

**CONSTRUCTING IMAGES, HIGHLIGHTING SOCIAL
DISCORDS: STUDY OF A TELEVISION REALITY SHOW IN
INDIA, SATYAMEV JAYATE**

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ABSTRACT

In today's world where communication is fast changing and the various forms of communication are dwelling into the lives of the people. People have started increasingly depending upon television to look up for not only entertainment per say, but also as a means to satisfy their informative and affective needs. The study is an attempt to gain insights into the impact the various television opinion leaders can have in forming perceptions and modifying the mindset of the audience towards various social discords through a television reality show. Findings clearly reveal that the show Satyamev Jayate has brought some amount of change in the perceptions of the respondents. The various social issues highlighted by the show were very much present in the system. After watching the episodes, the message has been clear and has forced people to rethink over those issues again. Ruling the two-step flow model, the study calls for the presence of an opinion leader along with a well designed message as important factors influencing perception formation. And suggests that showcasing the messages alone will not help instead some organizational efforts at the interpersonal level like campaigns, series of shows and workshops etc. are required in order to reinforce the message and sustain them, gradually replacing them into adaptable actions by the members of the society.

Keywords: Edutainment, Reality show, Opinion leaders, Two-step flow theory

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Background

Television was officially introduced in 1959 in India and now it has become the prime mode of entertainment. Indian television has made the transition from being an educational medium to being an exclusive entertainment based medium. Looking back into the history, the mandate of television in India was only to educate, spread information and to entertain people. In 1975, SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) can be called as the biggest achievement in the field of development communication to impart knowledge. In 1982, Asian Games were held in New Delhi which proved to give further impulse to the rapid expansion of the national television networks.

When Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India, a revolution of television took place. During that era, *Doordarshan* (DD) was introduced which was owned and operated by the government (Kumar, 2010).

The TV revolution did take place in 1984 when India's first soap opera was broadcasted on Doordarshan. The story was relating to the common men struggling in his day to day life and their aspirations. The TV programme became so popular after the success of *Hum Log* and other soap operas like *Buniyaad* and *Khandaan*, The sponsorship of indigenous soaps, advertising revenues and other serials provided spurt to production. Following the same soap opera format, religious epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* ended up in huge success on small screen. At the end of 1990s, there were almost 58 million TV sets all over the country, along with 15 million connected to neighbourhood cable networks. If we compare TV with the other mass media, it can be said that television attracts the largest number of viewers due to the fact that it is able to attract the audiences of all age groups whether they are literate or illiterate. Television can be called as an intervention in terms of technology and reach, and its growth during the decades is really commendable. Now-a-days it can be said that most of the people have television sets as source of edutainment at their homes (Kumar, 2010).

There are different genres of television serials namely Television news, TV documentaries or features, interview programmes, games show or quiz programme, children's programme, music and dance, TV commercials, reality shows, talk shows, soap operas etc. The genre of reality based shows is comprised of a variety of subgenres including game-doc, dating, docu-soaps,

talent, reality sitcoms etc. while these subgenres provide viewers with “an immediate, voyeuristic, yet often playful look onto what might be called the entertaining real” (Murry, 2004). Reality sitcoms include the humorous reality shows (Comedy Circus, Laughter Challenge). Docu-soaps show the documentary of the real people and real events. There are some court shows that feature real courtroom cases and the example is *Aap Ki Adaalat, Rakhi Ka Insaaf*. The above mentioned subgenres have their own style of representation and treatment of the contentment which makes them different from each other. (Sharma, 2010)

There are various studies on audience interactivity of reality based shows which emphasises on the engagement of viewers with media such as internet to find more information about the content of the program. The perceptions of reality and identity may be enhanced by the level of interactivity with the audiences. It is important to understand that people watch for different reasons and have different needs satisfied through the watching of this genre of television. In his work Holmes (2004) has argued that today, the influx of reality based television bridges the role of audience and producer, highly evident in programs such as *Big Boss* and *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*. In such programs viewers cast votes and have an important role in influencing the characters of the program. People always relate to what they conceptualize as real. While much of the literature talks about audience interactivity and states that it is closely related to perceived realism and character identification. Disposition theory uses this logic as a framework for predicting and understanding the reasons why audience experience different levels of enjoyment while watching entertainment programs with varying plot formats (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986).

