Online Misogyny on OTT Platforms: Impacted Perception of College Students

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Abstract

With the advent of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, the users' viewing behaviour has been disrupted through technological advancement and personal adaptations impacting conventional TV viewing. This study investigates the users' indulgence level towards the OTT platforms and Conventional TV. It explores how the socio-demographics of the users correlate with the seven components of the niche and gratification approach. As internet access has increased, so has content consumption in India. The mass viewership through subscription via OTT platforms like Netflix, Hotstar YouTube, Amazon, SonyLiv, Eros Now, and Torrent downloads has been greatly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. These platforms produce a lot of well-known shows and films. The creators take great care to offer fresh and relatable content to pique millennial interest. In reality, however, these shows encourage substance abuse, and violence against women, including verbal and physical abuse. These programs encourage this kind of conduct in teenagers and young adults, normalizing and making it attractive. This study will expose their deception by showing how they appear to be having the opposite effect of what they intended by confusing fiction with reality. This paper will look at how much misogynistic shows affect teenagers and young adults, particularly how these shows are deceiving young girls and women.

Keywords: OTT, video-on-demand, digitization, infotainment, content, covid-19 pandemic, lockdown

Introduction

The intellectual capacity of any individual to grasp information and pass it on has reflected the power play in the society for generations. The social construction of reality through the precepts of facts and the knowledge that ultimately derives the truth are based on the assumption of those who can affirm these precepts and project it as an objective truth. Technological advancement if nothing has been crucial to spread out the information to the common masses irrespective of their regional or lingual background.

Information and entertainment in today's world is seen as the reflection of an individual's life. Representation through art and culture is the justification of people and their mundane existence. The context of communication to the masses on the basis of their interest is an added bonus to the OTT platform which for a long time was available but not accessed. The point of access further delimits individual of their choices as those who can afford the subscription of the platform can access the different mediums on that platform.

With the advent sf Covid-19 that brought the society to a standstill, limiting people of their movement outside their home showcasing a second opinion of survival through the digital life. The different mediums of occupation, education and entertainment got its boost as the information was readily available for the people. In this context of accessibility, survival of the individuals depended on the information promoted through online media through e-copies of newspaper or magazines that included daily updates of the happenings in the society. The idea of survival of the fittest fits aptly in the context of the covid-19 and its avenues through digital media, as the access of information irrespective of the rumours promoted in the form of truth or entertainment through reels as the millennials recollect became the channels of expression and acceptance.

The digital wave through the OTT or Over-the-top content platforms promoted an environment of collective consumption of media and entertainment with and without factual errors. With limited resources of mobility and recreation, the internet along with the OTT platform proved to be a blessing for the common masses to utilize their resources and time. The timeline of the growth of the OTT also reflects the spread of misogynistic and biased opinions which has greatly influenced the youth of the society. Reels on social media platforms were projected as the cornerstone of individual expression of a hegemonic and misogynistic attitude towards the audience. These in turn were incorporated in their day to day actions through trolling and roasting on the online platform and eventually led to hostile behaviour in their personal space at home.

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Hatred or prejudice against women is referred to as "misogyny" (Kendall, 2022) [11]. Misogyny has a long history and a variety of manifestations, its roots may be traced back to ancient Greece as well as the Bible and Quran. It is the result of living in a patriarchal society. Misogyny presents itself in a variety of forms, including sexual harassment, violence against women, coercion, misogynist terrorism, and verbal abuse. The world's oldest prejudice is misogyny (Holland, 2006) [23]. Online misogyny is one of the newest and fastest-growing subtypes. Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, and several OTT services like Netflix and Hotstar are just a few of the websites and apps where online sexism is prevalent.

The Internet has become the trend of the youth. The phase of the youngsters is seen to be social media addicts, so web series are quickly running and gaining popularity amongst India. The serial on Television goes on for years and years, but the web series are small and have new concepts with new creativity. It has Unpredictable plots and shows the current situation much time. Also, Web series have no time-bound. People can watch it anywhere and at any point in time. Web series create any interest to watch the next episode. Web series are taking the rise in India because people can watch a series of their interests and their type. Web series provides all kinds of entertainment, and the majority of the series, at the end, leave back some moral for the viewers.

