

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The American Filter

Indira S. Somani

Journalism and Mass Communications, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA, USA

(Received 25 February 2010; final version received 27 January 2011)

This study explored the television viewing habits of a cohort of Asian Indians who migrated to the US more than 40 years ago. This cohort eventually became acculturated into watching Indian television via the satellite dish. The study used the integrative communication theory and examined how two concepts of the theory relate to adaptation: enculturation and acculturation. The study produced findings that described how these Asian Indians used American television to acculturate to the US, but used American television as a filter through which they judged Indian television and distinguished between what they believed to be good and bad programming.

Keywords: acculturation; enculturation; satellite television; Asian Indians

When immigrants migrate to the US, they try to maintain a connection to their homeland; thus they also stay in touch with their culture. Today immigrants have a variety of ways to keep in touch with their homeland, specifically through ethnic media.

Ethnic media allows the newcomer to orient themselves to their new host country (Adoni, Caspi, & Cohen, 2006). For example, ethnic media can be a resource to learn about health-care or how to find a job in their new host country (Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Ethnic media also provide news coverage of local events, cultural festivals, and community meetings to help immigrants integrate into their new communities. But some ethnic media focus on the country of origin, which allows immigrants to connect to the news and events of their home country (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011).

One of the most popular forms of ethnic media for immigrants to stay connected to their homeland is satellite television with programming imported from India. The type of television discussed in this study is programming created in India and imported via the satellite dish to the US. This programming has become attractive to Asian Indians in the US. In this study, Asian Indians, who migrated to the US between 1960 and 1972, discussed how they watch Indian programming because they want to stay connected to India. For them watching Indian programs via the satellite dish means: receiving information from India in real time, no longer feeling like outsiders when returning to India for a visit, hearing their native language, having a sense of pride in the advancement of technology, and experiencing the music and Indian themes in the programs (Somani, 2008). However, not all Asian Indians are

*Email: somanii@wlu.edu, isomani@aol.com

happy with the programming from their homeland. This study looks at how one group of immigrants use Indian television and its programming to stay connected to their homeland, but finds parts of the Indian programming unsatisfying.

Literature review

Theoretical framework

Integrative communication theory was developed as a result of its creator Young Yun Kim's interest in understanding the adaptive struggles and successes she and others experienced (Kim, 2005). Two concepts that relate to integrative communication theory and adaptation are enculturation and acculturation.

Enculturation

Herskovits (1955) described how the enculturation process starts during an individual's childhood when he or she becomes conditioned to fundamental habits, such as eating, sleeping, speaking, and personal hygiene. Herskovits also described how, with adults, the enculturation process functioned at a more conscious level, where individuals learned accepted behavior in society. This process of learning leads individuals to social stability and cultural continuity.

In 1963, Margaret Mead argued against Herskovits' distinction between socialization and enculturation. Mead (1963) criticized how the words *socialization* and *enculturation* were used interchangeably. Instead, she defined socialization as 'learning as a universal process' and enculturation as 'the process of learning a culture as it takes place in a specific culture' (Mead, 1963, p. 185).

With the distinction of socialization and enculturation by Mead (1963), Kim (1988) defined enculturation as a socialization process. The process of enculturation is the process in which individuals adapt to the surrounding cultural forces through the years of socialization. For example, children first learn how to live in the company of others. As adults, this internalized learning enables them to interact easily with other members of their culture, who share a similar image of reality and self. For that reason, the enculturation process is related to socialization.

Furthermore, Kim (2005) explained how the continuous enculturation process occurs through communication. For instance, individuals learned to speak, listen, read, interpret, and understand verbal and non-verbal messages that are recognized and responded to by those with whom they regularly interact. Enculturation occurs in the cultural adaptation process (Kim, 2001).

As seen in Figure 1, the cultural adaptation process (Kim, 2001, p. 53) includes the enculturation process where individuals, through years of socialization, adapt to the surrounding cultural forces. According to Kim (2001), culture is 'imprinted on each individual as a pattern of perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that is accepted and expected by others in a given society below the level of conscious thought' (p. 48). From birth, individuals are programmed by culture and are largely unaware of the hidden cultural programming that shapes many of their mind-sets and behavioral patterns (Kim, 2001). Furthermore, individuals hardly realize the impact that culture has on their ability to solve problems. In addition, culture also influences how the economic and governmental systems function together. After individuals have passed

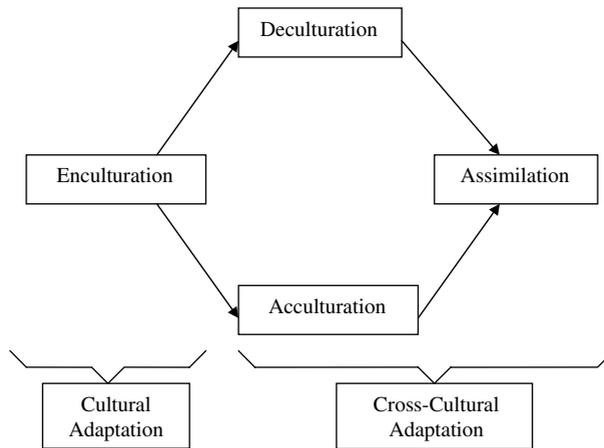


Figure 1. Relationships among the terms associated with cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001, p. 53).

