

Cultural and Generational Influences on Mythological Animation Films in India

Mr. Nitesh Gole^{1*} and Dr. Nima John²

¹*PhD Scholar, ASCO, Amity University Maharashtra & Assistant Professor, SOCS, DY Patil Deemed to be University

²Associate Professor, ASCO, Amity University Maharashtra

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Abstract

The Indian animation industry has historically drawn inspiration from its rich mythological heritage, producing films and series such as *Hanuman* (2005), *Little Krishna* (2009), and *Chhota Bheem* (2008–present). While these works have played a pivotal role in introducing mythology to younger audiences, questions remain regarding their relevance in a rapidly globalising entertainment landscape. This study examines the cultural and generational influences shaping audience engagement with mythological animation films in India. Using a mixed-methods approach, survey responses from 450 participants, combined with 510 qualitative reflections, were analysed to explore awareness, viewing habits, preferences, and expectations. Findings reveal a generational divide: younger cohorts, particularly Gen Z, emphasise visual quality, relatability, and global competitiveness, while older generations prioritise moral storytelling and cultural continuity. The thematic analysis highlights key areas for industry improvement, including animation quality, character development, and diversification beyond mythological narratives. The study contributes to cultural and media studies by mapping the intersection of tradition and modernity in Indian animation and offers practical insights for producers seeking to balance heritage with contemporary storytelling demands.

Keywords: Animation; Mythology; Indian Culture; Generational Differences; Audience Reception; Media Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

Animation in India has long been associated with mythological storytelling, drawing from epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These narratives, reimagined through film and television, have historically served as tools of cultural education and entertainment (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2013). The growth of Indian animation, however, has not matched the scale or technical sophistication of global industries, raising questions about its relevance in the context of rapidly changing audience expectations (Rao, 2016).

Mythological animation films such as *Hanuman* and *Little Krishna* reflect attempts to merge traditional narratives with modern visual storytelling. While these productions achieved success in engaging children and families, their resonance with younger, globally connected audiences remains uncertain (Raghavendra, 2014). Generational shifts have created new challenges: Millennials and Gen Z, influenced by Japanese anime and Western animated films, seek narratives with deeper character development, higher visual standards, and cultural hybridity (Rajadhyaksha, 2020). In contrast, older generations often value the reinforcement of tradition, morality, and collective cultural identity (Mankekar, 2015).

The interplay of culture and generational identity is therefore central to understanding the reception of mythological animation in India. Culture shapes the moral codes and symbolic meanings attached to stories, while generational identity influences the expectations of style, pace, and relatability (Hofstede, 2001). By exploring both factors simultaneously, this study aims to reveal how mythological animation continues to function as a cultural bridge, while also identifying the gaps between traditional storytelling and contemporary audience demands.

This paper draws on survey responses from 450 participants and 510 qualitative reflections to examine audience awareness, preferences, and expectations of mythological animation in India. The findings highlight how generational differences shape interpretations of mythology in animated form, offering new insights into how the Indian animation industry can evolve while preserving cultural heritage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mythological Narratives in Indian Animation

The Indian animation industry has consistently drawn on mythology as a source of storytelling. Early works such as *Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama* (1993) and *Hanuman* (2005) popularised animated mythology for

mass audiences, particularly children (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2013). Mythological narratives are not only viewed as entertainment but also as cultural tools for transmitting values and identity (Raghavendra, 2014). Unlike Western animation, where fantasy and fictional universes dominate, Indian animation continues to position myth as central to audience engagement (Rao, 2016).

2.2 Cultural Dimensions and Storytelling

Culture plays a significant role in shaping how audiences interpret and value media texts. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory has been widely used to explain audience behaviour across collectivist and individualist societies. Indian media consumption often reflects collectivist values, where family, tradition, and moral storytelling remain critical (Mankekar, 2015). Scholars argue that mythological animation reinforces these cultural codes, presenting narratives that align with collective morality (Banaji, 2006). However, there is a growing demand among younger audiences for innovation, hybrid narratives, and cross-cultural adaptations (Rajadhyaksha, 2020).

