

What to Watch Next?

The Labyrinth of OTT Content



June 2025

With rising OTT penetration in India, the overwhelming abundance of content makes choosing what to watch a high-involvement decision. Viewers invest precious time, seeking a good viewing experience, making content selection critically important.

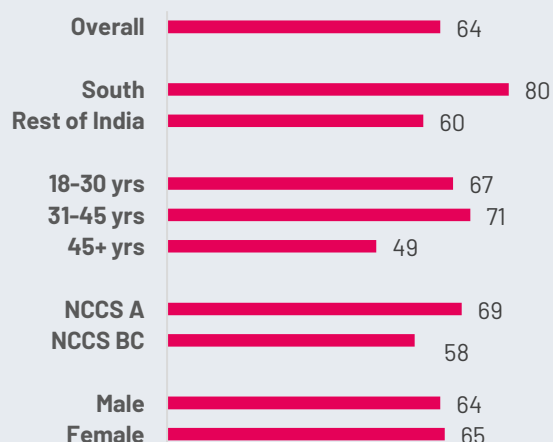
This article reveals the key factors that guide viewers' choices in the vast OTT universe. This is essential for content providers striving to capture audience attention in this competitive digital arena. By exploring these elements, the aim is to provide insights into the dynamics of content consumption in the burgeoning Indian OTT market.

OTT Landscape in India

Urban India is witnessing a surge in OTT adoption, reaching 64% penetration, which is interestingly similar across both genders. Expectedly, NCCS A leads the way at 69%, while NCCS BC shows a strong uptake at 58%.

This increasing demand is met by an ever-expanding library of content. Hundreds of thousands of hours of content are available across various platforms – a volume so vast it would likely take multiple lifetimes to consume in its entirety. And let's not forget that the content library is expanding at a rapid pace.

% Currently accessing OTT



Source: Ipsos Indiabus Survey - covering ~2200 sample in Urban India - across 16 cities from all 4 zones and mix of Metros, Tier I, Tier II, Tier III among NCCS ABC, 18+ years old. Data collected through hybrid methodology of online interviews and face to face interviews.

The Infobesity Conundrum

In today's time-constrained world, viewers seek content that resonates with their interests. Imagine planning family viewing sessions only to lose valuable time navigating an ocean of options. In this context, the question of 'What to watch next?' has become increasingly pressing, primarily due to a phenomenon known as 'Infobesity'—the overwhelming deluge of information. As viewers, our content choices are multifaceted, influenced by a range of factors, with each viewer potentially having their own reasons for selecting what to watch.

Influence of Recommendations

A substantial 39% of viewers base their content choices on recommendations from friends, family, and influencers - highlighting the power of

