

THE PREFERENCE OF SRI LANKAN TELEVISION VIEWERS FOR INDIAN SOAP OPERAS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The genre of soap opera on television has played a central role in the development of reader-oriented viewer theories within media studies. Although soap operas have been popular among TV viewers in many other countries in the world from about the 1950s, in Sri Lanka they became popular with the introduction of dubbed Indian soap operas. They have transformed 20 years of Sri Lankan tele-drama industry and made a considerable impact on Sri Lankan society and culture. This paper examines the reasons for preferences of audiences for soap operas, and especially why they prefer Indian soap operas over the locally produced soap operas and tele-dramas.

The objectives of this empirical study were to: (1) examine the main reasons for preference of television viewers for soap operas; (2) to study tele-dramas and soap opera viewing habits of selected participants, and explore their preferences; (3) To explore the influence of soap opera on their life-styles; (4) to find out the attitudes of the participants towards the influence of Indian soap operas on the Sri Lankan tele-drama industry; (5) to draw policy conclusions, based on the findings, to improve the quality of the local industry so as to expand the viewership of locally produced soap operas and tele-dramas.

The primary data were collected from focus group discussions using a purposive sample, and the secondary data were derived from an extensive literature review.

This study reveals that especially during week days none of the participants watched weekly tele-drams produced locally because of their preference for the long running Indian soap operas and tele-dramas. As predicted by Uses and Gratification theory and Social Learning Theory, focus group discussions proved that life-styles of the participants, television viewing habits, and interpersonal relationships were greatly altered or changed because of soap watching. These changes that have taken place in viewers' life because of soaps, prove that soap has become a part of the popular culture in Sri Lanka. It also indicates the hegemony of TV channels in a country.