through the enculturation process, they may transition into a new culture and experience the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Acculturation

In the cross-cultural adaptation process, acculturation is described as the process where strangers are compelled to learn a new cultural system (Kim, 2005). The process of 'new learning' is not just adding new cultural elements to prior internal conditions, but may also challenge the current cultural norms (Kim, 2002). Hence, as shown in Figure 1, as the process of new learning, (i.e. *acculturation*) occurs, the process of unlearning (i.e. *deculturation*) the old cultural habits also occurs. This unlearning is important so that new responses are adopted in situations that previously would have evoked responses from the old cultural habits (Kim, 2002). In continuation, Kim posits that the convergence of acculturation and deculturation creates assimilation. Assimilation is described as the process where strangers acquire elements of the new cultural system but also lose some of their original cultural habits (Kim, 2001). Assimilation is an ongoing process. Thus, for some individuals, complete assimilation is a lifetime goal because to change their internalized core values and beliefs is a slow and difficult process (Kim, 2001).

This study tries to gain understanding of why Asian Indians who migrated to the US in the 1960s and early 1970s became acculturated to Indian programming imported via the satellite dish. This particular cohort did not grow up watching television in the US, the reason they are used in this study. Television arrived in India in 1959, and at that time it was only in a few selected homes (Ray & Jacka, 1996). This cohort of Asian Indians learned to watch television after migrating to the US and thus became enculturated into American television. Once Indian programming was introduced in 1998 via the satellite dish, nearly 40 years after they arrived in the US, this particular generation became acculturated to Indian programming.

Generations that migrated to the US in later years (1980s, 1990s, and 2000s) have all been exposed to Indian television prior to coming to the US. It was not a new

phenomenon when they migrated to the US; they were already exposed to television, because it was already part of the culture in both India and the US. Furthermore, they developed their television-watching habits in India.

Ethnic media and cultural identity

As immigrants migrate to the US many maintain their ethnic identity through ethnic media. Ethnic identity can have three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Martin & Nakayama, 2007). The cognitive dimension ‘develops from lessons taught by older members of the ethnic group’ (Matsaganis et al., 2011, p. 71). The behavioral dimension of ethnic identity formation is when an individual behaves in accordance with the cultural norms (Matsaganis et al., 2011). The affective dimension refers to individuals feeling as if they belong to a particular ethnic group and identify with its history and its current concerns (Matsaganis et al., 2011). See Figure 2 for details.

These three dimensions of ethnic identity are interrelated. Ethnic identity development and ethnic media development can be mutually reinforcing. For example, ‘ethnic media might transmit the cultural knowledge associated with an ethnic identity (cognitive dimension), serve as a way for individuals to express that ethnic identity (behavioral dimension), and encourage a sense of belonging and pride in that ethnic group identity (affective dimension)’ (Matsaganis et al., 2011, p. 75). Ethnic identities are negotiated on an ongoing basis, and ethnic media can play a role in how people identify themselves and their communities (Matsaganis et al., 2011). For example, when news is reported in immigrants’ native language it allows immigrants to identify with their culture (Jeffres, 2000).

The need for ethnic television was identified after studies showed that migrant communities are anxious to maintain their identification with their homeland (Aksoy & Robins, 2003). New media technologies have made it possible for diasporic communities to stay linked to their communities of origin (Aksoy & Robins, 2003). Ethnic media also connects people to events and issues in their new community. This

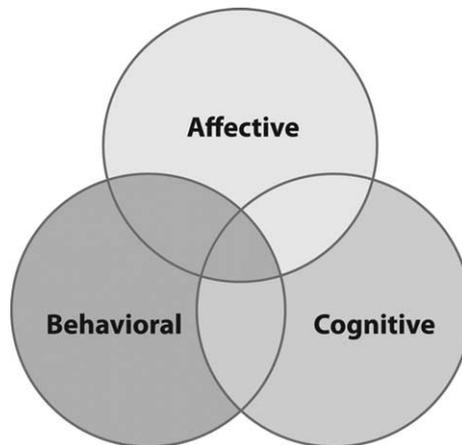


Figure 2. Three dimensions of ethnic identity, interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011, p. 71).

connection, community building, is why ethnic media are created (Georgiou, 2006). Ethnic media becomes a potential bridge for immigrants, once they move to their new host society, by involving them with what is going on in the neighborhood (Lin & Song, 2006). Ethnic media plays a role in 'mobilizing people toward concrete civic actions in the host society' and helps localize their practices of everyday life (Lin & Song, 2006, p.368). Ethnic newspapers also have bulletin boards which list 'announcements of upcoming events in the community, including festivals, cultural activities, flea markets, and even free medical exams' (Lin & Song, 2006, p. 381). These bulletin boards provide information immigrants can use in the host society and connect to their new surroundings (Lin & Song, 2006).

