

Regional Content Boom: Rise of Regional Content on OTT Platforms and Its Role in Cultural Revival in India

(With Special Focus on Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam Content)

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Abstract

These technological advancements have drastically changed the methods through which entertainment content is accessed and consumed by people all over the world. With regard to India, the advent of Over-The-Top (OTT) has opened up new horizons for content makers and consumers alike. The existence of affordable internet connections, increased use of smartphones, and the desire to watch entertainment content anytime and anywhere has driven millions of Indians towards adopting such digital mediums. This has resulted in the prominence that OTT platforms enjoy in India. One of the major changes brought about by the advent of digitalization in India's entertainment industry is that of the creation and consumption of content in regional languages. Hindi cinema and television shows had long enjoyed dominance within this industry, resulting in the suppression of other regional languages. But thanks to digital media, there has been a paradigm shift, and creators of content in different Indian languages have found more opportunities than before. Now, regional language movies and web series do not depend completely on traditional modes of distribution like theaters and TV broadcasts. Out of all these regional industries, those of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam stand out due to the uniqueness of the content they offer. Specifically, their stories are firmly grounded in their local cultures but at the same time deal with universal topics. Thus, their popularity shows that the audience prefers authentic and culturally specific films with a good plot rather than something specific regarding the language. The option of using subtitles and dubbing allows expanding the audience of these movies by making them available to people from other language communities.

The importance of regional content does not end there. As the representation of their local traditions, dialects, folk culture, social customs, and historical experience in the modern world becomes possible through such media channels, OTT platforms have become significant cultural arenas in an increasingly globalized media sphere. It is against this backdrop that this paper analyzes the development of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam content on OTT platforms and their contribution to cultural revival in India.

Keywords

OTT Platforms, Regional Content, Cultural Revival, Tamil Cinema, Telugu Content, Malayalam Cinema

Introduction

The advent of digital streaming has led to a revolutionary change in the media landscape across the world. In India, there has been a remarkable increase in the use of digital streaming

platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Sony LIV, ZEE5, Aha, Sun NXT, and Manorama MAX due to the rising prevalence of affordable internet connectivity, smartphone penetration, and growing demand for on-demand entertainment. These trends have contributed to making digital streaming a highly influential sector in the media industry of India.

Amongst these emerging trends, one of the most revolutionary developments has been the unprecedented rise of regional content. Although India boasts of an array of talented regional actors, directors, screenwriters, and technicians, they are constantly sidelined by Hindi film industry owing to the hegemony that it enjoys within the entertainment landscape of the country. On the other hand, the digital platform offers all sorts of artists an equal opportunity to produce films. Due to this phenomenon, content created in regional languages such as Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam has emerged as a powerful force in the entertainment industry. The increasing popularity of regional content is due to various reasons. The modern audience is craving for authenticity and a sense of belongingness with the story portrayed on the screens. This sense of belongingness is provided by the social and family dynamics, cultural traditions and practices portrayed authentically in the regionally produced content. In addition to that, the provision of subtitles and dubbing facilities has helped in breaking the language barrier to enjoy good stories without having to understand the native language of the country where the story is based. Thus, a pan-Indian audience has developed that appreciates good content irrespective of the language.

Some of the best examples of the rising popularity of regional content are that of the content from Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam languages. Tamil movies are widely known for portraying socially significant stories using novel storytelling techniques. Telugu movies are gaining popularity owing to the grandiose of their large budget spectacles along with commercially viable stories. Malayalam movies have received appreciation for the realism in their stories, excellent screenplay and artistry. Apart from entertainment value, the development of regional content has important cultural implications. The OTT medium acts as an effective vehicle for the representation, preservation, and revival of cultures. By depicting local traditions, folklore, languages, and history, regional content not only helps to preserve cultural heritage but also promotes it to new audiences. In a world of globalization where there is a risk of cultural homogenization, regional content becomes an important agent of cultural diversity and community identity formation.