It is thought that enjoyment is maximised when liked characters have positive outcomes and disliked characters suffer from negative outcomes. Perceived realism has been conceptualized in a variety of ways within the mass communication literature. In general, audiences are thought to perceive media content as realistic, if they judge it to be like a real life in some meaningful way or if they response to it as it were real. These perceptions are formed on the basis of the content such as its style or genre. Media realism is often studied by communication researchers to find out its contribution to media effects. Reality TV forums are an important object for research since they address us simultaneously as participants of debate, as users of social media, as audiences of television programmes and as citizens with our everyday experiences. The reality shows have given the up close bondage factor to the people and the personal touch which has

taken the Indian Entertainment by storm. This genre was introduced since 2000 and till date the reality shows which have been imprinted in the heart of the people are KBC (*Kaun Banega Carorepati*), Big Boss and Indian Idol (Sharma, 2012).

Cultivation theory developed by Professor George Gerbner, argues that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant (Daniel Chandler, 1995). It helps in studying the effects of the media on the mindsets of the people. According to the theory, television viewing can have a prolong effect that affects the audience. Over the time the images, symbols, messages and meanings becomes dominant and are absorbed by the viewers. The theory talks about the heavy television viewer's behaviour.

The Two – Step Flow theory conceives that there is an opinion leader who helps encode the message to the viewers and explains the influence of opinion leader over the people in the mass communication process. Opinion leaders inject their own interpretation and therefore bring behaviour change in the society. They pass their own interpretations to the masses and are able to give direction to the thoughts of the viewers. This theory is often viewed as an important contribution to the trend towards a more social-centered picture in the mass communication process (Schenk, 1987). This theory also helps in explaining the reason for why certain media campaigns were unable to change the audience attitudes. In the show *Satyamev Jayate*, Bollywood actor Aamir Khan can be called as the opinion leader disseminating message to the mass audiences.

Satyamev Jayate, a reality show was hosted by the famous Indian Bollywood actor Aamir Khan. The show co-produced by Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao was directed by Satyajit Bhatkal and hosted by Amir Khan himself. As a reality talk-show it was aired on ten different channels in seven different languages across India. The show focused primarily on thirteen different but pertinent and sensitive issues prevailing in the Indian Society - female foeticide, child sex abuse, medical malpractice, honour killings, insensitivity towards the physically disabled, domestic violence, over-use of pesticides leading to pesticide poisoning, alcoholism, untouchability and plight of senior citizen and water crises. After taking one complete year for the *Satyamev Jayate* team to collect all the data pertaining in the country about all the thirteen issues to be covered, the first episode was broadcasted on 6 May 2012. The basic ideology followed by the timeline of the *Satyamev Jayate* was to create the awareness about the thirteen issues at every pace and

not only to showcase the problems but also to give solutions to them. Aamir Khan being the host of the show introduced the topic in the beginning of every show and beautifully weaved the different aspects of the issue. The show not only included the research conducted by the team but also brought human touch by sharing the stories of the victims or the survivors. Various experts were called on stage to share their view points as well as reflect the existing scenario in the country.

Satyamev Jayate turned into a huge turn over in Television industry with the insights given on the Indian society and practices over the human behaviour. It pattered into the minds of the people and also served as a distinct platform to disseminate messages. The famous Bollywood actor Aamir Khan played the role of a facilitator to loop the different jigs of social issue which included the real stories called as *aap beti*, expertise talks, current statistics, loopholes in the mindset or at policy level, solution to the problem and the closure song. The balance of problem and the solution can be seen in this show along with the emotional touch maintained.

The show was telecasted simultaneously on Star Plus and on the national channel Doordarshan. This naturally raises the bar for acceptability, reach, as well as impact of the show. As per Tam report, *Satyamev Jayate* earned a rating of 3.8 in the Metros of Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai on Star Plus, which is higher than the IPL 5 ratings. (The Hoot, 2012)

Significance of the study

The impact of media in our lives is something which we cannot question due to the immense media exposure. Different modes of media have different degrees of impact and amongst all the modes television can be called as the most persuasive medium. It is like the environment pollution, in fast growing urban centres, that it is everywhere, yet invisible (Bhasin, 1984).

