Consumer Experience and Behaviour in OTT Platforms – A Mixed Methods Approach

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Abstract
The growth of OTT platforms in India is due to high-speed internet subscription packs, accessible smart devices, and affordable subscription plans. To attract consumers, OTT platforms require understanding consumer perceptions and behaviour with respect to what they want to watch on-screen. The objective of the study is to analyze consumer behaviour and experience in OTT platforms. Based on theories of media perceptions like Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Logic Theory, this research employs focus group discussions and thematic analysis to examine perceptions and behavior of consumers based on their needs, fulfilments, and influences. Qualitative data obtained from thematic analysis is validated through quantitative techniques. Academically, the research adds insights and value to the growing field of literature on perceptions and behaviour of consumers in the area of OTT streaming services. Practically, the study proposes measures for OTT platforms to meet consumer preferences through their content catalogue.
Keywords: over-the-top streaming services, consumer perceptions, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Media Logic Theory, mixed methods

Summary Statement of Contribution
The study adopts a mixed methods approach and contributes to the understanding of perceptions of consumers in the area of OTT streaming services in an Indian context. The study suggests measures to gauge consumer preferences for OTT platforms through their context catalogue. The primary consumer perceptions, not investigated before, highlight the values, beliefs, media influences, and experiences of consumers which will shape entertainment consumption in a country like India which is one of the largest consumers of OTT streaming services.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the COVID pandemic, significant changes in media consumption behaviour were observed worldwide. As outdoor entertainment and leisure were restricted due to global lockdown, consumers switched to video streaming services for their entertainment consumption (Agnihotri et al., 2022). Over-the-Top (OTT) video streaming platforms offer fresh content delivery to consumers using the internet on their smart devices.

OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and ZEE5 have become extremely popular globally due to their affordable subscription packages, easy accessibility, and diverse content library. These video streaming service providers allow consumers the flexibility to watch films, shows, and even live events directly over the internet. While the global OTT growth was estimated at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16 percent before the pandemic, industry trends predict this growth to reach 19 percent by the end of 2026.

The market value of the OTT sector is estimated to reach USD 438.5 billion globally between 2022 and 2026. While the USA and the UK are global leaders in OTT streaming services, emerging markets like India and China are expected to grow exponentially in the next few years.

According to a report published by Media Partners Asia (MPA), the Indian OTT video streaming market has captured approximately seven to nine percent of the entertainment industry's share and revenue (Singh & Sehgal, 2023).

With over 40-odd players offering original content in all languages, the industry is expanding quickly and consistently. There are currently over 45 million OTT subscribers in India.

This figure reached 50 million by the end of 2023 (Joseph, 2024). In fact, India is considered to be the fastest-growing OTT market in the world (ABP Studio, 2022), with a projected revenue of USD12.5 billion by the end of 2030 and with over 700 million unique subscribers. India has 46 OTT platforms with international and regional streaming providers (Chakrabarti, 2021; Simon, 2021).

For any OTT service provider, it is crucial to maximize and sustain video monetization by producing consistent high-value content. For most players in the video streaming market, a recurring fee is charged to subscribers at fixed intervals.

Consumers can access the entire content catalogue until their subscription ends (Chakrabarti, 2021). In fact, for video streaming services, revenues earned from subscription are the most crucial monetization sources. Video streaming is a popular research topic in contemporary times.

However, few studies have investigated what consumers feel about the content on these streaming platforms (Herbert et al., 2019; Kostovska et al., 2021; Lüders et al., 2021; Sundet & Colbjørnsen, 2021). Research has addressed the literature on OTT platforms in developed markets like USA and UK (Kim et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Voigt et al., 2016).

However, till date, little research exists in the Indian OTT market. Consequently, there is no guidance available to OTT platforms in India on how consumers perceive entertainment on these sites.

The objective of our study is to fill this gap through exploratory research that analyses consumer perceptions and behaviour related to entertainment options on OTT platforms. With India showing high growth in the OTT markets and slated to challenge the big global markets by the end of 2030, the study draws on five Focus Group Discussions with 33 depth interviews in India to find the primary perceptions of consumers regarding OTT entertainment.

From the insights generated from the Focus Group Discussions, we developed an initial set of items that was corroborated by a larger sample of Indian OTT viewers through an online survey. Academically, our study adds to the underexplored literature on perspectives of consumers on OTT entertainment. However, gauging consumer perceptions is far from straightforward in a country like India.

India is characterized by diverse cultural backgrounds, social norms, and historical lineage. This research is expected to potentially aid OTT platforms in recognizing the possible improvement opportunities in their existing strategies and, subsequently, position themselves according to the perceptions of their target subscribers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Lens

The multiple OTT platforms operating across the world compete for capturing the attention of audience. The business models, technological, and budgetary setups of OTT players might vary according to their market size. However, the basic principle that OTT platforms function on is providing their content catalogues for a subscription price and a fixed duration (Gupta & Singharia, 2021; Herbert et al., 2019).

OTT platforms dominate the lives of consumers because of their easy accessibility. Both international and local media are doing well in the Indian market. The preference for OTT platforms is especially seen in the younger generation as a primary source of entertainment. The media landscape in India is expected to grow further with access to high-speed internet and affordable smart devices.

To capture the attention of the audience and to keep entertaining them, content producers must focus on what consumers want to watch (Andersen & Sundet, 2019).

Ultimately, the onus of OTT platforms is on capturing a larger market share and increasing video monetization for their services in a competitive business landscape. Thus, how entertainment is regarded or interpreted by consumers has to be understood in detail for OTT platforms to cater to their preferences.

In academic research, we find that very little has been explored about consumer perceptions concerning OTT platforms. To interpret our findings, we use two primary theories of media perception that highlight the importance of media in the lives of people across the world. The first theory we chose is Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) which states that individuals consume certain kinds of media sources as they expect to obtain specific gratifications from the consumption experience (Katz et al., 1973).

We chose this theory in comparison to other media theories because UGT focuses on the consumers rather than the media messages and cues. UGT does not consider consumers as passive recipients of media messages. On the contrary, consumers are treated as active participants in their choice of media sources.

