

Effect of Crime Thriller Shows on Crime and Criminal Justice System: A Survey based Study

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Abstract

Crime Thriller Shows commonly accessed through Over-the-Top platforms (OTT) can depict sensationalized narratives of crime and justice. This study primarily explored the impact of these crime thriller shows on the perception of people about the crime and criminal justice system of India. As per Routine Activity Theory (RAT), regular exposure to crime thriller shows can be considered a routine activity and can motivate a person to commit a crime. Further, it was hypothesized that crime thrillers can have an impact on the emotional attitude of the viewer along with the fear of crime and victimization. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted amongst graduate students specializing in forensic science, legal studies, and psychology, all possessing knowledge and awareness of the criminal justice system and crime thrillers. The survey questionnaire included both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions regarding the impact of crime thriller shows. The results indicated a higher preference for documentaries among respondents, possibly due to their presentation of true stories and exploration of unfamiliar viewpoints. The respondents agreed on the exaggeration and sensationalization of crime in thriller shows. Additionally, the respondents admitted feeling anxious or fearful after watching crime thrillers. However, there was agreement that crime thrillers accurately portray real-life crimes and law enforcement, and they also contribute positively by raising awareness about the criminal justice system.

Keywords: Crime Thriller Shows, Criminal Justice System, Perception, Fear of crime, Victimization, Routine Activity Theory, moral panic theory, Cultivation theory.

1. Introduction

Crime thriller shows are TV shows or series that revolve around crime, suspense, and mystery. They often feature intense storylines, intense investigations, and thrilling plot twists. These shows typically focus on crimes like murder, robbery, sexual harassment, abduction, trafficking, or espionage and follow the efforts of detectives, investigators, or law enforcement agents to solve the cases. In previous times Television acted as the major primary source of access to watch these shows.

However, due to the continuous development of the digital world, Over-the-top platforms (OTT) replaced Televisions and gained the highest utilization. Due to the plethora of subscriptions and greater TRP rates, these applications also have large earnings. In crime thriller shows, we find a realm of paradox and contradiction. Crime thriller television series has become an essential component in modern entertainment, drawing viewers in with their gripping plots and endearing characters. These television programs have the power to influence viewers' opinions on crime and the criminal justice system, in addition to being just entertaining. Here, crime is portrayed not just as a crisis but also as a disruption, labelled as immoral, and even deemed evil. Criminals play a terrifying and paramount role in crime thriller shows[1]. Crime films have never been out of fashion and no such genre like crime shows exists till now[2]. Crime thriller shows are available in many mediums including literature, television, novels, and film[3]. The term thriller can refer to any narrative structured to maximize tension, suspense, and exciting action [4]. Globally, Netflix with over 231 million paid subscribers, offers binge-worthy original series, top IMDB films, and documentaries [5]. In India, Crime Thriller Shows are becoming the most popular and over-the-top (OTT) platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar, Jio T.V., and ALT Balaji are the most common means to assess these shows. In addition, OTT platforms are getting higher profits than television by way of subscription, users prefer OTT platforms over television because it is very compatible to use and have the freedom to watch of one's choice and some applications like Telegram provide free content to users for that reason, they are having high running time. Currently, Disney+Hotstar is at the top in streaming crime thriller shows in India. Concerning society, Crime films demonstrate social, economic, and political issues along with the perception of society about these issues. Furthermore, provides satisfaction to viewers by presenting that our society and criminal justice system salvageable despite their many failings. Rafter defines crime movies as a film that focus primarily on crime and its consequences [6]. Nothing makes a thriller more gripping than a twist that truly flips the narrative on its head and leaves viewers partially stunned. Crime thriller shows can be amusing, offer a way to escape reality, shed light on the criminal investigation, and foster critical thinking in viewers. Moreover, drawbacks to crime thriller shows include the tendency to reinforce prejudices, desensitize viewers to violence, raise irrational expectations for the legal system along intensify anxiety or terror. The concept of "Catharsis" by Greek Philosopher Aristotle states "Catharsis" is the term for the process of letting go of negative feelings through watching frightening or violent films. To put it further, they contribute to the "purging" of our violent feelings. Additionally, burns our anxieties and bad sentiments regarding the real scenario. The viewers get the ultimate satisfaction when the antagonist or murderer suffers [7]. Though occasionally movies have sparked far darker impulses, movies have also helped people find careers they love, causes they want to support, or just general characters they aspire to be like. A few instances of copycat crimes motivated by motion pictures have occurred recently [8]. At this point, no one can deny the great influence that films and TV productions have on our society. The lack of appropriate censorship for web series and over-the-top content in India has resulted in an abundance of criminal and pornographic scenes being shown in them, which is greatly influencing the youth of today. Numerous murders and crimes committed by people from all levels of society have been motivated by such content. Crime thriller shows are of broad categories as shown in **Figure 1**.