The Internet has also brought a radical change in the television industry around the world. Web series and streaming content are having a significant impact on our society, especially amongst youth. In the last few years, the online entertainment industry has marked remarkable growth in India. This is possible because of the changing lifestyle of the Indian viewers, the change in the type of content consumed, and various online streaming platforms on which the content is served to them. With the introduction of faster and cheaper internet services in the form of mobile connection and wide availability of broadband services, there has been major growth in the access to online content, in terms of the number of people visiting online for content, and the time they spend on watching online content.

The popularity of the internet, smartphones, and computers has increased in the twenty-first century. They have changed the way we live by digitizing almost every important aspect of it, from education to entertainment. The Covid-19 pandemic is proof that internet usage and related services have skyrocketed over the globe. As a necessary component of existence, entertainment gives us the much-needed break from our demanding lives. It functions as a distraction by separating us from reality. Several OTT services, including Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, and Voot, had seen a rise in viewers (Vaishnav, 2021) [21].

Euphoria, 365 Days, You, after, and the 50 Shades of Grey film series are contemporary examples of successful shows and movies. These shows and movies openly promote substance abuse, and they also glorify violence against women, including coercion, physical abuse, sexual assault, and verbal abuse. These initiatives normalize and elevate this type of conduct among adolescents and young adults (Getachew, 2022) [8]. Additionally, the performances are fooling young women and girls. As a result, they grow confused about what is real and what is fiction (Smith, 2019) [24].

Literature Review
It is becoming apparent that the attraction for traditional television viewing is declining amongst the Indian youth. The famous OTT platforms like Amazon Prime, Netflix, Sony LIV, and other video streaming websites provide instant access to broad categories of video content, attracting youth in India.

In the last decade, India has witnessed a technologically transformative media landscape that has promoted the mass market of niche channels, content, and television technologies. The new platforms of engaging with television media, mainly through smartphones and Internet TV/Video-On-Demand (VOD) and OTT platforms, gave rise to changing viewing patterns and platform choices.

Moving ahead, OTT platforms took advantage of a strong audience base that is increasingly growing accustomed to consuming entertainment content through smartphones. The online streaming platforms have now swooped in to take their slice of the market. The contents, features, and contexts of this online video streaming differ sufficiently from traditional TV. It remains a challenge to investigate how far traditional media theories and methodologies can inform research on the changing audience and their viewing pattern Over-the-top media services are also known as OTT platforms, which provide television and film content over the internet at the request and to suit the requirements of the individual consumer at any given time. OTT platforms are taking over traditional cable and satellite television. Digital subscriptions increased with the majority of OTT viewers aged 15-34. (Express News Service, 2022). They provide new and fresh content every day to cater to the audience. Some of the most famous OTT platforms in India are Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Amazon Prime, and Voot. These platforms are free from censorship and budget clutches, which provides creators freedom with content, genre, forms, and narratives. Creators want to create content that will be a top hit and have the highest ratings. For this, they are ready to cross all boundaries. Therefore, some of the latest popular shows and movies are producing some of the vilest and most inappropriate content. Shows like Euphoria and You and movies like 365 Days, after, and the 50 Shades of Grey film series are examples of such shows.

The problem with these shows is that not only are they available on these platforms without any censorship, but they are also marketed as shows for youth and teenagers. Teenagers in particular enjoy watching these shows. They produce shows and movies portraying young people having fun, partying, abusing drugs, and engaging in sexual activity. Making it appear as though this is how a teenager should live their life without presenting any activities that are happening, like homework or testing. As a result, viewers feel as though they are missing out on the excitement and desire to live the life they see in movies. The use of drugs is openly encouraged in these shows and films, and violence against women-including coercion, physical abuse, sexual assault, and verbal abuse. Due to the difficulty in casting real teenagers for such shows, adults play teenagers and youngsters. These performers are simply performing scenes as written.

It's Trending: These shows have a chokehold not only on the entertainment industry but also on social media. Tweets, memes, reels, Tik Toks, and fan edits are made about these shows and movies. Regardless of how bad the plot is, these shows are getting attention and praise for the actors who star in them and the unrealistic fantasy world that they depict. They make content that shows the so-called "coming of age," which in reality is nothing like what they depict.

