Revolutionizing the Portrayal of Indian Women in Mainstream Media: Indian Web Series

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Abstract: *The internet streaming services are grabbing viewers' attention and making the registers ring like never before. They are squabbling about television's stagnated content and the blossoming chances for the advent of rich, high-quality material. As internet streaming platforms tend to refill the entertainment sector, the overly dramatic television programming makes room for the new and accessible stories they provide. The Covid 19 reportedly destroyed practically every industry, but it also paved the way for the emergence of Over The Top (OTT) platforms and saw a spike in subscriptions. People turned to web series as a way to escape the monotony of everyday life since they were trapped inside their houses and had no other methods of entertainment. The online series was also credited with shattering gender stereotypes and revolutionising how women are portrayed in mainstream media. The researcher's goal is to analyse this updated representation, and audiences were surveyed for the study. The information gathered from the poll aids in understanding the factors contributing to the success of OTT platforms as well as how the public is reacting to the shifting representation of women in mainstream media.*

Keywords: OTT, revolutionizing, mainstream media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The millennial generation has long adored the web series available for streaming on websites like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and Hoi Choi. Due to India's technical advancement, Indian film is also seeing rapid growth. The internet and cell phones in particular are rapidly altering Indian television and film. Indian fans now watch movies, documentaries, and other video programming through social networking sites, new digital platforms, and wi-fi sticks. (Singh, 2018) The online series' material is more relatable to its younger audience. Other benefits include the ability to view at one's own pace and the authenticity of the information. These internet streaming businesses' development and revenues have been spurred by the Covid-19 epidemic. Online streaming services are working tirelessly to expand their user bases and are highly successful, especially at a time when movie theatres are required to remain closed owing to lockdown and social seclusion.

Digital entertainment has evolved from a trend to a need. Another significant development is how the online shows have altered how women are portrayed to reflect the times. The media is seen as a potent force in the creation, maintenance, and eradication of many sorts of representations or stereotypes of women. The online series challenges the stereotyped portrayal of women that appears frequently in popular media. They present women as individuals who are forming their identities independently of males. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown have been a blessing in disguise for OTT platforms in India, including Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALT Balaji, Zee5, MX Player, and Hoichi, to name a few. This has caused the dominance of television networks and movie theatres as the primary entertainment hub to crumble (Bhattacharyya, 2020). The lockdown and stay-at-home restrictions in India have compelled people to turn to internet entertainment, hastening a trend that was already taking place as the main platforms spend billions to entice customers away from theatres (The Hindu, 2020)

Our everyday lives are altering as a result of new media. Indian film is quickly evolving thanks to the internet (Singh, 2019). The primary motivation for using Over The Top (OTT) applications is entertainment. The portability of technology is the second main justification for employing this service. The availability of on-demand programming is the third (Singh, 2019). In India, mobile internet traffic has already overtaken that of desktop internet traffic. The majority of consumers now utilise mobile devices to access the internet. Producers and filmmakers were therefore aware that it would be challenging to get a spot for their movie in the theatre for a sizable amount of time, even once

lockdown restrictions were removed. Before the lockout, digital premieres weren't a novelty. However, there has been a seismic change as a result of the theatres being closed for more than four months. (Mitra, 2020) The trend of more movies being released on OTT platforms will cause OTT platforms to predominate the entertainment business in the near future (Salih, 2020). Many movies have already been finished, and a few more are almost finished. Numerous more Bollywood movies are scheduled for a direct-to-OTT release after the release of Gulabo Sitabo, Dil Bechara, and Shakuntala Devi; the genres range from horror-comedies to historical war movies (Mitra, 2020).

A Bollywood movie featuring Amitabh Bachchan called Gulabo Sitabo was expected to bring in millions of viewers, but instead it launched on Amazon.com Inc.'s Prime streaming service since the coronavirus kept Indians at home (The Hindu, 2020). Although Amazon Prime withholds its viewing statistics for Shakuntala Devi, it is believed that it has 20 million paying customers in India and that at least 20% of those users will see the film. This means that at least 4-5 million people should watch this movie on Amazon Prime. Given that the movie's budget is 25 crores, it was predicted to be sold to Amazon Prime for 35 crores, yielding a clear profit of 10 crores.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Web series break away from traditional television formats since there are no strict time constraints and no censorship concerns. They also provide a means to keep audiences interested and coming back for more. It is praised in an article in Outlook as a "bracing antidote against repression. Every significant character in "Made in Heaven" is hoping to be released from some kind of oppression. The finest desi original on Amazon Prime, according to Soumya Shrivastava, "unmasks the dazzling falsehoods of large fat Indian weddings". Aside from that, he adds that "Created in Heaven explicitly tackles and foregrounds current socio-political issues, especially those that don't normally fit into popular narratives, unlike numerous shows and films being made now."

With more people in India watching videos in Hindi and other regional languages, streaming platforms have the chance to create content for a specific audience. The language and presentation of the shows are bold, spicy, and mature in character, completely unlike the current programming shown on television. If one were to look at the content of the shows streamed on OTT platforms, they would be startled. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators 2020 report, wired internet subscribers would make up 3.24% of all internet subscribers by September 2019 while mobile device access will account for 96.68% of all internet users.

