The Influence of OTT Web Series on Students in Tamil Nadu: A Network Analysis

Mahalakshmi U. N.*, Research Scholar, Department of Communication and Journalism, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India*

Kiran Prasad, *Professor and Head, Department of Communication and Journalism, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India*

Abstract

There has been tremendous growth in the online industry in India in the past few years due to faster and affordable internet services, increase in the number of consumers visiting online content and the amount of time spent in online content consumed by the people. The change in the Indian viewers' lifestyle, online content consumption patterns, and the introduction of various OTT platforms paved the way for the new watching habits. Web series, much popular in western countries, with globalisation, became popular in India. Watching web series on OTT platforms is entertaining, fun, and sometimes addictive. The younger generation is the primary target audience of the web series. Online video streaming platforms introduced the habit of binge watching, watching subsequent series episodes in one sitting. The impact of binge-watching comprises both positive and negative effects. It acts as a stress buster that enhances productivity, gives high self-confidence, boosts the mood and brings happiness and contentment. On the other side, health complications like eye dryness and irritation, headaches, tiredness, anxiety, and sometimes depression also occur. The purpose of this research is to understand the reach of the OTT web series among college-going students in Tamil Nadu and understand behavioural changes due to the content shown. For this purpose, the researchers applied the survey method as a methodological tool to collect the data. This research concludes that OTT content has both positive and negative impact on their attitudes, academic performance, and personal and social lives.

Keywords: OTT, web series, influence, Network analysis.

Introduction

Digitalization and globalization have modified the way of media consumption. The tremendous growth of the online industry in recent years is due to the increase in internet connections, new technological innovations, affordability and availability of smart devices. The trend of media consumption is changing with time. However, studies denote that factors

like escapism, relaxation, time pass and companionship are why television viewers watch serials and web series viewers are also motivated by these factors (Greenberg, 1974; Steinkamp, 2010; Steiner & Xu, 2018). Viewers are shifting from traditional to online video streaming content (Netflix, 2013; Schweidel & Moe, 2016). The audience shifts from conventional to online video consumption because they have their viewing schedule and are readily available anytime, anywhere (Littleton, 2014). It is also because of vague censorship and more connectivity with content providers (Yijun, 2016).

India occupies second place in the Over the Top (OTT) market next to the US and will attain 138 billion worth market by the end of 2023. Steinkamp (2010) claimed that the other reasons for watching web series are lower price, quality of content, and fewer advertisements. According to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI, 2019) report, there was an increase in OTT subscribers in India, around 30-35 million by 2022.

There has been tremendous growth in data streaming of OTT service providers like Disney+Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, and Spotify, recording a 140% rise in India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand. OTT platforms engage the consumers mainly through smartphones and Internet TV and have changed the viewing patterns (Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012; Tryon, 2015). OTT services are typically accessed via internet-enabled devices like websites on computers, laptops, smart TVs, Smartphones, and tablets. Today, most OTT platforms offer more than video streaming and hosting. Some include video monetization features to sell your video content subscriptions, rentals, or bundled packages. Some notable examples include Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+Hotstar. Once subscribed for a subscription, they can access quality content anytime and anywhere. Along with this, there are many benefits of OTT Platforms. OTT Platforms and businesses have grown tremendously during the pandemic, playing an essential role in the information revolution and development.

OTT services are films and shows provided online for the audience by the content providers. Across the world, over 785 million people have subscribed to OTT channels like Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and so on.

The global OTT market size is expected to reach $179.9 billion by 2025, where the market growth will increase by 14.3% (Global Newswire, 2020). The primary audience watching web series belongs to the 18-23 age category. The main characteristic of this group is that the

audience is young and has the time to watch the series. Also, they have a light-hearted taste or humorous taste in the online media content. They prefer to watch more comedy shows followed by drama series with 30-60 minutes followed by 20-30 minutes. Web series may be harmful to the overall well-being of a person. It is seen that the different motivational factors and a person's preferences affect their cognition, emotion, and conation.

With Internet connection, people have started watching web series on mobile and immobile devices. The OTT platforms provide us with numerous options, and to access them; people need an internet connection and an annual subscription fee. Most houses have an Internet connection, so they only need a yearly subscription fee less than the TV subscription plans (McAdams, 2019). People are bored of watching the same repetitive content and have been looking for something new. These platforms offer the audience a great variety and less censored content that attracts the audience (McAdams, 2019). The biggest advantage of the Web series is that the Film Censor Board of India has still not loomed like a hungry vulture on the OTT content in India. The best part is that there is no need for censorship on OTT in India. This is why many directors and producers prefer the OTT platforms to screen their films or series without the hassles of unnecessary cuts and censorship. Unlike cinema halls, OTT content is largely meant for private viewing.

