



Web Series and Web Movies and their psycho- sociological impact on netizens in India

Anindita Chattopadhyay

Phd Research Scholar

Dept of Mass Communication, Burdwan University &

Assistant Professor

Journalism and Mass Communication Department

Taradevi Harakh Chand Kankaria Jain College, Kolkata

Email- anirumi89@gmail.com, Mobile- 8335823170

Abstract

In India, since the last few years, the growth of OTT services has transformed video consumption, enhancing the level of control that viewers have over on what they are watching, when they are watching at their convenient time. In India, today OTT Platforms hold a strong ground and has a strong fan base, even in remote areas. All it takes to access the contents of the OTT Platforms is just a smart phone with proper internet connection. Now this internet connection comes at a really cheap rates in India, with the subscriptions fees of the OTT Platforms being also negligible. Technology has changed the way people consume online content now, allowing them to orchestrate their own viewing in terms of time, content, location, and devices used. The popularity of Internet distributed OTT services, together with the production of more innovative stories, have contributed to the popularization of a specific habit of viewing among audiences– ‘binge-watching’. The contents of the OTT Platforms blends culture with help from technology and attracts a large number of viewers. Online platforms are interactive in nature, making them more popular among netizens, unlike their television or film counterpart, where viewers were mostly passive audiences.

This research paper will be an attempt to study the overall effects of the web series and web movies on the audiences, specially the youth, both in psychological and social aspects. Also in this paper the recent developments in the content and concept of the Indian web series and web movies, effects of online advertisements shown in these web series and web movies on them will be covered.

Keywords- Web series, Psychological impact, netizens, representation, storytelling, OTT Platforms.

Introduction- The growth of OTT services has transformed video consumption, enhancing the level of control that viewers have over on what they are watching, when they are watching at their convenient time and has seen a huge growth since the last few years throughout the world. In India, today OTT Platforms hold a strong ground and has a strong fan base, even in remote areas. All it takes to access the contents of the OTT Platforms is just a smart phone with proper internet connection. Now this internet connection comes at a really cheap rates in India, with the subscriptions fees of the OTT Platforms being also negligible. Technology has changed the way people consume online content now, allowing them to orchestrate their own viewing in terms of time, content, location, and devices used. The popularity of Internet distributed OTT services, together with the production of more innovative stories, have contributed to the popularization of



a specific habit of viewing among audiences— ‘binge-watching’. The contents of the OTT Platforms blends culture with help from technology and attracts a large number of viewers.

As per record, forty-two percent of international viewers said they binge-watched more TV series in 2017 than they did 5 years ago according to Ericsson Consumer Lab, 2017. Not only the production and consumption of Web series have increased with the growth of OTT Platforms but also now there is a greater scope for independent filmmakers with limited resources to make short films and release them (upload them) directly in YouTube or any other OTT Platform for net viewers. Here ‘views’, ‘like’, ‘share’ and ‘comments’ matters. Online platforms are interactive in nature, unlike their television or film counterpart, where viewers are mostly passive audiences.

Contents are the life line of the streaming channels and it is the content that effects the psychology of the viewers, leaving an impact on their mind. So it’s important to focus on what the audiences are getting served by these streaming channels. With rising demand of viewership of web series in India among the youths specially, it is a serious area of research that what can be the probable effects and impact of these Web series or Web movies’ contents on the minds of the audiences. It is noticed that several problems are also cropping up, relating with their lifestyle, and often affecting their health, family life and even the society as a whole.

Purpose of research- With tremendous growth in the field of web series and web movies consumptions in India, since the last few years, it’s an important area to study the effects of these web series and web movies on the audiences, specially the youth. This research paper will be an attempt to study the recent developments in the content and concept development of the Indian web series and web movies, effects of online advertisements shown in these web series and web movies on them and the overall effect of these web series and web movies on the audiences both in psychological and social aspects.

