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Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Perceptions of Non-Americans Towards American TV Series

by

Thaarika Charumathy Seetharaman

A Thesis presented

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

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PERCEPTIONS OF NON-AMERICANS TOWARDS AMERICAN TV SERIES

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School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

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Abstract

Television drama is one of the most entertaining genre of the media industry, and it serves as a socialization platform (Greenberg, 1982). American TV series have gained audience and fans from all around the world which opens up the scope for examining the effects of American media on the secondary audience. Drawing on the framework of cultivation theory, this study examined the effect of American TV series on non-American population. The results suggested that the cultivation effects are dependent on age and gender of the respondents, in connection with the genre of the series influencing the audience's framing of the social reality judgements about the American society.

Keywords: American TV series, media, non-American population, cultivation theory, perception.

Perceptions of Non-Americans Towards American TV Series

Media has become one of the most influential factors in people's lives since its invention (Turan, Tinmaz, & Goktas, 2013). Media has the power to influence its audience and it depends on some factors (such as education, social awareness) to measure the effects it might have on each consumer. While broadcast media claims to report reality, people fail to realize that the medium creates reality largely on its own (Bourdieu, 2001). Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009) argue that people are not aware of the role played by the media in constructing the reality and the resulting interactions among the individuals on a day-to-day basis. Recent studies suggest that the changes in the media industry have made a substantial impact on the medium of consumption (Brasel & Gips, 2011). Even with the advancement of technology, and increased usage of the internet, with similar functionality to television, indicators suggest that the internet might not be the same as television viewing (Ferguson & Perse, 2000). Research by Bucht and Harrie (2013) and Carlsson (2010) revealed that television viewing was one of the popular forms of media, despite the increased access to internet.

Acculturation is the process where one's values, behaviors, and attitudes change as a result of exposure to intercultural contact (Berry, 2001). Media plays a key role in fostering acculturation especially in the form of popular entertainment TV shows. The cultivation effect of television has been examined from various perspectives such as a comparison between degrees of television consumption (Good, 2009), the preferred method of accessing television content (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010), and the relationship between mass media processes and television exposure (Potter, 2014), forming the base for this study. The goal of this study is to understand the influence of the American TV series on its non-targeted audience by examining if the audiences' national origin influences their grasp of social understanding, and how the American

television dramas affect their social awareness and reality of life in the United States. Focusing on most viewed shows in 2016 across seven genres (action and adventure, comedy, crime and politics, science fiction, horror, romance, and thriller), the study aims to understand the perception of American society in the minds of non-American viewers. Other studies have examined the relationship between TV viewing methods (Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012), genre of the show (Brown, Lauricella, Douai, & Zaidi, 2012), age (Feasey, 2009), social reality expectations (Gamble & Nelson, 2016), cultivation process (Gerber, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986), perception of reality and scope for emulation (Hayes et al., 2009), and language and ethnicity (Kim, Agrusa, Lee, & Chon, 2007). However, none has measured the cultivation effect of American television drama based on non-American television consumers, especially the impact of their shows, on their values.

The US population was estimated to be 358 million (United Nation estimates, 2015). According to the Census (2015) data, 13.7 percent of the population in the US was born outside the country and has their roots in at least one other country. A study by Osman (2010) found that the television shows mostly targeting urban populations affected the rural population as well. The results proved that there was significant influence by the media on framing of their beliefs and values. The author found that the demographic variables altered the influence of TV in framing the mindset and attitudes of the respondents. The respondents agreed that their behavior and lifestyle were influenced by media. The unintentional impact helps in understanding better the effects of cultivation, especially on the non-targeted demographic.

This study examines the cultivation effects of entertainment television programs from the audiences' perspective. Some of the variables that alter the perceptions are gender, age, genres of the series, access to the content, personal connection with the depiction of reality, and viewers'

ideas of emulation. The study examined the perceptions as dependent variables that rely on the independent variable, the American TV series. The unintentional impact of these programs helps explain the cultivation effect which concentrates on a set of American TV series that remained constant, while the effect of the drama on its audience was measured depending on the genre and content of the television show. It can be argued that such shows should be considered only as a factor of entertainment, but the frequent exposure to these types of media can influence the audiences' perception about a community. Field et al. (1999) argue that despite the intensity of exposure, the media has the power to influence and shape the perceptions of the consumers. Using a survey methodology, the analysis focused on the relationship between audience's perception of the shows and cultivation effect. Participants were recruited via social media and on campus, to fill out a questionnaire.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in cultivation theory, focusing on audience effects. Americans spend significant time watching television (Hinckley, 2014), and American TV series have gained world fame and audiences (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). Martin (2002) analyzed French commercials that included images and content in English broadcasted on TV. The American TV series *Dallas* has been used as a "forum" for the overseas audience to reflect their true selves (Katz & Liebes. 1990). People from all over the world have been adopting westernization which explains the cultivation effect through American media (Bhatia, 1987).

Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner conceptualized cultivation theory as a general perspective for understanding the effects of media (Gerbner, 1969b). Gross and Gerbner worked together and developed the idea into cultivation theory, also known as the cultivation hypothesis or the

cultivation analysis. The theory suggests that extended exposure to television affects people's perception of reality. "Television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population" (Gerbner et al., 1986, p.18). The theory claims that media and television have an influence on their audiences' attitudes and perceptions about society. The higher the consumption of television, the stronger the effect.

The cultivation effect has been analyzed by many scholars from different perspectives using a variety of variables. The study by Potter (1990) suggested that the cultivation effect on middle and high school students influenced their attitudes. Kids who watched sports believed in hard work and winning while the ones who watched soap operas held their belief in luck. Feasey (2009) examined the impact of the show *Charmed* targeted towards teens and tweens and found that it affected viewers in their twenties and thirties too. The study argued the impact on viewers in their twenties and thirties resulted in influencing their opinion of marriage, securing employment, and being approved for a mortgage. Gamble and Nelson (2016) analyzed how the young adults frame their expectations of sexual interactions involving romantic relationships, based on their television viewing habits. The study revealed that women expected more sexual activity in their relationship, and they watched more relationship television content. Hernandez (2016) found that content did not necessarily have to be visual, but rather that even heavy consumption of radio had the power to shape attitudes and beliefs. His study concentrated on the Los Angeles radio show *Ryan's Roses* which spread the ideas of romantic relationships, and analyzed negative behavior among listeners. The study by Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, and Page (2005) focused on comparing couples who were exposed to television shows and found that women were influenced more by the television content. Hayes et al. (2009) studied college

students and found that the students found realistic portrayals of families on the television shows. Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, and Neuendorf (2011) studied media effects and found that people framed opinions on various ethnic groups, generations, and individuals that helped them develop their personal values influenced by media content. Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson (2004) in their study of how violent content influences audience found that heavy consumption induced negative emotions.

While other theories such as magic bullet have been proposed, they are less reliable because they don't take a rich enough context of applicability to the present world into consideration. Neuman and Guggenheim (2011) insist that "According to this simplistic paradigm, like a bullet or a needle, if the message reached its target its 'effects,' typically persuasive effects, would be immediate and evident." The "hypodermic needle" model argues that the message is directly acknowledged and accepted completely by the receiver (Brown et al., 2012). The hypodermic needle theory posits that the media effects is a persuasive method that will influence and shape the behavior and attitudes of the consumers, their preferences and beliefs towards political, economic and social concerns (Shaw, 1979). The assumption of this approach is that media users are passive in consumption, and that the theory can be applied to all. However, there needs to be a common ground for every media consumer, and some of the common gratifications that audiences seek through television programs are information, entertainment/pass time, companionship (Brown et al., 2012).

To account for context, this study avoided the limitations of the "silver bullet" approach, relying more on the rich contextualization of the cultivation approach. This study examined the influence of media based on the national origin of the audience and the reason behind the need to consume these shows despite the linguistics and demographics differences. The basic

gratification needs (escapism, entertainment, boredom, loneliness, learning) as laid out by Brown, Rice, and Pearce (2012) can be applied to non-targeted audiences, and this study focuses on how media effects mold audience perception towards American society. This study contributes to scholarship on how the cultivation effect impact unintentional audience, limiting the focus only on American TV drama.

Review of Literature

Social Phenomena

Several studies have examined a wide range of social phenomena that helped in laying the platform for this study. Gamble and Nelson (2016) found from their study participants that perceptions towards sexual expectation in their realistic relationships were based on gender, and their perceived realism was influenced by TV viewing patterns. In relationships, women anticipated more sexual interaction while men's expectations were more variable. Although it is clear that media exaggerates certain situations, it nevertheless influences audience opinion and sets viewer expectations about reality.