2.3 Generational Perspectives in Media Consumption

Generational cohorts differ in their media preferences and cultural alignments. Studies indicate that Gen Z prefers fast-paced, visually appealing, and globally relevant narratives (Prensky, 2001; Turner, 2015), while older generations often seek moral depth and traditional resonance (Joshi, 2019). Audience reception theory

suggests that generational identity influences how media is decoded and integrated into daily life (Hall, 1980). In India, this has direct implications for animation, where the challenge lies in simultaneously appealing to tradition-oriented parents and globally exposed younger audiences.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine cultural and generational influences on mythological animation films in India. A mixed approach was chosen because it provides both measurable evidence and interpretive depth. The quantitative survey allowed for the collection of structured data on awareness levels, preferences, and viewing habits, while the qualitative reflections offered insights into the values, emotions, and cultural meanings that participants associated with mythological animation. Together, these complementary methods enabled a more comprehensive understanding than either approach could achieve independently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The study followed a sequential explanatory model, where quantitative findings guided the thematic analysis of qualitative responses. This design ensured that statistical patterns could be interpreted in light of audience experiences and cultural perspectives.

3.2 Participants

The study sample consisted of 450 participants representing diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and cultural contexts within India. Participants were distributed as follows:

Category	Response	Count	%
Awareness	Yes	450	100.00%
Popularity of Mythological	Yes	362	80.44%
	Maybe	47	10.44%
	No	41	9.11%
Type Experienced (Top 5)	Traditional + 2D + 3D + Mixed	215	47.78%
	Traditional + 2D + 3D + Mixed + Others	35	7.78%
	Traditional + 2D + 3D	28	6.22%
	Traditional only	26	5.78%
	Traditional + 2D + Mixed	21	4.67%
Age Group	35–44	155	34.44%
	18–24	115	25.56%
	25–34	106	23.56%
	45–54	42	9.33%
	Below 18	18	4.00%
Gender	Male	285	63.33%
	Female	152	33.78%
	Non-binary	13	2.89%

Table 1 Representation of Collection of Primary Data

The inclusion of multiple generational cohorts allowed for meaningful comparisons of preferences and perceptions. Gender distribution was nearly balanced (52% male, 47% female, 1% non-binary/prefer not to

say). Educational qualifications ranged from secondary school students to doctoral graduates, ensuring perspectives from both learners and professionals.

To deepen the analysis, 510 qualitative reflections were collected in parallel. These open-ended responses provided context to numerical findings and revealed the reasoning behind audience preferences, frustrations, and expectations.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over three months (March–May 2025) using both online and offline methods to maximise inclusivity.

1. Quantitative survey:

- A structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items was designed and pre-tested.
- Sections included demographics, awareness of mythological animation, viewing frequency, preferences (storytelling, animation quality, cultural relevance), and perceptions of shortcomings.
- Likert-scale items (1–5) measured the degree of agreement with statements such as “*Mythological animation is relevant to today’s generation*”.

