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Seeing Indian, Being Indian: Diaspora, Identity, and Ethnic Media

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in the uses and gratifications theoretical framework, cultural proximity and social identity theories, researchers uncovered specific themes emerging from viewers of Indian television programming. The immigrant viewers actively chose ethnic programming, specifically Indian television available via the satellite dish, to feel a sense of gratification. That gratification came in the form of reinforcing their ethnic identity. One hundred Asian Indian immigrants from five major metropolitan U.S. cities (New York, Washington, DC, San Francisco, Chicago, and Houston) were interviewed. These participants had an average age of 68 and an average family income of \$150,000. In spite of the fact that they have resided in the United States for 40–50 years, they still felt attracted to Indian programming, as it allowed them to stay informed about India and feel connected to their cultural roots.

KEYTERMS

Asian Indian; social identity; television; uses and gratifications

Media researchers continue to study the media consumption habits of immigrants in the United States (Etefa, 2005; M. A. Johnson, 1993, 1996; Lee, 2004; Naficy, 2003; Park, 1990; Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2004), including the Asian Indian diaspora (Helweg, 1988; Hess, 1981; Leonard, 1993; Saran, 1987; Shah, 1999). This study applies the uses and gratifications theoretical framework and social identity theory to research how and why a cohort of high-income Asian Indians from across the country watched Indian television. This particular cohort left their home country, India, 40 to 50 years ago, and relearned things about India through technology, specifically satellite television. The concept of immigrants relearning things about their home country after being away for 40 to 50 years has been understudied. Likewise, little research has focused on the relationship between ethnic identification with large groups and their media consumption habits (Harwood, 1999a). Studying this concept significantly deepens the understanding of media use by immigrants, especially the highly understudied older cohorts, including how this maintains cultural identity. Finally, this study adds to the literature on the value of combining

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qualitative and quantitative research design to study a relatively older population with whom strictly quantitative designs are unlikely to be effective.

Fifty Indian couples from five major metropolitan areas across the United States (San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Houston, and Washington, DC) were interviewed from 2007 to 2012. These participants migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972. Besides investigating why these Indian immigrants watched Indian television programming, and what programs were most attractive to them, this study provides insight into their media consumption patterns and offers some suggestions about how media use for this cohort may apply to other ethnic groups with similar characteristics.

Background

Indian immigrants in the United States and the specific cohort under study

In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act ended the quota system in the United States, making it much easier for Asian Indians to migrate to the United States who were either professional, skilled, or unskilled workers needed in the United States (Chandrasekhar, 1982). By 1965, the United States was looking for scientists and for medical personnel to fill an increased demand for doctors to staff the new Medicare and Medicaid programs (Prashad, 2000). The Indian immigrants who migrated to the United States at that time were immediately absorbed into society and, as a result, soon attained middle-class status (Dasgupta, 1989).

Most participants in this study grew up watching Hindi movies in India, especially since television was not yet introduced. After immigrants began arriving in the United States in the 1960s, Indian media eventually followed, starting with Hindi movies, which were shown at local university theaters. Indian immigrants were drawn to these films, because of their strong sense of identity with Indian culture (Dasgupta, 1989). By the 1970s, the Indian diaspora community continued to maintain its cultural identity through reading the first Indian newspaper, *India Abroad*, as well as radio programs celebrating cultural and musical performances. By the 1980s and 1990s, Asian Indians continued to consume Indian movies, not just in a movie hall, but also on VCR. Research on Asian Indians living in a London suburb shows that they watched Hindi films on VCR, specifically to stay connected to their country of origin (Gillespie, 1989). For the older Asian Indians, “nostalgia” was the key to film watching (Gillespie, 1989).

Parents also had specific uses for these Hindi films, such as linguistic, religious, and sociocultural learning for their children. These were tools reaffirming cultural identity and continuity parents felt could “convey a sense of their past in India to their children” (Gillespie, 1989, p. 236). Many parents believed that by watching these entertaining films, their children would maintain their Indian language, which symbolized culture and identity (Gillespie, 1989). Parents regarded films as a point of reference to negotiate customs, traditions, values, and beliefs of Indian culture, especially when second-generation children born and brought up in England resisted Indian traditions and customs as shown in films. According to

Miller (2001) to maintain and develop a cultural connection, individuals must use education, customs, language, and religion and acknowledge their differences in and by the mainstream.

