

# Feature Films in Theatres and OTT Platforms: A Study into Viewing Habits and Preferences

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## ARTICLE INFO

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**Dates:**

Received: 10-01-2023

Accepted: 16-01-2023

Published: 00-00-2023

**Keywords:**

Films, OTT, Audience,  
Preferences

**How to Cite:**

Pathak CC. (2022)  
Feature Films in  
Theatres and OTT  
Platforms: A Study  
into Viewing Habits  
and Preferences.  
MediaSpace:  
DME Journal of  
Communication, 3(1),  
20-22.

doi: 10.53361/dmejc.  
v3i01.04

## MediaSpace:

DME Journal of Communication

e-ISSN: 2583-035X

## Abstract

Films in theatres and on OTT platforms is a very different kind of an experience. The coming of OTT has transformed the audience preferences and ways of consumption of the media content and cinema to be specific in this case (Pandit, 2020). Before the advent of OTT cinema has undergone many other types of changes as well. These changes of the past have had a lot of influence on how the people perceived cinema and its contents. From the single screen to multiplex, audience has been witness to plenty of transformations. From black and white films to colour and from big screens to TV screens via cable TV and now the OTT, these changes have been an outcome of the technological realities. Whatever may have been the reasons for these changes, the reality remains that OTT poses a serious threat to the cinema halls and their existence. Thus it becomes imperative that peoples preferences with respect to cinema and OTT is understood.

## INTRODUCTION

Films in theatres and on OTT platforms is a very different kind of an experience. The coming of OTT has transformed the audience preferences and ways of consumption of the media content and cinema to be specific in this case (Pandit, 2020). Before the advent of OTT cinema has undergone many other types of changes as well. These changes of the past have had a lot of influence on how the people perceived cinema and its contents. From the single screen to multiplex, audience has been witness to plenty of transformations. From black and white films to colour and from big screens to TV screens via cable TV and now the OTT, these changes have been an outcome of the technological realities.

In the context of this study, movie theatres/halls (cinema halls) are the closed spaces where the film screenings take place. Initially these cinema halls were huge in size with single screen and a capacity to accommodate hundreds of people. These changes were first witnessed in somewhere 1980s and post 1997 there was an upsurge in multiplexes. The coming of the mall culture actually coincided with the rise of multiplex culture. It somewhere meant that one place shop all and all kinds of experiences within a space. It meant that people came to buy groceries, clothes, have food and get entertained via films in the multiplexes.

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The multiplexes today can have varying capacity from 75-200 with no place called a balcony like in case of single screen. However, the degree of comfort is like never before but with a higher cost involved.

Now with the OTTs in place, the cinema theatres are facing acute existential crisis (Chatterjee & Pal, 2020). The multiplexes are going empty with many film producers choosing to release the films on OTT platforms. This is leading to a situation where the multiplexes need to increase the ticket prices along with the prices of other things like eatables and other services (Varghese & Chinnaiyah, 2021). This is further creating repulsion amongst the film viewers who are preferring to watch films on OTT. There are reports which also claim that people now a days tend to wait for the film to get down from multiplex and then appear on the OTT platforms.

These changes in audience preferences is also fuelled by the emergence of COVID (Okumus, 2022). The people were comfortable with OTTs, watching films and content at their own pace while also being safe at home. Prolonged lockdown across the country made this change, a kind of permanent behaviour. The multiplex owners and the producers are looking for all possible means to revert this habit and bring people back to the cinema halls (Okumus, n.d.). Amidst this, it becomes important to know what people feel about OTT and cinema halls, their preferences and choices.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

### Study Design

The study is quantitative by nature and approach and will follow a questionnaire survey method. The study population are the people living in Delhi/NCR. The total population for the study was estimated to be 100 people falling in the age group 18 and above in order to get genuine results from all the generations. Sampling is purposive sampling technique falling in non-probability category.

### Objectives

- To study and analyse the shift of cinema from theatre to OTT platforms.

- To analyse people's experience of watching cinema on OTT platforms and Big Screens.
- To analyse people's experience of watching cinema on OTT platforms in the context of movies that were supposed to be released in the theatres but were released on OTT due to Covid-19 and lockdown.

### Data Findings

- The majority of the people watch films often (at least once in a week) with a significant number of viewers claiming to be watching it daily. Very few claimed to be watching films rarely and amongst those are majorly the working people of age above 45 years.
- OTT platforms emerged as the preferred platform to watch films over cinema halls or multiplexes
- People cited the cost of tickets and other ancillary expenses to be the factor influencing their preferences.
- The flexibility of timing and place was another factor that influenced the choices of the people.
- People claimed that OTT has been an experience that was unimagined before the COVID lockdown and they consider it as the best thing to happen to them during the dismal period of death and sorrows. Raghuvanshi and Saha (2022) also validate the unexpected experience of the audience in their study on the OTT platforms and cinema in the era of global pandemic.
- The people have Amazon Prime as the first choice of preference followed by Netflix, then Hotstar and VOOT.
- People do tend to buy subscriptions if the cost of subscription is below one thousand rupees in a year. As the cost of subscription goes above one thousand, there is a fall in the leaning of the viewers to shell out money for subscription.
- People also do sharing of the applications and it is seen that on an average, three or more than three people are sharing the applications to watch films.
- People also said that the release of new films does compel them to buy subscriptions.
- People feel that COVID was the reason OTT became popular. If there was no such situation like COVID, OTT would not have been as popular.



- Surprisingly the people want to continue to watch films on the OTT platforms even when things would become completely normal.
- The big screen experience is different as claimed by the people but still they are not very keen to shell out money for that experience.
- The people tend to have developed some leaning towards the stories being narrated in films.
- It is also seen that males are more avid viewers of OTT platforms.
- The males also tend to spend more on subscriptions than the females.
- The overall preferred genre has been crime and psychological thriller followed by action and romance but the choices of the males and females are completely different.

## CONCLUSION

The concerns of the multiplex owners and the film producers is valid since it is evident that people have started to prefer OTT for cinema than multiplexes for film viewing. The film producers on every platform however do claim that OTTs are not a challenge as cinema has and will always be a medium of big screen but the changing audience preferences cannot be ignored. The filmmakers need to understand that the high costs of film

experience will not be borne by the people if there is an alternative available. The filmmakers, producers and film distributors need to work on a sustainable economic model within the OTT system to benefit from it. But it is evident that people like OTT and they watch it often but are comfortable with shelling only limited money for it. Its increasing popularity is a testimony to the fact that OTT is offering a thrilling experience as a relatively low cost.

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