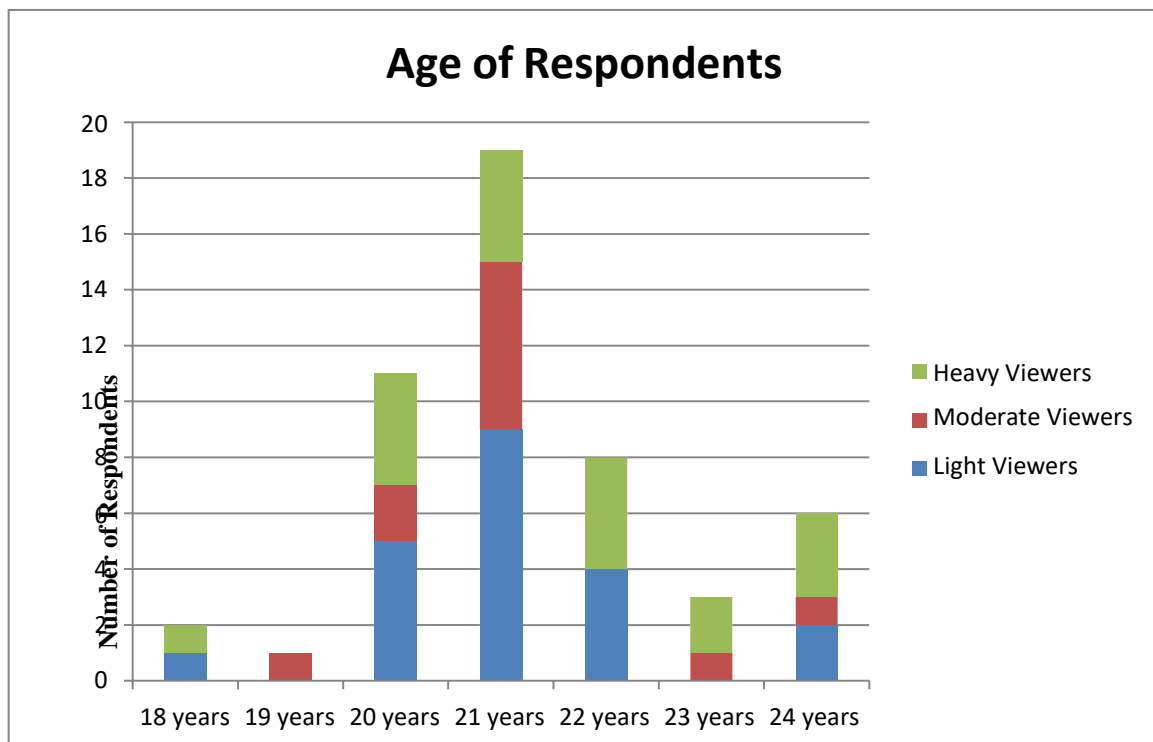
Since the study focuses on the influence of American Sitcoms on the Indian Youth, only those who watch these sitcoms were taken as a part of the sample population and administered the questionnaire to fill. The questionnaire was sent out to 100 people present on the Social Networking website, Facebook. Even though, the research focuses only on analyzing and comparing the data of 50 respondents, the questionnaire was sent out to 100 people considering the fact that some of the respondents did not send in their responses on time, some of them were invalid and some were repeated.

## Data Analysis

Once the data was collected significant patterns were identified while analyzing the data. The data was mainly analyzed in terms of comparison of “Heavy”, “Moderate” and “Light” viewers on each dependent variable. For the study, the respondents were asked the number of hours spent in front of Television, PC and Laptop in a day. The total number of viewing hours was calculated. On the basis of number of hours per day devoted to Television, PC or Laptop, the respondents were categorized into three categories: Heavy, Moderate and Low.

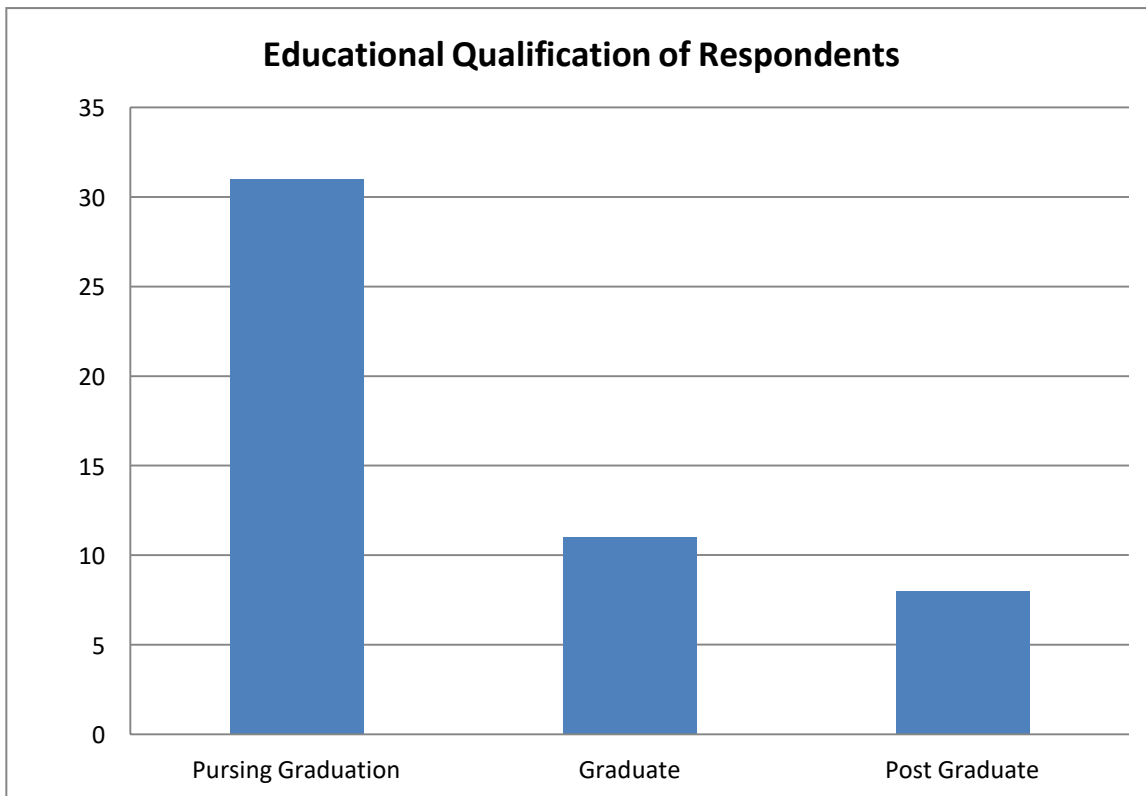
### Viewing patterns of the respondents

This section focuses on the demographics of the viewers of the American Sitcoms. It tries to identify a viewing pattern amongst the respondents. The data is presented according to the age, educational qualification, occupation, income level and the numbers of hours spent in front of television/PC/laptop.



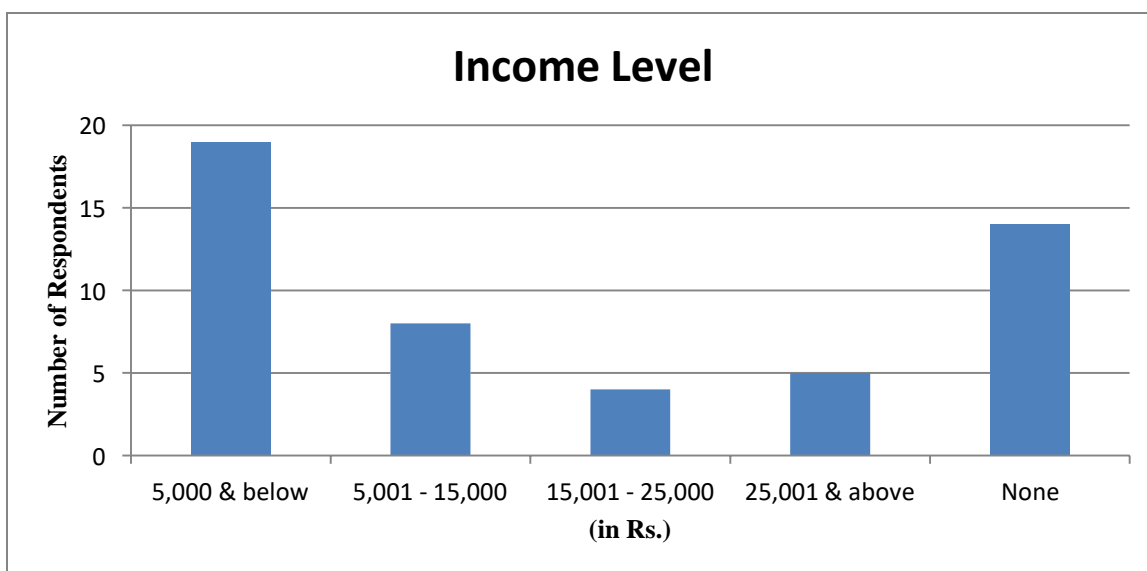
Graph 1: Age-wise distribution of the Respondents with respect to hours spent in front of Television/PC/Laptop