According to McKinsey Global Institute's 2019 report, "Digital India: Technology to Transform a Connection Nation," by 2023, India would have a 40% increase in internet users and a doubling of its smartphone population. According to the report, India now has more than 550 million internet users, ranking second in the world, and by 2023, this number may rise to 800 million as a result of the growing affordability and availability of smartphones and high- speed connectivity. Indians used more than 54 times as much data in 2018 as they did in mid- 2016 thanks to the government's Digital India Initiative and appealing packages provided by commercial telecommunications firms to internet customers. The research also notes that when it comes to digital user interaction in the areas of messaging, tweeting, purchasing, and streaming, India is digitising more quickly than all but one other nation in the study, Indonesia. Following the widespread and inexpensive availability of internet via mobile phones, material is now accessible in internet "dark zones," particularly in semi-urban and rural locations. According to the Indian OTT Platforms Report 2019 by Mudra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad and Communication Crafts, many of these users are first-generation consumers of OTT content. A paradigm shift from television sets to mobile screens has been brought about by smartphones and internet services, which are not only necessities but also a new source of enjoyment. Because they are aimed at young people, the web series' fresh realistic innovation topics attract a lot of viewers. It's a cutting-edge platform for business investment, and firms are modernising their branding tactics to compete in the digital sphere.

2.1 The portrayal of women in web series:

According to research, women's value in a movie is mostly determined by whether they identify as a mother, wife, or lover. In contrast to the industrious and adventurous male characters, women are represented as being overly emotional, dependant on other people, and limited to low-status employment. The return of formulaic portrayals in today's prime-time stories has been labelled as a "backlash" by some analysts. Independent women are portrayed as needing control, but by the story's conclusion, they have become doormats or shadows. In these tales, the "traditional" Indian lady is praised for her household tasks and attention on them. The plot of the programme wants us to think that the characters

are ambitious, yet they seldom ever demonstrate that. Their assertiveness, badass attitude, and unapologetic self can occasionally come across as forced and lacking in foundation, according to a News18.com report. (News18) Web series culture in India is seen as a new wave of narrating women's experiences, reflecting their reality, with the advent of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and several other streaming services, and their original content. In contrast to the usual television soap operas' socially acceptable sanskari protagonists, characters like Poroma Sarkar from Love, Lust, and Confusion and Megha n Lust Stories take on bolder on-screen personas. Numerous online series, such Sacred Games, Mirzapur, Pitchers, Permanent Roommates, or Lust Stories, which featured strong female characters and received great praise for their performances, have become highly popular with viewers. Despite the fact that these stories primarily follow male protagonists, female leads like Kubra Sait, Radhika Apte, Shweta Tripathi, Riska Duggal, Maanvi Gagroo, and Nidhi Singh have been successful in forging a distinct identity from the stereotypical and typecast roles that women in TV series typically play. These people are thought of as being contemporary, progressive, and highly relatable. Tara from Made in Heaven demonstrates to the world how a career-focused woman may be as feminine as she chooses to be while still relentlessly pursuing her aspirations. One of the few good representations of a trans woman on television is Cukoo from Sacred Games, while Vartika

Chaturved, an IPS officer in Delhi Crime, demonstrated how strong, tough, and supportive women can be. Shreya, the female lead in TVF Pitchers, puts her passion ahead of her relationship, sending a clear message to the viewers.
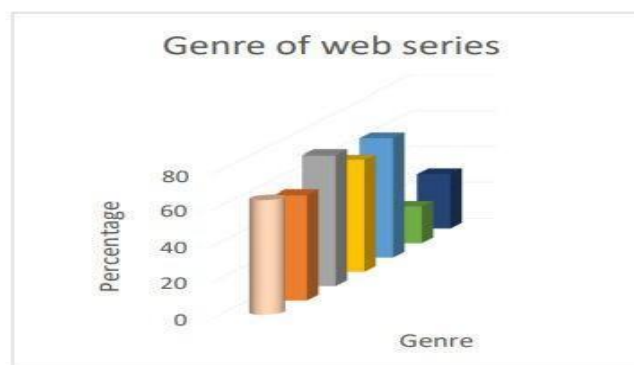
III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the essay is to critically evaluate the web series in order to examine how women are portrayed in their material and how this deviates from the stereotyped representation of women in popular culture. The information is given new life by this updated portrayal, which is somewhat more accurate. The article also intends to investigate millennials' interest in Indian online series.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online poll was carried out using a quantitative technique to determine the web series' popularity in India. The poll was carried out using Google Forms, and the answers were examined in order to determine the factors contributing to the success of the Indian web series and the acceptance of the newly developing identity of women as it is represented in the series. In order to comprehend the study goals of the article and the effects that the Indian web series' representation of the changing position of women is having on society, secondary data was also gathered.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics: The majority of the respondents to the online survey are between the ages of 18 and 25, which indicates that millennials have replied most frequently, while the age range covered by the study was 18 to 45.
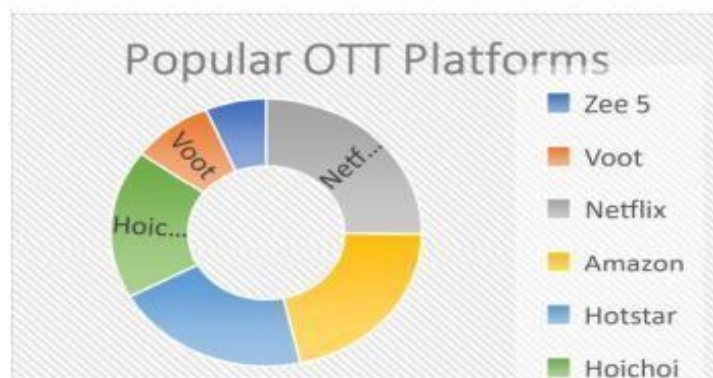