Media consumption is goal-oriented, and consumers usually have an apparent reason for consuming media based on their specific wants and needs. Individual, social, and psychological factors primarily drive media consumption. Research (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Zillmann, 2012; Igartua, 2010) shows that entertainment media has several purposes, uses, and emotional gratifications, which overlap with each other.

These have been categorized as mood management (consumers will seek entertainment as a distraction from their low or bad moods), mood adjustment (users are gratified by using media to adjust their mindset to whatever is currently happening), affective disposition (viewers root for good characters and morals over villains and bad morals), eudemonic motivation (consumers use entertainment media to search for deeper meanings, insights, and purpose for life), vicarious experiences (consumers seek fulfilment from living through the portrayed on-screen characters) and sensation seeking (viewers seek excitement from entertainment as a reward).

The second theory we chose is Media Logic Theory (MLT) which states that media formats and styles help consumers perceive the world around them (Altheide, 1987). The pervasiveness of OTT platforms could motivate consumers to interpret reality according to the media content they watch.

This theory highlights that the nature and significance of media logic are influential in leading individuals to a greater understanding and investigation of social realities. Media logic is a form of communication that is taken for granted, often institutionalized, and guides social interactions among people. Media Logic Theory helps institutions and individuals to correct misinterpretations, make revisions, gauge relevance, and apply content strategies accordingly.

Media logic can be considered as the guiding force of the mediatization process, which is formed as a result of the influence of mass communication on society, institutions, and politics (Mazzoleni, 1987; Mazzoleni & Schulz,1999). The establishment of OTT environments can be used to develop new theoretical perspectives on Media Logic Theory and expand the understanding of how constant access to OTT content can impact the perceptions of viewers (McQuail, 2005).

Using these two theories as lenses, we try to understand how consumers perceive entertainment on OTT platforms based on their needs, gratifications, and media influences. Both these theories are well-suited for our study because we are interested in the perceptions created and influenced by media in a community saturated with multiple entertainment platforms.

The research is conducted in India which is a country where cultural and social values of individuals are diverse and they reflect in various ways. This provides a contextual understanding of the entertainment landscape in an emerging OTT market domain.

2.2. Current Status of the OTT Market

Amidst the COVID pandemic, the consumption of OTT platforms grew in the range of 12 percent to 16 percent between 2020 and 2021. Approximately 2.2 billion individuals started using OTT streaming services from 1.9 billion in 2019 globally (ETBrandEquity, 2021). In India, OTT platforms have around 80 million active subscribers with huge growth potential.

As industry reports state, there are 46 OTT providers in India, including regional and big international players (Soren & Chakraborty, 2023). The streaming market in India is predicted to grow to USD 15 billion by 2030. The first Indian OTT platform was BIGFlix, launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008, and later big players like Netflix and Amazon Prime entered the Indian market in 2016 (Radošinská, 2017).

This growth in subscription-based OTT services is attributed to improved internet accessibility, smartphone penetration, and affordable subscriptions. Disney + Hotstar leads the OTT market in India with a 29 percent market share, Jio TV comes second with a 23 percent market share, and Amazon Prime Video stays in third place with a 19 percent share (ETDigital, 2022). These service providers have significantly invested in content strategies, pricing models, and bundling services to attract and retain consumers.

Amidst the pandemic, several filmmakers had to choose to release their new films on OTT platforms. However, OTT platforms have also forayed into independent film production, catering to their specific consumer segments. Even filmmakers have understood that few genres and subjects are more suited for direct release on OTT and must be created and budgeted accordingly (Negi, 2021).

Also, more than 200 web series were launched in India in 2021 in multiple languages (KPMG India, 2021). OTT web series has broken the language barrier with dubbed versions and high-quality subtitles for multilingual content. Filmmakers are now making the streaming versus theatrical choice at a project conceptualization stage. The understanding is that some genres and subjects are more suited to OTT and must be cast and budgeted in a particular manner.

Studios and producers must make the right choices, relying on consumer data to forecast the likelihood of success of a specific type of storyline and its appropriate medium of release (Kelly, 2019).

The web series business on OTT does not have much competition, with television serials mainly being family-based stories that run for infinite periods based on Television Rating Points (TRPs). However, OTT platforms provide content in multiple genres, usually in a short format with single-digit episodes. Hence, there is an inclination among consumers to watch such content rather than long-running television shows.

More than 200 web series were launched in India in 2021 in multiple languages. OTT content has broken the language barrier with dubbed versions and high-quality subtitles for multilingual content. In 2019, only about 25 percent OTT audience in India was consuming multilingual content. However, this percentage has grown to 40 percent even in rural and semi-rural areas where prior exposure to such content was scarce (ETDigital, 2022).

Research focusing on OTT entertainment is still burgeoning. A detailed understanding of what consumers want to consume on these platforms is necessary from both academic and industrial perspectives. Utilization of UGT and MLT to interpret the main consumption perceptions of OTT viewers allows us to add to this underexplored topic of discussion and provide insights for OTT executives in a competitive entertainment market. Thus, we ask the Research Question (RQ):

2.3. What perceptions do Indian consumers have concerning OTT entertainment?

Importance Of Chosen Domain – OTT Platforms

OTT platforms are emerging as important sources of entertainment in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report from Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), OTT mobile applications have contributed USD 271 billion to India's GDP by 2020.

OTT platforms have improved the possibility of direct-to-digital releases and presented diverse content catalogues worldwide. The average Indian viewer pays subscription fees to have access to at least four OTT platforms simultaneously. Big players like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and SonyLiv are investing heavily in acquiring or creating new content for Indian consumers (Fox et al., 2010).

By producing new types of entertainment catered to Indian consumers, OTT platforms are constantly improving the experiences of viewers. There is a significant preference for Hindi content in India, and the demand for OTT has even expanded to rural areas. As the digital content system evolves, OTT platforms must increase their monetization streams through unique and facilitative approaches in their entertainment strategies to continue their growth globally (Goldsmith, 2019).