Satellite television use

One of the most instant forms of ethnic media that allows immigrants to stay connected to their homeland is satellite television. The market for ethnic newspapers and video rentals declined once satellite television penetrated the US. Lee (2004) studied the role of satellite television in Korean immigrants' lives, and the results show that Korean satellite television reinforces the viewers' ethnic identity: their connection with Korean culture and society. Lee conducted in-depth interviews with Korean Americans from a 'sufficiently affluent' background who have satellite television in four Texas cities. Lee (2004) explained how Korean immigrants could watch Korean television in 'real time' 24 hours a day, providing viewers with the most recent updates of current events in Korea. Watching news in real time through satellite television gave viewers direct access to the homeland (Sinclair, Yue, Hawkins, Pookong, & Fox, 2000). Lee (2004) also noted that satellite television became a vehicle to maintain Korean language and culture for the next generation. In addition, Lee (2004) determined that the older generation of Korean immigrants enjoyed watching the historical dramas and programs because they featured old Korean songs. Korean satellite television also reduced stress and loneliness for many immigrants because it is a form of entertainment. As a result, Lee (2004) concluded that satellite television 'may replace ethnic newspapers and videos in the future' because of its real-time broadcasts (p. 78). The study tries to understand how Asian Indians watch Indian television via the satellite dish and their sense of the problems and improvements needed in the programming.

Participants and methods

This study implements the oral history methodology approach. According to Hoopes (1979), p. 5), oral history interviews are a test of other people, of the accuracy of their memories, of their ability to assess their own lives realistically, and of their ability to profit from experience. For example, the study includes interviews with a cohort of Asian Indians who function as primary sources that help to establish how media use changed as technology changed over time. Yet, human memory is not perfect and is subjective to the memory and view of the interviewee.

Oral historians must take into consideration that 'all historical documents, including both oral and written, reflect the particular subjective minds of their creators' (Hoopes, 1979, p. 15). In particular although written documents are less distorted by memory, the oral facts provided by the interviewee provide a deeper

understanding or 'feel' for the subject or event being recalled (Hoopes, 1979). The cohort of Asian Indians interviewed in this study provides a feel for the climate of media available to them throughout the past 40 years.

The oral histories in this study were conducted as standardized open-ended interviews. It was necessary at times to combine the standardized open-ended approach with a conversational strategy. All the interviewees were asked the same questions. The questions covered the early stages of their life in the US. For example, the researcher asked them about their American television viewing habits, movie renting habits, images of India on US television, their connection to their culture, and their Indian television viewing habits once a satellite dish was acquired. These questions are followed by a series of media-related questions. Some follow-up questions that emerged from the interviews covered the problems and kind of improvements the participants would like to see with Indian programming.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher conducted oral history interviews with Asian Indians from the Washington, DC, metro area who migrated to the US in the 1960s and early 1970s. Selecting individuals from the same generation and general location provided her with access to a cohort of individuals who had the same experience in one area of the country. This access gave insight to the individuals' lives and how they stay connected to their culture.

Since snowball sampling is a technique used for finding people who know people familiar with the subject, thus making the cases rich in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), the researcher used this technique to find the appropriate participants of the study: couples who are current subscribers of Indian television via the satellite dish and who also migrated to the US between 1960 and 1972. The researcher identified 32 couples, calling each of them, using the names of the recommenders to try to convince them to do the interview. The researcher was able to gain entry by using her friends and social networks to see if anyone could offer a referral into the cohort needed to do the study (Vallance, 2001).

Some couples were not interested in participating. Some couples said they really do not watch much television and, therefore, would not be good participants for this study. Some couples watched Indian television via Comcast instead of the satellite dish and, therefore, did not qualify for this study.

This study was about how certain members of this cohort have acculturated to Indian television after living in the US for nearly 40 years. As noted, this is a qualitative study; therefore if the participants were not interested in participating it was because they did not feel comfortable discussing their television viewing habits with a stranger. Also, couples who did not watch that much television would not have been good participants for the study, because the researcher probed each viewer with a variety of questions on why they watched certain programs. The couples who did respond to the phone calls were interested in participating in the study.

Ten couples who are current subscribers of Indian television via the satellite dish, and who also migrated to the US between 1960 and 1972, were used in this study. All of the participants subscribed to Indian programming via the satellite dish, and used the Dish Network for their satellite television services. Most of the participants started their satellite service in 1998 when Indian programming was first introduced in the US (S. Venkatasubramanian, personal communication, August 13, 2007).

The highest educational degree within this cohort was a medical degree. Among the remaining participants, eight held a master's degree and 11 had a bachelor's

degree. All of the participants are of the Hindu religion. A combination of Punjabi, Hindi, and English are spoken at home. However, some of the participants are originally from South India and therefore speak a combination of Telegu and English at home. None of the households speak only English at home. The average age of participants was 65.

Four participants arrived in the US before 1965 and the remaining 16 arrived after 1965. Family income for three couples ranges from US\$100,000 to US\$200,000 per year. Seven couples earn well over US\$200,000 per year. Eleven of the participants are still gainfully employed, four are retired, and five women are homemakers. Participants' occupations include real estate, medical physicist, esthetician, doctor, restaurant owner; and six are civil or mechanical engineers. All couples have children; three couples have three adult children each and the remaining seven couples have two adult children each. The couples reside in McLean, VA, Potomac, MD, Rockville, MD, Glenn Dale, MD, Darnestown, MD, or Springfield, VA, some of the wealthiest suburbs in the Washington metro region.