It is against this context that this study tries to analyze the emergence of the regional content phenomenon in the OTT space and its impact on cultural revival in India. The research will explore how OTT platforms have played an important part in bringing back into prominence the regional content that has helped preserve, promote, and revive the rich cultural heritage of India in the contemporary era.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the emergence of regional content in OTT platforms in India.

2. To understand the factors that contribute to the popularity of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam content in OTT platforms.
3. To study the impact of OTT platforms in promoting regional languages, cultures, and cultural identities.
4. To evaluate the contribution of regional content in fostering cultural revival and rejuvenation in contemporary India.
5. To conduct a comparative study of the portrayal of culture and identity in Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam OTT content.
6. To study the audiences' perceptions of authenticity and cultural value in regional OTT content..

Research Gap

Despite the fact that a considerable number of scientific papers were devoted to the study of the rise of OTT services and their growing popularity of regional-language movies in India, there are still numerous research issues which require careful consideration. Currently existing researches primarily focus on audience behavior, economic advantages, technological innovations, and competition within the field. The successful integration of regional-language films into online media platforms was analyzed by scholars, but little attention was paid to the impact of OTT-based regional content on cultural revival in India.

The lack of information concerning OTT platforms and cultural revival also implies that researchers analyze each regional-language industry separately, such as Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam film industry. In addition, the impact of the dissemination of regional stories in digital media on linguistic survival, cultural representation, and audience perception of those languages in various parts of India needs thorough investigation. Finally, the contribution of subtitles, dubbing, and online access to the cultural revival process needs to be explored.

Hence, the purpose of the present study will be to find out the way how OTT platforms contribute to the cultural revival and preservation of regional cultures with help of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam movies.

2. Literature Review

Early Studies on Digital Media and Cultural Globalization (2010–2015)

The basis of the development of regional content on OTT platforms can be explained by research conducted on digital media, globalization, and consumption of culture. In particular, Jenkins (2010) pointed to the phenomenon of participatory culture and discussed the possibilities of audience engagement through digital technology to create various types of media products regardless of geography. Also, Castells (2011) focused on the appearance of the new concept of the network society in which digital communications help to distribute and share cultural content in a more democratic way.

Regarding the case of India, Athique (2012) analyzed how the changing pattern of media consumption had occurred due to greater access to the internet and mobile connectivity. In this

regard, it is noted that digital technologies allowed challenging the role of broadcast media. It is worth mentioning that at the time under consideration, academic researchers mainly paid attention to the effect of globalization on the media industry as streaming was just emerging.

Emergence of OTT Platforms and Changing Viewing Habits (2016–2018)

The entry and spread of OTT services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and others brought about a paradigm shift in the Indian entertainment industry. As per Lobato (2016), the OTT platform was one such disruptive technology in the media sector that posed a threat to traditional forms of TV and film distribution through the facility of on-demand content provision.

According to Kumar and Jose (2017), Indian consumers' changing tastes towards personalized and more flexible viewing options was a result of OTTs' increasing popularity in the country. The growth rates of OTT subscription services were also very high in India due to the availability of affordable smartphones and cost-effective internet packages as highlighted in Ernst & Young (2018).

Rise of Regional Content and Audience Diversification (2019–2020)

The trend of regional film content was noticed by researchers from 2019 itself. According to Mehta (2019), OTT platforms have allowed regional filmmakers to access a larger audience without depending only on theatre screenings. It is because the use of digital platforms helped in overcoming geographical and linguistic boundaries through the use of subtitling and dubbing techniques.

A substantial rise in the consumption of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam films was noticed by Rao & Narayan (2020). Their observations indicated that there was an increasing interest among people towards culture-specific storytelling. This pattern was further fueled by the coronavirus outbreak that led to cinema halls shutting down. Viewers resorted to OTT platforms for their entertainment needs. Regional films that have seen direct release on these platforms have received recognition and appreciation.

