

Recalibrating Media Management: Content Innovation in the OTT Era With Reference to Indian Perspective

Dr Archana

Assistant Professor, Amity School of Communication, Amity University Rajasthan

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Abstract: India's media and entertainment (M&E) industry appears to be undergoing a paradigm shift related to the rise of digital platforms, changing consumer behavior, and a global thirst for more culturally interesting content. Though the space of traditional television is still expanding, it is the over-the-top, or OTT, space that "is leading a redefinition of how content is created, distributed, and monetized in India". Utilizing recent statistics and insights from reports by industry associations and market research companies, this study shows that India is emerging as a global powerhouse for content production, especially in the areas of animation, visual effects and post-production services. It explores the socio-economic conditions, such as access to mobile internet, or policy environments that can be seen as driving this change. At the intersection of creativity, technology and business strategy, this paper aims to provide a picture of emerging opportunities and challenges in India's media space. It highlights the main game-changing trends within the Indian Media and Entertainment (M & E) ecosystem, such as local content, genre-change, technological innovations, and international partnerships.

Keywords: media management, clientele, OTT platforms, Indian media, digital content, entertainment industry

I. Introduction

India's media and entertainment space is at a point of articulation, as technology, creative product and consumer preferences are blurring the lines of what this space has traditionally been. The Indian M&E industry, which until recently was predominantly television and print-based, has rapidly transformed into a multi-platform, digital-first industry. All of this is being driven largely by the rapid expansion of OTT platforms, mobile internet capability, and a more technically oriented generation which prefers on-demand, customized content experiences.

The FICCI-EY Report (2024) predicts the Indian M&E sector to grow to INR 2.83 trillion by 2025, estimating OTT services as growing at greater than 20% a year. This growth mirrors global trends but is also specific to India's linguistic plurality and local storytelling traditions. Previously "niche" regional content is now mainstream and has seen a 54% growth in viewership in 2023 alone. Previously more specialized genres like that of the psychological thriller, the mythological drama, or the experimental narrative are beginning to find success because of data-driven content strategies and audience segmentation.

As well as consuming content, India is also becoming a major producer of content globally. In this sense, the animation and VFX industries, that have grown 27% in 2023, are increasingly participating in international projects, moving the country from a service provider to creator partner along the media global value chain. This is also provided by economies of scale in post-production, costs, and a relatively young labor force that is digitally savvy. With the merging of producers and consumers, the Indian M&E space is a case of "media convergence economy." In this environment, strategy, alignment, and access, are key to future growth.

II. Emerging Avenues in India's Media and Entertainment Ecosystem

The recent developments in this direction have the backing of strong analytics, which allow content creators to more accurately and massively address niche interests. Indian content has had a dramatically increased footprint due to international OTT platforms. Indian originals and dubbed versions have become available in mainstream markets, representing a cross-cultural exchange and contributing to India's own soft power. In this sense, the Indian animation and VFX industries, that experienced a 27% growth in 2023 (FICCI-EY, 2024), are becoming known for their quality work for international productions. Through the export process, and supported by scalable dubbing and subtitling technology, Indian narratives in turn have brought greater exposure to Indian culture, narrative forms, and technical expertise abroad.

The industry is in the midst of a radical restructuring to accommodate a billion screens at home and around the world. D2C offerings, data backed content and interactivity are changing the Indian M&E sector. This is being compounded by the spread of smart devices and low-cost data, with India seeing over 700 million smartphone users and over 880 million internet subscribers as of late 2023 (TRAI, 2024).

India now emerges as one of the most diverse and prolific content producing countries in the world. The industry's dedication to values of inclusivity and representation of culture remains a strength for its global appeal. Be it film, video content, broadcast news or sports, Indian content is rapidly becoming visible on the global media landscape. Indian media have been able to broaden their reach due to technological developments in content creation and marketing, platform proliferation, and distribution. Though Indian cinema and television content traditionally has been accessible in over 130 countries, the advent of OTT platforms with international distribution on the other hand, has led to a different moment of inflection. These platforms also make content more accessible and allow content consumption to be multilingual.

