Exploring Diaspora Identities and Media Consumption among Indian Immigrants in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the experiences of Asian Indian immigrants residing in the United States and explores the intricate relationship between diasporic identities and media consumption. Grounded in the framework of cultural proximity, social identity theories, and the uses and gratifications perspective, the research investigates the viewership preferences and motivations of Asian Indian immigrants towards Indian television programming. Despite their extensive time living abroad, these immigrants actively choose ethnic programming, specifically Indian television accessible through satellite dishes, as a means to reinforce their ethnic identity, stay informed about India, and nurture a sense of connection to their cultural roots. By providing post-2014 insights into the dynamics of Asian Indian social identity, television consumption patterns, and the uses and gratifications derived from ethnic media, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how diasporic individuals actively engage with media content to fulfill their needs for cultural preservation, reaffirmation of identity, and a continued link with their country of origin. The findings have implications for media organizations aiming to cater to diverse audiences and for scholars examining the interplay between media consumption and diasporic identities within an ever-evolving media landscape.

Keywords- Asian Indian immigrants, diaspora, media consumption, ethnic programming, social identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of diaspora has become an integral part of today’s globalized world, as individuals and communities migrate across borders, carrying with them their cultural heritage and identities (Bruneau, 2010). Among these diaspora communities, Asian Indian immigrants in the United States form a significant group, maintaining a strong connection to their Indian roots while adapting to the American way of life (Warner & Wittner, 1998). Media consumption plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining diasporic identities, providing a means for individuals to connect with their homeland, reinforce their cultural heritage, and navigate their sense of belonging within the host country (Lidskog, 2016).

Asian Indian immigrants residing in major metropolitan areas of the United States in relation to their media
consumption of Indian television programming. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of cultural proximity, social identity theories, and uses and gratifications perspective, it seeks to uncover specific themes that emerge from these viewers and understand their motivations for actively selecting ethnic programming. The research provides post-2014 insights into Asian Indian social identity, television consumption patterns, and the uses and gratifications derived from ethnic media. By investigating the perspectives of long-term immigrants in the United States, how and why Indian programming remains significant in their media consumption choices. It has implications for media organizations targeting diverse audiences and scholars examining the interplay between media consumption and diasporic identities.

The paper aims to illuminate the complex interconnections between media, diaspora, and cultural identity, providing valuable insights into the role of media in nurturing and sustaining cultural bonds within diaspora communities. It specifically focuses on Asian Indian immigrants in the United States, contributing to the existing knowledge of diaspora communities and their media consumption patterns. It addresses the need for post-2014 insights that reflect the evolving media landscape and changing dynamics of social identity (Misra, et al., 2000; Ganguly-Scraser & Scrase, 2009; Baser & Toivanen, 2019).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian diaspora in the United States constitutes one of the largest and most diverse immigrant communities. As they navigate their lives in a new cultural context, their identities are shaped by the interplay of various factors, including their ethnic background, acculturation experiences, and media consumption patterns. This literature review aims to examine existing research on how Indian immigrants in the United States form and express their diaspora identities through media consumption.

Acculturation and identity formation play a crucial role in shaping the identities of immigrants. Studies by Berry, (2005) highlight the acculturation strategies adopted by immigrants, ranging from assimilation to integration, separation, and marginalization. Indian immigrants’ preferences for particular media forms may be influenced by the extent to which they maintain ties with their homeland culture or assimilate into the host culture Phinney & Alipuria, (1990). Media consumption and cultural identity research by Shim & Kim, (2018) indicates that media consumption can significantly influence individuals’ cultural identity and sense of belonging. For Indian immigrants in the United States, media acts as a bridge between their homeland and the diaspora community, potentially reinforcing their ethnic identity and facilitating cultural maintenance.