Graph 1 shows the number of respondents of different age. For the purpose of the study 50 responses were included in the sample. It was observed that a majority of the respondents were 21 years old, closely followed by 20 years old and 22 years old. However, it can also be noticed that majority of people in the popular age groups are Light viewers as compared to people in the age range of 23-24 years where majority of them are Heavy Viewers.



Graph 2: Educational Qualification of the Respondents

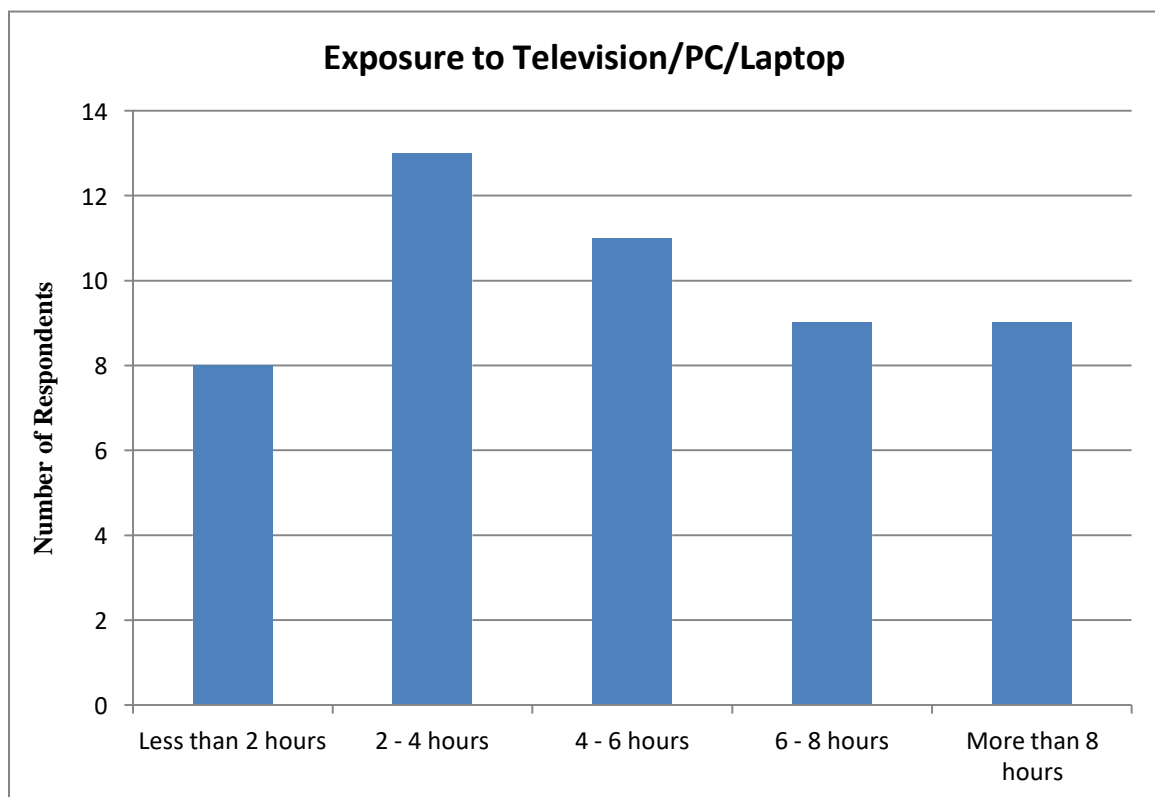
Graph 2 shows the Educational Qualification of the Respondents. Most of the respondents are students pursuing Graduation, the number being 31. There are 11 respondents who are graduates and 8 respondents are Post Graduates.



Graph 3: Income Level of the Respondents

The respondents were also asked about their monthly income (if any). It was observed that the majority of respondents (19) are earning below Rs.5,000 per month, closely followed by 14 respondents who are not earning any income.

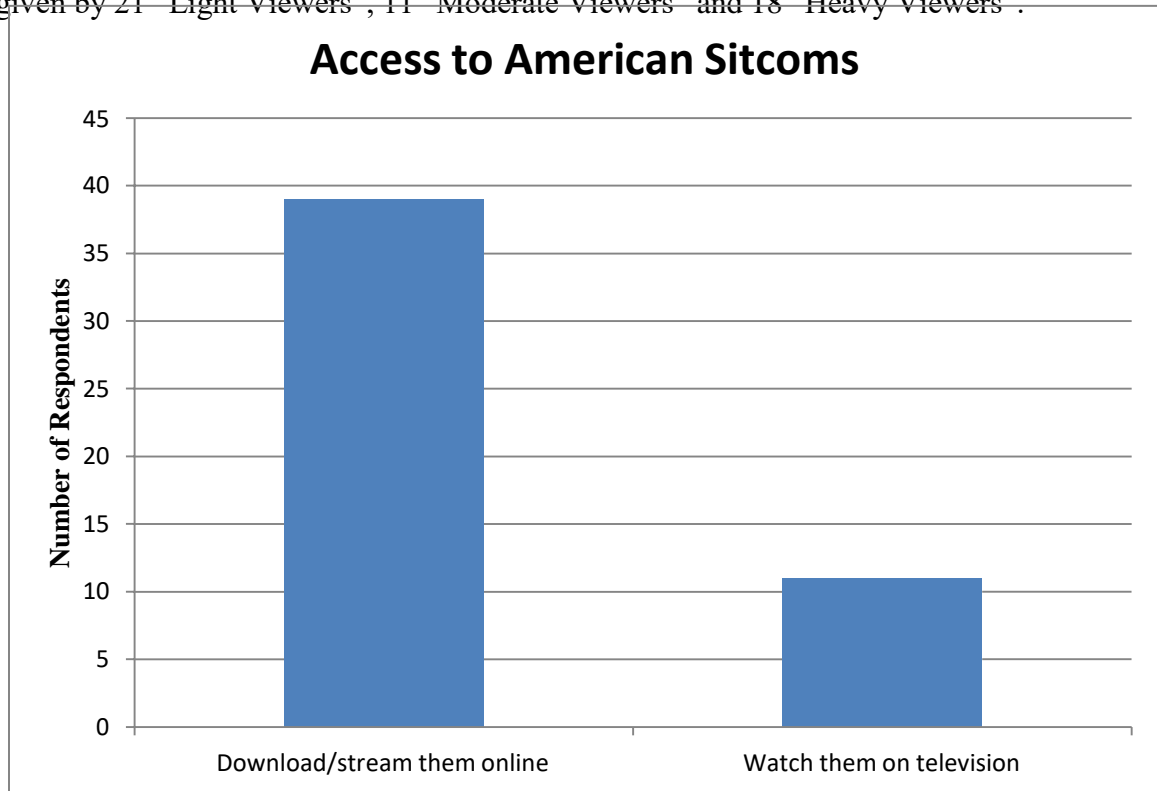
Some of the earlier studies indicate that socio-economic background have an effect on media habits of the youth. *The Surgeon Generals' Report (1972)* also concludes that those adults whose parent's occupation and educational levels placed them in the lower socio-economic strata spent more time on watching Television than those at the higher socio-economic levels. This data also provides the evidence to support the argument that socio-economic background of the viewers has an obvious influence on the amount of viewing of foreign shows. Therefore, it can be observed that the majority of viewers of these American Sitcoms are those earning below Rs.5,000 per month or not earning anything at all, as compared to only 9 respondents who are earning Rs.15,000 per month or above.