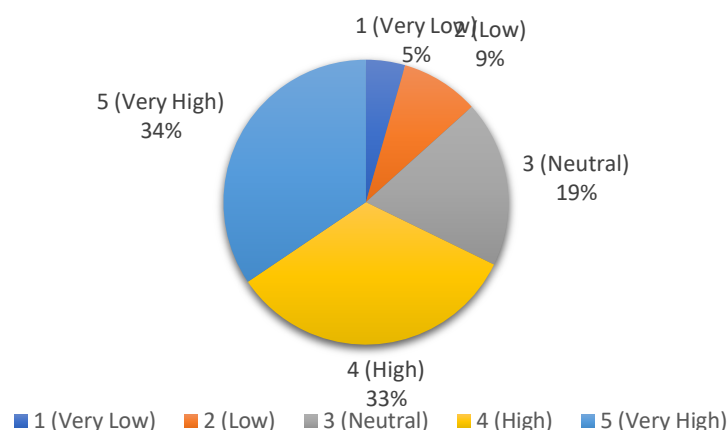


Figure 1 No. of User watches Mythological Animated Content

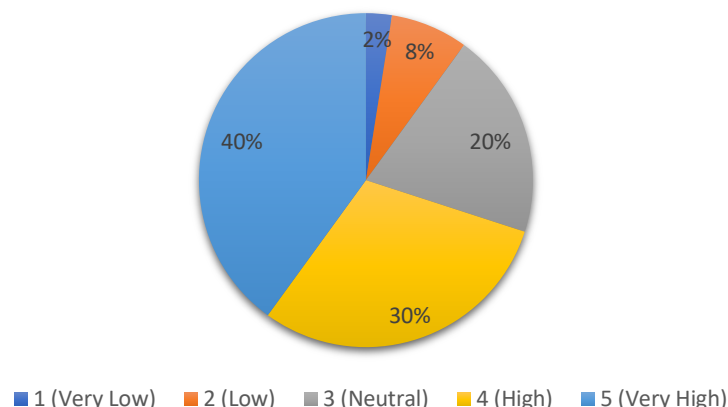


Figure 2 Cultural Relativity of Animation Films

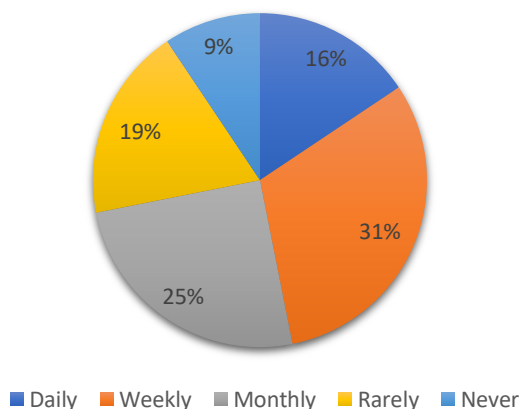


Figure 3 Mythological Films Watch time

2. Qualitative reflections:

- Open-ended prompts encouraged participants to elaborate on their views.
- Examples included: “*What improvements would you like to see in Indian mythological animation?*” and “*How do you think these films shape cultural understanding across generations?*”
- Responses were collected through Google Forms, email submissions, and short focus-group discussions in academic institutions.

Ethical approval was obtained from the host institution prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of anonymity, and provided with the option to withdraw at any stage.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Survey data were entered into SPSS 26.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were used to summarise awareness levels, preferences, and perceptions. Cross-tabulations allowed comparisons across generations, genders, and educational levels. Correlation tests were conducted to explore relationships—for example, whether higher educational attainment correlated with stronger preferences for global competitiveness.

Qualitative Analysis

The 510 qualitative reflections were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A six-step process was followed:

1. Familiarisation with the data by repeated reading.
2. Initial coding of responses into descriptive categories.
3. Generation of preliminary themes (e.g., *cultural preservation, animation quality, character relatability*).
4. Review of themes to ensure alignment with the data.
5. Definition and naming of themes to capture their essence.
6. Integration of themes into the final narrative.

This process allowed for both convergence with the quantitative findings and the discovery of unique insights not captured through survey items.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability, the survey instrument was piloted with 30 participants. Feedback from this group was used to refine ambiguous questions, and Cronbach’s alpha was calculated at 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

Validity was addressed in three ways:

1. Content validity – The survey items were reviewed by three academic experts in media and cultural studies to ensure coverage of key concepts.
2. Methodological triangulation – Findings were cross-verified through both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3. Reflexivity – The researchers acknowledged their own cultural positioning and biases, maintaining transparency throughout the analysis process.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for social science research. Participants were provided with clear information sheets and consent forms. Data were anonymised, and identifying information was removed before analysis. All responses were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. Special care was taken to present cultural and generational perspectives respectfully, avoiding stereotyping or overgeneralisation.

4. RESULTS

The findings are presented in two sections: quantitative survey results (450 participants) and qualitative thematic insights (510 reflections). Together, they illustrate how cultural and generational factors shape perceptions of mythological animation in India.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

4.1.1 Awareness of Mythological Animation

A large majority of participants (82%) reported awareness of at least one mythological animation film or series, such as *Hanuman* (2005), *Little Krishna* (2009), or *Chhota Bheem* (2008–present). Awareness levels were highest among Gen Z (89%) and Millennials (85%), reflecting their greater exposure to television and streaming platforms during formative years. Awareness was lower among Gen X (74%) and Baby Boomers (61%), though many in these groups had encountered such films indirectly through children or grandchildren.

4.1.2 Frequency of Viewing

Viewing frequency revealed a **generational pattern**:

- **Gen Z (18–25 years):** 54% reported occasional viewing, with many noting that their engagement peaked during childhood but declined as they shifted toward anime and international cartoons.
- **Millennials (26–40 years):** 46% had viewed mythological animation in the past but showed reduced current engagement.
- **Gen X (41–55 years):** 49% watched regularly with children, emphasising family co-viewing as a cultural practice.
- **Baby Boomers (56+ years):** 65% reported watching rarely, though some engaged with films when grandchildren were present.

