

Transformation of Indian Cinema Due to OTT Platforms

Prithvi Abhay Shankaregowda*

Abstract

The rapid rise of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms has transformed Indian cinema by changing the way content is distributed, how the audience consumes content and the globalization that it has brought. This research paper explores the impact of OTT platforms on traditional Indian Cinema, including the role of OTT in promoting regional cinema, giving a global reach for Indian filmmakers, and redefining how the Indian audience consumes content. These platforms, including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and many more have introduced new forms of storytelling, they have introduced new aspects of culture and society and expanded accessibility, along with altering traditional revenue models. The study aims to analyze the relationship between the rise of OTT and introduction of global concepts in the Indian Cinema. The paper draws from secondary research, case studies, and industry analysis, to highlight the democratization of content access and challenges to traditional Indian Cinema. The study yields, 1) that the OTT platforms have majorly contributed to the reach of regional Indian cinema to the global audience and 2) OTT has promoted modern concepts of society and culture in the themes of new Indian Cinema due to interaction with international cultures. This research paper is a stepping stone that bridges the gap between the norms of the traditional Indian Cinema and the modern ideas that OTT platforms are bringing while giving scope to future research into this dynamic concept.

* Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Times School of Media, Bennett University, Greater Noida, UP.

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Introduction

The Indian cinema has always been known for its innovative storytelling, direction and complex characters portrayed by phenomenal actors of Bollywood. The Indian cinema, popularly known as Bollywood, has undergone a tremendous change since the coming of OTT or Over the Top platforms. One of the earliest OTT platforms was Netflix, which was then followed by more, like Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar which is now Jio Hotstar. Movies which were previously known for their blockbuster releases in the theatres, have now adopted a digital-first attitude. OTT platforms have played a huge role in bringing different regional cinema, especially the variety of Indian language cinema under one umbrella. Localized Indian content has been made popular all over the world. Another aspect that OTT has contributed to is the spread of modern ideas and concepts that revolve around modern society and culture.

The Covid-19 pandemic has fueled this shift from traditional cinematic practices to modern digital platforms, fostering a direct-to-digital release of films. The subscription based model of OTT platforms has not only surpassed traditional theatre releases, but also TV broadcast. The earlier audience that subscribed to TV channels using Tata Sky and Dish TV have flocked to either a combination of TV and OTT as in the case of Airtel TV or Tata Play or completely switched to OTT.

The Indian Cinema has integrated the best of traditional practices and OTT culture and has made its name on international platforms. Indian media houses have also come up with their own OTT platforms like Zee5, Alt Balaji and Hoichoi which shows the intensity of the rapid shift from traditional cinema to OTT culture. This study dives into the intricacies of the impact of OTT on traditional Indian cinema, exploring the concept using case studies, film reviews and industry statistics.

Literature review

A study by Roy and Mukherjee (2018) talks about how OTT platforms have caused a disruption in conventional film distribution

methods. The new digital first attitude has enabled instant global reach, where the diversity of Indian Cinema in terms of languages and themes has gained immense popularity. The paper highlighted the declining importance of theatre premieres, mainly for films that are independent and have a low-budget. The article, Growth of OTT services in India, published in IJLRHSS, Kumari (2020) turns the focus on regional content. Kumari says that OTT platforms like Hoichoi and MX Player have given regional storytelling a new face and that the local audience prefers this regional content because the traditional cinema did not include such variety of languages. The traditional themes of Bollywood are being challenged by the OTT platforms.

Sharma and Lulandala (2023) analyze the rise of OTT platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic and credit it for OTT's immense popularity that came in such a short term. The study talks about how new platforms emerged during the pandemic while the existing ones like Netflix adapted to the incoming of a large number of audience and catered to their preferences by introducing regional content and giving all kinds of content a platform for distribution. The research done by Bose (2022) emphasizes on the globalization of Indian cinema through OTT platforms. The popular film 'The White Tiger' on Netflix was one of the earliest to demonstrate how OTT enables cross-cultural storytelling. This was one of the first films providing Indian filmmakers access to international audiences.

The paper 'Factors influencing OTT subscriptions' published in Technology in Society identifies key factors that have influenced consumer preferences for OTT platforms. The factors include affordability, exclusive content, and user-friendly interfaces. The new generation is tech-savvy and finds that the OTT platforms are cheaper than traditional mediums of entertainment and along with that, they give access to a wide range of not just Indian but international content.

Research gap

The existing literature includes the transformative effect of OTT in Indian Cinema in terms of audience preference of content, regional languages and subscription models. Although it highlights the variety of content available on OTT platforms, the quality of content has not been discussed. The effect that OTT has had on the genres and

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content in terms of modern societies and cultural expectations has not been attempted.

Hypothesis

H1: OTT platforms have majorly contributed to the reach of regional Indian Cinema to the global audience as well as bringing international content to India.

H2: The rise of OTT has promoted modern concepts of society and culture in the themes of new Indian Cinema due to interaction with international cultures.