Research Questions- The important questions that are to be considered in this research work are:

1. What is the evolving direction of the contents of the Indian web series or Web movies? What are the factors effecting and deciding the story telling patterns of these web series?
2. What are the issues relating with censorship regarding the contents of the online web series?
3. What are the impacts of these Web Series and Web Movies on Netizens?
4. What can be anticipated about the future of these web series and online streaming platforms and how they can be used as a positive platform for healthy entertainment?

Research Methodology- To conduct the research and reach a conclusion, mixed methods of research will be followed, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative aspect will provide the data to help understand the choices and consumption patterns of the respondents and effects of the web series on them, which will be acquired through questionnaires. Survey will be conducted, where fifty people from different age groups and socio economic back groups with be provided with the questionnaire to find out about their online viewership pattern and its impact on them. A qualitative understanding will come through in-depth analysis of the contents of the series and the advertisements shown in these series.



Theoretical Framework- To conduct this research study, it is important to understand media usage patterns and their effects on consumers, both psychologically and socially. For this reference to the uses and gratifications theory is one of the most popular method used to understand viewer's usage patterns as because this audience-centric framework focuses on how people use media for their convenience. The uses and gratifications theory also helps in understanding choice in communication behaviours of individuals and helps in explaining how the media and their content can be a source of influence on audiences. This theory also recognizes the potential for audience initiative and activity. Furthermore, in order to understand how viewers engage with web series, and the cognitive approach, the model of cognitive poetics is essential. As Mittell explains: "According to this model, viewing (or reading of literature) is understood by drawing upon our knowledge of cognition and perception, and then positing how the formal elements in a text might be experienced by such a viewer—while viewers are not reduced to their mental mechanics, the insights of cognitive science informs how we imagine the possible ways that viewers engage with film or television". To complete this research paper we will also refer to Freudian model of psychoanalysis consisting of the concept of Conscious, Pre Conscious and Sub conscious mind.

Factors effecting the content development in Indian web series and web movies-

Contents plays the most vital role in any web series or web movies. It is the content that attracts the attention of the viewers and also it is the content that leaves an impact on the minds of the viewers. As an audience living in an age where content is available at the click of a button, it is important to study the factors effecting the contents of the online streaming platforms in India and to understand the new set of patterns of behavior of today's audiences that they are engaging in.

In order to understand how viewers engage with web series, we can refer to the cognitive preference of the audiences. While watching a web series or web movie a cognitive approach is essential to understand how viewers engage with the content. The producers of web series and web movies recognized this approach and are making web series and web movies with which the India audiences can relate with. While making the web series for Indian audiences special care is taken that the plot should be "Indianized" and "localized" containing popular elements from Indian social structure, following Indian culture and covering themes from Indian mythologies and folklores, so that the audiences can get a feel of cognition. Yet the contents are fresh, with new concepts, innovative presentation style, and unique themes. This is helping them to survival in this highly competitive digital market and also are being able to catch and retain the attention of the target audiences through this practice. The treatment of these shows are completely different and these series are psychologically appealing.

We can refer to the user's gratification theory, which is an approach to understand why and how people actively seek out a specific media to satisfy their specific needs. Many researchers highlights that convenience of the audiences and their choice in selecting contents are given priority by streaming series. This is mainly in urge to impress the audiences and capture more and more market space to earn more profit. As OTT Platforms are more for personalized viewing, the producers target smaller audiences, mostly young people who are more



tech savvy, up scaled and well educated viewers. An important area of focus in terms of storytelling pattern in web series is that Web series are commissioned, created, and distributed at the season level, so the story telling pattern has to change to keep a balance. There is always new opportunities and chance of bringing creativity in the different web series that are getting produced. "Video on demand, or the Netflix effect, is ushering in a mediated culture of instant gratification, infinite entertainment choices, and immersive experiences in televisual fantasies that combine drama and realism in irresistibly fascinating and spectacular ways." (S Matrix, 2014).

