



Diversity of Indian Regional Content on OTT Platforms: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Over the top platforms (OTT) have completely transformed the way we consume content. When it comes to content, Indian viewers love regional content on OTT platforms, according to a recent study titled Indian OTT Platforms 2023. According to a FICCI-PwC report, the share of regional language consumption on OTT platforms will cross 50% of total time spent by 2025, easing past Hindi at 45%. According to ABI Research, the over-the-top (OTT) video market across the world will continue to grow at a brisk pace, and with a surge compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10 percent through 2022, the OTT market will generate a massive \$51.4 billion. In the current scenario, OTT platforms are emerging in regional markets that cater to local tastes and preferences. The regional OTT players are firmly focused on meeting the content needs of native audiences. In the last one year, we have seen regional OTT platforms mushrooming in markets like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh-Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Some of the well-known platforms in this space are aha (Telugu), Hoichoi (Bengali), Planet Marathi, Koode (Malayalam), and City Short TV (Gujarati), among others. OTT is following in the footsteps of TV broadcasting. Regional content has successfully reshaped regional storytelling on the digital medium. Regional content has unexplored potential and the ability to establish a strong connection with the audience. This review paper highlights the Diversity of Indian Regional Content on OTT Platforms.

Keywords: Regional OTT; Local language; Regional market; Web series; Local taste;

Introduction

Over-the-top (OTT) platforms are video streaming services that deliver content directly to consumers over the internet without requiring a traditional cable or satellite TV subscription. OTT platforms have become increasingly popular in recent years due to technological advancements and behaviour changes in consumer viewing habits [1]. Many OTT platforms range from subscription-based services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video to free ad-supported platforms like Pluto TV and Tubi. Some OTT platforms offer a mix of both subscription and ad-supported content. One of the primary advantages of OTT platforms is the flexibility they offer in terms of viewing options. Unlike traditional TV, viewers can access OTT content from any device with an internet connection, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and smart TVs. This allows viewers to watch their favorite shows and movies on their schedule rather than having to tune in at a specific time.

Another advantage of OTT platforms is the diverse amount of content available in regional language. Many platforms offer TV shows and movies including original content unavailable elsewhere [2]. This has led to increased competition among OTT providers, with each platform trying to differentiate itself by offering unique features and content. OTT platforms have also disrupted the traditional TV advertising model. Rather than relying on advertising revenue to fund their operations, many OTT platforms generate revenue through subscription fees. This has forced advertisers to adapt by finding new ways to reach consumers, such as through targeted advertising or product placement.

There are also some challenges associated with OTT platforms. One of the main challenges is content fragmentation. With so many platforms offering exclusive content, it can be difficult and expensive for consumers to access all the content they want to watch. This has led to the rise of aggregator services like Roku and Apple TV, which allow viewers to access multiple OTT platforms through a single device. Another challenge for OTT platforms is piracy. Because OTT content is delivered over the internet, it is easier for users to illegally download or stream copyrighted content. This can significantly impact revenue for both content providers and OTT platforms. OTT platforms

have revolutionized the way we consume video content, offering viewers greater flexibility and choice than ever before. While there are challenges associated with OTT platforms, their popularity shows no signs of slowing down, and they are likely to continue to shape the future of the entertainment industry [3].

Historical perspective:

The history of OTT platforms can be traced back to the early days of the internet when companies first started experimenting with delivering video content over the web. In the 1990s, RealNetworks introduced RealPlayer, a streaming media player that allowed users to watch video content online.

However, it wasn't until the mid-2000s that the concept of OTT platforms began to take off. In 2007, Netflix launched its streaming service, which allowed subscribers to watch movies and TV shows online. Initially, the streaming service was only available to customers who subscribed to the company's DVD rental service, but it was later offered as a standalone service. In 2008, Hulu was launched, offering ad-supported streaming of TV shows and movies. This was followed by the launch of Amazon Prime Video in 2011, which provided unlimited streaming of movies and TV shows to Amazon Prime members.

Since then, the number of OTT platforms has exploded, with new services launching every year. In 2013, Disney launched its first OTT platform, Disney Movies Anywhere, which later evolved into Disney+. In 2015, HBO launched its standalone streaming service, HBO Now. In 2016, YouTube launched YouTube TV, a subscription-based live TV

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service. And in 2017, Facebook launched its Watch platform, which offers original and user-generated content.

The rise of OTT platforms has significantly impacted the entertainment industry, disrupting traditional TV networks and cable providers. In response, many traditional media companies have launched their OTT platforms, such as CBS All Access, NBC's Peacock, and Warner Media's HBO Max. Today, OTT platforms are a crucial part of the entertainment industry, offering viewers a wide diversity of content on demand. The popularity of OTT platforms is expected to continue to grow in the coming years, with more companies launching their streaming services and the number of subscribers increasing.

