

OTT VIDEO Services and Its Influence on People during COVID – 19 Pandemic

Ms. Sindhura Vemuri

PG Research Scholar,
Department of Visual Communication and Electronic Media,
PSG College of Arts and Science,
Coimbatore – 641 014.
sindhuravemuri94@gmail.com

Dr. Jayaseelan R.

Assistant Professor,
Department of Visual Communication and Electronic Media,
PSG College of Arts and Science,
Coimbatore – 641 014.

Abstract: With the emergence of television in the 1950s, Indians have found a new source of home entertainment. As times progressed and technology developed, every other person in India now has a smartphone in their hands. Mobility and portability of entertainment has become a game-changing factor to introduce Over the Top (OTT) video services. OTT refers to apps or services that deliver audio-visual content over the internet unlike traditional cable television or a dish-at-home connection. OTT offers anytime anywhere content access to people who have subscribed to their services. As far as India is concerned, various OTT platforms are players in the current scenario including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hotstar, etc. In 2021, the world got inflicted with the novel corona virus, which put a pause on the conventional movie watching experience. This study attempts to analyse and understand how the OTT platforms are influencing the people of India during the COVID – 19 pandemic. People now have significant access to at-home entertainment after the imposition of lockdown in the country. Also, their inclination towards new media with adaption to and adoption of new-age media and technologies as part of their daily lives has been acknowledged. The methodology adopted to conduct this research is of a qualitative approach. Semi structured interviews have been conducted and opinions from the interviews have been considered to perform this research. The results of this study will disclose the factors that contribute OTT watching and also the future of OTT post pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, OTT Platform, New Media Studies, Mobile Applications.

1. INTRODUCTION

This world has a population of 7.7 billion according to the census collected by the United Nations. [1] Out of which, the second most populous country in the world, India has a population of 1.2 billion people according to the census conducted in 2011. [2] With its rapidly increasing population over the years, the needs of people also changed with time. Technological advancements have seen the day and night of this planet. In 1959, the introduction of television took place in India and the need for visual entertainment gradually increased. [3] Every human has their own set of needs that gratify them in various ways. Entertainment has a major contribution to relax and keep people occupied. Television was the biggest source of entertainment in the late 90s. With the introduction of Internet in India, the consumption of visual entertainment has become mobile. In 2020, with the outbreak of the corona virus worldwide, people are confined to their homes to protect themselves from this global pandemic. Right now, the biggest source of entertainment is OTT video service platforms. OTT stands for Over-The-Top, which means that the video streaming to the viewer on the platform happens via the Internet without the use of any traditional cable or satellite TV services. The term OTT was first coined in 2011 by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Canada's telecom regulator, stating that it "considers that Internet access to programming independent of a facility or network dedicated to its delivery (via, for example, cable or satellite) is the defining feature of what have been termed 'over-the-top' services". [4]

OTT is a third party application that delivers audio video content to the end user via the Internet Service Protocol (ISP). There are over 40 OTT platforms in India and the demand for new content has seen a drastic increase over the past three years. The first platform that was introduced in India is BIGFlix in 2008. Later on DittoTV, now renamed as ZEE5, SonyLIV took over the market, till the launch of Hotstar in 2015. In India most of the people has chosen Hotstar as their favourite OTT platform [5]. The entertainment company Disney has purchased and integrated Hotstar and its existing application, and renamed it Disney+Hotstar in April. 2020.

Netflix entered the Indian market in January 2016. According to Morgan Stanley Research, Netflix had the highest average watch time of more than 120 minutes but viewer counts of

around 20 million in July 2018. As of 2018, Netflix has six million subscribers, of which 5–6% are paid members.[5]

Amazon Prime Video was launched in 2016, currently having movies and web series spanning through 6 Indian languages. There are other OTT platforms that are present in India, ALTBalaji, Spuul, Voot, ZEE5, MX Player, YuppTV, SonyLIV, ErosNow, JioCinema, HOOQ, along with platforms that offer specific regional content, HoiChoi in Bengali, SunNXT in the four Southern languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, and AHA in Telugu.