Contents of web series allows for flexible narrative structures that converge at the end of each episode, creating curiosity in viewers' mind and prompting viewers to watch the next episode to resolve narrative complexities, and this had given birth to the habit of watching the whole season of the series at a go among the audiences, commonly known as 'binge watching'. "Television is a relationship. It asks for our time, commitment, and trust and, in return, provides certain pleasures and payoffs through its storytelling. In many ways, this relationship is one-sided. The control largely remains in the hands of the viewer, and the show alone carries the burden of satisfaction. Enter: Netflix. The streaming service releases entire seasons of its shows all at once, a strategy that arguably encourages creators to reconsider or reallocate emphasis within this viewing relationship. If a show fails to woo us on episode one, the next episode is a mere 15 seconds away from starting. Why not give it the benefit of the doubt? Without a week in between each installment, the Netflix model potentially extends the courtship period." (Sharma, 2016).

The online series don't have to go through the ruthless scissors of the censor broad like the Indian television serials and films, so it can be said that they do have more freedom in terms of expression and presentation of ideas and concepts. Another point is that if the new media fails to provide something new and attractive enough contents to the digital audiences, why will they follow the series? Moreover as there is no censorship issues in the streaming platform these web series can very boldly deal with the contemporary socio – political issues prevailing in our country. They are entertaining and engaging, at the same time thrilling. "Creators of television programs have always encountered certain restrictions or guidelines for what they are able to present on screen. As the number of avenues for programming has grown, creators have become faced with several distribution options offering various degrees of creative freedom and autonomy. These variations can be attributed to industrial, organizational, and commercial factors. By studying the historical progression of creative freedom in television, we can get a sense of the influences and motivations behind the creative environment that Netflix provides the creators of its scripted series. Censorship and content restrictions have a substantial impact on creative freedom. The FCC has long regulated broadcast television, censoring what it determines to be obscene, indecent, and profane content." (Sharma, 2016).

Another important factor effecting the content development of web series and web movies are the advertisers and the sponsor's. Advertiser's demands does affects the contents of the web series. It is an open secret now that brand endorsements are done in embedded format through web series and web movies. As advertisements are one of the most important revenue earning source of the digital platform besides the subscription fees, the makers of the web series



tends to change or modify their contents to please the advertisers and attract them. Lately advertisers are also aiming at putting up their advertisements in the digital platform due to the huge audience shift towards it and the rising demands of web contents among people. Now the target audience of the advertisers are more available at digital platforms, so to catch their eyeballs the advertisers are also shifting their focus towards the OTT Platforms. According to survey reports, there has been a sharp rise in the advertisement revenues for OTT Platforms in India in the last four years.

While considering the area of advertising it can also be noted that advertisements shown in surrogate manner in popular web series or movies can have a deep impact on the mind of the young viewers. They may get attracted to a level, where they might feel it to be extremely necessary to buy a certain product or avail to a certain service to maintain acceptance among peer group and retain social status. Creation of such false needs can be highly dangerous for the audiences.

Impact of contents of web series on audience-

“One new disorder is arriving in Youth “Internet addiction Disorder”. Indian young youth now a days only follows Netflix, Amazon prime, Hot star, You tube. They ignore their studies, work, family, and friends. Every time every second youth opens the mobile screen, Laptop screen, Tab screen and watching the web series only.” (Koravi, 2019)

Entertainment is the biggest reason behind the use of OTT platforms. The OTT Platforms are gradually becoming part of common people’s life. Especially the youth, who are more comfortable with online platforms and are having access to internet and devices like laptops or at least a smart phone, prefers watching entertainment programs on OTT Platform as the web series succeeded in providing the audiences with the much needed fresh contents, interesting plots and realistic presentations of characters and situations with which the audiences tends to relate themselves. The mobility of gadgets on which these platforms are available and the availability of contents on demand, the power to choose are the other important factors effecting the rise in demand of OTT Platforms among viewers. Most often the young audiences goes for “Binge watching” and it is slowly taking the shape of addiction among them, hampering their life style and health. The people gets so engrossed in “binge watching” that they fail to perform their daily routine including studying or completing professional responsibility.

