

# PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

## USAGE OF OTT PLATFORMS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: TRENDS, RATIONALE AND IMPLICATIONS

*Navsangeet Saini*

Assistant Professor

University Institute of Media Studies, Chandigarh University, Punjab, India

**Navsangeet Saini, Usage Of Ott Platforms During Covid-19 Lockdown: Trends, Rationale And Implications– PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology 17(6) (2020), ISSN 1567-214X.**

**Keywords: OTT, Video-on-demand, digitization, infotainment, content, COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown.**

### Abstract

Digitization has revolutionized the way we access and consume content. Information is just a click away and always at our fingertips. The spread of Internet led to shrinking of the globe, figuratively. Content with focus on entertainment mingled with information (infotainment), as opposed to purely newsy one, tends to garner better audience attention. With the rise of OTT platforms, this trend has seen a new dawn. Content from all across the world is available without much ado. It will not be wrong to say that OTT platforms such as Netflix, Voot, Amazon Prime Video etc. have given a catalytic impetus to the shrinking of globe into a village. These platforms can be lauded for bringing the world together and closer and for fostering an enhanced sense of cultural understanding among the masses. During the unfortunate times of a hitherto unprecedented global pandemic such as COVID-19, these video-on-demand platforms have seen a surge in their viewership. Owing to lockdown and statutory social distancing norms adopted by most countries affected by the pandemic, people have registered higher presence on these platforms.

It is in the wake of these trends and statistics of increasing preference and dependence on OTT platforms for entertainment, information and engagement among the viewers that this study has been conducted. This study of urban youth aims to examine the trends in content consumption during lockdown, understand its reasons and implications.

The study finds that use of OTT content platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Voot, Hotstar (now Disney Hotstar), etc. has seen a rise especially among the younger age cohorts of population. The content has appeal owing to its entertainment value coupled with information, also the intrigue global

content from diverse cultures offers to the knowledge enthusiasts. A discernible rise is also detectable in the prevalence of series as opposed to movies. This trend implies a rise in demand of OTT content and signals a growing popularity of OTT video-on demand platforms.

### **Introduction**

Communication and entertainment are imperative to human existence and even the most primitive humans had their ways of communication, however crude or unstandardized those may have been. Communication is primordial in nature and has existed since the beginning of time. One cannot imagine a human society without communication. Similarly, entertainment forms a great part of our everyday lives. Different people have different modes of entertaining themselves but the gratification that it offers the human mind cannot be overruled.

With time, various media evolved. In the pre-historic times, people used methodologies such as smoke signals, signs and symbols, and storytelling. Then came the more standardized manuscripts, documents written by hand. It was with the advent of printing press that written or more aptly printed communication was spurred into the masses. Replication of documents became less cumbersome and time-efficient, thereby leading to decentralization of knowledge, social and economic revolutions across the world and a revamping of the social order. Once science and knowledge became abundant, there was no dearth of technologies and discoveries. Technological advancements gave birth to glorious media of communication such as newspapers, letters, telegram, telephone and some more cutting-edge mass media such as radio, Television and lately the Internet.

The advent of Internet encompassed the entire globe in an all-inclusive wave of information and the world was but a village, where everything was within reach without much difficulty. Internet is, unequivocally, by far the invention that has made the world seem most shrunk and connected. Internet changed the way we communicated, the way we mingled or socialized, our economies, our politics and societies, nothing was to of the influence of this grand virtual space that engulfed the world and brought forth a wave of information like never seen before.

Internet has changed the consumption patterns of the audience leading the producers to come up with inventive programs and content distribution platforms that were previously unheard of. One such invention was OTT platforms that made direct to consumer chain possible. OTT or Over-the-top content platforms are the media platforms that according to Tata Consultancy Services are “the platforms that deliver film and television content, bypassing the conventional distribution streams of cable and satellite TV, from producer to consumer directly, an exchange driven by Internet.” Some of the commonest OTT platforms in India and elsewhere include Netflix, Disney Hotstar, Eros Now, Amazon Prime Video, Voot, etc.