There are some limitations in using this particular cohort for this study. First, this cohort is from a particular part of the country, the Washington metro area. As a result, the researcher cannot generalize as to whether other Asian Indians who migrated to the US during the 1960s had the same experience in other parts of the country. Second, these participants were all willing to participate in the study. Using the snowball sampling method and referral system (from each participant), the researcher was able to find 10 couples who were willing to talk for an hour or hour and half about their television viewing habits. Finally, they all came from a specific socio-economic background, enabling them to afford a satellite dish and a wide variety of programming, not to mention a very particular lifestyle. Thus, this group does not represent the overall Asian Indian population in the US.

Each oral history was conducted in the home of the couples, usually in the dining room, at a time that was convenient for them. One interview was conducted in the participant's workplace. Because the oral histories were conducted in their homes, the participants remained in their comfort zone. Furthermore, the researcher was able to observe the Indian culture established in each participant's home by the artifacts on display as well as aroma of Indian cooking. Thus, the researcher became familiar with the interviewees in their home-setting: 'Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 106). By immersing herself in the home setting of each participant, the researcher also learned from her own experience in the home-setting: 'This immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his own experience of the setting' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

All of the interviews were conducted in English. Each audio-taped interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. Each person was interviewed separately, meaning no husband and wife were interviewed together. The researcher took notes during the interviews, which consisted of key words, phrases, and major points made by the respondents during the interviews (Patton, 2002).

Data collection was completed at 10 couples because patterns in the participants' answers that appeared to be themes for analysis were discovered (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Furthermore, the discoveries of similar findings in the answers present an appropriate level of confidence for analysis in the sample size of the data collection (Babbie, 2007).

In the US, Indian programming packages became available on the Dish network in 1998. Although satellite television services were available well before that, Indian programming (via satellite) was not. On average, each person watched 25.5 hours of Indian programming a week. The programs included news programs, soap operas, talk shows, game shows, and sports programs. Each participant was given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

Results and discussion

This cohort was attracted to the programming primarily because it was available in real time. These participants became enculturated, a learning process that leads individuals to social stability and cultural continuity within their culture, into American programming. Hence, they learned how to watch television in the US including its standard of presentation and visual elements in the programs. When Indian programming became available via the satellite dish, they acculturated to watching Indian programs. Acculturation is a cross-cultural adaptation process where individuals learn a new cultural system in their new host society but still maintain their own cultural integrity. However, American television became a filter through which these participants judged Indian television. As a result, Indian television was held to the standard of American television, thus creating an overall finding called *The American Filter*. The researcher sub-categorized the findings in *The American Filter* as follows: copying Western culture, objectifying women, Indian news programs not up to standard, and Indian soap operas dragged on too long, and she explains each finding below. The quotes from each participant have not been corrected grammatically to better reflect what way these immigrants speak.

Copying Western culture

The first finding described by almost all the participants is that the programming is 'too Western.' Dinesh Dharma, a 67-year-old mechanical engineer, said Indian programming is simply copying Western culture and not really reflecting the reality of the country:

And whatever they are showing is based on lifestyle that American shows that, you know. They are copying rather than reflecting the real life in India of the majority of the people, you know. Even like the lifestyle they are showing for the rich, that also is not Indian life styling.

Dharma said Indian television focuses on how the wealthy lived in India, and they are a small portion of the population. Just like television, 'The India that is now being shown through Bollywood cinema covers only the cosmopolitan class. Only a few films highlight social issues, and the ones that address these issues do not become "hits" at the box-office' (Raj, 2007). Dharma does not feel Indian television programs focus on how the majority of the population lived in India. Dharma said the programming copy American shows, because he believes American programs also focused on the wealthy rather than the majority of how the American population lives. Furthermore, he believes the wealthy in India have adopted a Westernized lifestyle and that image is being perpetuated on the screen.

Dharma's wife, Deepti, a 61-year-old retired pension analyst, agreed that the programs have some Western cultural elements and would rather see programs stay true to Indian culture:

They are copying everything what we see here, you know, the basic standards, style, you know setup and all that. One way it is good though, because whole world is getting into one culture, it looks like, you know, everybody is following America.

Deepti Dharma feels the style of the programming exposes too many Western cultural values. She, like her husband, wants to see Indian programs develop their own style.

In summary the Dharmas do not believe some of the Indian programs reflect true Indian culture and would rather see programs embrace Indian culture and tradition. The Dharmas want to see India the way they remember the country as it was when they left nearly 40 years ago. Although they have traveled back to India many times, they have not changed with the country. As a result, they remain connected to India's traditional values and culture and do not connect with the Western images of India in the Indian programming.

Objectifying women

Some participants disliked the way women appeared on the screen. Some participants complained that Indian women on Indian television are scantily dressed and too open about their relationships with men. They are used to seeing women dressed in Indian attire, like a sari or salwar suit, explained Vandana Dutta, a 62-year-old restaurant owner:

Like the girls, they don't look like Indian anymore. They don't wear that much Indian, Western clothes; they are into Western clothes. And like even the sets, like they have adapted lots of Western movies and they turn into Indian movies. And sometimes it's depressing that to see, that we are, we are losing our culture that way.