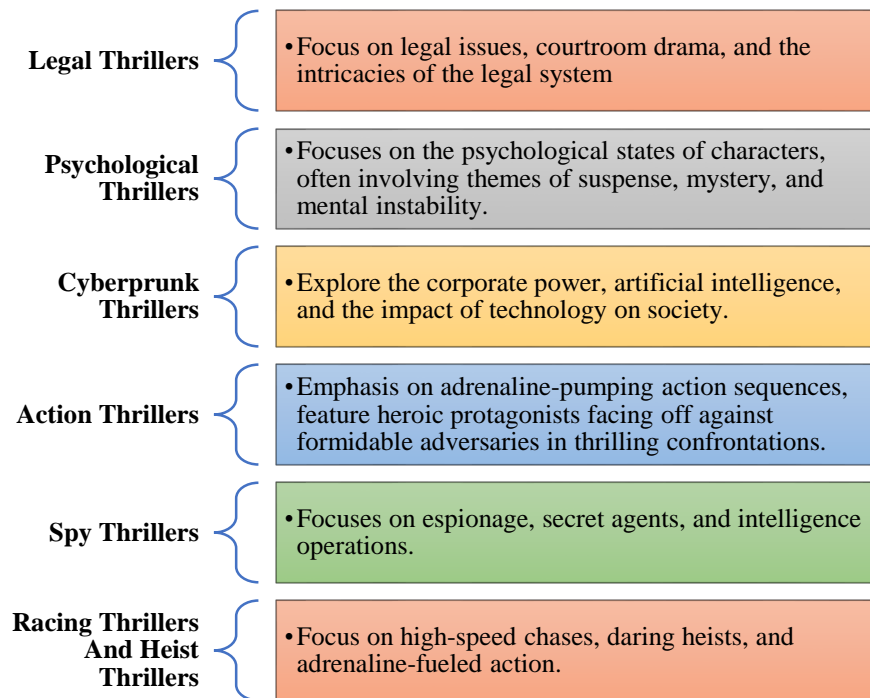


Figure 1. Depicting the Categories of Crime Thriller Shows

The relationship between fear and television is impacted by the content of crime shows and audience characteristics. Most importantly, the way that the TV and fear relationship is structured is heavily influenced by the perceived racial makeup of the neighbourhoods [9]. Media exposure and attention would predict, and partially mediate, the effects of various individual-difference variables on teen viewers of crime and emergency (e.g., medical drama) television shows on alcohol-related risk perceptions. The intrinsic nature of media use variables in influencing health-related attitudes and television narratives centered around emergencies and medical dramas may occasionally have incidental positive effects on attitudes related to health [10]. There is a link between crime films and society along with their direct effect on society, culture, law, and justice. We are influenced more by what we see than by what we read. There are several movies that have inspired criminals to commit crime. The film makers of crime related movies just present their creativeness of depicting real life crime stories but they are failed to glorify the evil in society, by seeing these movies young minds imitate the criminal behaviour [11]. The entertainment media plays a significant role in affecting the public perceptions towards force used by police, crime and criminal justice system. The police misbehaviour portrayed in crime dramas and exposure to these portrayals influences people's opinions of the police. It has been observed that people who watch crime dramas are inclined to think that the police are effective in reducing crime, that force is only used when required, and that wrongdoing rarely results in false confessions. On the other hand, opinions about how often force occurs remain unchanged [12]. Relating to Crime Shows on Contemporary Criminal Investigations in law enforcement agencies, crime shows have a greater influence on modern investigation and law enforcement. In general, further investigation is significantly required to fully understand the influence crime shows have had on modern policing [13].

Television crime shows also leads youth to learn about new crime techniques and insecure feeling about society. Most of the crime show plots were contrived to attract viewers' curiosity with violent and confrontational scenes which should be restricted in these kinds of shows [14]. The crime reality shows had a strong impact on young viewers, mainly watched on television by middle and upper-middle-class audiences, despite digital options like YouTube. These shows, centred on online crimes, murder mysteries, and violence, raised awareness about social problems but also promoted criminal notions. While they increased alertness, the research stressed the importance of less overdramatized content. Additionally, on-screen portrayals of law enforcement correlated negatively with real-life situations, indicating rising crime rates and heightened fear of victimization in society[15]. The crime dramas majorly influence perception of crime. It was predicted that viewers become less fearful of crime and criminals and more faith in the ability of the criminal justice system to apprehend offenders due to the quantity and variety of crime dramas they watch. The people who like crime dramas do believe more in the criminal justice system in the United States [16]. Criminals are being inspired to commit crimes by new ideas and methods they see on crime shows. It was also discovered, though, that those with a Negative Mentality are not more likely to choose up new skills from these crime reenactment programs [17]. The concept of social learning theory by Psychologist, Albert Bandura states that social behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. Psychologist B.F. Skinner, also focused on influence on behaviourism. While behavioural psychology focuses on how the environment and reinforcement affect behaviour [26]. The way that crime show consumption affects people's behaviours and perceptions of crime and criminal activity helps us understand the application of Routine Activity Theory to crime thrillers. According to the criminological theory known as RAT, three things need to come together for a crime to be committed: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the lack of a capable guardian. Criminal activity may be explained by the connections between these patterns. It also underlines how crucial daily activities and routines are in determining the likelihood of criminal incidents [29].

The representation of women in Indian crime web series, the media has always idealized women and perpetuated stereotypes about them through its content [18]. To investigate the relationship between crime-show awareness (CSA) and crime-show impact (CSI) as well as CSI and crime-show novelty (CSN), the negative impact of CSA on CSI, and the role that crime-show impact plays as a mediator between CSA and CSI. Significant predictive relationships between CSA and CSI and between CSI and CSN. Moreover, the development of psychosocial intervention plans may lead to the reduction of negative impacts of crime shows [19]. Crime-based reality programmes helps to foster positive perceptions of police professionals. Additionally, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that young women frequently fear becoming victims [20]. Crime web series in India use violence and sexual content for its promotion. Additionally, these promotional videos (trailers) of the crime show aids viewers to take decisions to watch them. The trailers for web series with a criminal theme have a big impact. The dramatic and fascinating teasers for these shows attract viewers. Men exhibit more preferences than women for crime-based web series, which also depicts a gender preference gap [21].

