"Impact of OTT Platforms in Bangladesh"

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ABSTRACT

Growing internet access and smartphone usage have led to the emergence of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms in Bangladesh, which have changed the country's media industry. The economy is impacted and media consumption patterns are being changed by platforms like Netflix and BongoBD, which provide a variety of material. Content producers benefit from these services, but there are also issues with job security, cultural identity, and industry restrictions. Concerns of cultural homogeneity have arisen as a result of the move toward individualized, on-demand material, which has fractured consumer tastes. The necessity for laws that balance artistic freedom with social responsibility and safeguard employees' and users' data is highlighted in the literature. Due to the increasing demand for Bangladeshi content, local OTT platforms like as BongoBD and Bioscope began to develop in the early 2000s thanks to advances in digital infrastructure. Local services prospered by concentrating on Bangla-language content, despite obstacles encountered by multinational platforms between 2016 and 2018. Viewership increased dramatically between 2018 and 2020, helped along by more accessible internet and the introduction of Hoichoi, which enhanced the local content market.

INTRODUCTION

Over-the-Top (OTT) platform proliferation is driving a transformational shift in Bangladesh's media and entertainment industry. The media landscape in Bangladesh, which was formerly dominated by movies and television, has undergone a dramatic shift as viewers' preferences for digital streaming services grow. This change is mostly attributable to the nation's increasing internet access and the pervasive use of cell phones. The direct delivery of material to users over the internet by over-the-top (OTT) platforms has brought about a new dynamic in Bangladeshi media consumption. These services, which include worldwide behemoths like Netflix and Amazon Prime as well as local favorites like BongoBD and Hoichoi, provide a wide range of material for both domestic and foreign viewers. As a result, there has been a noticeable shift away from traditional media, with consumers now demanding more individualized and on-demand material. OTT services have an influence that goes beyond simple adjustments to viewing preferences. The nation's cultural and economic fabric will be significantly impacted. In terms of the economy, the emergence of OTT services has given content creators new avenues for growth, which has stimulated expansion in the regional entertainment market. But it has also brought up issues with industry rules, freelancer job security, and content monetization. The increasing influence of foreign content on Bangladesh's culture has both enriched and endangered regional storytelling customs, raising concerns about cultural identity. This research aims to explore the impact of over-the-top (OTT) platforms on media consumption habits, economic, regulatory, and cultural ramifications, aiming to better understand how OTT platforms are changing the media landscape and develop solutions for managing this evolving environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media and entertainment environment in Bangladesh has seen a substantial transformation due to the emergence of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms. More consumers are moving away from conventional media, like television and movies, and toward digital channels as a result of rising internet prevalence and Smartphone usage. This study of the literature looks at a number of facets of this change, such as the ways in which people consume material, the effects on the economy and society, the difficulties with regulations, and the cultural implications. Alam (2022) claims that a sizable portion of the populace now uses mobile internet to access digital