The fashion and beauty industries are greatly influenced by shows that are about teenagers. "Euphoria" was New York

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Fashion Week's biggest beauty inspiration. The HBO series about Gen Z teens sparked a beauty revolution on the NYFW runways (Alexa Tietjen, 2019) [1]. Bold outfits, neon lights, and glitter-that's Euphoria. Instagram was flooded with posts of Euphoria-themed parties, makeup, Halloween costumes, reels, and stories. Even the National Institute of Fashion Technology in India celebrated Euphoria Day. The issue is, do the people know exactly whom they are dressing up as? people dressing up as Rue, a 17-year-old teenager who is an addict, or Cassie, the most vulnerable character on the show. The most concerning part of this are that not only are these trends being followed by youngsters but also by school-going children.

Toxic Beauty Standards: Toxic Beauty Standards often leak out into real life, so people feel terrible that they are not buff and muscular or skinny and pretty since everything that comes out of these shows tells viewers they're only valuable if they're attractive. Female actors need to be light-skinned and petite, with perfect skin, hair, and teeth. This makes female audiences very conscious of their normal bodies, thinking that their bodies do not fit the beauty standards and need to be modified. People start crash diets, starvation, and use other unrealistic methods to look better (Sadhwani, 2021) [19]. They even get plastic surgery to look like these actors. The same is true for male actors; they only cast "the tall and handsome" kind with a good physique and charming face to attract female viewers. These movies only survive because of their extremely attractive lead roles. And for the ones who do not fit in, try to fit in by engaging in risky activities. Kat from "Euphoria" is a 17-year-old who deals with body image issues and struggles with societal pressure and ends up becoming a cam girl (Espinoza, 2022) [5].

Deception: These shows and movies use attractive men to play the role, they are very cleverly using them to make misogyny marketable. Female viewers are blinded by their looks and hence fail to see the problem. Choking, kidnapping, verbal abuse, physical coercion, and drugging are some of the ways misogyny is promoted. If the lead was an unattractive male, the genre would quickly change from romance to crime. Women develop fantasies because they find this behavior attractive. There have been many tweets and memes online about how women want to be kidnapped after watching the 365 Days movie. Thus, these shows and movies are misleading young girls and women.

Substance Abuse: These shows and movies suggest that women are vulnerable under the influence and that men can never be vulnerable, but in fact, they get even more powerful. In films like "After," college students were shown attending frat parties, drinking, smoking, and playing party games, and how an innocent college girl would join them under peer pressure. They also showed how easy it is to take advantage of young girls who are under the influence of alcohol.

In euphoria, it gets even worse because most of the characters are minors. They were frenetically throwing themselves into all the treacherous and injurious acts that we'd been trained, by popular culture and the media that preceded *Euphoria,* to believe were the markers of young adulthood. Social media was central to the unfolding of their tragic sagas, inundating their peers' Instagram feeds with photos of red cups, bags of bud, and hot-boxed cars-all indications of a so-called "real coming of age" (Getachew, 2022) [8].

They took it to an extreme level by showing really disturbing scenes of overdosing, hyperventilation, intoxication, and being high on drugs. These shows are not only showing how they purchase drugs but also how they consume them. For instance, 17-year-old Rue Bennett, played by Zendaya, has been shown snorting drugs and stealing medicines from her friend's house. She takes powerful opioids like marijuana, Xanax, and fentanyl and injects morphine (Law, 2022) [12].

Abuse and Coercion: Sexual and verbal abuse against women has been glorified in many forms, including eve-teasing, kidnapping, marital rape, and others (Vaishnav, 2021) [21]. Women have always been portrayed as weak and helpless. In movies like you and 365 Days, kidnapping, coercion, and stalking are the main themes. In these movies, the men are ready to go to lengths to have the women they like. Joe Goldberg from "You" is a serial killer because he keeps all of these victims in a soundproof glass cage.

Netflix accurately describes "365 Days" as "controversial." The film's audience is left looking for a protagonist among the main characters, all of whom are rapists, kidnappers, or suffering from Stockholm syndrome-the hero, of course, is Massimo (Morris, 2020) [14].

In "Euphoria," abusive relationships and verbal abuse make up half the plot. Older men lure minors for their pleasure, choke them, and use physical strength to assert dominance.

Making sexual and nonsexual violence against women appear to have positive outcomes contributes to greater acceptance (Brownmiller, 1974; Burt, 1980) [3, 4]. Adding to this is the famous Andrew Tate "Top G" controversy, which has taken the world by storm. The man who is promoting misogyny and labeling women is a real-life example of how online misogyny can escalate quickly and influence men.

