A Comparative Study of Indian Television: Doordarshan Era vs Digital Streaming Era

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ABSTRACT

The landscape of Indian television has undergone a dramatic transformation from the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period of the 1980s–1990s to the present period of digital streaming platforms. The purpose of this research is to analyze the evolution of programming content, viewers' behavior, and depiction of culture between the two periods. Using a mixed-method approach, the research draws upon a structured questionnaire and secondary data to compare viewership patterns, storytelling quality, and socio-cultural influence. The findings indicate that while India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan played a vital role in nation-building and promoting Indian values, online streaming services have redefined entertainment through diversity, personalization, and global access. However, the digital period also raises concerns regarding cultural dilution and excessive individualism. The study concludes that both periods hold distinctive relevance—India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan for its collective identity and the digital period for its creative freedom and accessibility.

KEYWORDS

India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan, Digital Streaming, Indian Television, OTT Platforms, Media Evolution, Audience Behavior, Cultural Representation, Storytelling, Television History, Comparative Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Television in India has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades—from the humble beginnings of India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan, the country's first and only public service broadcaster, to the highly dynamic and personalized world of digital streaming platforms. The transformation of Indian television is not merely a tech-based progression; it is a reflection of changing audience preferences, social values, and cultural narratives.

The India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period, beginning in 1959 and peeking through the 1980s and 1990s, served as a unifying force for millions of Indian households. It was the period of limited choice but deep emotional connection. Families would gather around the television set to watch programs such as Ramayan, Mahabharat, Hum Log, Malgudi Days, Chitrahaar, and Krishi Darshan. These shows not only entertained but also educated and reinforced moral and cultural values. The programming content was regulated, informative, and socially responsible—reflecting India's diversity and developmental aspirations.

With the advent of satellite television in the 1990s and the digital revolution in the 2010s, the media landscape changed dramatically. Affordable internet access, smartphones, and global connectivity have given rise to Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV, JioCinema, and YouTube. These platforms have empowered audiences with the freedom to watch what they want, when they want, and how they want. Content consumption has become more individualistic, diverse, and intperiodctive.

This transition from the collective family viewing experience of the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period to the personalized consumption model of the period of digital streaming platforms signifies a broader cultural shift. The narratives, formats, and production styles have changed, but so have the underlying values and representations. While India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan played a crucial role in promoting national integration and traditional ethos, online streaming services have redefined storytelling through innovation, inclusivity, and global collaboration.

The purpose of this research is to compare the two periods of Indian television—the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period and the Digital Streaming period—focusing on programming content diversity, viewers' behavior, depiction of culture, and tech-based influence. By analyzing both primary data (through a structured questionnaire) and secondary sources, this research seeks to understand how television has evolved from being a tool of social cohesion to a medium of individual expression and digital entertainment.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The transformation of Indian television from the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period to the period of digital streaming platforms represents one of the most profound shifts in the nation's media and cultural landscape. This study is significant because it provides an in-depth understanding of how these changes have affected programming content creation, viewers' behavior, and depiction of culture in India. It bridges the gap between traditional broadcasting and modern digital media, highlighting the continuities and contrasts that define both periods.

Firstly, the study is important for understanding the evolution of Indian media. India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan, being the pioneer of Indian television, played a vital role in shaping national identity, disseminating educational programming content, and promoting social awareness. The emergence of digital streaming platforms, on the other hand, has redefined the notion of entertainment and accessibility through tech-based advancement and globalization. By comparing the two, the research illustrates how media evolution mirrors broader social and tech-based progress in India.\

Secondly, the research holds value for cultural and social analysis. It explores whether modern online streaming services continue to uphold Indian traditions, ethics, and family-oriented storytelling as strongly as India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan once did. The findings will contribute to understanding how changing programming content formats influence moral values, cultural narratives, and audience perceptions across genperiodtions.

