

## **Preaching the Gospel and introducing Christ in the modern era**

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### **Abstract**

Through the years the Gospel has survived among the general public in various forms as oral, written, printed or mobile application. Throughout its existence the transmission of the Gospel has been transmitted to the Christians through the church or at religious gatherings in the traditional method of sermons. In the evolving world which is empowered with rapid enhancements and developments of media and technology, digitalization of lives is inevitable. Whatever tends to move along with the old-school methods instead of accepting change and adapting to suit the standards of the modern citizen is obvious to fail survival. This is the reality even with the church and its practices, whereas, the transmission of the Gospel, which introduces Christ to all Christians does not escape this reality. Hence, the church should seek for innovative creative methods of transmitting and preaching the Gospel in a society which is highly digitalized, aiming to reach individuals more effectively and to bring them closer to God. This study intends to investigate the success of using audio-visual adaptations of the Gospel in introducing Christ and his ministry to the general public, with special reference to the popular modern Christian television show, *The Chosen*. The study is conducted in a mixed-method design using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which aim in identifying the viewer response towards the show. The findings of the study reveal the success of the show and focuses attention on the importance of using modern creative methods in preaching the Gospel.

**Key words:** The Chosen, Gospel, Jesus.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

The Gospel becomes the base of introducing Christ to all Christians throughout the world. The preaching and the transmission of the Gospel has occurred in the traditional method of sermons for centuries with limited change, even though the world has passed several eras of development reaching a tech driven modern world, where life is more connected to technology, lifestyles are digitalized and the modern man has withdrawn from the traditional and conventional methods of continuing life. Hence, in such an era, the church needs to accept change and adapt its ministry to suit the needs of the modern generation, which will aid in connecting them more effectively with the church.

In the modern era digitalization of the Word seems more successful than the traditional preaching method used by the Christian churches throughout the world. Christians all around the world, especially those in their youth are readily drawn to the digital visualization of the Bible and its characters, which has shown success in all visualized programs, which could be easily accessible at one's fingertip.

This study is aimed at investigating the effectiveness and success of the digitalizing the Gospel and its presentation via audio-visual means, with reference special reference to the popular Christian television show *The Chosen*.

### **1.2. Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the study was; *The modern television series "The Chosen" available through various platforms, including mobile apps, is a better way to introduce Christ and his ministry to the people and preach the Gospel to the modern world.*

### **1.3. Objectives**

The study which aims to identify the effectiveness of the television series, *The Chosen*, in preaching the Gospel, was designed to achieve the following objectives;

1. To investigate the popularity of the television show, *The Chosen*, among Sri Lankan Christians.
2. To investigate the most popular mode of streaming the show.
3. To identify viewer perspective on the television show, *The Chosen*.
4. To study how the impact of the deviance of the show from the Bible effect the viewer.
5. To analyse the effectiveness of the television, show *The Chosen*, in introducing Christ and his ministry.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature of previous studies was referred based on three aspects. Studies that discuss the preference of the modern generation in watching movies and videos, the importance and success of using modern media to preach the Gospel, and literature based on the television series, “*the Chosen*”.

### **2.1. The modern generation’s attraction towards audio-visuals**

Several studies provide evidence that the modern generation is withdrawing from the old-school means of reading and listening, and are being more attracted to audio-visual representations, (movies, short videos, etc.) Watching television and videos have rapidly increased within the past 25 years, whereas, other modes of media consumption has decreased gradually (Barwise et al., 2019). Literature provides evidence that older women prefer reading while older men prefer watching television or listening to the radio. Furthermore, individuals with low levels of education prefer watching TV, while those with higher education levels, prefer reading (Molina et al., 2016). Similarly, watching videos helps in gaining content more successfully and hence, makes learning more efficient and effective (Rahayu, 2020). Similarly, learners prefer using audio visual media in their studies (Setyawan et al., 2022). This study also provides evidence that individuals prefer using and are attracted more towards audio-visual means. Watching television and videos generate brainwaves associated with pleasant, wakeful relaxation, and absorbed cognitive capacity. This helps in attracting and connecting the viewer with television and videos (Barwise et al., 2019), whereas audio visual media has a unique ability to evoke emotions and strong responses (Cras, 2023).