Graph 4: Heavy Viewers, Moderate Viewers and Light Viewers

Graph 4 shows the number of hours for which the respondents are exposed to Television/PC/Laptop in a particular day. The respondents are classified on the basis of number of hours they are exposed to media. Respondents who fall under the category of “Less than 2 hours” and “2 – 4 hours” are categorized as “Light Viewers”. Respondents who are exposed to Television/PC/Laptop for ‘4 – 6 hours’ in a day are classified as “Moderate Viewers” in the study. Those with high levels of exposure ranging from “6 – 8 hours” and “More than 8 hours” are classified as “Heavy Viewers”.

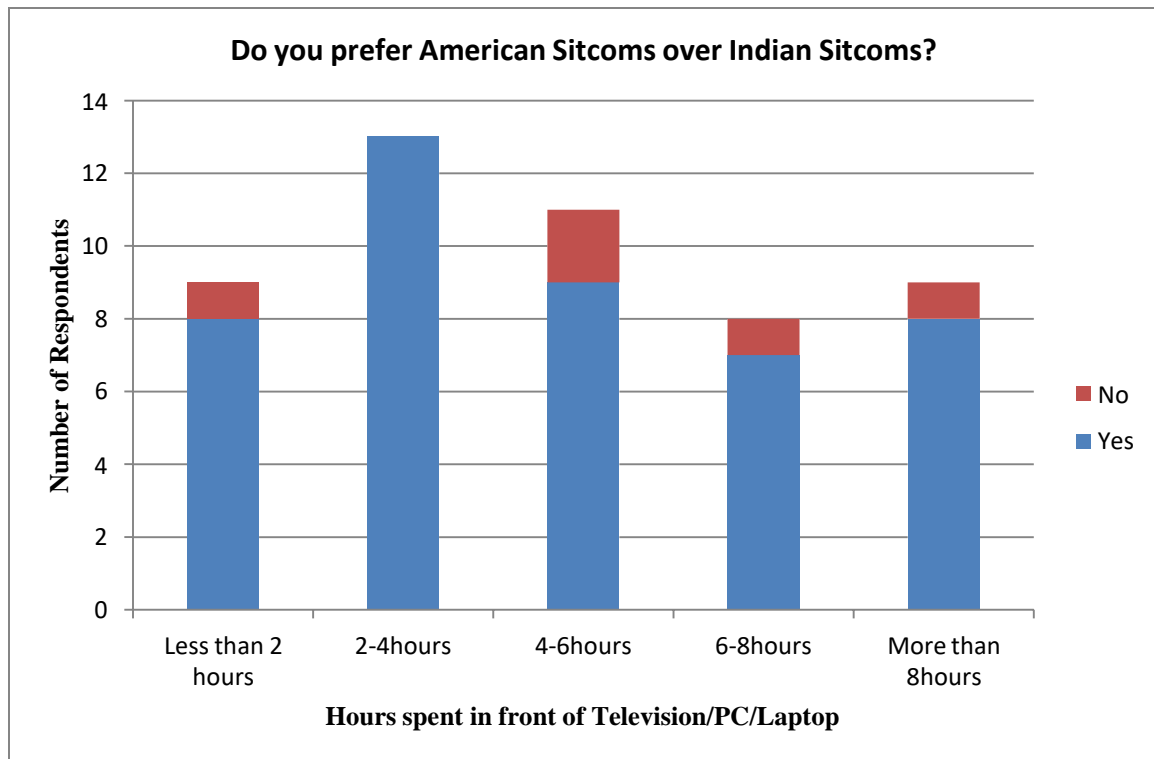
The longer the duration of exposure to foreign media, the greater may be the impact. The study focuses on the answers given by 21 “Light Viewers”, 11 “Moderate Viewers” and 18 “Heavy Viewers”.



Graph 5: Access to American Sitcoms

The researcher also asked the viewers as to how do they gain access to the American Sitcoms that they watch. Majority of the respondents (39) said that they downloaded these American Sitcoms from the internet or streamed them online. 11 Respondents said that they watched them on television. This reflects how the viewers find it easier to access these shows over the internet whenever they want, rather than waiting for a whole week to watch their favorite episode on the television. Also, the viewers get access to a greater variety of American Sitcoms over the internet, as the television broadcasters in India only showcase a few of these on the television. There are a large number of websites available on the internet where you can stream or download free American sitcoms with just the click of a button.

**Reasons for preference of American Sitcoms**



Graph 6: Preference of American Sitcoms over Indian Sitcoms

The respondents were also asked whether they preferred watching American Sitcoms or Indian Sitcoms. 45 Respondents said that they prefer American Sitcoms over Indian Sitcoms, whereas only 5 Respondents prefer Indian Sitcoms over American Sitcoms. Graph 6 shows the responses of Respondents and the huge gap between those who prefer American Sitcoms and those who prefer Indian Sitcoms. It is noticed that, irrespective of the number of hours spent in front of Television/PC/Laptop, there is a strong inclination towards American Sitcoms over the Indian Sitcoms amongst the youth.

The Respondents who prefer American Sitcoms over Indian Sitcoms were also asked about the reason for this preference. Most of the viewers of these American Sitcoms believe that there is quality humor in American Sitcoms as compared to the common slapstick comedy portrayed in the Indian shows. Majority of the respondents said that they found American Sitcoms funnier and more interesting as compared to the Indian Sitcoms which get repetitive and boring after a point of time. The viewers also feel that American Sitcoms are of better quality due to superior and well-written scripts, good production value, better direction and well-defined characters, which ultimately create a lasting influence on the viewers.

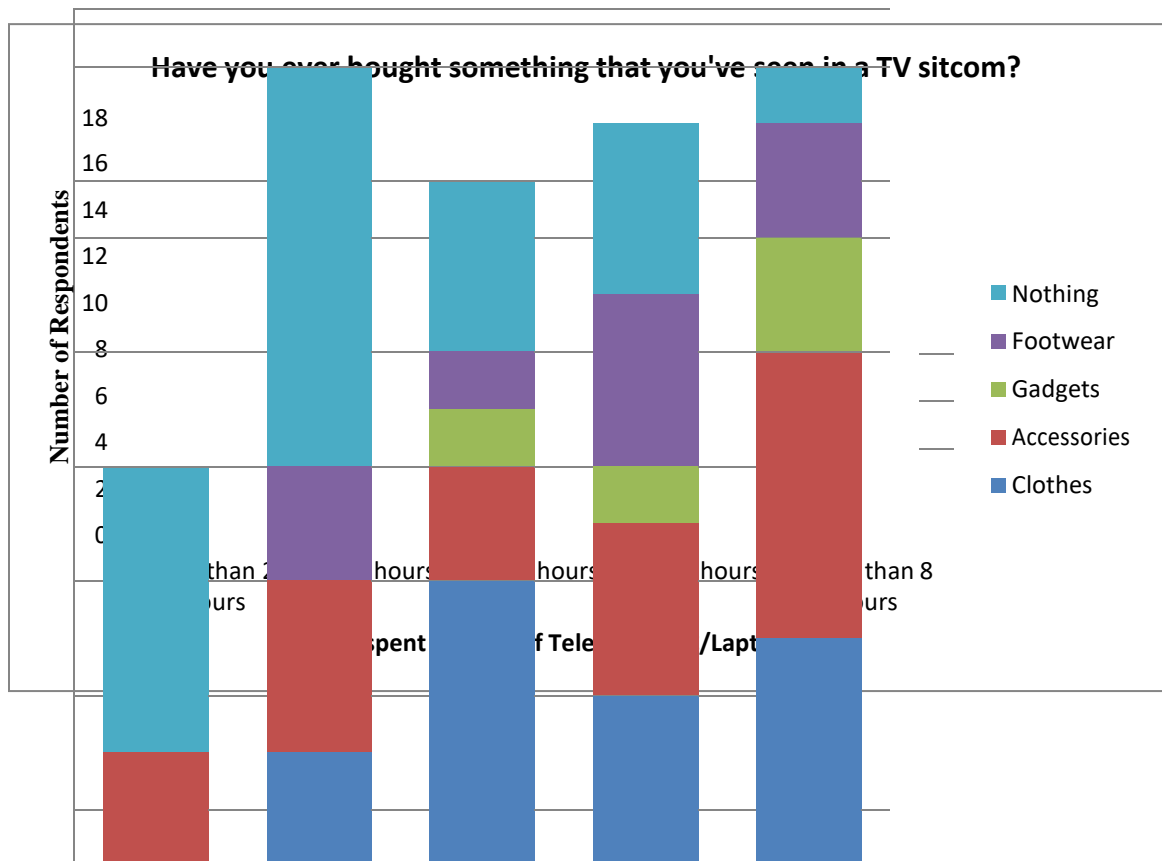
The viewers stated that American Sitcoms are more logical and innovative in nature and setup in a more realistic environment. They are more relatable in every way in comparison to the shows available on Indian television. The concept of situation-based comedy shows, Sitcoms, as they are popularly known has not really developed in the Indian television industry. Indian sitcoms still seem to be struggling with the East-West influence. Whatever limited shows that exist lack originality and creativity. Probably one of the last good Indian Sitcom was “Sarabhai v/s Sarabhai”. Ever since that show ended its run, there has been a void.