However, the literature on the OTT market is very scarce in academia despite its practical importance in the industry. Thus, we selected OTT platforms as the background context of our study because of (i) its predicted growth in the entertainment sector, (ii) the expected contribution to this new, underexplored, and burgeoning field of literature, (iii) the lack of studies that analyze the primary uses and motivations that consumers seek from OTT entertainment and (iv) to gain an understanding of the fulfilments that consumers receive from OTT entertainment consumption.

3. Method

Several methods are available for gaining insights into consumer perceptions, be it qualitative techniques, such as individual depth interviews and focus groups, or quantitative methods, like close-ended surveys, clustering, and conjoint analysis. We decided to use Focus Group Discussions to conduct an initial exploration of consumer perceptions regarding OTT entertainment.

In qualitative research, focus groups are mainly used to collect information about any topic from a relatively small group of individuals. We chose this method to observe the points of consensus and disagreements among individuals. The results of the focus groups were classified and modified using thematic analysis. We also expected that participation in these discussions would encourage individuals to share their experiences more clearly.

While we tried to ensure that the results are valid and comprehensive, we also state that the findings from a small sample of people are exploratory in nature. After completing the focus groups, we corroborated the list of main themes through a more extensive quantitative survey to confirm the quality and consistency of our qualitative findings (Farquhar et al., 2022).

3.1. Data Collection

Before starting our qualitative data collection, we ensured that all respondents who participated in the study (i) had consumed OTT entertainment services for at least six months before this study was conducted and (ii) had subscriptions to at least one international OTT platform (example: Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu) and at least one local OTT platform (example: AltBalaji, ZEE5) for a period of minimum six months before this study.

Based on these inclusion criteria, we contacted 21 participants through personal contacts and social media. Snowball sampling was used for this study. The first few respondents helped us to select new participants for the Focus Group Discussions. Finally, we received a list of 33 participants who were willing to participate in this study.

We conducted four Focus Group Discussions with nine participants in focus group 1, eight participants in focus group 2, seven participants in focus group 3, and nine participants in focus group 4, respectively. We also ensured a balance of gender (55 percent males and 45 percent females), age (18-70 years), and educational levels (high school-pass outs to Ph.D. holders) among the participants in the Focus Group Discussions.

The final list of participants is exhibited (Annexure 1). Each respondent signed a consent form to participate in the study. They were also informed that participation was voluntary. Due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, all the focus groups were conducted online, over ZOOM platform.

A primary advantage of this method was that participants from different locations across the country could join in without incurring travel costs. As proposed in literature (Flick, 2010; Oringderff, 2004), online focus groups can be implemented with more participants than traditional, face-to-face FGDs. Thus, it was expected that the data in this study would be more enriched and comprehensive.

We prepared a list of questions to explore consumer perceptions and behaviour concerning OTT consumption in the Indian context. We divided the Focus Group Discussion into three main sections. In the first section, we asked the participants to provide their opinion regarding OTT content catalogues in recent times.

Second, we asked the participants what would motivate them to subscribe to OTT platforms or to renew their existing subscriptions.

Third, we asked them about their fulfilment from OTT content. Each Focus Group Discussion lasted around 60 minutes, and the same moderator conducted all the discussions. The participants were requested to discuss three categories of OTT content: (1) web shows, (2) independent OTT films, and (3) reality shows.

3.2. Data Analysis

For this study, we followed the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the Focus Group transcripts. We noted down the main points from the data.

Second, we created a preliminary list of codes from the data that signify the common patterns in the data. We added excerpts for each code we derived from the transcripts. We grouped all the quotes associated with each code.

Third, we sorted the codes into themes by combining, modifying, and deleting the initial list. These themes represent the main patterns in the data by combining the codes.

Fourth, we reviewed and revised the list of themes to ensure that there was enough data to substantiate our claims. We merged and removed those themes that did not have enough supporting data.

Fifth, we finalized the themes and assigned an operational definition to each of these to ensure that the list of our themes is mutually exclusive from each other.

Sixth, we wrote a detailed report that highlights the main patterns in the data, provides quotes as supporting examples, and backs up the theme list.

3.3. Results From Qualitative Study – Study 1

Our analysis was based on uncovering the perceptions of consumers – addressing their consumption habits, motives, experiences, and concerns. We found a strong consensus among perceptions, explanations, and gratifications of viewers concerning entertainment consumption on OTT platforms.

3.3.1. Perception 1: Consumers are uncomfortable with sexual content, violence, misogyny, and morality of OTT entertainment.

From the responses of the participants, we found that they were keen on consuming content that did not use distasteful tactics to grab views. There were many scenes with excessive sexual content, violence, and abusive language in OTT content that participants felt uncomfortable with.

They also mentioned that on-screen female objectification was something they found very crude and disrespectful. According to the participants, such tactics to grab views challenged the social fabric of the Indian culture. Female participants of the study pointed this misogyny out and claimed that they would avoid OTT content that did not respect the dignity of women.

We also found that the respondents from the southern states of India were more dissatisfied with such content than respondents from other parts of the country. These participants repeatedly claimed that they would be more comfortable watching entertainment content with their families.

Sexual or violent content did not fulfill their consumption needs related to entertainment. Those participants with older people (above 60 years of age) or children (under 16 years old) in their families seemed to express more concern about the content available on OTT platforms.
When asked which aspect they want to be implemented in entertainment in the future, "new talent representation", "family-friendly shows", and "coverage of societal issues" came up as the main ideas. This reveals that participants wanted to see new forms of storytelling catered to their values.

Several participants mentioned that Western norms heavily influence OTT platforms, and the content presented on these platforms is not attuned to the needs of Indian consumers.

Indians have a set of beliefs and family values which are very distinct from that in the west. However, OTT platforms seemed to create content inspired by Western culture rather than simple stories of family values and societal issues catered to the Indian audience. The mindset among consumers seemed to be that media has a strong influence on society, and exposure to excessive violence, sex, or misogyny could impact people negatively.