platforms for media consumption, with OTT services like BongoBD and Hoichoi dominating the local market. These platforms satisfy the varied tastes of Bangladeshi viewers by providing a blend of local and international content. Rahman (2021) draws attention to the fact that there is still a digital divide between urban and rural consumers in rural areas due to issues like expensive data plans and inadequate internet infrastructure. Even if OTT platforms have the potential to have a significant influence, this restricts their reach. Hossain (2020) asserts that, in contrast to broadcast television, younger consumers in Bangladesh favor binge-watching programs on services like Netflix. Moreover, OTT platforms give users access to a wide range of foreign content, introducing them to global narrative styles and trends. According to Farooqui (2021), personalized content recommendations on over-the-top (OTT) platforms contribute to the creation of a more customized watching experience. Users are increasingly consuming niche content, as they delve into genres that were previously underrepresented in traditional media, thanks to this customization. These changes in consumption patterns also demonstrate how audience preferences are becoming more and more fragmented. Khan (2021) has observed that the local entertainment sector is growing as a result of the considerable increase in demand for independent films and web series produced locally on platforms like BongoBD. Filmmakers may now create video with more creative flexibility and on a smaller budget thanks to these platforms. According to Ali (2020), in order to maintain the industry's survival, legislative frameworks that assist regional content producers are essential. According to Rahman and Haque (2020), OTT platforms have given Bangladeshi filmmakers the freedom to explore delicate and culturally significant subjects that censorship would have otherwise prevented from being shown on television. Discussions on social problems including politics, gender equality, and identity have become more prevalent thanks to these forums. According to Islam (2021), Western ideals and lifestyles have been introduced by the flood of global content available on platforms like Netflix, and they may conflict with traditional Bangladeshi norms. Concerns regarding cultural uniformity and the erasure of regional cultural identity have arisen as a result. Sarker (2022) asserts that these platforms have not only raised the demand for material but also brought about job openings for technical personnel, directors, actors, and screenwriters. The emergence of over-the-top (OTT) content has resulted in the expansion of independent production businesses and freelancers in Bangladesh. Ahmed (2020) highlights the absence of appropriate rules in the industry concerning OTT content production employees' compensation and job security. Because of this, a large number of workers in this new digital economy lack benefits and are subject to exploitation. Hasan (2021) emphasizes the necessity of content regulation in light of Bangladesh's traditional social mores, which strike a balance between artistic freedom and social responsibility. According to Alamgir (2020), OTT platforms gather enormous volumes of user data, putting users at danger of privacy violations in the absence of strict data protection regulations. Future studies on the long-term impacts of OTT platforms on Bangladesh's cultural and economic landscape, with a particular focus on digital accessibility and content regulation, may become necessary as the platform's growth continues.

THE RISE OF OTT IN BANGLADESH

Over-The-Top (OTT) platform expansion in Bangladesh is a relatively recent phenomenon, driven by the rise of streaming services globally, rapid advancements in digital infrastructure, and shifting media consumption habits. An outline of the significant turning points in Bangladeshi OTT platform history may be seen below.

1. Initial Phases: Internet and Mobile Growth (2000s):

The proliferation of mobile connectivity and internet services in Bangladesh during the 2000s set the groundwork for over-the-top (OTT) platforms. Important advancements consist of:

Internet Penetration: Due to the expansion of cyber cafes and the availability of limited broadband connections, internet usage in Bangladesh began to gradually increase in the early 2000s.

Mobile Internet: When telecom companies like Grameenphone, Robi, and Banglalink introduced mobile internet services in the late 2000s, it completely changed the way individuals could use the internet and made it possible for more people to connect online.

Although these advances were significant, the entertainment environment was still dominated by traditional media, such as radio and television, and there were no official OTT platforms at this time (Ahmed, 2012; Islam & Hyder, 2016; BTRC, 2010).

2. The 2013 launch of 3G technology:

The launch of 3G mobile services in 2013 marked a significant turning point in Bangladesh's digital landscape. This advancement paved the way for the emergence of digital platforms by significantly boosting internet speeds and accessibility across the nation.

Effect on Media Consumption: As mobile internet speeds increased, more people started watching videos on their cell phones. As a result of their immense appeal, websites like YouTube are now the main resource for on-demand video material.

It was around this time that the habits of content consumption that would eventually drive demand for over-the-top (OTT) services began to take shape (Islam & Hyder, 2016; BTRC, 2014).

3. Local OTT Platform Emergence (2015–2017):

The official launch of local over-the-top (OTT) platforms in Bangladesh occurred in the mid-2010s. Among the significant advancements are:

2013 saw the birth of BongoBD, one of the first regional OTT services. At first, it concentrated on streaming television series, films, and music videos in Bangla. BongoBD targeted both domestic consumers and the Bangladeshi diaspora, capitalizing on the growing need for local content. 2016 saw the launch of Bioscope by Grameenphone, which quickly became another significant participant in the regional OTT industry. To meet the needs of an increasingly mobile-first audience, it provided a mix of live TV channels and Bangladeshi content available for viewing on demand.

