

THE GROWING TREND OF OTT AND AUDIENCE PREFERENCES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY FOCUSING ON YOUTH AGED 18–30 IN RAIPUR CITY

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ABSTRACT

The second decade of the 21st century marks a digital renaissance, altering global media consumption paradigms. In India, the post-2016 telecom revolution coupled with the deployment of 5G networks transformed high-speed data into an essential utility. This structural shift accelerated the decline of traditional linear media, paving the way for Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming platforms. This study empirically investigates the OTT consumption habits, preferences, and socio-psychological determinants among youth aged 18–30 in Raipur, the capital and a prominent educational hub of Chhattisgarh. Rooted in the **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)** and the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, the research uses a mixed-methods design comprising descriptive and quantitative approaches. Primary data was gathered via structured questionnaires (N=150) and targeted field surveys across key socio-commercial clusters in Raipur. The findings indicate that JioCinema (38%) leads local adoption due to economic value and sports streaming, followed by Netflix (24%) and Amazon Prime Video (22%). Crime thrillers dominate genre choices (42%), and an operational "New Prime Time" has emerged between 10:00 PM and 1:00 AM. The paper discusses the theoretical implications of these behaviors, addresses the rising challenges of binge-watching and screen dependency, and details strategies for integrating regional Chhattisgarhi content into mainstream digital ecosystems.

Keywords: *Over-the-Top (OTT) Platforms¹, Uses and Gratifications Theory², Technology Acceptance Model³, Tier-2 Cities⁴, Media Consumption⁵, Raipur Youth⁶.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE DIGITAL RENAISSANCE AND MEDIA SHIFT

The contemporary era is defined by an Information Revolution that has fundamentally reorganized human interaction, communication networks, and entertainment choices. From an Indian standpoint, 2016 stands as the definitive inflection point. The aggressive entry of Reliance Jio into the telecommunications landscape catalyzed an unprecedented collapse in data pricing, positioning India as a global leader in low-cost data access. The subsequent nationwide rollout of 5G infrastructure further advanced network speeds, throughput, and system reliability. Consequently, digital connectivity has transitioned from an elite luxury to an infrastructural necessity, integrating itself deeply into the standard socio-economic hierarchy. Data access is now functionally recognized alongside the core material needs of food, clothing, and shelter.

This systemic transformation has disrupted the traditional media and entertainment industry. Linear television architectures including legacy cable networks, Direct-to-Home (DTH) operators, and traditional cinema exhibition formats are experiencing a steady loss of audience share and market exclusivity. They are being replaced by Over-the-Top (OTT) digital platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and JioCinema. By utilizing unmanaged internet channels to deliver high-definition audio-visual content directly to the end-user, OTT architectures bypass traditional regional distribution monopolies. This shift decouples the viewing experience from structural time and space constraints, giving rise to an "anytime, anywhere" on-demand media environment.

1.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT: RAIPUR AS AN EMERGING HUB

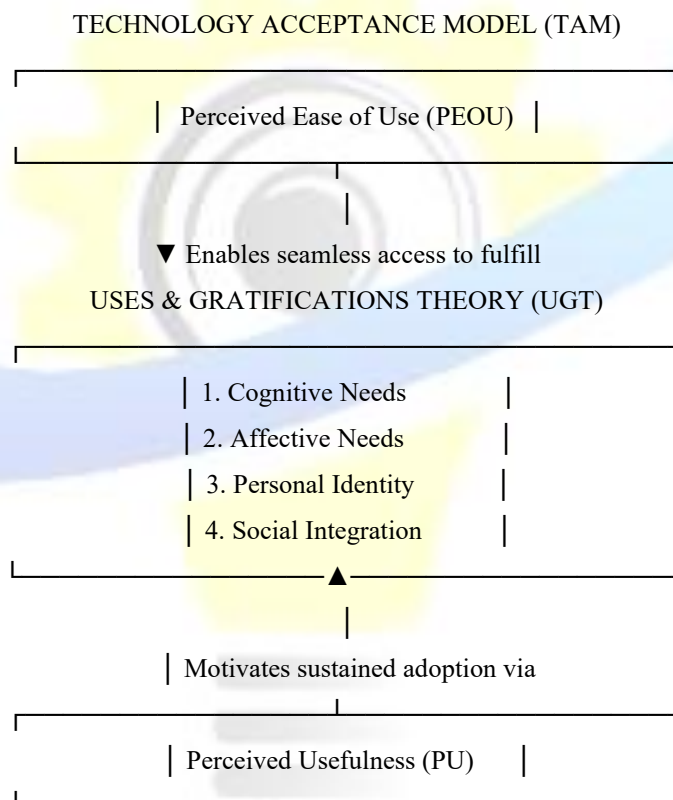
Raipur, the administrative capital of Chhattisgarh, serves as the focus city for this empirical study. Over the past decade, Raipur has transitioned from a localized administrative node into a major educational, commercial, and metropolitan center within Central India. The city hosts several premier national institutions, including Hidayatullah National Law University (HNLU), National Institute of Technology (NIT Raipur), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Indian Institute of Management (IIM Raipur), and Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University (PRSU). This institutional expansion has drawn a dense population of students and young professionals aged 18 to 30. This demographic includes both local residents and individuals arriving from diverse semi-urban and rural areas of Chhattisgarh and the wider nation. Socio-behaviorally, this population consists of "digital natives" whose primary media habits were formed directly within smartphone-centric and internet-enabled environments. The unique socio-economic traits of Raipur's youth position them as highly active consumers of OTT content:

1. **Discretionary Purchasing Power:** Through personal income or family-allocated allowances, these individuals possess independent decision-making authority over digital subscriptions.
2. **Independent Domestic Structures:** Living in hostelry, paying guest (PG) accommodations, or independent rentals isolates them from traditional family-shared television viewing. This releases them from intergenerational conflicts over media choices and remote-control access.

3. **Temporal Flexibility:** Academic workloads, non-standard study hours, and shifting professional assignments push their entertainment windows into late-night hours—a demand profile that linear broadcasting cannot satisfy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To look beyond superficial viewing metrics, this study evaluates media consumption shifts using two established theoretical models from media sociology and information systems.



2.1 USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY (UGT)

Formulated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), UGT shifts the analytical focus from what media does to audiences to **what audiences do with media**. The model views the audience as active, intentional agents who select specific media platforms to fulfill distinct psychological and social goals. In Raipur, youth choose OTT content to satisfy four primary dimensions of the UGT framework:

- **Cognitive Needs:** Seeking information and intellectual engagement. This includes watching specialized investigative documentaries, historical accounts, or financial narratives like *Scam 1992*.
- **Affective Needs:** Pursuing emotional regulation, relaxation, and escape from stress. After long academic or professional schedules, viewers use comedies and thrillers to manage stress and unwind.
- **Personal Identity:** Finding validation for personal experiences, struggles, and worldviews. Culturally resonant web series like *Aspirants*, *Kota Factory*, and *Hostel Daze* mirror the anxieties and social lives of students, reinforcing their personal identities.

- **Social Integration:** Maintaining social currency and conversational inclusion within peer groups. Consuming popular web series helps avoid social exclusion, allowing youth to participate in peer discussions and engage with digital subcultures like internet memes.

2.2 TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM)

Developed by Fred Davis (1989), TAM offers a behavioral framework for tracking how users adopt new digital interfaces. The model posits that technological adoption is driven by two main factors:

- **Perceived Usefulness (PU):** The user's assessment of how effectively technology improves their daily tasks or entertainment quality. For Raipur's youth, OTT platforms provide high utility through customized, high-definition (HD), ad-free viewing available across multiple language tracks.
- **Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU):** The user's assessment of the effort required to operate a technological interface. OTT architectures lower access barriers via single-click mobile interfaces, cross-device synchronization ("Continue Watching"), and offline download options.

2.3 STRUCTURAL SYNTHESIS

This study operates at the intersection of these two models. High Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and clear Perceived Usefulness (PU) allow users to meet their core cognitive, affective, and social needs with greater intensity and autonomy. In a growing educational center like Raipur, this convergence creates a highly user-centric, digital-first media landscape.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW & IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH GAP

3.1 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL MEDIA ADOPTION

The transition toward digital streaming has been extensively documented in international media markets, showing structural changes in user habits. Smith and Marwick (2018) examined media usage patterns in US and European markets, identifying a clear trend of "cord-cutting" among young demographics. This process—the complete cancellation of legacy cable or satellite television services—was driven by a preference for ad-free environments, multi-device flexibility, and premium original programming. Their work confirmed that modern consumers prefer personalized media over fixed broadcast programming. In Asian markets, Kwon et al. (2021) analyzed OTT adoption across South Korea and Japan, identifying the rise of "binge-watching"—defined as viewing multiple episodes or entire seasons in a single sitting. Their findings linked this behavior to academic and professional stress, where binge-watching serves as a form of psychological "escapism," letting users retreat into narrative spaces to manage real-world anxiety.

3.2 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE INDIAN MARKET

The Indian digital ecosystem is shaped by unique linguistic, cultural, and economic factors. According to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and BCG Report (2023), India's OTT ecosystem is among the fastest-growing markets worldwide, noted for a shift toward long-form, episodic content over standard three-hour feature films. This indicates an audience preference for deeper character development and complex storytelling.