The technology in OTT platforms also allows a clear classification of family and mature content. It's easy for those who don't wish to watch any mature themes to stay away.From action thriller to drama or dark humour to survival drama, it's easy to find the content of any genre. Web series focus on casting the best actor for a role by recognizing amazingly talented actors. Film Directors tend to cast stars with a significant fan following to maximize their box office collection. But web series, with their subscription-based revenue model, do away with this capitalization on a star's fame and pave the way for many new and upcoming talents. Not just actors, web series, are also responsible for bringing talented writers such as Sudip Sharma, the writer of 'Patal Lok,' Gaurav Shukla of 'Asur' fame, and Richie Mehta, the writer, and creator of 'Delhi Crime.' Credit goes to the OTT platforms for greater democracy in talent recognition and awards.

Most OTT platforms aim at increasing viewership by releasing web series in different languages. Audiences need to log in to their account, choose their preferred language, and enjoy the series. Moreover, one can control the playback of the series and can skip to the next or previous scenes, episodes, or even seasons. Such controls are not available on cable TV.

Also, there are options to customize a list of favourite series, add seasons to the list, and watch them any time later. This gives OTT service providers a sizable opportunity to get the most out of the digital medium. Watching web series is entertaining, fun, and sometimes addictive. It acts as a stress buster which enhances productivity and gives high self-confidence, boosts the mood, and adds a big smile, happiness, and contentment. Health complications like eye dryness and irritation, headaches, tiredness, anxiety, and sometimes depression also occur.

Related studies

Web series are different from television formats since they do not have time frames and censorship issues (Agarwal & Das, 2022). Audiences are kept occupied and revisit the platforms often for more content (Kumar & Dwivedi, 2020). Adult content, multiple genres and short time durations are the advantages of web series, which are also bold in the presentation (Pandit, 2020).

> "Entertainment is fast becoming an all-you-can-eat buffet. Call it
> the Netflix effect" (Matrix, 2014).

"Web Series " is a series of written or unwritten videos, usually in the form of episodes and uploaded on the Internet (Kassabian, 2017; Lee, 2019). Web series can be considered an example of the convergence of online space and entertainment content. Services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar provide multiple show episodes, enabling marathon viewing sessions (Lee, 2019). When Netflix released its original content called House of cards in 2013, over 30,000,000 views were recorded daily across the globe (Yin, 2016). Web series can be considered an entertaining as well as an educational platform. It allows its audience to travel worldwide virtually and experiences how it feels to be part of a culture or a place (Gianchandani, Shah & Sharma, 2020).

One major characteristic of web series is its length. People watch the series depending on the amount of time they have; for those busy with their work-life, short web series are also available, whereas, for others who want to do time pass, a lengthy one is available. Nielsonwire (2011) said that 72% of the US audiences pay for both: TV subscriptions as well as to watch web series. Research done by Jenks in 2010 showed that 33% of US users watch videos online full time. The increasing demand for web series was defined as 'network

drama' (Yijun, 2016). The trend towards internet globalization and consumer intake of web series is increasing continuously.

India occupies the second place in active internet users after China and has the largest youth population;(Nagaraj, Singh & Yasa, 2021). India is a big market for internet and content providers, flexible and new sources of entertainment were required as an alternate source when it comes to fulfilling the needs of such a vast audience. The popularity of web series in India is mainly due to the infrastructure supporting it, other than the choices of the masses.

According to a report by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in October 2018, Internet subscribers have increased rapidly over four months. As of June 2018, the number of followers was 512.6 million showing an increase of 3.7% from March 2018. Of the 512.26 million, 66% were from urban areas, and 34% were from rural areas. The authorities also added that the availability of the internet plays a significant role in the popularity of web series in India. India has seen a sea of change over the past few years, with YouTube Influencers creating their channels, Sony Entertainment, and Hotstar making their subsidiaries. This shows us that web series and the OTT platforms have a future in India, considering the present growth rate.

The most popular OTT platform in India is Hotstar, followed by Amazon Prime, but as far as web series are concerned, Netflix is the urban youth's favorite. (Joglekar, 2018). These OTT platforms have signed a self-censorship code (Filtzgerald, 2019) and avoided the prohibited contents. Amazon Prime Video states that the existing laws are adequate. The Central Board of Film Certification's (CBFC) version is that the informal usage of sex and untailored crass language in web series attract the audience. This raises the question of what effects this would have on children.