Anxiety, lack of sleep, preferring isolation are some of the common problems developing among the “binge watchers”. Violence, use of vulgar language and sex are exaggerated in these web series in the name of authentic presentation of the real world , while morality is often compromised leading to negative impact on audience mind. Researchers also highlights the point that web series with good content will have good effects on the audience psychology while that with regressive contents will affect the audience psychology in an adverse manner. “When grooming age youth would more focus the web series it mean they are learning a lot of things from web series. In fact, the analysis shows that majority of youth psychological affected through web series. Web series are not only changing their behavior toward aggressive but also changing their language and language is most important part of any culture. Smoking, Drinking habits are fast increasing in youth. More use of web series as source of entertainment than the other physical activates. Obesity, depression, eyes disorders are commonly seen in youths.



Findings shows that youth perceive the content of the web series shows is very against the ethics, culture and value of society.” (Koravi, 2019). So it is very important that what the audiences are watching and at what extend they are watching and absorbing such online contents.

“Such behaviour of binge-watching shows the addiction of viewers to virtual content that often leads to disturbances in their personal life whether it’s displaying anti-social behaviours, increased emotional sensitivity or disrupted sleep-cycles leading to various health issues amongst the bingers, usually youth.” (Dhanuka; Bohra, 2019)

Observations-

While doing this research paper work, many important areas regarding the content development and effect of OTT Platforms’ contents on netizens came into consideration. In term of concept development, many new trends are observed in the field of Indian OTT platforms. Priory is given to women centric plot development, where female characters are portrayed in much dignified, progressive and realistic manner, unlike their television counter parts like “The Test Case” “Leila”,”Maarzi”, “Aarya” and many more . Web series covering contemporary socio political aspects, economic exploitations and prevailing injustice based on caste, creed and gender are being made in a bold manner, with strong story lines like “PaatalLok”. Entertainment is provided along with strong theme. Various genres are getting covered by the web series and web movies ranging from horror like “Ghoul”, “Betaal” to Indian mythology to psychological thrillers like “Asur” to crime thriller like “Breath”, “The Family Man”, to romance including complex tale of relationships like in “Out of Love”, “Made in Heaven” and many more. These web series are totally different in terms to presentation from their television or films counterpart. Misen sense, real location shooting plays a vital part. Not only Indian web series, Indian Netizens are also addicted to watching international web series shown in Amazon Prime and Netflix like “House of Cards”, “Stranger Things”, “Money Heist”, “Dark” and many more.

Here is the response received from audiences while doing the research paper (Total sample size 50).

1. Do you have access to OTT Platforms?

	Percentage
a) Yes – 45	(90%)
b) No – 5	(10%)
c) Don’t know- 0	(0%)

2. What do you prefer watching for your entertainment and infotainment?

	Percentage
a) Television 19	38%
b) OTT Platforms 27	54%
c) None of them 4	8%



3. Do you watch web series on regular basis?

	Percentage
a) Yes	40
b) No	10
c) Don't know	0

4. Do you prefer watching Web Series and Web Movies?

	Percentage
a) Yes	45
b) No	5
c) Don't know	0

5. Do you get involved in "Binge Watching" often?

	Percentage
a) Yes	35
b) No	10
c) Don't know	5

6. Does the contents of web series or whatever you watch on OTT Platforms leaves an effect on your mind?

	Percentage
a) Yes	45
b) No	5
c) Don't know	0

7. Has your viewing of OTT Platform increased at present?

	Percentage
a) Yes	35
b) No	5
c) Don't know	10

8. Would you like to shift to online platform for viewing more/different entertainment from television?

	Percentage
a) Yes	35
b) No	10
c) Don't know	5

9. Do you try to follow the mannerism or lifestyle pattern of the characters shown onscreen in these web series?

	Percentage
a) Yes	32



- | | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| b) No 11 | 22% |
| c) May be sometimes 7 | 14% |