The study by Ribarsky (2014) examined the role of media in building viewers' opinions about "romantic relationships." While media influences many attitudes among audiences, one of the most predominant concepts included in almost every TV series is the concept of "romantic relationships." Viewers of different age have a variety of connections with love, bonding and romantic relationships. But could the reality be different from how the American TV shows portray these relationships on air? Hayes et al. (2009) found that the realistic portrayal of families on television has been improving over time. The study also found that the viewers are learning from media and applying the scenarios in their real live. Does that mean the audience

believe the media portrayals to be real, and run families emulating the content for successful family life?

Most of social perception is through the eyes of the media and people trust what is telecasted (Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, & Neuendorf, 2011). The study focused on media effects on identity, self-image, formation of image and values, and social stereotypes indicated that the influence of television allied with the audiences' perception of values as represented in the media. The results reveal that television and media play a major role in framing the perception of media consumers' personal values and ethnic groups. A similar study by Lett et al. (2004) examined the amount of violence the TV news provoked and its effects on college students. The results confirmed the link between TV news viewing with negative personal relationship experiences and emotions, and positive perspective on Islam and Muslim peers in general.

The fictional television characters have an influence on political leaders and the public, and the viewers' attitudes and perspective changes towards the actual world of politics (Mutz & Nir, 2010). The authors found that positive media portrayal led to positive beliefs about criminal justice structure and vice versa. Mutz and Nir (2010) explain:

A large body of research on 'cultivation effects' argues that when primetime television is viewed daily over time for decades, it cultivates symbolic representations of power that promote deference to police authority—and by extension, to state authority in general. (pg. 198, p.2).

Heavy influence of television viewing patterns reinforced stereotypes about ethnic groups portrayed by media (Lee, Bichard, Irely, Walt, & Carlson, 2009). The study revealed that the majority of TV viewers held ethnic stereotypes. Viewers associated positive personality traits with Caucasians, believed Asians to be soft and shy, and held mixed opinion on African

Americans. Furthermore, the participants stereotyped Latinos/Hispanics as friendly and open, and Native Americans as lazy, uneducated, less introverted.

A study by Sanders and Ramasubramanian (2012) on dimensions of the stereotypes using the SCM (stereotype content model) analyzed African Americans' perceptions of Black fictional media characters. The results suggested that the audience presumed that African American characters were warm and competent. TV portrayals mold the opinion, and social reality judgement of audiences (Riddle, 2010). The authors employed a heuristic method to understand the cultivation effects on students who were asked to watch specific episodes, and then fill out a questionnaire to examine their social reality beliefs, which showed that frequency, recency, and vividness were the influential factors of constructing their beliefs and values.

Unintentional Impact

In order to examine the unintentional impact of entertainment media on foreign language viewers, Kim, Agrusa, Lee, and Chon (2007) analyzed articles, newspapers, and content as well as conducted a survey on the show *Winter Sonata*, a TV drama series. The study found a bridge in understanding the relationship between two countries, Korea and Japan. The results suggested that the key reasons for the audiences' preference for the Korean show was the appeal of the traditions, culture, humanism, empathy, scenic attraction, and music in the show. The target respondents were tourists and their views supported the craze for the show. Building on these studies, I am interested in understanding how foreign-born audiences connect with American TV series. Similarly, Martins and Jensen (2014) examined teen (high school students) to understand the influence of the TV show *Teen Mom* and the findings did not support the hypotheses which tested the relationship between exposure to the content and perceptions of motherhood based on the TV program. They found that teenagers perceived the show to be real, and understood the

concept of teen parenting as mothers who usually are sophisticated, enjoy a quality life with a higher income, and are involved in relationships with fathers. Thus, giving us a clear understanding that age plays a dominant role in whether viewers perceive a TV series as realistic or not.

Raman and Harwood (2008) studied the process of acculturation of Asian Indian visitors through American television program, and compared the Indian and American media, and confirmed that there was a noteworthy effect based on the consumption of television and resulting perceived realism of the scenario portrayed in the shows. The acculturation effects were the perceived reality of television, the needs for acculturation, filial attachments, and the level of intimate relationship between Indians and Americans. This study explored the process of acculturation by examining the participants' ideas of emulation.

