

THE TREND OF SUPERNATURAL SHOWS ON INDIAN TELEVISION: A STUDY ON THE POPULARITY, PORTRAYAL AND PERCEPTION OF NAAGIN

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Abstract

There have been several coveted trends on Indian television that the content producers have followed which has resulted in the production of some iconic shows. One trend, however, that is currently popular on Indian television and is liked by the audience is of supernatural themes/characters. This 'trending' element has led to the success of a number of shows, the number one being Naagin that surpassed the popularity of any other show of current times and is also the area of study for this research. The three main points of the research are popularity, portrayal and perception. This research aims to find out the reasons behind the show's popularity and the audience's perceptions about supernatural theme with the help of focus groups. The portrayal of supernatural themes in the show has been analysed with the help of quantitative content analysis. The findings of the study illustrated that the supernatural characters are portrayed more in their human form and the human element to be the dominant narrative of the show. The viewers opined that the storyline, the characters and the music were the elements that contributed to the success of the show; and not the supernatural elements depicted in the show.

Keywords: Indian Television, Supernatural, Trend, Naagin, Soap Opera.

INTRODUCTION

With the changing times, television has undergone a number of changes and along with it so has the content. There has always been a trend that the content artists and producers have followed and lately the one trend that is currently trending on television is supernatural. Every channel you come across has either one or more than one show based on supernatural. Earlier it was just the introduction of supernatural elements in the daily soaps whose popularity led to the introduction of the supernatural serials. One of the pioneers of the trend is said to be Naagin which is also the main subject of study. The basic motivation of selecting the topic was to study the supernatural content, its portrayal- to study whether the supernatural characters are shown more in their human or supernatural element, why do people enjoy such content and what is the social-cultural connect or impact that the show has. It is to understand how the supernatural content is different from that of the other serials and its understanding amongst the viewers.

Soap operas have been one of the most enticing elements that have changed the face of Indian television. There have been several studies and researches that provide us with useful insights and have revealed different layers of soap opera that have been introduced with time. (Munshi) in their book has given us a closer look into the world of soap operas and has highlighted how the prime-time soaps garnered the maximum attention of the audiences and is the biggest source of income for television channels. (Jaggi) in their research paper studied the evolution of content on Indian television and analysed the 'paradigm shift' in content. (Deprez) in their study emphasised on the proliferation of content on Indian television through the changing times and highlighted the different waves of. The study also elaborately explained how Indian television both through originality and adaptation have created their own version of serials that attracts the masses by giving them the best of both worlds- loyalty to the local identity and innovation. (Nagamallika) in their paper studied and analysed the universal and important element of Indian television serials that is family, the family relationships and the extent of drama used in order to overcome or extend the serials life. The study comprehensively explained the changing dynamics of families and the portrayal of families in Indian television. It gave a useful insight as it mentioned the introduction of paranormal elements into the family structure and how it has been used to defeat the ordinary. With a new concept to cater, the content producers have today brought together three of the leading elements of television- soap opera, family and supernatural. While there have been much research on soap opera and family, few researchers have taken supernatural into consideration and have discussed about it in depth. This research aims to discuss about the

Supernatural genre- here focussing on Naagin, its popularity, portrayal and perception.

The theoretical framework aims to establish a link between this research and the existing set of scholarly theories that are applicable for the study.

Uses and Gratification Theory: The study aims to highlight the points through which the viewers of Naagin satiate their needs and the way they interpret the show.

Semiotics: The series Naagin being all about shapeshifting snakes, the signs and symbols constitute an important part of the show for the audience to understand and interpret the concepts and distinguish the characters better and hence plays a vital aspect of content analysis and the study.