Indian perspective:

OTT platforms have seen tremendous popularity and growth during Covid-19 in India. India is the second-largest market for internet users worldwide. The increasing availability of high-speed internet connectivity has made it easier for viewers to access streaming services on various devices.

Some of the popular OTT platforms in India include:

1. **Netflix:** Netflix was launched in India in 2016 and quickly became popular among Indian viewers. It offers a wide range of international and Indian content, including TV shows, movies and documentaries.
2. **Amazon prime video:** Amazon Prime Video was launched in India in 2016 and offers a mix of Indian and International content, including movies, TV shows, and original content produced in India.
3. **Disney+ Hotstar:** Disney+ Hotstar is a popular OTT platform in India that offers a mix of international and Indian content, including movies, TV shows, sports, and news.
4. **Zee5:** Zee5 is an Indian OTT platform launched by the Zee Network. It offers a wide range of Indian content, including movies, TV shows, and original content produced by Zee.
5. **Voot:** Voot is an Indian OTT platform launched by Viacom18. It offers a mix of Indian and international content, including movies, TV shows, and original content produced by Viacom18.
6. **SonyLIV:** SonyLIV is an Indian OTT platform launched by Sony Pictures Networks India. It offers a mix of Indian and international content, including movies, TV shows, sports, and news.

The popularity of OTT platforms in India has led to increased competition among providers, with each platform trying to differentiate itself by offering unique content or features. Many platforms have also started producing original content in India to attract viewers and stand out in a crowded market. However, OTT platforms in India have also faced regulatory challenges, with the Indian government introducing new rules and regulations to govern the content available on these platforms. For example, in 2021, the Indian government introduced new rules that require OTT platforms to self-regulate their content and provide a complaint mechanism for viewers [4].

Regulations on OTT platforms:

OTT platforms have been subject to varying levels of regulation in different countries around the world. The regulation of OTT platforms typically falls under the remit of national governments or regulatory bodies responsible for media and telecommunications. The nature and extent of regulation of OTT platforms varies widely across different countries. Some countries have strict regulations in place that apply to both traditional TV networks and OTT platforms, while others have

taken a more laissez-faire approach to regulating these platforms [5, 6].

In some countries, OTT platforms are regulated in the same way as traditional broadcasters, with rules governing the content that can be broadcast and the times at which certain content can be shown. In other countries, OTT platforms are subject to less strict regulations, with guidelines or recommendations in place rather than legal requirements [7].

Here are some examples of the regulations that have been introduced in different countries:

1. **India:** In 2021, the Indian government introduced new rules that require OTT platforms to self-regulate their content and provide a complaint mechanism for viewers. The rules also require platforms to classify content based on age suitability and to display content warnings.
2. **UK:** In the UK, OTT platforms are subject to regulation by the Office of Communications (Ofcom). Ofcom has the power to enforce broadcasting standards, including rules on protecting children and preventing harmful or offensive material.
3. **USA:** In the USA, OTT platforms are subject to the same regulations as traditional broadcasters regarding advertising and marketing practices. However, there are currently no specific regulations governing the content that can be shown on these platforms.
4. **Singapore:** In Singapore, OTT platforms are subject to the Broadcasting (Class License) Notification, which requires platforms to comply with content standards and classification requirements.

The regulation of OTT platforms is a complex issue that requires a balance between promoting creative freedom and ensuring that content is suitable for all audiences. As the popularity of OTT platforms continues to grow, governments and regulatory bodies will likely continue to review and update the regulations in place to govern these platforms [8].

Diversity of Indian regional content:

India is a multilingual country. Industry experts say there was already a rising curiosity towards regional cinema. According to a Google and KPMG study, regional language users surpassed

English language viewers by a whopping 201 million. OTT players are witnessing high demand for movies and original content, even in regional languages around the world. The inclusion of regional content on OTT platforms has paved the way for mass-market adoption instead of the initial niche offering that these were once. As over-the-top platforms in India reach the scale, the need for local content will increase along with it. As per research points to around 500 Mn OTT platform users within the next three years, out of which at least 90 percent will be non-English speaking users, and at least half will be non-Hindi speaking users [9].

Multi-lingual OTT content:

Over-the-top (OTT) content refers to audiovisual content delivered over the internet directly to viewers, bypassing traditional broadcast and cable TV networks. India has seen a significant increase in the popularity of OTT platforms over the past few years, with viewers opting for on-demand and personalized content.

One of the significant factors contributing to the growth of the OTT market in India is the availability of multi-lingual content. India is a diverse country with several regional languages, and the demand for content in different languages is high. OTT platforms have recognized this demand and are catering to it by offering content in various languages [10-16].

The availability of regional content on OTT platforms has provided viewers with a broader range of choices, catering to their language and cultural preferences. This has not only helped in reaching a wider audience but has also increased the viewership of regional content. The production of original regional content on OTT platforms has provided opportunities for regional actors, directors, and writers, contributing to the growth of the entertainment industry in India.