Thirdly, this study is relevant to media educators, researchers, and policymakers. It offers insights into the implications of media convergence, programming content regulation, and the growing influence of global platforms on local storytelling. The analysis can help policymakers develop balanced media policies that preserve cultural integrity while encouraging creative freedom.

Additionally, the research is beneficial for media professionals and programming content creators, as it identifies audience trends, programming content preferences, and storytelling expectations. Understanding the contrasts between the two periods can guide producers and writers in creating programming content that blends the nostalgic appeal of India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan with the innovation and engagement of online   streaming   services.

This study contributes significantly to the field of Mass Communication and Media Studies by documenting India's transition from a collective, state-driven media experience to an individualized, technology-driven digital ecosystem. It emphasizes that while technology continues to shape the way audiences consume programming content, the essence of meaningful communication lies in the cultural and emotional connection between media and society.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to compare the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period and the period of digital streaming platforms in Indian television, focusing on how tech-based, cultural, and social changes have influenced programming content and viewers' behavior. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To compare the nature and programming content of Indian television programs during the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period and the period of digital streaming platforms.
- To analyze changes in viewers' behavior and viewing preferences between traditional broadcast television and modern OTT platforms.
- To examine the cultural and social impact of India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan and digital streaming platforms on Indian society and its value system.
- To evaluate audience perceptions regarding programming content quality, engagement, and depiction of culture across both periods of Indian television.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The transformation of Indian television from the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period to the period of digital streaming platforms has been widely discussed in academic and media research. Various scholars have examined the transformation in programming, viewers' behavior, depiction of culture, and tech-based adaptation. This section reviews significant studies and reports that contribute to understanding this transition.

Kumar (2010) in his book Television in India: Development and Impact traces the growth of India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan as a state-owned broadcaster and its role in promoting national integration, rural development, and educational awareness. He emphasizes that India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan's programming was rooted in public service and reflected the socio-political priorities of post-independence India.

Mehta (2015) in India on Television: How Satellite News Channels Have Changed the Way We Think and Act discusses how the libperiodlization of the media industry in the 1990s shifted television's focus from development communication to commercialization and entertainment. The entry of private channels introduced competition, leading to increased programming content diversity but also a decline in moral and cultural depth.

Rao (2018) in The Changing Face of Indian Media highlights that the advent of digital technology and OTT platforms has empowered audiences by offering greater control over what, when, and how they watch. Rao argues that digital streaming has democratized programming content creation, giving rise to independent filmmakers and regional storytellers who were earlier marginalized in mainstream television.

Chakraborty and Banerjee (2020) in their article Digital Streaming and Indian Culture published in the Journal of Media Studies explore how streaming platforms have altered cultural consumption in India. They observe that while online streaming services encourage creative freedom and global exposure, they often dilute traditional values and family-oriented narratives that characterized the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period.

Joshi (2021) in From Television to OTT: Changing Media Consumption in India notes that Indian audiences have transitioned from collective family viewing to individualized consumption. The study indicates that

younger viewers prefer web-based programming content due to its flexibility, variety, and contemporary themes, whereas older genperiodtions remain nostalgic about India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan's simplicity and moral storytelling.

FICCI-EY Report (2022) on Media and Entertainment Industry provides statistical evidence of the rapid expansion of India's OTT market. The report highlights that the Indian streaming sector is one of the fastest-growing globally, driven by low data costs and increased smartphone penetration. However, it also warns that traditional television still plays an important role in rural and semi-urban areas.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2023) in its Report on Broadcasting in India underscores that despite the digital boom, India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan continues to serve as a vital medium for public communication, education, and cultural preservation, especially among audiences with limited access to digital technologies.