Cultivation Theory: The study aims to highlight the impact and influence the show has on the viewers. It also emphasises whether the viewing of the show has led to any changes in the attitudes or beliefs of the people

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the present study are to understand what contributes towards the success of the show Naagin, to analyse whether the show focusses only on supernatural content or any other narrative; and to discuss the cultural- social connect of the show. The researcher also discusses the dominant narrative of the show and tests whether the show creates any belief in supernatural and magical powers. A mix of qualitative and quantitative approach is adopted which includes Focus Group Discussion and Content analysis. For Focus groups, participants between age group of 20-55 years from Mumbai were selected with the help of Convenient and Snowball Sampling. Two FGDs were conducted with 5 participants each. For content analysis, episodes to be viewed were chosen with Systematic random Sampling. Since the show has 4 seasons, for analysis, the researcher selected 6, 7, 10 and 3 episodes respectively.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Certain parameters were determined to distinguish the content of the show in their respective categories, the major one being- Supernatural Value and Human Value. Under the Supernatural Values, the three sub categories are as follows:

Appearance: This involved the full appearance of the characters in their supernatural nature. This involved scenes where the character has taken its supernatural form for example transformed into a Snake or any other supernatural character.

Signs and Symbols: This involved elements like sticking out of tongue, snake eyes, appearance of snake skin, peacock claws, bull horns etc. when the characters were in their human form which illustrated that the characters are some creatures in addition to being humans. This also involved characters when they were showcased in half human and half supernatural form. This sub category also recorded the appearance of characters when they appeared as humans but were dressed in their supernatural character outfit.

Non-verbal element: This sub category involved any non-human object that showcased supernatural powers and also other supernatural powers of the characters like laser eyes, abnormal stretching of hands, etc.

Under the Human Values the four sub categories are as follows:

Romantic-Emotional: It involved romantic, emotional and romantically emotional conversation of the characters with their partners.

Self-talk and actions: This sub-category involved the characters speaking to themselves and also recorded their actions while they're trying to contemplate a situation. It also considered scenes where the character is either spying someone or secretly listening or overhearing other individual's conversation.

Family Interaction and Bonding: Family Interaction and Bonding sub category involved the interaction and conversation of the characters with the family members or when the characters were presented in a family setting. Each of the selected episodes were measured in seconds by studying each scene right from the beginning to the end and all the aspects of the episodes were recorded based on the above given categories.

Table 1 to 4 represent a detailed analysis of episodes as per the parameters selected for the present study. The researcher has only considered scenes where supernatural characters are featured.

The analysis for Season 1 highlighted the dominant presence of the human aspects in the particular season as a majority of the episodes held the maximum percentage the highest being for episode 30 with a total of 70.14%.

As per the analysis, just like the previous season, the human narrative turned out to be the dominant narrative that was shown majorly throughout the episodes of Season 2. The highest percentage that the dominant category held was of 82.28% and the least was 36.39% for episode 30.

In Season 3, the 'Supernatural Values' continued to remain the inferior narrative. The highest amount of percentage for Human Category was 89.02% for Episode 60 and the minimum was 40.27% for episode 100. The same episode proved to be an exception as it held a percentage of 52.58% for Supernatural Values and 40.27% for the Human Values.

Episodes	Total Duration	Supernatural Values				Human Values				
		Appearances	Signs & Symbols	Non-verbal element	Total %	Romantic-Emotional	Self-talk & actions	Family Interaction	Non family Interaction	Total %
Episode 10	2653s	107s (4.03%)	344s (12.97%)		17 %	114s (4.3%)	188s (7.09%)	1020s (38.45%)	79s (2.98%)	52.82%
Episode 20	2671s	52s (1.95%)	673s (25.2%)	4s (0.15%)	27.3%	439s (16.44%)	397s (14.86%)	419s (15.69%)	189s (7.08%)	54.07%
Episode 30	2666s	56s (2.1%)	247s (9.26%)		11.36%	889s (33.35%)	123s (4.61%)	818s (30.68%)	40s (1.5%)	70.14%
Episode 40	2583s	87s (3.37%)	789s (30.55%)		33.92%	756s (29.27%)	289s (11.19%)	311s (12.04%)	260s (10.7%)	63.2%
Episode 50	2675s	13s (0.49%)	1268s (47.4%)	20s (0.75%)	48.64%	127s (4.75%)	63s (2.36%)			7.11%
Episode 60	2678s	151s (5.64%)	1157s (43.2%)	10s (0.37%)	49.21%		149s (5.56%)	152s (5.68%)	552s (20.61%)	31.85%

