

Unpacking Online Negativity: Understanding its Impact on Young Minds and Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

During covid 19 period, when individuals were unable to leave their homes, OTT platforms emerged as a viable alternative, leading to a significant increase in viewer engagement with these services. In contrast, traditional television channels typically offer continuous news coverage throughout the day, which can result in a limited viewing experience. During pandemic, various OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and Sony Liv made significant inroads into the Indian market. The surge in viewership during this time was largely driven by the closure of cinema halls, which left many seeking alternative forms of entertainment. The introduction of 4G technology further facilitated uninterrupted streaming, allowing audiences to enjoy content seamlessly. The advent of OTT platforms has provided a diverse array of content options that were previously unavailable. The transition from 3G to 4G technology has undoubtedly played a role in this shift. The introduction of 4G has facilitated faster connectivity, thereby offering consumers new alternatives to traditional media. As viewers were exposed to innovative content, their preferences began to gravitate towards OTT platforms, Repetitive programming on conventional electronic media, such as television, can occasionally cause boredom for some audiences. When similar themes, formats, or shows are aired repeatedly, it can become tedious, particularly for viewers who are looking for fresh or varied content in their entertainment. In contrast, the proliferation of OTT particularly web series has captured the attention of younger audiences, suggesting a shift in viewing habits. there are specific genres or formats that are gaining attraction among various demographic groups. And contribute to the widespread appeal of OTT platforms across different audiences.

The adverse effects of web series on the lives of students are becoming increasingly rising . A significant number of students are captivated by these series, which frequently portray characters and scenarios that resonate with their persona life. As students engage deeply with these narratives, they may cultivate a distorted self-image and a misperception of their environment, resulting in a disconnection from their actual lives. This disconnection can have enduring consequences for their mental health, as they may experience heightened stress and mood fluctuations influenced by the content they consume.

Keyword: Younger Audiences, Persona Life, Repetitive programming & Mood Fluctuations

OTT AND TECH WORLD:

OTT platforms have undergone substantial evolution, now offering diverse content tailored to various customer bases and genres, including horror, romance, and war films. A notable advantage of OTT platforms is the ability for viewers to watch content at their convenience, as opposed to the fixed schedules associated with broadcast media. users can access content on various devices, including mobile phones

and computers, without the necessity of a traditional television set. This flexibility significantly enhances the viewing experience, thereby contributing to the shift away from conventional media consumption.

The entertainment industry has witnessed a significant shift towards OTT platforms, particularly following the Covid pandemic. This transition has brought about both positive and negative impacts on society, including various physical and psychological effects. The surge in popularity of OTT platforms can be attributed to several factors, such as the availability of new and original content, advancements in technology, and the rollout of 5G. Additionally, the proliferation of mobile devices equipped with advanced chips has played a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences and expectations.

With the film industry largely at a standstill, OTT platforms became the primary source of entertainment. This shift was particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who turned to these platforms after their online classes, leading to an increase in screen time. Unfortunately, this trend has resulted in a growing addiction to streaming content, as many individuals found it difficult to disengage even after the pandemic subsided. (Dang, 2020). Research indicates that urban students aged 18 to 25 have developed a strong preference for English-language shows, particularly in genres like comedy and suspense. This demographic's inclination towards platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime reflects their maturity and preference for diverse content. However, it is important to acknowledge that this increased consumption has also led to some negative consequences, including mental health challenges. As we move forward, it will be essential to find a balance that allows for enjoyable viewing experiences while also prioritizing overall well-being. As we observed during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a significant rise in Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, with a noticeable shift towards on-demand services and their content. The increased competition in this space, coupled with the impact of the pandemic, greatly influenced the productivity of OTT services. Additionally, the amount of time viewers dedicated to watching OTT content surged, primarily due to the growing popularity and accessibility of streaming services, which was facilitated by improved internet connectivity. This accessibility is a crucial factor (Khandelwal et al., 2023). Furthermore, the time and financial investment in OTT services led policymakers to strategically curate content for viewers, allowing them to select from a wide range of options based on their personal preferences. Consequently, the demand for OTT content has significantly increased till date.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Social Responsibility Theory: The media holds a significant moral obligation to serve the public interest. It is essential for filmmakers, producers, directors, and actors within the film industry to ensure that their work contributes positively to society. Their efforts should aim to enhance societal well-being and foster a peaceful environment, minimizing the risk of harm stemming from religious or caste-related sentiments. The media plays a crucial role in conveying messages that inspire societal change, in addition to providing public awareness and entertainment. It encourages constructive transformation by promoting diverse cultures, gender perspectives, and various religious and ideological viewpoints.