With a scalable voice-dubbed and sub-titled infrastructure for dubbing and subtitling, Indian stories can now be available for international markets and audiences. It is estimated that this level of globalization will not only enhance the generation of content in the country but also provide job opportunities while transforming media from being peripheral to India as to a center of the world.

India as a Global Media and Content Creation Hub: Strategic Advantages and Emerging Paradigms

India's promise as a content creation destination has been backed by its ability to operate at various points along the media and entertainment (M&E) value chain. India has the potential to provide complete, economical media services worldwide because it has a large and diverse pool of on and off camera talent, and cutting edge pre-production and post-production facilities. This has been especially the case with animation, visual effects (VFX), and digital post-production, which have been more and more important in an age of globalized digital media. Recent industry reports and market studies acknowledge India's increasing position in the global M&E space. The FICCI-EY Media and Entertainment Report (2024) estimates that, just last year, India's animation and VFX industry expanded by more than 28%, as Indian companies have begun working not only on feature films but also web series, gaming, and advertising, partnering with foreign clients. This positions India not only as a backend services provider but also as a creative partner in the pipeline of content globally.

Keeping into consideration, India's emerging media ecosystem, it would appear that the country is poised to become a major player in media production globally. Several elements support this shift, among them, good technical skills, ability to have scalable operational efficiencies, better broadband access, and a young, digital content consumers and producers friendly demographic profile. These are part of what scholars and strategists call, "media convergence economies," where the synergistic combination of infrastructure and human capabilities spurs growth and innovation.

In addition, from a business standpoint India is an enticing market for foreign media companies as a market for 'development.' India's media is among the most diverse and heterogeneous in the world, with over 850 television channels and more than 17,000 registered newspapers. This plurality not only responds to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, but provides multinational companies with a promising field for localized content and targeted marketing.

While this is rich, there is also much more that could be done. As a percentage of GDP, but, advertising spending in India is still one of the lowest in the world, though it is on the rise. This suggests that there is still room to grow ad-wise, especially as digital penetration continues to grow and as audiences progressively demand - rather than appointment - content. 5G availability and cheaper smartphones will continue to drive this exponential content consumption - as more will mean new ways to generate revenues and to engage. India, plus, has developed clear policies and forms for this media sector investment regarding licenses, joint ventures, and full ownership. All of these raise questions for the study of transnational media flows, cultural hybridity in media production, and the localization of global media companies in India.

Ultimately, India is evolving into a media superpower - and this is not speculation, but rather a structural changing of the guard, based in talent, technology and demographics. As media scholars and practitioners look toward the future and consider issues of global media ownership and control, India offers useful insights on how developing countries can challenge the old paradigms in a way that is innovative, inclusive and integrates developing countries more meaningfully and effectively into the global system.

Inference

There is a technological and "consumption" change in the Indian media and entertainment industry; a change "in how and why audiences consume media". Also changing are the relations between businesses and their clients. In an increasingly fragmented and digital marketplace, media companies must operate nimbly and in a data-oriented fashion, not just in terms of what they produce but who they should market and sell to and how they should do it. The importance of working with the right clients, those who understand and value time, professionalism and strategic direction, has never been greater. A disparity in expectations can be detrimental to overall output, work flow and possibilities for future growth. At the same time, India is steadily emerging as a center for global content production. With access to a vast talent pool, advanced post-production technology, and digital infrastructure that continues to rapidly improve, the country is set to dominate the animation, VFX and OTT portions of the content industry. The rapid rise in regionally generated content and partnerships abroad highlights India's vast cultural and linguistic multiplicity as a key strength in the global arena of storytelling.

On top of that, the combination of traditional and digital media allows for experimentation, for new content to emerge, and for participatory and inclusive models for content production. The combination of a favorable policy environment, foreign direct investment and scalable digital access has provided an opportunity for a sustainable industry to grow.

Ultimately, media managing in India will be about combining good media ideas with strong client relationships. If the Indian M&E ecosystem continues to embrace both of these paradigms it will be set to lead the way in the 21st century in terms of creative production and as a global model of media entrepreneurship.

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