10. Do the advertisements shown in these OTT Platforms effects your shopping behaviour?

- | | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------|
| a) Yes 38 | 76% |
| b) No 7 | 14% |
| c) May be sometimes 5 | 10% |

A survey conducted among fifty people, belonging to different age groups, different professional background and living in different locations revealed the facts that young generation among the age group of 15 to 30 years prefers watching entertainment on OTT platforms rather than television. Moreover they do try to relate with the characters and gets influenced by their mannerism.

The result of dependence on OTT Platforms for entertainment is fast growing with cheap and easy access to internet connection and digital gadgets like laptop or just a smart phone. With this the lifestyle of the netizens are also rapidly changing. Over dependence on virtual medium is actually hampering the social life of the netizens. It is becoming a habit to stay alone and watch web series and web movies on OTT Platforms for relaxation, rather than going out to meet people and socialize. This may have a long term effect on the social structure as a whole, where people prefers being isolated. Another factor is that there is peer pressure to get used to watching entertainment on OTT Platform. To become a part of social circle where everyone is talking about certain web series, one has to watch the web series himself or herself to earn acceptance in that social circle. But uncontrolled 'binge watching' of contents on OTT platform have led to some serious health disorders both physically and psychologically like sleeping disorder, eye sight problems, irritation , depression and so on.

Product Placement in Web series is rapidly increasing. The products and services being advertised in the web series and web movies does effects the psychology of the audiences and often creates an unwanted urge to buy the product or service, failing to do which does leads to tremendous dissatisfactions.

The contents of the web series being new and innovative, often drawing references from contemporary socio political scenario around us does attracts the attentions of the netizens, which has actually led to the success of the OTT Platforms. Entertainment is the main urge behind watching contents on OTT Platforms and it also works as a mode of escapism for them. More than often the netizens try to imitate the language used, mannerism and lifestyle pattern of the characters shown on screen.

Conclusion

Today digital media is one of the most powerful wing of mass media, and mass media being an integral part of public sphere can contribute a lot in highlighting different important issues of our society. But this may go horribly wrong with severe consequences if mass media platforms with huge viewership like OTT Platforms act differently by reflecting realities of society with misrepresentation, understatement or even overstatement. Unsolicited use of vulgar language,



violence and due to the deep-set patriarchal mindset which is embedded into the consciousness of the people and been inherited down the ages, more than often we get to see that the contents of the web series and web films does trends to portray women in a new stereotyped manner, all of which can have a deep negative impact on the minds of the young audiences. After completing this research work and also as different researchers have pointed out, it can be concluded that these web series have a deep impact on the psychology of the audiences, they try to relate with the characters and even follow them and their mannerism. The advertisements shown in the web series and web movies, often as surrogated advertisements tends to create an unnecessary want among viewers to buy those products being advertised as being “necessity” or “status symbol”, to find a place in the contemporary society.

At the same time while doing this research work, new approaches are also detected in the field of digital platform, where new contents , innovative presentation of concepts and storytelling patterns and also proper representation of today’s women , their lives, their struggle, their needs, their insecurities and desires are portrayed in a much dignified and progressive manner. If women characters are portrayed in a dignified, progressive manner in these web series, it may have a good effect on the minds of the audiences and may be in long run it can actually prove to be beneficial to the society as a whole. OTT Platforms with web series and web movies does have an ability to be an innovative, subtle, minimalist and an effective medium to create and maintain close bonds with their audiences and this bond if used in proper manner can help in not only with the development of the Indian web platform in future with enhanced quality of storytelling pattern, concept development and decent representation of women but also leaving a good impact on the mind of the audiences. If contents shown on OTT Platforms succeeds in impacting the minds of the young generation in a positive manner and if they learn good things from the web series and web movies, that will be actually beneficial for the society as a whole.

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