According to the Social Responsibility Theory, content produced for Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms should prioritize societal benefits and strive for a lasting, positive impact on the future (Talikoti, 2018). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the availability of OTT content that addresses religious and cultural sensitivities. While some web series may portray reality under the guise of themes like freedom and expression, it is vital for media platforms to consider the potential effects of their content on the public and societal order. This consideration is at the heart of the Social Responsibility Theory.

Uses and Gratifications Theory: According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory proposed by Blumler and Katz in 1974, consumers actively select and engage with media content. They participate in the process of consuming media to achieve specific personal objectives. This engagement may be driven by cognitive factors, individual interests, or the pursuit of satisfaction.

According to this theory (Sichach, 2024), The uses and gratifications theory posits that consumers, as active audience members, select specific media content based on their personal preferences and motivations. Once they engage with this content, they experience a sense of satisfaction that stems from their individual choices. This theory emphasizes the importance of the consumer's experience over the media's message, highlighting the focus on how individuals utilize media to meet their needs.

There are five key assumptions: first, that consumer motivation drives their choices; second, that these choices fulfill various needs and trigger psychological responses; third, that they foster connections within social networks; fourth, that media consumers are actively involved in selecting content; and fifth, that there is a strong link between selection and satisfaction. Through this process, individuals not only satisfy their cognitive needs but also experience emotional connections, empathy, and relationship-building with family and friends. Additionally, media consumption can provide mental relief and relaxation, helping to alleviate stress for both professionals and students alike.

OTT CONTENT IMPACT ON G- GENERATION

In the 21st century, we have experienced remarkable changes driven by innovations like the internet, Wi-Fi, tablets, video games, and various electronic devices, including GPRS systems. As technology has evolved, so too has the way we engage with media. In the past, mobile phones were a luxury for a select few, but today, they are ubiquitous, allowing individuals to access content and communicate effortlessly. Previously, audiences adhered to fixed schedules for traditional media consumption, but OTT platforms have revolutionized this experience. Viewers can now enjoy content at their convenience, watching whenever and wherever they choose. This flexibility has transformed societal behaviors, as online shopping and brand networks have become commonplace. People are increasingly opting for the convenience of online transactions, often reducing physical activity as they fulfill their needs and seek entertainment from the comfort of their homes (Saravanan. V.M.2021).

In addition, the integration of OTT platforms and digital technology has significantly altered consumer behavior and societal dynamics, highlighting the profound impact of these advancements on our daily lives. It serves as an online platform for content delivery. The individuals aged 15 to 25 show a significant interest in web series. Research indicates that this demographic, particularly teenagers, is increasingly accessing content that may not be suitable for all audiences. The popularity of web series is on the rise across the country, especially in metropolitan areas such as Bangalore, Delhi, and Kolkata. Viewers are drawn to the gratification and excitement these series provide, leading to a growing preference for this form of entertainment. As a result, many are dedicating more time to watching web series, which is influencing their spending habits. Additionally, there has been a noticeable shift in cultural norms and preferences, reflecting the impact of this trend on society. OTT content appeals to individuals across various age groups, with younger audiences showing the greatest interest. They enjoy a diverse range of programming, including web series, live shows, popular series, and Indian gaming. This demographic appreciates the innovative formats offered by OTT platforms, which differ significantly from traditional media. In contrast, individuals in their early 60s tend to prefer serials, episodic content, or specific web series. Content preferences vary widely among different demographic groups. Younger viewers are often