Graph 1: The genre which audiences prefer on OTT platforms

Genre of Web Series: Figure 1 displays the types of web series that respondents, who are web series viewers, find most appealing. The graph below indicates that Drama (58.4%), Comedy (72.6%), Romance (66.4%), and Crime (61.9%) are the most well-liked genres, have a better affinity with the youthful audience, and are more likely to get critical acclaim. Additionally, a sizeable portion of the respondents were told that the genres of family and thriller are ones that they

enjoy. 20.2% of respondents said in the poll that they would be interested in viewing horror or thriller-related content. On the other hand, 30.1% of respondents said they enjoy viewing stories about family life.

Popularity of OTT platforms:

When the respondents were asked which OTT platforms they used to view content, 45.1% said they preferred Hoi Choi, 51.3% said they preferred Hotstar, and 53.1% said they chose Amazon. Of the respondents, 62.8% are fans of Netflix. 15.9% of people favour Zee 5, while 21.2% prefer Voot

Graph 2: The most popular OTT platforms

91% of the respondents agreed that there has been a revolution in the portrayal of women in web series, and a huge majority of audiences are quite receptive of this as they believe this will bring about a significant change in the mindset and culture of the society. Hardly 9% of respondents were of the opinion that there has been no particular change in the representation of women in web series. When asked if there has been a significant change in how women

were portrayed in Indian web series, a responder responded, "Yes, they are redefining whatever Indian women signify. Women have always been the foundation of every country in the globe, and their contributions to society have a significant positive impact, according to a young media student. We have a wide variety of audiences throughout India. Web series are popular among young people, therefore promoting the subject of women's empowerment through various series serves to inform people about the safety of women and the need of not discriminating on the basis of gender or caste. Women are just as capable as males, if not more so. "Yes, it has provided numerous vast options to demonstrate and portray one's talent through the screenplay," another respondent stated. Another individual affirmed the change by responding, "Yes, of course.

Take Jamtara or Delhi crimes as examples. When discussing the television dramas, a millennial said, "Yes. Finally, Indian online programmes are moving away from the stereotypical Saas- Bahu representation of women. For instance, Kavya from Little Things, Meera from Girl in the City, Damini, Siddhi, Anjana from Please take four more shots, Chanchal from Tripling, and many others. The list goes on forever. When talking about how gender roles are evolving, it is important to include how the LGBTQ community is represented. A commenter on this topic stated, "Exploring women's sexuality or people's sexuality in general is not viewed as "risqué" as it is for TV channels as the general content consumers are young adults and teens. The taboo nature of women's sexuality, which includes aspects like polyamory, LGBTQ, and domination, is eloquently shown by the web series.

According to the data that was gathered, the respondents notably enjoyed the online series Sacred Games, Byomkesh, Kota Factory, Little Things, Girl in the City, Mirzapur, Stories by Tagore, A Family Man, Ghost stories, etc. These were the respondents' top-favored television shows. Some of them, however, spoke about places like Kota Factory, Made in Heaven, Charitraheen, and Permanent Roommates. One commenter made the following observation about the female leads in web series' choice of clothing and cosmetics: "First of all, there has been a big shift in the manner that female protagonists have experimented with their looks. Focus should be placed more on the personalities of the characters rather than their appearance or skin tone, as well as on how elevated the standing of the female protagonists is in the plot. Many online series, according to a large fan of web series, are emphasising women's empowerment and

including female protagonists. A millennial, however, said that rather than continuing with the same old plot, web series writers should aim to produce unique material.

VI. CONCLUSION

Web series and movies are both incredibly effective communication tools. According to researchers, communication has a role in the establishment, maintenance, and alteration of cultures. A civilization can only evolve if it makes an effort to break free from the antiquated customs and ways of thinking that frequently act as a barrier to that society's development. The shifting representation of women in web series is also dismantling ingrained gender stereotypes in people's thoughts. These have enormous influence, are transcendent, and have the power to alter people's perspectives and behavior for the better.

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