However, if OTT platforms can focus on highlighting the social and family ties in Indian society then that could help consumers perceive the world around them in a more positive and empathetic light. The consensus was that *"media influence is so crucial due to its omnipresence that it is necessary to create content responsibly. Consumers should feel good about themselves and their surroundings, rather than have negative emotions like resentment, anger, jealousy or sadness."*

Participants also majorly agreed that *"Acquiring a greater sense of our culture and society is a gratification most viewers seek. We are Indians, and our society is different from the Western world. What works there is not necessarily what we want to see, and our values passed down from earlier generations will most definitely reflect in our viewing choices. Gimmicks like female objectification, sex, and violence might not work for us. Instead, representation of our values, society, and families are important for an enjoyable consumption experience."*

3.3.2. Perception 2: Indian consumers want a balance between international and local content.
Participants (21 out of 33) expressed that OTT content should focus on "biopics on real-life heroes", "historical narratives", and "on-screen adaptations of the rich Indian literature". Participants said India has a rich heritage that must be adapted on-screen for children to learn from.

Most children are addicted to social media influences, and it would be helpful for them to learn about their own country and its heroes through educative entertainment. Stories of soldiers, doctors, athletes, and artists must be shared on-screen to throw limelight on real-life, unsung heroes.

These participants also agreed that OTT platforms could go beyond adaptations of international shows and look into rich history and literature of India. Besides, real-life narratives can make consumers more aware of their past and present, which can help them visualize the future better.

Participants mentioned that OTT platforms should not only restrict themselves to entertaining consumers but instead educate their subscribers about their history and present social conditions and encourage them to envision a prosperous future through their shows and films.

However, a few participants (12 out of 33) thought that international shows could give Indian consumers a broader perspective on the cultural norms and ethical standards practiced across the globe. These respondents stated that only highlighting Indian heritage and socio-cultural history could restrict the mindsets of viewers. International exposure could help viewers learn more about the stories, cultures, and history from across the world.

Such exposure would help viewers gain an overall perspective about what is happening in the rest of the globe. While the primary consensus was that the focus of OTT platforms should be on producing content catered to Indian values, a section of the participants also believed that international and regional shows could exist independently.

The overall view was that OTT platforms should *"strike a balance between international shows or remakes and local, regional content".* Participants mentioned that they sought knowledge from their entertainment choices, and OTT platforms had to *"teach something to their viewers through their entertainment catalogue. The request for biopics, historical shows, and literature-based adaptations is based on the need to learn and acquire knowledge from entertainment".*

3.3.3. Perception 3: Consumers seek original vernacular content catered to Indian culture on OTT platforms.

Respondents from the southern and eastern parts of the country preferred local platforms presenting content in their vernacular languages. The demand for Bengali, Tamil, Telegu, and Malayalam content seemed to be high among participants.

Participants shared the overview: *"Our country has rich, vernacular languages. We want OTT platforms to highlight these languages through regional storytelling."* These consumers seemed to think that the vernacular content depicted their value systems and social beliefs in a better way.

On the contrary, respondents from the rest of India preferred content in English and Hindi. They wanted subscriptions for big players like Amazon Prime, Netflix, and HBO over local platforms since they felt that the content on these sites often reflected a wider-world view. However, the main consensus was that Hindi is the most preferred language among Indian viewers (26 out of 33).

They thought that focusing on the country's vernacular content could highlight the importance of the distinctive Indian culture. Participants said, *"We want to watch content in our own languages, but we also want to watch some international content. It is difficult to choose, but vernacular content should be our priority as it reflects our country*'s *heritage*". Connecting with the language and culture of the country is necessary for participants, who expect OTT platforms to provide them with that.

3.3.4. Perception 4: Consumers are more interested in the morality of entertainment storytelling.

Almost all the participants (30 out of 33) were concerned with the importance of morality associated with the films and web shows on OTT platforms. They were also eager to gain some information in advance regarding the content of a movie or web series before they decided to watch something new. Participants overwhelmingly agreed*, "Morality needs to be imbibed in entertainment to highlight what is right and what is wrong for viewers. Entertainment can be a lesson too".*

Consumers wanted to understand the positive moral content of the storytelling process and demanded that OTT platforms highlight or focus on the ethical impact of their content. It was clear that participants were more eager to maintain a balance between morals and their entertainment choices to ensure that they watched content that adhered to their beliefs, culture, values, and morals.

3.3.5. Perception 5: Consumers want independent OTT film franchises.

Twenty-one participants claimed that OTT platforms could create independent film productions, which could eventually be turned into a franchise. While OTT platforms produced short-formatted web series with several seasons, there were very few film franchises that OTT platforms made. Most OTT production films have independent storylines, yet consumers considered that by interlinking characters from multiple movies, OTT platforms could create an exclusive franchise similar to DC, Marvel, or Harry Potter series.

They mentioned that *"creating a film franchise is just potential goldmine OTT platforms are sitting on. Imagine OTT exclusive products in the market and a film franchise that continues to enthrall audiences over time".* Such franchises can increase derivative pleasures in people because these franchises are expected to have characters that audiences can emotionally engage with over time. Participants said they could *"live their fantasies through such characters over a longer period."*

3.3.6. Perception 6: Consumers want short-formatted content.

Participants unanimously agreed that OTT content should come in short formats and with finite endings. All 33 participants said that the issues with television were the lack of good storytelling and the long-running soap operas that failed to entertain them.

They expressed that they connect with the characters and the plot if it is short, crisp, and to the point. Besides, the story's intrigue remains until the end if it is in a concise format.

The main consensus was that *"OTT platforms have gained credibility in the market because the content on television is so regressive, long-drawn, and ever-looping. Loyal TV soap viewers continue to watch their serials daily, but most people are disillusioned with such content. We would rather watch fast-paced stories that give us conclusive endings and not drag on for years".*

Participants thought six to eight episodes for one show season was enough, and if the story needed further completion, it could come up in successive seasons. Participants mentioned, *"Such short formats help us manage our moods and give a quick respite from tiredness, loneliness, and boredom. Sometimes, just binge-watching a short show is so much fun".*

3.3.7. Perception 7: Collectivist feedback is important for making choices.

As indicated by literature, consumer feedback is a key driver of increasing awareness around a product or service. Seventeen respondents confirmed that they had taken content recommendations from their families and friends. In fact, positive feedback encouraged participants to watch something that they had initially not planned to watch.