drawn to more visually engaging and trendy content, while those aged 40 and above typically have more limited viewing time due to their busy professional lives. Despite their differing schedules, both groups share a common interest in the content available to them. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential negative impacts of excessive consumption of OTT content, particularly among the youth. Issues such as insomnia, increased crime rates, and a rise in substance abuse have been observed. Additionally, changes in eating habits and social behaviors have been linked to the influence of this content. The rise in serious crimes, including those against women, is concerning and highlights the need for a balanced approach to media consumption. Overall, the content consumed can significantly shape the attitudes and behaviors of young viewers, prompting a shift in their perspectives and lifestyles. College students often find themselves drawn to consuming a significant amount of online content, which can lead to a high level of satisfaction. However, this trend can have adverse effects on their well-being, particularly due to late-night viewing habits that contribute to insomnia and distract from their academic responsibilities. It is found that young individuals, especially those aged 18 to 25, are increasingly becoming reliant on digital media. A study was conducted in Mumbai highlights that G – generation viewers engaged in binge-watching, often viewing four to five videos in one sitting, which can negatively affect both their physical and mental health. This excessive consumption has been linked to rising levels of anxiety, depression, and other health challenges among this age group (**Dhenuka, A. et al. 2019**). Furthermore, it appears to impact their cognitive abilities, self-confidence, and emotional stability. For instance, individuals are experiencing heightened anxiety and insomnia as a result of their viewing habits thus it is essential to address these issues to promote healthier lifestyle choices among college students.

The Deloitte 2015 Digital Democracy Survey (**Deloitte, 2015**), highlights a trend known as "binge-watching," which occurs when viewers watch three or more episodes of a TV show or web series in one sitting. This uninterrupted viewing experience is particularly prevalent on OTT platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, which cater to the preferences of Indian youth. These platforms offer a diverse range of content, including genres like thriller, comedy, science fiction, and horror, allowing viewers to explore various categories of entertainment. Unlike traditional media, where audiences must wait for weekly episodes of a show, OTT services enable viewers to consume an entire series at once. This format eliminates the anticipation associated with waiting for the next episode, providing a seamless viewing experience that is not available through conventional broadcasting methods.

The G generation, comprising individuals aged 18 to 30, represents the primary audience for OTT platforms, particularly in the realm of web series. This demographic is increasingly drawn to online streaming and video content, leading to a notable shift in their viewing habits. The convenience of internet video streaming has fostered a unique viewing style, especially among students aged 18 to 25. However, this trend has raised concerns, as the consumption of web series and other content has been linked to negative societal impacts, including issues related to alcohol, substance abuse, sexual violence, and a growing indifference towards education (**Wagh, V.W. et. al. 2022**). Consequently, significant changes in lifestyle have been observed within this age group. In response to these challenges, a wide array of OTT content is now available, with a particular emphasis on comedy, which has gained popularity in today's entertainment landscape.

The phenomenon of binge-watching and its implications warrant careful examination, particularly in relation to its prevalence among young individuals. It is essential to recognize that many viewers do not limit themselves to a single episode; rather, they often consume two to three episodes in one sitting (**Loeber et al. 2020**). Following the completion of an episode, it is common for viewers to actively search

for subsequent episodes, indicating a strong desire to continue watching. This behavior frequently leads individuals to begin viewing at late hours, engage them in prolonged viewing sessions. As result, the cognitive and mental health of individuals can become significantly impacted by this binge-watching behavior, resulting in a loss of self-regulation. The consequences of such habits can be observed in various aspects of life, particularly among students and professionals. For instance, university students and school going children may find their academic responsibilities compromised as they prioritize viewing content over completing assigned tasks. This trend is concerning, as it suggests that the habit of binge-watching is not merely a leisure activity but rather a pervasive issue that can detrimentally affect the work ethic and productivity of young individuals. Thus, the inclination towards binge-watching and the consumption of diverse content is increasingly prevalent among the youth, leading to potential negative outcomes in their academic and professional pursuits. It is imperative to address this issue to mitigate its impact on the younger generation.

Few years back, American television programs frequently depicted a considerable amount of sexual behavior, including kissing and various unwanted other acts (Collins et al.2004). Moreover, messages conveyed through this content may encourage sexual behavior among adolescent viewers. As result, a notable shift in sexual behavior was seen, particularly among teenagers. Exposure to various forms of media often includes unwanted contact, sexual themes, and adult content intended for audiences' consumption such material can have detrimental effects on young minds, potentially encouraging sexual behavior as well.

UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ABUSIVE ONLINE CONTENT ON YOUTH

Sexual content pertains to media that portrays sexual behavior, which may be either explicit or implicit in nature (Brown,2002). An example of implicit sexual behavior is flirting. Teenagers, especially those drawn to sexually charged media such as web series and talk shows, may develop tendencies toward sexual objectification. This is particularly evident in male viewers, who may engage in derogatory comments about women's bodies, reflecting a concerning pattern of behavior. This phenomenon is often observed among university and college students who tend to emulate the styles and trends portrayed in the media. There is a growing trend among youth towards consuming sexual content available across various media platforms. This includes not only explicit sexual themes but also discussions surrounding sensitive topics like sexual violence and body anatomy. Additionally, non-verbal cues in this content often carry ambiguous meanings that can further influence perceptions and behaviors Although, sexual content can be categorized into two types: explicit and implicit. Both forms have the potential to shape and influence sexual behavior among young audiences.