Table 1: Analysis of the supernatural characters in their Supernatural and Human Values for Season 1 of the show Naagin

Episodes	Total Duration	Supernatural Values				Human Values				
		Appearance	Signs & Symbols	Non-verbal element	Total%	Romantic-Emotional	Self-talk and actions	Family Interaction	Non Family Interaction	Total%
Episode 10	2646s	73s (2.76%)	176s (6.65%)		9.41%		365s (13.79%)	695s (26.27%)	561s (21.2%)	61.26%
Episode 20	2641s	115s (4.35%)	236s (8.94%)	28s (1.06%)	14.35%	421s (15.94%)	234s (8.86%)	292s (11.06%)	435s (16.47%)	52.33%
Episode 30	2602s	86s (3.31%)	258s (9.92%)	63s (2.42%)	15.65%	280s (10.76%)	392s (15.07%)	94s (3.61%)	1375s (52.84%)	82.28%
Episode 40	2628s	150s (5.71%)	1231s (46.84%)	98s (3.73%)	56.28%	144s (5.48%)	177s (6.74%)	244s (9.28%)	528s (20.09%)	41.59%
Episode 50	2642s	50s (1.89%)	93s (3.52%)	47s (1.78%)	7.19%	62s (2.35%)	353s (13.36%)	559s (21.16%)	373s (14.12%)	50.99%
Episode 60	2666s	190s (7.13%)	231s (8.66%)	141s (5.29%)	20.48%	190s (7.13%)	547s (20.52%)	58s (2.18%)	175s (6.56%)	36.39%
Episode 70	2543s	46s (1.81%)	901s (35.43%)	58s (2.28%)	39.52%	500s (19.66%)	142s (5.58%)	350s (13.76%)	353s (13.88%)	52.88%

Table 2: Analysis of the supernatural characters in their Supernatural and Human Values for Season 2 of the show Naagin

Episodes	Total Duration	Supernatural Values				Human Values				
		Appearance	Signs & Symbols	Non-verbal elements	Total %	Romantic-Emotional	Self-talk & action	Family interaction	Non family interaction	Total %
Episode 10	2504s	108s (4.31%)	61s (2.44%)		6.75%	255s (10.18%)	251s (10.02%)	222s (8.87%)	821s (32.79%)	61.86
Episode 20	2478s	12s (0.48%)	157s (6.34%)	26s (1.05%)	7.87%	554s (22.36%)	146s (5.89%)	264s (10.65%)	788s (31.8%)	70.7%
Episode 30	2510s	10s (0.4%)	430s (17.3%)	7s (0.28%)	17.98%		427s (17.01%)	236s (9.4%)	989s (39.4%)	65.81%
Episode 40	2546s	41s (1.61%)	480s (18.85%)	8s (0.31%)	20.77%	261s (10.25%)	510s (20.03%)	410s (16.1%)	301s (11.82%)	58.2%
Episode 50	2506s	95s (3.79%)	172s (6.86%)		10.65%	107s (4.27%)	469s (18.72%)	794s (31.68%)	650s (25.94%)	80.61%
Episode 60	2553s		5s (0.2%)		0.2%	849s (33.25%)	477s (18.68%)	470s (18.41%)	477s (18.68%)	89.02%
Episode 70	2525s	118s (4.67%)	255s (10.1%)	75s (2.97%)	17.74%	169s (6.69)	527s (20.87%)	304s (12.04%)	468s (18.53)	58.13%
Episode 80	2561s		494s (19.29%)		19.29%	885s (34.56%)	206s (8.04%)	249s (9.72%)	650s (25.38%)	77.7%
Episode 90	2481s	17s (0.69%)	9s (0.36%)		1.05%	296s (11.93%)	16s (0.64%)	321s (12.94%)	1192s (48.05%)	73.56%
Episode 100	2756s	313s (11.36%)	1056s (38.32%)	80s (2.9%)	52.58%	347s (12.59%)	103s (3.74%)	263s (9.54%)	397s (14.4%)	40.27%

Table 3: Analysis of the supernatural characters in their Supernatural and Human Values for Season 3 of the show Naagin