Off late the word OTT has become very popular amongst people of various age groups. This trend has primarily skyrocketed by increase in the number of devices that support these platforms along with tremendous rise in the number of internet and mobile data subscribers. The rise of OTT platforms has also seen growth with the steady but positive increase in the number of people who are wanting content that is produced for the television and as well as newly made exclusive content that is available on demand at anytime of the day, which makes it one of the biggest opportunities in the entertainment industry in the recent times. The affordability of smartphones and the low mobile data costs are among the important factors contributing to OTT growth. Digitalization of content has reduced conservation, reproduction and distribution costs, which, in turn, has promoted the explosive growth in the supply of online content. [6] Factors like digitization reduced mobile data costs, high speed internet, and multi- screen penetration across geographies and classes and fixed line broadband growth, can determine a huge potential in the sector of OTT services in India, which is likely to grow tenfold in the coming years [5]. The purpose of conducting this research is to understand and analyse the influence OTT platforms have on people in these current times, when they have access to OTT as their main source of entertainment.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To know and understand whether people prefer OTT over theatrical movie releases and traditional TV post pandemic.
- To understand the opinions of people's entertainment who prefer watching direct release movies on OTT or Friday releases in the theatre
- To ensure privacy and confidentiality of viewing history

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today's fast growing world we can't even think people without technological resources, the consumption of media among people are in different heights. In this tech savvy world people have full freedom to choose their media content at anytime from anywhere. This happens only because of technological development and newly evolved internet speed. The newly evolved OTT apps like Netflix, Amazon, and Zee Five etc, have become huge competitors for the traditional medium. [7] The Smartphone mobile traffic in 2014 was 1.73 EB and is projected to grow at a compound rate of 60% from 2014 to 2019. [7] The digital media worldwide is projected to increase to \$118bn by 2021 with a compound annual growth rate of 11% between 2016 and 2021. [8] Keeping in line with the global trends, India has also shown an increase in the consumption of all types of content ranging from text, audio or video on different digital platforms. India has become the second largest online market after china with over 460 million internet users. By 2023, the users' rate will be doubled comparing to the current scenario [9]. A lot of favourable factors like improved networks, better access to internet, multimedia service- capable mobile devices and application development ecosystem have contributed to a tremendous increase in media consumption on digital platforms. India has around 300,000 app developers and is the second largest app developer after US. [7]

The usages of new application based mobile platform in India have tremendously changed the consumption of video in this time period. The penetration of smartphones in India is projected to grow to 520mn by end of 2020 and broadband penetration will increase from 14% currently to 40% in 2020[10]. This change has given the new media a big development by surpassing the traditional media. There has been a decline in the percentage of Indian Consumers who prefer watching shows on TV from 47% to 10% over the last one year. [11] While TV shows are watched on laptops and desktops, smartphones are used to watch short video clips.

So, there is a tremendous shift from the traditional TV viewing to digital viewership and a lot of factors have contributed to this shift. Mobile handsets have become more affordable and technologically advanced. The implementation and new implication of new media have shown a different height for India. This development makes the Indian government to move further close with technological adoption. Companies like Facebook, YouTube, Hotstar, Saavn, and Buzzfeed and so on are increasing their share of investments. Commerce is shifting from offline to online. Internet of Things will soon be a household concept. All these major trends and shifts will further drive people to spend more time on digital mediums.

The international mobile usages are expected to grow further in hug heights in future. As per the data available till February 2017, mobile devices accounted for 49.74% of web page views worldwide with Asia and Africa leading the pack. [9]

In India, 59% consumers watch advertisements in digital media than TV commercials [7]. The share of digital advertising in India is projected to double in the next 3 years from 12% currently to 24% by end of 2020. As per the data available till January 2017, mobile devices accounted for 79% of web page views in India. [9]Internet access is mainstreaming among Indian consumers and the use of mobile is intensifying. Many people are spending their most of the time in online for various purposes. India at present is the third biggest country in terms of internet users in the world with as many as 121 million Indians accessing internet. There has been 25% growth in Indian internet users over a year. 59% of the Indians access the internet via their mobiles. The average time spent on social media is 3 hours and 70% of Internet users watch online videos.[9]An average mobile web user in India consumers 6.2 hours of media on daily basis in which 102 minutes for media usage and 79 minutes for various internet content. 21 % of the total time is spent by youth on audio and video entertainment [7].

Among the Social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter account for 47% and 42% of overall videos watched online. The remaining 11% belong to OTT services like Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Prime video, Jio TV and VOOT. In India there are more than 24 lacks of OTT users. The market for OTT subscription is projected to grow to 4,000 crore by end of 2020.Currently, the average amount spent monthly for paid content is Rs.255. [12]

It includes subscription based services, free, ad supported services and pay-to-watch streams offered by services including iTunes and Video on demand. [7] OTT services are either offered for free or at a small monthly subscription fee. Examples of OTT devices include Smart TV's like Google TV and LG Electronics Channel Plus, various gaming devices like Xbox One, PlayStation, smart set-top boxes like Apple TV, tablets and smart phones like iPhones and Android phones. The new mobile application platform thus shows its huge competition to the electronic media in content wise as well as service wise.

Various factors are driving paid subscriptions like need for high quality videos, better viewing experience, ease of access and wider content choice. Though the internet speed in India is one third of the global average, but the optimal data speed along with friendlier data costs would contribute to a rapid growth in OTT in India.

