


Chapter 4

Shifting Discourse of Digital Entertainment in COVID–19: Investigating Revolutionary Consumeristic Strategies of OTT Platforms

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ABSTRACT

The advancement in Internet technology tremendously improves the quality of human lives, especially during and post Covid-19. Covid-19 has challenged all aspects of lives around the globe, and people avail everything by being at home, as the way consume media and entertainment has changed. The adversity of the pandemic impedes people in the four walls settings, propelling the OTT medium to reach rocket profit for its original and dynamic content, unlimited access and round-the-clock (24/7) service. The demand for quality content compels OTT platforms to devise novel strategies to attract consumers' demands in the competitive entertainment industry. This chapter investigates the revolution of OTT in the media and entertainment industry, its diverse contents, viewers' consumption patterns, freemium plans and revenue, the growth of OTT with the effect of Covid-19, and its comparison with conventional cinema to understand whether the OTT platforms supersede the most popular conventional medium of entertainment i.e., cinema theatre.

INTRODUCTION

Our globe is digitally transforming from domestic to business at a rapid pace and has transformed the life of everyone and everything more convenient and comfortable. The internet has shifted communication to the digital realm by adopting technical breakthroughs like smartphones, laptops, and smart TVs. The medium of entertainment has entirely changed with the digital advancements and Covid-19 has impacted

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the conventional medium of entertainment such as televisions and cinema theatres. Though televisions are streaming diverse content, over-the-top (OTT) competes with television, at a much faster pace during and post covid globally. The advent of many private channels, HD channels and the internet results in 1.6 billion OTT subscribers in the world in 2023 which is expected to reach 1.8 billion by the end of 2023 (Pennington, 2023). People who were hesitant for subscriptions are attracted or forced to subscribe to Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video in surplus numbers during the Covid-19 lockdown. The global pandemic and work from home (WFH) resulted in loneliness and depression and people started binge-watching to get rid of it. Warner Bros. Discovery reported, 1.6 million users in Q1, 2022 surged to 94.9 million active sign-ups in Q3, 2022, to reach more than 130 million by 2025 (Forristal, 2023). The number of Disney+ subscribers also increased to 164.2 million, and the number of Apple TV+ paid members also increased (Pennington, 2023). The content across genres and needs is the ultimate key for lifetime subscribers, and “content services who want to acquire and keep subscribers every month, with low churn, must provide more than one kind of content, and/or offer more than one type of service” (Pennington, 2023).

Digital media offers ample opportunities for individuals to choose, customize and comprehend media, and India holds the second-highest population of internet users around the globe. Covid-19 has accelerated the digital transformation globally, and forced business, education, healthcare, news, sports, entertainment, etc., into digital platforms (Hassani, et.al., 2021). The unprecedented lockdown forces people to share their screen time together, thus relying on one home device (TV) minimizes the choice of individuals. OTT comes as a redeemer in the media and entertainment industry for consumers (against conventional media without cables and satellites) with innovative and engaging content, easy access to multiple devices, unrestricted location streaming and round-the-clock service (Patnaik et.al, 2021). Though OTT platforms emerged in 1997 with Netflix in America, it focuses on the most populated country like India for its success, and 80% of the subscriptions have surged during the Covid-19 lockdown. According to the Statista report 2023, the OTT revenue is expected to reach \$294 billion in 2023 and exceed \$397 billion with 4.22 billion users by 2027 (Statista, 2023). Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are the giants in the OTT market among the other OTT platforms like Disney+, Hulu, ESPN+, Zee5, HBO, YouTube, Aha and others (Singh & Singh, 2022). Providing all categories including education, professional, business, sports, health, spiritual and entertainment drives phenomenal growth, thus people adopt OTT media for its convenience, 24*7 services, cost-effectiveness, content quality, easy access to internet, content recommendation based on customers and AI’s personalization based on individuals’ choice. Though humans are social organisms, OTT strategizes to retain customers by streaming original content, and in recent days many movies of big stars are lined up for OTT release to reach the audience straight. Thus, it is a great challenge for the film industry to go for theatrical release. With this background, the introduction chapter traces the drastic changes in the media and entertainment industry with the effect of Covid-19 and the emergence and rise of OTT platforms globally. A few most popular OTT platforms in India and their content diversity is traced in the next chapter. The third chapter comprehends the strategies of OTT platforms ‘survival of the fittest’ to retain their position in the media and entertainment industry. The following chapter analyses whether OTT replaces the conventional medium of media such as TV and cinema theatre. The concluding remarks comprehend the consumers’ choice of platforms in the media and entertainment industry with technological advancements.

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