

Stretching serials to weekends: Boredom or treat?

Again there is a trend of Hindi GECs extending weekday fictions to the weekends. Fictions on weekends have never worked – until Naagin changed the game. But telecasting same shows on weekends might cause audience fatigue. Weren't weekends designed for family viewing more than just female viewing? BestMediaInfo tries to find out

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Even if you love pizza to the core, is it possible for you to eat it all seven days of the week? Likewise, no matter how much you love a movie or a particular innings of the Indian cricket team, how long can you watch it every single day of the week?

Keeping this in mind, the need to have diversification in offering was felt and attended to, even by the Hindi general entertainment channels (GECs). This is how the terminologies of afternoon primetime, evening primetime, weekend primetime and Sunday mornings came about. The programming on the channels was also designed and scheduled in such a way that the audience can enjoy various flavours at different times.

By definition, while weekday evening primetime was reserved for women viewers, like *saas bahu* sagas, the weekend primetime was carefully used for non-fiction or crime-related shows expecting to find better resonance with the male audience. However, before the reality and crime genres came in, often on weekends, one could enjoy movie screenings right from the 'Doordarshan-only' days.

This is testimony to how weekend and weekday programming needed to be and was differentiated. However, lately, some of the major GEC players have been experimenting with extending regular fictions on weekends to give the audience an extra dose of their favourites.

In the recent turn of events, Star Plus extended its major fiction properties by two days, to be telecast from Monday to Sunday, including serials like *Siya Ke Ram*, *Saath Nibhana Saathiya*, *Mere Angne Mein*, *Suhani Si Ek Ladki*, *Ye Hai Mohabbatein*, *Dehleez*, *Silsila Pyaar Ka*, *Diya Aur Baati Hum*, *Ye Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* and *Tamanna*.

Colors too tried it with three of its shows, *Sasural Simar Ka* and *Thapki Pyaar Ki*, going six days a week, while *Ishq Ka Rang Safed* ran seven days a week.

Satrangi Sasural, Kala Teeka, Qubool Hai, Jamai Raja, Sarojini and *Tashn-e-Ishq* of Zee TV were also pushed till Saturday gradually.

Sony has, however, kept its shows five days a week, except for *Suryaputra Karn* and *Sankat Mochan Mahabali Hanuman* which air six days a week. The channel has specialised fiction for the weekends, including their longest running show *CID* and other popular crime-based shows.



Anup Vishwanathan

Anup Vishwanathan, Senior Vice-President, Marketing, Sony Entertainment Television, said, "Sony has always had fiction programming airing on weekends. Our two primetime shows – *CID* and *Adaalat* – have been extremely popular with our viewers and are equally loved by men, women and children. This is one of the reasons we are bringing *Adaalat* back on our channel very soon."

The GECs have tried this seven-day strategy a couple of times but revoked it after a short span. But things changed when *Naagin*, the fiction show on Colors, experienced runaway success on the weekend slots. The major differentiator here was that *Naagin* is a 'weekend-only' fiction. Star Plus had extended a few of its shows to weekends in 2014 and again a few others in 2015. But the decision was revoked every time.

Fiction shows and soap operas have always been the crucial survival parameters for any Hindi GEC and extending those to the weekends might be considered a guaranteed 'good returns' policy. However, along with this comes another side of the coin – risk of fatigue. Consumption of the same content for seven days, week after week, might lead to boredom.

Monetary driven

Production costs for a regular fiction show goes up to Rs 5 lakh per episode against a reality show which can shoot the cost from Rs 25 lakh to crores per episode. Similarly, the satellite rights cost of a blockbuster movie is also on the upper side.

Against this, fiction shows have already been tested for loyal appointment viewing over those thousands of episodes of airings that some of the flagship shows have experienced. Well, there was an intermediate time when the viewers were given glimpses of their favourite fiction shows on weekends through 'Maha Episodes'. These were one-hour long elongated episodes which were used to highlight some important twists in the storylines, or bigger functions like weddings or even episodes incorporating star cast of two shows.

But even the Maha Episodes cost the channels a higher amount than the regular 22-minute shows. However, the sponsors and advertisers of fiction shows definitely assure a stable sale of inventory on the rates commanded by the channels over weekday prime time slots.

Boredom or treat

Industry experts say it is a treat for a few weeks and then fatigue for sure. "A troubled digestion is the only possible result of overeating the same item too much and too frequently," said a media planner.



Vidhu Sagar

Vidhu Sagar, Managing Partner, GTB (formerly Blue Hive), seconds the 'fatigue' factor, saying, "Such decisions are a clear reflection of marketer's greed. The problem is that once something starts working, one feels let's give the viewer 'extra' of that. The fatigue is bound to happen if you extend anything to extreme. Trying to exploit something too much will not really help."

On the other side, Sunjoy Waddhwa, CMD, Sphereorigins, said that the content can be made creative to avoid fatigue. "Parallel storylines are a must to avoid fatigue and that is the way forward for seven-day week fiction format. The twists and turns in the storyline are a part and parcel of any show and once the creativity in writing is continued, the boredom and fatigue can always be avoided."

Compromising on content

Sagar suggests that the content quality does go for a toss as you stretch it too much, "Instead of adding meatier content, they drag it and then they realise that they need to review the decision or take it back. If we take analogy from outside the TV spectrum, something similar happened with magazines. When the fortnightly or monthly magazines started working well, the frequency was increased to weekly. The juice and meat in the higher frequency magazines was lost and readers started losing interest. I feel TV shows may face similar consequences."

A senior producer, on condition of anonymity, said, "No actor wants to shoot seven days a week, everyone wants a weekly off which is very normal. In this run, when fiction shows are shot on an everyday basis with merely a day's gap in shooting and telecast, maintaining production quality is in itself a challenge. But since we are commissioned by a channel and the demand comes for seven days, we have to do it."

Waddhwa, a strong supporter of extension of fiction to weekends, said, "The parallel storylines help in getting to shoot with actors on a rotational basis. Not every actor needs to be present every day and it is

possible to manage the resources. The time frame of delivery shortens for sure but that is not such a big problem.”

Consumer insight for weekend watching

Other than everything that has been said and done about the fiction shows and the weekday primetimes, the main reason for special content on weekends was based on insight. Weekend programming started becoming different, considering that co-viewing is more prevalent on weekends. This means shows targeting women may not work.

Till recently, there was nothing worth watching over weekends because ‘apparently’ people didn’t want to sit at home and watch TV on weekends. The trend changed when reality shows came in and it jumped up even more with *Comedy Nights with Kapil Sharma* on Colors.

So, are people then watching TV on weekends the same way as they are watching over weekdays? Sagar said, “I don’t think so. People still watch less TV on weekends, unless there’s a tent-pole property. So I would suggest that ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’. There isn’t any insight where the audience says that we can’t wait till Monday to see where the storyline goes. It is not about viewership link, rather it is completely market influenced and, hence, I think it is a disastrous recipe.”

The senior producer suggested how people are always more in a happier mode on weekends and fiction shows are a little depressing or stressful to watch. “My personal overall suggestion has always been to put happier or neutral content on weekends. Talent hunt shows, comedy shows or even competitive reality shows are a good way to entertain. People are in no mood to stress out on a protagonist’s problems over the weekends.”