### **2.2. The importance of using modern media to preach the Gospel**

At present where the world has become a global village due to the advancements in digital communication, selecting an appropriate channel for effective communication becomes important, as the wrong channel could create obstacles to communication and improper retrieval of the delivered message (Ifeanacho, 2023). The church needs to change its traditional preaching styles to match the multimedia culture of the twenty- first century which if not will outdate its teachings making it impossible to communicate the message of God (Purcell, 2005). In this digital era, the most effective channel of communication becomes digital communication, due to its ability of reaching a wider range of audience (Ifeanacho, 2023). Similarly, social media becomes a successful platform in preaching the Gospel in this digital era, as it provides the opportunity to communicate with thousands of people with just one click (Grosso, 2018; as cited by Ifeanacho, 2023).

Preaching is not merely conveying God’s message, but it should reach the listener and help her/him in changing their lives. The use of artistic genres and technological methods in preaching have been more effective in connecting the audience (Trevithick, 2012). Artistic means of preaching the Gospel is accepted equally by all irrespective of their age and gender (Purcell, 2005). The Bible, which itself is a medium of art, encourages the introduction of artistic genres to deliver the message of redemption and love to Christians all throughout the world (Trevithick, 2012). Such creative modern methods of preaching by inculcating media and technology has been successful with the Pentecostal churches of Botswana and Zimbabwe (Togarasei, 2012)

### **2.3. The Chosen**

There have been a number of reviews and comments on the famous television series; *the Chosen* which debuted in 2017. The series created by Dallas Jenkins, is based on the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life and ministry, and is expected to extend to seven seasons overall (Jones, 2024).

The series was popular from its debut telecast which exceeded 100 million global viewers (Romano, 2023). The series has gained popularity due its unique features of availability through mobile apps (the Chosen and the Angel Studios), and streaming facilities available on Netflix and Amazon Prime (Jones, 2024). *The Chosen* has reached people all around the world, due to its ability to break down the barriers of language, culture, and age, where the show has subtitles in 600 languages and has been dubbed in 50 languages (Equipping the Church, 2024). The show has also gained its popularity through its social media platforms, whereas *The Chosen Facebook page* has 3.8 million followers (Jones, 2024).

Many viewers are inspired by the realistic portrayal of the characters of *The Chosen*, which helps them to accept these characters as common human beings (Burgett, 2023). Specifically, The character of Jesus appears to be very personally relatable, with obscurity in his divine nature and making him appear more human (Hux, 2022). The portrayal of Jesus as a normal man who feels the pain, suffering and fatigue makes him closer to man. Even though the same aspects are mentioned in the Gospels; when Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for water (John 4:6), Jesus needing rest (Mark 6:31), and Jesus falling asleep in the boat before the storm (Luke 8:23), reading and listening does not seem to be powerful as the visual representations (Cras, 2023).

Even though the show is highly popular, there is great controversy on it, especially due to its deviations from the Gospels, with deviations in characters and incidents, differences in characterization, etc. which go beyond the Bible (Mattison, 2023). There is great criticism on this free manipulating the Holy Scriptures. Many Christian leaders have spoken against the series and states that it would introduce a different Jesus (Kerns, 2023). Even amidst such controversy, *The Chosen*, takes the risk of portraying Jesus' personality along with the traits of creativity of making him more human, and making the situations more relatable to the modern world, which would have imaginably existed, though not mentioned in the Bible (Burgett, 2023 & Russel, 2023).

Hence, existing literature reveals that *The Chosen* has reached many people and introduced Christ to them. It has also been capable of reaching individuals with more impact being in the audio-visual mode which attracts more modern men. Hence, the church needs to pay attention accepting change and adapting new methods in preaching the Gospel and continuing their ministry in a highly modernized world.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. The Research Sample**

The study is based on investigating the effectiveness of the television series, *The Chosen* in preaching the Gospel. In order to understand the viewer response towards the television show, a purposive sample of ten (10) participants involved in the study. The sample was mixed in terms of the demographic variations of age, gender, and locality. All the participants were Christians.