With 75% of Indian internet users in the age group of less than 35 years and more than 50% of smartphone app users aged between 18 to 24 years, OTT platforms are targeting a younger demographic. [11]

With 70 million video viewers in India and about 1.3 million OTT paid-video subscribers, the number of Indian consumers inclining towards OTT platforms is increasing rapidly. But, the numbers fluctuate every month. Hotstar claims to have 5 million viewers on a regular basis which could rise up to 100 million during IPL season. [11] OTT services in India uses top-down approach in India but to be successful in the long term, a bottom-up approach to reach at every segment of internet savvy population.

4. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory adapted for this research is Uses and Gratification Theory. How an individual consumes content on OTT platforms during these times can be determined using this theory. The main aspect of this theory is that the user of these platforms gets to experience and connect with the media platform and can satisfy his or her needs depending upon their requirements. To decide what to watch, a show or a movie depends upon one's own preference. Whichever gratifies them, they can selectively choose and engage with that particular OTT platforms.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research is qualitative of nature. The main target group for this study is the people who live in the state of Telangana. The trends of OTT majorly influence people in urban areas, and also semi urban. Mostly people with access to internet and OTT. The research is performed on how people are using OTT as their main source of entertainment during pandemic. Lockdown has been imposed all over the country from March 23rd 2020, and people are confined to their houses to protect themselves from the virus. The theatres have been shut down and movie releases have come to a halt. So, now all tasks are currently fulfilled by being at home, so is movie watching. Hence, this study is performed on people with the age group of 20 to 40. Their opinions have been collected by performing semi structured interviews carried out with 10 people, both male and female that come from the state of Telangana, India with varied backgrounds. All of them are technologically adept and understand how OTT platforms function. 5 respondents come from Hyderabad, an urban area, 3 from Warangal, a semi urban area and 2 from Rangareddy, a rural area. The responses together form the result of this study. How the OTT platforms have brought in a change of video viewing in the lives of people.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you prefer OTT platforms over traditional TV, and why?
- 2) Are OTT platforms taking over theatrical experience?
- 3) What is the future of OTT in India?
- 4) During the COVID-19 pandemic, how has your OTT experience been?
- 5) Do you feel that OTT gives you the entertainment that you need?
- 6) Should OTT platforms get direct movie releases post pandemic?
- 7) Does OTT have content that is safe for family viewing?
- 8) Do you feel your viewing history is safe?

6. DATA COLLECTION

Data has been collected in the form of opinions taken from 10 respondents. All of them are graduates but hail from different geographical locations in the state of Telangana. To obtain an overall result this variation has been selected. The target age group is 20 to 40, as they are most accessible to the Internet and also adapt new technological developments into their daily lives. OTT platforms are mostly accessed by youth that come under this age group. So this was the preference and their opinions were considered to perform this study. Currently, now that mostly everyone is at home, there has been a rise in OTT consumption. So, people in this age group will go to OTT as their source of entertainment. The interviews were conducted on a one to one basis over telephone as the respondents were all confined to their homes during the self-quarantine period.

7. RESULTS

All the respondents were asked these questions and their opinions were understood theoretically using the uses and gratification theory. All the 10 respondents are currently active users of OTT platforms. Respondents #1, #4, #7, #9 and #10 hail from Hyderabad. Respondent #2, #5, #8 from Warangal, and #3 and #6 from Rangareddy.

#1, #4 and #9 have been using Netflix and Amazon Prime for over a year. They do not use traditional TV and prefer to watch OTT content any day. They have watched many shows and movies, and exclusive content present on the platforms. After the lockdown began, #1 and #9 have taken Disney+Hotstar VIP membership to watch content present there. But they still feel that the effect of watching a movie in a theatre is an experience in itself.

#3, #7 and #8 have only subscribed to Amazon Prime Video and have watched the exclusive direct movie releases on the day of its OTT release. They prefer to watch content at home rather than going to the theatre.

#6 watches the free content that is present on the Disney+Hotstar and MX Player platforms and is not paying for any subscription.

#2, #5 and #10 hail from a slightly higher economic background. They are subscribed to 6 different OTT platforms after imposition of lockdown – Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+Hotstar, ZEE5, SunNXT and Aha (A Telugu based OTT platform) which covers all Telugu content, along with Hindi, English and other regional languages, if necessary.

As for the facility to watch OTT over tradition TV, all the respondents feel that is true, as traditional TV does not have good content, like shows that are made to attract audience of this age and time. They prefer to watch content on OTT itself, which offers a wide variety of movies and shows. Also, some OTTs like Disney+Hotstar, SunNXT and ZEE5 offer Live TV options that are linked to Star, Sun and Zee channels respectively.