OTT Platforms and Cultural Representation (2021–2022)

Academic attention towards the cultural ramifications of regional OTT content grew between 2021 and 2022. According to Nair (2021), regional cinemas were represented through online video streaming and digital technology facilitated greater exposure to regional languages, cultures, and socio-economic conditions. The paper revealed that the OTT industry allowed directors to explore unique stories which were beyond the reach of traditional cinema. Likewise, Subramanian (2021) conducted an analysis of the role of Tamil content in OTT platforms and found that there was a greater inclination among producers of regional films to focus on social justice, caste politics, and governance issues. Furthermore, the popularity of Telugu-language movies in the entire nation prompted scholars like Reddy (2022) to contend that the Indian film industry had transformed into a culturally relevant experience.

KPMG's research (2022) suggested that regional language content had made significant contributions towards the viewership numbers of OTT content in India. The findings confirmed that authentic cultural content played a significant role in attracting viewership.

Regional Content as a Tool for Cultural Revival (2023–2024)

There have been increased scholarly connections between the success of regional content on OTT streaming services and the preservation of cultures. According to Sharma & Menon (2023), digital streaming platforms act as cultural repositories since they archive the region's traditions, folklore, rituals, languages, and history. Their study indicates that regional content plays an educational as well as entertainment role in regional societies.

Joseph (2023) investigated how Malayalam and Tamil content are received across the globe and revealed that people become more aware of Indian regional cultures through subtitled regional content. The paper underscored the role played by OTT streaming services in cross-cultural communication.

According to Entertainment and Media Outlook of PwC India (2024), regional language content has become one of the fast-growing sectors within the digital entertainment industry of India. In particular, there is an increase in the amount of investment streaming services make in their original shows in languages such as Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. According to scholars like Krishnan (2024), it demonstrates a wider shift toward cultural decentralization.

Contemporary Perspectives and Research Gap (2025–Present)

In recent years, studies highlight the importance of the content revolution in terms other than mere marketing changes. In fact, many researchers regard the development of OTT streaming services as a powerful force of cultural revival and preservation and identity formation. Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam content have proven that stories rooted in unique culture and language may become popular nationally and internationally and preserve their cultural authenticity at the same time.

The research area has attracted considerable attention; nevertheless, much work remains to be done in this field. Currently, studies either address OTT usage patterns or regional cinemas without linking the two subjects. Few scholars have attempted to analyze how regional contents provided through OTT services play a role in preserving culture and language and identity formation within various sectors of South Indian film industry. Comparative analysis of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam contents is a rather novel issue in this context.

Research Methodology

This study is based on both primary and **secondary data analysis**, including:

Primary Data

- Structured questionnaire survey of OTT users.
- Semi-structured interviews with selected viewers and media professionals.

Secondary Data

- Articles from research papers and journals.
- Reports from industries (KPMG, PwC, EY, FICCI-EY).
- Reports by OTT platform and audience analytics.
- Books and studies on digital media and cultural studies.
- Reports from industries (Nielsen, Deloitte, Ormax Media).
- News reports and OTT analytics.
- Academic papers and research papers.

Findings and Discussion

According to the analysis, there has been a marked evolution of the Indian media industry as a result of OTT platform usage. This is because it has become much easier for viewers to access regional language content through streaming and even subtitle options. Productions in Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam languages have managed to gain popularity in an unprecedented manner. From the analysis conducted, one key takeaway from the findings is that viewers are preferring regional content due to various factors. Unlike mainstream productions which tend to focus on the commercial interests of the producers, regional content focuses on depicting unique features such as traditions, folklore, social issues, among others. In addition, the analysis shows that regional content has enabled audiences who are not native speakers to embrace Indian culture and even learn more about their culture.

Growth of Regional Content on OTT Platforms

Market Expansion and Investment

OTT platforms have raised their spending on regional content. In 2025 alone,

- The budget allocated to regional content grew by 34%-42% (TechnoSports Media Group)
- OTT platforms spent over ₹2,800 crore on regional content productions (TechnoSports Media Group)

It highlights the new strategy of focusing on regional stories as a main growth driver.