This digital era helps the audience to connect and engage themselves and has opened avenues for streaming service providers. The OTT platforms must concentrate on key factors that drive the customers' decision to remain connected and provide a steady flow of sales in the future to stay competitive (Viswanathan, Hollebeek, Malthouse, Maslowska, Kim & Xie 2017). These OTT platforms gave rise to changing viewing patterns and platform choices (Livingstone, 2007; Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012; Tryon, 2015).

Several types of research proved the direct or indirect effects on adolescents (Flayelle, Maurage & Billieux, 2017; Menon, 2022). Binge behaviors are closely related to negative feelings (Sung et al. 2005). Many studies provided examples of articles that correlate binge-watching, body dissatisfaction (Anschutz, Engles, Leeuwe & Strien, 2008), low academic achievements (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020), depressive symptoms (Steins-Loeber, Reiter, Averbeck, Harbarth & Brand, 2020), and low esteem (Stice, Presnell & Spangler, 2002).

Peterson (2016) analyzed the impact of binge-watching on academics and stated, "online content watchers schedule a time to binge-watch as a reward for themselves after their daily work accomplishments. Consumers are unaware of this new binge-watching model's effect, which reflects in their academic performances and social life. Sung, Kang & Lee (2015) established through their research that binge-watching led to depression and loneliness among youth. The increase in binge-watching significantly since the pandemic situation and the COVID-19 lockdown of web series and online video content on OTT platforms has brought several changes in students' attitudes, behavior, and social life.

Objectives of the study

The major objectives of the study include:

1. To understand the reach of OTT web series among college-going students in Tamil Nadu.
2. To know the reasons for watching web series, to find behavioral changes, if any, due to the content shown, and to explore the perception and understanding of youth regarding the nature of content shown in web series.

Research Methodology

The researchers adopted a quantitative methodology for this study. Based on the literature review, the questionnaire was constructed and circulated through online mode (using Google form). One hundred samples were collected from Tier1 and Tier 2 cities in Tamil Nadu.

The data was collected from recognized and prestigious institutions in and around Tamil Nadu. The collected sample was converted into graph format using Pajek Software to understand the impact of the web series.

Analysis and Interpretation

The students were divided into age groups of four categories. Most of the students who watch web series on OTT platforms belong to the 20- 23 age group with 50%, followed by 43% of the students falling in the 18-20 age group and 7% belonging to the above 23 years age group category. No respondents were found in the age group category of under 18.

Most of the samples were post-graduate, with 56% female. It is also noticed that students' favorite OTT platform to watch web series is Netflix which comprises 56%, Disney + Hotstar, 23%, and Amazon Prime, 17%. Most students watch web series for relaxation, time pass, knowledge, escapism from reality, and companionship.

Regarding their watching time, 67% of the students watch web series whenever time permits, 26% watch late at night, and the remaining 7% watch while travelling. Based on the web series, students either view it as binge-watching or with intervals. Their watching duration per day is 2- 6 hours

Majority of the students accepted that they were affected by watching web series. 74% of the students like web series because they relate to or identify the character that resembles them.

Table 1: The most attractive element of the web series

Category	Agree	Disagree	Sometimes
Variety of Content	80	10	15
Less Censored	50	20	45
Western Culture	50	15	35
Quality of Content	75	5	20

Table 1 reveals the variety and quality of content followed by western culture, and a less censored range attracts the students. 50% of them like to watch Intimate scenes, and 69% felt that most web series used abusive language.

Table 2: Subscription Pattern

Language Preference	Percentage
Regional	12%
English	67%
Original with Subtitles (Korean, Spanish)	21%

From table 2, it is possible to understand that International Subscriptions are students' preferred ones, followed by national and regional subscriptions. It is also noted that students' favorite genres are thriller, mystery, suspense, comedy, romance, romcom, love, and so on. They prefer English language content with subtitles and also regional shows.

Table 3: Addicted to watching web series

Response	Percentage
Yes	38%
No	35%
Maybe	27%

From table 3, it is evident that most students accept that they have become addicted to watching web series. Surprisingly, 71% of the students said they had an impact by watching web series.

The students denied that they watch web series for social status or due to peer pressure. This generation, except for a few, are well aware of the pros and cons of any technology. Students stated that watching web series helped them improve communication skills and vocabulary, learn multi-language, know various cultures, people, world, life lessons/styles, and social messages.

