



Trends in OTT Platforms Usage During COVID-19 Lockdown in India

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Abstract: COVID – 19 Pandemic resulted into sudden lockdown in entire world. It was a period of big challenge for the whole world. It was a period of learning for entire universe as a situation like this raised almost after a century. Every single industry in the world had to adopt the changes whether it is from the supply side, manufacturing side or distribution side. Same like other industries lockdown also affected the entertainment industry whether it is broadcasting, content creation, OTT platforms or searching for a newer ways or newer places to shoot and edit. The situation in which entertainment industry remained at halt was beyond expectation and no one was really prepared to. At the same time the industry came with new ideas like editing in remote areas or in isolation for already shoot videos and use of internet and technology for capturing international market. The industry observed that during lockdown, people had a lot more time to spend on entertainment services it took it as an opportunity to take a benefit of this situation.

This study aims to understand the trends in Over-the-top content consumption as pertains to lockdown amidst COVID 19 outbreak in India.

Index Terms: COVID-19, Lockdown, OTT Platform, Pandemic, Digital Content

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing cases of COVID -19, the government of India declared nation wide lockdown starting from 25th Mar. 2020 initially for 21 days and continued for months. It remains world's biggest lockdown to date (Mukunda, M. & Singh, R. 2021). The private and public offices as well as transport offices closed down and restrictions were put on mobilization of people. This affected millions of people. But, at same time the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic has proved beneficial for many industries such as pharmaceutical, IT, E-learning, Virtual reality, etc. With these industries OTT players also got an opportunity to grow

their business due to more demand for entertainment as people got more time in their hands. Many people during this tough time were at halt due to travel ban, some people were in mandated self-quarantines after their travel and some were following social distancing measures and they were away from their peers. It was a time when OTT came to rescue as other entertainment channels i. e. TV Channels/movies failed to give more variety to viewers. Many of the OTT apps had shown the growing trend in 2020. It is also observed that most of the new subscribers are registering from Tier II and Tier III cities. With cinema halls shut for almost a year, many of these OTT platforms even released movies digitally.

Digitalization has had significant consequences in the world of cinema and the moving images in terms of content as well as ways of watching moving pictures (Balbi, G., Magaouda, P. 2018). With its cheap & flexible subscription fees and variety of video library OTT is becoming popular for individual viewer in India. Indian film Industry loses around Rs 50 billion per year due to piracy. India is on top for sharing pirated content (Singh, P. 2019). These contents are now available on OTT at better prices. Some of the commonest OTT platforms in India and elsewhere include Netflix, Disney Hotstar, Eros Now, Amazon Prime Video, Voot, etc. OTT TV's competitive superiority surpasses that of traditional TV (Katherine, C. & Yi- Ning 2019). China is the world's biggest manufacturer of TV sets, developed its own set of technical standards and has concentrated first on digitizing its cable TV systems (Tu-li, L. & Robert, G. 2014). Desai, M. 2021) points out that smartphones are becoming new destination for television consumption and COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns made it more important.

II. OBJECTIVES

The present study is focused on the following objectives:

1. To study the impact of COVID 19 lockdown on OTT platforms
2. To assess the reasons for the popularity of OTT platforms in India
3. To compare OTT platform with traditional TV channels.

III. IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON OTT PLATFORMS:

COVID-19 lockdown has given a major setback to film and television industry as same like other industries the industry was not prepared for the lockdown. India was among top ten countries in world in total box office from 2011 to 2018 (Qiao, L., Yanqiu, G. & Hong, L. 2021). Most of the video content shown on entertainment channels were repeated as shoots were banned due to increasing COVID cases. At the same time cinema halls were also shut to maintain physical distancing norms. Even after reopening of the cinema halls producers were reluctant to bring new films in cinema theatres. Some of the films were released digitally but some producers are still holding with their big release and waiting to normalise the situation so that everyone can watch the movie as it is a one opportunity window.

Where films and daily soaps have struggled, web series captured the new viewers. The format of web series, its story telling, cast and themes are different than TV content which attracted most of the viewers. The viewers includes housewives, employees working from home and children learning from home through e-learning apps. People realised that without stepping out of home much more creative content is available easily in their hands through laptop or smartphones.

