Influence of Social Media Recommendations on OTT Content Consumption among the Youth with Special Reference to West Bengal

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Introduction

In present times social media has transformed into a potent platform that not only enables individuals to perform social interactions but also plays a significant part in influencing consumer behavior, generating marketing policies, and tracking the content consumption outlines. With the growth of OTT (Over the Top) platforms, that operate through the Internet, there has been a radical change in how people engage, access, and consume the media content, especially the youth population. This change is apparent in India where OTT platforms have

accumulated a strong and significant user base that is exceeding the conventional television viewership and developing into the favored channel for consuming content.

The 2023 Data Reportal reports that there are 692.0 million internet users in the country. Internet penetration in the country stands at 48.7 percent of the entire population and presently 1.10 billion mobile phone connections are running active in the country which equals 77.0 percent of the entire country's population. As far as the social media platforms are concerned, according to the advertising resources of Meta, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter had 314.6, 229.6, and 27.25 million users respectively while as per the resources of Google advertising, there are 467.0 million YouTube users in India (Kemp, 2023). Such an enormous amount of social media penetration signifies its importance in the domain of development and marketing for the OTT sector and it has led the OTT platforms to turn to social media for promotion, marketing, and engagement.

According to a study, several reasons influence the consumer for their choices in streaming and obtaining OTT subscriptions. It was revealed that 71% of individuals were persuaded by social media, 82% of individuals were convinced by friends to subscribe to any OTT platform and other reasons include recommendations from family members and word-of-mouth, who persuaded them majorly to consume OTT platforms (Meena & Kumar, 2023). Studies have emphasized on the noteworthy influence of social media recommendations on content discovery and viewing preferences as a huge section of users depend on social media to discover new content platforms and offerings. This underlines the significance of consideration of aspects that support the efficiency of social media recommendations, which include the relevance of content, content dependability, and the social background in which recommendations are created. The study focuses on the youth population of West Bengal in India and proposes to trace the factors by exploring the effectiveness of social media

recommendations and their positive and negative impacts on content discovery and user engagement on OTT platforms.

1. The power of social media

Social media can be termed as an array of internet-based communication applications that enable the formation, development, and distribution of either collective or distinctive user-created content (Davis, 2016). It is a lining up of web-based tools and software that helps the online user to network, disseminate content, and acquire a customized connection with co-workers, associations, and friends (IET, 2015). Social media platforms are gradually becoming prevalent in our daily lives and they can be observed not only as detached from the real physical form but can also be measured as an essential portion of an interlaced social sphere (Davis, 2016).

Social media has a universal presence in the present digital period, bearing an induced mark on the lives of people globally, especially among the youth. With the development of different social media platforms, young individuals are now engrossed in the virtual sphere that provides unparalleled communication prospects, connections, and creativity. They have become an inseparable implement for generating networks allowing young people to connect the geographical barricades and be involved in relentless connections with their friends, associates, and family members. Moreover, these platforms provide easily accessible and abundant information which has changed the way young people retrieve knowledge, enabling them to obtain a wide range of informative resources conveniently. Social media has also played an intrinsic role in endorsing activism and social consciousness. It has also developed into a strong tool that provides a platform to the youth, permits them to stand up for causes that they support, and impacts societal transformation (Sumadevi, 2023). Hence, in a nutshell, social media

platforms are now an essential everyday part of life among individuals, influencing their thoughts, likes, and actions (Harikrishnan & Surendher, 2023).

2. The OTT in the entertainment era

In the era of present times, entertainment consumption has evolved drastically, especially with the rise of the internet and OTT (Over the Top) platforms advancing as the leading showrunners in providing content to viewers. OTT (Over the Top) platforms are media digital streaming media services that can be accessed by the viewers directly through the internet. OTT denotes the latest generation of television connections which, unlike the cable or satellite television providers, facilitate live linear streaming of channels through the open internet instead of a guarded, isolated network of privately-operated set-top box-like devices (Harikrishnan & Surendher, 2023).