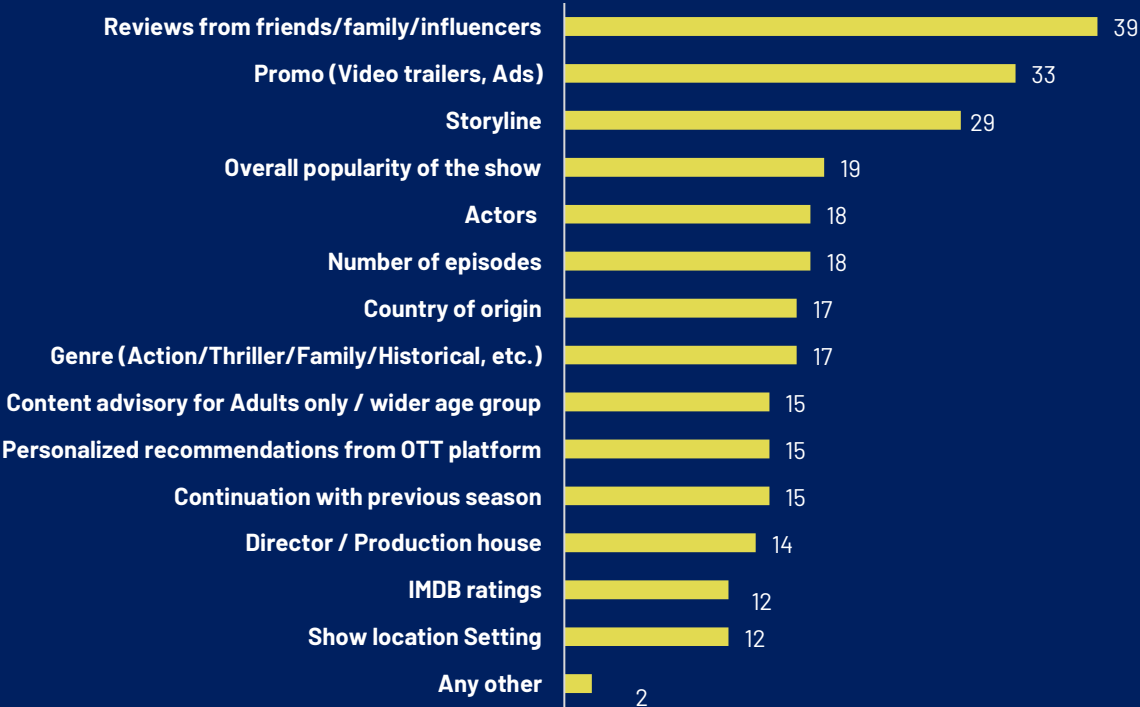
social influence in content discovery. These endorsements can either reinforce existing tastes or open doors to entirely new viewing experiences.



My Insta feed is full of various content influencers. Since I prefer to watch specific genres, I feel their suggestions are very relevant. I keep saving their reels so that whenever I have to watch anything, I directly refer to their suggestions"

– Female, 22 yrs, Mumbai

Factors influencing content selection on OTT (%)



Source: Ipsos Indiabus Survey



Social media influencers, in particular, have emerged as key players in shaping viewing habits, especially for niche content. Films like 'Axone' and 'Eeb Allay Ooo!', rooted in Delhi's cultural landscape, have found audiences through influencer endorsements, demonstrating their ability to spotlight hidden gems. Influencer recommendations span diverse languages and genres, catering to viewers seeking variety, and increasingly serve as content validators, guiding viewers toward quality entertainment. This trust has led OTT platforms to actively pursue collaborations with influencers to amplify their content promotion efforts.

The Conversational Catalyst and FOMO

Content consumption has also become a popular subject of casual conversation during office breaks and social gatherings. These conversations often ignite a desire to explore trending shows, fueled by the 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO).



During office lunch breaks, since we want to talk about something which is not work related, we tend to talk about the latest web-series which people are watching or sports or current affairs. Hence it is important to have some understanding of these topics so that I can also contribute to the discussion. If anyone shares their views on any latest shows that they have watched, it gives an impression of that person's personal choice"

- Male, 33 yrs, Cochin

A notable 19% of viewers are driven by a show's overall popularity, a trend more evident among higher socio-economic classes, where content accessibility contributes to the challenge of excessive choice.

The Power of Story & Genre

The storyline and genre of a series are decisive factors for 29% and 17% of viewers, respectively. Storylines are revealed through trailers, reviews, and descriptions, while location settings also influence 12% of the audience—a scenario exemplified by the popularity of different web series set in India's Hindi heartland, such as 'Paatal Lok', 'Mirzapur', 'Panchayat' and many more.

The appeal of regional and foreign language content is also on the rise, prompting OTT platforms to strategically develop or acquire such programming.

In addition to the broader genres of action, thriller, drama, comedy, etc. viewers are increasingly drawn to niche genres like spy thrillers, docuseries, historical dramas and women centric narratives, a trend facilitated by the search functionalities of OTT apps.



Hero Worship Continues on OTT

The phenomenon of 'hero worship' ingrained in Indian cinema extends to OTT platforms as well, with 18% of viewers making selections based on the actors involved. Emergent stars like Pankaj Tripathi, Shefali Shah, Pratik Gandhi, Jaideep Ahlawat, Rasika Duggal, etc have achieved significant acclaim through this medium.