### 3.2. Data Collection Procedure

The data process was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the participants were provided with a questionnaire designed to collect participant responses according to the Likert Scale, with five ratings for each question ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”, except for the questions related to demographic features and means of streaming the show.

The second phase was a semi-structured interview, in which each participant was individually interviewed and their responses to pre-formed open-ended questions were recorded along with the consent of the participant.

### 3.3. Methods of Data Analysis

The research design was of a mixed-method, conducted using the research tools of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS toolkit, whereas, the data collected via interviews were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

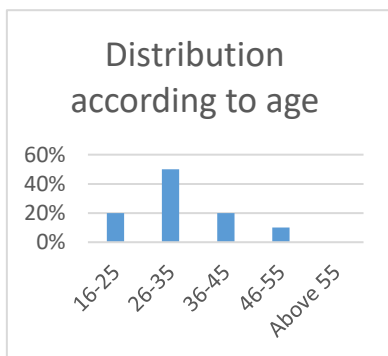
## 4. Discussion of Results

### 4.1. Quantitative Analysis of Questionnaires

The quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire containing 25 questions. The questionnaire included three basic areas, (a) demographic aspects of the participants, (b) knowing and streaming the show, and (c) their attitude towards the show.

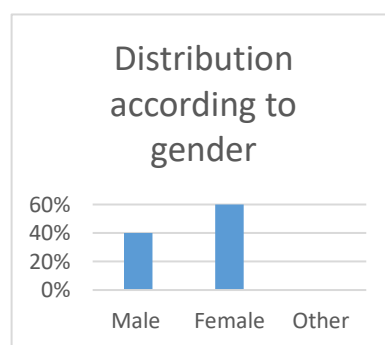
Figures 3.1.1, 3.1.2, and 3.1.3. represent the distribution of participants according the demographic features of age, gender and locality.

Figure 3.1.1. Distribution according to age



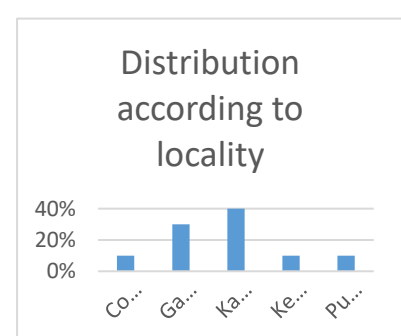
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Figure 3.1.2. Distribution according to gender



Source: Author

Figure 3.3. Distribution according to locality

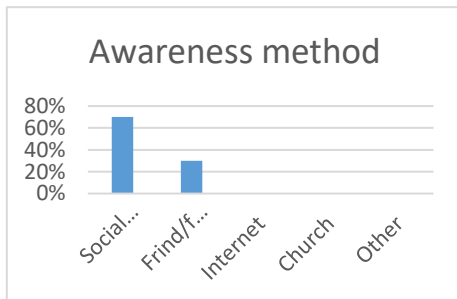


Source: Author

According to figure 3.1.1, majority of the participants were in the age category 16-35 years (70%), with most of them ranging between 26 to 35 years (70%). As represented by figure 3.1.2., majority of the participants are females (60%), and as figure 3.1.3., majority are from the Kandy district (40%) with others distributed among the districts, Gampaha (30%), Colombo, Kegalle , and Puttalam (10% each). This confirms the variation in the sample according to the demographic features of age, gender, and locality.

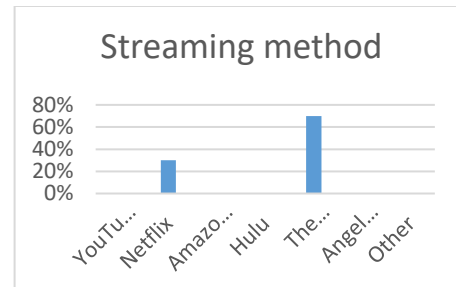
Figures 3.1.4 and 3.1.5, represent the methods the participants became aware of the television series, *The Chosen*, and the methods of streaming it.