□ **Changes in the attitude of Youth**

The Youth is particularly vulnerable to the outside influence, where exposure to foreign media plays a vital role in formulating the opinions on various issues. This section focuses on studying the changes in attitude of the Indian Youth, to find out if there is an influence of the American Sitcoms on the Indian Youth in terms of:

1. Spending Behavior
2. Sexual Norms
3. Familial Ties

The first variable of this study focuses on the Spending Behavior of the viewers of American Sitcoms.

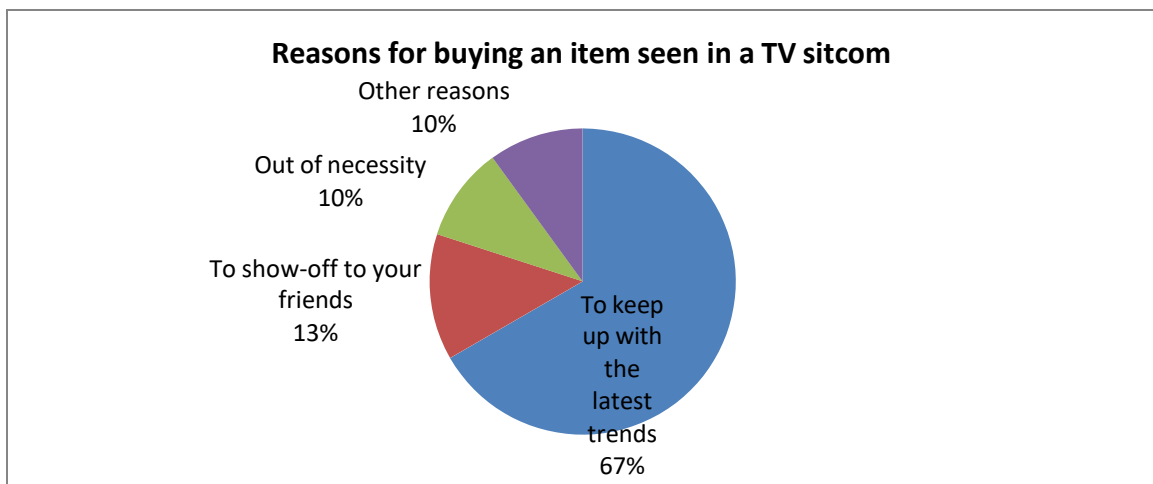


Graph 7: Distribution of items purchased after seeing them in a Sitcom amongst Light, Moderate &

The Respondents were asked if they have ever purchased any item that they have seen in Sitcoms. Graph 7 shows the distribution of items purchased after seeing them in Sitcoms amongst Light Viewers, Moderate Viewers and Heavy Viewers.

It can be noticed that amongst the Light Viewers (Respondents exposed to Television/PC/Laptop for “Less than 2 hours” or “2 – 4 hours”) over 62% people have never bought anything that they have seen in a television Sitcom. That implies only 38% of Light Viewers have purchased something that they have seen in a Sitcom.

A huge difference can be noticed in the data for Heavy Viewers (Respondents exposed to Television/PC/Laptop for “6 – 8 hours” or “More than 8 hours”), as only 27% of the respondents have never bought anything that they have seen in a Sitcoms. Therefore, around 73% of Heavy Viewers have bought something or the other under the influence of a Television Sitcom. This data clearly helps to understand that the greater the exposure to these American Sitcoms, the more

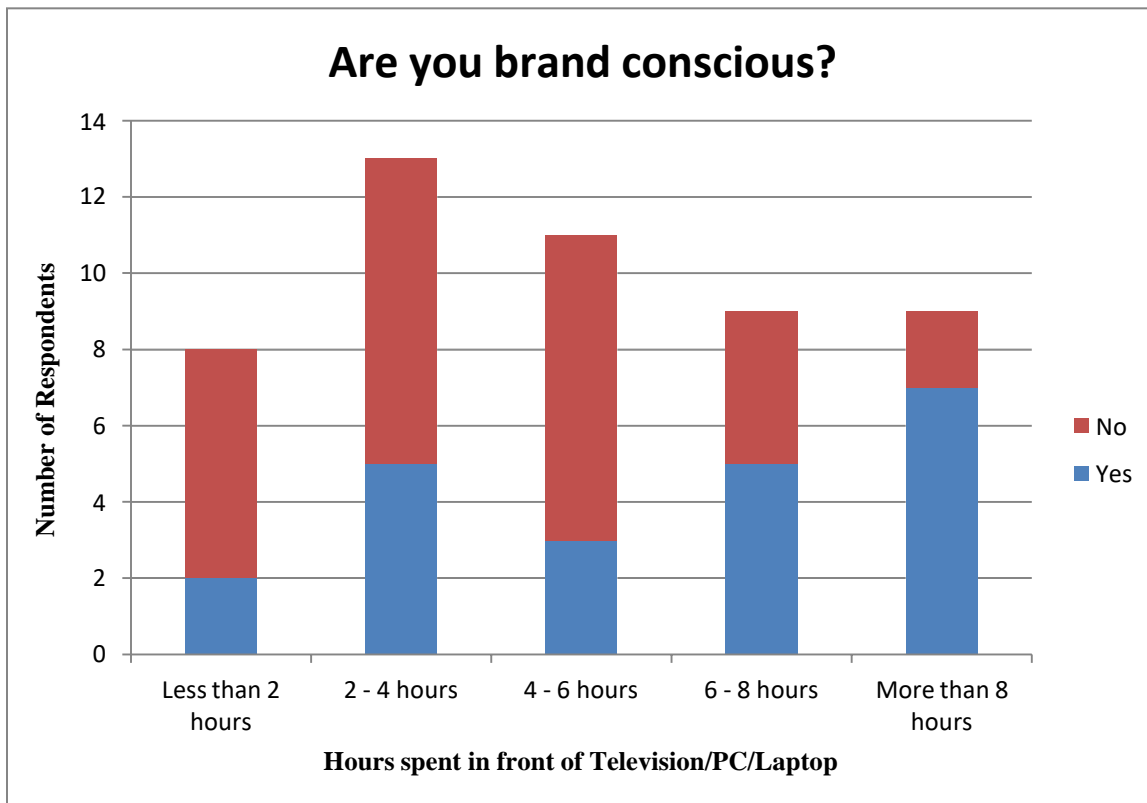


likely it is to influence the things you buy.

Pie Chart 1: Percentage distribution of the reasons for the purchase of items seen in Sitcom

The Respondents, who have bought any item (Clothes, Accessories, Gadgets, Footwear, etc.) after seeing it in a Sitcom, were also asked the reason for making the purchase. 67% of the respondents said that they made the purchase to keep up with the latest trends. However, 13% of the respondents bought the items to show-off to their friends, whereas 10% said that they bought them out of necessity.

The data reflects how the Indian Youth wants to stay updated with the latest trends. They don't mind indulging in Clothes, Accessories, Footwear, Gadgets and other commodities to improve their lifestyle.



