The Psychological Impact of Western Web Series on India High-Schoolers

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the depth of the influence of western web series on young impressionable minds of school-going teenagers. These teenagers are studying in both residential and non-residential schools, in tier 1 and tier 2 cities. The feedback that was received was encouraging enough to indicate that drugs, alcohol, smoking, and violence were not what they wanted to replicate, but they were enamoured by the education system as well as the academic life that students in these series depicted. This was a source of attraction for Indian high schoolers to the extent that it did make them consider pursuing these countries for higher education. The next step of my study would be to extend the survey to a wider reach of students in different cities in rural and urban areas.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Considering the widespread mushrooming of private English-speaking schools in India, teenagers are very familiar with watching western-made series. This has been aided by inexpensive access to various media screening platforms. The two together have resulted in easier availability of an array of various genres of web series. The attempt in this paper would be to analyze the impact of such easy availability of web series on a teenager's mindset. Primary data that has been collected would be critically analyzed to indicate the direction that teenagers in English-speaking private schools are moving towards.

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen an explosion in the spread of the internet throughout the country. Over the years, there has been in India both the availability of cheap android phones as well as cheap internet accessibility. The spread of both has been very widespread and has resulted in remote areas of India having access to such facilities.

The issue that arises is that there is no available method to filter the type of content that is screened. All stakeholders, e.g.: parents, teachers, and higher administration officials, would like to filter the content depending on the age of the viewer.

The only method to restrict such viewing is to ensure that the student does not have access to mobile phones. In residential schools, the authorities have restricted the time- period in which accessibility is allowed whether the phone or the laptop. In non-residential schools/day-boarding schools, authorities try their best to implement their stringent instructions concerning access to mobile phones for both parents and students, but they have been partially successful.

The impending issue that arises is that for the safety of their children and to be in touch with them, parents feel the need to provide mobile/cell phones to their wards. The question that arises is whether these instruments are used more for other reasons than just 'being in touch', with their parents.

Keeping this in mind, a primary study was conducted to analyze the impact of various genres of western web series on the mindset of an Indian young adult. With globalization and liberalization of the Indian economy since the 1990s, western influence has increased over time in all spheres of life. The influence is so apparent that even

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the way teenagers dress, talk, eat, or 'hang out' is quite like their western counterparts. In the age of instant connectivity, any event -political, economic, social or entertainment- is immediately screened on various social media platforms and television.

The advancement of Instagram, Facebook, etc. screen teasers and promos of episodes of various western web series, thus, increasing interest and hence, viewership. There is an economic reason for doing so, as the greater the viewership, the greater the advertisement revenue and the greater the profitability.

What is also becoming extremely relevant is the changing pattern of viewing various series in the comfort of your home rather than trying to watch them on a screen. This is cheaper for the producer and consumer, leading to a win-win situation for both.

The most popular web series providers are:
- Netflix
- Amazon Prime
- Disney + Hotstar

They are all foreign service providers which are available worldwide and have penetrated the Indian entertainment industry. The major share of the above providers is owned by foreign investors. It is extremely relevant that they screen several series throughout the world as soon as they are launched.