The current study aimed at understanding and analyzing the impact of crime thriller shows on emotions and attitude. Secondly, to assess the impact on personal safety and concern and at last, to analyze perception of viewers on criminal justice system and about crimes in India and real-world criminal cases.

2. Material and Methodology

A detailed review was conducted of various OTT platforms, to understand the prevalence of crime thriller shows in India. Then a questionnaire was designed with a combination of Likert scale-based closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire included questions related to impact of crime thriller shows on emotions of people, their perception of crime, and the criminal justice system in India. A purposive random sampling technique was followed, which means participants having knowledge and awareness of the criminal justice system and crime thrillers were selected for the survey. A total of 60 students of forensic science, legal studies, and psychology branch from Chandigarh University (Punjab, India) participated in the survey. The survey form was circulated among students of each branch to gather information. The consent was obtained from all the participants indicating that their participation would be voluntary and that all answers would be kept confidential. All information will be anonymized to preserve privacy, and answers won't be shared with third parties. The demographic information in **Table 1.** showed that most of the participants were from the age group 18-24 years, that is, 57 (95%) followed by the age group 25-34 years, that is, 3(5%). Descriptive analysis and percentages are used to analyze the responses from the survey. Tables and charts are used to visually interpret the data.

Table-1 illustrating the demographic information of survey participants

S.No.	Demographic information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender		
	Male	30	50%
	Female	30	50%
	Prefer not to say	0	0
	Other (please specify)	0	0
2.	Highest level of education		
	Bachelor's degree	42	70%
	Master's degree	16	27%
	Doctorate or professional degree	2	3%

3.	Family income status		
	Less than 1 lac	5	36%
	1-3 lac per annum	7	9%
	4-6 lac per annum	10	12%
	7-9 lac per annum	3	17%
	10 lac or above	12	5%
	Prefer not to disclose	21	21%
4.	Residential area		
	Rural	6	10%
	Urban	38	63%
	Semi-urban	16	27%
	Specify area	0	0%
5.	Any prior knowledge about effects of crime thriller shows		
	Yes	47	78%
	No	12	22%

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Media Consumption

Figure 2 depicts that majority of respondents, that is, 73% access crime thriller shows through OTT platforms, 15% of respondents access through YouTube whereas 8 % access through other sources such as telegram and minority of respondents, that is, 3 % access through crime thriller through cable television. This finding shows the dominance of OTT platforms in delivering crime thriller content. Also, it reflects the contemporary trend in media consumption where online streaming services are increasingly preferred over traditional television. One possible explanation for why OTT platforms are more popular with consumers is that they allow them to watch their favourite movies and TV series at home. This is especially tempting to people who prefer not to deal with the inconvenience of long waits, expensive tickets, and crowded theatres. Moreover, a wide variety of content is offered by OTT platforms, meeting the needs of a varied audience. Many times, traditional cable or satellite TV channels do not offer their original content. Although many platforms offer dubbing and subtitles to reach a worldwide audience, the content is also more accessible to viewers [22].

3.2. Time consumed by respondents watching crime thriller shows

Figure 3 depicts the time consumed by respondents watching crime thriller shows, by observing the data one can find out that 49% of respondents watch crime thriller shows very rarely, 23% of respondents watch on a monthly basis therefore 20% of respondents watch every week and 5% watch daily, rest of 3 % never watch crime thriller shows. According to these findings, 97% of people watch crime thriller television, of which only 5% watch every day. This could be due to addiction, as the remaining population finds crime television to be of little interest and only watches it very infrequently.