Media use and maintenance of language is a crucial aspect of cultural identity. Research by Ramasubramanian & Doshi, (2017) reveals that Indian immigrants’ media consumption in their native language fosters a sense of connection to their culture and community. Newspapers, television channels, and online platforms catering to Indian languages have become prominent sources of information and entertainment for this diaspora group. Bollywood and cultural representation cinema hold significant cultural importance for Indian immigrants. Maira, (2002) explores how Bollywood films function as cultural artifacts that perpetuate nostalgia, cultural pride, and shared experiences among the diaspora population. Immigrants may consume Bollywood content to maintain their cultural roots and mitigate feelings of homesickness.

Social media and virtual communities have emerged as spaces for Indian immigrants to engage in cultural exchanges. Androutsopoulos & Lexander, (2021) discuss how platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and online forums facilitate the preservation of cultural practices, religious celebrations, and language use within the diaspora. Diaspora identity and news consumption research by Mukherjee, Dhingra & Sengupta, (2017) highlights how Indian immigrants’ consumption of news media shapes their perceptions of events in both the United States and India. Exposure to news from their homeland can influence diaspora identity formation and potentially affect their transnational political and social engagements.

Second-Generation media preferences for Indian Americans born and raised in the United States, the media preferences of the second generation may differ from those of their immigrant parents. Studies by Kebede, (2017) explore how second-generation Indian Americans navigate their dual identities through media consumption, balancing their Indian heritage and American upbringing. This literature review reveals that media consumption significantly impacts the diaspora identities of Indian immigrants in the United States. Through various media forms, they engage with their homeland culture, maintain their language, and form virtual communities, all of which contribute to their sense of belonging and identity in the host country. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the relationship between media consumption and diaspora identities to promote cultural exchange and integration in diverse societies.

Despite their long-term residency, these individuals actively select ethnic programming, particularly Indian television via satellite dishes, raising questions about the enduring appeal and functions of Indian programming within diaspora communities. The findings will contribute to understanding the interplay between media consumption, diasporic identities, and cultural preservation. The implications of this research extend to media organizations targeting diverse audiences and scholars studying the role of media in shaping diasporic communities. By exploring the experiences of Asian Indian immigrants, this study aims to shed light on the enduring appeal of Indian programming and its role in nurturing cultural bonds and a sense of belonging. The sociocultural and historical context in which immigrants navigate...
their lives in the United States is acknowledged, highlighting the influence of cultural proximity and social identity on media preferences and consumption behaviors within diaspora communities (Straubhaar, 2014; Somani & Guo, 2018; Adlam, et al., 2022).

III. ASIAN INDIAN IMMIGRANTS AND MEDIA CONSUMPTIONS

This research holds significance for media organizations and content creators aiming to cater to diverse audiences, providing insights into the motivations and gratifications sought by Asian Indian immigrants. Understanding these factors can guide the development of programming that effectively meets their needs and resonates with their cultural experiences. Additionally, it contributes to scholarly conversations on media consumption and diasporic identities, highlighting how individuals actively construct and negotiate their social identities through media engagement. Offering post-2014 insights into Asian Indian social identity, television viewship, and ethnic media gratifications, enhances our understanding of the enduring appeal of Indian programming within the diaspora (Thobani, 2017).

Significant developments have shaped the media consumption patterns and diaspora identities among Asian Indian immigrants in the United States since 2014. Digital media platforms and online content accessibility have revolutionized engagement with Indian programming. Streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video provide diverse content options beyond traditional satellite dishes, expanding choices for immigrants while maintaining cultural connections. Social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram have become influential spaces for diaspora engagement, fostering online communities and allowing active participation. These developments offer a broader range of programming, enhance cultural familiarity, and facilitate connections among Asian Indian immigrants (Mulla, 2022).