Eventually cable television offered programs produced by the Indian diaspora community, but those programs only aired on Saturday and Sunday mornings (Somani, 2008). In 1999, programming imported from India first became available on the satellite dish through the DISH network (Somani, 2008). In the 2000s, the Asian population grew faster than any other race groups (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). Asian Indians, in particular, tended to be highly educated and to maintain a high-income. The population of Asian Indians in the United States grew from 1.7 million in 2000 to 2.9 million in 2010 (U.S. Census, 2012). According to the U.S. Census, at least 68% of Asian Indians held a bachelor's degree and 36% had a graduate or professional degree compared with 27% of Americans (U.S. Census, 2007). Asian Indians have a median household income of \$90,528 (U.S. Census, 2010), which is significantly higher than the median household income for all Americans, \$50,054 in 2011 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2012). The generation of Asian Indians in this study maintained an economic status that allowed them to subscribe to Indian programming via the satellite dish or cable. Their wealth also enabled this generation to maintain a strong connection to their Indian culture by visiting India every 2 to 3 years, or for some, every 5 to 7 years. Now, after living in the United States nearly 50 years and of retirement age, many of these participants visit India every year, especially during the winter months continuing to maintain their strong cultural ties to India.

This particular generation of Asian Indians did not grow up watching television, because television was not introduced in India before 1959 (Ray & Jacka, 1996), and even then, only a few selected homes had access. Therefore, this cohort of Asian Indians learned to watch television after migrating to the United States: They became enculturated into watching television in the United States, and eventually became acculturated into watching Indian television shows once these became available in the United States (Somani, 2008).

Theoretical framework

Uses and gratifications

The uses and gratifications theoretical framework explains the motives behind the media choices in terms of how an audience's psychological and sociological needs are met (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Uses and gratifications help scholars understand why people use media, and what motivates them to engage in certain media-use behaviors (Lin, 1999; Rubin, 1994). Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) assumed media users are goal-oriented. For example, media users know what they need and select media based on their needs being met or gratified. Blumler (1985) provided justification for considering social identity as part of the uses and gratifications theoretical framework.

Ruggerio (2000) suggested use of media can be motivated by two types of needs: surveillance needs and/or diversion needs. These needs are influenced by one's life experiences, values, and belief system and their environment. Surveillance needs mean people use media to monitor or survey the changes in their environment; diversion needs mean the media are used as an escape or distraction from one's daily routine.

Information-based programs, such as news and business reports, may satisfy one's surveillance needs, such as by monitoring current events (Vincent & Basil, 1997). Entertainment-based media, including music, movies, and talk shows, can satisfy diversion needs (Conway & Rubin, 1991).

Social identity theory

One gratification that may be satisfied through media use, especially among immigrants, may come from reinforcing ethnic identity. Social identity theory suggests that people identify with others who are similar to them (Tajfel, 1978). This process helps build their self-esteem and supports their self-concept. Social identity theory describes how individuals connect to society, through group memberships, influencing individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in their relationships with members of other social groups.

Social identity can also be viewed as an outcome of social categorization and classification (i.e., cognition, labeling) and group identification (i.e., identification with a group or a particular identity; Jenkins, 2000). Processes of identity formation, however, are complex and context specific. When individuals identify with a group, they see themselves as members of that group, an in-group (Giles, Reid, & Harwood, 2010). Individuals may watch ethnic media, such as ethnic programs on satellite television, to maintain their group identity needs also known as *in-group needs* (Mastro, 2010).

Thus, ethnic media, such as Indian television programs, are important to maintaining one's ethnic identity (Luther, Lepre, & Clark, 2012). *Ethnic media* can be defined as "broadcast, print, and digital communication channels that serve a particular cultural or racial group. This definition does not impose boundaries such as geographic location, size, scope or ownership" (M. A. Johnson, 2010, p. 108). Members of a diasporic group do not automatically produce ethnic media, but they do use media from their home country to stay connected with their homeland. Diasporic media can also be called *transnational media* or *migrant media*. This media can be attributed to media of people displaced from their homeland (Georgiou, Bailey, & Harindranath, 2007; M. A. Johnson, 2010; Kosnick, 2007; Sun, 2005).

Literature review

Ethnic media and social identity

According to Davis and Gandy Jr. (1999), how individuals self-identify may not be aligned with how others perceive them. "Individuals may have different motivations

that lead them to choose media that fulfills the gratifications they seek” (Davis & Gandy, 1999, p. 377). For example, audience members may choose specific types of media based on consistency in values, beliefs, and identities (Davis & Gandy, 1999). Davis and Gandy (1999) found African Americans preferred programs featuring Black actors, as well as African American lifestyles and culture, because they were pleased in seeing images of themselves on screen (Davis & Gandy, 1999). Therefore, the uses and gratifications theoretical approach was specifically tied to the concept of identity, by understanding how African Americans could identify with media as it tied to their belief systems.