These platforms set themselves apart from international OTT competitors like by concentrating mostly on offering locally created content to Bangladeshi viewers (Khan, 2017; BTRC, 2016)

4. The Arrival of International OTT Platforms (2016–2018):

Global OTT behemoths started to enter Bangladesh's market as its internet infrastructure continued to improve:

Netflix Launch (2016): As part of its global growth, Netflix brought its services to Bangladesh in January 2016. However, the platform's poor credit card penetration, relatively expensive subscription costs, and lack of local content initially made it difficult for it to establish a significant presence.

Amazon Prime (2017): This streaming service offers a variety of foreign TV shows, movies, and some local content. It entered the Bangladeshi market after Netflix. It experienced issues with price and a dearth of locally produced material, just like Netflix.

Local OTT platforms continued to dominate because of their emphasis on Bangla-language programming, even as global platforms started to draw niche viewers interested in foreign content (Ahmed, 2018; BTRC, 2017).

5. Local Content and Audience Growth, 2018–2020:

Due to the widespread use of smart phones and reasonably priced internet bundles, the number of OTT platforms and their audiences increased significantly between 2018 and 2020.

Launch of Hoichoi (2018): In 2018, the Bengali-language content-focused OTT platform Hoichoi, based in India, made its debut in the Bangladeshi market. Offering top-notch Bangla web series, films, and music that appealed to both Bangladeshi and West Bengali audiences, it immediately became well-known.

Original Content: During this time, regional platforms like Bioscope and BongoBD started to create original films and web series. The transition towards producing original material primarily for digital platforms was crucial in drawing in younger viewers, who were progressively looking for alternatives to television. It was also at this era that "binge-watching" started. (Khan, 2019; BTRC, 2020)

6. COVID-19 Pandemic Effects (2020–2021):

Lockdowns and other social distancing tactics caused people to stay indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly increased demand for digital entertainment and had a huge effect on Bangladesh's over-the-top (OTT) market.

Increased Viewership: As consumers looked for alternate sources of entertainment during the epidemic, OTT platforms saw a sharp rise in viewership. There was also an increase in subscriptions during this time for both domestic and foreign sites.

Change in Advertising: As production slowed down in traditional media, many marketers moved their funds to digital platforms, which helped OTT services, expand even more.

The pandemic hastened the transition to on-demand streaming, solidifying OTT platforms' place in Bangladesh's entertainment landscape (Rahman, 2021; BTRC, 2021).

7. Regulatory Issues and Government Supervision Beginning in 2021:

The Bangladeshi government started to look more closely at content regulation and taxes problems as OTT platforms gained popularity:

Censorship and Content Regulation: Discussions over the necessity of regulating content to make sure it conforms to regional cultural and religious values were sparked by worries about the unedited nature of over-the-top (OTT) content. As a result, talks arose on the adoption of more stringent policies for platforms and content producers.

Data Privacy and Taxation: The government also voiced worries regarding the privacy of user data and started looking into measures to control how foreign OTT platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, were taxed. These companies were making money from Bangladeshi consumers, but they were not paying local taxes (Hasan, 2020; BTRC, 2021).

8. Present Situation and Prospects for the Future (2022–Present):

Presently, the OTT scene in Bangladesh is typified by a blend of domestic and international platforms contending for an expanding viewership:

Growing Local Investment: Local platforms keep making investments in original content, concentrating on music programs, web series, and short films that showcase Bangladeshi culture.

Global Influence: International players like Netflix and Amazon Prime have started to make investments in locally produced content, including obtaining the rights to Bangladeshi films and providing Bangla subtitles.