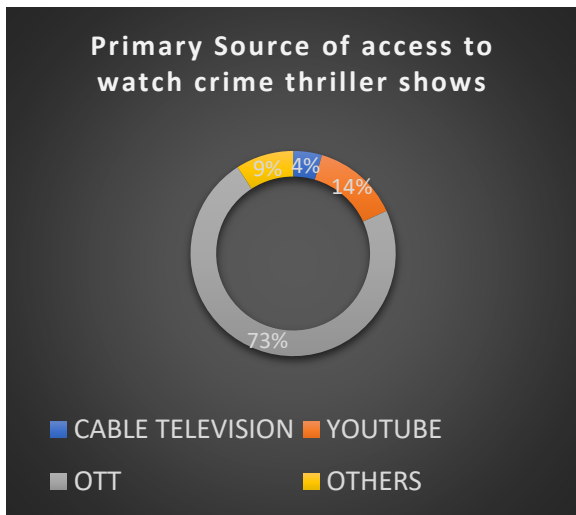


Figure 2

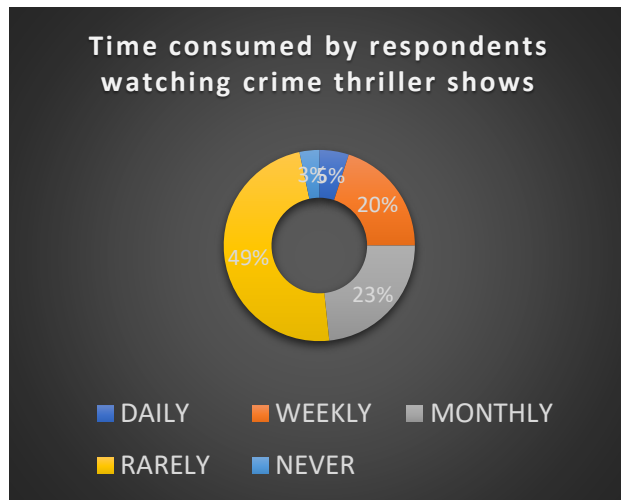


Figure 3

3.3.Highly preferred shows by viewers

Figure 4 depicts that shows which are highly preferred by viewers to be streamed, by analysis we can figure out that 23% of respondents highly prefers to watch documentary shows, 17% of respondents prefer to watch psychological thrillers, 16% of respondents prefers to watch shows full of mysteries and 12% of respondents prefer to watch detective fiction whereas 9 % of respondents watch political crimes shows and 8 % of respondents watch legal dramas and 7% of respondents watch online crime and 4% watch police procedural shows and 2% watch shows containing action filled with violence and other shows. The results showed that a greater proportion of people enjoy watching documentaries. The cause of this may be Documentaries frequently share true stories and provide light on viewpoints and experiences that the general public may not be familiar with. Watching documentaries can help people keeping up to date on social issues, current affairs, and other crucial subjects. Psychological thrillers, mystery-thriller series, and detective fiction are the second most popular television genres.

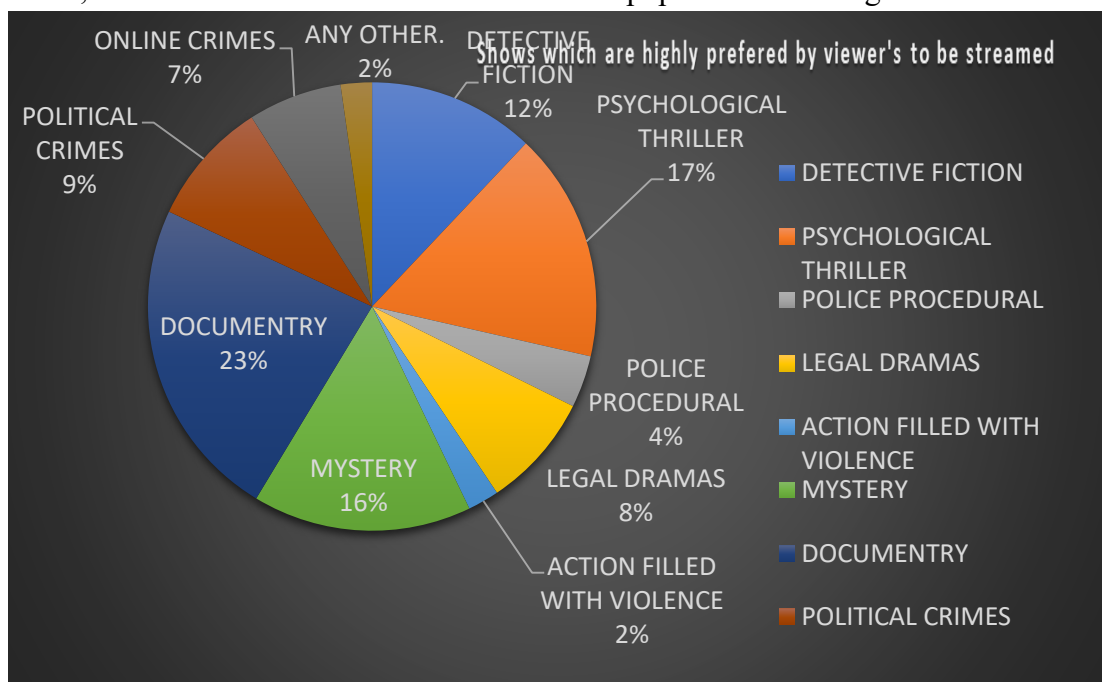


FIGURE 4

3.4. Exaggeration or sensationalization of crime and criminal behaviour by crime thriller shows

Figure 5 depict that 49% of respondents were agree about Exaggeration or sensationalization of crime and criminal behaviour by crime thriller shows, 38% were had neutral response whereas 10% strongly agree, 3% of population were disagree with the statement. A previous study also revealed that print, online, and television media all have a significant impact on the public's perceptions and understanding of crime by disseminating the idea that crime poses an excessive threat to society. Sensationalist media coverage like these fosters moral panic or outrage directed towards demographics like youth or racial minorities [23] . People may therefore imagine themselves as possible victims in these circumstances. Media outlets frequently exploit the information to incite fear in the public and hardly ever investigate the underlying causes of crime, such as socioeconomic factors [24]. Police officers are often portrayed in media as courageous law enforcement officials who bravely combat crime daily at considerable personal threat. This is in sharp contrast to the main responsibilities of police officers, who are more likely to patrol and establish relationships with the community than to actively enforce the law. The "CSI effect," which results from the show's exaggerated portrayal of the police's use of forensics in investigations, is another tendency of these dramas to exaggerate what law enforcement can and will do on their duties, raising public expectations. These crime dramas blur the lines between fact and fiction even more by claiming to be "based on a true story"[25]. A thorough comparison of the current study's findings with earlier research demonstrates how crime thriller shows sensationalize and exaggerate crimes and criminal behaviour.