Customers of Ott who have developed a strong reliance on the internet show a promising trend in their future purchasing behavior. This trend is not only positive but also plays a crucial role in fostering relationships and enhancing connections among family and friends. There is correlation between Over the Top (OTT) services, social satisfaction, consumer engagement with OTT platforms, and the intention to subscribe. (Priya et al. 2021) .The results indicate that consumers exhibit a stronger connection to OTT platforms that align with their identity. Furthermore, the research highlights that in order to utilize OTT services, consumers must possess interactive technology on their smart devices and demonstrate a certain level of digital literacy. Regarding the impact of excessive consumption of web series and other media content on academic performance. It was found that individuals who engage in prolonged viewing tend to

exhibit a detrimental effect on their academic outcomes. This excessive engagement not only hampers their academic pursuits but also adversely affects their mental health, leading to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness, as well as insomnia (Rout et al. 2021). Consequently, there is a direct negative correlation established between media consumption and both mental and physical health. The study further indicated that students who devote significant time to various forms of media content demonstrate a pronounced inclination towards continued viewing habits.

HOW ONLINE NEGATIVITY SHAPES YOUNG MINDS

The psychological effects are more pronounced than the physical ones, and the detrimental influence of negative psychology has been observed among young individuals, resulting in a loss of confidence and the emergence of psychological issues. These individuals are experiencing depression and increased aggression (Dhiman, B. et al. 2021). The presence of abusive content on online platforms has a significantly adverse effect on college students and university attendees, indicating a negative correlation between such content and the well-being of young people.

The rise of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms has significantly influenced society, particularly among the youth, in both mental and health-related aspects. Contemporary young individuals are increasingly engaging in body modifications, such as acquiring tattoos, altering their hair color, and utilizing various cosmetic products for enhancement. Additionally, there is a notable shift towards the adoption of Western cultural practices, including the consumption of fast food (Kaur, J. et al. 2023). The prevalence of body modification has surged, with many young people opting for diverse hairstyles, body piercings, and tattoos. This trend is accompanied by a heightened awareness among individuals regarding these practices, indicating a substantial impact on their overall well-being.

Research indicates that repeated exposure to online streaming content can have a lasting impact on young individuals. As they engage with various episodes or series, they often begin to shape their perceptions of characters based on their own experiences. Unfortunately, this can lead to the development of negative images and emotional responses, which may contribute to psychological issues such as anxiety and depression.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many young people exhibited a strong sense of confidence and resilience when faced with challenges. However, it appears that today's youth may be more sensitive and this shift in mindset can deeply influence their cognitive behavior and overall outlook on life.

Moreover, there is a growing trend among young people to spend more time consuming online and video content rather than engaging in physical activities. This change in lifestyle has been linked to noticeable alterations in their eating habits and overall health. It is essential to address these issues to support the well-being of our youth. In addition to this, the content disseminated through social media platforms, such as Reels and short videos, often contains vulgar and abusive language. This type of content is frequently embraced by impressionable youth, who may find enjoyment in it. However, such exposure can have detrimental effects on their character and communication skills. For instance, when abusive language is used that may tarnish their reputations. Furthermore, in the pursuit of likeness, influencers often drive individuals to present themselves in ways that prioritize superficial appeal over viewers. This trend suggests that many individuals seek to showcase their identities in a manner that garners attention among viewers.

CONCLUSION

India represents a significant market for OTT platforms, with substantial business growth in this sector. The journey began with the launch of BigFlix by Reliance Entertainment in 2008, marking the inception of OTT in the country. The industry gradually expanded, and by 2016 and 2019, numerous local platforms entered the Indian market. However, the real surge in OTT popularity occurred in 2020, largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian market, particularly among the youth, has shown a strong inclination towards OTT content, regardless of whether they reside in metropolitan areas or smaller towns. In terms of content, there has been a notable trend towards storytelling that draws from real-life incidents, particularly in web series, talk shows, and live events. This approach contrasts with traditional cinema, where societal norms and censorship often limited the portrayal of certain themes. As a result, the language and expressions used in OTT content have begun to resonate with younger audiences, reflecting a shift in cultural acceptance.