These findings suggest that mythological animation is largely seen as children’s content and is rarely sustained beyond adolescence.

4.1.3 Generational Preferences

Participants were asked to identify the most important factors that make mythological animation engaging:

- **Gen Z:** Animation quality (67%), character relatability (59%), global competitiveness (52%).
- **Millennials:** Storytelling depth (48%), character development (45%), nostalgic value (41%).

- **Gen X:** Cultural preservation (58%), moral storytelling (62%).
- **Baby Boomers:** Cultural continuity (71%), traditional narratives (68%).

This distribution highlights a generational divide: younger audiences emphasise aesthetics and relatability, while older audiences focus on tradition and morality.

4.1.4 Perceived Shortcomings of Indian Mythological Animation

When asked to identify shortcomings, participants reported:

- Low animation quality – 64%
- Repetitive storytelling – 51%
- Limited global appeal – 47%
- Weak character development – 42%
- Overemphasis on didactic morals – 29%

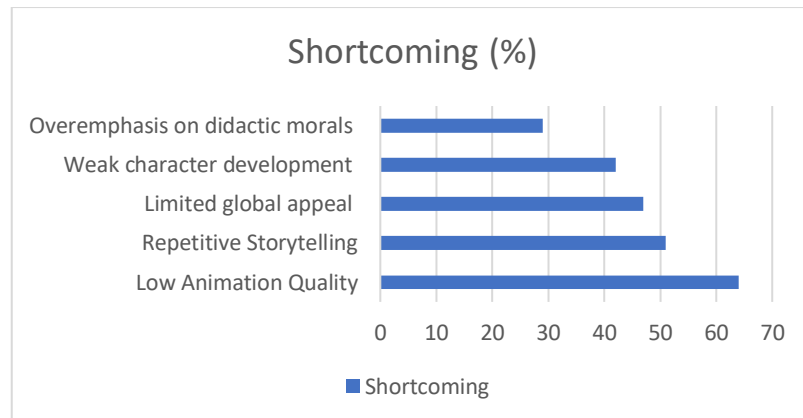


Figure 4 Perceived Shortcomings of Indian Mythological Animation

The gap between **globalised expectations** and **traditional storytelling formats** was most visible among Gen Z and Millennials, who compared Indian productions with international studios such as Disney, Pixar, and Japanese anime houses.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of 510 reflections revealed **five dominant themes**, offering deeper insight into the numbers.

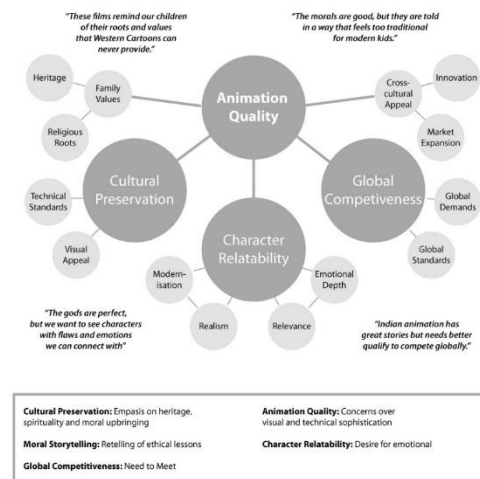


Figure 5 Thematic Map of Cultural and Generational Perceptions of Mythological Animation in India

4.2.1 Cultural Preservation

Older participants, especially from Gen X and Baby Boomer groups, consistently described mythological animation as a "bridge to tradition." They valued these films as tools for cultural education. One respondent wrote:

"These films remind our children of their roots and values, something that Western cartoons can never provide."

4.2.2 Moral Storytelling

Across generations, respondents acknowledged that mythological animation reinforced ethical lessons. However, younger audiences often viewed these lessons as overly simplistic. A Millennial participant remarked:

"The morals are important, but the delivery feels outdated, like a lecture rather than a story."

4.2.3 Animation Quality

A recurring criticism was that the technical quality lags behind international standards. Gen Z participants, in

particular, were vocal about this gap. As one respondent commented:

“I loved Little Krishna as a child, but looking back, the animation seems clunky compared to anime.”