I watched some great shows after my friends and my partner recommended them. I would say that feedback is very important because it makes me aware of the content that people around me love and I could get access to fresh content too.

Respondents additionally mentioned that they had opted out of watching a new film or web show even though they were interested initially, based on poor reviews.

I really wanted to watch a romantic movie that was slated to release on my favourite OTT platform on my birthday. However, the reviews and feedback around it was so bad that I skipped it even though it featured my favourite hero. Instead, I watched a docu-drama from which I learnt about history.

Participants mentioned that they would additionally like to get personalized recommendations based on their preferences. They wanted OTT platforms to create dedicated forums where like-minded viewers could discuss content suggestions, reviews of what they have watched, and knowledge they have picked up from discussions with other viewers.

I love watching these and it would be great if OTT platforms remind us of any new content update that we may otherwise miss. In fact, having a dedicated OTT forum would help us gain perspectives on new releases, and go back to watch something old that others recommend.

Viewers can discuss shows and films, and find new pointers to talk about. We can learn so much from other viewers through discussions with like-minded people or even those people who oppose our pre-conformed ideas. It will help us challenge our existing ideas, pick up new ideas and learn from entertainment. Consumption of social realities is important.

3.3.8. Perception 8: Reflection of social trends in an entertaining manner.

Respondents mentioned that they are impressed with the multiple social problems and issues that content on OTT platforms addressed. Fourteen out of 21 participants explicitly stated that they had learnt a lot about what was going around them from OTT releases. They also claimed that weaving stories around these issues was effective in creating awareness among viewers.

I think in recent times, OTT content has become much more realistic and mirrors what happens around us. Unlike before when entertainment was mainly centred on fantasy, larger-than-life stories, OTT has brought the focus on issues like poverty, need for education, women empowerment and minority representation. I enjoy these new stories and try to watch one new film or show per week.

I find that the content on OTT sites is useful and informative. Especially when I am all for realistic entertainment choices and do not want to watch mindless comedies or soppy romances. I want to watch hard-hitting stories that reflect issues our society faces collectively.

Respondents were specifically asked about social issues which impacted them deeply. The most recurrent issues that came up in this discussion were respectful representation of the gay community and focus on retelling the stories of real-life unsung heroes.

As a member of the LGBTQA community myself, I really love how same-sex love is being shown in an empathetic and sensitive manner on OTT. Earlier, mainstream content often ridiculed people like us and it was very hurtful. Thanks to OTT, we are represented in a much more respectful manner. Gay and transgender actors are also getting lead roles on OTT. It is a great trend and I hope it will improve the understanding around our community.

I never knew about heroes who were soldiers, spies or para-athletes. There are so many inspiring stories to learn from and these unsung heroes, who have not gotten enough limelight in media. Through their biopics, they can get more fame and respect, and we can learn so much from their journeys.

3.3.9. Perception 9: Learning through new experiences in entertainment is significant for viewers.

Each participant was explicitly asked about the forms of content they are willing to watch on OTT platforms in the future. Their views reflected the need for new innovations in content design and marketing for different target groups.

Participants mentioned that they wanted a dedicated section for children on these sites. While a few sites like Netflix and Amazon Prime have separate sections for children, participants wanted all OTT sites to develop multiple forms of content like cartoons, sitcoms, and sports for kids exclusively.

I want to see more content for kids. Unfortunately, sometimes kids watch age-inappropriate content unintentionally. This must be avoided at all costs by having separate sections for kids and keeping locks on the adult sections. The market for children is still unexplored and I would love to see OTT platforms take the initiative.

Seven participants stressed on creation of programs that focus on mental health awareness because there are increasing cases of depression and anxiety among people of all age groups. Excessive consumption of content available on the internet needs to be addressed too, as mentioned by participants. Having talk shows or dedicated discussions on mental welfare could help people understand and empathize better.

I feel the younger generation is addicted to their screens and find it hard to detach. In such a scenario, it would be so useful if OTT platforms initiate conversations on mental health awareness and on how people can fight any kind of mental illness. Screen addiction needs to be discussed in these conversations as well.

I think talk shows with mental experts could help people in a big way. OTT is accessible to all, and having such shows would make people more aware and knowledgeable. In turn, it would make them empathetic towards others and also take care of their own mental health.

Ten participants mentioned that they wanted issues like animal rights and sustainability to be addressed through entertainment content on OTT platforms. These respondents thought that through depiction of these topics in an entertaining manner, consumers would be more aware of the choices that they can make towards a healthier and ethical lifestyle.

I think OTT platforms should focus on sustainability and animal ethics through their content. While many people consider these as unrealistic or preachy options, we can expect that consumers will be educated and informed about how they can make the planet better.

Five participants stated that they wanted the addition of immersive media on OTT platforms to gain a more holistic and engaging experience. They mentioned that addition of such technology would enhance the viewing experience to a great degree and remove the need to go for theatrical visits.

I want my content to be innovative and experimental. I wish my OTT providers would incorporate immersive technologies in entertainment content to make our experiences so much more comprehensive, involving and mesmerizing. It would be equivalent to watching a theatrical release from the comfort of my sofa. I can learn so much more from these deeply absorbing experiences that will enhance my motor skills. I can retain the knowledge deeply in my mind because the experience will be memorable.

The format of limited series also gained traction amongst participants. They mentioned that most web series had seven to ten episodes that made for a comfortable watch, rather than the long soap operas on television that do not have a finite ending in sight. Besides, the short formats often left the scope for the story to come back for new seasons, and participants mentioned the wait for these new seasons often created intrigue and excitement in them.

I think limited format works the best for me. I like watching something, and then moving on to something new. If the same content is played over the years, I would get terribly bored. It won't work for me. I like short stories, and if at all there are further seasons, I would like to wait for them. And we can pick up so many new things from these quick formats, and learn new stuff quickly without the learning experience being a drag.

3.4. Online Surveys – Study 2

3.4.1. Data Collection

Based on the insights generated from the qualitative study in Study 1, we created the questions for Study 2 and collected responses using 5-point Likert scale. Respondents filled their responses regarding OTT entertainment consumption. For the data analysis in Study 2, we conducted a formal test. The questionnaire was divided into two sections.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of insights from the qualitative analysis in Study 1. For the second part of the survey, we collected the basic information of consumers regarding socio-demographic traits like gender, age, education level, experience of usage, and motivation of use.