Dutta also wants to see India the way she remembers it when she left the country. She remains connected to the traditional values of the culture and, therefore, cannot relate to the images of modern-looking women on the screen. Dutta even said the girls do not look Indian anymore. She feels as if she is watching Indian women with a Westernized demeanor and clothing on screen. She also thinks the television sets and movie sets are too Western-looking. As a result, she feels women wearing Western clothes and Western-looking television and movie sets show how Indian television programs are not staying connected to Indian traditional culture.

Uma Bhatt, a homemaker in her 60s, said the programs are adopting Western culture:

The clothing, less and less clothing, they're wearing. And the way they start talking, and drink, and smoke, the ladies, we never saw before. But I see now in a lot of movies, and kind of shows that ladies are freely drinking and all that. So I would say they have adopted a lot of Western culture there.

For Bhatt, the image of Indian women drinking is something that she had never seen before. Furthermore, this image is being perpetuated on Indian television. Bhatt said Indian programming is copying Western culture by showing images of Indian women drinking on Indian television. According to Bhatt, the concept of women drinking in India is something her generation cannot imagine. Bhatt remembers India as she left it 40 years ago, as having a very traditional, conservative culture for women, who are shielded from Western influence. She has not changed with the country and is not familiar with the modern image of an Indian woman. Bhatt believes Indian programming does not portray the average Indian woman on television.

The Asian Indians in this study are accustomed to seeing American women portrayed in a sexually free manner on television, but not Indian women. Women appeared to be more open about their relationships with men, as Renu Advani, a 60-year-old homemaker, explained: 'Now the girls have relationship before marriage, you know, they live with the boyfriends even without getting married. It's getting so, you know, they say it's getting so popular.' Advani went on to say, 'Then we feel this is not our culture, but, and the way they dress up. I mean there is no shirt or anything. They are, all they are wearing is strapless and things.'

Advani and others are part of a generation who left India when arranged marriages were still the norm. Couples did not date or live together before marriage. When this cohort sees women acting more open about their relationships with men, they interpreted that to be demeaning to women. They expect to see women sheltered as they were in their young adult life. Hence, they are thinking of images of Indian women as they remembered them in India when they left the country 40 years ago. Furthermore, they expected to see women dressed in Indian attire, fully covered, and not in Western clothes, such as strapless blouses.

Sunita Sharma, a homemaker in her 60s, also feels that copying the Western format of programming makes Indian women appear in a degrading manner, and it does not show the reality of the culture:

They should not try to follow Western [ways] because they think they are [better]. This television is showing in abroad countries, so they should [not] do those kind of things what the people do is here, it's wrong. If that is their motto to do that, they should keep their originality to show the good things in the television, set an example over here, but why they are following Western things. Clothes wise they are following, drinking wise and flirting wise, sleeping with one another, husbands cheating on the wife, it was not in our culture and all they show in the television . . . So that's what I want know, are they really happening there or they are copying only just to show us here?

Sharma said the images of women do not show a realistic picture of how women behave in India. She wants only positive images of India broadcast on television to preserve India's traditional culture and values for viewers abroad. When she sees images of women in Western clothing, she thinks women are copying Western culture. Furthermore, when she sees images of women drinking, flirting, or committing adultery, she thinks Indian television is copying a Western style of programming in their story themes. Sharma does not believe Indian women behaved that way. She said the programs are not accurately portraying Indian culture.

In summary, Dutta, Bhatt, Advani, and Sharma, as well as other participants, disliked the way Indian women are portrayed as scantily dressed in Western clothes instead of Indian attire. They also are not used to seeing Indian women being open

about their relationships with men, or drinking. They said these images on Indian television do not represent traditional Indian culture. Some do not believe that Indian women really behaved this way.

Indian news programs not up to standard

The Asian Indians in this study do not connect with the Western images of India and Indians on television. They still long for India's traditional values and culture to be portrayed in its Indian programming. However, they said Indian news programs are not up to the standard of American news programs. This cohort became enculturated into a certain standard of news programs: American news programs.

Many said there is not enough actual news content, as Vikas Dutta, a 70-year-old doctor, explained:

You try to get an update, but as I said, you know, one of the things, which [it] lacks is the more of political discussion. And the news you watch occasionally, if you turn on the news channel, I mean that's it the saddest part, is they are not up to standard. And they do not provide enough information and the first thing they talk about is cricket [sport].

Dutta is tired of news programs being consumed with sports and wishes there were more news programs that have political discussion like *Meet the Press*. Overall, he does not believe the Indian news programs are up to the US standard and do not provide enough information about the rest of the country.

Balraj Das also criticized the news, saying it focuses on too much sports and celebrity news:

I think, again, the news is very below standard. They even don't have any news which is what we [are] watching. They have one cricket [news item]. They will spend 15 minutes, for example. They don't make any sense. I mean it's a huge country, billion people. There are [a] lot of things. When I go, I see lot of things, which I think they will be, newscast should be about those problems the country faces, not about cricket. Fifteen minutes out of 30 minutes for cricket and then there is a wedding going on, nonsense stuff about wedding of a film-star son.