Television alone as a mass communication tool is of huge importance and definitely has tremendous impact in forming public opinion or consensus by adding the edutainment value to any message. The different television shows leave a certain degree of impact on viewers depending upon the treatment of the message. Nowadays the reality shows have become a vital part of the television as well as of people due to the fact that they provide real issues with real situations. The real issues focusing on the real characters bring the feeling of relation with the

characters. With the population of over 400 million individual television viewers and a bunch of channels offering huge number of options reality shows which deviates out attention and pain towards the situation/ pain of the others. The youth have a variety of channels and genres to choose from which includes reality shows dealing with games, music, dance, dating, friendship and some other sensitive issues. When there are huge number of popular reality based television shows understanding viewer's perspectives, in itself can provide us with interesting insights.

This particular reality show, *Satyamev Jayate* became the medium to do a reality check in terms of the most sensitive yet prevailing issues existing in our country till date. The level of impact of this television show must be measured. This research is an attempt to help understand whether the TV anchor, Amir Khan can be called an opinion leader or not. The impact of such talk shows on the mind sets of people gearing towards development as an issue can help in understanding the role of television as a tool to bring about change in the society.

Objectives

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To study the perception of viewers regarding selected episodes of *Satyamev Jayate* - a reality based talk show.
- To undertake a detailed content analysis of the selected episodes in terms of the genre, style of narration and potential of engaging the audience.
- To study the profile of the respondents selected for the research.
- To understand the role of television in constructing images under the influence of reality shows like *Satyamev Jayate*.
- To comprehend the perceptions of the audience towards the three selected episodes from gender lens.

2.1 Methodology

In order to get a better perspective and in-depth knowledge, the study was carried out in phases. Sample of 80 respondents belonging to the age-group 15-35 years residing in the national capital of Delhi/NCR was taken for the study. Purposive random sampling was done whereby television viewers who have watched at least first six episodes were selected for the study. The sample was

further stratified into 40 females and 40 males. Interview Schedule was used for understanding the demographic profile of the respondents and analysing their viewership patterns.

Phase I

In this phase, detailed content analysis of the three episodes, focusing primarily on women issues was done. During the first phase the key focus was on doing a detailed analysis of the profile of the reality show - *Satyamev Jayate* and its three gender based episodes.

Phase II

- Demographic profile of the respondents
- Comprehending the tele-viewing pattern
- Reasons for watching the three selected episodes

Phase III

- Recalling of the messages from the episodes
- Understanding the perspective from gender lens
- Finding out the change in the perceptions (if any) of the respondents

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Profiling Satyamev Jayate

Satyamev Jayate, a reality based talk show was aired on Star Plus and Doordarshan. The show was meant for the general audience. Out of the thirteen episodes, the following three episodes focusing on women issues were studied in detail, female foeticide, Indian big fat wedding and domestic violence. The format of the reality show not only raised sensation but also intended to bring awareness regarding these pertinent and relatively silent issues. The first episode titled **Female Foeticide** was aired on 6th may 2012 for duration of about an hour. It raised one of the most pinching yet ignorant problems in India- "Female Foeticide and The Skewed Sex-Ratio. As far as the episodes showcased in the show were concerned, there were about thirteen episodes which were categorized in five sub-categories (child related, gender issues, health issues, ecology based issues and issue of untouchability) and the respondents were asked to choose episodes they have watched based on their understanding of these issues. It was found that majority of the male (83%) and female respondents (80%) felt that all the issues were covered in the

episodes. However, interestingly both men and women could co-relate to the gender issues being focused in majority of the episodes as compared to the rest four issues. In order to measure reach and publicity of the show, respondents were asked whether they watched *Satyamev Jayate* show or not. It came out that majority of the female respondents (98%) as well as the male respondents (95%) had watched the show. Findings also revealed tools for effective marketing of *Satyamev Jayate*. Television proved to be the most effective tool for marketing the show covering 65% of the sample size (65% female & 65% male). After Television, the most potential marketing tool that worked was the print media amongst females (25%) and word of mouth (15%) amongst males. In response to the question enquiring whether *Satyamev Jayate* can be qualified as a reality based talk show, it was found that majority (93%) of the respondents, categorized *Satyamev Jayate* as a reality based talk show. Out of this figure, 95% respondents were women and 90% respondents were men.