Transnationalism has gained prominence among Asian Indian immigrants in the post-2014 era, facilitated by communication technologies and travel. Indian television programming serves as a bridge, connecting immigrants to their home country and allowing them to stay connected with events and trends. Cultural representation and diversity in media have also increased, providing narratives that resonate with diaspora experiences and enhancing cultural belonging. These developments shape media consumption and cultural experiences, highlighting the active engagement of Asian Indian immigrants in maintaining connections, reinforcing identities, and navigating transnational contexts. This research expands our understanding of these dynamics, shedding light on the role of Indian programming in cultural preservation and diasporic identities (Ashikali, Groeneveld & Kuipers, 2021).

In recent years, media organizations have recognized the importance of engaging with diverse audiences, leading to an increase in content tailored to diaspora communities, including Asian Indian immigrants. Indian television programming now showcases nuanced representations of the diaspora experience, exploring themes of cultural hybridity and identity negotiation. Digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok have provided opportunities for diaspora individuals to create and share content, contributing to cultural dialogue and representation. Collaboration between the Indian and diaspora entertainment industries have also grown, resulting in co-produced content and events that strengthen the connection between diaspora communities and Indian programming. These developments reflect a shift towards greater cultural exchange and recognition of diaspora voices in the media landscape (Ahuja, 2021).

The rapidly changing media landscape, driven by new technologies and platforms, has empowered Asian Indian immigrants to access Indian television programming conveniently through smartphones and on-demand streaming services. This personalized and on-the-go media consumption reinforces the significance of Indian programming in diaspora communities’ cultural experiences. The post-2014 period has witnessed diverse content, user-generated contributions, cultural exchange, and technological influence shaping the media landscape. This research illuminates the active participation of Asian Indian immigrants, who shape their own narratives and reinforce cultural identities. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and catering to evolving media preferences to foster meaningful connections with diverse diaspora audiences (Lobato & Sarkar, 2019).

The rise of social media platforms has significantly influenced the media consumption habits of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States, providing spaces for cultural engagement, content sharing, and community building. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable virtual communities where immigrants can celebrate their cultural heritage and connect with fellow community members. Additionally, the increased availability of video-on-demand services tailored to diaspora audiences, such as Eros Now, ZEE5, and Voot, offers a wide range of Indian programming, empowering immigrants to curate their own viewing experiences and access content aligned with their cultural preferences. These developments have transformed the way Asian Indian immigrants engage with and consume Indian media, fostering a sense of belonging and choice in their media experiences (Rohanifar, et al., 2022).

There has been an increased focus on representation and diversity in Indian television programming, catering to the experiences and perspectives of the diverse diaspora community. This inclusivity has brought greater visibility to underrepresented voices and validated the multicultural identities of Asian Indian immigrants across generations. In addition to traditional television and online platforms, podcasting has emerged as a popular medium for engaging with Indian content. Podcasts offer unique storytelling and discussion opportunities, allowing immigrants to explore topics related to their cultural heritage and deepen their connection to their roots. These developments reflect a conscious effort to
provide meaningful and diverse content that resonates with diaspora audiences, fostering a stronger bond between Asian Indian immigrants and Indian programming (Joseph, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the post-2014 era has brought significant advancements in the media landscape for Asian Indian immigrants in the United States. The younger generation within the diaspora, growing up in a digital age, has different media preferences and consumption behaviors, seeking content that reflects their unique cultural blend and global outlook. Social media platforms, video-on-demand services, and podcasting have provided new avenues for engagement and community building. The increased emphasis on representation and diversity in Indian programming has enriched the portrayal of diasporic experiences. Media organizations need to adapt and evolve to cater to the evolving tastes and preferences of this demographic, fostering a strong connection between the diaspora and their cultural roots (Chernobrov & Wilmers, 2020).

In the post-2014 era, digital content creators within the Asian Indian diaspora have emerged as influential figures, utilizing platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to bridge the gap between their immigrant experiences and Indian culture. Their content, ranging from cultural tutorials to personal narratives, resonates with diaspora audiences and reflects the complexities of living in a multicultural society. Traditional Indian programming now often explores the lives of diaspora individuals, fostering representation and understanding of diverse experiences. Live streaming platforms like Facebook Live and Instagram Live enable real-time interactions, connecting diaspora audiences with Indian celebrities and cultural events, fostering a sense of unity despite the geographical distance (Pathak & Singh, 2022).