The receptiveness of such series increases their numbers as the audience readily accepts them. In the Indian scenario, with English being the major medium of instruction, the availability of such series showcases the type of sociological behaviour, way of living, in school or at home, as well as different types of entertainment.
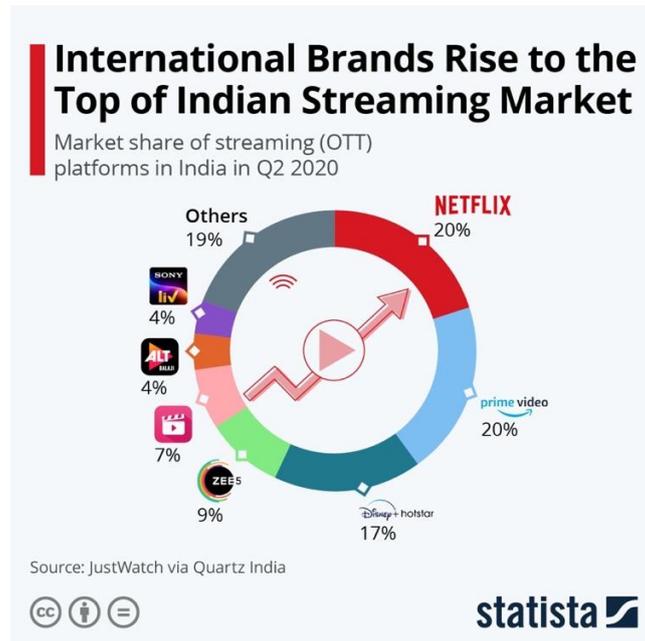
Figure 1: Logos of some service providers
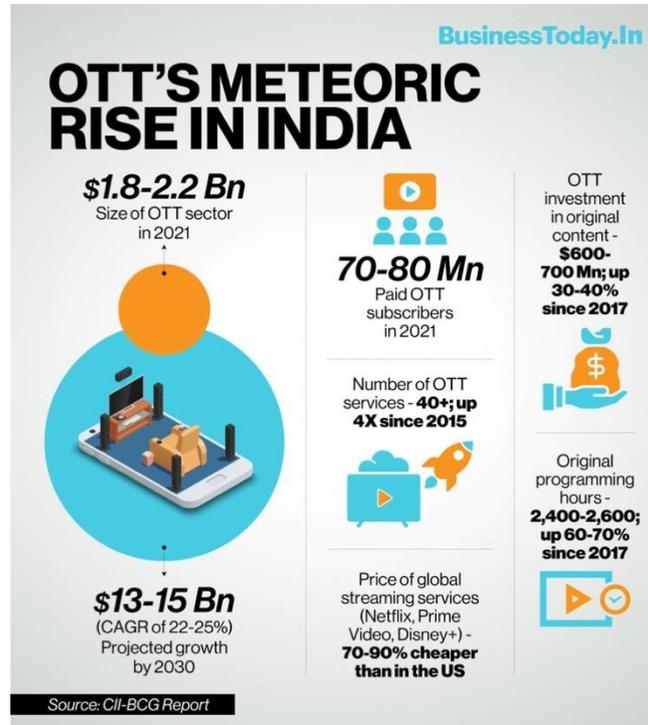

Source: Google Images

OTT's (OVER THE TOP) RISE IN INDIA:

Figure 2: Increasing viewership in India of the above providers
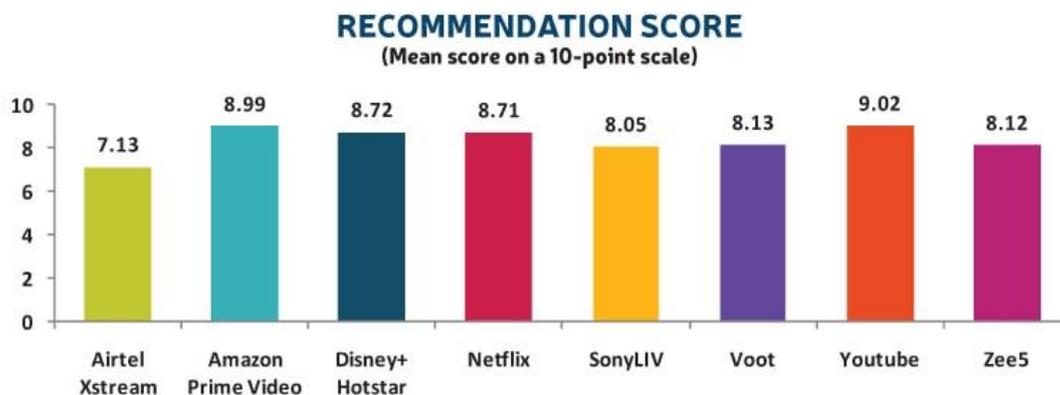

