


Chapter 11

The OTT Syndrome: Psycho–Social Impact of Binge–Watching

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ABSTRACT

OTT platform and binge-watching are the new buzzwords. Web series engage people through enticing stories and dramas. Content creators produce programs for binge-watchers. Human curiosity and the quest for instant gratification led to people watching episodes back-to-back. It is creating massive psycho-social impact. The effect can be seen mostly amongst the youth. Insomnia and eye disorders are the immediate side-effects. Long hours of isolation are creating loneliness, leading to myriad mental health issues. Students' academic performance is affected. Employers are reporting poor work performance by employees. The entire fabric of the family is getting stretched. Children are at great risk of getting exposed to things at an inappropriate age. The incidence of crimes inspired by the OTT content are being reported. Several studies and research are pointing towards severe detrimental consequences. There is an urgent need to address these issues. It is appropriate to term it OTT Syndrome.

1. INTRODUCTION

The end objective of all human endeavour is happiness. The human mind seeks happiness in all activities. Happiness for self and family is the utmost goal. The quest for happiness leads to indulgence in activities that have manifested itself in myriad ways. For eons gone by the world witnessed the emergence of several activities in the fields of art, music, culture, sports. For centuries gone by, the indulgence through physical activities was the norm across global societies. Thus people of all age groups especially the young took active participation in various activities that ultimately resulted in defining the culture of a group of people or society. Technological innovations over the past several centuries brought about significant alterations to the lives of people and the activities they indulged in.

People's pursuit for happiness and entertainment led to the development in the fields of arts and science. It led to the development of culture and sports. It led to the development of the defining characteristics

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of a society. Although the process was gradual and slow; each society emerged with distinct identity. The exchange of ideas and culture was localized in nature. The civilizations that emerged defined the distinct characteristics.

Over the last two centuries, the developments in the fields of science and technology narrowed down the distances and eroded the barriers between societies. The development of means of travel led to cross cultural exchange of ideas and entertainment. The radio was a harbinger of a new era of entertainment that led to global exchange of ideas and provided a means of entertainment that involved a large audience. It involved the human mind and engaged people through listening and hearing. The development of the films and movies was a strong means of entertainment that could be consumed by a vast multitude of people unlike drama and theater. The emergence of television marked a significant phase that altered the way people consumed entertainment. People could now engage through the audio-visual mode from the comfort of their homes.

If there's one thing that defined families on a global scale; it was the family time spent in front of the television sets watching sitcoms, serials, sports, movies, cartoons, music channels, and news – the families would pull out the dinner trays and prep at the microwave before sitting down and spending quality time in front of the television sets for hours. Watching the latest must-see TV series was the real pastime. It was the weekly ritual, and it was a cultural cornerstone by every means of the word. In India serials like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Humlog garnered people's imagination and eyeballs; virtually bringing the entire nation to a standstill during the telecast hours.

The last two decades have brought about a paradigm shift in the way people indulge for entertainment. The emergence of the mobile technology has now enabled entertainment on the go. There is the added bonus of watching content whenever we want as and when desired.

The world no longer consumes digital content as a family, once a week, together around the television. Now there is content streaming across devices – mobiles, computers and televisions. Every individual member of a family is engaged on the digital content through various digital platforms and social media platforms. All this is shaping the need-it-now mindset and culture from the inside out.

1.1 OTT – Over-the-Top

OTT first appeared in the early 2000's, when internet speeds started to rapidly improve. The evolution of mobile technology from 3G to 4G and now 5G has accelerated the deep impact across the world. It has broken the generational barriers as millions of 8-to-80-year-olds are hooked onto the OTT platforms. There are now a host of OTT platforms streaming great shows and digital content. The OTT-On-The-Go is now a reality as people are compromising with the sleep hours to binge.

The video based content and its ease of access is impacting the lifestyles of the viewers. The acronym OTT stands for Over-the-Top. The term explains the new delivery method of films and television content over the internet. This content is available whenever we want, across many different devices, without the need for traditional broadcast, cable, or satellite TV providers. In simple terms, OTT streaming means paying an internet provider for internet access to watch Netflix, without paying for cable TV. OTT streaming is when premium content and a superior experience are made available by an OTT content platform, like Netflix, Disney+, Hotstar, Amazon Prime with the user not needing a cable TV subscription to watch. Because of this format, OTT content can be streamed on a variety of devices. The accessibility of OTT content is one of the many reasons it's so popular. To stream OTT, customers only need a high-speed internet connection and a connected device that supports apps or browsers. One can access OTT

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