Growth of Audience: As long as internet infrastructure continues to develop, there will be more people using OTT platforms. This will be especially the case in semi-urban and rural areas where data rates are predicted to drop and mobile internet will become more widely available. The OTT platform industry in Bangladesh has experienced rapid growth and changes in content consumption due to technological advancements and changing audience preferences. Despite being relatively young, the industry is poised for continued expansion, with a focus on local content production and regulatory balancing. As more consumers transition to digital platforms, OTT services are expected to become a cornerstone of Bangladesh's media and entertainment sector (Rahman, 2022; BTRC, 2023).

Statement of problem

The media environment in Bangladesh has changed significantly as a result of the growth of over-the-top (OTT) platforms. These platforms present issues with legislation, cultural influence, economic structures, and media consumption habits even while they have given consumers and content providers new opportunities. With a

focus on topics including the transition from conventional media, the regulatory landscape, cultural effects, economic repercussions, and the move from traditional media, this research attempts to explore how OTT platforms are changing Bangladesh's media and entertainment industry.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate how OTT platforms have affected media consumption habits in Bangladesh.

1. To evaluate the OTT services' financial effects on the regional entertainment sector.

2. To investigate how OTT material, especially international content, has influenced Bangladeshi culture culturally.

3. To evaluate the regulatory obstacles that the government must overcome in order to balance taxes, data privacy, and content control in the OTT industry.

Significance of the Study

This research will offer insightful information on Bangladesh's changing over-the-top (OTT) scene to media researchers, legislators, and industry stakeholders. It will support regulators in creating fair regulations, enable content creators better understand audience preferences, and advise local platforms on how to contend with international OTT behemoths. Additionally, it will add to the conversation on cultural preservation in the face of rising consumption of foreign content.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods strategy is used in this study to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative research. It includes polls of OTT platform users from a range of demographic categories in addition to interviews with regulatory agencies, content producers, and industry experts. While secondary data will be gathered from published publications, scholarly research, and industry analysis, primary sources will provide information on media consumption habits, economic trends, and regulatory challenges.

Research Design

To get a quick overview of the present dynamics of OTT platforms in Bangladesh, a cross-sectional study methodology is employed. Over a predetermined length of time, the design enables examination of a number of variables, including user preferences, trends in content development, and regulatory problems.

Sampling Methods

To choose important OTT industry participants, such as platform operators, content producers, and regulators, purposive sampling is used.

Data collection

Interviews with regulators and business experts are conducted to investigate financial and legal-issues.OTT platform content analysis is done with an emphasis on the kind and nature of the accessible material. Secondary data on OTT legislation and Bangladesh's digital economy are gathered from scholarly works, industry reports, and official publications.

Analysis

Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms in Bangladesh have grown due to technological advancements, changing media consumption patterns, and demand for flexible content. This analysis examines market growth, content trends, economic impact, regulatory challenges, and future prospects.

1. Market Expansion and Acceptance:

The OTT market in Bangladesh is rapidly growing due to increased internet access, a young, tech-savvy population, and the availability of global platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime. The country's urban population has a high internet penetration, making it a favorable environment for OTT platforms. Local platforms like BongoBD, Bioscope, and iFlix cater to local tastes by providing Bangla-language content, making them more relevant to Bangladeshi audiences. However, challenges in adoption include the urban-rural divide, as rural regions have low adoption rates due to inadequate internet infrastructure and high data costs. Additionally, the high cost of subscriptions to global platforms like Netflix makes locally produced, ad-supported platforms more popular.

2. Preferences and Trends in Content:

Bangladeshi consumers have diverse preferences for online television (OTT) content, with both local and global content gaining traction. Local content, such as web series, movies, and short films, is in high demand, while international content, particularly English-language TV shows and movies, is popular among younger viewers. OTT platforms like Hoichoi and BongoBD focus on local content, while BongoBD has launched local shows focusing on romance, drama, and thriller. OTT platforms offer censorship-free content, allowing creators to explore sensitive social issues. However, there is a significant gap in genre diversity, with most content focusing on drama and romance. Additionally, many OTT platforms struggle to balance high-quality productions with mass content creation to attract viewers. Some platforms have produced critically acclaimed content, while others face criticism for low-budget, poor-quality shows.