According to a report published by Ormax Media asserts that the country's OTT market comprises 130.2 million subscribed viewers in 2022 witnessing an 18% climb since the previous year. The figure is anticipated to rise more as the media and entertainment industry of the country is expected to cross $100 billion by the year 2030 as per the report published in EY – FICCI (Bhardwaj, 2023). OTT services enable the customer to stream the content straight over the internet and there is no requirement for any wire, satellite television, or broadcasting platforms. Previously, content managers and distributors while handling the traditional modes of entertainment hugely relied on such strategies that were linear with certain restrictions of place and time. Streaming services have rapidly grown in the entertainment sector and almost all entertainment modes have restructured themselves and molded into this technology. OTT platforms have now evolved into a dynamic entertainment system that provides a noteworthy influence on young people's minds globally. The popularity of OTTs has also increased in the country over the past few years. Since OTTs are now considered as normal services in the

telecom sectors, they are now providing quick developments towards the route of digital services and implements along with the rise in internet acceptance. Unlike television's mode of linear connection tendencies, OTTs allow the viewers to access the contents rapidly from any place and time over a single sitting, which results in enticing a large number of viewers (Meena & Kumar, 2023).

3. Preference of OTT platforms among youth

The significance of OTT platforms has been distinct in the lives of the common people, particularly the youth who are savvier with the usage of digital platforms that require an online connection and effortless handling of laptop and smartphone usage. Youth in particular favor viewing OTT platforms especially content such as web series which create inquisitiveness among the young viewers that eventually leads them into binge-watching. It is generally observed among youngsters who are gradually getting engulfed by it in the form of compulsive viewing, disturbing their well-being, eating habits, and way of life (Negi & Gupta, 2022) Davidson (2023) points out that the young audience is hooked to the OTT platforms due their exclusive availability and collection of original content with no imposition of censorship. However, with the planning imposition of government censorship, there could be a substantial influence as it will constrain the original content accessibility that majorly attracts the OTT audience (Davidson & Jeyshree, 2023)

Kala (2020) in a study observed the rising acceptance of OTT platforms and their effect on young people. It mentioned that OTTs are now an intrinsic aspect of the media and entertainment usage habits among the younger generation. As these platforms are easy to access and tractable, they are preferred and picked mostly for entertainment consumption. Furthermore, the addition of exclusive content in OTTs further pushes their popularity factor.

The study recommends the supervision and observation of parents to lessen the adverse effects of OTTs on the health and welfare of children (Kala, 2022).

Matrix (2014) in a study mentions that among teenagers, binge-watching has formed an important aspect of how teenagers consume media content. The study also traced that a popular trend among them is binge-watching which enables teenagers to access content easily as per their suitability without the requirement of scheduling any time. On-demand content availability has also caused the rise in media consumption which increases the anxieties of possible negative consequences of too much screen-time viewing. The study also specified prospects for teenagers to look at the varied content and participate in social media debates among peers. It is also important for educationalists, official representatives, and parents to observe the impacts and discover ways to stabilize its hazards (Matrix, 2014)

In their study, Nimje et al (2023) highlighted that youngsters being technologically savvy are always on the lookout for advanced technology, therefore they are willing to deviate from the traditional entertainment mediums and shift towards more superior platforms featuring advanced technology. The study was based on the responses of the sample population highlighting the major reasons for choosing OTTs among the youth were easy to access, choice able content and reasonable costs were some of the key reasons for the change in preference to OTT platforms (Nimje et al, 2023)

Sowmyya et al (2021) in their study, traced the reasons that led to the influence of online streaming platforms among the Indian youth. A survey based on a questionnaire method was conducted among 158 respondents of diverse age groups. The study revealed the major factors that primarily motivated the youth to choose streaming platforms over conventional television programs, it revealed that the streamed content via these platforms had a long-lasting influence in the minds of the audience. However, the youth of the country favored them due to their easy

usage, viewing and shareability, convenience, tractability, pricing factors, and provision of viewer-friendly options (Rahman et al, 2021)

