

# Vindhyan Bloom



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## From Screen to Stream: How the Pandemic Accelerated India's OTT Boom

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**Abstract:** The rapid evolution of India's entertainment industry from traditional broadcast channels to digital streaming platforms has been one of the most significant media transitions of the last decade. Whole concept of entertainment has been transformed completely. Entertainment industry (television) has travelled a long way from daily soaps to CD players, to DVD players, to USB uploads, to digital platform. While Over-the-Top (OTT) services had already begun gaining traction, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated this shift, reshaping viewing habits, technology dependence, and consumer expectations. And slowly and steadily the acceptance of these OTT platforms has been very smooth, although time taking. In the process of acceptance by the customers, emergence of COVID has been a catalyst. Whole world has witnessed various changes post covid. Media habits of consumers is also one of them. Dynamic approach of OTT big banner movie releases on platforms like Amazon and Netflix, return of old content like Mythological programmes from the DD era on Hotstar etc had further enhanced popularity. This study presents a case-based examination of India's OTT landscape, analysing how the pandemic acted as a catalyst in driving digital adoption and transforming media consumption behaviour. Through an in-depth case study of major OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and

Disney+ Hotstar, the research explores changes in consumer perception, the influence of millennial digital habits, and the strategic responses of OTT providers during and after the pandemic. Supported by secondary data, industry reports, and published literature, the study maps OTT adoption trends pre- and post-COVID-19 and evaluates the sector's future prospects in India. Findings highlight that convenience, accessibility, personalized content discovery, and improved digital infrastructure have significantly contributed to the sustained rise of OTT platforms. The study concludes that OTT services will continue to play a transformative role in India's entertainment ecosystem while also confronting potential regulatory and economic challenges ahead.

### Introduction

The entertainment industry in India has undergone a remarkable transformation, shifting from traditional television and physical media to digital, on-demand streaming platforms. While the acceptance of Over-the-Top (OTT) services had been gradually increasing over the past decade, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a powerful catalyst that accelerated this transition. Lockdowns, cinema closures, and changing work-from-home lifestyles reshaped consumers' media habits, leading to a surge in OTT subscriptions and viewership. Customers are preferring variety in the content, seamless

accessibility which has been further aggravated because of acceptance of smart mobile and prompt internet infrastructure. OTT has become a very popular and likeable medium of entertainment delivery and consumption. The biggest audience for OTT business is generation Y, who are grown up as digital natives and don't have patience to wait for the movies. Content and recommendation based on watching history is what makes the OTT experience especially rewarding for the common man. Platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and others responded with dynamic strategies—ranging from direct-to-digital film releases to revival of nostalgia-driven content—further solidifying their popularity. Current study witnesses OTT journey throughout and tries to evaluate the role played by the pandemic in evolving OTT media consumption trends; a qualitative mapping of increase in OTT adoption – Pre and Post COVID 19 in India. Also aims at analysing the changes in the customer perception, towards OTT before & after Covid19. Study also focuses on the future growth prospects of OTT in our country. Research also focuses on understanding factors which lead to adoption of OTT services among millennial consumers. Millennial consumers, raised as digital natives, emerged as the largest and most engaged audience segment, valuing convenience, personalization, and instant access. Supported by improved smartphone penetration and robust internet infrastructure, OTT services quickly became one of the most preferred modes of entertainment during and after the pandemic.

This research paper presents a **case study analysis** of India's OTT evolution, examining how COVID-19 influenced adoption patterns, altered consumer perceptions, and shaped the future trajectory of digital entertainment. It further explores the factors driving OTT

usage among millennials and evaluates the broader implications for the country's media landscape.

### **OTT Journey**

Over-the-top (OTT) media services refer to digital streaming platforms that deliver content directly to viewers via the internet, bypassing traditional distribution channels such as cable, broadcast, and satellite television (Natalie 2017). India's OTT journey began in 2008 with the launch of the country's first dependent OTT platform by Reliance Entertainment (Dangwal 2017). This was followed by the introduction of the mobile app NextG in 2010, which became the first platform to live-stream Indian Premier League (IPL) matches on smartphones during 2013 and 2014. IPL live-streaming from 2015 onwards proved to be a major turning point for the OTT ecosystem, with Hotstar acquiring exclusive IPL streaming rights—an achievement that significantly accelerated its popularity in India (Jaideep 2021; Harsh 2021). Riding on this momentum, global streaming giant Netflix entered the Indian market in January 2016, registering as a Limited Liability Partnership and beginning to commission local content. By December 2021, consolidation trends emerged with Sony and Zee announcing plans to merge their OTT services (Chandni 2021).