Much like the global trends that indicate a rise in the use of tablets, smartphones, laptops and other internet enabled devices for content consumption by the audiences, India too has seen a steep growth in the number of internet users. India currently has the second largest users of internet after China and with a rapid growth rate, the market promises a huge potential. As a report by Deloitte states “Online entertainment services lead by audio and video content is the cusp of inflection point in India.” With the audience focussed on infotainment and

increasing demand for global content, India is a thriving marketplace for OTT platforms.

With a hitherto unprecedented pandemic forcing the public to remain indoors and offices, schools and businesses being shut, a discernible rise in the demand of OTT content has been noticed. COVID-19, a deadly strain of coronavirus, with abnormally high rate of infection and the absence of a concrete cure for this outbreak have led countries all across the world to go into complete lockdown to tackle the spread of the virus. Crores of people suddenly have more time on their hands than they can possibly spend. In this situation, films and entertainment content have emerged as the saviour especially on-demand video content.

This study aims to understand the trends in Over-the-top content consumption as pertains to lockdown amidst COVID-19 outbreak in India, the reasons for its prevalence over the traditional entertainment media and the implication it may have on media market and industry in the long run.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study the popularity of OTT media platforms in comparison to films/ TV channels amid lockdown.
2. To assess the reasons of the enhancement on on-demand content popularity among youth.
3. To examine the implications it will have on the content production and distribution vis-a-vis the change in consumption habits of audience.

### **Review of literature**

In a report titled ‘Digital Media: Rise of on-demand Content’ by Deloitte it is noted that the rise of internet-enabled digital devices capable of supporting digitized content has led to an increase in the use of digital content globally. In India, this trend is observed across diverse platforms such as audio, visual, news, music etc. It mentions that an Indian youth, on an average spends 14% of their time and nearly 17% of their monthly expenditures on entertainment. An internet content consumer in India consumes an average of 6.2 hours of content on everyday basis out of which 21% of the time is spent on audio-visual entertainment. A shift in consumer attitude with regard to a favoritism for OTT content and easy access to vast library at any time and place over content ownership is notable.

Similar observations can be seen in PwC India’s report that slated a huge opportunity for OTT platforms in India. The report however states that pricing of content can be hindrance to the growth and suggests a revised policy to foster the OTT market in India.

A study titled ‘UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION FACTORS OF OVER-THE-TOP VIDEO SERVICES AMONG MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS’ by Dr. Sabyasachi Dasgupta and Dr. Priya Grover also reiterates that Indian audiences have swayed towards OTT content and are willing to spend for easy and unlimited access to content without a place and time limitation. It again notes the inverse impact of pricing strategy of OTT on its popularity. Data consumption is another attribute

that makes it a tough choice for Indian viewers and so is habits and preferences for TV as a medium.

Another study by Sidneyeve Matrix on Netflix observes that viewers, especially youth, are becoming active curators of content than couch potatoes taking in ‘whatever producers feed them.’ Supporting this paradigm shift in consumers is the need to share, stay connected and discuss the content on social media forums. In the process of these social media transactions, the viewers are setting new standards of expectations from producers thereby becoming an active catalyst in the production process too.

A paper by Paramveer Singh finds that Netflix, Hotstar and Jio are most popular among Indian youth. The youth is skewed towards free trials available on these platforms, are nocturnal viewers and prefer web series format over films. The respondents affirm that over-the-top applications are changing media consumption patterns in India. The shift can be attributed to convenience of service, personalized experience and availability of global content etc. The study finds the future of OTT in India to be promising due to increasing smartphone penetration, economic convergence of media companies (take-overs/ mergers) at national or international level, and quality of reception of digital content. Also instrumental is the competitive internet data plans offered by telecom service providers in India.

Ritu Bhavsar in her research paper entitled “The Burgeoning Digital Media Consumption: A Challenge for Traditional Television and Advertising Industries – An Analysis” mentions that digital media has become an indispensable part of everyday lives and is a prominent medium used for gathering and disseminating information, socialization, entertainment and marketing. An ever-increasing consumption of content via digital media effects a change in the consumer preferences and attitudes and this transformations trend can be associated with better internet connectivity, advanced digital devices, competitive data prices in India and the accessible, on-the-go nature of internet media.