The Covid 19 pandemic has added to a greater number of subscriptions of OTT platforms and viewership increased during this period as people had sufficient free time to consume education and entertainment content during the lockdown period. Since most of the television and film shootings were halted due to the pandemic, the viewers shifted their content viewing preferences to OTT platforms which branched out at a rapid level. With the rise in comfortability in viewing, suitability to view ad-free and diversity of content factors, consumers are more contented with OTT services (Meena & Kumar, 2023). Dang (2020) in his study, mentions that during this period, youngsters in particular, accessed social media to debate on their preferred web series shows and discussed the contents among peers. They also recommended, disapproved, and acknowledged the narratives and plots and idolized the onscreen actors. Digital content viewing via these platforms turned out to be the most common foundation of entertainment among the millennials and Gen Z populace living in urban centers of the country, holding almost 70 percent of their entertainment requirements. The surge in popularity of OTT platforms has directed these organizations to create content that is progressively catered to the viewer's interest and there has been rapid growth in the creation of both authentic and international content via OTTs in the country (Dang, 2020)

Research conducted by Singh (2019) elucidates that the youth is more inclined to receive free trial offers that are provided by the OTT platforms. They generally view content late at night and prefer web series content over feature films. He further mentions that in his study, the respondents uphold that OTT apps are transforming the outlines of how people consume media. He also notes that this change can be credited to the service accessibility, personalization of content experience, and easy obtainability of content from across the world (Singh, 2019).

4. Influence of social media recommendation dynamics

OTT content users especially the youth are always on the move in search of recommendations and they are often exposed to a variety of content which expands their prospects crossing the traditional media limitations. This homogenization of content finding nurtures the values of searching and experimentation, where the youth are more persuaded to see niche content genres, independent films, and overseas productions they might not be able to access via traditional platforms. The demography of the youth in particular is categorised by digital eloquence and dependence on social networking sites and these recommendations play a significant part in determining the content consumption outlines. Such a move enables the OTT players and social media platforms to devise the ideas of algorithms of recommendation to organize content customized according to the choice of the viewer. The algorithms examine the data of the user counting the previous watching habits, communication, and demographic details of the viewer to create tailored recommendations. In this way, user engagement is enhanced and the consumers can navigate the relevant content (Ahlawat & Ahlawat, 2020).

Although the fast rise of OTT platforms has led to the exceptional capacity of media-generated content that is easily available to consumers at any place and moment, this profusion of content has also posed a challenge, i.e., the duty to trace the content from the middle of a large volume of selections that echoes with the likings of individual viewers and their viewing preferences. To fill this gap, algorithms that provide recommendations have been developed as vital tools for consumers for resourceful navigation and extraction of specific content. These algorithms utilize the user data like viewing choices and exchanges and viewing history of the consumer to create content recommendations particularly targeted for every individual viewer (Yousaf et al, 2021) (Vijayakumar & Neyah, 2024)

Ahlawat and Ahlawat (2020) in their study concluded that there will be a significant rise in OTT platforms in the future and there will be more OTTs available in the market providing

more options to the customer which will result in larger command and customization in viewing. Another significant change is the rising prominence of offering customized recommendations to the viewers. Customers will receive better opportunities to see new content that resonates with their likings due to the personalized method which further subsidizes a complete upgrade in the experience of viewing (Ahlawat & Ahlawat, 2020).

A study conducted by Axis My India Survey in 2023 mentions that 80 percent of the respondents view video content on social media platforms such as Facebook shorts, YouTube, Instagram Reels, etc. regularly. It depicts the noteworthy influence of digital media among viewers in terms of content consumption. The report also mentions that 47 percent of the respondents informed viewing OTT programs regularly, especially from the states of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, and Gujarat where regular OTT content consumption is informed the maximum, signaling the rise in acceptance of on-demand OTT streaming services (BrandEquity, 2023).