Source: Statista

Figure 3: Increasing revenue of OTT platforms

Source: Business Today

As indicated in the above diagrams, there has been a phenomenal increase in the viewership of OTT platforms. This is an indication that there are many young adults spending hours watching their favourite genres.
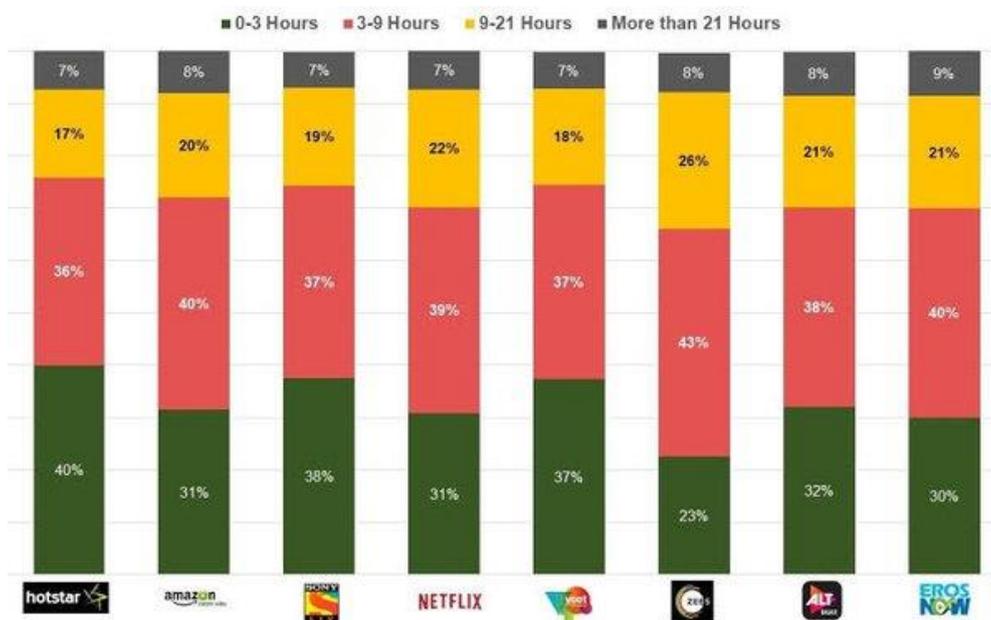
Figure 4: India's top OTT platforms

Source: Voice & Data

The figure above indicates the most watched OTT platforms in India, and as one can see in the figure, there is a large emphasis on YouTube, Amazon Prime Videos, Disney + Hotstar and Netflix. This data points towards a greater percentage of foreign-screened platforms that showcase foreign serials.

YouTube has a huge viewership too; this is likely to include Indian language content. As foreign platforms' popularity and revenues have increased, they have ventured into Indian language series too.

Figure 5: Number of hours spent on various OTT platforms

Source: BrandEquity

Figure 5 indicates the number of hours of viewing various OTT platforms indicating the level of popularity and the extent of revenue that could be directed by various companies towards popular shows and serials. OTT is now a serious competitor to films and various reality shows that are screened on television and movie screens. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the popularity of OTT platforms. It is thus important to analyze its impact on young adults.

ANALYSIS OF POPULAR WEB SERIES BY TEENAGERS IN PRIVATE ENGLISH-SPEAKING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

A study was conducted by sending questionnaires via google forms to various schools in India. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in the appendix. The primary aim was to understand the impact of such increased viewership with special reference to western web series on the mindset of young adults.
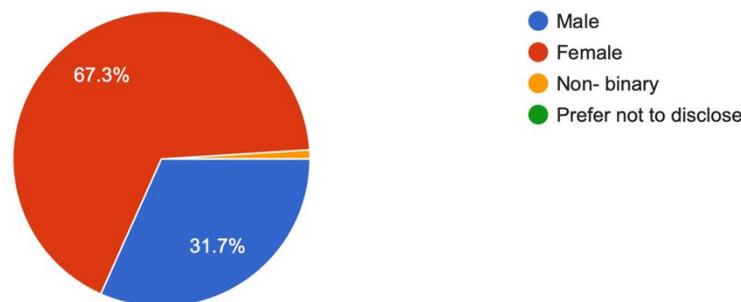
The targeted recipients were from private English-speaking educational institutions, both in Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities of India.