It can therefore be concluded from the literature review that the popularity of OTT is on the rise owing to increasing smartphone penetration, competitive internet data plans offered by Indian telecom service providers, the abundance and quality of content on these platforms and the global media industry dynamics that have a sizable impact on the economic and policy matters of OTT service providers. To add to this is the personalized nature of smartphone media and the availability of content from around the globe. Also instrumental is the preference of youth for free and unlimited access to content as opposed to complete content ownership in a limited manner.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is based on a combination of research methods that include: observation, focus group study and interviews.

- **Observation** of trends and reports available online is carefully conducted to discern important data.
- **Focus Group Study**

Three groups of 10 participants between the age of 18-40 years were made on the basis of the occupation of the respondents using **Snowball sampling**.

- Group 1: Students
- Group 2: Homemakers
- Group 3: Salaried/ self employed
- **Interviews** of Media professionals and academicians to understand the reasons and implications effected by OTT content in consumer attitudes.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The focus groups, being in lockdown, were administered a set of open ended questions to assess their choice of popular media during lockdown and to ascertain the rationale for the same. Their responses provided an insight into changing audience preferences especially in a time like this when there is all the time in the world and very limited tasks to do.

In my focus groups, only 2.4% of special cases including police personnels, doctors, nurses etc were allowed to work while the majority were observing the norms and remained home due to lockdown. All participants had a fair knowledge of social distancing owing to the widespread information available to them on various media platforms.



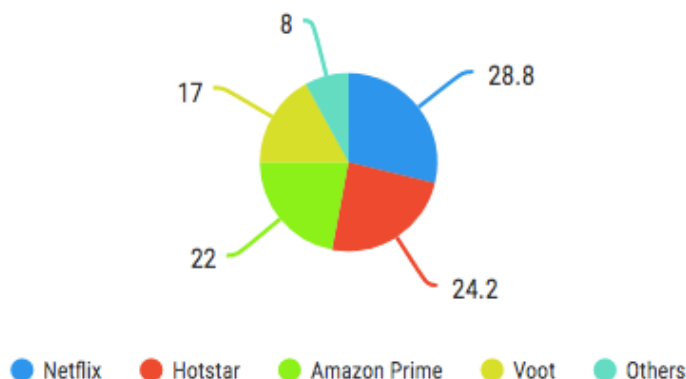
Majority of the respondents watched TV as well as OTT media for entertainment. While working respondents had more time to devote to entertainment, homemakers didn't feel much change as their tasks remained constant or were increased due to their role as caretakers and mothers of kids freshly introduced to online learning from home.

### Preferred Media for infotainment



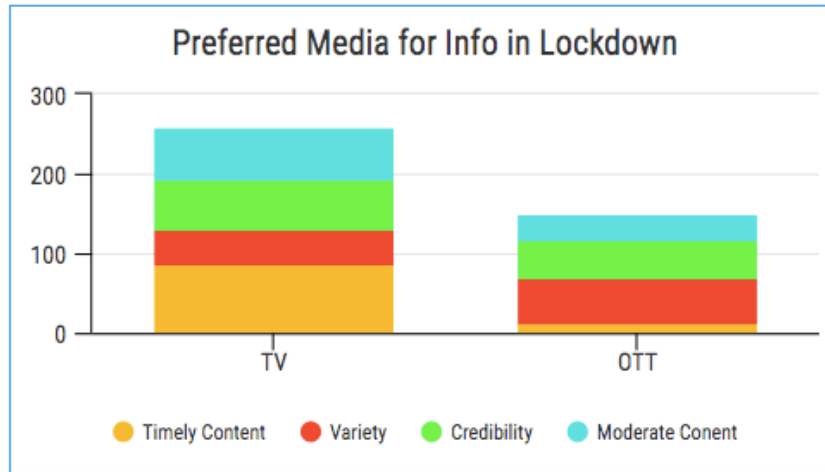
Prevalence of OTT content is registered by many respondents as OTT brings content to the home screen without having to step out, the precise condition laid down by lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic. Of the various OTT players capturing Indian market, Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hotstar remain top favorites followed by Voot, Tata Sky Binge, Zee 5 etc. The popularity varies from individual to individual depending upon the choice of content. Some households were also accessing multiple platforms for gratifying different content needs.