Another survey conducted by Moj, a short video platform, states that 77 percent of young viewers in India spend a major part of their time viewing short videos. The report was conducted through an online survey and the findings are based on the primary data collected from Moj app users falling under the 18-34 years age bracket. The survey tried to find the content preferences and buying power of young Indian viewers (MN4U, 2023). The maximum preference for short videos among youth holds a strong potential to implement the usage of short videos and clips as social media recommendations in the form of viral posts and reels.

Furthermore, OTT streaming platforms themselves run advertisements in their SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) and Freemium-based subscription models. Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ Hotstar for instance have mobile-only edition subscriptions where advertisements are played in between during content streaming. On the other hand, a freemium

model signifies streaming in the platform where the viewer can access specific content for free without buying any subscription.

5. Social media strategies implemented by OTT platforms

5.1 Leveling up of user engagement: One of the foremost reasons behind the implementation of social media strategies by OTT platforms is to upsurge user engagement. For instance, social media provides features such as commenting, liking reacting, and sharing posts. Through such virtual interactions, users are encouraged to visit the OTT platforms and check their content. Such actions help to bring the consumers together forming virtual communities and generating more participation among social media users and increased engagement brings more user fulfillment. Moreover, the personalized disposition of social media recommendations nurtures a feeling of familiarity and significance, echoing the distinct perceptions and interests of the youth viewers. Through behavior and preference analysis, the algorithms modify recommendations to bring them into line with precise viewing conducts, thus improving the probability of recalling and engagement. This cataloged experience improves user gratification and trustworthiness as youth viewers feel understood and served by the OTT platforms, and they spend time more.

5.2 Personalization of content: With the application of social media data, OTT platforms can offer their viewers a more immersive and tailored user experience through personalized content recommendations and specific and aimed advertising. It enables more pleasurable viewing and the users see content that they prefer according to their appeal. The benefits of receiving personalized content recommendations transcend the aspect of convenience. An effective personalization plan provides users, the capability to shape their understanding of personal entertainment resulting in lengthier sittings of engagement and greater user satisfaction stages.

Furthermore, as consumers trace the relatable content, there are chances for the consumers to discover underrated content and even try viewing genres that are not otherwise relatable to them. Hence, the application of innovative personalization methods assists in initiating viewer engagement and recalling which consequently impacts the overall growth of the OTT sector (Vijayakumar & Neyah, 2024)

5.3 Generation of hype and excitement: social media plays a significant part in generating excitement at the time of a film or web series premiere on their platforms. Providing regular updates and creating a countdown reminder of the premiere date are some general outlines for OTTs. Streaming platforms devise diverse themes to bundle up their new-release proclamations and at times, create playlists for specific content and at times they follow the theme of the content to present the message. To involve the audience further before the release of any original or web series on OTT, they issue content snippets either by presenting character artists or the significant aspect of the original/web series (Social Samosa, 2023). OTTs bank majorly on social media platforms to bring in more viewers with an anticipation of what they can discover from the content libraries of these apps. Moreover, social media has turned into a significant drive of trending discussion generator which helps in garnering reach and creating likeness for the brand. Memes on social media in particular daily help in generating content. Memes usually feature artists and actors from their own respective OTT shows. They also employ the usage of video clips from their content libraries to directly convey their brand image and create a better communication route with the viewers (Social Samosa, 2023). Social media recommendations provide a substantial impact in intensifying the acceptance and visibility of precise content among youth audiences. The principles of peer pressure and social proof come into the scenario as people are more likely to participate with content recommended by their social groups which includes friends, influencers, and online societies. This social validation

produces a ripple consequence, where the trendy shows or films garner traction via word-of-mouth advertising, raising debates, memes, and fan groups across social media platforms.