Nossek and Adoni (2007) studied media usage in Israel and how it nurtured four social identities based on the media used by the participants. These four identities were (a) Israeli identity (identification with Israeli society), (b) Jewish identity (identification with Jewish people), (c) global identity (identification with the global community), and (d) ethno-cultural identity (identification with one’s ethno-cultural community). They discovered that participants who read newspapers the most contributed to the construction of their Israeli identity. Participants who read books more than any other media helped construct their Jewish identity. The internet was used the most in constructing a global identity. But reading books and watching television both played a role in structuring ethno-cultural identity. Their study showed that both printed media and television helped in the construction of social identities, and that these two platforms had a high degree of interchangeability. But the researchers found that both cable and satellite TV contributed to the participants’ ties with the global community, constructing national and ethno-cultural identities as well as a global identity.

Harwood (1999a) focused on the relationship between age-group identity and television viewing gratifications, finding that young adults who selected shows with young characters lead to age-group identification. Harwood found television-viewing choices reinforced a sense of identity: “The mere act of making a viewing choice may enhance one’s sense of belonging in a group and be important to overall self-concept,” and therefore, “actual viewing may result in more substantial effects” (p. 130).

Lee (2004) interviewed affluent Korean Americans in Texas who tried to stay connected to Korea through satellite television. Emphasizing the role of satellite television for Korean immigrants, Lee (2004) showed Korean satellite television reinforced the viewers’ ethnic identity and their connection to Korean culture and society. By watching satellite television, the participants could maintain Korean language and culture. Lee (2004) found older Korean immigrants appreciated the historical dramas and programs, because they featured old Korean songs.

Albarran and Umphrey (1993) studied the television viewing motivations and viewing preferences of 12 program categories among 1,241 Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites. Blacks received greater gratifications than Whites or Hispanics using television for entertainment as a diversion. These motivations came from different types of programs, such as situations, comedies, sports, police, and game shows. Hispanics had different motivations for using television, primarily for learning the language (English) and acculturation into their new homeland. The Hispanics

preferred to watch news, talk shows, and reality programs. Whites had less motivation to watch television compared to Blacks and Hispanics and used it for entertainment and information. All three groups reported being aware of news events, and relaxation was an important motivation across groups, with movies and comedies serving these needs. Albarran and Umphrey (1993) asserted that to understand the use of television among these audience members, the researchers must study how ethnicity impacted their expectations and satisfaction from the medium.

Jiang and Leung (2012) investigated the predictive power of lifestyles, gratifications sought, narrative appeal, and demographics on the viewing preference of American and Korean TV dramas among 455 Internet users in urban China. They discovered that lifestyles were important predictors of gratifications sought. For example, the well-educated and well-informed thinkers were more likely to watch for entertainment and learning. Strivers and innovators watched for sociability. Those with limited resources watched for escape. Overall the study expanded the understanding of the uses and gratifications approach. Aside from entertainment and escape, which had already been established by another scholar, Jiang and Leung's study found two other interesting gratifications: sociability and learning and these gratifications were closely related to lifestyles. Watching foreign TV dramas motivated viewers to learn the language, fashion, and culture of a foreign country. It also became a way for Chinese viewers to modernize their lifestyles. The more viewers wanted to learn, the more they watched American dramas. The viewers who watched fewer American dramas, they sought escape. Jiang and Leung (2012) emphasized that "industry managers may want to understand the dynamics between gratifications sought in imported TV drama viewing and the lifestyles of their target audiences in China" (p. 174).

The current study aimed to enrich these studies by investigating whether and how an older generation of affluent Indian immigrants used satellite television to maintain their connection with Indian culture and society.

Research questions

To understand how Asian Indians sought gratification, and how gratifications were obtained, from watching Indian television, the researchers set out to uncover:

Research Question 1: What types of programs were most popular among these Asian Indians?

Research Question 2: Were these Asian Indian immigrants attracted to Indian programming? If so, why?

Research Question 3: Why did these Asian Indian immigrants feel connected to India through watching Indian programming?

These research questions demanded the integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a "fuller understanding" of the issues (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2008).

Participants and methods

Mixed method studies are more than reporting two distinct “strands” of qualitative and quantitative research. R. B. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) described mixed methods research as qualitative and quantitative research with viewpoints, data collection, analysis, and inferences. Here mixed methods were needed to link the theoretical and empirical “strands” to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

Quantitative content analysis is an empirical method to analyze audiovisual media content to produce generalizable predictions (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011; Früh, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004; Rössler, 2005), showing trends in the content of media messages. The media observed is classified into distinct categories relevant to the research question (Bell, 2001). These categories are then used to code materials.

In this study, the overall trends are captured and presented with quantitative data, but the discussions are mainly based on the quotes from in-depth interviews conducted in English, face-to-face, by the lead researcher. In-depth interviews allowed for rich narrative descriptions of the programs watched. Identifying overall themes and patterns with quantitative data from their responses first allowed the authors to discover trends about the findings, such as, the most-watched media content and the major reason for feeling attracted to Indian television programs. Once the trends were established, the researchers sought to supplement the quantitative data with much more detailed explanation. These trends have never been published and served as a foundation for the discussions of the in-depth interviews.