Responses received according to the sex of the young adults

Figure 6: Sex of the respondents
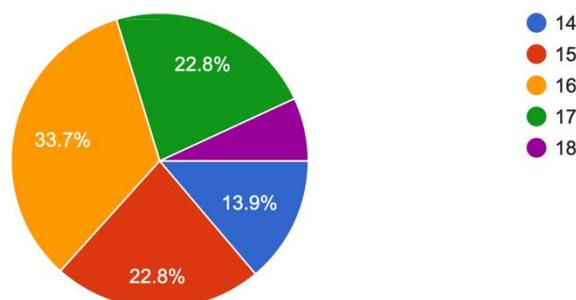

Source: Own Source

The responses indicate that a higher number of females answered the questionnaire vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

Responses received concerning the age of the young adults.

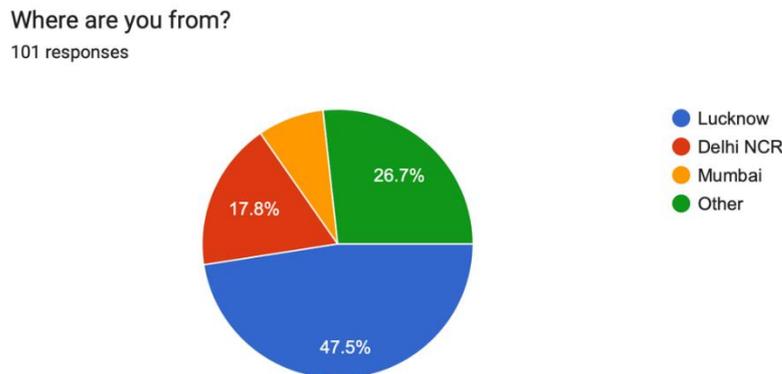**Figure 7: Age of the respondents**

Source: Own Source

The age group that responded to the questionnaire largely fell in the 16 years bracket. Fifteen- and seventeen-years responses were a fairly large number as well.

Figure indicating responses according to the Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.

Figure 8: Responses concerning the cities

Source: Own Source

A specific question regarding the place of residence was added to the questionnaire to understand the impact of different cities on viewership. The two metropolitan cities, Delhi/NCR and Mumbai, indicate a percentage of 44.5% while a Tier-2 city, like Lucknow, has indicated a response of 47.5%.

This percentage shows almost an equal number of respondents from both sets of cities. It was important to make this differentiation to understand the fact that metropolitan cities are assumed to be more progressive and adventurous than their Tier-2 counterparts.

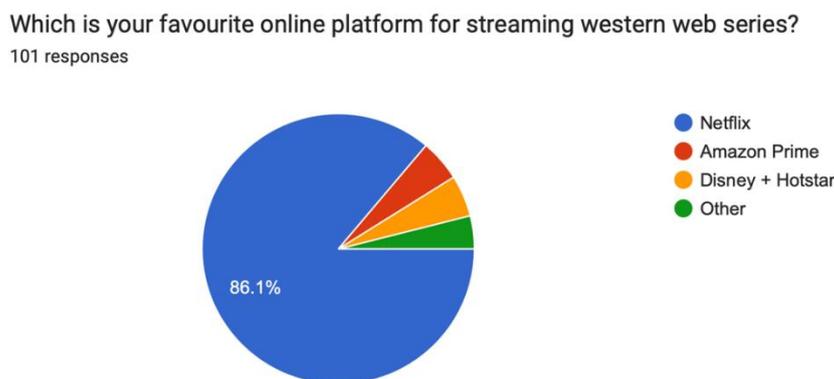This study wanted to understand whether the statement is a myth or a reality.

EFFECT OF THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN WEB SERIES ON THEIR BEHAVIOUR

To understand the impact of western web series on high schoolers, various questions were asked in the questionnaire to try and get an accurate indication of its impact. The questions that were put to the respondents were:

- 'Which is your favourite online platform for streaming western web series?

   The sample indicated that many teenagers watched Netflix (86.1%).