Figure 3.1.4. Awareness method



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.5. Streaming method

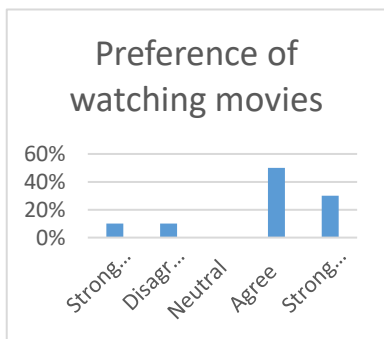


Source: Author

According to figure 3.1.4. the participants have learnt about the show either through social media (70%) or form a friend or family member (30%). Similarly, Figure 3.1.5. exposes that the participants either stream the show through *The Chosen mobile app* (70%) or through Netflix (30%).

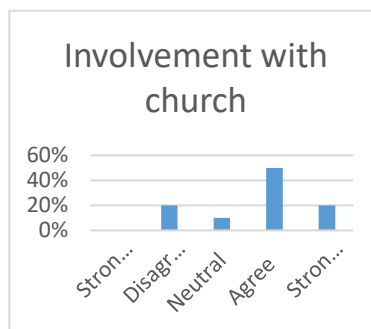
Figures 3.1.6, 3.1.7, and 3.1.8, represent the participants' attitudes towards preference watching movies, their involvement with the church, and knowledge of the Bible.

Figure 3.1.6. Preference to watching movies



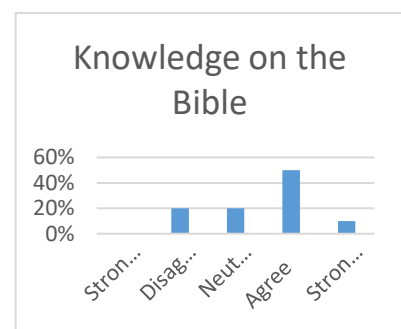
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Figure 3.1.7. Involvement with church



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Figure 3.1.8. Knowledge on the Bible

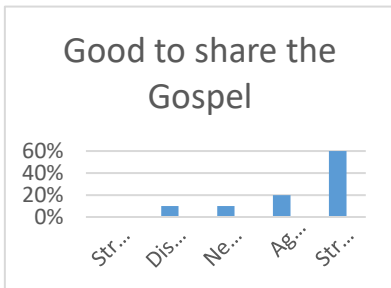


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Figure 3.1.6. provides evidence for majority of the participants (80%) preferring to watch movies over reading books, and figure 3.1.7. reveals that majority of the participants (70%) are regularly involved with the church. Furthermore, figure 3.1.8. represents that majority of the participants (60%) had a good knowledge on the Bible. Hence it is evident that the participants prefer involving in modern communication methods, whereas, they are involved with practicing their faith with a sound knowledge on the Bible.

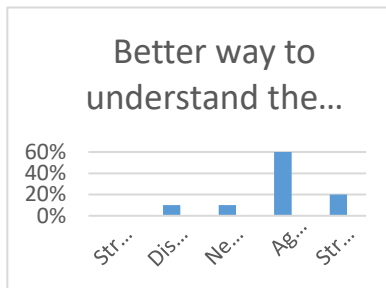
Figures 3.1.9 to 3.1.14 are based on the responses provided by the participants related to questions based on how *The Chosen* helps in understanding the Gospel, knowing Jesus better, and Christian faith

Figure 3.1.1.9 A better medium to share the Gospel



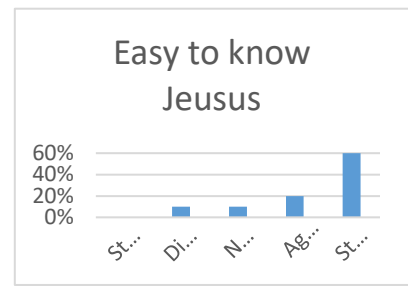
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Figure 3.1.10 Helps in understanding the teachings



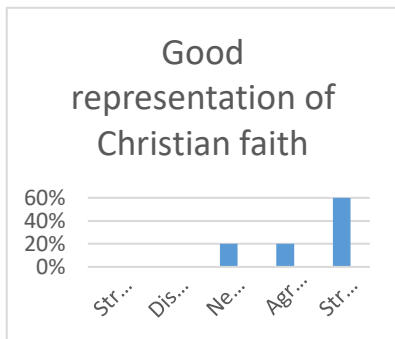
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Figure 3.1.11 Helps in knowing Jesus better