All of the participants came from five metro areas, which were selected for this study, because of the large population of Asian Indians living in those areas (Hoeffel et al., 2012). They were interviewed at different times (years research conducted are noted in parenthesis): Washington, DC (2007); New York, including Northern New Jersey, and Long Island, NY (2010); Houston (2011); Chicago (2011); and San Francisco-San Jose (2012). The couples selected were found through snowball sampling. To attract participants from the San Francisco area, an announcement was posted in *India West*, an ethnic newspaper catering to the Indian diaspora on the West Coast. In the New York-New Jersey and Houston metro areas, an announcement was posted on the South Asian Journalists Association listserv, which yielded responses leading to couples who met the demographic criteria. In Chicago and Washington, DC the lead researcher knew a few couples who fit the demographic; the snowball method led to finding other couples. Snowball sampling is often used to find people who know people familiar with the subject, thus enriching the cases (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Each of the 50 couples migrated to the United States between 1960 and 1972 and subscribed to Indian television programs imported from India via satellite and/or cable. In four cases spouses arrived in 1973. Each individual was interviewed separately. Couples were not interviewed together, so answers could not be influenced.

The ethnic programming packages these consumers subscribed to were dominated by Hindi language channels as opposed to another Indian dialect. Focusing on Hindi language channels provided a greater chance of understanding, if the same programs were watched across different cities. It also made it easier to categorize the types of programs and trends.

Sample

The 100 respondents included 50 couples: 50 men and 50 women. All interviews were conducted with heterosexual married couples. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents earned a college degree or higher. More than half (57%) of the sample had graduate degrees (Master's, Ph.D., M.D, J.D). Participants had a high standard of living, with 82% reporting their annual income level to be \$100K or higher (44% reported more than \$200K). They had been living in the United States for an average of 42 years as of 2012. The mean age of the participants was 68.1 years, and a vast majority (91%) of respondents were Hindu, although they were not drawn from similar regional/linguistic backgrounds in India.

Each interview took approximately 1 hr. Pseudonyms were used for the Washington, DC cohort, but participants in other cities gave permission to use their names.

Thematic analysis and coding

All the transcripts were analyzed; patterns discovered in the transcripts became themes for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Quantitative content analysis was used to describe the attributes of message content and compared across time and cities to identify trends (Holsti, 1969). By also quantifying the respondents' answers, the researchers were able to systematically generalize findings and identify emerging themes from the responses regarding Indian television programming usage in the United States. Coding of each interview material as units of analysis was based on exhaustive categories (Creswell, 2009). The types of television genres that emerged from the transcripts included news, serials, entertainment (talk shows, comedy, showbiz, dance shows, idol, etc.); movies, sports (cricket), religion, yoga (spiritual), cooking, and one television program called "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa," a talent/musical reality show produced in India that launched in 1995, where contestants compete through singing. Key reasons mentioned by respondents for their attraction to Indian programs emerged from the transcripts included to be informed, patriotism, language, culture, nostalgia, reinforcement of Indian values, pastime, and maintaining culture with grandkids. Finally, feeling connected to India from Indian television programming included gratifying aspects such as makes me proud, language, connection to cultural roots, nostalgia, platform advantage (of television) and reinforces values.

After a coder training session, two coders analyzed 20% of the total sample of 100 interview transcriptions independently. Comparison of the two coders' agreement

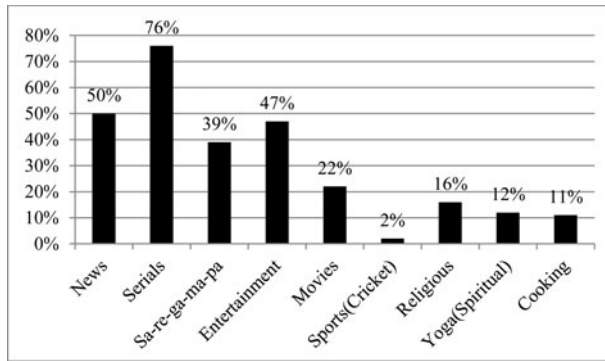


Figure 1. The type of Indian television programming watched.

of 10 couples interviewed yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Given the satisfactory intercoder reliability, the coders then analyzed the remaining 80 interviews.

Results

Quantitative content analysis and overall trends

This study is grounded in both quantitative content analysis and in-depth interviews. However, the researchers wanted to first establish the trends across the five cities. Regarding Research Question 1, the most popular types of Hindi genres among the Asian Indians interviewed were serials, news, entertainment, and one specific program, "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" (please see [Figure 1](#)), respectively. "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" was treated as its own category given its popularity among Asian Indians. Its creator, Zee TV, has held a top spot in India's television ratings, because of shows like "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa" (Mahadevan, 2012).