Existing scholarship has covered a wide range of studies focusing on the cultivation effects of media on their audience and the gratification needs. However, very few studies have examined the unintentional impact of television shows on their audiences, especially non-targeted demographics. This study focuses on how American television series affect foreign-born viewers and how they shape their perceptions about American society.

Research Questions

Literature suggests that basic expectation and influence differs based on gender. The expectations, attitudes, values, and opinions differ from men to women (Durrant & Ellis, 2012). Potter (1986) defined perceived realism as “the degree of reality people ‘see’ in mediated messages” (p.160), and that attitude towards reality might be influenced by the media consumed. Television portrayals can influence the development of positive outcomes (Gillespie, 1995), and the effect of socialization is stronger among audiences who perceive realism in media portrayals

(Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). To determine the role of gender and genre in the consumption of American TV series and the effect of perceived realism among the social phenomenon, the following research questions were examined:

RQ1. How does media consumption differ based on the gender?

RQ2. How does media consumption differ based on the genre of the American TV show?

RQ3. How do audiences perceive realism as depicted on American TV series?

RQ4. How do audiences connect with social happenings/ phenomena on American TV series?

Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional survey (Creswell, 2014) because it allowed sampling of the non-American population to understand their views and opinions about the cultivation effect during a particular period. “A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. From sample results, the researcher generalizes or draws inferences to the population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). A snow-ball sampling approach (Creswell, 2014) was used to distribute a questionnaire to a foreign-born population via social media, and through International Students Services of a large private university in the North East. The study involved gathering data from human subjects and hence went through the process of Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were provided with a link to the questionnaire online after the approval of IRB. After giving consent, the respondents were asked to respond to the survey as truthfully as possible.

A total of 197 participants responded to the survey. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents have been watching American TV series for over a year. Ten genres (action, adventure, comedy, crime, fiction, historical, horror, politics, romance, and thriller) were suggested, and all the

participants responded that they watch more than two of the given genres. The questionnaire included questions about preferred American TV series, and follow-up questions asked about how they perceive their preferred shows. Likert-like-scales were used to measure the respondents' connection with the realism depicted in the TV series. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: demographic, questions pertaining to American TV series consumption, responses to the depiction of realism in the series, and ideas of emulation. The sections on depiction of realism contained questions that measure the personal connection of the respondents to various social phenomena (friendship, families, high school/college, sexual relationship, science fiction, crime, ethnicity, and voice in words and action) in each genre. Considering the evolution of technology, understanding the medium of access (television, Netflix, online-streaming, and downloads) to the television content was also measured.

The collected data was coded into SPSS where the frequencies were measured and the relationship between variables were tested using the Chi-square test of independence.

With the guidance of existing literature, I listed and defined various cues that are the predominant variables of the study, such as:

- Genre referred to the category of series that were grouped based on the similarities of style, form, or media content.
- Social phenomena (Gamble & Nelson, 2016; Hayes et al., 2009; and Kim et al., 2007) were defined as regular pattern/presence of social living such as friendship, family, high school, college, sexual expectations, crime, character's ethnicity, violence as both action and words.
- Emulation (Hayes et al., 2009) referred to recreation of instances like any of the incidents portrayed in the American TV series that the participant might have watched.

Findings: Survey Measures

Demographics

Participants' age ranged from 15 to 50 and the majority of the respondents were between 21-25 (56%). Out of the 197 respondents, the responses were split between male ($n = 122$, 62%) and female ($n = 75$, 38%). Over 60% of the respondents were single and 42% had at least a bachelor's degree, and 43% had a master's degree. In terms of employment, 50% of the respondents were students, while 4.1% were homemakers, 32% were employed for wages, 3.5% were out of work, while 2% were looking for work, and 10.2% were self-employed. Responses included participants from 26 countries, with Indians making up 78% of the participants. Currently, 78% of the participants follow 1-5 American TV series, and 37% spend about 1-3 hours a week watching them. Netflix was the most preferred medium for accessing the American TV series, compared to the traditional TV viewing, and online streaming or download of the content (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age (Years)		
15-20	19	10
21-25	111	56
26-30	57	29
31-35	5	2
36-40	1	1
>40	4	2
Total	197	100
Relationship Status		
Engaged	2	1
In a relationship	39	20
It is complicated	5	3
Married/ Domestic relationship	32	16
Single	119	60
Total	197	100
Education		
Associate degree	2	1
Bachelor's degree	83	42
High school graduate/ diploma	9	5
Master's degree	84	43
Professional degree	7	3
Some college credit, no degree	10	5
Some high school, no diploma	2	1
Total	197	100

Employment Status

A homemaker	8	4
A student	99	50
Employed for wages	63	32
Out of work & looking for work	4	2
Out of work but not currently looking for work	3	2
Self-employed	20	10
Total	197	100

How many American TV series do you currently follow?

