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Why Hindi TV is failing to create iconic new characters



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Article Content:

Hindi general entertainment channels (GECs) are struggling to strike a chord with viewers, as new protagonists in fiction shows fail to create any meaningful connect, resulting in low viewership and often, quick takedown from air.

With most new characters falling flat, broadcasters are increasingly reliant on legacy stars from long-running shows to drive viewership. Media experts attribute this to outdated writing, overdone plots and a widening disconnect between on-screen narratives and today's audiences.

Declining debut impact

According to media consulting firm Ormax, the number of new fiction characters entering the monthly top 10 popularity list has been steadily falling since 2016—and hit an all-time low in 2024.

Meanwhile, legacy characters like Daya from *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*, who hasn't appeared since 2017, still dominate the charts, thanks to re-runs.

Older shows such as *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* continue to deliver familiar faces that audiences have built long-term emotional ties with, making it harder for newer shows to break through.

Shrinking relevance

"There is a growing disconnect between on-screen narratives and viewers' lived experiences. With over 70% of urban homes now nuclear, the traditional joint-family melodrama feels increasingly out of sync," said Surabhi Saxena, associate VP—strategy, media, Dentsu India.

Saxena said the hyper-glamourised world of many GECs feels emotionally unrelatable, and lacking authenticity, hurting engagement.

She noted that nearly 75% of new Hindi GEC shows launched between January and March 2024 failed to

make any significant impact, largely due to their weak protagonists and derivative plots.

"In the race to extend TRPs, many Hindi GECs fall into the trap of overextending plotlines, compromising both character integrity and narrative logic. The trade-off between quantity and quality is now more visible than ever – and audiences are voting with their remotes," Saxena pointed out.

Many GECs have adopted a factory-like production model, which experts say is now hurting creativity and consistency.

"We're seeing repetitive, unoriginal stories, flat characters, and gimmicks to fill time," said Navin Kathuria, EVP – media planning and buying, Mudramax. He added that content quality is frequently undermined by TRP-chasing rewrites and hasty production decisions.

More than just weak characters

While poor character connect is a clear issue, it's also a symptom of a deeper shift.

"Main characters failing to click is a result of structural changes in how content is consumed today," said Sandeep Gupta, COO–broadcasting business, Shemaroo Entertainment Ltd. Viewers now expect quicker pacing, fresh stories and multidimensional protagonists—and GECs aren't keeping up.

Earlier, networks allowed time for characters to grow on audiences, but tight budgets and fierce ratings pressure often result in shows being pulled before they find their voice.

"...while lack of character connect does contribute to viewership challenges, it is deeply linked to broader industry dynamics including reduced risk appetite, the need for immediate ratings, and the changing preferences of audiences in a digital-first world," Gupta pointed out.

The TV–OTT double bind

Today's GEC content needs to work across both TV and OTT platforms.

"The same show now reaches different audiences—some watching on TV with families, others binge-watching on a phone," said Munish Vaid, VP, Primus Partners. He suggested broadcasters consider building multi-format story universes, with TV as the core and digital-first spinoffs or parallel arcs tailored for younger audiences.

A JioStar spokesperson said while content consumption has become fragmented, the answer is sharper storytelling.

"India is an 'AND' market, not an 'OR' one. The loyal audiences of our shows watch across TV and JioHotstar," the person said.

JioStar is continuously investing in research to stay attuned to changing audience aspirations, enabling it to craft narratives that are both emotionally resonant and culturally relevant, the person said.

Producer Goldie Behl said visual and narrative sameness is another challenge. "Flip from one show to another, and they almost all look the same," he said.

Post-pandemic viewers are more exposed and expect realism over fantasy. Creators must find their unique voice and break the cookie-cutter approach that has plagued Hindi GECs for years, he added.