Sharma and Kaul (2022) conducted empirical research tracking media consumption shifts among youth in major metropolitan centers like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore. They recorded a 60% increase in OTT subscription renewals and active watch-time during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. This increased consumption persisted after lockdowns were lifted, showing a long-term behavioral shift in consumer lifestyles.

Significantly, Mishra (2024) explored the geography of digital consumption, showing that the next phase of Indian OTT expansion is driven by Tier-2 urban clusters such as Raipur, Jaipur, Lucknow, Patna, and Indore. Youth in these cities combine rising purchasing power with high-speed internet access to seek a balance between regional identity and global media, a pattern described as "glocal" consumer behavior.

3.3 RESEARCH GAP

Most existing academic literature on Indian OTT consumption focuses on Tier-1 metropolitan centers, leaving a gap regarding rapidly evolving Tier-2 cities like Raipur. Raipur presents a unique research environment for three main reasons:

1. **Linguistic and Cultural Mix:** The local population balances regional Chhattisgarhi cultural traditions with mainstream Hindi media.
2. **Socio-Economic Shifts:** Raipur's growth as an administrative and educational hub has modified the financial capacity and independent choices of its youth.
3. **Content Requirements:** Local youth look for content that aligns with global narrative standards while maintaining connection to regional themes.

No existing comprehensive study integrates these unique socio-economic, theoretical, and regional factors within the context of Raipur. This paper aims to address this research gap.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a systematic, scientific methodology to ensure empirical accuracy, objectivity, and repeatability.

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses mixed-methods design, combining descriptive and quantitative approaches:

- **Descriptive Approach:** Used to capture and document current patterns of OTT platform usage, preference profiles, and consumer habits among the youth without altering external variables.
- **Quantitative Approach:** Formulated to collect statistical data. Responses are converted into numerical codes and categories to analyze metrics like active screen time, monthly subscription fees, and distribution choices across platforms, ensuring objective conclusions.

4.2 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

- **Target Population:** Defined as youth aged 18 to 30 residing within the urban limits of Raipur, Chhattisgarh. This demographic represents active users of smartphone devices and digital tools.

- **Sampling Method:** Given the impracticality of census-scale evaluation, non-probability sampling was used via two techniques:
 1. *Convenience Sampling:* To connect with accessible, voluntary respondents across educational and recreational centers.
 2. *Snowball Sampling:* To identify heavy media users through peer referrals, capturing specialized streaming habits.
- **Sample Size:** A sample of 150 valid respondents was selected across diverse municipal zones in Raipur. Incomplete, inconsistent, or anomalous submissions were filtered out during data screening to maintain data integrity.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND LOCATIONS

Data collection relied on a combination of primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data:** Gathered through a dual-channel design. First, a structured questionnaire using multiple-choice indicators and Likert scales was distributed via Google Forms across digital communication networks. Second, an in-person field survey was conducted across major social, commercial, and educational hubs in Raipur to capture ground-level variations, specifically:
 - *Telibandha Lake (Marine Drive):* Capturing a diverse cross-section of young youth.
 - *Magneto Mall and City Center Mall (Pandri):* Targeting urban consumers.
 - *Pandri Textile Market Area:* Connecting with working and business-oriented youth.
 - *National Institute of Technology (NIT Raipur) Hostels:* Reaching high-data-consuming resident and migrant students.
- **Secondary Data:** Sourced from peer-reviewed journals, national digital indices, and industry reports—including publications from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), and advisory assessments from KPMG and BCG.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 MARKET PENETRATION AND SUBSCRIPTION DYNAMICS

Quantitative distribution analysis across the sample (N=150) shows a distinct market structure for OTT platforms in Raipur, driven by cost and content availability.

Platform	Consumer Preference Share (%)	Primary Drivers of Selection	Target Demographic Focus
JioCinema	38%	Free streaming of premium sports (IPL); cheap entry-level plans (₹29/month).	Price-sensitive students.
Netflix	24%	Premium international content; high PEOU; ad-free interface.	Working professionals (24–30); high-income brackets.
Amazon	22%	Multi-service bundling (e-commerce)	Value-seeking urban youth.

Prime Video		delivery, Prime Music).	
Jio Hotstar	16%	Legacy serial catalogs; regional movie selections.	General entertainment seekers.

5.2 GENRE PREFERENCES AND CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

Analysis of preferred content genres reveals high engagement with intense, realistic storytelling.