Das thinks the news programs focused on too much sports and entertainment and, as a result, they are below standard. Das said the Indian news programs do not reflect the content-driven newscasts he is used to watching in the US. He presumes the newscast should be about the problems in the country, not about sports. Das also said the news programs concentrated on Indian celebrity news. Most of the participants in this study are used to watching news programs that have depth. They think Indian news programs copy the style of *Entertainment Tonight* or *ESPN* rather than a regular evening news program like *ABC's World News Tonight*.

Das went on to say what he would like to see in news programs:

I mean it's a vast country with vast problems with lot of things going on. There is a lot of progress going on. We have a culture which dates back to, civilization dates back to hundreds of years. There are a lot of things, they can plan these programs on. They can have this news about what's going on in today's world, in the international world and India. How we are reacting to those things.

Das wished there were more educational programs that focused on India's history and culture. He also emphasized that India was a large country with both problems and progress and would have liked to see Indian news programs reflect coverage of everything going on in the country. He also would like to see Indian news programs have more international coverage of events around the world.

Other participants talked about how they wished the programs reflected the 'real life' of India. For example Prakash Patel, a researcher in his 60s, said:

The program[s] need improvement. There is no question in my mind. It definitely needs quality improvements, even in sitcoms. I mean if they have to reflect, there should be some reality somewhere. I think Indian programs lack reality.

Patel, like Das, also feels the programs need improvement. He feels Indian programs, in general, are not realistic and that is why the overall content needs to be improved.

In summary, Dutta, Das, and Patel would like to see Indian news programs improved. They all feel the news focused on too much entertainment and sports and does not reflect the reality of the country. Dutta would like to see an Indian version of *Meet the Press*, and Das would like to see more educational programs. Patel would like to see realistic Indian programs.

Indian soap operas dragged on too long

The next finding is that participants think the evening soap operas drag on too long. Some participants of this study talked about how they watched soap operas when they first came to the US. These shows included *General Hospital*, *Young and the Restless*, and *Guiding Light*. These Asian Indians became enculturated into watching a certain genre of television: American soap operas.

When viewing American soap operas, these participants became enculturated by watching the characters evolve and change over the episodes. They also maintain knowledge of what happened to the story line in previous episodes. They are enculturated into following the progress of the American story line in soap operas. As a result, when Indian soap operas drag on too long, some participants become frustrated because the development of the characters and story line are not up to the standard of American soap operas. Sunita Sharma explained further:

In the beginning I liked it, but these, all these soap operas they, they take to you nowhere, they are just, oh my gosh, when the story finishes, they want to drag on, they start good plays, but they keep on drag on, oh they drag in such a way that the original play you forgot what, how nice it was.

Sharma discussed specifically what does not work in the soap operas:

The story line they start, but no characters are good. Acting is very good, that is very good part about it, but the only thing I am concerned about when they start a story, continue that theme. They, I think, after running for two, three months, they don't know what to do with the story.

Sharma described how in the beginning she enjoyed the Indian soap operas, but then she felt as if the storyline was going nowhere. The storyline in Indian soap operas

starts out strong but does not manage to continue a strong theme after two or three months. Sharma said the soap operas drag on and the viewers eventually forget the original plot. Sharma likes the acting but thinks the characters are not fully developed. Sharma went on to say that some of the dramatic effects used in the soap operas lower the production quality of the soap operas, not something they became used to seeing in the American soap operas:

And put on each one, they are putting the flash light [spotlight] on each one [character] and breaking the light just like that, that the person can be shattered. I don't know why they do that in every play, not only in song. I would say that is, whatever the production, whoever the producer is or the direction, I don't know, or the storyteller, whosoever, its wrong idea.

Sharma feels some of the special effects used in the soap operas sensationalized the story. Sharma described how the camera and music in the soap opera scene focused on five family members sitting, when someone entered their house. Spotlight effects were then used on each family member creating another dramatic effect. Sharma does not like these effects. She has become enculturated into watching American soap operas, which use fewer special effects and more developed plots and characters.

Vikas Dutta also thought the soap operas dragged on too long:

We would like to see more of that (Indian political discussion shows), because after a time, you know, we get tired of watching soap operas. And the problem with the soap opera is, you know, they unnecessarily drag on. And some of us, you know, who are not really serious watchers of the shows, for example one day to another day, you know, if you don't watch it for three days, you know, you have no idea how things change and what has happened.

Dutta also said the soap operas drag on too long and he eventually got tired of watching them. He said that if a viewer missed several episodes, he or she would not be able to follow along. Dutta has also become enculturated into the variety of American programming available in the evening. He finds that too many Indian soap operas are offered in the evening and not enough intellectual programming.

Prakash Patel believes the storylines of the Indian soap operas are also deteriorating: 'They started as hilarious comedy, interesting, you know. But they, as the story went on, I didn't like the trend of the story. I don't think the story writer[s], they are doing a good job.' Patel thinks they started out amusing and captivating, but he also thinks the story lines drag on. In summary Sharma, Dutta, and Patel all became tired of the ongoing storylines in Indian soap operas. Sharma does not like the special effects used with the shows, and Dutta thinks there is not enough intellectual programming in general.