Graph 8: Distribution of Light, Moderate & Heavy viewers on the basis on brand-consciousness

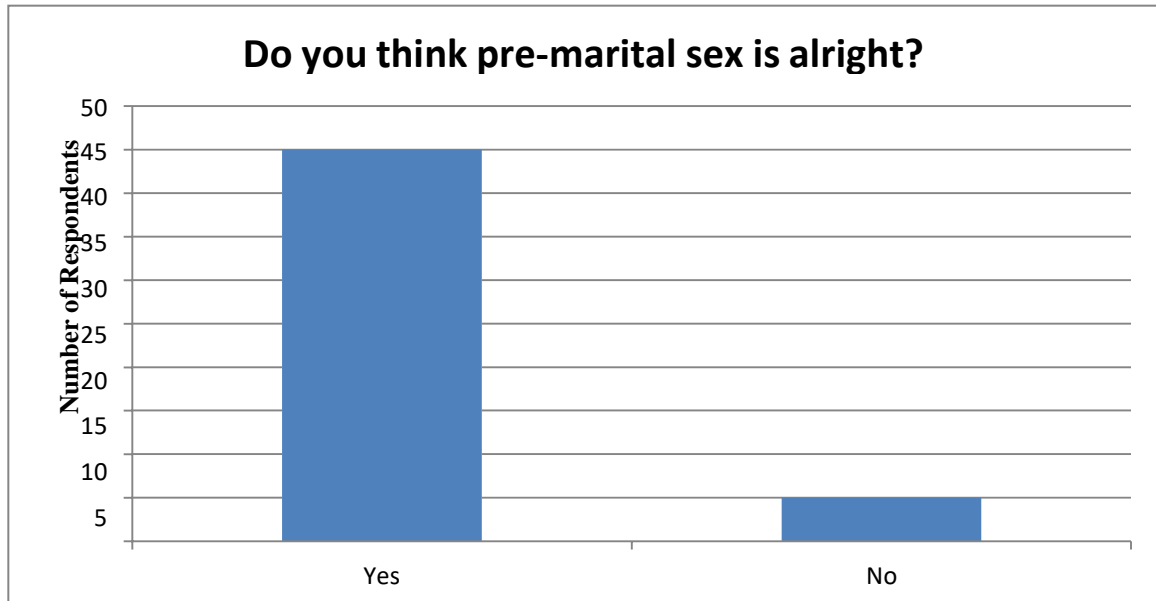
The respondents were asked whether the brand of an item is a key factor or not, when it comes to purchasing that item. Graph 8 shows the number of respondents who answered that question, distributed amongst Light Viewers, Moderate Viewers and Heavy Viewers.

It can be observed that most of the respondents (67%) who answered that they are not brand-conscious were of the Light Viewer category. Only 33% of the respondents who belonged to the Light Viewers category said that the brand of an item matters to them when it comes to purchasing the item. However, in the case of Heavy Viewers, 67% of the respondents answered that they are brand-conscious and only purchase high-label brands, whereas only 33% of the Heavy Viewers answered that the brand of an item did not really matter to them.

The respondents, who answered that they are brand-conscious, were also asked to name certain brands that they usually buy. Most popular brands amongst the Indian youth were found out to be Zara, Forever 21, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and Levi's. Most of these popular brands are foreign brands.

These figures help to understand that viewers with heavy exposure to American Sitcoms have certain affinity towards branded commodities, whereas viewers with light exposure to these Sitcoms do not care much about the brands.

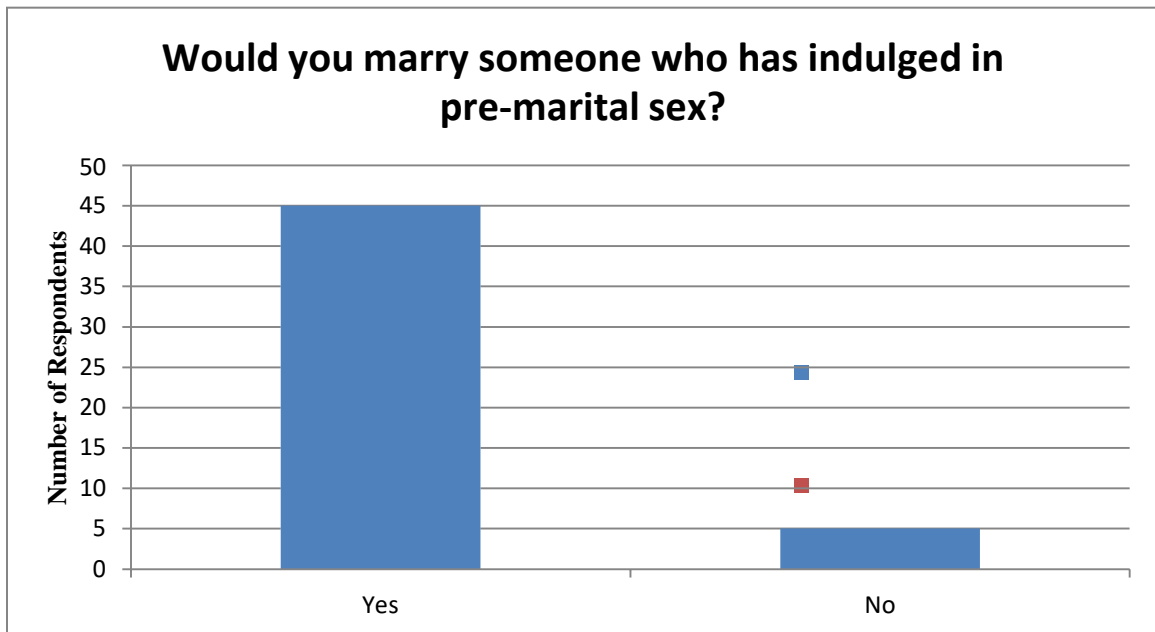
The second variable of this study focuses on the attitudes of the viewers of American Sitcoms, towards sexual norms in the society.



Graph 9: Respondents view on pre-marital sex

The respondents were asked whether they believed in the concept of pre-marital sex or not. Graph 9 shows the responses to the question asked. 90% of the respondents do not find anything wrong with pre-marital sex. Only 10% of the respondents believe that it is against our traditional values and norms.

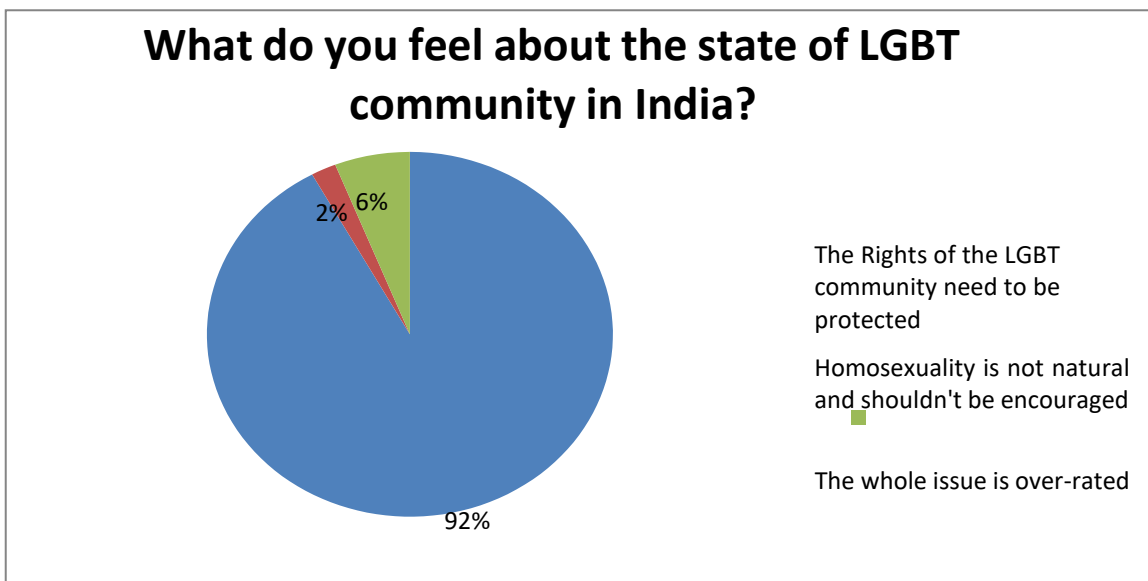
This particular data shows how people are now more open to western concepts. In India, sex is considered to be a part of marriage, it is not allowed before or outside the marriage. Pre-marital sex is not a part of the Indian cultural system and is described to be a western concept. However, with the infusion of western ideas through these sitcoms, people are now more open towards such concepts.