Rapid technological changes, increasing internet penetration, digitization of payments, and the massive rise in smartphone and smart TV usage have transformed India's media consumption landscape over the past few years. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified this shift. With the widespread adoption of digital classrooms, Zoom meetings, and online work environments, internet infrastructure strengthened significantly. Although demonetization did not fully achieve its intended push toward digitalization, the pandemic succeeded in accelerating digital adoption across

sectors. Consequently, OTT services began reshaping India's media space by offering viewers the flexibility to watch films, shows, and international content at their convenience (Jose 2020). Changes in organizational work culture during the pandemic also contributed to rising OTT subscription levels (Swati & Saha 2022).

While television remains a widely used medium in Indian households, a noticeable migration toward digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hotstar is evident. Despite their relatively higher subscription costs, OTT platforms offer compelling advantages—including fewer advertisements, superior content discovery through advanced recommendation algorithms, and an expanding library of original productions. The evolution of entertainment technologies—from theatres to video cassettes, CDs, DVDs, cable networks, and DTH services—has culminated in the rise of OTT streaming (Sundaravel & Elangovan 2020). With accessibility across internet-enabled devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, and smart TVs, OTT platforms provide unprecedented mobility and personalization. Free from the limitations imposed by traditional censorship, box-office pressures, and demographic targeting, they empower creators to experiment with diverse narratives. Enhanced audio-visual quality has further elevated the home-viewing experience. The pandemic marked a decisive turning point for OTT platforms in India. As cinemas shut down, production houses increasingly turned to OTT services for direct releases (Sharma 2020). This created a mutually beneficial ecosystem—OTT platforms gained access to fresh content, while filmmakers found alternative avenues for distribution. Although theatrical releases traditionally generate higher revenues and employment opportunities, video-on-demand consumption surged, particularly among

millennials seeking cinematic experiences at home. The rise of OTT has also boosted demand for smartphones equipped with 5G connectivity, powerful processors, and affordable data plans (Sant 2020). Convenience, flexibility, personalized preferences, and cost-effectiveness remain major drivers of OTT adoption, often leading subscribers to reduce reliance on conventional television broadcasting (Swati 2020). However, despite its rapid expansion, the OTT sector presents regulatory and economic challenges. Notably, it contributes minimally to government tax revenues and offers limited benefits to traditional access providers. Nonetheless, OTT unquestionably represents the future of India's digital entertainment landscape. As platforms like Disney+ Hotstar scale up, they may further influence the prospects of smaller niche services (Meghan McAdams 2019). In this context, the present research paper explores how the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst in accelerating India's transition **from screen to stream**, reshaping media consumption patterns and redefining the country's entertainment ecosystem.

## Research Methodology (Case Study Approach)

### 1. Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative case study research design** to examine the evolution of OTT platforms in India and assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on media consumption patterns. The case study approach is suitable for gaining an in-depth, contextual understanding of complex behavioural, technological, and market-driven changes in the entertainment sector.

### 2. Nature of the Study

The research is **exploratory and descriptive**, aimed at exploring emerging trends, documenting changes, and

interpreting patterns related to OTT adoption before and after COVID-19.

### 3. Case Selection

The case study focuses on major OTT platforms operating in India, including:

- **Netflix**
- **Amazon Prime Video**
- **Disney+ Hotstar**
- Supporting references to platforms such as Zee5, SonyLIV, and regional OTT services

These platforms were selected due to their significant market presence, diverse content strategies, and substantial growth during the pandemic.

### 4. Data Collection Methods

The study relies primarily on **secondary data**, collected from:

- Published academic papers and journals
- Industry reports (FICCI-EY, KPMG, Deloitte, BCG)
- Market insights and OTT analytics
- News articles, press releases, and business publications
- Government and regulatory documents
- Existing literature cited in the Introduction and OTT Journey section

Secondary data was chosen due to the wide availability of reliable information on OTT usage trends, market growth, and pandemic-driven changes.