Episodes	Total Duration	Supernatural Values				Human Values				
		Appearance	Signs & Symbols	Non-verbal elements	Total%	Romantic-Emotional	Self-talk and actions	Family Interaction	Non Family interaction	Total %
Episode 10	2460s	101s (4.11%)	222s (9.02%)		13.13%	114s (4.63%)	227s (9.23%)	179s (7.28%)	887s (36.06%)	57.2%
Episode 20	2528s		58s (2.29%)	161s (6.37%)	8.66%	218s (8.62%)	548s (21.68%)	703s (27.81%)	704s (27.85%)	85.96%
Episode 30	2458s	122s (4.96%)			4.96%	524s (21.32%)	170s (6.92%)	501s (20.38%)	115s (4.68%)	84.98%

Table 4 Analysis of the supernatural characters in their Supernatural and Human Values for Season 4 of the show Naagin

As per the analysis, the human values accounted for a maximum percentage of seconds for each episode throughout the season the highest being for episode 30 with a total of 84.98% and the minimum being for episode 10 with a total of 57.2%. Similar to the rest of the seasons, this season indicated the Human values to be dominant and has also been the only season that doesn't have a single episode that dominated in the supernatural category. Throughout the four seasons there has been a constant pattern wherein the Human Values turns out to be the dominant category thus indicating that the show focusses more on showcasing the supernatural characters in their human form than in their supernatural element and we can also conclude for it to be the dominant narrative of the show.

The Focus Group Discussion resulted in attaining some useful insights from the participants and has highlighted some of the important themes. Supernatural Narrative The main attribute that has distinguished the show from the rest of the serials is that a majority of the participants believed it to be different because of the supernatural content and also it breaks the mundane of the 'typical *saas-bahu*' serials and has given them something different to watch. A majority of the participants believed that the supernatural characters were shown in their human form that in their supernatural form.

The most repeated answer by a majority of the participants for the aspect that lead to the popularity of the show included the story and the storyline of the show. Each season portrayed the story in a different form which involved a number of twists and all of this has been much appreciated by the participants that are also considered as one of the important elements that have contributed to the success of the show. The same kind of appreciation was also seen towards the casts by a majority of the participants. The above-mentioned elements also turned out to be their personal favourites and the reason for which they turned back to the show. Much emphasis was given to elements like suspense and the story. Other elements like VFX , graphics, makeup and more were also mentioned by the participants. A majority of the participants associated and remembered the show because of its music. The participants mentioned a few tracks like-*'the Shiv Mantra*, the theme song, a chant called *'Naageshwaraiya'*, the sound of the *'been'*, the Baahubali song.

Perception: A majority of the participants denied that the show created or reinforced believe in supernatural powers. However, there were other participants that believed that there is a possibility. The ones who denied usually focussed on the point that the show was majorly viewed for entertainment purpose. They also denied that the show didn't change their perception of supernatural. The participants reiterated on the fact that they would personally not be influenced by it or the show does not create a belief for them in supernatural powers and they view it just for entertainment but there is a possibility that people started to believe in the supernatural content that is showed in the show.

Social and Cultural Connect: The show is based on Naagin and the way the characters are portrayed highlighted the point of culture and leads to the question of cultural connect. A majority of the participants agreed that the show had a strong cultural connect where they highlighted points like mythology and folklore. While the participants believed there was a cultural connection, they also put forth the point that whatever they portrayed in the show was not entirely true and also mentioned that it was shown mostly for entertainment purpose. A majority of the participants also agreed that the female-oriented narrative empowered the women and were of the view that the show didn't create a different perception of the country and culture internationally.

CONCLUSION

The research illustrates that the supernatural characters are shown more in their human form than in their supernatural element and the human factor is proved to be the dominant narrative. The participants agreed that the serial is shown more from the human perspective and also believed that the show doesn't create any belief in supernatural or supernatural powers. The storyline and the actors were highlighted as the major contributors to the popularity of the show, hence justifying and answering the hypothesis and research questions. The further

scope of the research could be increased to the viewers from multiple cities to understand if the perception changes as per the geographic location.

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