On the contrary it is also not necessary that movie stars will always make it big on OTT – The Trial (Kajol), What the Love (Karan Johar), Fame Game (Madhuri Dixit), The Final call (Arjun Rampal) are some examples.

The trend of social media influencers transitioning into OTT content is rapidly gaining traction, capturing audience attention. Recognizing this shift, OTT platforms are strategically integrating influencers into their content strategies, either by casting them in starring roles or developing entire shows centered around their established personas and fan bases. This approach leverages the influencers' existing reach and engagement, providing OTT platforms with a direct line to dedicated audiences and a powerful means of content promotion.



I always prefer to watch a series which has familiar actors who have delivered good shows in the past. Their past performance gives me confidence to watch their new shows.”

– Male, 48 yrs, Bareilly

The allure of a show extends beyond its cast; the director and production house play a crucial role in shaping viewer expectations. Promotional campaigns frequently emphasize phrases like "From the makers of XXX," capitalizing on the brand recognition and reputation of established studios. Viewers often develop a sense of loyalty towards certain production houses, trusting their ability to consistently deliver high-quality entertainment and seeking out their projects based on past successes.

The Rise of AI in Content Selection

The future of content discovery lies in personalized recommendations, with 15% of viewers already embracing AI-driven suggestions, a trend particularly strong among higher social strata and in the South region. As algorithms become more sophisticated, they will revolutionize the viewing experience, tailoring content selections to individual tastes and preferences. Envision a future where viewers can input long form search queries, specifying preferences such as family viewing, genre, setting, and period, enabling AI to curate a viewing experience that is uniquely their own.





Content Marketing

While 33% of viewers may consciously acknowledge the influence of traditional advertising, the true impact is likely far more significant, amplified by the innovative and attention-grabbing campaigns orchestrated by OTT platforms. These platforms are creatively harnessing mediums such as out-of-home advertising and strategic brand partnerships to ensure successful content launches. The Mumbai-Howrah train was transformed into a mobile advertisement for "Khakee: The Bengal Chapter," while brands like Swiggy, 5 Star, and Knorr cleverly integrated with Squid Game season 2, and its Pink Guards appeared at airports. The Mirzapur team effectively leveraged its 350K+ Instagram followers, teasing the season 3 release date and turning "Kab aa raha hai Mirzapur season 3" into a viral sensation, demonstrating the power of innovative marketing to generate buzz and

drive viewership.

With a constant barrage of new content vying for attention, video trailers have become a strategic asset in the OTT landscape, serving as a crucial tool for viewers to form initial impressions. Marketers meticulously craft multiple trailer versions, rigorously testing them with target audiences before launching them on a wider scale. Unlike traditional product launches with extended marketing campaigns, OTT content marketers operate under a compressed timeline of just 2-3 weeks before release. This limited window underscores the strategic importance of marketing in creating a compelling narrative and driving initial viewership.



Harnessing consumer insights

Marketers are strategically leveraging consumer insights to develop highly effective launch strategies for OTT content. Beyond simply testing promos, they rigorously evaluate various marketing stimuli through comprehensive consumer research. By combining consumer surveys with social media intelligence, marketers gain a granular understanding of the buzz surrounding a show, enabling them to take targeted actions in specific cohorts or geographies to maximize interest. A sophisticated blend of System 1 and System 2 methodologies, including eye-tracking, facial coding, and consumer surveys, provides actionable insights that drive strategic decision-

making and optimize marketing ROI.

In conclusion, the selection of what to watch is a multifaceted decision-making process, where the act of discovery is often part of the enjoyment. As AI technology advances, we can anticipate a future where content discovery becomes more streamlined, allowing viewers to spend less time searching and more time enjoying quality content tailored to their preferences. It would be interesting to see how marketing involves in this journey.

For further information, contact the author:

Piyush Dixit

Executive Director

Ipsos India

piyush.dixit@ipsos.com