[Figure 2](#) suggested four top reasons these Asian Indians were attracted to Indian programming. The respondents expressed that the cultural tie (to India), wanting

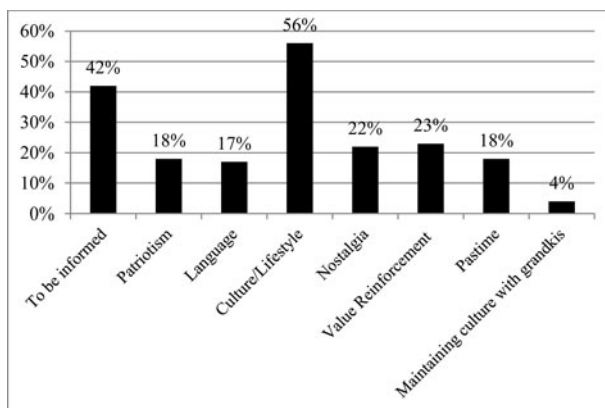


Figure 2. Reasons for attraction to Indian television programming.

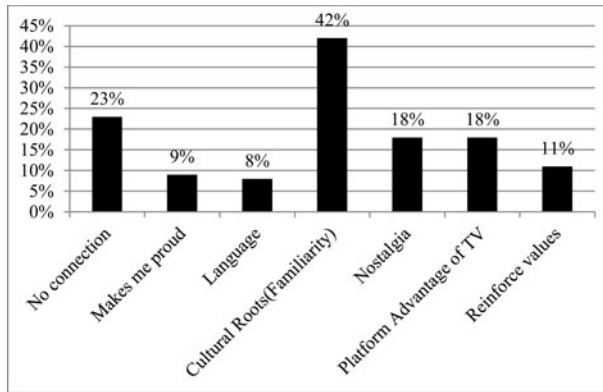


Figure 3. Connection to India through watching Indian television programs.

to stay informed about India, reinforcing their cultural values, and nostalgia as their top reasons for being attracted to the programming.

Figure 3 indicated that 23% of the respondents said they did not feel a stronger connection with India by watching Indian television programs. However, nearly half of these Asian Indians suggested Indian programming strengthened their tie with India, because these programs reminded them of their cultural roots and made them feel nostalgic. One-fifth of the respondents in the five cities said television was more effective than radio and print to stay connected to India.

Trends by metropolitan region

To investigate whether the participants differed in their preferences of Indian programming by city, chi-square tests on the four most selected answers to each question were performed. Table 1 indicates the preferences for news and serials did not vary significantly across five metro regions. However, there was a significant difference among the Asian Indians in how they watched “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” and entertainment shows (like comedy shows and dance shows): “Sa-Re-Ga-Ma-Pa,” $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 11.94, p < .05$; entertainment, $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 31.15, p < .001$.

In Research Question 1, we uncovered the most popular types of Indian programs: serials, news, entertainment and “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa.” As previously indicated, “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” is a talent/musical-reality show produced in India. In addition, according to Table 1, the participants in Washington, DC enjoyed “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa”

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of program types and city.

Program type	City					χ^2	df
	DC	Chicago	San Francisco	New York	Houston		
News	10	10	10	10	10	0	4
Serials	18	16	14	16	12	5.7	4
Sa-re-ga-ma-pa	2	10	19	6	11	11.94*	4
Entertainment	12	10	17	8	0	31.15***	4

Note. $N = 100$.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of attraction to Indian programming and city.

Program type	City					χ^2	df
	DC	Chicago	San Francisco	New York	Houston		
To be informed	14	9	0	10	9	21.59***	4
Culture/lifestyle	15	11	6	16	8	15.18**	4
Nostalgia	3	4	2	5	8	6.18	4
Value reinforcement	6	4	7	4	2	4.29	4

Note. $N = 100$.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the least, but in the San Francisco region, the participants enjoyed “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” the most. Meanwhile entertainment was enjoyed the most in San Francisco and the least in Houston.

Table 2 showed the differences in attraction to Indian programming among five metro regions. In these five cities the reasons for watching Indian programming varied significantly; for example, answers included “to be informed” and “culture/lifestyle”: to be informed: $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 21.59, p < .001$; culture/lifestyle: $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 15.18, p < .01$.

In Research Question 2, both Figure 2 and specific answers from the in-depth interviews explained why these Asian Indian immigrants were attracted to Indian programming. The participants said culture and lifestyle in India, wanting to stay informed about India, reinforcing their cultural values, and nostalgia were the top reasons for being attracted to the programming. Furthermore, in Table 2, participants from San Francisco did not have much interest in staying informed about what’s happening in India as did the participants in Washington, DC. In addition, participants in New York cared about keeping up with Indian culture and lifestyle more than did the participants in San Francisco.