Phase II

3.2.1 Profile of the Respondents

In the second phase, information was obtained from respondents regarding their age, education, marital status, occupation and the zone they fall in, using questionnaires. The total sample size (N = 80) was divided into the equal number of respondents (n1 = 40 males and n2= 40 females) of urban Delhi. Respondents fell in the age group of 20-35 years. According to the responses obtained, it was found that 43% of the people who participated in the study were from East region, followed by 30% from West, 27% from South and only 23% from North Delhi. Further, it was found that the majority of the respondents (63%) belonged to the age group of 20-25 years. As far as their marital status was concerned, it was found that most of them (66%) were unmarried. Regarding the educational qualification, it came out that amongst the female respondents, majority of them (65%) were post graduates while amongst the male respondents' majority (63%) had only completed their graduation. Based on the responses received, it was found that majority (55%) of them were salaried professionals.

3.2.2 Tele-viewing pattern of the respondents & their preferences

For the purpose of the study, studying the viewership pattern of the respondents was important in order to understand the extent to which Television was consumed to seek information or entertainment. It was equally important to gain insights into the program genres preferred by the respondents. According to the responses attained, it was found that almost all the respondents (95%) used television to get the information and for entertainment value and watched *Satyamev Jayate* for similar reasons. Regarding the

type of TV genres, it was found that the majority of the women respondents watched reality based television show whereas majority of male respondents watched news. Understanding the preferences of the program genres, it was found that amongst the various genres of the reality show, majority of males and females preferred watching Talk Shows followed by the dance shows and lifestyle fashions shows.

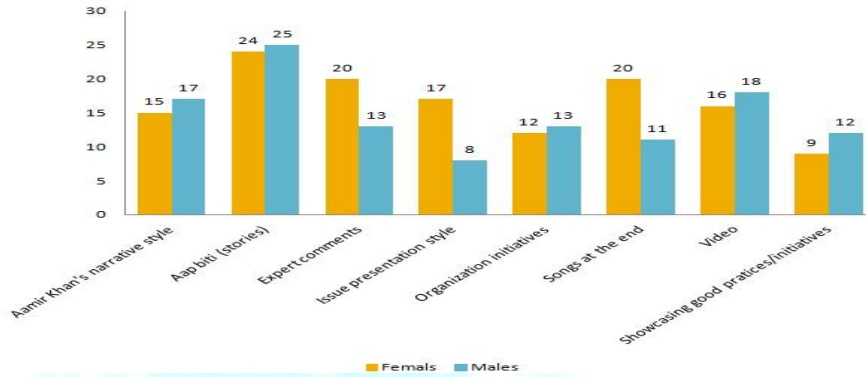


Figure 3.1 (Part of *Satyamev Jayate* liked by the respondents)

3.2.4 Respondent's favourite episode

It was found that of the total sample (N=80) 43% of the male respondents and 60% of the female respondents watched all the three female focused episodes in the show. And as there were wide range of social issues covered in various episodes broadcasted highlighting the dark side of the society. From the bar graph given above, it can be concluded that 20% men and 40% women responded to the episode on Female Foeticide as their most favourite episode. The second most favourite episode amongst women was the episode on domestic violence and amongst men it was the episode on child sex abuse.

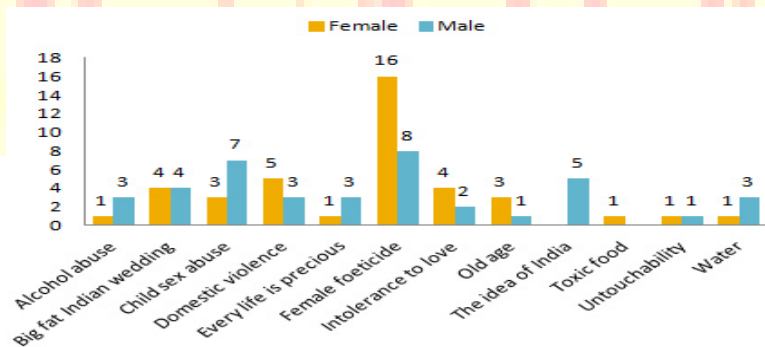


Figure 3.2 (Respondent's favourite episode)

3.2.5 Viewership of the three female focussed episodes

This question was asked basically to understand the viewing pattern of the selected three episodes of the show. From the bar graph shown below it can be concluded that the majority of the males and females were able to watch all the three female focused episodes being raised in the show. At an individual level, majority (60%) of the respondents were able to watch the very first episode which was on Female Foeticide. This was followed by almost 25% respondents watching the episodes on domestic violence and big fat Indian wedding.