Graph 10: Distribution of respondents who answered “Yes” in Graph 9, in regards to whether they will marry someone who has indulged in pre-marital sex.

Respondents who answered “Yes” in Graph 9 were further asked another question, whether they would marry someone who has indulged in pre-marital sex. 90% of those respondents said that it did not matter to them what their to-be-partner has done or indulged in before marriage. However, 10% of the respondents felt that it was okay for them to indulge in pre-marital sex but when it comes to marrying someone who has indulged in a similar act, it was not acceptable to them.

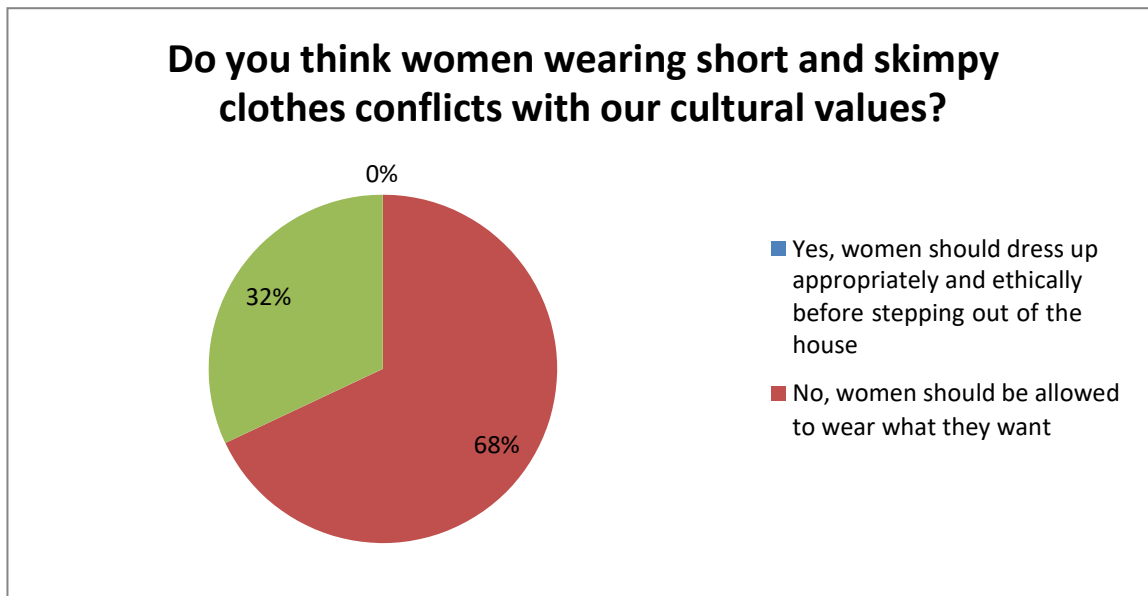
Pre-marital sex is something that is openly showed and discussed in most of the American Sitcoms that the Indian youth is exposed to. It can be concluded that watching of American Sitcoms does bring about a change in the attitudes and perceptions of the Indian Youth as they become more liberal towards western concepts.



Pie Chart 2: Respondents viewpoint on LGBT community in India

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community has been a topic of debate in our country. The current scenario being, the latest judgment passed by The Supreme Court which criminalizes homosexuality in India. Pie Chart 2 shows how the respondents feel about the state of LGBT community in the country. 92% of the respondents feel that the Rights of the LGBT Community need to be protected. However, 6% of the respondents feel that the whole issue is over-rated, whereas just 2% of the respondents feel that homosexuality is unnatural and shouldn't be encouraged.

Homosexuality is evident in a number of American Sitcoms and acts as a catalyst of humor in some of these shows. Since the Indian youth is exposed to these American Sitcoms, it can be seen that the youth support the whole issue and feels strongly for the rights of the LGBT community.



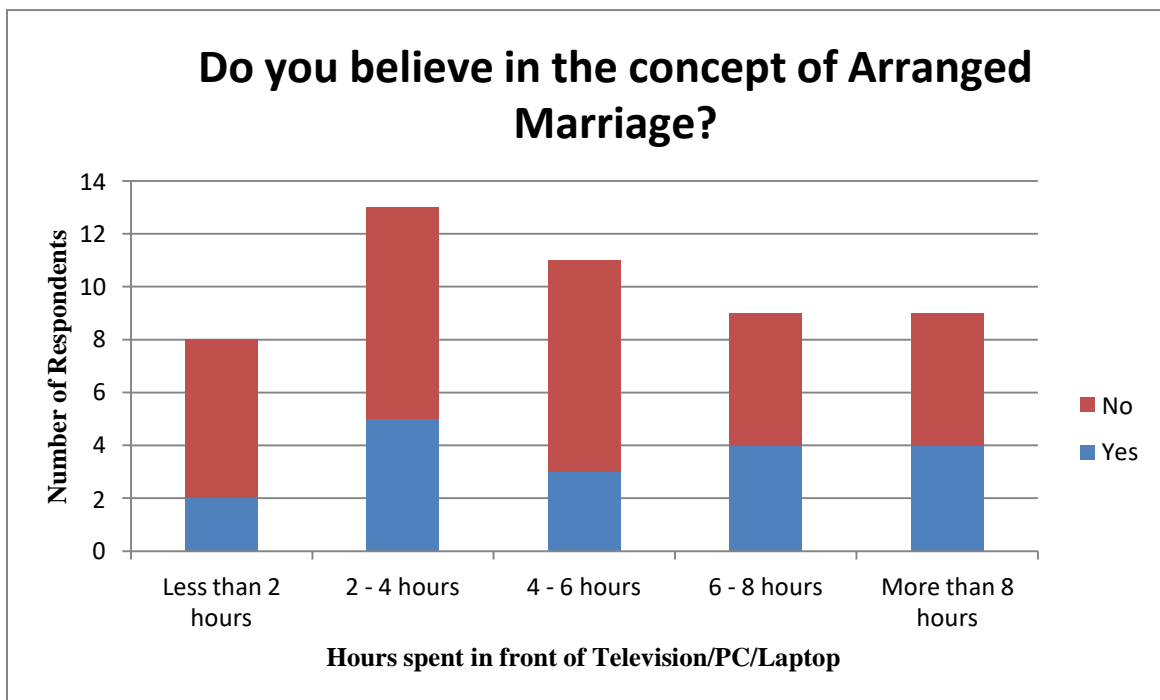
Pie Chart 3: Respondents reaction to how women should dress up in the Indian Society

The respondents were asked how they felt about women wearing short and skimpy clothes and whether it conflicts with the cultural values of our country. Pie Chart 3 shows the responses of the respondents. 68% of the respondents feel that women should be allowed to wear what they want and wearing short clothes does not conflict with our cultural values. 32% of the respondents feel that women should keep in mind the place and the time of the event before deciding what to wear. None of the respondents feel that women wearing short and skimpy clothes have anything to do with our cultural norms.

This data shows how people are becoming more sensitive towards protecting the Rights of women. Even though there is still a considerable number of respondents who feel that women should think about the time and the place of the event before deciding what to wear, the perceptions are slowly changing. Majority of the respondents believe that women should have all the freedom when it comes to wearing the clothes of their choice.

American Sitcoms showcase women in a different perspective as compared to the Indian Sitcoms. There are business women, bikini-clad models, home-makers and women from all fields and backgrounds. Being exposed to such concepts through these American Sitcoms, Indian youth is now more open to the concept of women taking the forefront and deciding what they want to do with their lives. American Sitcoms help break the image of a typical Indian female home-maker and brings about a positive influence in the attitudes of the viewers by showing them in a new light.

The third and the last variable of the study focuses on the attitudes of the viewers of American Sitcoms, towards the familial ties in the Indian Society.