Existing litperiodture collectively shows that Indian television has evolved from a collective, state-controlled communication model to an individualized, digital, and globalized entertainment ecosystem. The India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period symbolized social responsibility and cultural unity, whereas the period of digital streaming platforms signifies creative diversity and tech-based empowerment. This comparative understanding forms the basis for analyzing how Indian audiences today balance nostalgia with innovation in their media consumption habits.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology forms the foundation of any academic study as it provides a systematic framework to collect, analyze, and interpret data. This study adopts a comparative and descriptive research design to explore the differences and similarities between the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period and the period of digital streaming platforms of Indian television in terms of programming content, audience perception, and cultural impact.

5.1. Research Design

The study employs a descriptive research design to describe and compare the characteristics of both periods of Indian television. The research focuses on identifying changes in audience preferences, viewing patterns, and depiction of culture. It combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

5.2. Data Collection Methods

The study is based on both **primary** and **secondary** data sources:

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Primary Data: The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire titled "A Comparative Study of Indian Television: India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan Era vs Digital Streaming Era" (see Appendix). The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to gather information about respondents' demographics, viewing habits, platform preferences, and opinions on programming content quality and depiction of culture.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles, government reports, research papers, and credible online sources related to the evolution of Indian television and digital media. Reports such as the FICCI-EY Media and Entertainment Industry Report (2022) and publications by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting were also used to support the analysis.

5.3. Sampling Method

The study used a random sampling method to ensure that respondents represented diverse age groups, occupations, and geographic backgrounds. This helped in obtaining a balanced view of both traditional and digital media consumption habits.

5.4. Sample Size

A total of 100 respondents participated in the study. The participants included students, working professionals, homemakers, and retired individuals belonging to different age categories ranging from 18 to 50 years and above. The inclusion of multiple demographics ensured a comprehensive comparison between genperiodtions exposed to both India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan and digital streaming.

5.5. Tools for Data Collection

The questionnaire contained multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. It was divided into two sections:

- Demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, and place of residence).
- Questions related to television viewing habits, India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan nostalgia, digital platform usage, programming content preferences, and perceptions of depiction of culture.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected through the structured questionnaire was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to understand the changing trends in viewers' behavior, programming content preferences, and cultural perceptions across the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan and period of digital streaming platformss. The responses from 100 participants belonging to different age groups, occupations, and educational backgrounds were compiled and interpreted to identify key patterns and insights.

Table1: Analysis and Interpretation of Data

S. No.	Parameter	Findings (Based on 100 Respondents)	Interpretation
1	**Age Group Distribution**	60% aged 18–25 years, 25% aged 26–35 years, 15% above 36 years	The majority of respondents belong to a younger generation that has exposure to both Doordarshan and digital platforms.
2	**Doordarshan Viewership**	82% grew up watching Doordarshan; most popular shows: *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, *Malgudi Days*, *Shaktimaan*	Doordarshan still holds nostalgic and cultural value, remembered for moral and family-oriented content.
3	**Frequency of Watching Doordarshan**	65% watched daily or weekly; 25% occasionally; 10% rarely	Indicates Doordarshan's importance as a daily family activity during its era.
4	**Usage of Digital**	90% currently use OTT platforms; top platforms: *YouTube (85%), Netflix (60%),*	OTT platforms dominate today's viewing