3.2.6 Role of celebrity as a channel of disseminating information

During the study respondents were enquired to identify the impact of celebrity becoming a channel for disseminating sensitive information on issues like female foeticide, abuse and violence etc. It came out from the study that majority of the female respondents (80%) would have watched the show even if there would have been any other celebrity hosting the show whereas, the percentage dropped to 63% in males. This clearly indicates the strong preference for a television celebrity in hosting reality based talk shows to disseminate such sensitive information adding another evidence to the use of celebrities as a channel of communication.

Phase III of the study was dedicated to understanding the recall of messages being talked about in various episodes of Satyamev Jayate and research the perceptions of the respondents from gender lens in order to find out the changes in their perceptions, if any. In order to find the perceptions of audience regarding the three selected gender sensitive episodes, detailed interviews with male and female respondents who had watched all the three episodes were conducted.

3.3.1 Recall of the key messages being raised in the episode on

a) Female foeticide; b) Big Fat Indian Wedding, and; c) Domestic Violence

3.3.1 Recall of messages being raised in episode on Female Foeticide

3.3.1(a) Ideal family size

According to all respondents, the ideal size of the family depends upon the type of family - joint or nuclear family. And in case of a nuclear family they were in the favour of 4 being the ideal family size.

3.3.1(b) Responsible for the sex of the child

The key messages discussed in the episodes were asked to analyse their recall and gain insights into the possible impact the show has had on the respondents. It was found that all the female respondents could remember the facts clearly as stated in the episode and according to them neither women nor God but only the husband is responsible for the sex of the child. Whereas, all male respondents still thought that God is responsible for the selection of the sex of the child during the biological process. Further,

3.3.1(c) Knowledge of the PCPNDT ACT from the show

Respondents were asked about their knowledge regarding the PCPNDT Act and it was found that all the respondents both, men and women knew about the act. In order to comprehend the encoding channel of the message respondents were asked about their source of information and it was found that newspaper, text books and television were all equally important sources of information which the respondents were able to access. Amongst the female respondents though television, newspaper and the text books all the three were concluded as major sources of information, for male respondents educational qualification was an important criteria resulting in differences in the knowledge level of the respondents about the PCPNDT Act. In continuation to enquiring about the existing knowledge of the PCPNDT Act, this question was asked to know about the role played by the show in making them aware about the Act. It was found that all of the respondents knew about the act prior to the show, which clearly highlights that other forms of media channels have played an important role to spread awareness.

3.3.1(d) Repercussions of Female Foeticide

This question was purposefully kept open ended to get a better understanding regarding the respondents' thought process. The responses kept beating around the same bush. Among the males, societal imbalance, problems affecting the natural life cycle chain were the reported repercussions. Male responses were related to the economic concerns. Whereas, female

responses pointed to increased discrimination, exploitation, increase in rape cases and other similar crimes as the main repercussions of female foeticide

3.3.1(e) Change in the Preference of the child

All the respondents did not have any child preference earlier as well, but after the show they all now have a strong opinion that they will stick to the value of being neutral towards the sex of their child.

3.3.2 Recall of messages being raised in episode on Big Fat Indian Wedding

3.3.2(a) Views on Indian Marriage

According to the 50% of the respondents, marriages in earlier decades use to be a reason of celebration, but nowadays it has become a business kiosk where people tend to buy or sell bride/groom and are measured in terms of family background and the amount of money spent on wedding.

3.3.2(b) Defining the term dowry

This question was kept close ended in order to understand the people's perception by making them choose from the given options. Majority (60%) of the interviewees stated dowry as assets given by the maternal family at the time of marriage while all others stated dowry as a token of love or respect given at the time of marriage by bride's family.

3.3.2(c) Describing Dowry and Reasons for giving Dowry

Almost 70% of the respondents gave the responses as no, which means that giving dowry at the time of marriage was not considered essential by them. As per the messages given and responses received by the respondents, dowry has been measured in terms of assets, jewellery and cash given to the groom's family. Majority (60%) of respondents opted social pressure as one of the reasons of giving dowry. Following this other reasons for practicing dowry in India were reported as - setting a status symbol or as token of love.