Methodology

This is quantitative research. A diverse group of degree-seeking students from various Mumbai colleges was chosen for this study. Students from St. Andrews, St. Xaviers, Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues College of Engineering, Don Bosco, L.S. Raheja, M.L. Dahanukar, and other colleges participated in this survey. There were 72 participants. The age range covered those between the ages of 18 and 21. Google forms were used to perform the survey. This was the ideal choice because we can gather a lot of data and connect with a large number of students. This is an extremely cost-effective and time-saving method of data collection. The main objective of this study was to show the impact of popular shows and movies on the perception of college students. The secondary goal of this study was to determine whether Indian college students were aware of or were consumers of such content. To determine whether such shows and movies are promoting misogyny. Two sections make up the survey. The participant's consent and the gathering of their data were covered in the first section. The second half of the survey consisted of 14 multiple-choice questions.

Results
Part 1
72 students participated in this survey. The outcomes are shown in the following table.
1. Age

Table 1: Age of the Students Respondents

Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
Below 18	2	2.8%
18-19	61	84.7%
20-21	9	12.5%

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2. Gender

Table 2: Gender of the Student Respondents

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	31	43.1%
Female	39	54.2%
Prefer not to say	2	2.8%

3. College

Table 3: College of the Student Respondents

Name of the College	Number of Participants
St. Andrew's College, Bandra.	11
St. Xavier's College, Fort.	10
Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues College of Engineering, Bandra	10
M.L. Dahanukar College, Vile Parle.	8
Sheila Raheja, Bandra.	7
Don Bosco College, Kurla.	5
Others	21

4. Currently Pursuing

Table 4: Current Education Level of the Student Respondents

Type of Course/Degree	Number of Participants
B.M.S	22
B.A	15
B.E	9
B.Sc	8
B.Tec	4
B.Com	4
Culinary arts	3
Others	7

Part 2: The following are the results of the second section of the survey. There were 14 multiple-choice questions, which can be further divided into 5 parts.

1. **Viewing Habits:** It has been found that 68 (94.4%) participants prefer watching online shows, movies, and web series, whereas only 4 (5.6%) prefer traditional TV. 65 (90.3%) use OTT platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, and Voot, while 7 (9.7%) do not. 66 (91.7%) participants have heard of shows and movies like Euphoria, 50 Shades of Grey, YOU, 365 Days, and After, and 6 (8.3%) have heard of some of them. All of the participants responded "yes" when asked if they had watched any of the above-mentioned shows or movies.
2. **Popularity:** As the target audiences of these shows are teenagers and young adults, they are highly popular among them. 61 (84.7%) participants think that these shows are popular among college students, and 11 (15.3%) think that they may be popular. 71 (98.6%) participants have seen content related to these shows and movies on social media, and only 1 (1.4%) has not seen such content.
3. **Beauty Standards:** The beauty standards in these shows and movies are unrealistic for both men and women. 55 (76.4%) participants voted that movies like 365 Days, 50 Shades of Grey, and After use attractive actors to cover up the character's terrible actions, but 17 (23.6%) do not think

so. 57 (79.2%) participants voted that it has always been shown in movies that beautiful women are supposed to be fair and thin with perfect hair, and 15 (20.8%) do not think so.
4. **Substance Abuse:** 54 (75%) participants voted that shows like Euphoria are promoting smoking, vaping, and drugs among teenagers, and 18 (25%) voted that they do not promote these among teenagers.
5. **Misogyny:** This section contains some of the most surprising and unexpected responses. 38 (52.8%) participants believe that shows like Euphoria promote gender inequality, while 34 (47.2%) do not. 32 (44.4%) think that movies like 365 Days and 50 Shades of Grey suggest that women are weak, whereas 40 (55.6%) think that they do not suggest that women are weak. This was the most unexpected outcome of the entire survey. 51 (70.8%) participants think that these movies suggest that men may abuse women or do anything they want to them, but 21 (29.2%) do not think so. 55 (76.2%) participants think that these shows and movies use luxury, money, and a rich lifestyle to cover up the violence and abuse against women, whereas 17 (23.6%) do not think so. 50 (69.4%) participants think that these shows and movies promote sexist behavior, whereas 22 (30.6%) think that they do not promote sexism.

Discussions: Easy accessibility and advancements in the internet and its services have increased their usage tremendously. The data collected indicates that a large number of college students prefer watching shows and movies online. Many participants use OTT platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, and Amazon Prime because they allow them to watch whatever they want, whenever they want, and in complete privacy.