Many regional actors have gained recognition and popularity through their performances in regional OTT content. The production of original regional content has also boosted the regional film industry. This has encouraged more filmmakers to produce quality content in regional languages to showcase their work to a wider audience.

Some of the popular multi-lingual OTT platforms in India include:

Netflix: Netflix has a vast library of content in multiple languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, and more. The platform has also produced original content in regional languages such as Sacred Games (Hindi), Paava Kadhaigal (Tamil), and more.

Amazon prime video: Amazon Prime Video also offers a wide range of content in various languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, and more. The platform has also produced original content in regional languages such as The Family Man (Hindi) and Breathe: Into the Shadows (Hindi).

Disney+ Hotstar: Disney+ Hotstar offers content in several languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and more. The platform has also produced original content in regional languages such as Aarya (Hindi) and Triples (Tamil).

Zee5: Zee5 is a platform primarily focusing on regional content, offering content in various languages such as Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, and more. The platform has also produced original content in regional languages such as Kaafir (Hindi) and Godman (Tamil). Voot: Voot is another platform that offers content in various languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and more. The platform has also produced original content in regional languages such as Asur (Hindi) and The Raikar Case (Marathi).

The availability of multi-lingual content on these platforms has not only catered to the demand of regional language viewers but has also helped in reaching a wider audience. The production of original content in regional languages has also given a boost to the entertainment industry, providing opportunities for regional actors and filmmakers.

Reasons why regional language content boomed on OTT platforms

The boom in regional language content on OTT platforms in India can be attributed to several reasons, including:

Diversity: India is a diverse country with multiple languages, and viewers prefer consuming content in their native language. OTT platforms recognize this and have started providing regional content in various languages, contributing to the growth of regional language content.

Demand: The demand for regional content has increased significantly in recent years as more people are looking for relatable and culturally relevant content. The availability of regional language content on OTT platforms has fulfilled this demand and provided viewers with a wider range of options.

Original content: OTT platforms have started producing original regional language content, which has given a boost to the regional film

industry. This has not only created more job opportunities for actors, directors, and writers but has also helped improve content quality [17].

Availability: With the increasing penetration of smartphones and internet connectivity, OTT platforms have become more accessible to a wider audience. This has made it easier for viewers to access regional content from anywhere at any time.

Cost-effective: Regional language content on OTT platforms is often more cost-effective than watching movies in theatres or subscribing to cable TV services. This has made it an attractive option for viewers looking for affordable entertainment.

Word of mouth: Word of mouth is a powerful tool in the Indian entertainment industry. When regional language content on OTT platforms receives positive reviews and feedback, it spreads quickly through word of mouth, contributing to its popularity and success.

Future of regional content on OTT platforms in India

The future of regional content on OTT platforms in India looks bright as the popularity of regional language content continues to grow. Here are some of the trends that are expected to shape the future of regional content on OTT platforms:

More original content: OTT platforms will continue to produce more original regional content, as it has proven to be a successful strategy in attracting and retaining viewers. This will provide more opportunities for regional actors, directors, and writers, contributing to the growth of the entertainment industry [17-27, 28].

Expansion to more languages: While OTT platforms offer content in various regional languages, there is still room for expansion. Platforms may start focusing on languages that have not yet been explored, catering to niche audiences and diversifying their content library.

Localization: As OTT platforms expand to more regional languages, localization will be more focused. This means creating content in the local language and reflecting the local culture, traditions, beliefs and customs. This will make the content more relatable and appealing to viewers.

Monetization: While regional content on OTT platforms has proven popular, monetization remains a challenge. OTT platforms will need to develop innovative monetization strategies, such as pay-per-view or subscription-based models, to ensure that they can continue producing quality regional content.

International expansion: With the increasing popularity of regional content, OTT platforms may look to expand internationally, catering to the diaspora and non-Indian viewers who are interested in Indian regional content. This will provide new opportunities for regional actors and filmmakers to showcase their work on a global platform.

The future of regional content on OTT platforms in India looks promising, with more original content, expansion to more languages, localization, monetization, and international expansion expected to shape the industry. As viewers continue to demand regional language content, OTT platforms will need to keep innovating and adapting to ensure that they remain competitive and provide quality content that meets the needs of their viewers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Regional content is the pathway to boosting

subscribers and offering original content in languages people are well-versed within developing and developed nations. Trends already show that viewers are thirsty for content in their regional dialects, and the next couple of years might see a significant expansion in regional video content streaming, magazines, and series. The popularity of OTT platforms in India has increased significantly, and the availability of multi-lingual content has played a significant role in this growth. The demand for regional language content is high, and OTT platforms have recognized this and are catering to it by offering content in multiple languages. With the increasing popularity of regional language content, it is expected that more OTT platforms will focus on producing and providing regional content, contributing to the growth of the entertainment industry in India.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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