3.3.2(f)(i) Knowledge about the *Pakawa Beya*

Knowledge about *Pakawa beya*, a kind of marriage in which the boy is kidnapped and is forced to marry a girl in order to save dowry was shared by the host Amir Khan. It was told that the practice still continues in some parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Almost 50% of the respondents were able to recall the information.

3.3.2(f)(ii) Relevance of *Pakawa Beya* in today's scenario

According to all the respondents, the practice of *Pakawa Beya* is not justifiable in today's scenario due to the simple reason that the practice is inhumane and is disastrous for both girls as well as boy who are forced to marry. Speaking about *Pakadwah Beya*, one of the respondents replied "marriage is an occasion of celebration which should include everyone and make everyone happy, practices like *Pakawa Beya* poses a secretive event which exactly is not what marriage should be." Rest only 10% of the respondents thought that the practice is justifiable in today's scenario due to the fact that dowry is still practiced in our society so there is no harm in practicing *Pakawa Beya* and such marriages should also be accepted.

3.3.2(g) Possible solutions to reduce dowry pressure

The options were provided to the respondents from which they had to choose the most relevant ones. Majority (70%) of the respondents choose "mutual cost bearing by both the families" and "couple themselves bearing the entire marriage cost" as the two most favorable solutions to reduce dowry pressure.

3.3.3 Recall of messages being raised in episode on Domestic Violence

3.3.3(a) Definition of Domestic Violence

This question was kept closed ended to know about the general awareness on domestic violence. The two options "physical abuse" and "sexual abuse" were chosen by all the respondents as being inclusive under the practice of domestic violence. The rest three types of abuses, verbal, emotional and financial were given equal weightage.

3.3.3(b) The Domestic Violence (DV) Act

About 90% of the respondents knew about the Domestic Violence Act. As per the responses obtained, it can be said that television is truly the most effective tool to disseminate information.

In our study, nearly 60% of the respondents reported television as the source of receiving information regarding DV Act while remaining 40% had received the information regarding DV Act from their text books. However it was found that majority of the respondents (60%) knew about the DV Act before watching *Satyamev Jayate*.

3.3.3(c) Ranking of the options to reduce Domestic Violence

Respondents ranked empowering girls/women by educating them followed by spreading awareness amongst women about their rights and creating sensitivity amongst men/boys as the options to reduce domestic violence.

3.3.3(d) Definition of Masculinity

The term masculinity after knowing people's responses can be reframed. Masculinity is not something which is only attached to the physical appearance of a male but is linked to his treatment towards women. According to majority of the respondents, masculinity is to be measured with the way a man treats a woman, a true man should treat woman appropriately, should respect her, should not attach derogatory meaning to the women and should be free from patriarchal thoughts. A true man, according to the respondents is one who does not impose his decisions and opinions on women and is not male chauvinist.

4. Conclusion

Study reported that majority (93%) of the respondents categorised *Satyamev Jayate* as reality based talk show. Of the total, 95% respondents were women and 90% respondents were men. Further, majority of the male (87%) and female (95%) respondents agree that the *Satyamev Jayate* is the right platform to showcase such social issues. It can be also be concluded from the study that majority of both males and females liked the *aap bita* (stories) the most and the second most liked part of the show by the females were the expert comments and song at the end of the show which denotes that only the content doesn't matters the music also lends an emotional touch. The second most liked part by the male respondents was the videos shown along with the Aamir Khan's unique style of presenting the show and the issue. Reinforcing the two-step flow theory the study found that majority (80%) of the respondents reported having watched the show due to the celebrity hosting the show which had further added to show's overall appeal and

clearly highlighted that preference of the medium of communication over the message being communicated via mass media like television.

5. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of responses of a selected set of respondents, following recommendations can be made about reality based shows:-

- Each episode of *Satyamev Jayate* aired on television had a lot of information for viewers. Absorbing entire content in one single episode is an impossible task for any human and has been backed by the survey results mentioned in the initial sections.
- One recommendation, which came from our respondents pointed out to the need to link with local based NGOs for increasing the penetration and density of reach of the show.
- Another observation made, was the negative image of Women in India. Viewers of the television have lately developed an image about Indian women, who perceive them as weaker members of the society. This image needs to be revamped with help of media, if change is to be brought.

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