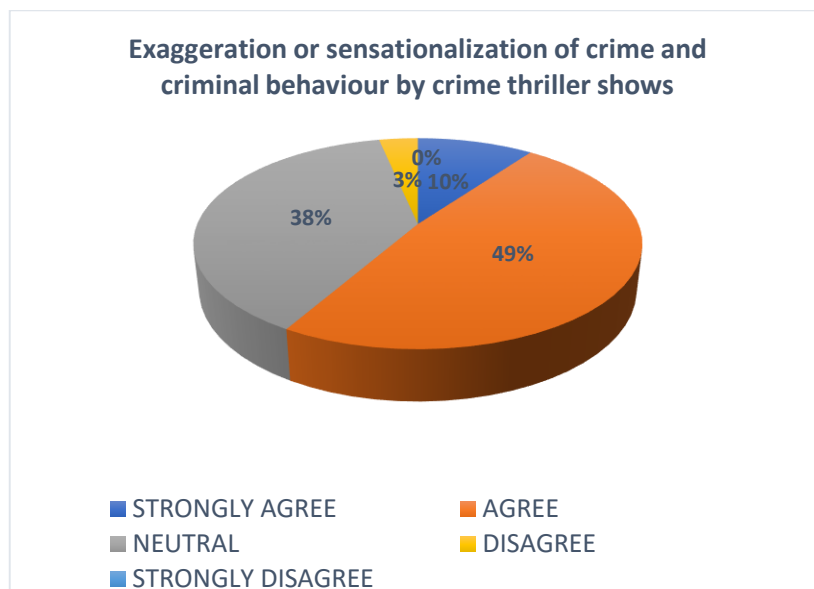


Figure-5

3.5. Impact on Emotions and Attitude of Respondents

Our study revealed that majority of respondents sometimes feel anxious or fearful, after watching crime thriller shows. This highlights the significant impact these shows have on viewers' emotions. A previous study also identifies that these programs can install fear in the vulnerable and sensitive minds and harm their psyche [15].

The findings align with past research indicating that intense content, like crime thrillers, can evoke strong emotional reactions. The study also shows that at least 57% of respondents have some kinds of raising of criminal thoughts into mind after watching crime thriller shows This revealed the major drawback of watching crime thrillers which needs to be restrained soon, as criminal thoughts can be changed into criminal act. These criminal thoughts and ideas might be due to psychological impact like frustration, anxiety, jealousy, revenge or for self-satisfaction.

Figure 6 depicts that 81% of respondents have a positive response that watching crime thrillers gives them pleasure and satisfaction. Here the concept of “**Catharsis**” by Greek Philosopher **Aristotle** can be applied. Majority of respondents shown positive attitude towards unsafe feeling while interacting with strangers and feeling of insecurity and high risk on going outside from home. The factor behind this can be the raising of irrational thought and fear in mind towards society. According to **G. Gerbner's cultivation theory**, the television viewers who watch television frequently are more sensitive to media messages and are more likely to accept them as true and legitimate. Additionally, the viewers who consume large amounts of violent content are more likely to develop the **Mean World Syndrome**, which is the idea that the world is more unsafe and terrible than it really is [15].