### Popularity of OTT platforms

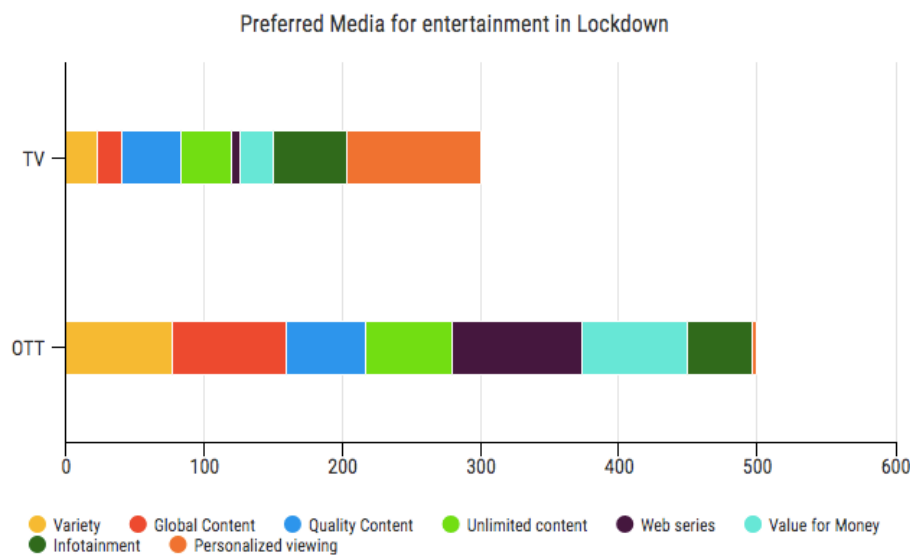


For the purpose of informational content, TV still remained a favorite while OTT was almost catching up. Both platforms provide different kinds of satisfaction to the viewers. For pure news content and political debates etc., respondents preferred TV as it has more up-to-date and timely content. Hard news content is mostly accessible on TV and the variety of news shows can cater to diverse needs. For a softer informational content, sometimes coupled with entertainment, OTT was the

choice for Documentaries, cross- cultural content, light on the eyes and ears. Invariably, both the media were indispensable for the audiences as their purposes and contents tend to differ.



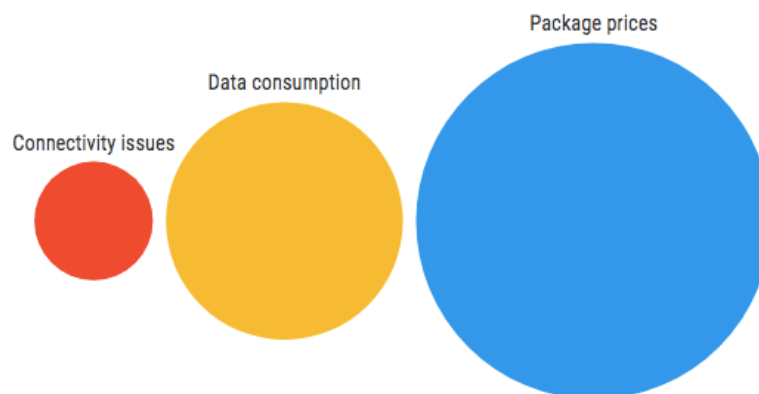
The case of preference for media was reverse for the purpose of entertainment. Majority of respondents showcased more interest in OTT platforms due to the variety these platforms have to offer, for availability of global content, unlimited choice of programs and web series that can prove to be a good engagement when time is aplenty, like in the current situation, especially for those who are required to put in no or limited hours while working from home. Homemakers registered an increased usage of OTT than before pertaining to family viewing as opposed to individual viewing time.



The respondents were asked for the reasons of their increasing preference of OTT content as opposed to TV content. Some of the commonest reasons for the preference were the doorstep delivery of global content, variety of entertainment content, an access to wide variety and unlimited library of content. Some respondents even expressed satisfaction and labelled OTT as value- for- money while majority of them agreed that such huge variety was effective tool for fighting the lockdown blues.