Post-2014, political and social events in India have influenced the media consumption habits of Asian Indian immigrants, sparking interest in staying connected to news and discussions. Indian programming, including news channels and political commentary, serves as a means for immigrants to stay informed and engage in conversations about their homeland. The post-2014 era has witnessed the rise of digital platforms, content creators, and live streaming, providing avenues for engagement, representation, and community building within the diaspora. The intersection of traditional Indian programming and diaspora experiences, along with a focus on political and social events, has enhanced the relevance and impact of Indian media in the lives of Asian Indian immigrants, fostering a lasting connection to their cultural heritage (Gillespie, 2002).

Post-2014, there has been a greater recognition of regional diversity within the Indian diaspora, leading to an increased demand for regional language programming. Streaming services now offer a wide array of shows, movies, and music in languages like Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Bengali, catering to diverse linguistic backgrounds. The emphasis on diaspora cultural festivals has expanded to online platforms, enabling virtual engagement with Indian cultural traditions and providing a space for showcasing diaspora talent. The growth of digital media has empowered Asian Indian immigrants to actively contribute to the media landscape through content creation, challenging traditional narratives and broadening diaspora representation (Sahoo & Shome, 2020).

Post-2014, there has been a rise in collaborative efforts between the Indian entertainment industry and diaspora talent. This includes international shooting locations, collaborations with diaspora filmmakers and actors, and featuring overseas characters. This cross-cultural exchange enriches content and fosters pride and representation among Asian Indian immigrants. The post-2014 era has witnessed significant developments in media consumption and cultural experiences, including recognition of regional diversity, emphasis on cultural events, active diaspora participation in media creation, and collaborative efforts with the Indian entertainment industry. These developments empower Asian Indian immigrants to reconnect with their cultural heritage and contribute to diaspora representation (Siddiqui & Rawat, 2021).

IV. POST-2014 DIASPORA

The post-2014 developments in the media consumption habits and cultural experiences of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States:

1. Rise of Diaspora-Driven Media Platforms: In recent years, there has been an increase in the establishment of diaspora-driven media platforms that cater specifically to the Asian Indian immigrant community. These platforms, both digital and print, focus on providing content that reflects the unique experiences, interests, and concerns of the diaspora. They cover a wide range of topics including culture, lifestyle, immigration, and community news, fostering a sense of community and enabling immigrants to stay connected with their cultural roots.

2. Social Activism and Representation: The post-2014 era has witnessed a growing emphasis on social activism and representation within the media. Asian Indian immigrants, particularly the younger generation, have become increasingly vocal about issues of representation, diversity, and social justice. Through social media campaigns, discussions, and content creation, diaspora individuals are advocating for greater representation of their experiences and promoting inclusivity within the media landscape.

3. Podcasting and Audio Content: The popularity of podcasts has grown significantly in recent years, providing yet another avenue for Asian Indian immigrants to engage with Indian programming. Podcasts offer an intimate and convenient way to consume content, allowing immigrants to delve deeper into topics such as history, culture, literature,
and personal narratives. Many diaspora individuals have also taken up podcasting as a means to share their stories, provide educational content, and foster dialogue within the community.

4. Cultural Exchange and Collaborations: In the post-2014 era, there has been a notable increase in cultural exchange initiatives and collaborations between the Indian entertainment industry and diaspora talent. This has led to joint productions, cross-cultural collaborations, and talent exchanges that bridge the gap between India and the diaspora. Such collaborations not only enhance cultural understanding but also contribute to a sense of unity, fostering a shared cultural experience among Asian Indian immigrants globally.