At present, India is the world's fastest growing OTT market. As per the India Brand Equity Foundation report the OTT sector in India saw a 30% rise in the number of paid subscribers, from 22.2 million to 29.0 million between March and July 2020 (IBEF, 2020). With the increasing number of internet users this number is going to increase in future. India is now second only to China in terms of internet users (Mandavia, M. 2019). It is noticed that 75% of internet users belong to the age group of less than 35 years (Deloitte, 2015). It is estimated that about 325 million Indians today stream online video — either ad-supported or paid (Debolina, B. & Sohini, M. 2021). By 2024, the industry is expected to reach Rs. 3 Trillion at a growth rate of 9% (Karthika, C. 2021).

IV. REASONS FOR THE GROWING POPULARITY OF OTT PLATFORMS IN INDIA:

1. Fresh content and Pocket friendly:

Many of the OTT platforms such as ZEE 5 and VOOT which creates contents for TV channels releases a fresh content 24 hours before it goes on TV channel. Therefore, subscriber get the content in advance than TV. OTT platforms are also pocket friendly. Subscribers can compare the various schemes available and can select the best suitable plan. The recent advances in digital TV with increased storage enables the application of recommendation technologies in the TV domain (Borko, F.(2009). OTT services nowadays are focusing on local markets and that is why they are using multiple strategies such as 'localization strategy', 'partnership strategy' and 'content differentiation strategy' to attract local audience (Park, S., Kwon, Y. 2019).

2. International content

The subscriber can access variety of content. Hundreds of movies and shown not only in multiple regional language are available but international content is also available easily. It includes movies, web series, sports, kids contents, etc. The OTT user can watch any content of any country. Due to digital technology customers are no longer limited to local stores or certain brands, they can choose different brands and variety of substitutes are available to them through digital platform (Mehdi, K. 2018).

3. No outdoor plans

During lockdown all outdoor activities had a ban. Even print media was closed. During that period, only TV and OTT platforms were available for entertainment.

4. Device

The benefit of OTT platform is, it is available anytime and anywhere. It is said that TV is a medium of family entertainment whereas, OTT is a medium of individual entertainment. One can enjoy the OTT content 24 hrs a day as media service is available anytime. It also supports connection with Android TV or laptop or smartphones. So, individual gets more choice for selecting media. It is observed that youth and adults too are watching television differently from the way they did earlier. They are watching more programs online rather than offline in their convenient time (Patti, M. & Jessica, T. 2017).

5. Audio Video Quality

As the content of OTT is available mostly in High Definition, the quality of audio and video is high. The viewer gets best quality of audio and video quality while watching movies. Not only this, the viewer can also adjust the audio video quality as per the internet speed. In India, most of the content is available in Hindi or English and this gets translated into regional languages for vernacular audience. The two steps are important to win the OTT

market – understanding a regional consumer and winning over that consumer (Arvin, S. 2020). The OTT platforms are now focusing on regional content to attract more audience. Amongst all OTT platforms Netflix is devoted to high quality media content (Kevin, M. & Daniel, S. 2016). Not only this, platforms like Netflix and Amazon are using AI to predict user choices and preferences (Shubhankar, D. & Saikat, G. 2021).

V. OTT PLATFORM V/S TV CHANNELS

The entire picture of entertainment has changed after the entry of digital content in entertainment sector. COVID-19 has changed the TV industry in a faster pace. The OTT platforms which were earlier struggling to make place in entertainment industry have grown drastically in first three months of lockdown. But, it doesn't mean that OTT industry will take away the viewership of TV content. India still has base of 70-80 million audience for TV (John P., Mark F., (2021). The biggest advantage of TV is that it is a popular medium for family entertainment. Most of the OTT content is watched by viewer individually when he is in travelling that too on smartphones, whereas the entire family watches the longer content on TV when family is together. And TV is a medium which keeps entire family entertaining together and it is a part of their routine. So, at present it is difficult for OTT platforms to occupy the place of TV.

VI. CONCLUSION

No doubt, with cheap internet network and conditions prevailed due to lockdown, OTT market is growing very fast in India. In the coming years OTT will come out with more creative content in our regional languages which will further boost our entertainment industry. TV, OTT and Film industry will co-exist and give more creative content once the situation will normalise.

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