Table 3 showed among the top explanations for feeling a strong connection to India by watching Indian programs, “cultural roots” and “nostalgia” varied significantly across the metro regions: cultural roots, $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 14.20, p < .01$; for example, nostalgia, $\chi^2(4, N = 100) = 14.63, p < .01$. Table 3 meant participants in Washington, DC and Houston felt a strong connection to their cultural roots by watching the programming, but participants in San Francisco and New York did not feel a sense of nostalgia for India by watching the programming, unlike the participants in the other cities. As discussed earlier, to get a complete picture as to why

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of connection to India through Indian TV and city.

Connection	City					χ^2	df
	DC	Chicago	San Francisco	New York	Houston		
No connection	1	7	7	10	3	7.68	4
Cultural roots	12	10	3	5	12	14.20**	4
Nostalgia	4	3	1	1	9	14.63**	4
TV platform advantage	7	4	0	3	4	8.54	4

Note. $N = 100$.

** $p < .01$.

these Asian Indians were attracted and felt connected to India from watching Indian programming, in-depth interviews from a small sample of the participants provided detailed explanation to supplement the numeric data.

Discussion and conclusion

In-depth interviews

The three research questions were addressed in the “results” with quantitative data indicating the most watched types of programs, the top reasons for feeling attracted to the Indian programming, and connected to India through watching the Indian programming. However, to develop fuller understanding as to how the uses and gratifications theoretical framework and social identity theory contributed to the ethnic identification and media consumption habits, the researchers examined a small sample of the best answers from the in-depth interviews. Quantitative data coupled with the in-depth interviews answered not only the “what” made these Asian Indians feel attracted to Indian programming and connected to India, but also the “why” and “how.”

Types of programs watched

The most popular types of Indian programs were serials (76%), news (50%), followed by entertainment shows (47%) and one particular show called “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” (39%). These results suggested that Asian Indian immigrants watched Indian programming to fulfill two main gratification needs: the surveillance need and diversion need. The news program helped these long-time immigrants stay up-to-date with the current events in India and also made them feel part of the Indian society. For example, Mr. Advani from Washington, DC, explained why he watched Indian news programs:

When we go to India, we don't feel left out over there, because we know what's happening around there now. India is a[n] upcoming power. Through news, we see ... how India is growing and [how] much India has grown.

Mrs. Dani, from Houston, explained why she watched Indian news:

When we watch the news and you see there what is going on in India, then you feel connected that they should be doing or we should be there to do this or that or help this or that.

News was the second most popular, because it fulfilled a type of surveillance need, in other words, these Asian Indians watched news programs, so that they did not feel left out of the Indian society even though they live thousands of miles away (Ruggiero, 2000; Vincent & Basil, 1997). Similar to Nossek and Adoni's (2007) study of Israeli's media use, by watching news programs, Advani and Dani could identify with India, and thus maintain their Indian identity. Also, according to [Table 1](#), news programs were equally popular across all five cities/metro regions.

In addition, serials, entertainment shows, and “Sa-Re-Ga-Ma-Pa” were ranked as the first, third, and fourth popular types of Indian programming, respectively. These entertainment-based media programs satisfied these participants’ diversion needs (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Just as these Asian Indians received gratification from watching entertainment as a diversion, in Albarran and Umphrey’s (1993) study, Blacks received greater gratifications than Whites or Hispanics for using television for entertainment and as a diversion.

When asked why she watched serials, Dr. Chandra from Chicago, said, “Oh just relaxation, that’s all. Simple.” This quote suggested entertainment shows and serials were popular, because these programs met Asian Indians’ need for diversion and allowed them to “escape” or “relax” (Radway, 1983). By having this sense of gratification from watching Indian television, these Asian Indians also experienced their social identity reinforced. Similarly, Lee (2004) established that Korean-Americans watched satellite television to reinforce their ethnic identity and connection to Korean culture and society.

Besides “diversion,” watching serials and entertainment shows also served as a means to stay informed of the current trends in the popular culture in India. Also, according to Table 1, participants in Chicago found serials to be popular among types of programs. Therefore, the quantitative data were confirmed by these qualitative interview findings.

“Sa Re Ga Ma Pa”

Shows like “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,” according to the participants, demonstrated a more inclusive Indian society. This program showed a significant change in India compared to what these immigrants experienced in their upbringing. “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” was included as a category, because during in-depth interviews, respondents were asked which Hindi genres they watched, many participants simply said “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,” rather than list a television genre. “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” is one of India’s most popular television programs; 37% of the respondents confirmed this. The show was popular, because it gave a chance for anyone in India, regardless of income level, religion, and caste, to compete for a better quality of life using their singing talent. “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” was the most popular in the San Francisco-San Jose area, which was reinforced by one of the qualitative interview findings below. Mrs. Asnani of San Francisco said she was a fan of “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,”

because I want to see the new talent coming up and it’s amazing to see and watch, and then when you watch that you get to see all these people you never heard of, the music directors and all the singers.