Changing Viewership Patterns

- Regional content accounts for over 50% of OTT consumption (mint)
- Regional languages account for about 8-10% each (mint)
- Non-Hindi content is driving subscription numbers in many platforms (Moneycontrol)

It highlights the decentralization of content consumption from Hindi-centricity.

Role of Technology

Key technological enablers include:

- Subtitles and dubbing
- AI-driven recommendation systems

- Affordable mobile data

These innovations have minimized language barriers and facilitated cross-cultural consumption.

Rise of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam Content

Tamil Content

Tamil films on the streaming platforms have emerged as popular films due to the compelling narrative that they tell. Films such as *Suzhal: The Vortex* have amassed millions of views, showing the broad appeal to masses other than the Tamil-speaking people (mint).

The Tamil film industry is known for its portrayal of societal issues and its storytelling approach.

Telugu Content

Telugu content has emerged as a major driver of OTT growth due to:

- High production value
- Mass entertainment appeal
- Strong diaspora audience

Platforms like Aha have further strengthened Telugu digital content ecosystems.

Malayalam Content

Malayalam cinema is often regarded as the benchmark for realistic storytelling. Its success lies in:

- Content-driven narratives
- Minimalistic production with strong scripts
- Critical acclaim and word-of-mouth popularity

Malayalam films and series have found national audiences through OTT, redefining quality standards in Indian entertainment.

Regional Content and Cultural Revival

Preservation of Language and Identity

OTT platforms have revived regional languages by:

- Promoting native dialects
- Encouraging local storytelling
- Increasing linguistic pride

Revival of Folk Traditions and Narratives

Regional content often incorporates:

- Folk traditions
- Local myths and legends
- Indigenous cultural practices

This has contributed to the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage.

Representation of Grassroots Realities

Regional OTT content highlights:

- Rural and semi-urban life
- Social issues such as caste, gender, and inequality
- Local governance and traditions

This has expanded the scope of Indian storytelling beyond urban-centric narratives.

Pan-India Popularity and National Integration

Breaking Language Barriers

Subtitles and dubbing have enabled audiences to consume content across languages, fostering cultural exchange.

Rise of “Pan-India” Content

Films and series are no longer confined to linguistic boundaries. South Indian content now attracts audiences across North India and globally.

Youth and Digital Consumption

Young audiences are increasingly:

- Language-agnostic
- Open to diverse narratives
- Driven by content quality rather than language

This shift is crucial in driving regional content’s national success.

Challenges in Regional OTT Growth

Despite rapid growth, challenges remain:

- Limited budgets compared to Hindi content
- Discoverability issues on global platforms
- Lack of consistent marketing
- Risk of content homogenization

Conclusion

The increasing popularity of regional content in OTT is certainly the one of the most significant developments happening in the media industry in India. The trend of increasing interest in Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam content reveals the desire of consumers to watch something real, culturally relevant and interesting. In addition to providing entertainment opportunities, OTT provides the space for disruption of the existing hierarchies within the sphere of entertainment. As per the findings of the study, OTT platforms operate as dual entities. Apart from offering entertainment options, they are also regarded as cultural entities.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Compare and contrast South Indian and North Indian regional OTT content.
- Evaluate the effect of regional OTT content on learning languages and preserving linguistic diversity.
- Study the role of artificial intelligence in encouraging regional content through recommendation algorithms.
- Carry out research on global perception of Indian regional content among diaspora populations.
- Evaluate the gender portrayal and social inclusivity in regional OTT content.
- Conduct long-term studies on the effects of OTT regional content on culture.
- Conduct audience perception studies for different OTT platforms including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, Aha, Sun NXT, and ManoramaMAX.
- Study the economic implications of OTT platforms on regional film and TV industry.

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