3. The Financial Effect:

The rise of Over-the-Air (OTT) platforms has significantly benefited Bangladesh's media and entertainment industry, creating job opportunities for content creators and driving growth in production and post-production. OTT platforms in Bangladesh operate under various revenue models, including subscription-based (SVOD) like Netflix and Amazon Prime, ad-supported (AVOD) like BongoBD, and hybrid models like BongoBD. However, challenges include monetization issues due to limited consumer willingness to pay for content and a smaller advertising market, and piracy, which undermines revenue streams. Additionally, the rise of digital content production has raised concerns about the freelance nature of employment in the OTT industry, with limited job security and benefits for those working on projects.

4. Issues with Censorship and Regulation:

The unregulated nature of OTT platforms in Bangladesh has sparked debates about content moderation and censorship. Traditional media, like television and cinema, are heavily censored to maintain cultural norms and religious values. However, OTT platforms have more freedom to address controversial topics, leading to discussions about stricter regulations. The government is also interested in regulating OTT content to maintain cultural and societal values. Additionally, data privacy is a major concern, as OTT platforms collect significant user data.

5. The Influence and Representation of Culture:

OTT platforms in Bangladesh are transforming content consumption and influencing cultural narratives. Local filmmakers can produce authentic content without heavy censorship, allowing for more authentic representation. However, globalization, like Netflix and Amazon Prime, raises concerns about overshadowing local storytelling. Some argue it could erode local culture, while others believe it enhances diversity and provides more consumer choice.

6. Technological Difficulties and Usability:

The digital divide in rural areas is exacerbated by slow internet connections and high data costs, limiting the accessibility of OTT services. Addressing this divide is crucial for OTT platforms to reach their full potential.

Additionally, low internet speeds and bandwidth limitations can lead to poor streaming quality, affecting user experience.

7. Potential Futures:

The future of OTT platforms in Bangladesh is promising, but growth will depend on localized content, improved infrastructure, and government policies. Investment in local, culturally relevant content is crucial for both domestic and global platforms. Expanding internet access and reducing data costs will help increase adoption in rural areas. Regulatory frameworks must balance creative freedom with cultural sensitivities for ethical standards.

OTT platforms are transforming Bangladesh's media landscape, offering new opportunities for content creators and consumers. Driven by changing media habits, technological advancements, and demand for diverse content, they are gaining popularity. However, challenges like regulatory issues, economic sustainability, and technological constraints need to be addressed for continued growth. The OTT market will significantly influence Bangladesh's entertainment and media consumption.

FINDINGS

Here are the key findings of impact of OTT platforms in Bangladesh:

1. Infrastructure Challenges in Rural Areas: Inadequate infrastructure and expensive data plans prevent Over-the-Top (OTT) services from being widely adopted in Bangladesh's rural areas. The integration of OTT platforms into the digital entertainment environment is delayed in rural regions due to major access constraints, even if OTT platforms are growing quickly in metropolitan areas.

2. Material Preferences: Although local OTT platforms mostly feature Bangla-language material, there is a specific consumer niche that is becoming more and more drawn to overseas services. This tendency points to a dual pattern of consumption, whereby foreign platforms draw certain audience segments looking for a variety of products, while local platforms flourish on local content.

3. Employment and Industry Issues: While over-the-top (OTT) platforms have had a favorable impact on Bangladesh's media landscape, the industry still faces issues including content producers' job security, persistent worries about piracy, and hurdles with content monetization. These problems cast doubt on the feasibility of independent content creation and obstruct the industry's capacity to develop sustainably.