Previously, audiences would wait several days between movie releases, but OTT platforms have transformed this experience, allowing viewers to enjoy content from the comfort of their homes at any time. While this convenience is appealing, it raises concerns about potential negative impacts on youth behavior and attitudes, as excessive consumption of certain content may lead to undesirable influences.

Ott streaming opens up a world of choices for media lovers, allowing them to take control of their viewing habits (Lee, C. et al. 2023). However, indulging in late-night streaming marathons can throw a wrench in their sleep routines are being seen among youngsters. Recently a study was conducted in the Navi Mumbai area for examining the effects of alcohol consumption on young individuals aged between 18 to 24. The findings revealed a negative correlation, indicating that alcohol adversely affects psychological, mental, and physical health (Deshpande, A. et. al. 2020). Additionally, in those participants, who engaged in binge-watching habit as result, health issues such as poor sleep quality, weight gain, and signs of academic decline. The research also highlighted challenges in time management among those who frequently consumed media content. Furthermore, it was noted that these individuals experienced increased financial pressure related to subscription costs for content viewing.

But The content available on OTT platforms is expected to adhere to ethical guidelines; however, the enforcement of these standards has been inconsistent. In December 2024, the Indian High Court imposed a ban on 18 OTT titles due to concerns over inappropriate and vulgar content. This highlights the need for stricter implementation of the IT rules 2021 to ensure that OTT content aligns with ethical standards. In accordance with the newly implemented regulations, Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms are mandated to establish a comprehensive three-tier grievance redressal mechanism. At the initial level, these platforms will address complaints through a designated grievance officer, whose contact details will be made accessible online. Furthermore, it is required that each social media entity appoints a Chief Compliance Officer, a Nodal Contact Officer, and a Grievance Officer. The second tier will consist of an institutional self-regulatory body formed by content publishers and their respective associations. This self-regulatory organization will be comprised of industry experts and will be chaired by a retired judge from either the Supreme Court or a High Court, or another distinguished individual within the sector. Members of this body will be selected from a panel established by the ministry, which will also include six additional professionals with expertise in media, broadcasting, technology, and entertainment, in accordance with the prescribed guidelines (Thakur P ,2021).

The younger generation in India is profoundly impacted by the growing popularity and widespread availability of web series and content accessible through internet streaming platforms. (Kumar ,2020).

The content showcased in web series available on various online streaming platforms effectively engages and holds the interest of younger audiences, resonating with their preferences and viewing habits. The content accessible on OTT platforms exerts a significant psychological influence on Indian children, especially when it comes to exposure to sensitive and disturbing themes such as violence, sexual harassment, and various forms of abuse. In India, the modern transitional youth culture has been significantly shaped by the influence of soap operas and reality television shows, which have been specifically designed to cater to and align with the evolving preferences and trends of a globalized audience ((Liu & Chuang, 2015) With the increasing popularity of the internet and mobile devices, contemporary programming has embraced a more direct and innovative approach. It now incorporates explicit and candid communication, utilizing clear and direct content and language to effectively capture the attention and engagement of its predominantly young audience. (Nair,2021).

To address these challenges, a robust monitoring system is essential. While it is crucial for OTT providers to maintain a business-oriented approach, government oversight should be balanced to avoid stifling creativity and freedom of expression. The parameters for monitoring should be guided by moral obligations and the impact of content on society. As we move forward, it is vital to consider the potential societal changes that may arise from increased consumption of OTT content, particularly regarding youth engagement and behavior.

However, there is positive outcome due to emergence of this platform. Ott has proven to be particularly beneficial, especially during the Covid pandemic when many young individuals turned to online education as a primary means of learning. With schools, colleges, and universities transitioning to virtual classes, students were able to continue their education from the comfort of their homes. This shift not only provided a solution during a challenging time but also made education more accessible to those in remote areas. The convenience of attending virtual classes allowed many individuals to enhance their skills and knowledge, fulfilling their educational goals despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. The integration of advanced internet technology and mobile devices played a crucial role in this transition, enabling seamless access to educational resources. In addition to educational purposes, OTT platforms also served as a source of entertainment, further enriching the experience for users. For instance, platforms like Byju's have successfully combined learning with engaging content, catering to a diverse audience. Overall, the adaptability and reach of these platforms have significantly transformed the landscape of education and entertainment alike

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