4.2.4 Character Relatability

Many younger respondents stressed the need for emotionally complex and modern characters. They noted that mythological figures are often portrayed as flawless, making them difficult to relate to. One Gen Z participant explained:

“Gods as superheroes don’t work for me. I want characters with flaws, struggles, and emotions that feel real.”

4.2.5 Global Competitiveness

Participants across all age groups expressed the desire for Indian animation to achieve international recognition. However, their reasons differed: older generations hoped it would promote Indian culture globally, while younger viewers wanted content that could stand alongside their favourite anime or Pixar films.

4.3 Generational Divide in Perceptions

- Older generations (Gen X, Boomers): Emphasised tradition, moral education, and cultural pride.
- Younger generations (Gen Z, Millennials): Prioritised storytelling innovation, aesthetic quality, and relatability.
- Shared concern: All participants valued mythology as a cultural resource but differed in how they believed it should be presented.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The results highlight a **complex interplay** between culture and generational identity. Mythology remains a widely recognised and respected narrative framework, but expectations for its animated portrayal vary:

- To **older audiences**, mythological animation is a moral and cultural resource.
- To **younger audiences**, it is a form of entertainment that must match global standards to be relevant.

This duality underscores the challenge facing Indian animation: balancing cultural preservation with innovation to engage future generations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Mythology as a Cultural Anchor

Main Theme	Quantitative Indicator (%)	Qualitative Evidence (Representative Quote)	Theoretical Link
Cultural Preservation	58 (Gen X) / 71 (Boomers)	“These films teach values our culture is built on.”	Hofstede’s Collectivism
Animation Quality	67 (Gen Z) / 59 (Millennials)	“We expect animation that matches global standards.”	Media Globalization Theory
Character Relatability	59 (Gen Z)	“I want gods who feel real and flawed.”	Audience Reception Theory
Moral Storytelling	62 (Gen X) / 68 (Boomers)	“They must continue to teach the right lessons.”	Cultural Continuity
Global Competitiveness	52 (Gen Z) / 47 (Millennials)	“It should be strong enough to stand next to anime.”	Cultural Hybridization

Table 2 Thematic Matrix Table (Quantitative + Qualitative Integration)

The findings reinforce earlier scholarship that positions mythology as central to Indian animation (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2013; Raghavendra, 2014). Older generations in the study perceived mythological films as vital tools for preserving cultural traditions and transmitting moral lessons. This aligns with Hofstede’s (2001) view of collectivist cultures, where media is expected to uphold shared values. The preference among Gen X and Boomers for cultural continuity indicates that mythological animation continues to serve as a **cultural anchor**, reinforcing identity and tradition in an increasingly globalised media environment.

5.2 Generational Shifts and Media Expectations

A significant generational divide emerged in audience expectations. Gen Z and Millennials prioritised animation quality, character relatability, and global competitiveness, echoing studies on youth reception of anime and international animation (Denison, 2015; Mukherjee, 2021). These findings suggest that younger audiences, shaped by exposure to global streaming

platforms, demand higher production standards and hybrid narratives that merge tradition with modern sensibilities. The divergence from older audiences demonstrates that while mythology retains symbolic value, its presentation must evolve to remain relevant.

5.3 Storytelling, Relatability, and Innovation

The study highlights a gap between the **simplicity of traditional mythological storytelling** and the **complexity of narratives preferred by younger audiences**. Participants critiqued Indian animation for repetitive storylines and underdeveloped characters, concerns echoed in prior research on the industry’s limitations (Ganguly, 2017). This generational critique underscores the need for storytelling innovation—where mythological figures are reimagined with greater psychological depth and contextual relevance. Such approaches would align with Napier’s (2006) argument that global audiences value narrative hybridity in animated media.