Graph 11: Respondent’s viewpoint towards the concept of Arranged Marriage

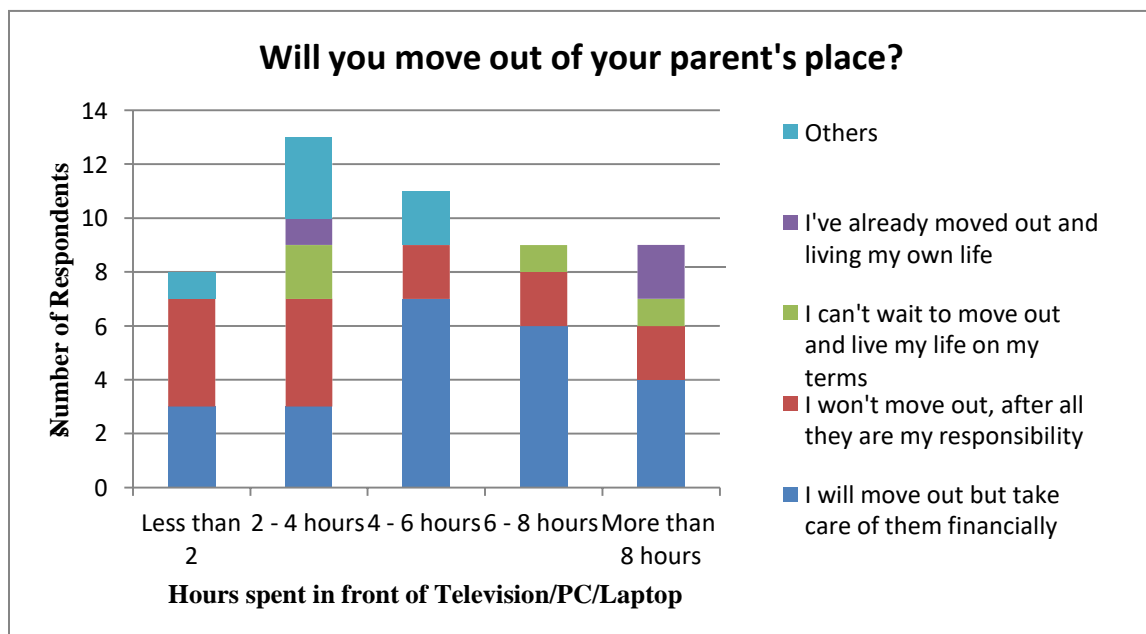
The concept of Arranged marriages has been around for centuries in our country. It involves two families, strangers to each other, coming together and a boy and a girl from the respective families marrying each other. However, for the past few years this concept has evolved and enhanced in certain ways.

Graph 11 shows how the respondents feel about the concept of Arranged marriages. 64% of the respondents do not believe in the concept of Arranged marriage at all. However, 36% of the respondents still feel that Arranged marriages are how it is supposed to be.

The respondents were also asked to support their answer in a brief paragraph. After analyzing the responses, the researcher noticed that most of the respondents find the idea, of not knowing a person too well before getting marriage or letting others decide who you should spend your life with, unnatural. They believe that love is the foundation of any relationship and without love the relationship is bound to suffer. Respondents against the concept of Arranged marriage also feel that marriage is a life-long commitment and the decision shouldn't be taken hastily or under pressure. Respondents who support the concept of Arranged marriages feel that it shouldn't be a problem as long as it happens with the consent of the bride and the groom. Some of the respondents also argued that Arranged marriages are more successful as compared to people who get married after falling in love.

The concept of marriage in India is undergoing a drastic change. With major influences from the Western culture, the idea of an arranged marriage in India has evolved. The

Youth believes more in the idea of falling in love and then settling down, rather than letting their parents decide their respective partners.

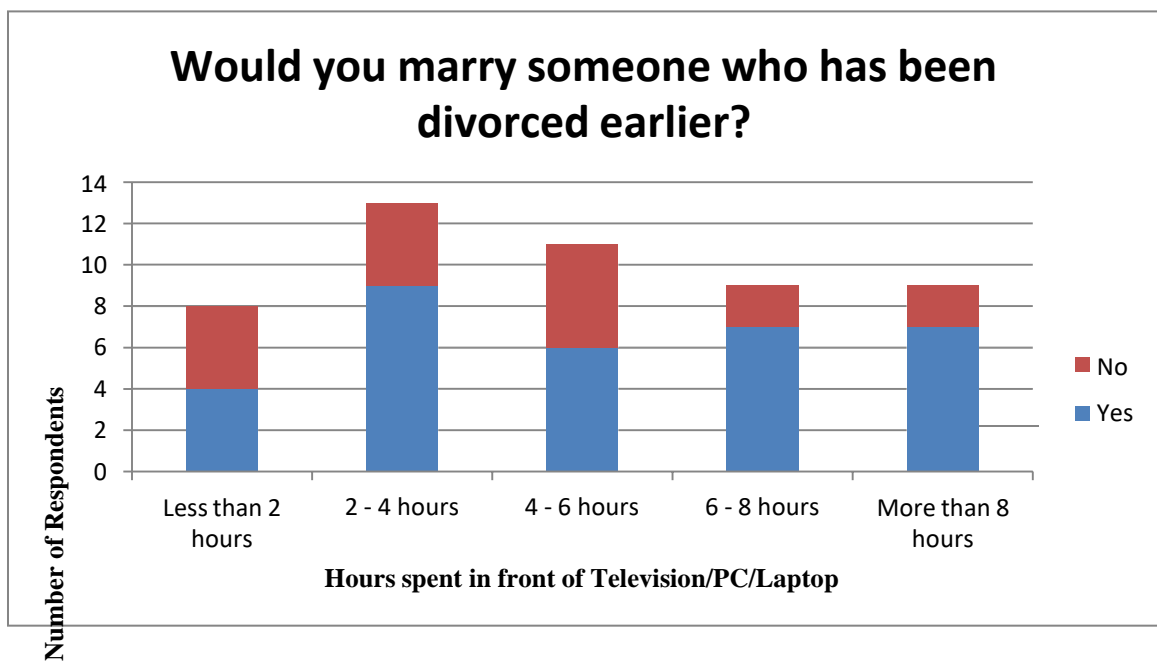


Graph 12: Respondents viewpoint on moving out of their parent's place

Graph 12 shows the respondents reaction on whether they will move out of theirparent’s place or would rather stay with them. On studying the responses, the researcher noticed that 38% of the respondents belonging to the Light Viewers category said that they won’t move out of their parent’s place, as they believe it’s their responsibility to take care of them. However, only 11% of the respondents belonging to the Heavy Viewers category said that they won’t move out of their parent’s place.

Also, 42% of the respondents belonging to Light Viewers category said that they will move out of their parent’s place once they start earning. However, over 77% of the respondents from the Heavy Viewers category stated that they will move out once they start earning.

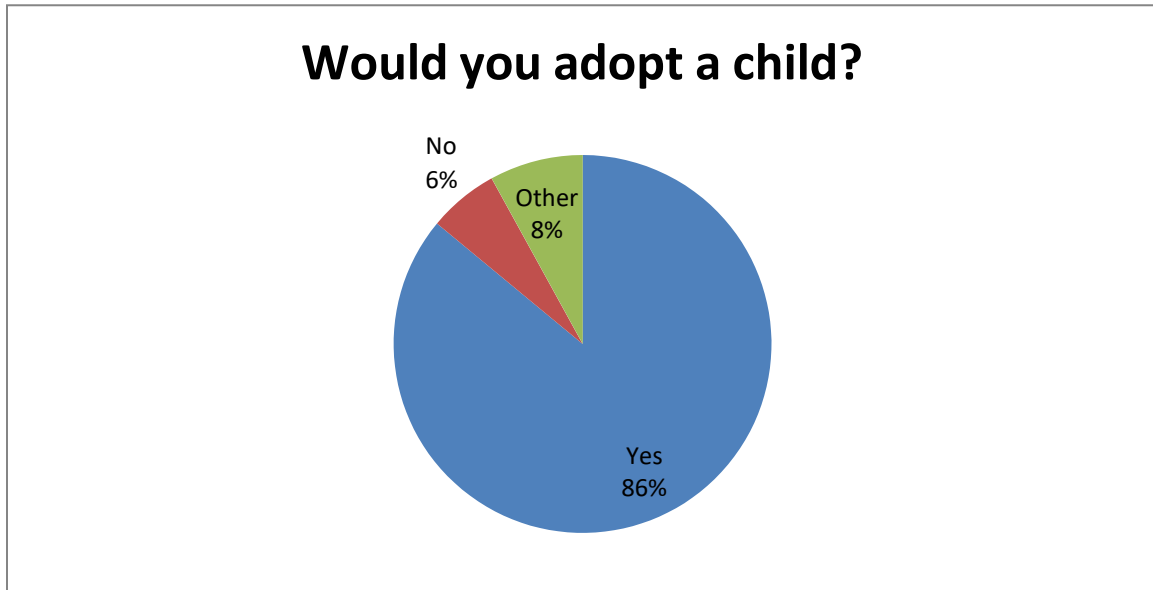
The data present in Graph 12 clearly shows the variation of responses between Light viewers and Heavy viewers of American Sitcoms. Moving out of the parent’s place is majorly a western concept and its influence can clearly be seen on the Indian youth watching American Sitcoms. Although, the researcher also analyzed that majority of respondents who believe in moving out of their parent’s place feel the need to take care of their parents financially, even after moving out their houses. A pattern can be noticed in the responses, which helps to understand that viewers interpret these western concepts in their own way and adapt them accordingly to the Indian value system.