1-5	154	78
6-10	19	10
More than 10	24	12
Total	197	100

How long have you been watching?

1-3 months	15	8
4-6 months	14	7
7-12 months	14	7
Less than a month	20	10
More than 12 months	134	68
Total	197	100

Preferred mode of access

Television	63	24
Netflix	122	47
Others (Download, Online streaming, etc.)	72	29
Total	257	100

Emulation

On examining the situation being recreated from the television shows, 54% of the respondents agreed that they might emulate them in the future, even though there were no significant results to measure the relationship between emulation and other variables.

Results

Chi-Square Test of Independence

RQ1: How does television series consumption differ based on the gender?

The theory of cultivation has been used to examine different topics in order to test the relationship between perceptions and opinions about gender roles (Morgan, 1982, 1987; Signorielli, 1989; Signorielli & Lears, 1992). The chi-square test of independence identified a significant relationship between gender and genre of the American TV series' preference. The test showed that men preferred "action and adventure," $X^2(1, N = 197) = 8.31, p < 0.05$, and women preferred "romance," $X^2(1, N = 197) = 16.82, p < 0.001$ (see Table 2).

RQ2: How does television series consumption differ based on the genre of the American TV series?

Media play an important role in constructing social status and differentiating groups based on class and cultural differences, and genre plays a significant role in shaping the perspective (Forster & Kleinen-von Konigslow, 2016). Gender, age, and educational background are some of the variables that influenced participants' selection of American TV series genre. The chi-square test found a significant relationship between age (between 21 and 25), and romance, $X^2(5, N = 197) = 11.81, p < 0.05$. There was also a significant relationship between the educational background and preference for "comedy," $X^2(6, N = 197) = 14.47, p < 0.05$. Participants with a bachelor's or master's degree were more likely to consume comedy.

RQ3: How do audience perceive realism as depicted on American TV series?

Pouliot and Cowen (2007) argue that:

Studies have implicitly or explicitly assumed that effects on spectators are more important if the message content is perceived to be real rather than fictional and several empirical studies have shown that when message content is perceived as unreal or unrealistic, it indeed has less influence on spectators' cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses that when it is perceived as real or realistic. (p. 242-243)

The chi-square test of independence identified a significant relationship between perceived realism and age across most genres. Depending on age, participants perceived realism in "action," $X^2(25, N = 197) = 52.43, p < 0.001$; realism in "comedy," $X^2(25, N = 197) = 70.07, p < 0.001$; realism in "fiction," $X^2(25, N = 197) = 49.99, p < 0.01$; realism in "horror," $X^2(25, N = 197) = 37.58, p < 0.05$; realism in "romance," $X^2(25, N = 197) = 55.52, p < 0.001$; and realism in "thriller" genre, $X^2(25, N = 197) = 37.97, p < 0.05$ (see Table 3). Participants between age of 21 and 25 are more likely to perceive realism in various genres of American TV series than people in other age groups.

RQ4: How do audience connect with social phenomena on American TV series?

To test the personal connection between audience, and depiction of social phenomena on American TV series, the chi-square test of independence was performed. A number of significant relationships were found between genres of action and adventure, comedy, crime and politics, fiction, horror, romance, and thriller, and personal connections with social depiction of friendship, family, high school/ college, sexual relationship, science fiction, crime, ethnicity, violence in words and action in different combinations (see Table 2). The relationship between genres and social situations were significant for:

Action and adventure. Friendship, high school/college, and violence (in action) were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with when watching shows in the genre of “action and adventure.” The chi-square test found a significant relationship between the genre and friendship as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 27.31, p < 0.05$, and high school/college as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 34.14, p < 0.05$ and violence (in action) as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 31.25, p < 0.05$.