4. Content Moderation and Privacy Concerns: As the usage of over-the-top (OTT) platforms grows, the conversation over censorship, data privacy, and content moderation is becoming more and more heated. Clearer rules and guidelines are requested by stakeholders, including users and content producers, in order to address these important concerns that affect industry practices and user experience.

5. Cultural Authenticity vs. Global Influence: As artists work to reflect localized narratives, there has been a noticeable improvement in the authenticity and depiction of Bangladeshi culture in local material. Concerns about the dominance of international content, which runs the danger of obscuring regional storytelling customs and cultural manifestations, nevertheless exist.

6. Digital Divide and Internet Access: Access to OTT platforms remains limited by the digital divide, particularly in rural areas where internet connectivity is sluggish. This disparity in access underscores the necessity for targeted efforts to enhance digital infrastructure, ensuring equitable opportunities for all consumers to engage with OTT services.

7. Future Considerations: Development of localized content, strong internet infrastructure, and reasonable laws are essential for OTT platforms to reach their full potential in Bangladesh's entertainment business. As the sector develops, taking care of these issues will be essential to building a strong digital ecosystem that can both celebrate local tales and successfully compete with global platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are meant to help manage the impact of over-the-top platforms in Bangladesh:

Encourage the creation of local content: To increase content consumption, OTT platforms should promote local talent investment, diversify genres like documentaries, sci-fi, and animation, and encourage regional content. Government incentives like tax cuts and subsidies can help attract a wider audience. Additionally, regional content in languages or dialects can draw on the rich cultural diversity of Bangladesh.

Strengthen Digital Infrastructure: Strengthen digital infrastructure by expanding high-speed internet access in rural areas and collaborating with OTT platforms and telecom providers to offer affordable data packages for streaming.

Improve Models of Monetization: OTT platforms should offer affordable subscription plans and ad-supported models to cater to price-sensitive consumers, while collaborating with local businesses for targeted advertising can generate additional revenue.

Deal with Censorship and Regulation Concerns: OTT platforms should collaborate with regulators to establish clear guidelines that protect cultural values without stifling creativity, while strengthening data privacy and security measures to ensure transparency in data collection, storage, and usage.

Take Action against Piracy: Encourage collaboration between Bangladeshi OTT platforms and international players for co-productions showcasing Bangladeshi culture, and expand international presence by targeting the Bangladeshi Diaspora with culturally relevant content.

Assist Content Producers: Invest in training programs for Bangladeshi filmmakers and creators, offering grants and scholarships for digital content creation. Address job security concerns for freelancers in the Gig Economy by promoting fair compensation and benefits.

Promote the Representation of Cultures: Encourage the telling of positive cultural narratives by supporting content that honors regional customs, values, and stories. Through artistic methods, OTT platforms can serve as a means of promoting national identity and heritage.

Increase Interaction with the Audience: Platforms can enhance viewer engagement through interactive storytelling and live events, while also enhancing their social media presence for behind-the-scenes content, discussions, and community-building activities.

CONCLUSION

Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms' explosive growth is drastically altering Bangladesh's media and entertainment scene, changing both the structure of the sector and how people consume information. The media landscape in Bangladesh, which was formerly dominated by movies and television, is currently changing as a result of more people having access to the internet and using smart phones more often. This change is towards digital streaming. Local and foreign OTT platforms provide a wide variety of material to meet changing user expectations for customized and on-demand viewing. From an economic standpoint, OTT platforms have boosted the expansion of the regional entertainment industry and given content creators additional avenues for their work. Nonetheless, there are still many obstacles to overcome, including the need for strong legal frameworks, employment security for independent contractors, and content monetization. Concerns over the preservation of regional storytelling customs and cultural identity have been raised by the flood of global material, which has brought new cultural influences. The review emphasizes the importance of addressing digital divide, regulatory concerns, and economic sustainability for the success of OTT platforms in Bangladesh. Future strategies should focus on local content promotion, digital infrastructure enhancement, and balanced regulation.

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