- **Crime Thriller / Suspense (42%):** Dialogues and themes from series like *Mirzapur*, *Paatal Lok*, and *Sacred Games* are integrated into the daily vocabulary of local youth. High-budget international crime series like *Money Heist* and *Squid Game* show a similar trend.
- **Romantic Comedy / Drama (25%):** Relatable, light-hearted narrative arcs that capture standard lifestyle interactions and relationship dynamics.
- **Documentary / Real-life (18%):** Documentaries centered on equity markets, venture capital ecosystems (*Shark Tank India*), and real-world financial fraud cases (*Scam 1992*) show rising popularity among collegiate audiences, aligning with UGT cognitive satisfaction goals.
- **Animation / Sci-Fi (15%):** Niche experimental narratives capturing high-end alternate reality environments.

5.3 LANGUAGE DISTRIBUTIONS AND REGIONAL TRENDS

While Raipur is located within a primary Hindi-speaking area, its youth exhibit a multilingual consumption profile:

- **Hindi Only:** 60%
- **English / International Dubbed:** 25%
- **Regional Languages / South-Indian Dubbed:** 15%

A notable gap exists regarding regional Chhattisgarhi content. While the Chhattisgarhi cinema industry ('Chhollywood') maintains a presence in single-screen movie theaters, mainstream OTT platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime lack high-quality Chhattisgarhi web series. Consequently, young audiences turn to YouTube to watch short-form local comedy sketches and independent productions. Additionally, Hindi-dubbed commercial releases from South Indian cinema starring actors like Allu Arjun, Jr. NTR, and Ram Charan attract strong viewership across both physical theaters and digital streaming services.

5.4 SCREEN TIME SHIFTS AND BINGE-WATCHING PSYCHOLOGY

OTT adoption has modified traditional television prime-time windows (typically 8:00 PM to 10:00 PM). Data indicates that 64% of Raipur's youth actively stream content between 10:00 PM and 1:00 AM. This shift is tied to privacy needs, as individuals stream media on personal mobile screens in bedrooms or hostelry rooms away from family oversight. The data highlights the habit-forming nature of these platforms: 70% of respondents state they regularly find it difficult to stop watching when prompted by "Next Episode" automation. During weekends, this individual watch-time often rises to 4–5 hours per day.

6. DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 SOCIO-CULTURAL AND BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS

The data shows that OTT platforms function as more than simple entertainment delivery systems for youth aged 18 to 30 in Raipur. They serve as influential spaces that shape socio-cultural awareness, linguistic habits, peer communication styles, and modern lifestyles. Aligned with Uses and Gratifications principles, the medium satisfies desires for personal autonomy, private consumption spaces, and psychological relief. It provides an alternative to traditional family-centric television viewing, giving users control over their entertainment choices. However, high consumption rates pose challenges. Extended viewing habits are associated with physical and psychological strain, including sleep disruption (insomnia), attention issues, and screen dependency. Financially, managing multiple subscriptions can lead to uncoordinated discretionary spending. These challenges point to a need for balanced digital consumption and improved self-regulatory tools.

6.2 ACTIONABLE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the digital streaming landscape while mitigating user challenges, this study proposes three core recommendations:

1. **Strengthening Self-Regulation and Access Controls:** Broad government censorship risks restricting creative expression and narrative variety. A more effective approach involves refined self-regulation. Platforms must implement clear content ratings (e.g., 13+, 16+, 18+) and accessible, user-friendly profile locks to support family-level choices.
2. **Integrating Regional Content ('Vocal for Local'):** To meet local demand, Chhattisgarhi production companies should expand beyond legacy distribution formats and independent YouTube streaming. Local storytellers need to establish commercial partnerships with national and global OTT platforms. This strategy can help showcase Chhattisgarhi folk traditions, historical narratives, and tribal heritage to a broader audience while generating economic opportunities for regional artists.
3. **Promoting Digital Wellness Initiatives:** Educational institutions should introduce modules on digital wellness to help students manage screen time and build balanced online habits.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

7.1 CONCLUSION

This research provides an empirical review of OTT media consumption among youth in Raipur. It demonstrates how infrastructure improvements and changing demographic profiles have accelerated the shift away from linear media toward on-demand streaming. By analyzing adoption patterns through UGT and TAM, the study details how convenience, cost, and psychological alignment drive digital choices. The results highlight a clear market evolution in Tier-2 urban areas, providing insights for media researchers and content creators.

7.2 FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

As this study focused on the urban limits of Raipur and a specific youth demographic, future research could expand into several areas:

- **Geographic and Socio-Economic Expansion:** Future studies could assess media adoption across rural and tribal communities in Chhattisgarh (e.g., Bastar and Surguja districts) to examine variations across the digital divide.
- **Psychological and Content Impact Studies:** Longitudinal research is needed to evaluate how prolonged exposure to intense or crime-heavy genres affects behavioral patterns, stress management, and consumer habits.
- **Gender-Based Evaluations:** Future work can investigate distinct gender-driven choices in platform selection, genre preferences, and streaming habits among male and female demographics.

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