We used a 5-point Likert scale to analyze the responses, with a score of 5 representing "strongly agree" and a score of 1 representing "strongly disagree". We collected data from a total of 253 respondents.

Before we circulated the questionnaire to the target population, the respondents were asked to confirm if they had consumed entertainment content on (1) at least international OTT player (examples: Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney + Hotstar) and (2) at least one regional OTT platform (examples: ZEE5, MX PLAYER) for minimum six months before this research was conducted. We analysed the responses using SPSS version 25.0.

First, we cleaned the data by eliminating any missing data, errors, or those that did not meet the criteria of being an OTT subscriber for at least six months. Next, we profiled the socio-demographic information of the respondents in percentages and frequencies (highlighted in Annexures: 2, 3, 4).

Third, we calculated the means of each statement to determine the importance score. We also used the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) test and the Bartlett sphericity test for analyzing sample adequacy. The values we received are 0.938 and $p<0.00$, respectively, highlighting that the number of responses was adequate for conducting the study.

3.5. Results of Study 2

The descriptive statistics show that out of the 253 participants, 44.3 percent were females, and 55.7 percent were males. Regarding age groups, 24.1 percent were between 18-24 years old, 26.1 percent were between 25-31 years of age, 24.5 percent were between 32-38 years old, 16.2 percent were between 39-45 years old, 5.1 percent were between 46-52 years of age, 2.8 percent were between 52-58 years, and 1.2 percent were 60 years and above.

The age distribution of the respondents is consistent with the consumption patterns on OTT platforms, with the younger population constituting the maximum of viewers. Regarding education, cumulatively, 18.6 percent had completed standard XII, 41.9 percent had completed their graduation, 33.6 percent had completed their master's degree, and 4.3 percent had a Ph.D. degree or equivalent (highlighted in Annexures: 2, 3, and 4).

We aimed to understand the main consumer motivations to subscribe to OTT platforms. We asked the test participants to respond to 15 statements using a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from score 1 (strongly disagree) to score 5 (strongly agree). Five of the main statements in this study had mean scores of more than 4, and the rest had a score above 3.5.

Standard deviations ranged between 0.9835 and 1.224. Responses to each statement are presented in Table 1. We measured the item reliability to check the consistency of a set of items and the extent to which they reflect consumer perceptions. We used Cronbach's alpha, the most popular item reliability and consistency measure (Cronbach, 1951).

We checked the effect of each item on the overall alpha value by re-computing the value by excluding that item. If alpha increased when we excluded an item, we concluded that the item did not highly correlate with the other items on our list. If the alpha decreased, that item correlated well with the other items in the scale.

Based on Table 2, we see the overall reliability of our set of items and the Cronbach's alpha value is of 0.919, which is much greater than the minimum threshold value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). An alpha value greater than 0.9 is considered excellent and thus, we can claim that the items we generated from our qualitative study and used in our quantitative analysis are consistent and closely related (Hair et al., 2013). Table 3 shows that removing each item would decrease the alpha value, and thus, we decided to consider all items on our list as important and retain them.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Items

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
New talent representation can bring more variety to watching OTT content.	4.112	1.0486
I think OTT Content should highlight the society around us.	4.060	1.0627
Biopics on lesser-known real-life heroes are an ethical decision to bring these talented people of our country to the limelight.	4.028	1.0624
Dedicated content Should be made for children on OTT platforms.	4.028	.9835
I think the dignified representation of national service professions (like doctors, the army, and the police) is important.	4.012	.9836
Highlighting our society's rich cultural history would benefit the audience.	3.956	1.1081
I don't think we need		

Indian adaptations of international shows. Bringing regional content to the forefront on OTT platforms through dubbed versions/subtitles would benefit lesser-known talents.	3.940	1.0956
I want to see more family-centric, heartwarming stories on OTT platforms.	3.920	1.0852
I want OTT platforms to create new independent film franchises.	3.913	1.1583
OTT content needs to bring minority representation to the forefront (Here, minority refers to a group of people that differ in some way from the majority of the population)	3.876	1.0776
I dislike the explicit violence or abuse in OTT shows/films.	3.876	1.0903
	3.858	1.1867

I do not like the objectification of females on-screen (making them wear skimpy outfits, focusing on their body parts, etc.)	3.857	1.1721
I like short-format shows.	3.762	1.0817
I do not find the sexual content in OTT content to be moral.	3.726	1.2241

Table 2: Overall Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.919	15

Table 3: Item-Total Statistics for Reliability Analysis

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I do not find the sexual content in OTT content to be moral.	55.109	111.307	.584	.915
I dislike the explicit violence or abuse in OTT shows/films.	54.962	112.431	.560	.916

I do not like the objectification of females on-screen (making them wear skimpy outfits, focusing on their body parts, etc.)	54.962	112.457	.565	.915
I want to see more family-centric, heartwarming stories on OTT platforms.	54.904	113.558	.527	.917
New talent representation can bring more variety to watching OTT content.	54.690	111.593	.700	.911
Dedicated content should be made for children on OTT platforms.	54.795	112.500	.689	.912
I like short-format shows.	55.054	112.598	.614	.914
I think OTT content should highlight the society around us.	54.724	111.739	.687	.911
OTT content needs to bring minority				

representation to the forefront (Here, minority refers to a group of people that differ in some way from the majority of the population)	54.950	111.754	.659	.912
Highlighting our society's rich cultural history would benefit the audience.	54.845	110.501	.702	.911
I don't think we need Indian adaptations of international shows.	54.866	112.898	.599	.914
Bringing regional content to the forefront on OTT platforms through dubbed versions/subtitles would benefit lesser-known talents.	54.904	110.919	.693	.911
Biopics on lesser-known real-life heroes are an ethical decision to bring these talented people of our country to the limelight.	54.782	111.591	.683	.912
I think the dignified representation of				

national service professions (like doctors, the army, and the police) is important.	54.816	114.563	.594	.914
I want OTT platforms to create new independent film franchises.	54.941	113.013	.593	.914

Recommendations for Industry Experts on OTT Platforms

Building on the findings of this study, there are multiple implications for industry researchers. First, content researchers can discuss strategies with parents of children, media professionals, and social networks to understand their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with respect to entertainment.