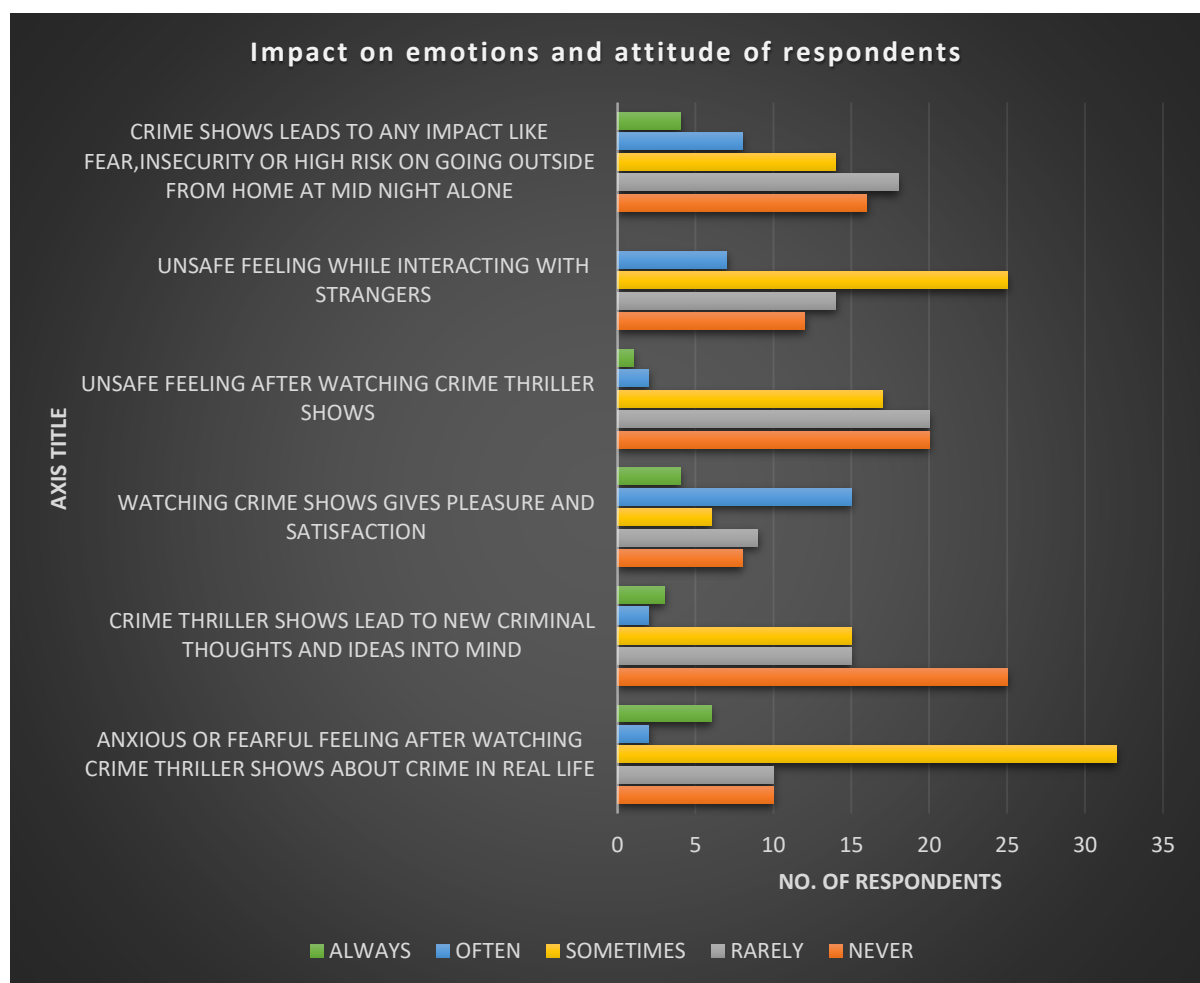


Figure-6

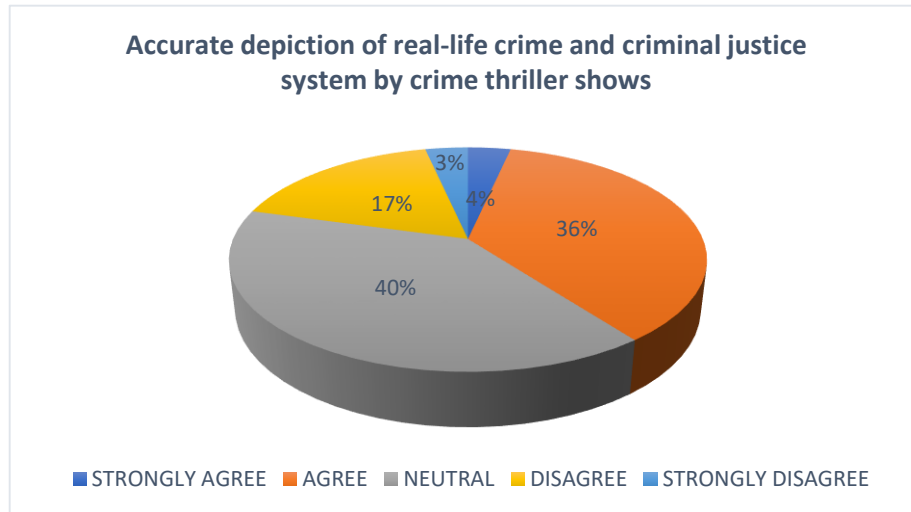


Figure-7

3.6.Perception of Criminal Justice System

According to **Figure 7**, 80% of the respondents agreed that real-life crime and law enforcement practices are being accurately portrayed. It reveals how much viewers believe in crime thriller shows. **Figure 8**, depicts that majority of 54% respondents have balanced response, 31% of perceives that crime thriller show enhance knowledge regarding law and proceedings, 10% believe that crime thriller shows enhance the moral of people, 5% believes that crime shows enhance faith in law and order. The research demonstrates the positive aspects of the criminal justice system as they are portrayed in crime dramas.