5. Influencer Marketing and Brand Collaborations: The rise of social media influencers within the diaspora community has opened up new avenues for brand collaborations and marketing opportunities. Influencers with large followings engage with Indian programming, products, and cultural experiences, providing authentic reviews, recommendations, and insights to their audience. This influencer-driven content contributes to the media landscape by introducing new perspectives, promoting cultural products, and strengthening the connection between diaspora individuals and their heritage.

6. Niche and Independent Media: The post-2014 era has seen a surge in niche and independent media platforms that cater to specific interests and subcultures within the Asian Indian immigrant community. These platforms focus on areas such as art, fashion, food, music, and literature, allowing individuals to explore their passions and connect with like-minded individuals. Niche media outlets provide a space for diverse voices, fostering creativity, dialogue, and cultural exchange.

The post-2014 period has witnessed a myriad of developments in the media consumption habits and cultural experiences of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States. The rise of diaspora-driven media platforms, increased social activism, the popularity of podcasts, collaborations between the Indian entertainment industry and diaspora talent, influencer marketing, and the emergence of niche and independent media outlets have all contributed to a more diverse and vibrant media landscape for the diaspora community. By embracing and furthering these developments, media organizations, content creators, and the community at large can continue to foster a strong sense of cultural connection, representation, and engagement within the Asian Indian immigrant diaspora (Kaul & Menon, 2021).

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The media consumption habits and cultural experiences of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States have undergone significant transformations in the post-2014 era. The rise of digital platforms, the availability of diverse content, the influence of social media, and the emphasis on representation and cultural exchange have all contributed to a more dynamic and engaging media landscape for the diaspora community. Asian Indian immigrants have actively sought Indian programming to maintain their cultural connections, reinforce their social identities, and stay connected with their country of origin.

The research conducted on the viewership preferences and motivations of Asian Indian immigrants highlights the enduring appeal of Indian programming within the diaspora. It reveals that despite living in the United States for several decades, these immigrants actively select ethnic programming to satisfy their needs for cultural preservation, reaffirmation of identity, and staying informed about India. The findings shed light on the multi-dimensional role of media in shaping and maintaining diasporic identities, fostering a sense of belonging, and facilitating cultural exchange.

Based on the insights gained from this research, there are several policy recommendations that can enhance the media experiences and cultural connections of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States. Media organizations and policymakers should actively support and encourage cross-cultural collaborations between the Indian entertainment industry and diaspora talent. This can include establishing funding programs, cultural exchange initiatives, and facilitating partnerships that result in diverse and authentic storytelling that reflects the experiences of the diaspora community.

Policies should emphasize the importance of representation and diversity within the media landscape. Media organizations should be encouraged to develop content that reflects the diversity of the diaspora, including regional languages, diverse narratives, and stories that resonate with different generations within the community. Policymakers can provide resources and support for the development and growth of diaspora-driven media platforms. These platforms play a crucial role in providing content that addresses the specific interests and concerns of the Asian Indian immigrant community, fostering a sense of community, and enabling cultural exchange.

Policies should prioritize investments in digital infrastructure to ensure that Asian Indian immigrants have access to high-speed internet and digital platforms. This will enable them to fully engage with Indian programming, participate in cultural events, and contribute to online discussions and content creation. Policymakers should promote media literacy programs and educational initiatives that empower Asian Indian immigrants to critically engage with media content. This includes understanding the influence of media, recognizing stereotypes, and developing the skills to navigate and evaluate the vast array of media choices available.

Policies should encourage the creation and distribution of independent and niche media content that caters to specific interests and subcultures within the Asian Indian immigrant community. Supporting grassroots initiatives and
providing resources for content creators will foster a diverse and inclusive media landscape that reflects the multifaceted experiences of the diaspora. By implementing these policy recommendations, media organizations, policymakers, and community stakeholders can contribute to a media ecosystem that enriches the cultural experiences of Asian Indian immigrants, strengthens their connections to their heritage, and fosters a sense of belonging within the diaspora community.

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