However, when asked why she liked to watch “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,” Mrs. Jaiswal of New York said,

I love those shows because we get to see different, new talent from India and you see how many different parts of India has a talent and they are able to bring them out and then show them on the TV. Which I think is excellent.

The trends in [Table 1](#) showed “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,” was not as popular with the participants from New York as with the participants from San Francisco. This finding confirmed that Asian Indians of that generation are not a homogenous group, as seen in the quantitative content analysis results, as well as the in-depth interviews.

This generation of Asian Indians studied had opportunities to advance their quality of life, because they had professional skills. But “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” created opportunities for people in India without professional skills. Watching “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa,” gave participants a sense of pride in the possibilities created for people of lower income levels. It not only entertains the Indian immigrants, but also offers a window into the social and cultural changes in the modern Indian society as they are happening. Similar to Davis and Gandy’s (1999) study, these participants still found the Indian program consistent with their values and beliefs.

Attraction to Indian programming

Research Question 2 asked why these Asian Indians were attracted to Indian programming. The categories created in [Figure 2](#) yielded culture/life style (56%), wanting to stay informed about India (42%), reinforcing Indian values (23%), and nostalgia (22%) as the top four reasons.

“Culture/lifestyle” meant the participants wanted to stay connected to their Indian culture and that suggested a need to reinforce their ethnic identity as a gratification sought in the process of watching Indian television. The responses suggested more than half of the participants felt attracted to Indian television programs, because of the Indian culture and lifestyle these programs represented.

These responses also suggested the participants’ needs or expectations satisfied their goals. Therefore, the gratifications were expected and valued by these Asian Indians as they consumed ethnic media. By having this sense of gratification from watching Indian television, these Asian Indians also experienced their social identity reinforced (Tajfel, 1978). These Asian Indians preferred watching characters who looked like them, sounded like them, and lived like them, as these characters reinforced their ethnic identity and enhanced their self-worth. These active media users also expected to be gratified, because they actively watched Indian programs, which reinforced their sense of self and fulfilled a need.

For example, Mr. Desai of Chicago said he enjoyed Indian programming, because “people love anything in their own language; because what they enjoy, their cultural outlook. They see their own culture.” Mr. Jaiswal of New York said he was attracted to Indian programming, because “you can still stay in touch with your country culture-wise, fashion-wise, food-wise, all those valuable things.” Both men actively interpreted meaning from Indian television programming by identifying with the language and culture on screen. But they also expected to be gratified, because they were active media users. Notably, these participants still refer to India as their home country, even after living abroad for four or five decades. Like Desai and Jaiswal, in Jiang and Leung’s (2012) study, Chinese participants were motivated to learn the language, fashion, and culture of a foreign country, which expanded the understanding of the uses and gratifications approach in that study. Furthermore, the trends in

Table 2 showed culture/lifestyle attracted participants to Indian programming from DC, Chicago, and New York the most, which confirmed these qualitative interview findings.

Besides culture/lifestyle, almost half of the Asian Indians interviewed indicated they were attracted to Indian television, because it filled an immediate need to find out the news in India in “real time.” This immediate need corresponded to an earlier finding that Indian immigrants liked to watch news programs to stay informed about their home country. For example, Mr. Mehta of San Francisco, described how he stayed informed about India by watching Indian programs in the United States:

Well, sometime I call my brother or my sister and I give some news about India. They say, you know more about us than we do. We don't get a chance to listen to radio, or TV, we are so busy. I said, look I am retired. I am watching everything [through Indian channels in the United States].

Mr. Mehta was actively engaged with Indian programs, because he had time, and felt a need to watch Indian television and stay informed about his home country in “real time.” This active engagement did not just fill a surveillance need for Mr. Mehta, he also expected to be gratified from watching Indian news in “real time.”

Feeling a connection to India

Research Question 3 asked why these Asian Indians felt connected to India through watching Indian programming. More than 42% of the respondents indicated they felt connected to India, because their cultural roots were tied to India. Nearly 20% said watching Indian programs made them nostalgic.