### 5. Data Analysis

A **qualitative content analysis** method is used to interpret the collected data. The steps include:

1. **Data categorization** into themes such as technological changes, consumer behaviour, pandemic effects, platform strategies, and millennial adoption.
2. **Pattern identification** to compare OTT usage before and after COVID-19.

3. **Interpretation** of trends through cross-case insights drawn from multiple platforms.

This thematic analysis enables a holistic understanding of how OTT consumption evolved over time.

### 6. Scope of the Study

The study covers:

- The evolution of OTT platforms (2008–2026)
- Pre- and post-COVID-19 OTT adoption trends
- Consumer perception shifts
- Millennial behaviour and usage patterns
- Future prospects and challenges of OTT platforms in India

### 7. Limitations

- The study relies on secondary data; primary user surveys were not conducted.
- Rapid technological changes may lead to variations in findings over time.
- Case outcomes may not represent smaller regional OTT platforms in full detail.

### 8. Ethical Considerations

All data used comes from publicly available secondary sources, ensuring transparency, authenticity, and ethical use of information. Though India, is far behind in comparison with other countries, but the future of viewing entertainment is changing rapidly (Moochhala, 2018). With increase in technological innovation by Reliance GIO & other telecom competitors', growth in availability of 4G, 5G network with unlimited data generated the online services more affordable and accessible. Netflix is among the most preferred platform. Also, customers are attracted towards the content variety. OTT is preferred because of versatility and range of programs from romantic to thrill, sports, action, mythology, movies, short films and web series (Swati, 2022). (bilbil

2018) while comparing advantages and disadvantages of OTT high adoption rate was the main highlight. Rise in consumer interest coupled with online media content is also an important factor. Challenges faced further includes regulatory balance, innovation without discouraging industry growth. Government is also intervening to ensure, privacy, data protection, price control, effective competition and appropriate taxes. Day by day government regulations will also increase. Millennial generation has been preferring binge watching movies, TV shows, sports, web series on OTT. Factors which has been attracting most of OTT views are content availability, innovative content, superior audio/visual quality, no advertisement insertion, price and overall experience. Future of OTT will be marked by HD videos. Limitation of OTT is lack of high-speed internet services, especially in rural areas. Although players like reliance jio are offering attractive reasonable internet plans.

## 9. Conclusion

The transition “from screen to stream” marks one of the most remarkable shifts in India’s entertainment ecosystem. While OTT platforms had already gained moderate traction before 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a decisive catalyst that accelerated digital adoption across demographics, geographies, and income groups. Forced indoor confinement, closure of cinema halls, and the rise of remote work transformed entertainment into a personalised, on-demand, and technology-driven experience. The availability of smartphones, affordable data plans, and improved broadband infrastructure further strengthened this shift, enabling OTT platforms to emerge as the preferred entertainment medium for millions of Indians. The study’s case-based analysis of Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and supporting regional platforms highlights that the pandemic significantly

reshaped consumer expectations and content consumption patterns. Key drivers—such as convenience, content variety, flexible viewing, ad-free experiences, personalised recommendations, and the rise of direct-to-digital film releases—contributed to sustained OTT adoption. Millennials, being digital natives, played a pivotal role in this transition, preferring instant access to diversified content over scheduled television broadcasting. The research also indicates that OTT platforms have transformed not only viewing habits but also the broader media production ecosystem. Trends such as nostalgia-driven content, platform-driven originals, and increased experimentation with themes and formats have redefined storytelling in India. However, challenges persist. Regulatory uncertainties, rural connectivity gaps, taxation issues, and sustainability of subscription-driven models remain areas requiring careful policy and industry attention.

Looking ahead, the future prospects for OTT in India are highly promising. Continued advancements in 4G/5G connectivity, rising smart TV adoption, deeper personalization through AI-based recommendations, and expanding regional content libraries are poised to drive further growth. While OTT may not completely replace traditional media, it will continue to shape entertainment preferences and redefine the digital marketplace. Ultimately, OTT platforms have evolved from being optional alternatives to becoming central pillars of India’s entertainment culture—ushering in a new era of accessible, personalized, and technology-integrated viewing experiences.

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