| S. No.	Parameter	Findings (Based on 100 Respondents)	Interpretation
	Platforms	*Amazon Prime (55%), Disney+ Hotstar (50%)*	habits due to flexibility and content variety.
5	**Preferred Type of Content**	70% prefer web series/movies; 20% documentaries; 10% news/reality shows	Entertainment-based content has overtaken educational programming.
6	**Storytelling and Quality Comparison**	75% find digital content better in quality; 25% prefer Doordarshan's simplicity and morals	Digital platforms excel in creativity and production, while Doordarshan is remembered for moral depth.
7	**Cultural Representation**	60% say Doordarshan represented Indian culture better; 30% prefer digital diversity; 10% neutral	Doordarshan promoted cultural unity, while OTT offers global perspectives but less traditional content.
8	**Impact of OTT on Traditional TV**	80% agree OTT has reduced the importance of traditional TV	Reflects the decline of scheduled television viewing in favor of on-demand content.
9	**Overall Viewer Sentiment**	Respondents associate Doordarshan with simplicity and unity; OTT with modernity and independence	Both eras hold unique significance — one represents nostalgia and values, the other represents creativity and innovation.
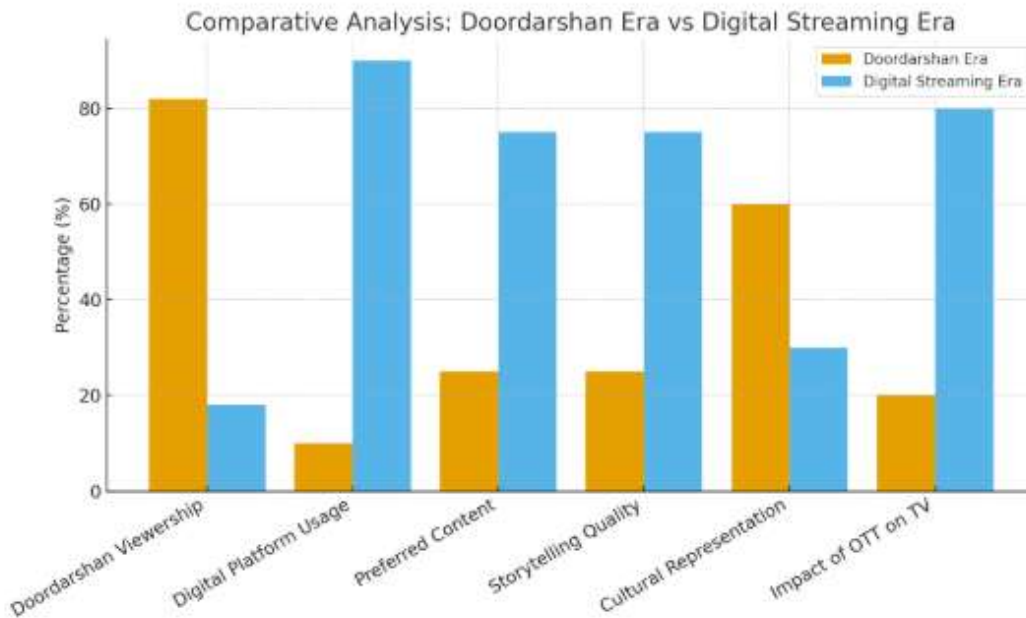
Figure 1

6.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data revealed that the majority of respondents (about 60%) were in the 18–25 years age group, followed by 25% from the 26–35 years bracket, and the remaining 15% from above 36 years. Most respondents were students and working professionals, indicating that the survey largely represented a tech-savvy audience familiar with both traditional and digital media. Around 70% of participants were from urban and semi-urban areas, while 30% were from rural backgrounds.

6.2. Doordarshan Viewing Habits

India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan Viewing Habits : About 82% of respondents mentioned that they had grown up watching India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan. Among the programs recalled most fondly were Ramayan, Mahabharat, Malgudi Days, and Shaktimaan. A majority (65%) of respondents stated that they used to watch India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan daily or weekly, mainly during family time. The findings highlight the emotional and cultural connection audiences still associate with India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan, emphasizing its role as a medium that fostered family unity and shared values.

6.3. Usage of Digital Streaming Platforms

An overwhelming 90% of respondents confirmed that they currently subscribe to or regularly use at least one digital streaming platform. Among the most popular platforms were YouTube (85%), Netflix (60%), Amazon Prime Video (55%), and Disney+ Hotstar (50%). Respondents cited reasons such as programming content variety, convenience, and on-demand viewing as key motivators for their preference toward online streaming services.

6.4. Preferred Type of Content

When asked about preferred programming content types on streaming platforms, 70% of respondents chose web series and movies, while 20% preferred documentaries and educational programs. Only 10% indicated regular viewing of news or reality shows. This reflects a major shift from India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan's informative and educational programming content to the entertainment-centric nature of OTT platforms.