Mrs. Keswani of San Francisco emphasized the importance of maintaining a connection to Indian cultural roots. She said, “That’s our roots. Why should we forget our roots? Just because you have come to another country? No, you can’t forget your roots.” Mr. Bhattacharya of San Francisco explained his strong connection to India through Indian programming by saying, “Because we still feel like to be attached to our roots. We still feel an attraction for the Indian culture and the roots.” These participants liked how their sense of self was reinforced. This feeling of a strong connection to India also made them active media users, who felt a sense of gratification that satisfied their goal to be connected to their cultural roots. This sense of gratification came from the media being tied to these Asian Indians’ values and beliefs, which was similar to Davis and Gandy’s (1999) study among Black audience members, who preferred programs featuring African-American lifestyles and culture. However, according to Table 3, Asian Indians in San Francisco felt the least connected to their cultural roots through Indian programming, which underscored the differences in the findings using mixed methods.

Dr. Patel from New York explained,

I think it [Indian program] reinforces my values in India, the good values. I look at the people and it also makes you feel that and it’s time for us to do something for them and we have the Indians doing well now.

These Asian Indians actively identified with the culture represented in the programming. The quotes also showed no matter how educated or financially well-off ethnic groups were, this group was not fully assimilated to the mainstream U.S. culture and still had strong ties to their culture. This feeling of connection was aptly illustrated by Dr. Patel:

I think, there's an Indian nation [in] every Indian although I know I love this country. This country [United States] has given me a lot of opportunities and it has been very good to me, intellectually, financially and even my medical growth has been tremendous here and I would not trade that for anything else but I know I'm an Indian.

Dr. Patel is another example of an active media user who chose to watch Indian programs, because he knew his needs would be met. This feeling of connection to India was also shared by Dr. Pitchumoni from northern New Jersey. He said, "When you work in a western country in an American set-up, you always have a feeling that you don't belong to this culture. And you occasionally want to go back to your culture."

Both Dr. Patel and Dr. Pitchumoni actively watched Indian television, because they felt a sense of ethnic identity, a sense of belonging when they saw people who looked like them. Harwood (1999a) examined the connection between identity and television viewing motivations. He focused on age-group identity, and discovered that young adults liked to watch shows with young characters. Like Harwood's (1999a) study, these participants felt a connection to watching Indian programming and found their television-viewing choices reinforced a sense of ethnic identity. Ironically, the trends in Table 3 showed that participants from New York felt "no connection" to India through Indian programming, which showed the disparity among Asian Indians using mixed methods in this study.

This study strengthened the existing literature and added greater understanding of social identity through the uses and gratifications theoretical framework. It demonstrated that Asian Indians had developed, negotiated, and reinforced their ethnic identity through watching ethnic media. While residing outside of India for decades, these Indian immigrants used ethnic media to maintain their "in-group" status through watching Indian television programs (Giles et al., 2010). These immigrants were active: they consciously choose to seek gratification from the programming they subscribed to on satellite television to sustain a connection to their homeland and culture.

This study's unique contribution to communication studies is to shed light on how a diasporic group, which is economically and professionally successful and has seemingly acculturated to the American society, still called India "home" after decades of living abroad. They chose to experience the Indian culture through satellite television. This study is similar to how Korean satellite television was essential to affluent Korean immigrants in reinforcing their ethnic identity and staying connected with Korean culture (Lee, 2004). This study confirmed Asian Indian immigrants watched Indian television to increase their group identification (Harwood, 1999a, 1999b). Watching Indian programming satisfied their need to stay informed about India (Vincent & Basil, 1997), reinforced their identity, and helped maintain

a connection to their cultural roots. To some extent, watching Indian programming was part of “being Indian” (as noted in the title).

When discussing Chinese diaspora in the United States, Shi (2005) argued cultural flows from peripheral countries to Western cultural centers were enabled and reinforced by technologies such as the satellite TVs. These technologies helped create placeless cultures (Meyrowitz, 1986), which offered the diaspora resources and disciplines for the construction and understanding of selves. The current study indicated staying informed about India and connected to the culture through ethnic television programming, provided Indian immigrants with similar “resources and disciplines” of what it meant to be Indian, regardless how being Indian had evolved in India in the past decades. This group was still attracted to Indian programming, despite all the culture around them from living in culturally robust cities in the United States.

More importantly the implication this research makes to other ethnic groups is to further understand how the United States is divided by various ethnicities, and how ethnic programming caters to its respective groups to maintain cultural identity. This study also underscored the importance of transnational markets and media distribution systems. Transnational media flows could threaten the autonomy and integrity of national identity. This study could apply to other ethnic groups to understand their media consumption patterns, such as their interest in transnational media, especially those who migrated to the United States 40 to 50 years ago.

Limitations to the study

One important limitation to the study was snowball sampling. Participants from each city had connections with each other, making them in-groups. As a result, the participants from each city may share similar television viewing habits, which could have skewed the data.

The researchers were also only funded in the summers to collect the data; therefore, the data were collected from different cities over the course of four summers. Nonetheless, the same Hindi language programming channels were offered by the satellite companies to each cohort interviewed.

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