5.4 Release of films in the OTT space: Indian OTT platforms have been releasing films directly via their streaming services which enables them to overcome the theatrical release. Feature films such as Govinda Mera Naam, Oh My Darling, Blur, and Darlings among others are a few examples. To leverage the marketing for such films they are generally aiming for content creators and social media influencers on platforms like Instagram and YouTube who have a better connection with the millennial and GenZ viewers. The conventional forms of advertisement platforms like radio, print, and television endeavored to communicate with the viewers widely and although the expenditures are not as high as the commercial films these films generally plan a very robust post-release strategy in case, they receive large word-of-mouth publicity (Jha, 2022). The chief business officer of ZEE5 India, Mr. Manish Kalra emphasizes that as digital video viewing rises, it becomes an easy path for wholesome content to grasp the masses and reach the exact target audience groups. It also enhances the visibility and uplifts the content consumption of the OTT platform especially for films, which are releasing directly on OTT that have a niche audience. For such films, there is a larger opportunity to invent marketing strategies as they contain unmarked, new titles that possess no previous viewer opinions in contrast to post-cinema releases (Jha, 2022).

5.5 Application of efficient marketing and promotion: The application of social media recommendations helps in garnering suitable online content that promotes the OTT platforms and their latest releases through campaigns, and viral promotions which attract more online users and generate more post engagement. OTTs bank majorly on social media platforms to bring in more viewers with an anticipation of what they can discover from the content libraries

of these apps. Moreover, social media has turned into a significant drive of trending discussion generator which helps in garnering reach and creating likeness for the brand. Memes on social media in particular daily help in generating content. Memes usually feature artists and actors from their own respective OTT shows. They also employ the usage of video clips from their content libraries to directly convey their brand image and create a better communication route with the viewers (Social Samosa, 2023). The creative director and co-founder of White Rivers Media, a digital agency, Mr. Mitesh Kothari states that content marketing for OTT is grounded on the application of artificial intelligence and tracking user behavior. For instance, memes in OTT advertising work in diverse content genres as viewers can identify with them and share them virtually across different social media platforms. There can also be the inclusion of posts in OTT marketing such as 'Did you Know?' acumens or 'backstage scenes' to enhance the involvement of the viewer (Jha, 2022)

6. Significance of Influencers and content creators

6.1 Growth of Influencer marketing: Influencer marketing forms another effective medium via which social media recommendations impact OTT content viewing among the youth. With the upsurge of social media influencers who sway a substantial number of followers and exert significant influence over them, collaborations among different OTT platforms and content creators have become progressively dominant. Influencers hold a grip over their legitimacy, relatable factors, and aspiring lifestyles to recommend or sponsor OTT content, efficiently linking the breach between content creators and consumers. Such a synergetic affiliation not only affiliates viewership but also simplifies deeper engagement and creates a sense of brand recall among the youth demographics. Influencers can be practically defined and theorized as opinion leaders as they have a large cluster of followers and have attained a great standing.

They can also be explained as semi-celebrities who can launch innovative products or fads and influence a diverse audience (Johnson & Sandström, 2022)

6.2 Connecting to Millennials and GenZs: The digitalization and development of social media have primarily changed the shape of media. The rise of these communication networks has produced the growth of influencers, leading to influencer marketing and every connected trend of social media i.e. the infamous (Khamis et al 2016). Associate creative director, Ms. Ambika Sinha from Rabbit Hole, Zoo Media Network, mentions that marketing operations are determined to generate recognition from every corner. Digital footprints are looming large almost in every sphere ranging from the content creator budget, creating trending instants via tweets or reels, and editorial or advertorial-based content. Advertisement based on word-of-mouth is done perfectly through content creators and influencers particularly when they are communicating with the millennial or GenZ population (Jha, 2022)

6.3 Relatability factor: Personalities of social media are generally distinguished as dissimilar from the personalities of the actual world and they can be considered micro-celebrities (Abidin, 2016). Influencer personalities can be termed as individuals who construct a massive group of followers and are considered reliable forerunners in specific or different nooks (Veirman et al, 2017). Since these personalities are considered more approachable and substantial than contemporary superstars and celebrities, patrons have a habit of to relate with them more and replicating them to a larger degree (Tran & Strutton, 2014)