Graph 13: Respondents viewpoint on marrying someone who has been divorced earlier

The respondents were also asked as to how they feel about getting married to someone who has already been divorced earlier. Graph 13 shows that 78% of the respondents belonging to the Heavy Viewers category said that they won’t have any problem marrying someone who has been divorced earlier, whereas 62% of the respondents of the Light Viewers category said the same. Overall, it was observed that 66% of the total respondents do not have any problem in marrying someone who has already been divorced. This data highlights how the Indian youth is more accepting and

less judgmental towards people who have divorced, whereas the same people were frowned upon in the last few decades.



Pie Chart 4: Respondents viewpoint on adoption of a child

The respondents were asked whether they would adopt a child or not, if given a chance. Pie Chart 4 shows that 86% of the total respondents said that they would go ahead with it. Only 6% of the respondents said that they would not go for adoption, if given a chance.

The data depicts how the Indian youth is now less bound by the typical norms of the Indian Family system and is more rational and objective in their approach.

## Inferences and Conclusions

The basic idea behind the research was to study whether exposure to American Sitcoms influences the attitudes and perspectives, regarding the cultural ethos, of the Indian youth. The study intended to find whether watching of American Sitcoms replaces the existing norms of the Indian value system and leads the Indian youth to accept the western norms as they are projected in the American Sitcoms.

It is generally assumed that more a person is exposed to certain media more is likely to be the impact and hence the study also made an attempt to see whether there was a difference in the perceptions of Heavy Viewers and Light Viewers. The study focused on the youth, as they are more vulnerable to external influences. Adopting Online Surveys as the method of research and data collection, the respondents were asked a number of questions pertaining to their demographics, attitude towards familial ties and sexual norms and their spending behavior.

After analyzing the demographic responses on the sample population, the researcher came to various interesting conclusions. It was observed that majority of the Light Viewers belong to the age group of 20-22years, which was also the age group with the maximum number of respondents. However, the majority of Heavy Viewers were of the age group 23-24years, as compared to any other age group.

The researcher also noticed that the maximum of viewers in the sample population did not have any monthly income or earned less than Rs.5,000 per month. This can be backed up by *The Surgeon Generals' Report* (1972) which states that a socio-economic stratum of an individual influences the amount of viewing of television shows. People coming from higher socio-economic strata spend less time watching television shows as compared to people coming from lower levels of the socio-economic strata.

The data also concludes that a majority of the viewers of these American Sitcoms access the shows over the internet, rather than watching them on television.

Studying the demographics of the viewers helps in identifying interesting patterns amongst the Indian youth. Age group of an individual, educational qualification and income level influence the consumption of foreign content of an individual.

The data collected on this topic showed huge gap in the preferences of Indian youth when it comes to watching American Sitcoms and Indian Sitcoms. Most of the respondents prefer watching American Sitcoms over Indian Sitcoms. Graph 6 represents the data. 90% of the respondents prefer American Sitcoms over Indian Sitcoms.

The respondents were also asked the reason for this preference. Going through the responses thoroughly, the researcher concluded that the reasons, for this strong inclination towards American Sitcoms, are many.

One of the prime reasons being the difference in the quality of humor in the shows. Indian Youth does not find the slapstick humor, used in most of the Indian Sitcoms, funny. They prefer the sarcastic and dry humor presented in the American Sitcoms. Another reason is the scale of production and the production value of American Sitcoms. Indian Sitcoms tend to get repetitive and monotonous after a while, whereas the Indian viewers feel that American Sitcoms are compelling and force them to think.

Also, studying each variable in regards with the viewing time of the American Sitcoms helped provide a better understanding of the topic.

*Spending Behavior* – A major gap was noticed between the spending behaviors of Heavy viewers

as compared to that of the Light Viewers. The researcher observed that majority of the Heavy Viewers have bought some item or the other under the influence of the American Sitcoms, while Light Viewers did not indulge, a lot, in items that they have seen in these Sitcoms. Also, respondents under the category of Heavy Viewers are conscious when it comes to shopping and prefer to buy only high-label brands. Respondents under the Light Viewers category are also brand-conscious, but the number is more evident in Heavy Viewers.

The data collected by the researcher helps in identifying a pattern between the spending habits of the viewers in respect to the number of hours they are exposed to foreign media. Heavy Viewers were noticed to be more easily influenced in their decision-making process (while spending on clothes, accessories, footwear, gadgets, etc.) as compared to those respondents who are categorized as Light Viewers.

*Sexual Norms* – The respondents were asked a number of questions related to the sexual norms in the Indian value system. Some of the questions focused on pre-marital sex, a concept that is considered to be a part of the Western culture. However, the researcher observed that a majority of the respondents do not find anything wrong, that is objectionable in nature, about the whole concept. In fact, 90% of respondents do not care whether their-to-be-partner indulges in the act of pre-marital sex or not. Almost all of the respondents support the Rights of the LGBT community in the country and feel the need to give women the freedom to wear what they want, whenever they want.

After combining the viewing patterns of the Indian youth and the change in attitude towards the sexual norms, the researcher concluded that exposure to American Sitcoms does create an influence on the perspectives and ideologies of the viewers.

*Familial Ties* – The last set of questions that the respondents were asked to answer focused on the familial ties and bonds in the Indian value system. When asked, whether they will move out of their parent's place or not, 77% of the Heavy viewers supported the statement and said that they want to move out or have already moved out. However, only 42% of the respondents of the Light Viewers category supported the statement. Also, 64% of the respondents do not believe in the concept of Arranged marriage, a tradition that has been a part of the Indian cultural system for decades. Other than that, 67% of the respondents do not mind marrying someone who has already been divorced earlier. A majority of the respondents are also open to the idea of adoption, if given a chance.

Analyzing these responses with respect to the exposure to American Sitcoms, a pattern can be seen which relates the influence caused in each variable to the viewing of the American Sitcoms.

Therefore, this proves the research hypothesis, which states, **“Heavy viewers of American Sitcoms show a significant change in their attitudes and perspectives regarding the cultural ethos of the society as compared to the light viewers of these shows.”**

## **Limitations of the study**

The present research adopts an empirical approach, verifiable by observations and experiences, which has certain inherent limitations. The research treats individuals as uniform entities. As such, the research does not focus more on the viewer's subjective interpretation of American Sitcoms, i.e. it does not take into account how an individual respondent interprets the message being portrayed in the Sitcom. The research studies the influence of American Sitcoms, as a whole, on the Indian Youth and does not focus on some specific shows catering to a specific genre.

## **Suggestions for further study**

The present research does raise some interesting questions and aspects which can be studied further in detail to gain a better understand on the topic. Only a few dimensions of the Cultural ethos were addressed in the research. A detailed and in-depth study may be conducted on each independent variable with respect to exposure to foreign media. The reactions of the respondents may be observed closely to formulate more reliable and qualitative data.

Instead of doing an impact-study, an ethnographic approach can be adopted to explore the cultural paradigm from the point of view of the subjects of the study, i.e., the viewers. It can help understand the complex world of television audience and how audience interpret and internalize the media message under the influence of socio- cultural factors.

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