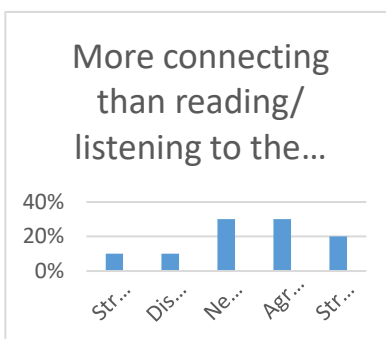
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Figure 3.1.12. A good representation of Christian faith



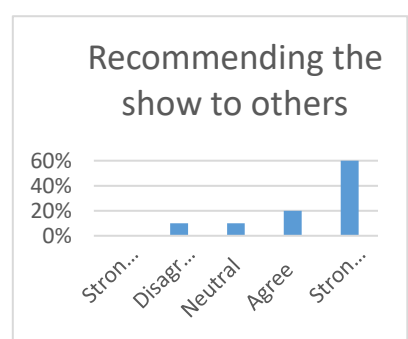
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Figure 3.1.13. Connects than reading/hearing the Gospel



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.14. Recommend the show to others



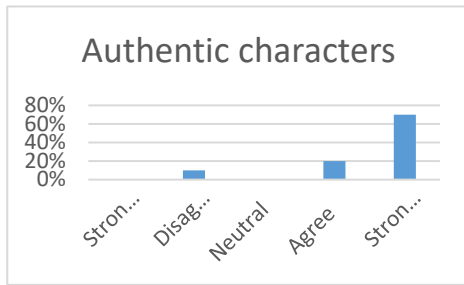
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According to figure 3.1.9. it is evident that a majority of the participants (80%) agree that the show is a better way of sharing the Gospel, whereas, according to figures 3.1.10 and 3.1.11 respectively a majority (80% each) agrees that the show helps in understanding the Gospel teachings and knowing Jesus better. Moreover, according to the figures 3.1.12 makes it evident that majority (80%) agrees that the show is a good representation of Christian faith. Figure 3.1.13, represents that even though 50% feel connected to the show than reading or listening to the Gospel, there is yet another 50% who prefer the old-school methods (20%) or who remain neutral

in their response (30%). Figure 3.1.14. reveals that majority (80%) willing to recommend the show to others.

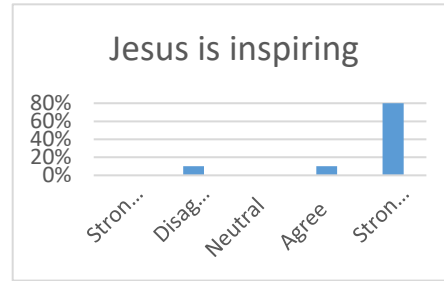
Figures 3.15 and 3.16 are related to the representation of characters in the show which was seen to be a highly influential aspect of the show.

Figure 3.1.15 Characters are authentic and relatable



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.16 Jesus was portrayed as inspiring

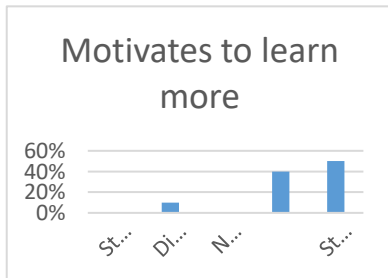


Source: Author

According to figures 3.1.15 and 3.1.16 respectfully, majority of the participants believe that the characters are authentic (80%) and that the portrayal of Jesus is meaningful and inspiring (90%).

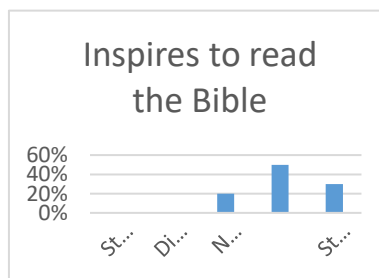
Figures 3.1.17, 3.1.18, and 3.1.19 represent the inspirations gained by watching the show.