These viewers, like other participants in this study, developed an understanding of serial television after becoming enculturated into American programming. With serial television, the viewers' pleasure in each show had to do with the development of the story lines and characters. As a result, some of the participants who watched American soap operas after moving to the US became enculturated into this genre of television as well. Their process of enculturation stemmed from watching the characters evolve and change through the episodes and maintaining knowledge of what happened to the storyline in previous episodes.

When they started to watch Indian soap operas, they acculturated into watching them. They already had a knowledge base of how soap operas developed after watching American soap operas. As a result, they learned to watch Indian soap operas and appreciated them for their Indian themes. However, they all felt the story lines dragged on too long and were of low quality.

Conclusion

'The American Filter' demonstrates that these Asian Indians are skilled television viewers. They know the difference between good and bad programming. This study tries to understand how this cohort of Asian Indians watches Indian television. The findings of this study apply only to those Asian Indians who actively see Indian programs. These Asian Indians have become enculturated into American television. They use American television as a filter to help them decide if the Indian programming is up to their standards, both in its production quality and storytelling. Hence, these Asian Indians are attracted to Indian programming primarily because they could see what was going on in the country in real-time, while at the same time they also saw problems with the programming and suggested areas for improvement.

These Asian Indians said Indian television programs are 'too Western.' The programs have western values and beliefs. They believe the programs copy Western culture and would be better in their own style. Many of the participants said the Indian programs do not reflect true Indian culture, and they would rather see programs embrace Indian culture and tradition. For these Asian Indians, the image of India they want to see on the screen is the image of the country they remember. Many people who left India in the 1960s still think of the country as it was 40 years ago. Although they travel to India and visit their extended families every few years, they have not changed with the country. It is almost as if they are stuck in a 'time machine,' holding onto the Indian culture from their young adult years. These viewers analyze and evaluate what they see in the Indian programming. Many participants say the programs are simply focusing on how the wealthy (a small portion of the population) live in India.

Participants also dislike the way women appear on the screen. Some viewers think the women on television who wear Western clothes expose too much of their body parts. The participants are accustomed to seeing women dressed in Indian attire and connecting to the traditional culture. Again, disliking how women are objectified on television is another example of how this cohort analyzes and evaluates Indian media through an 'American Filter.'

Some participants said the Indian news programs are not up to standard and spend more time on sports and entertainment news. They said the news is incomplete given the reality of the country. As a result, they would like to see more educational programs and political discussion shows. As these Asian Indians analyze and evaluate Indian news programs, they compare them to American news programs, because they have been enculturated into American programming. By becoming enculturated into American programming, particularly news, they understand the role of media in democracy. This kind of media literacy is what makes these Asian Indians feel that the Indian news programs are not up to standard.

As participants discussed how the Indian soap operas drag on too long, they said they are used to watching American soap operas with better character and story

development. Again, these Asian Indians analyze and evaluate Indian soap operas and compare them to American soap operas. By becoming enculturated into American soap operas, they use American soap operas as a filter to judge Indian soap operas. In Indian soap operas, they can see through the low level of production quality and story-telling, which makes them believe the shows are not up to standard.

This research brings greater understanding to the process of adaptation for immigrants. These Asian Indians left their homeland nearly 40 years ago, when media technology was not really available to them. Yet they longed to stay connected to India and felt instantly gratified by watching Indian television in real-time, once it became available.

Today, the adaptation process is different for newcomers, because they have access to the internet, satellite television, and better phones. Newcomers are faced with a variety of media choices to feel instantly connected to their homeland. Even video can be watched on the internet. Newcomers have less chance to feel isolated in their new host country. In fact, they may not even feel the need to join a diasporic community, because technology keeps them connected to their home culture on an individual level. For today's newcomers, the adaptation process is smoother and less isolating. Because of technology, the chances of feeling lonely are less likely.

As media companies try to program for the future, this study allows for greater understanding as to why one particular ethnic group struggles to identify with the programs imported from its home country. This study also indicates how this cohort has become media savvy, after living in the US for nearly 40 years, and judges Indian television against American television.

The later generations of Asian Indians that have migrated to the US have change with India. That is, as India adopted Western values, the later generations were exposed to the changes in the country as they were taking place. Furthermore, the later generations grew up watching television in India. As Indian television adopted Western values, the newer generation saw Indian television change over time. Furthermore they recognize how Indian television exposes a Western influence to the mass Indian audience.

The cohort of Asian Indians in this study left India before there was an influence of television in the country. They also remember India as it was when they left in the 1960s. Therefore, they have not changed with the country. As a result they remain connected with India's traditional values and culture and do not connect with Western influence in India or its programming. For example, they expect to see Indian programs embrace Indian culture and tradition; they expect to see women on television dressed in a sari or involved in an arranged marriage; they expect to see news programs that do not focus so much on sports and entertainment, but the 'real life' of India; and they expect to see a better development of characters and story line in the American soap operas.