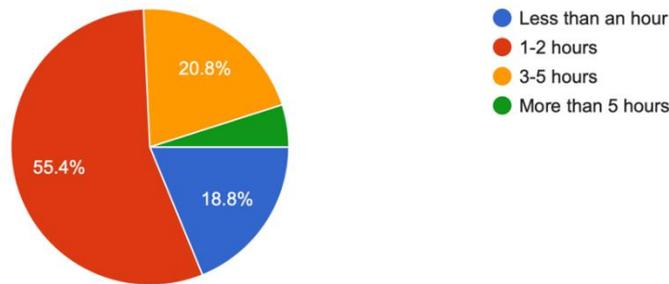**Figure 9: Favorite online streaming platforms of the respondents**

Source: Own source

The time that the questionnaire was sent out was close to the school-going exams, thus most of the teenagers who responded indicated that they spent a couple of hours every day watching western web series. The hours are likely to increase during vacation time.

Figure 10: Time spent by the respondents on these series.

How much time do you generally spend watching those web series every day?
101 responses

Source: Own source

The most popular genres were:

➢ Thriller/Mystery (64.4%)
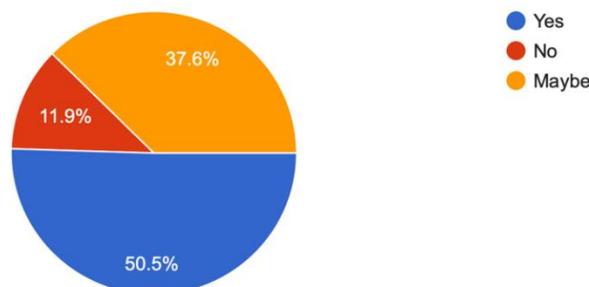➢ Teen-drama (50.5)
➢ Comedy (45.5)

Theme, story, and cast seemed to be the most popular areas. This indicated that the respondents to the sample were well-versed in their knowledge of the actors and the storyline of the western web series, as they were likely to have been watching such series for a long time. If the respondents' age is largely in the age group 15-17, it meant that they were involved in watching the series for at least a couple of years. This may indicate that the respondents had access to internet facilities when they were much younger. It could also be true that the environment (schools) that they were in led them to specifically get hooked on a particular genre of series, indicating the influence of peers.

This statement was corroborated in the sample whereby about 50% of the replies indicated that they were psychologically affected by what they were watching.

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents being psychologically affected by western web series

Do you agree that western web series have psychological effects on you?
101 responses

Source: Own source

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The impact of watching these series by a teenager is likely to impact the child's psychological mindset concerning studying overseas as well as some of the mannerisms that could rub off on them.

It has been indicated that close to 50% of the respondents would like to complete their studies at a foreign university. One of the reasons might be closely related to the series that they have been watching over the years, or it could also be the attraction of leaving home for further studies, as well as difficulty in obtaining admission to an Indian university.

The attraction to vices like alcohol, smoking or drugs etc. does not seem to have an important role as indicated by the survey. But this may be a normal occurrence as Indian society, too, has opened to a large extent, in this sphere, after globalization. With increased connectivity, the mindset of a young teenager, in India or any other country in the world, does not seem to be very different.

The widespread use of all the above is quite apparent irrespective of income level, residential or day boardings, and government or private schools. Thus, the respondents' answer seems to be moving in the anticipated direction. Web series are unlikely to impact young teenagers, as most children today are exposed to the dangers of drugs irrespective of what they watch.

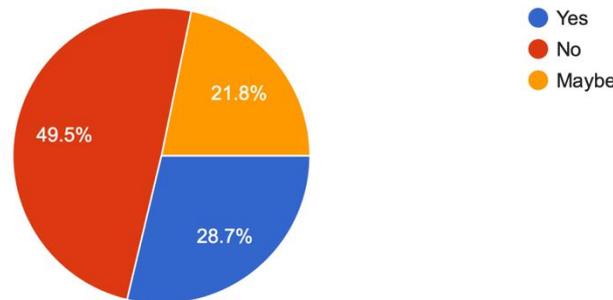**Figure 12: Drug consumption by children below 18 years (2020)**

Source: Lok Sabha

DISSATISFACTION WITH A YOUNG ADULT'S PRESENT LIFESTYLE

Figure 13: Percentage of respondents being insecure with their present situation

Do you think western web series have caused insecurity in your life?
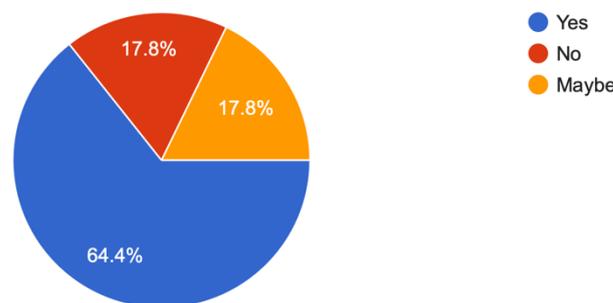101 responses