Comedy. High school/college, ethnicity, science fiction, and violence (in words) were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with when watching shows within the genre of “comedy.” The chi-square test found a significant relationship between the genre and high school/college as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 34.94, p < 0.05$; with ethnicity as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 32.33, p < 0.05$; with science fiction as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 29.40, p < 0.05$; and with violence (in words) as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 30.29, p < 0.05$.

Crime and politics. Science fiction, and crime were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with when watching shows within the genre of “crime and politics.” The chi-square test found significant relationship between the genre and science fiction as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 37.97, p < 0.01$, and with crime as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 28.36, p < 0.05$.

Fiction. Friendship, high school/college, crime, and violence (in action) were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with when watching shows in the genre of “fiction.” The chi-square test found a significant relationship between the genre and friendship as $X^2(24, N = 197) = 37.69, p < 0.05$; with high school/college as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 36.93, p < 0.01$; with crime as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 28.36, p < 0.05$; and with violence (in action) as $X^2(24, N = 197) = 37.04, p < 0.05$.

Horror. Friendship, high school/college, crime, science fiction, ethnicity, and violence (in action) were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with the genre of “horror.” The chi-square test found significant results between the genre and friendship as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 31.26, p < 0.05$; with high school/college as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 27.80, p < 0.05$; with crime as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 33.53, p < 0.05$; with science fiction as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 35.82, p < 0.01$; with ethnicity as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 28.72, p < 0.05$; and with violence (in action) as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 34.45, p < 0.05$.

Romance. Family, crime, and violence (in words and action) were the social phenomena that participants could personally connect with when watching the genre of “romance.” The chi-square test found significant results between the genre and family as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 27.28, p < 0.05$; with crime as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 35.26, p < 0.01$; with violence (in words) as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 28.26, p < 0.05$; and with violence (in action) as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 32.25, p < 0.05$.

Thriller. High school/college and crime was the social phenomena that the participants could personally connect with the shows in the genre of “thriller.” The chi-square test found significant results between the genre and high school/college as $X^2(20, N = 197) = 31.41, p < 0.05$; and crime as $X^2(16, N = 197) = 26.42, p < 0.05$.

Table 2:

Relationship Between Genre and Social Phenomena

Variable	Friendship	Family	High school/college	Sexual relationship	Science fiction	Crime	Ethnicity	Violence (In words)	Violence (In action)
Genre	<i>p</i> value								
Action & Adventure	0.05	-	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	0.05
Comedy	0.05	-	0.05	-	0.05	-	0.05	0.05	-
Crime & Politics	0.05	-	-	-	0.01	0.05	-	-	-
Fiction	0.05	-	0.01	0.05	-	0.05	-	-	0.05
Horror	0.05	-	0.05	-	0.01	-	0.05	-	0.05
Romance	-	0.05	-	-	-	0.05	-	0.05	0.05
Thriller	-	-	0.05	-	-	0.05	-	-	-

Discussion

As the cultivation theory suggest, perceptions of reality may be reconstructed due to excessive exposure to television's portrayal of reality (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). The theory does not work with short-term consumption, but exposure to television for a prolonged period of time. The objective of this study was to examine how the American society is perceived through the eyes of non-American population via American TV series. The study was grounded in the theory of cultivation, and referred to uses and gratification theory in order to analyze the impact of media on the non-targeted audience. Some of the study's main findings support cultivation effects of television on audience, and other findings support the uses and gratification concepts, supporting gratification beliefs as to why American media is consumed despite the difference in language and demographics.

First, the cultivation effect was analyzed from the perspective of gender to examine if the consumption differed between men and women. Kahlor and Eastin (2011) found that gender plays a predominant role in influencing the consumption of media. The findings of this study also suggest that the consumption differs based on genre where men prefer the "action and adventure" and women prefer the "romance," over all the other genres listed in the study. Second, the study examined from the perspective of genre to observe if the consumption differed depending on the genres. Existing literatures identified that certain genres provoked negative responses from its audience. A study by Cohen and Weimann (2000) found a distinct relationship between genre and television viewing patterns, and the viewing pattern was guided by preference of genre. My results supported the previous research that the demographics (age, sex, and educational and employment background) influenced the selection of genre, and that

these demographic differences are essential factors in analyzing the effects of cultivation.

Respondents between the age of 21-25 watched “romance” more than the other genres.