Respondents #1 #4 and #9 feel that even though OTT exists and is running functionally right now, the theatrical experience is something that they miss and feel would never replace the OTT platform experience. Respondents #3, #7 and #10 feel that the pandemic might affect them and their health so that's the reason why they chose to stay away from theatres at this point of time. Respondents #2, #5, #6 and #8 can watch only OTT and not go to the theatre as the theatrical experience does not matter to them, as long as they are able to watch the content at their convenience and leisure.

The corona virus has shaken the entire world all together and all one can do right now is being confined to their houses to protect themselves and their loved ones from the harmful virus. At this time, sitting under one roof can take a toll on a person. So new content on OTT has been a refresher for all the respondents. Right now the situation is as such, that one cannot step out. So, the main source of entertainment has been OTT for all the respondents.

The content that is present on these platforms are given a censor certificate based on their genre and content, but really, there is not filter or there is no stopping to viewing any content that is present on the platforms. With everyone in the household being at home right now, there has been an increase in family viewing. Some shows that are aired on Netflix are absolutely not safe for everyone to watch together. Some scenes contain nudity, while the others contain heavy amount of violence.

Mostly, the respondents watch movies of various genres. Next comes original web shows and then come TV shows, Live TV and documentaries. Mostly, their needs are met but half of the respondents miss the Friday theatrical movie releases and new movie content in the OTT platforms. All shootings have been stalled due to the inability to shoot and film during this virus outbreak.

Regarding the viewing history, respondents #1, #2, #4 and #10 said that they do not have privacy in for their viewing history as they use the same OTT login credentials on other devices. The history gets mapped on to them, so when they open their OTT account from another device, the last watched video pops up in the history automatically. So if they are sharing their password to other people, the viewing history will reflect on those devices as well.

Respondents #5 and #9 use their OTT accounts only on their smart TVs and logged into only one device so they feel that their viewing history is safe. Same with respondent #6 who uses their Smartphone for watching OTT content.

Remaining respondents #3, #7 and #8 do not see viewing history as a hindrance. Their login credentials are present on other devices as well, and they do not have any issues with it.

9. CONCLUSION

This research was performed as an attempt to study the usage and adoption of OTT platforms in the daily lives of people during the COVID pandemic. The virus outbreak brought in a new normal to everyone's lives. With the increase in technology and mobility, OTT viewing is rapidly increasing and there have been direct movie releases exclusively on these platforms, which have been accepted by one and all. Post pandemic, there has been a tremendous shift in the way how entertainment is considered. Even if their viewing history is not safe, it does not serve as a hindrance to using OTT platforms. The content that is created on these platforms will get more and more in number with time. The future of OTT in India is very bright. How much ever there is an emerging trend of OTT platforms and freshly made content, there is still a need of the theatrical experience. The sound and the picture clarity are greater in a theatre when compared to watching the same at the comfort of one's homes. OTT has made our lives convenient and will continue to. But it can never take away the effect of the theatres have on people.

REFERENCES

1. World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_10KeyFindings.pdf
2. Size, Growth Rate and Distribution of Population https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter3.pdf
3. A Brief History of Television in India https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/94199/7/07_chapter%202.pdf
4. CRTC – Convergence Policy, Policy Development and Research October 2011 <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/rp1110.htm> - rftn2

5. Netflix is getting crushed in India, and it's all because of Amazon and Hotstar
<https://www.androidcentral.com/netflix-getting-crushed-india-and-its-because-amazon-and-hotstar>
6. Consultation Paper On Regulatory Framework for Over-the-top (OTT) services TRAI 2015
<https://traigov.in/sites/default/files/OTT-CP-27032015.pdf>
7. Digital Media: Rise of On-demand Content Deloitte 2015
<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/in-tmt-rise-of-on-demand-content.pdf>
8. Digital marketing spend to hit \$118bn by 2021, but budgets will shift to experiences
<https://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/01/26/digital-marketing-spend-hit-118bn-2021-budgets-will-shift-experiences-0>
9. *Internet usage in India - Statistics & Facts*
<https://www.statista.com/topics/2157/internet-usage-in-india/>
10. Media and entertainment industry in 2019 grew by almost 9% to reach INR 1.82 trillion: EY- FICCI report 2020
https://www.ey.com/en_in/news/2020/03/media-and-entertainment-industry-in-2019-grew-by-almost-9-percent-to-reach-inr-1-82-trillion
11. Digital Video and the Connected Consumer
https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/accenture/conversion-assets/microsites/documents17/accenture-digital-video-connected-consumer.pdf
12. Video OTT vs DTH players: How Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar cornered Indian market
<https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/video-ott-vs-dth-players-how-netflix-amazon-prime-hotstar-cornered-indian-market/948816/>