Figure 3.1.17 Motivates to learning more



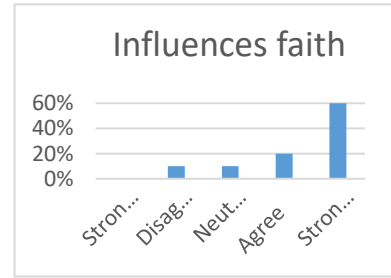
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Figure 3.1.18 Inspires to read the Bible



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.19 Influences personal faith

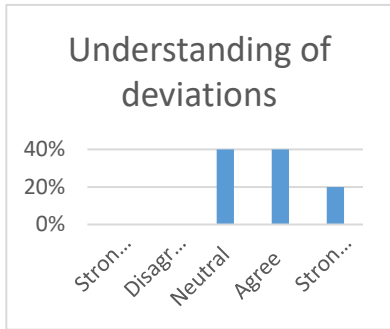


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Figures 3.1.17, 3.1.18, and 3.1.19 respective present a majority motivated to learn more about the Gospel (90%), inspired to read the Bible (80%), and who have been influenced in their personal faith (80%).

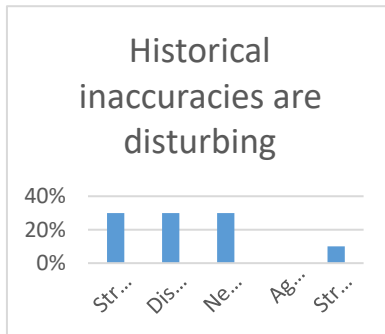
Figures 3.20, 3.21, and 3.22 are related to the attitude towards the deviation of the show from the real accounts of the Gospel.

Figure 3.1.20 Understanding the deviation



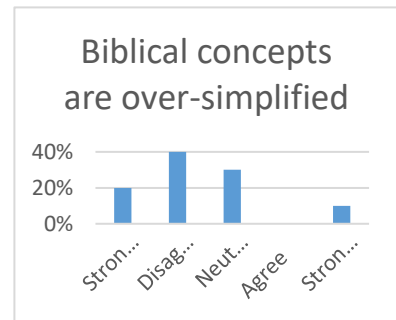
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Figure 3.1.21 Disturbed by historical inaccuracies



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.22 Biblical concepts are over-simplified

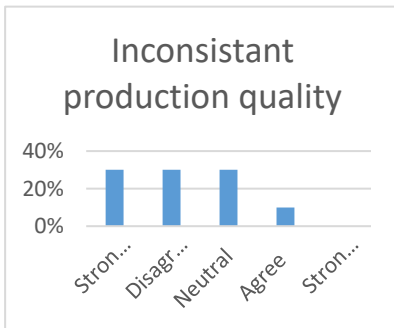


Source: Author

According to the figure 3.1.20 it is evident that a majority (60%) is aware about the existing deviations in the show to the Bible. Yet as shown in figures 3.1.21 and 3.1.22 the majority (60% each) respectively does not find these deviations to be disturbing and that the biblical concepts are over-simplified. Hence it is evident that the deviation from the Gospel accounts do not affect the message delivered by the show.

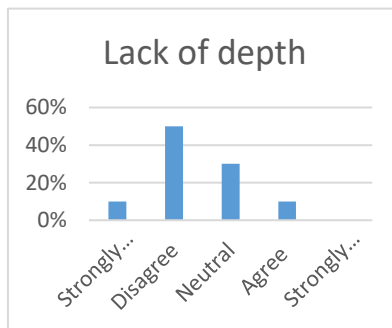
Figures 3.23, 3.24, and 3.25 focus on the production quality of *The Chosen*.

Figure 3.1.23 Inconsistent production quality



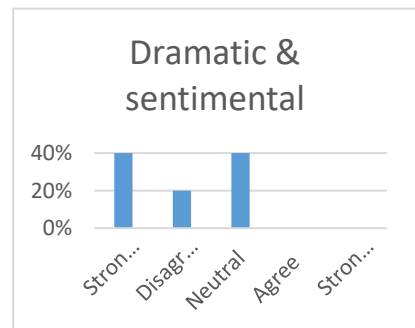
Source: Author

Figure 3.1.24 Lacks depth



Source: Author

Figure 3.1.25 Dramatic & sentimental



Source: Author

According to figures 3.1.23, 3.1.24, and 3.1.25, it is evident that majority of the participants do not have a negative attitude towards *The Chosen*. 60% of the participants do not believe that the production quality of the show is inconsistent, 70% do not believe that *The Chosen* lacks depth, and 60% do not believe that the show is dramatic and sentimental. Hence, it is evident that the attitude towards the production of the show is positive