They said that it also boosts their confidence, helps them understand and compare their lives with others, and changes their perspective and behavior. Students mentioned that they would think twice before speaking to anyone to avoid hurting others since they have witnessed the consequences of such situations in the web series and understood the value of sacrifice and making adjustments with their family and friends

Most of them identify themselves with web series characters that resemble them and feel attached to it.

Emotional value, love, food inspiration, the importance of relationships, perspective change about sex and LGBT are other factors they have come across by watching web series.

The data shows that Friends, Squid Game, Money Heist, Sex Education, Stranger Things, Orange is the New Black, Alice in the Borderland, and All of us are dead are some of their most-watched web series.

Table 4: Impact of Watching Web Series

Impact Code	Impact Factor	In-Degree Value	Significance
IM1	Becoming violent	25	Significant
IM2	Sexual initiation	46	Highly Significant
IM3	Aggressive behavior	37	Highly Significant
IM4	Provoked smoking	30	Significant
IM5	Stimulated to consume alcohol	37	Highly Significant
IM6	Poor academic performance	37	Highly Significant
IM7	Feeling restless	1	Not Significant
IM8	No impact	6	Not Significant
IM9	Laziness	2	Not Significant
IM10	Distraction in schedule	4	Not Significant

Table 5: Student Demographics

Category	Count	Percentage
Male Students	44	44%
Female Students	56	56%
Total Students (Set V)	100	100%

Table 6: Watching Habits of Students

Watching Habit	Percentage
Prefer romance-based web series	54%
Use mobile phones/laptops to watch web series	94%
Influence of uncensored international content	87%

Data collected from the students show (In tables 4, 5 & 6) various impacts of watching web series, namely becoming violent, sexual initiation, aggressive behaviour, provoked smoking, stimulated to consume alcohol, poor academic performance, feeling restless, no impact on them, laziness, and distraction in their schedule. These factors are coded as IM1, IM2… IM10, respectively. The set of students is represented by the set V={1,2,3, …, 100}. Set V consists of 44 male students and 56 female students. The graph was constructed (Figure 4) using Pajek software.

The most significant impacts of watching web series on OTT platforms are sexual initiation, aggressive behaviour, stimulation to consume alcohol, poor academic performance, provoked

smoking, and becoming violent with respective in-degree 46, 37, 37, 37, 30, and 25. The in-degree for other factors, namely no impact, distraction in their schedule, laziness, and restlessness, are 6, 4, 2, and 1. From this in-degree value, the researchers can conclude that distraction in their schedule, laziness, and restlessness are not significant factors.

The data showed that 54% of the respondents prefer to watch romance-based web series. It is also noted that students' watching habits are changing since the OTT allows them to watch any program at their convenience. It is also noticed that 94% of the students use mobile phones or laptops to access web series. This is the primary reason for the change in the watching pattern of college students. Around 87 percent of respondents accepted that the availability of uncensored international content with English subtitles plays a significant role in the watching habits of the students.

Romance-based web series contain straightforward concepts that are effective in breaking taboos. For example, in the Netflix web series "Sex Education," one of the lead characters, Otis, requests his mom not to have a relationship with the plumber who visits their home since he is dating the plumber's daughter Ola. In their culture, it is common that if the parents are not their biological parents, they can date, unlike in our culture where they become brother and sister. In "Money heist," having a relationship with criminals is glorified. The web series represent characters consuming alcohol, smoking, and discussing sex openly. These concepts may change their perspective on sex and could be the reason for their sexual initiation, which is the dominant factor.

Most students accept that they become aggressive when their late-night binge-watching is disturbed by their parents or family members. They also expressed experiencing/copycatting their favorite characters by imitating their behaviours, such as smoking and consuming alcohol. These factors play an essential role in affecting their academic performance.

Conclusion

Any new technological development will influence the younger generation since they are gadget lovers and love experimenting with all products. This will positively and negatively impact their attitudes, academic performance, and personal and social lives. Today's youth are exposed to everything much earlier than in the olden days. Self-realization helps them improvise their future since they experience almost everything virtually through watching web series.

Students wanted to explore the world in their own private space with the available smart devices, which are affordable for them. They turned towards web series as an alternative entertainment, which has global content, no censorship, an element of humour, and a new storyline with exciting content. Moreover, they can watch these web series conveniently and anywhere. Apart from nudity and profanity, they also learn many good things. This 2K generation is more competent in analyzing and interpreting anything which should be adequately guided and acknowledged for the betterment of their life.

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