In this study both American and Indian television played a role in shaping this cohort's identity. These Asian Indians identify with Indian traditional values but also identify with a certain quality of programming. The cohort of Asian Indians in this study experience a dual identity or 'dual frame of reference' (Reese, 2001). This dual frame of reference refers to 'immigrants who know the norms of both the country of origin and the host country and can use both sets of cultural rules' (Matsaganis et al., 2011, p. 58). This cohort has been exposed to two different kinds of television. They

were first exposed to American television and watched that until Indian television was introduced via satellite dish. As a result this cohort has strong connections to both ethnic and mainstream media outlets. These participants have the option to use mainstream and ethnic media, which keeps them connected to both their country of origin and their country of settlement (Bendixen & Associates, 2006; Durham, 2004).

This study is significant because the cohort used in this research is a transnational audience, an audience where individual migrants experience being both 'here' and 'there' (Matsaganis et al., 2011). In other words transnationalism is the 'set of connections that individuals maintain across borders between their home and host country' (Levitt & Waters, 2002; Matsaganis et al., 2011, p. 64).

Ethnic-based transnational audiences are already a niche market and the main target of transnational media corporations with satellite capabilities (Gillespie, 2000). Studying the satellite television viewing habits of this particular cohort also provides insight on how to plan programming for future generations of Asian Indians. Most importantly, it provides greater understanding to media executives on the changes in audience behaviors in a new media environment. Furthermore, media executives have an opportunity to understand how immigrants use ethnic media to negotiate their cultural identity.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the editor, Dr Hao Xiaoming, and the reviewers for their insightful comments to improve this manuscript. The author also thanks Dr Renée Pratt, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Washington and Lee University, for her help in editing this paper.

Notes on contributor

Indira S. Somani, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communications, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA. Her research is twofold: one, to study how ethnic groups, specifically the Indian diaspora in the US and around the world, use media to stay connected to their homeland; and two, to make documentary films about how ethnic groups, such as Asian Indians, maintain and preserve their cultural identity in another country.

References

- Adoni, H., Caspi, D., & Cohen, A. (2006). *Media, minorities and hybrid identities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Aksoy, A., & Robins, K. (2003). Banal transnationalism: The difference that television makes. In K.H. Karim (Ed.), *The media of the diaspora* (pp. 89–104). New York: Routledge.
- Babbie, E.R. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Bendixen & Associates. (2006). *Ethnic media in America: The giant hidden in plain sight*. Miami, FL: Author.
- Durham, M. (2004). Constructing the 'new ethnicities': Media, sexuality, and diaspora identity in the lives of South Asian immigrant girls. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 140–161.
- Georgiou, M. (2006). *Diaspora, identity and the media diasporic transnationalism and mediated spatialities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Gillespie, M. (2000). Transnational communications and diaspora communities. In S. Cottle (Ed.), *Ethnic minorities and the media: Changing cultural boundaries* (pp. 164–178). Philadelphia: Open University Press.

- Herskovits, M.J. (1955). *Cultural anthropology: An abridged revision of man and his works*. New York: Knopf.
- Hoopes, J. (1979). *Oral history an introduction for students*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Jeffres, L.W. (2000). Ethnicity and ethnic media use. A panel study. *Communication Research*, 27(4), 496–535.
- Kim, Y.Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation an integrative theory*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kim, Y.Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y.Y. (2002). Adapting to an unfamiliar culture. In W.B. Gudykunst & B. Mody (Eds.), *Handbook of international and intercultural communication* (pp. 259–273). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y.Y. (2005). Adapting to a new culture. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 375–400). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lee, C.M. (2004). Korean immigrants' viewing patterns of Korean satellite television and its role in their lives. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 14(1), 68–80.
- Levitt, P., & Waters, M. (Eds.). (2002). *The changing face of home: The transnational lives of the second generation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lin, W.-Y., & Song, H. (2006). Geo-ethnic storytelling. *Journalism*, 7(3), 362–388.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martin, J.N., & Nakayama, T.K. (2007). *Intercultural communication in contexts* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Matsaganis, M.D., Katz, V.S., & Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (2011). *Understanding ethnic media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mead, M. (1963). Papers in honor of Melville J. Herskovits: Socialization and enculturation. *Current Anthropology*, 4(2), 184–188.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Raj, A. (2007). Bollywood cinema and Indian diaspora. In D.P. Macedo & S.R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 332–339). New York: Peter Lang.
- Ray, M., & Jacka, E. (1996). Part II: Indian television: An emerging region force. In J. Sinclair, E. Jacka, & S. Cunningham (Eds.), *New patterns in global television* (pp. 83–125). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reese, L. (2001). Morality and identity in Mexican immigrant parents' visions of the future. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(3), 455–472.
- Sinclair, J., Yue, A., Hawkins, G., Pookong, L., & Fox, J. (2000). Chinese cosmopolitan and media use. In S. Cunningham & J. Sinclair (Eds.), *Floating lives: The media and Asian diasporas* (pp. 35–90). St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press.
- Somani, I.S. (2008). *Enculturation and acculturation of television use among Asian Indians in the US* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- Vallance, R.J. (2001). Gaining access: Introducing referred approval. *Issues in Educational Research*, 11(2), 65–73.
- Wilkin, H.A., & Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (2006). Reaching at-risk groups: The importance of health storytelling in Los Angeles Latino media. *Journalism*, 7(3), 299–320.