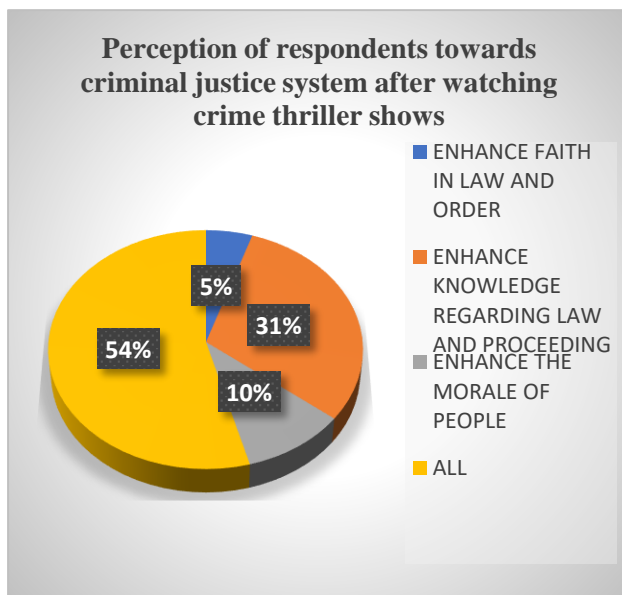


Figure-8

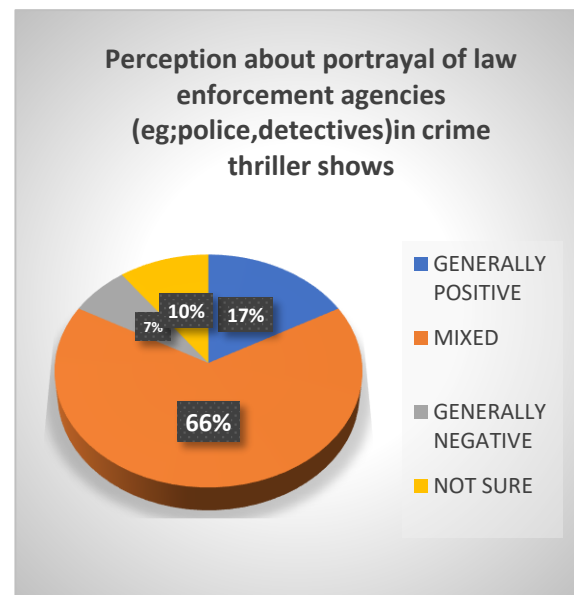


Figure-9

Figure 9, depicts that majority of 66% of respondents had mixed, that is, positive and negative perception about portrayal of law enforcement agencies (e.g.: - police, detective) in crime thriller shows. **Figure 10**, shows that the statement that the challenges of ethical dilemmas faced by law enforcement officers are accurately represented is supported by 34% of respondents, 46% of respondents who gave a neutral response, and 3% of respondents who strongly agreed. **Figure 11**, shows that after talking and debating crime and justice issues with friends, family, or on social media about crime thriller shows, 59% of respondents' opinions were somewhat influenced, 24% were not influenced, 14% thought the question was irrelevant, and 3% were strongly influenced.

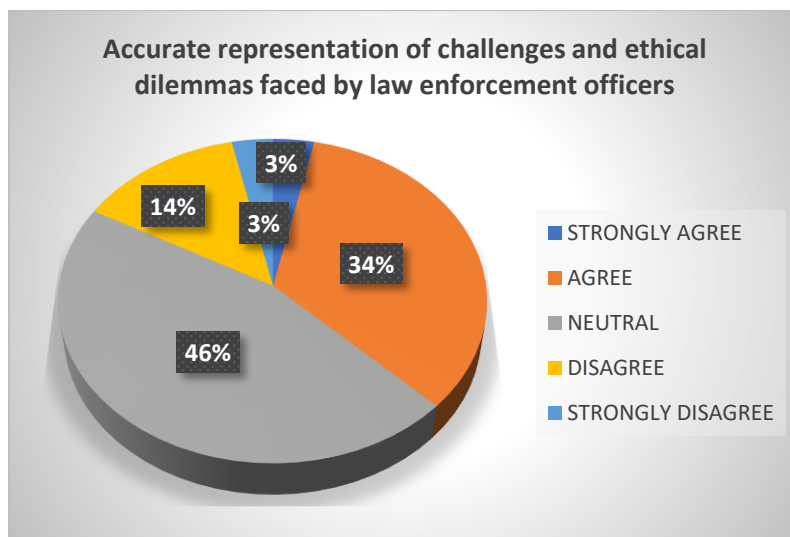


Figure-10

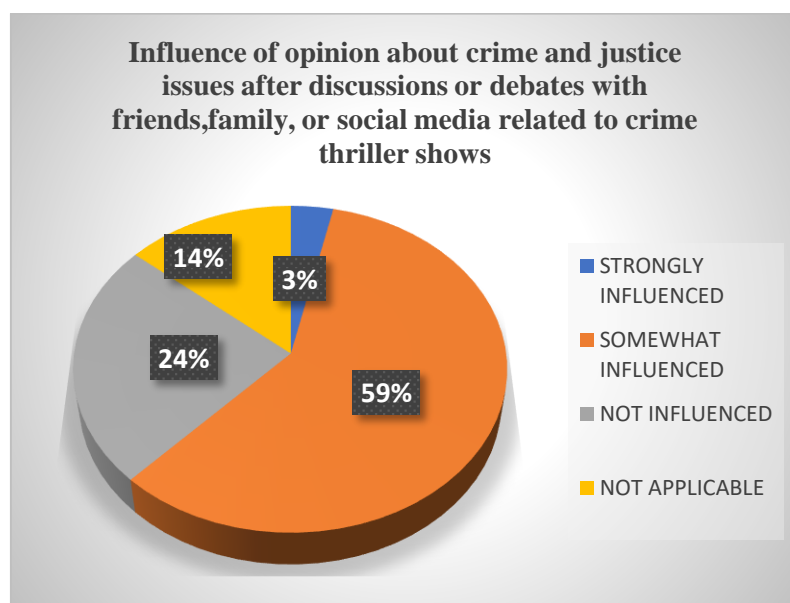


Figure-11

3.7.Perceptions of Respondents about Real-World Criminal Cases

Since there are many crimes in India, there should be strict laws or measures against it. For the sake of justice, criminals are punished with torture or other cruelties. crime and the law coexist, existing in parallel systems. However, we can lower the rate of black crime by educating people. Even so, white collar crime is also committed by educated people. India's criminal justice system needs to be thoroughly studied and scrutinized. Nobody is a criminal by birth; instead, people's behavior is shaped by the social and personal systems in their environments. A family would only be able to live better if the government could supply the resources they require. Additionally, respondents stated that criminal shows have no effect on crime in India. However, to give one a better understanding of crime in India, these media outlets entertainingly present these actual criminal cases. Respondents also mentioned that crime thrillers that are available on streaming services or as web series are very effective because they educate us about the different kinds of crimes, how to solve them, the roles played by the police and other defense forces, the court system, and the laws and regulations about crime. A small percentage of respondents stated that crime thrillers influence, motivate, or inspire people to commit crimes. Respondents believe that the various etiological factors behind crimes in India can be overpopulation, corrupt powerful individuals or groups encouraging crime and criminal activity as a means of achieving their own goals by taking advantage of the weaker segments of society, unemployment, and poverty, to meet the country's economic needs through the exchange of money, assets, or capita, Ineffective laws, Pride, retaliation, and mental instability.