Third, I applied cultivation theory to non-American viewers by focusing on how shows framed social reality for such audiences. Weimann (1984) found that Israeli audiences who consumed heavy American television content tended to perceive life in the U.S. in a more attractive way with high standard of living and wealth. Considering the differential effect of non-targeted audiences, and analyzing the cultivation effect, the perceptions of realism was influenced by types of television genres such as action and adventure, comedy, fiction, horror, romance, and thriller. Pouliot and Cowen (2007) confirm these findings by suggesting that the influence of media content depends on the realistic depiction of the subject-matter.

Finally, this study confirmed previous findings showing that social reality judgements were framed by media consumption. Studies on various social phenomena by Gamble and Nelson (2016), Hayes et al. (2009), and Kim et al. (2007), reiterated that cultivation effects influence social reality expectations based on television viewing patterns. The current study supported the findings of the existing literature that respondents also connected with some social happenings on American TV series, even though they were foreign born. Some of the significant relationships included connection with social phenomenon such as friendship, fictional families, sexual relationships, education, crime, violence, and other such social reality beliefs.

The entire study focused on the perspective of foreign-born audiences, satisfying the traditional gratifications of media as suggested by Harwood (1999). Brown et al. (2012) found that the motivations and gratifications of television users and online user-shared videos were the same but differed in their intensity. Adding to the literature, this study’s findings suggests that the traditional TV viewing methods have changed; accessing the media content through other

access (like internet, Netflix, Hulu, etc.) are growing in popularity. This study also identified a significant relationship between genres and the social reality expectations based on the depiction of realism. As a contribution to the existing literature, genres can further be considered as a predominant variable in examining media effects. The impact of media content on a non-targeted audience increases the scope of examining and testing the cultivation theory.

Limitations

The results of this study are based on the responses received during the phase of research, and findings from the depiction of social situations through media. Though the study has shown significant results, it cannot be generalized to the entire non-American population due to a small sample size, and snow-ball sampling approach. The majority of the respondents were based in India, making the results hugely dependent on one country. The study categorized genres and listed the top 5 shows in each genre, restricting them to be the top viewed shows in the year 2016. It is possible that the study might have attracted more participants if the options were not restricted to these particular series. The study focused only on American television dramas and other types of American television shows (reality shows, Ted talks) were not considered. The methodology also has a limitation as it is possible that the respondents were not completely honest about their opinion. Also, the closed ended questions restrict the respondents from giving away their thoughts. The survey was shared on social media, confining the recruitment of participants to a small network of people.

Future Studies

Notwithstanding the limitations, the study has opened up the scope for analyzing how the American society is being perceived through the eyes of non-Americans. A future study could focus on a comparative analysis to examine the cultivation effects of media, between Americans

and other countries' population to understand perceptions of American TV series. A qualitative study could use focus group or interview approaches to get more in-depth feedback from various demographics about their perception of American TV.

Conclusion

This study has established that the American TV series influence the perception of American society and culture in the minds of non-American population. We found that the choice of genre of the TV series differed based on gender, and age played a predominant role in perceiving the realism towards various social phenomena that are depicted through these series. In the world of ever growing technology, even though there are other mediums like Netflix, Hulu, and other online video sharing forums through which the media content is consumed, the basic idea of "television" remains unchanged. Despite the dissent about the validity of the cultivation theory, this study has taken a stand in projecting the cultivation effects media could hold over its audience. To conclude, American TV series consumers need to be rational in realizing that media is a form of entertainment that could consciously alter the perception of reality.

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Appendix

SURVEY PROTOCOL:

The following is a survey protocol for collecting information from audiences of various American TV series on the connection with their real lives.

Perceptions of non-Americans on American TV series

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceptions of non-Americans of American TV series. The purpose of this study is to understand how different genres and drama effects in framing opinions in real life.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before completing the questionnaire.

This study is being conducted by Thaarika Charumathy Seetharaman from Rochester Institute of Technology, School of Communication.

STUDY PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to understand the influences of American TV series on its non-targeted audiences in shaping their opinions.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in study, you will complete an online/ handout questionnaire about your experience and connection with the American drama/series you watch(ed), which should take 10-13 minutes of your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Online and handout survey instruments will assign you a unique id and your information collected in this study, will be used for data analysis purpose only.