## 4.2. Thematic Analysis of Interviews

The semi-structured interviews composed of ten open ended questions based on the viewer perspective on the television series *The Chosen*. The questions of the semi-structured interview are given below

- Q.1 Did you enjoy watching *The Chosen*? Why do you think you enjoyed it/ didn't enjoy it.
- Q.2 What did you like the most about *The Chosen*? Why?
- Q.3 What did you like least about *The Chosen*? Why?
- Q.4 How has *The Chosen* impacted you in understanding the Gospel?
- Q.5 What aspects of *The Chosen* did you find misleading or inaccurate?
- Q.6 What suggestions would you provide to improve *The Chosen*?
- Q.7 What are your concerns and criticisms about *The Chosen*?
- Q.8 Do you think that *The Chosen* should be less creative and focus in bringing out the exact Gospel accounts? Why?
- Q.9 In what way has *The Chosen* changed your life?
- Q.10 Will you recommend the show to others? Why?

According to the thematic analysis, it was evident that majority of the participants have a positive attitude towards the television series *The Chosen*. Majority of the respondents enjoy the show because it helps them know Jesus better (60%) and as they believe that it has increased their Christian faith (20%). Furthermore, majority of the participants are impressed by the portrayal of Jesus's character in the show (80%). It is also evident that majority of the respondents are not disturbed by anything in specific in the show (50%), whereas 30% of the respondents are not happy with the deviation of certain Gospel accounts. The analysis also reveals that *The Chosen* has motivated participants in knowing the Gospel better (30%), understanding the teachings of Jesus (50%), and in seeking the truth (20%), and majority of the participants (60%) do not believe that the show is misleading or inaccurate. According to suggestions, a majority of 40% suggest that it is better to have more teachings of Jesus in the show, while 30% believe that the show should be less deviating from the Gospel. 40% state that *The Chosen* is a good show, while 30% are disturbed by its deviation from the Bible and another 20% find the social media promotions to be disturbing. Majority loves the creativity of the show, and they believe that the creativity makes the show more interesting (10%) and that it makes the show more relatable and real helping them to connect lively with Christ (60%). Only a few (30%) find the show to be confusing and misleading due to its creativity. All participants believe that the show has changed their life in some aspect, either by bringing them closer to Christ (50%), by motivating them to study the Gospel in depth (30%), or by enhancing their Christian faith (20%). Moreover, except 20% of the participants who believe the show to challenge Christian faith, the other 80% are willing to recommend the show to others, either because it reveals the Gospel better (50%) or brings you closer to God and religion (30%).

Hence, the thematic analysis of the responses to the interview questions reveal a majority of the viewers have a positive attitudes towards the show, *The Chosen* which according to their opinion has impacted their lives by enhancing their understanding of the Gospel and bringing them closer to God.

## 5. Conclusion

The data analysis of the study revealed the perspective of the viewers of the highly popular Christian television series *The Chosen*. Considering the popularity of the show, even though the show is not much popular in Sri Lanka, the study reveals that it is gaining popularity among young Sri Lankan Christians. Many Sri Lankan viewers have become aware of the program through social media, and they use *The Chosen mobile app* as the main platform of streaming the show. Analysis of the viewer perspective towards the show, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, reveal that majority of the viewers have a positive attitude towards the show and that they are not concerned about or not confused by several deviations in the Gospel accounts presented in the Bible. The analysis also reveals that many viewers consider *The Chosen* to be an effective way to introduce the Christ and his ministry.

Due to the great attraction and positive attitude towards the television series, *The Chosen*, it is evident that the church should be more creative and innovative in preaching the Gospel, taking into account the most effective and successful means of reaching the present modern youth, and ensuring their involvement and engagement with the church and its teachings, and in loving Christ. In inculcating such modern methods in preaching the Gospel, the church and its leaders should also pay attention towards providing the content in the best possible way, ensuring that the message or the original purpose of the Gospel is well served.

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