Parental guidance is necessary to design content for those under 18 years of age. Besides, media professionals and psychologists are also crucial sources of information.

They can provide suggestions based on the insights from consumers. They can also scrutinize existing content catalogues on OTT platforms and rectify any content that causes discomfort to the viewers. Second, OTT executives and content producers can be provided training sessions to increase awareness about moral entertainment — including different values, beliefs, and customs of different target consumer segments.

By becoming more knowledgeable about the core concepts of morals and virtues, OTT platforms will be better positioned to develop strategies that make entertainment ethical as per consumer standards. Third, members of OTT platforms have to build positive perceptions about their content through effective advertising, trailer releases, and interviews with lead actors (Finsterwalder et al., 2012).

In doing so, OTT platforms can successfully promote their existing content and generate consumer interest in their entertainment catalogues. Although participants were not unanimous in their perception of uses and gratifications from entertainment consumption, they expressed a common belief concerning the increasingly dark and disturbing content on most OTT platforms.

Thus, OTT service providers must look into their upcoming storylines and ensure that the content is clean and family-friendly without being too problematic or embarrassing for their target audiences.

Fourth, given the concerns of consumers about female objectification, sexual content, and violence in OTT shows and films, content producers should think of new ways of exploring visuals that do not make the Indian audience uncomfortable (Allam & Chan-Olmsted, 2021). Fifth, OTT productions should experiment with new storytelling styles rather than emulating or adapting international shows for the Indian audience.

Sixth, OTT platforms must highlight India's history, culture, heritage, and people through their content.

Seventh, OTT platforms could conduct deeper market research to collect consumer feedback into the loop at each stage of the production and delivery process to cater to their preferences more efficiently.

Such a move could help OTT platforms curate the content of their films and web series with consumer inputs on why they use entertainment sources.

Eighth, policymakers must also work with content creators, marketers, and creative analysts to understand how consumers gain fulfilment from entertainment and design strategies according to the various gratifications which consumers seek from OTT entertainment (Rubin et al., 2022). Additionally, OTT platforms could conduct separate studies to understand the different types of appeasements that the Indian audience seeks from entertainment to know how OTT strategies could impact influences and perceptions of the audience. The study may be extended to other countries where the presence of OTT platforms is high to understand consumer behaviour and perceptions in those countries.

Implications For Academia

We used Focus Group Discussions to generate our main insights and then tested the quality of our themes with a larger population for generalization. Drawing on a mixed methods approach, our study reveals six important factors for entertainment consumption on OTT platforms.

Meeting the expectations of consumers is significant for OTT platforms due to the intense competition among multiple entertainment channels. To cater to consumers in a diverse country like India, OTT platforms must deeply explore the values, beliefs, and virtues of different consumer segments. With the plethora of content options available to viewers, it is essential to capture and hold their attention as quickly as possible.

By catering to their perceptions and preferences, OTT platforms can attract and retain more subscribers in an emerging market like India. Besides, OTT entertainment has been underexplored in academic literature. The study contributes to this research area through an exploratory analysis. In our study, consumers express their expectations explicitly from OTT entertainment and highlight how they seek knowledge, enjoyment, and value representation from their entertainment choices.

The main contribution of the study is finding the primary consumer perceptions of OTT entertainment in India. Based on the theoretical lenses we used, we can see how the values, beliefs, media influences, and experiences of consumers shape their entertainment consumption. Katz et al. (1973) describe the needs and the gratifications of consumers from media consumption experiences as the central proposition of UGT. MLT highlights the strong influence of media content on viewers and society as a whole.

This theory also mentions how media represents social realities that can influence different consumer segments in multiple ways. The insights from the study contribute to the literature on UGT, MLT, and OTT entertainment consumption.

The study corroborates the main tenets of UGT by showing how consumers use entertainment and how they seek fulfillment from OTT content. The tenets of MLT highlight how media influences viewers in interpreting the world around them (Mazzoleni, 1987). The study also substantiates this claim by showing how participants are likely to perceive the world around them based on what they see on OTT screens.

The findings of the study highlight that entertainment strategies influence consumers and that a substantial portion of their needs and fulfilment come from OTT entertainment choices.

Researchers should continue to explore how media and entertainment viewers perceive entertainment in unique ways, using media perception theories like UGT and MLT.

4. Conclusions

Previous investigations highlight how multiple approaches to entertainment have evolved from various sources like media, news, television shows, films, and reality shows. In contemporary times, due to the growth of OTT platforms, consumers have a wide variety of entertainment choices at their disposal and can switch between content forms easily.

Thus, OTT platforms must ensure that their content catalogue is aligned with consumer values, beliefs, and virtues to keep them interested in the offered services. Entertainment can be considered as evocative due to consumer awareness about their choices and the contemporary societal trends around people. In fact, entertainment has become more important than just passive delight, and consumers demand storytelling processes to mirror their thoughts, beliefs, values, and societal contexts.

The primary purpose of the study was to better understand consumers' perceptions of OTT entertainment through qualitative and quantitative studies across different cities and towns in India. The general consensus is that Indian consumers want more family-friendly shows on OTT platforms. They are tired of watching adult-rated content with high violence, abuse, and sexual imagery.

The participants also mention that they are willing to pay for subscriptions on those OTT platforms that are willing to break away from the trend of crime shows, adulterous content, and gory murder mysteries. Instead, they want to watch light-humoured shows that depict real lives of individuals and provide good enjoyment.

Several participants also mention that there should be a line between creative freedom and adherence to moral codes to ensure that subscribers are not manipulated. Besides, participants also specify that they want to watch more content on real-life biopics, historical plotlines, and even contemporary social issues. Participants specify that they want to watch more family-friendly shows, in contrast to the content that is currently being shown on OTT sites.