Senior manager, of client servicing, Ms. Sushmita Sinha of The Small Big Idea, a digital marketing company, mentions that regional OTT platforms potentially strategize their assets and their marketing plans reflect over their contents. She also mentions that international or national OTT platforms may possess large star power and budget in their content libraries but

the local, and regional OTTs have larger relevance, and local and regional appeal. They include strategies such as engaging in meme marketing and partnering with micro-influencers with the addition of regionalization (Jha, 2022). The vice president of marketing, media, and publishing, T-Series, Mr. Shivam Chanana mentions that their organization is surveying the opportunities of digital marketing along with the traditional communication mediums such as radio, television, print, and outdoor media for premiering films on the digital format and making sure that the possibilities for content creators and social media influencers rise in diverse forms through this process (Jha, 2022)

Digital agency director of SoCheers, Mr. Jitendra Hirawat opines that the release of new songs, social networking, and field-based activities have already been an aspect of film promotion, however, the inclusion of content creators and social media influencers further intensifies the marketing efforts (Jha, 2022). As social networking platforms increased, content creators initiated effective measures to bring out their content for viewers which previously was not attainable during the period of traditional media. With such a development, the viewers received the chance to discover content from across the globe and also relished the regional and locally rich content in the languages that they could comprehend (Khader, 2023)

6.4 Statistical reports on the influencers and content creator market: According to a 2024 report conducted by Ernest & Young and assigned BigBang.Social, mentions that influencer marketing in the country is predicted to rise by 25 percent in 2024 clocking 2,344 crore and increasing to 3,375 crore by the year 2026. The report also highlights that 50 percent of smartphone usage is devoted to social media platforms and marketers should combine communication approaches in influencer marketing. Additionally, it is predicted that the country will possess 740 million active internet-enabled phones by 2023 (Earnest & Young, 2024). The CEO of BigBang.Social, Mr. Anurag Iyer further highlighted that India is

frequently defined as a new and ambitious nation and a quickly evolving significant economy, and in the digital marketing sphere, receiving attention from a consumer for merely two or three minutes is a major uphill task, content creators can attain that complete attention via their creative thought process (Bhatt, 2024)

Another 2022 Statista report mentions that the industry influencer market was valued crossing Rs. 12 billion and the industry is predicted to rise at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) for the next five years. The market price of the industry is further predicted to extend to a value of Rs 28 billion by the year 2026. As of 2022, approximately 55 million Indians living in cities are the forthright customers of influencers of different categories (Statista, 2024). Instagram has been considered by influencers as the most admired platform where content can be made on various subjects followed by YouTube where most customers decide to buy products recommended by YouTube content creators, film actors, and influencers from Instagram (Statista, 2024)
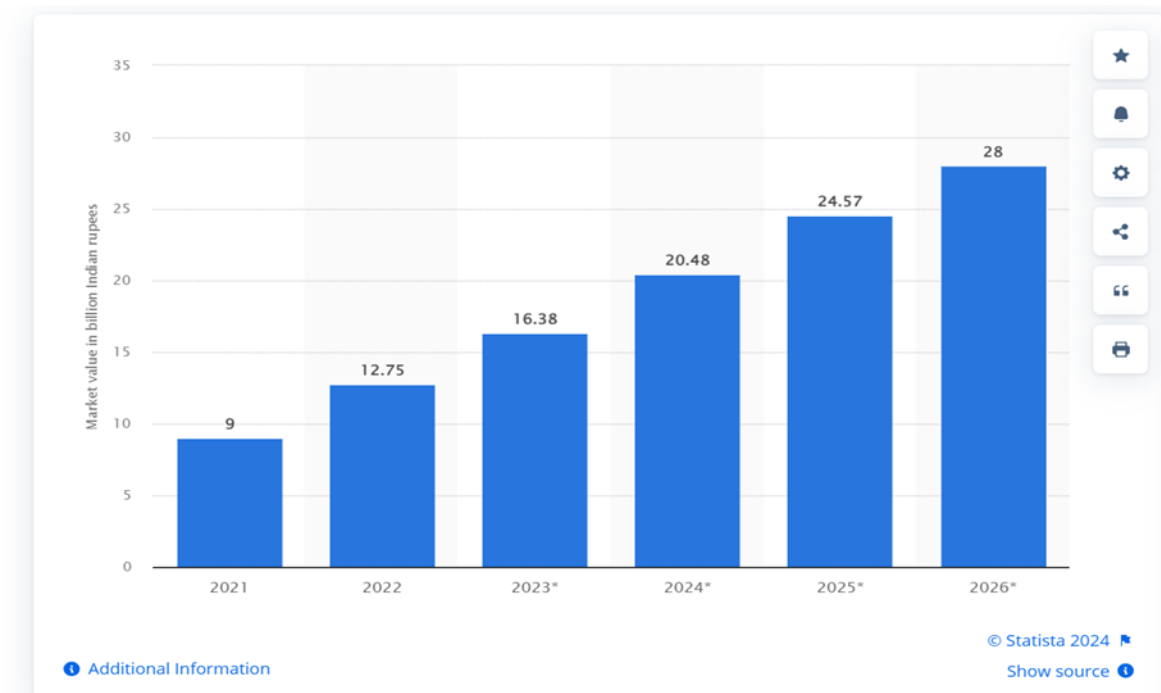