It is often believed in films that law enforcement and the police perform subpar work, it is the case that they mishandle cases and offenders. In our nation, the laws are sufficient to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. We are not putting them into practice correctly. Just as the justice system is portrayed in crime thriller television series, the real world also provides justice to victim as soon as possible. Law enforcement agencies also increase in number. As per the respondents, it takes a lot of time and money for the country court's legal firms to resolve a single case. In India, it is imperative to enhance and expedite the judicial authority. Indian law enforcement agencies are very different from those we see in dramas and television shows. Police complaints won't be given much thought or attention. Like how most complaints of sexual harassment go unanswered and are only disclosed in the event of a particularly severe rape among all rapes. If state law enforcement agencies nationwide fail to take decisive action against repeat offenders, criminal activity in India will persist. Respondents expressed that, rather than concentrating on the criminal trial and acquittal, there is considerable room for improvement in the criminal investigation process. Respondents suggested that, we must educate, care for, and show love to the offender to reform or rehabilitate them. In addition, certain crimes, such as physical and sexual assault, ought to be prosecuted with the same Vigor as acts of terrorism, rather than merely being subject to a fine or bond.

4. Conclusion and further suggestions

The study has proven that OTT platforms become the primary source of access to crime thriller shows, and YouTube is the second source to access these shows. 95% of respondents agreed that they watch crime thriller shows. Crime thrillers also have a tremendous impact on the emotions and attitudes of the younger generation, due to which fear towards society and interacting with strangers also builds up. These shows also lead to irrational thoughts and criminal ideas in the mind. The psychological impact can be seen among viewers in terms of fear and anxiety. The results indicate that people's emotions and attitudes are significantly impacted by crime thriller television. Most viewers experience anxiety and fear after watching crime thriller shows. Stanley Cohen's moral panic theory also suggested that the media, even in the simple act of broadcasting news, has a significant influence in fostering moral panic in society. Cohen believes that the media sensationalizes or overreacts to behaviours that break social norms [28]. Therefore, the way it is portrayed in the media may cause individuals to observe and adopt the behavior based on the illustration they see. The media's portrayal of a moral panic encourages more inappropriate behavior. Previous studies have also discovered that crime thrillers elicit the same kinds of reactions in susceptible and delicate minds. It demonstrates the psychological impact of crime thrillers on people. Therefore, research indicates that crime thriller shows may negatively affect viewers' attitudes and feelings. As a result of watching crime thrillers, the majority of respondents felt uncomfortable interacting with strangers. The respondents acknowledge their fear of society and their illogical thoughts. After watching crime thrillers, a greater number of viewers report feeling pleased and satisfied, but some respondents report having criminal thoughts in mind. This demonstrates how crime thriller shows negatively affect viewers' concerns and feelings of personal safety. In regards to the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies, the study concluded that crime thriller television has a beneficial effect on the criminal justice system and law enforcement. Both knowledge and confidence in the criminal justice system are increased by these programs. According to the study, law enforcement officers have a positive attitude toward accurately representing the difficulties and moral dilemmas they face in their work. The study found that crime thriller shows accurately depict real-life crimes and law enforcement. The survey respondents concurred that crime thrillers raise morale and provide information about the criminal justice system. The respondents also acknowledge that discussions and debates with others have an impact on their opinions regarding matters of justice and crime. The results showed that crime thrillers have positive impact on law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. The viewers place significant importance on the portrayal of crime thriller shows, with a particular emphasis on the realism of law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. It was further suggested that the portrayal of law enforcement agencies as well as the criminal justice system should be realistic in crime thriller shows.

The future perspectives indicate a potential for conducting survey with larger sample sizes. Alongside additional techniques, such as, interviews can be employed for data gathering. Furthermore, expanding the participant pool from diverse backgrounds may offer the opportunity to capture a range of perspectives.

Contribution to Discipline

Primarily through encouraging theoretical development, the study offers insightful information to a variety of fields. It examined how crime shows and the media affected viewers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour about crime and the justice system, as well as how viewers perceived law enforcement and crime. Additionally, the study looked into how watching crime thriller television affected viewers' anxiety levels, their fear of crime, their sense of personal safety, and in some cases, the tendency to commit crimes. In addition, the research identified the different causative elements of criminal conduct and the ways in which these elements could be mitigated. The primary goal of this survey study was to find out if viewers' opinions of crime and the criminal justice system were genuinely affected by crime thriller television series. Research on victimology theories was also advanced by the study. Furthermore, the study has improved understanding of numerous victimology theories.

Ethical Consideration

Consent was obtained based on the facts that participation is fully voluntary and that all answers will be kept confidential. All information will be anonymized to preserve privacy, and answers won't be shared with third parties. Survey participants were free to leave the survey at any moment without penalty, and they had the freedom to skip any questions they wish not to answer.

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