It has also been found that the participants have not only heard about shows and movies like Euphoria, 50 Shades of Grey, YOU, 365 Days, and after but have also watched them. According to the data collected, we can say that these shows are highly popular among college students and are also popular on social media. Memes, tweets, fan edits, reels, and social media accounts have added to their popularity.

Unrealistic beauty standards have been showcased in almost every movie. A majority of the participants agreed that these movies star actors and actresses who are extremely attractive and have excellent physical features. They distract the audience with their looks, and hence they fail to see the sexism these movies are promoting.

Euphoria, for example, promotes not only alcohol, smoking, and other illegal drugs but also new ways to get high, such as e-cigarettes and vaping. Not only are vapes and e-cigarettes highly popular among high school and college students, but these are also easily available online and in shops that sell cigarettes. These shows are normalizing such behavior by showing high school students consuming these products and even overdosing. A majority of the participants have voted that such shows are promoting smoking, vaping, and drug use among teenagers.

The last part of the survey had some of the most unexpected responses. Almost half of the participants voted that shows like Euphoria do not promote gender inequality. More than half of the participants think that movies like 365 Days and 50 Shades of Grey do not portray women as weak. Many participants believe that these shows promote violence against women while covering it up with attractive male actors, luxury, and a lavish lifestyle. To support this point, we shall

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compare it to a study called, "The Effects of Mass Media Exposure on Acceptance of Violence against Women: A Field Experiment." The results indicated that exposure to films portraying violent sexuality increased the male subjects' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women (Malamuth & Check, 1981) [13]. Hence, the results in this section help us prove that people do get carried away and fail to see the sexism these shows and movies are promoting.

Limitations: Because these shows include mature content, young viewers can be hesitant to talk about them and might not want to express their true feelings. Due to the characters' diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds, as well as the fact that these series and movies also deal with themes of gender, health, and the LGBTQ+ community, viewers may be able to relate to some of these characters. Some of these parallels cause people to get carried away and fail to recognize the misogyny that these shows are promoting. As a result, when these shows are criticized, the viewers may feel offended or as though they are being evaluated. The way that men are portrayed in movies may influence young men to feel antagonized. The male population may view this study negatively as a result.

Recommendations: It's important to remember that anyone, regardless of age, can access OTT services. As mentioned earlier, most content is consumed by users between the ages of 13 and 24. Hence, these platforms should not be used to stream content from shows like Euphoria or films like 365 Days and 50 Shades of Grey with excessively explicit scenes. Parental guidance, age recommendations, trigger warnings, and explicit scene warnings should be present at the start of every episode or movie. OTT platforms need to outlaw shows with strong misogyny and obscene content. For the streaming of these movies, special websites and streaming portals should be created.

To ensure that the content is appropriate for streaming, a committee should be established to watch these shows before their release. It should be mandatory to censor streaming websites and control explicit and pornographic content. A list of guidelines should be made to curb such content production.

Conclusion

Hence, we can conclude that such shows and movies do alter our perception by using clever tricks like cinematography, following popular trends, fashion, and attractive actors. This is also the reason why these shows are popular among teenagers and youngsters and are the top hits of today. Not only are they spreading the wrong messages, but they are also influencing the younger generation to do the same. They prefer watching these shows over ones that are truly worth watching. To avoid all of this, streaming platforms must make sure that shows and movies do not showcase extreme misogyny and obscene content. The study finds that there is a discernible rise in the prevalence of OTT as a preferred medium, a habit solidified by the formerly unheard of lockdown due to the highly virulent COVID-19 pandemic. The main reasons for OTT popularity are availability of cross-cultural content, a subscription to virtually unlimited content, accessibility of informative content of form of documentary/docu-series format indicates a paradigm change in the way informational content is made, distributed and consumed. Also vital are factors like increasing penetration of smartphones and availability of internet data at competitive prices in India. While OTT is looking forward to capturing a new horizon, the habitual preference for TV media cannot be ruled out. Web series emerges as another favorite program

format. Lockdown, is not merely is social or political mandate, but also cues a looming economic crisis of global scale. The world as we knew is will have changed, mostly for better hopefully, but how the media scenario pans out will, besides consumer attitudes, be largely dependent on the economic situation post lockdown.

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