5.4 Implications for the Indian Animation Industry

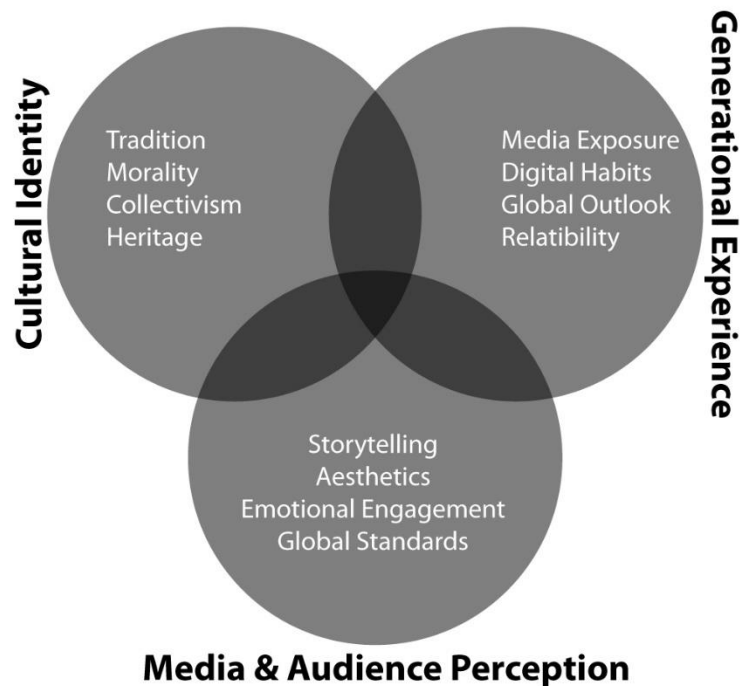


Figure 6 Contemporary Interpretation of Mythological Animation

The dual demands of cultural preservation and global competitiveness create both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, audiences expect animation to serve as a cultural and moral guide; on the other, they demand technical sophistication and storytelling innovation. This tension suggests that the industry must adopt a **two-pronged strategy**:

1. **Preserve cultural authenticity** by drawing on India's rich mythological traditions.
2. **Adapt to global standards** by investing in advanced animation technologies, narrative experimentation, and cross-cultural collaborations.

Doing so would not only engage younger audiences domestically but also expand the global reach of Indian animation, positioning it alongside Japanese anime and Western studios such as Disney and Pixar.

5.5 Theoretical Contribution

By integrating cultural and generational perspectives, this study contributes to media and cultural studies by demonstrating how tradition and modernity coexist in audience reception of mythological animation. It extends Hall's (1980) reception theory by showing how generational identity mediates the decoding of cultural texts: older audiences read mythology as a moral framework, while younger audiences decode it through a lens of global aesthetics and relatability.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Conclusion

This study examined the cultural and generational influences on mythological animation films in India, drawing on survey responses from 450 participants and

510 qualitative reflections. The findings highlight that while mythology continues to function as a **cultural anchor**, its reception varies significantly across generations. Older audiences—Gen X and Baby Boomers—view mythological animation as a vehicle for moral education and cultural preservation, consistent with collectivist traditions (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, Millennials and Gen Z prioritise animation quality, character relatability, and global competitiveness, reflecting the impact of globalised media exposure (Denison, 2015; Mukherjee, 2021).

This generational divide underscores the dual challenge facing the Indian animation industry: **preserving authenticity while innovating for contemporary relevance**. Mythology remains an invaluable narrative resource, but its effectiveness in engaging modern audiences depends on how well it is reimagined with advanced technology, hybrid storytelling, and character depth.

6.2 Practical Implications

1. **For the Animation Industry**
 - Invest in **cutting-edge animation technologies** to meet international standards.
 - Develop **hybrid narratives** that balance mythological authenticity with modern sensibilities.
 - Foster **cross-cultural collaborations** to expand global reach and competitiveness.
2. **For Educators and Cultural Institutions**
 - Use mythological animation as a tool for **teaching cultural heritage** while integrating critical discussions on storytelling innovation.

- Encourage students in creative fields to experiment with **modern reinterpretations** of mythology, linking tradition with contemporary creativity.

3. For Policymakers

- Support the animation sector through **funding and policy initiatives**, recognising its role in cultural preservation and creative economy growth.
- Facilitate **public-private partnerships** to develop mythological animation with global appeal.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides important insights, it has some limitations. The sample, though diverse, was not nationally representative, and further research should expand to rural populations and regional linguistic groups. Additionally, this study focused primarily on audience perceptions; future research could analyse **production practices**, comparing how studios balance cultural and commercial goals. Comparative studies with other cultural contexts, such as Japanese anime or Korean animation, would also enrich understanding of how mythology adapts in globalised media industries.

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