Source: Own source

According to the survey conducted, nearly 50% of the respondents indicated that they were not affected, while 28.7% were affected and 21.8% did not indicate either way. It is possible to assume that close to 50% were impacted by lifestyles that were shown in the web series. This may not be a 'bad' thing, as it might harbour a greater zest to work hard and achieve the lifestyles that they watch. (This may be driving luxurious cars, living in opulent houses, or wearing designer clothes, bags, shoes, and other accessories.)

All of the above may have a positive impact. The problem arises when the young respondents want to ape their hero in terms of smoking, drugs, robbery strategy and gimmicks which could harm the child's life. This type of influence was noticed in some games that young teenagers decided to download and play as a team (Like Blue Whale Challenge) which unfortunately led to some of them taking their lives.

Figure 14: Effect of western web series on the respondents' spoken language and behaviour

Have western web series and online shows affected your spoken language and behaviour?
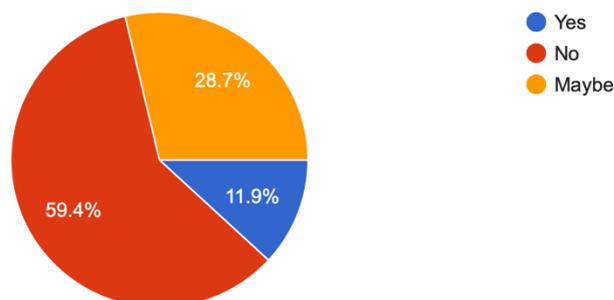101 responses

Source: Own source

The results indicate a strong influence of western web series on spoken language and behaviour. This seems to be true at any age that the children start watching western web series. They talk the same language; think in the same manner and most of the time use words that are extremely correlated to the lifestyle of the characters that they watch. This happens to such a large extent, that they start thinking in the language that they watch. This seems to be an extremely novel way to be completely conversant with the English language. It is the best way to get the right accent as well as knowledge of English grammar. This depends again on the type of web series that they view.

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Figure 15: Pie chart indicating the percentage of youth who think that the culture shown in western web series fits in with Indian culture

Do you feel the culture shown in western web series (sex, teenage life, violence, alcohol and drugs) fits in the life of Indian Youth?

101 responses

Source: Own source

The diagram shows a minority of respondents (11.9%) who are impacted by what they see in the series. The youth is quite clear about what they watch which may be very different from how they live, indicating they are mature enough to differentiate between make-belief and reality.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT/LIMITATIONS

Analyzing the responses concerning the impact of western web series on Indian school-going children from the age of 14-18 years, it was apparent that many respondents, irrespective of whether they were in residential or nonresidential schools, tier 1, or tier 2 cities, seemed to be viewing western web series for 2 hours a day. The positive result of the survey was that they were not overly affected by the impact of drugs, alcohol, smoking and violence-related incidents. About 50% seemed to be influenced by the education system, and it may affect their choice after schooling in India.

Most respondents were more interested in the storyline rather than in watching porn or other sexually inclined series.

The negative impact of the survey that must be kept in mind is the income levels of the children who responded, which is indicated by the type of schools that they attended. These children have enough knowledge of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol.

A more meaningful relevance of the survey would be to include children from income levels across urban and rural areas as well as private and government schools.

CONCLUSION

The survey was extremely encouraging in the fact that the respondents seemed to be aware of their surroundings and were only interested in watching themes related to interesting storyline type of the series. They were not watching them for their lifestyle, or their consumption of drugs and alcohol. There seems to be an inclination of the respondents to continue their studies outside India. Further studies in this area would attempt to encompass a wider audience.

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APPENDIX

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1LbrfUng33jmuZBNlVL1KsyryLN1LrqQsCl8-HqmuiAA/edit