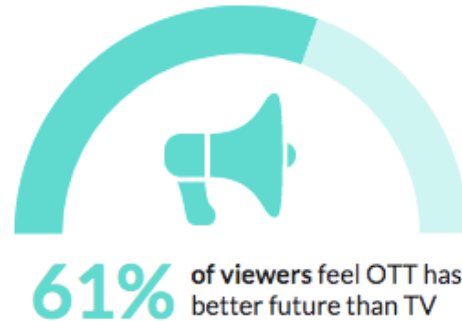


To understand the rationale of a lag in OTT growth despite the advantages, the respondents were asked for the reasons that threw them off of the OTT platforms. Commonest of the reasons included Package prices for OTT platforms that tend to be slightly on the higher side as per the Indian audience, the issue of data consumption also cropped up especially in the case of students who have limited data to spare and sometimes, internet connectivity issues also hamper the viewing experience.



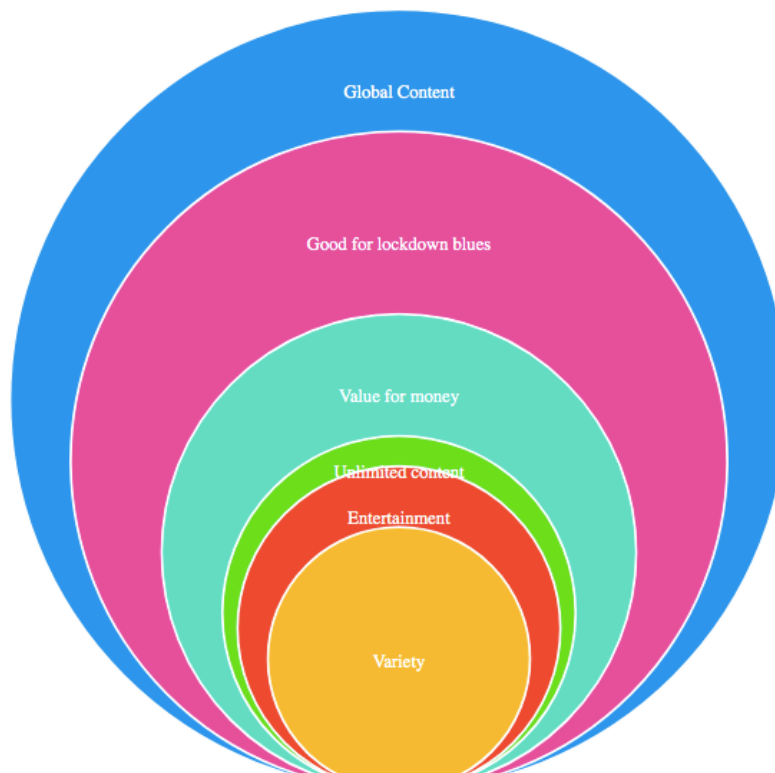


Majority of respondents feel that the increasing dependence of the masses on OTT content, spurred by lockdown, holds a promising future for OTT industry in India as the period of lockdown has been instrumental in inculcating and developing the habits of binge watching amongst the masses.