The OTT content could be detrimental to children, and participants are worried that there is not enough emphasis on showing the rich cultural heritage of India that could teach viewers, especially children, something valuable.

The older generation could enjoy historical stories, cultural narratives, and social issues through family-friendly, educative shows. Several participants mention that entertainment media on OTT medium often exploit female bodies through sexual objectification, which could also lead to issues for women in real life.

Such imagery would raise the assumption that women are disposable and their bodies can be used as per will. In India, such objectification could prove to be detrimental. OTT platforms should take care before adding such content to their catalogue. It is worth noting that the values among consumers from different parts of the country are somewhat distinct from each other.

The results show that the values of participants from southern parts of India are pretty conservative in contrast to participants from different parts of the country.

Participants from south and east India are especially interested in watching regional content more rooted in their cultural beliefs rather than consuming international shows. However, consumers from north India show interest in watching global content because they want to understand more about the rest of the world.

It is also important to reiterate that the cultural environment in India differs from the western world.

Indians have traditionally consumed entertainment shows on television and are accustomed to certain kinds of shows or films. The research shows that participants mainly want to consume entertainment that is placed within their values and traditions.

Thus, to cater to Indian consumers, OTT platforms must produce more content within the cultural and social contexts of the country. However, several participants also mention that focusing solely on Indian sensibilities would not expose the audience to global culture and norms. OTT platforms must balance international and local appeals regarding consumers' preferences.

Participants place high importance on the morality of the OTT content. The differences in ethical beliefs are seen between viewers who stayed in different parts of the country and are influenced by their age, education, and gender. Viewers tend to develop their outlook and enjoy fulfilment based on their values and beliefs.

The six themes which are identified in the analysis are important perceptions. However, the themes are certainly not the only way OTT consumers perceive entertainment. The study contributes to the literature on UGT and MLT theories, as well as the literature on OTT entertainment. While many participants seek vicarious pleasure or mood cheering from their entertainment choices, several consumers want to gain knowledge from their OTT consumption choices.

Researchers should utilize media perception theories like UGT and MLT to explore how other groups of consumers perceive entertainment choices to fulfil their requirements.

Future Research Directions

The research findings are based in the Indian context and on perceptions of Indian consumers only. While the close-ended survey collected data from several parts of the country, it was difficult for researchers to collect responses of participants from each state of the country. Thus, the findings may not reflect the views of the entire Indian population.

However, the findings act as a starting point to further in-depth research on this underexplored area of enquiry. OTT platforms are gaining in importance globally. Academic researchers could test the findings of this study in other big OTT markets like China, the USA, and the UK. Future research could also investigate the relative importance of the factors among consumers to provide content strategies for OTT platforms in the long run.

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Annexure 1: Details of Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Number	Participant List	Age (in years)	Gender	Education	Area of Residence
FGD1	P1	21	Female	Graduation (animation)	Delhi
FGD1	P2	25	Male	Masters'(English Literature)	Mumbai
FGD1	P3	27	Male	Masters' (Commerce)	Chennai
FGD1	P4	35	Female	Graduation (Engineering)	Trivandrum
FGD1	P5	39	Female	Graduation (Engineering)	Patna
FGD1	P6	44	Male	Graduation(Medical Sciences)	Lucknow
FGD1	P7	48	Male	High school pass out	Chandigarh
FGD1	P8	57	Female	Masters' (History)	Guwahati
FGD1	P9	60	Male	Masters' (Statistics)	Udaipur
FGD2	P10	28	Female	Graduation (Engineering)	Kolkata
FGD2	P11	32	Male	Graduation (Law)	Jaipur
FGD2	P12	35	Male	Masters' (Accounts)	Bhopal
FGD2	P13	38	Female	Graduation (Anthropology)	Sonepat
FGD2	P14	46	Female	Graduation (Business Studies)	Jammu

FGD2	P15	49	Female	High school pass out	Kohima
FGD2	P16	59	Male	Graduation (Commerce)	Bangalore
FGD2	P17	65	Male	High school pass out	Ranchi
FGD3	P18	23	Female	Graduation (Bengali Literature)	Durgapur
FGD3	P19	27	Female	Graduation (Engineering)	Varanasi
FGD3	P20	35	Male	Graduation (Zoology)	Surat
FGD3	P21	44	Female	Masters' (History)	Pune
FGD3	P22	52	Male	Doctorate (English Literature)	Kolkata
FGD3	P23	57	Male	Graduation (Commerce)	Bangalore
FGD3	P24	68	Male	Doctorate (Mathematics)	Kochi
FGD4	P25	25	Female	Graduation (Journalism)	Mysore
FGD4	P26	28	Male	Masters' (Food and Hospitality)	Kanpur
FGD4	P27	36	Female	Graduation (Chemistry)	Ludhiana
FGD4	P28	38	Male	Graduation (Mathematics)	Palakkad
FGD4	P29	43	Male	Doctorate (Computer Science)	Coimbatore
FGD4	P30	52	Female	Graduation (Medical Sciences)	Jalpaiguri
FGD4	P31	61	Female	High school pass out	Latur
FGD4	P32	64	Male	High school pass out	Sasaram
FGD4	P33	70	Male	Doctorate (History)	Nagpur

Annexure2: Gender Demographics in Online Survey

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	141	55.7	55.7	55.7
female	112	44.3	44.3	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

Annexure 3: Age Distribution of Participants in Online Survey

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-24	61	24.1	24.1	24.1
25-31	66	26.1	26.1	50.2
32-38	62	24.5	24.5	74.7
39-45	41	16.2	16.2	90.9
46-52	13	5.1	5.1	96.0
53-59	7	2.8	2.8	98.8
60+	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	253	100.0	100.0	

Annexure 4: Education Degrees of Participants in Online Survey

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Completed 5th grade	3	1.2	1.2	1.2
	Completed 10th grade	10	4.0	4.0	5.1
	Completed 12th grade	34	13.4	13.4	18.6
	Completed graduation	106	41.9	41.9	60.5
	Completed masters	85	33.6	33.6	94.1
	Completed Ph.D. or above	11	4.3	4.3	98.4
	Did not attend school	4	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	253	100.0	100.0	