Research methodology

This study has been done using secondary research methods, along with analyzing data from industry market reports, relevant articles by credible sources and case studies. The research includes qualitative and quantitative evaluations of viewership trends, content diversity as explained by reputed film reviews and critiques, and a qualitative analysis of how OTT content has promoted modern ideas of society and culture in India.

Data analysis

OTT platforms have reshaped Indian cinema by changing the way films and content is distributed, it has made all kinds of content accessible all over the world, expanding accessibility, and has redefined content diversity while introducing modern ideas of society to Indian culture.

Content localization and diversity

Disney+ Hotstar's focus on Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket among other sports and Bollywood blockbusters is at a stark contrast with Netflix's strategy in curating content. Disney+ Hotstar still has the essence of traditional cinema which is evident in the kind of original content that is showcased on the platform while Netflix has promoted originally produced films and shows like Sacred Games, Haseen Dilruba, Fame Game. The significance of Netflix's varied content can be seen in the kind of topics and genres that it portrays, going out of the conventional themes, Netflix has produced content like Bombay Begums, Masaba Masaba and Ludo. Regional content such as Panchayat which is one of the most popular shows on

Amazon Prime Video has gained recognition for its satirical take on the truths of the Indian rural society. Many films of regional languages, especially south Indian languages have become popular due to OTT. These films also act as a breaker of barriers when traditional Bollywood stars have taken part in it, popular examples being RRR, Pushpa: The Rise etc. OTT has proven to be the true unifier of different cultures and languages in India, while letting the regional content maintain their own identity.

Global reach of Indian content

OTT has made it possible for Indian content to leap into international forums. Films like The White Tiger and Jai Bhim demonstrate this. RRR upon getting popular on Netflix, went on to win an Oscar for the song "Natu Natu". Similarly, the film Laapata Ladies has gained global recognition and has been nominated for best feature film in the Academy Awards. Streaming platforms have made it possible for regional gems to reach international audiences, earning accolades like Oscar nominations and tremendous critical acclaim.

Another aspect of global reach is the collaboration between Indian film makers, directors and producers with international concepts, this can be seen in the Citadel universe that has debuted on the Amazon Prime Video platform. The original series, produced in the USA, stars the Indian Actress, Priyanka Chopra. The subsequent sequel and prequel of the show has been made in Italian and Hindi respectively. Citadel: Diana, an Italian show and Citadel: Honey Bunny, an Indian show are all part of the same universe, produced by Amazon Studios, this shows the exceptional collaboration that OTT platforms have made possible.

Shift in consumer behavior and economic impact on theatrical releases

Data collected by industry sources say that the OTT subscriptions increased by 30% during the Covid-19 pandemic, depicting the growing preference for on-demand viewing in contrast to traditional TV channels. Platforms such as Amazon Prime have seen success with family-oriented content and their diversity in terms of regional content catering to all demographics of the Indian audience.

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The consumers have opted for subscription-based models rather than the traditional one which worked on the basis of advertisements.

Theatrical releases first faced a challenge during the pandemic in 2020; currently it faces challenges as hybrid models gain popularity. The simultaneous release of films on OTT and the theatres like *Radhe* (Zee5), *Stree 2* (Amazon Prime) etc disrupted box office economics, showcasing the viability of digital premieres due to its wide demand and cost effectiveness.

Concepts of modern societies and culture

One of the most notable changes that OTT has brought into the transformation of the Indian Cinema is the popularization of concepts that challenge traditional norms. These concepts of modern societies that tackle issues like gender inequality, domestic violence and importance of education in children and representation of marginalized communities have proved to play an important role in using media, especially cinema as a way to put forward positive and modern ideologies. It is important for our culture to incorporate these ideologies and this has been possible due to OTT, as it has been a way to expose the traditional cinema to foreign concepts and ideas.

A prominent example of this is the Tamil movie '*Jai Bhim*' in which an activist-lawyer fights for justice when a poor tribal man, who gets falsely accused of robbery, goes missing from police custody. Shows like '*Bombay Begums*' discuss gender-politics, work place discrimination against women and movies like '*Darlings*' starring Alia Bhatt and Shefali Shah give a comical twist to fighting domestic violence in Indian households. Amazon Prime Video show '*Made in Heaven*' discusses the concept of dynamic modern marriages, which break the barriers of traditional gender roles, taboo of inter-caste and same sex marriages. Shows and movies like these are prominent in the modern age and OTT has been the key in this change in concepts and genres of films and shows.

Conclusion

OTT platforms have indeed revolutionized Indian cinema by making international content accessible to the Indian demographic along with promoting indigenous regional content while also introducing new concepts into the world of Indian films. The pandemic

was the driving force for the rise of OTT in Indian Cinema and while OTT has significantly challenged the sustainability of theatrical models, it will take a little more time for the audiences to shift completely to digital platforms. The wide opportunities that OTT has brought for Indian film makers is notable and also the discussion of modern concepts of marriage, gender and equality has been proved to be an important aspect of OTT. This transformation can also lead to a future where hybrid strategies of OTT and traditional cinema and content innovation can coexist.

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