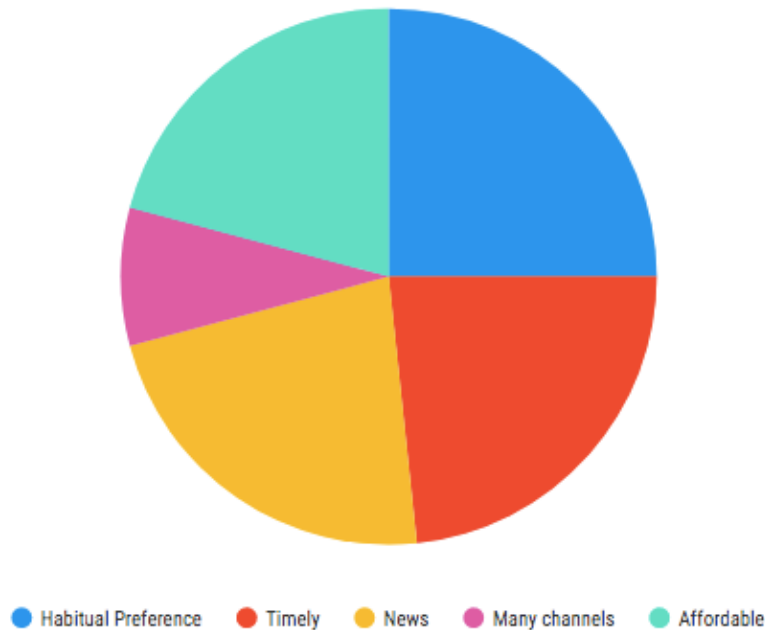


Also noticeable is the comparison that respondents drew out between TV and OTT. While there is no clear winner, OTT seems to growing by leaps and bounds owing to the variety and quality of content it can generate. But the audiences are still hooked to TV and state that TV too has its own advantages. Their responses are summed up in the charts below.

Advantages of OTT



### Advantages of TV



The findings suggest that lockdown had had a palpable impact on the viewership patterns and habits of Indian audiences. While TV is still popular a promising trend favoring OTT seems to be on the rise. Binge- watching is a habit that has been aided by lockdown situation and it may signal a change in the OTT market in times to come.

### Conclusion

The study finds that there is a discernible rise in the prevalence of OTT as a preferred medium, a habit solidified by the formerly unheard of lockdown due to the highly virulent COVID-19 pandemic. The main reasons for OTT popularity are availability of cross- cultural content, a subscription to virtually unlimited content, accessibility of informative content of form of documentary/ docu-series format indicates a paradigm change in the way informational content is made, distributed and consumed. Also vital are factors like increasing penetration of smartphones and availability of internet data at competitive prices in India. While OTT is looking forward to capturing a new horizon, the habitual preference for TV media cannot be ruled out. Web series emerges as another favorite program format. Lockdown, is not merely is social or political mandate, but also cues a looming economic crisis of global scale. The world as we knew is will have changed, mostly for better hopefully, but how the media scenario pans out will, besides consumer attitudes, be largely dependent on the economic situation post lockdown.

## References

1. PricewaterhouseCoopers. (n.d.). Television and OTT. Retrieved April 21, 2020, from <https://www.pwc.in/industries/entertainment-and-media/television-and-ott.html>
2. Deloitte. (n.d.). Digital Media: Rise of On-demand Content. Retrieved April 15, 2020, from <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/in-tmt-rise-of-on-demand-content.pdf>
3. Mandavia, M. (2019, September 26). India has second highest number of Internet users after China: Report. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/india-has-second-highest-number-of-internet-users-after-china-report/articleshow/71311705.cms?from=mdr>
4. Dasgupta, Dr. S., & Grover, Dr. P. (2019). UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION FACTORS OF OVER-THE-TOP VIDEO SERVICES AMONG MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS. *International Journal of Computer Engineering & Technology*, 10(1), 61–71. Retrieved from [http://www.iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/UploadFolder/IJCET\\_10\\_01\\_008/IJCET\\_10\\_01\\_008.pdf](http://www.iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/UploadFolder/IJCET_10_01_008/IJCET_10_01_008.pdf)
5. Matrix, S. (2014). The Netflix Effect: Teens, Binge Watching, and On-Demand Digital Media Trends. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6(1), 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jeu.2014.0002>
6. Singh, Paramveer. (2019). New Media as a Change Agent of Indian Television and Cinema: A study of over the top Platforms. 9. 131-137. 10.31620/JCCC.06.19/18.
7. Bhavsar, R. (2018). The Burgeoning Digital Media Consumption: A Challenge for Traditional Television and Advertising Industries – An Analysis. *Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies*, 8(1), 17–23. Retrieved from [https://amity.edu/UserFiles/asco/journal/ISSUE68\\_2.%20Ritu%20Bhavsar%20-%20AJMCS%20Vol%208%20No%201.pdf](https://amity.edu/UserFiles/asco/journal/ISSUE68_2.%20Ritu%20Bhavsar%20-%20AJMCS%20Vol%208%20No%201.pdf)