6.5. Engagement and Storytelling Quality

Approximately 75% of respondents rated digital streaming programming content as having better storytelling and production quality compared to India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan. They appreciated the creativity, realism, and modern themes explored in digital shows. However, 25% felt nostalgic about the simplicity, moral clarity, and emotional depth of India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan programs, which they believed promoted stronger family values.

6.6. Cultural Representation

A significant 60% of respondents agreed that Doordarshan portrayed Indian culture and values more authentically than digital platforms. Conversely, 30% believed that digital content provides a more diverse and global perspective**,** while 10% remained undecided. This indicates that while digital platforms offer innovation and inclusivity, they sometimes lack the cultural rootedness associated with traditional television. A significant 60% of respondents agreed that India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan portrayed Indian culture and values more authentically than online streaming services. Conversely, 30% believed that digital programming content provides a more diverse and global perspective, while 10% remained undecided. This indicates that while online streaming services offer innovation and inclusivity, they sometimes lack the cultural rootedness associated with traditional television.

6.7. Impact of OTT on Traditional Television

Nearly 80% of participants agreed that the rise of OTT platforms has reduced the importance of traditional television. Respondents highlighted that the convenience of mobile streaming, ad-free experiences, and personalized recommendations have changed viewing habits permanently. Traditional television, including

India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan, is now mostly watched by older genperiodtions or during national events.

6.8. Overall Perception and Emotional Attachment

While India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan evokes nostalgia and collective memories, digital streaming represents modern aspirations and global exposure. Respondents expressed that India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan symbolizes simplicity and community, whereas online streaming services symbolize freedom and diversity. Thus, each period has its unique value and influence on viewers.

INTERPRETATION

The analysis clearly demonstrates a generational and technological shift in India's television consumption patterns.

- The Doordarshan era was characterized by limited access but strong moral, educational, and cultural orientation, fostering a sense of unity and shared experience.
- The digital streaming era offers unlimited content, creative diversity, and global access, but has led to individualized viewing habits and reduced collective cultural experiences.

Overall, while digital media dominates today's entertainment space, the emotional and cultural imprint of Doordarshan remains unparalleled. The study concludes that Indian television's evolution reflects the broader transformation of society—from collective identity and moral storytelling to personalization, innovation, and digital democratization.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of Indian television from the India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period to the period of digital streaming platforms reflects a profound transformation in technology, programming content creation, and audience engagement. The study reveals that while both periods belong to different tech-based and social contexts, each holds a distinct significance in shaping India's media landscape and cultural identity.

The India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period symbolized simplicity, moral education, and national integration. It served as a unifying medium that brought families together, promoted developmental messages, and reflected the values and aspirations of a newly modernizing India. Programs like Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Malgudi Days not only entertained but also strengthened cultural consciousness and ethical understanding among viewers.

In contrast, the period of digital streaming platforms represents innovation, diversity, and globalization. Platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and YouTube have redefined how audiences consume programming content. The focus has shifted from collective viewing to personalized, on-demand entertainment. Digital media has provided creative freedom to storytellers, expanded regional representation, and enabled audiences to explore a wider range of genres and global narratives.

However, the findings also suggest that the rise of digital media has led to individualized viewing habits and a gradual erosion of shared cultural experiences once created by India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan. While OTT platforms excel in technical quality and creative storytelling, they often lack the moral and cultural rootedness that characterized earlier television programming content.

In conclusion, both periods complement each other in defining the journey of Indian television. The India's public broadcaster, Doordarshan period laid the foundation of socially responsible broadcasting, while the period of digital streaming platforms continues to innovate and diversify programming content consumption. The future of Indian television lies in achieving a balance—embracing digital advancement while preserving cultural authenticity, ethical storytelling, and collective social values.

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