PAYMENT:

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS:

For questions about the study, contact the researcher: **Thaarika Charumathy Seetharaman** at +1 (585)733-9573 or email: tcs6902@rit.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the Rochester Institute of Technology, Institutional Review Board at 585-475-7673 or by email at hsro@rit.edu

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the investigator.

1. Age:

- 15-20
- 20-25
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35-40
- 40 & above

2. Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to answer

3. Relationship status:

- Single
- In a relationship
- It is complicated
- Committed
- Engaged
- Married or Domestic partnership
- Divorced
- Widowed

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree
 - Professional degree
 - Doctorate degree
5. Employment status: Are you currently...?
- Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Out of work and looking for work
 - Out of work but not currently looking for work
 - A homemaker
 - A student
 - Military
 - Retired
 - Unable to work
6. National Origin:
- Foreign _____
7. How many American TV drama series do you follow currently?
- 1-5
 - 5-10
 - More than 10
8. Genres that hook your interest? (Check all that apply)
- Action
 - Adventure
 - Comedy

- Crime
- Fiction
- Historical
- Horror
- Politics
- Romance
- Thriller

9. How long have you been watching?

- Less than a month
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-12 months
- More than 12 months

10. Check below the series you watch/ watched? (Choose one in each genre, skip the genre if you do not watch that genre).

- Action and Adventure
 - Arrow
 - Flash
 - Person of Interest
 - Game of Thrones
 - Prison Break
- Comedy
 - Friends

- The Big Bang Theory
- Modern family
- How I met your mother
- Two and Half men
- Crime and Politics
 - House of Cards
 - American crime story
 - CSI: Miami
 - Narcos
 - The Good wife
- Science Fiction
 - Fringe
 - Stranger things
 - Teen Wolf
 - Sanctuary
 - Taken
- Horror
 - American horror story
 - The walking dead
 - Scream
 - Dead of Summer
 - Hemlock Grove
- Romance

- You Me Her
- Desperate Housewives
- Masters of Sex
- Crazy Ex-Girlfriend
- Sex and the city
- Thriller
 - Dexter
 - Breaking bad
 - Homeland
 - Supernatural
 - How to get away with Murder

11. How would you describe your emotions while watching the show? Check all that apply

Genre			Crime				
Emotion	Action & Adventure	Comedy	& Politics	Fiction	Horror	Romance	Thriller
Fear							
Anger							
Sadness							
Joy							
Disgust							
Trust							
Anticipation							
Surprise							

12. Why do you watch the selected series?

- It is entertaining
- Helps me pass time
- Keeps me addicted to watch
- Helps me reduce my stress
- Educational purpose
- Others _____

13. How much time do you spend in a week, watching these series?

- Less than an hour
- 1-3 hours
- 3-6 hours
- 6-10 hours
- More than 10 hours.

14. Preferred mode of watching the shows?

- Television
- Netflix
- Other online sources

15. How realistic is the depiction of the shows to real life?

1
2
3
4
5
strongly
mildly
neutral
mildly
strongly
disagree
disagree

agree
agree

Scale					
--------------	--	--	--	--	--

Genre	1	2	3	4	5
Action & Adventure					
Comedy					
Crime & Politics					
Fiction					
Horror					
Romance					
Thriller					

16. Rate your connection depicting **friendship** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				

Romance				
Thriller				

17. Rate your connection depicting **families** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

18. Rate your connection depicting **high school/ college** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				

Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

19. Rate your connection depicting **sexual relationships** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

20. Rate your connection depicting **science fiction** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

21. Rate your connection depicting **crime** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				

Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

22. Rate your connection depicting **characters' ethnicity** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

23. Rate your connection depicting **violence (in words)** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect

Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

24. Rate your connection depicting **violence (in action)** from the drama(s) you watch(ed):

Scale	1	2	3	4
Genre	Connect Strongly	Connect Moderately	Connect Slightly	Not at all Connect
Action & Adventure				
Comedy				
Crime & Politics				
Fiction				
Horror				
Romance				
Thriller				

25. Have you tried recreating instances like any of the incidents portrayed in the series you watch?

- Yes
- No

26. Do you plan on recreating instances like any of the incidents portrayed in the series you watch, in the future?

- Yes
- No
- May be

27. How much would you recommend the series you watch, to your (depending on the show)?

Scale	1	2	3	4
Recommend	Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at all
Friends				
Family				
Colleague				
Acquaintance				