Figure 1: Indian Influencer marketing business value: 2021-2026 (in billion/Indian rupees)

7. Social media approaches used by different OTT platforms

OTT platforms while devising their strategies on social media platforms emphasize more on engagement and lure viewers into watching both the new and previously released content. To find the social media strategies used by different OTT platforms, Social Samosa, an online portal surveyed in 2020 using Talkwalker Data and user scrolling observations. The study was done on prominent OTT apps such as ALT Balaji, Netflix India, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and SonyLIV. The OTT platform ALT Balaji reaches out to its viewers on social media in a conversational attitude. The platform uploads CTA (Call to Action) posts, and memes and tries to engage the user with dialogues and screenshots along with other content materials. Every platform is optimized but the content is generally augmented in a similar tone all over. Special emphasis is laid on celebrities starring in the original OTT content, particularly at the time the program is released. Generally, posts mention the names of the producers and cast members of the show alongside hashtags such as #BrokenButBeautiful or #WeWantBrokenButBeautifulWithPani has often been used for a specific show that promotes the web series name mentioned in the hashtag. The ALT Balaji platform on their Facebook page uses more emoticons as compared to their Twitter handle. Most of the emojis denote the visuals of adoration, contentment, and appreciation to involve the users and type comments beneath the Facebook posts. The data further mentions that the platform's Facebook page often communicates with keywords such as video streaming, season, updates, episodes, and waiting and the Twitter account communicates with viewers through the usage of names and profile links of individuals starring in the ALT Balaji shows (Verma, 2020).

The report further states that the Netflix India Twitter account garners the largest engagements in the form of tweets along with pictures. It is constant in replying to queries in the form of GIFs and terms of retweets, they share informative content related to new releases on the Netflix OTT platform. SonyLIV in its Twitter handle also receives similar tweets in the form

of text and images and generates engagement double the video tweets. All three above-mentioned social media OTT platforms create memes as a medium of content promotion. Amazon Prime India uses screenshots from their content library to generate similar action in the form of a conversation. It has been found that tweets that are embedded with links do not generate much engagement. The study also states that all the OTT platforms pull celebrities to drive more conversations, particularly on the Twitter platform in the form of visuals mentioning the platforms or the content's name. These humanistic approaches help in generating engagements possessing refined CTA as this helps in garnering the attention of the viewer (Verma, 2020)

8. Social media approaches of Bengali OTT platforms

The inception of Bengali OTT platforms in the West Bengal region in 2016 when Addatimes was launched in the same year followed by Hoichoi in 2017. There has been a growth of a few more OTT platforms such as KLIKK, Platform8, and Mukti Prime among others. Apart from these regional OTT platforms, major OTTs such as Amazon Prime Video, ZEE5, and Disney+ Hotstar among others also have a fair collection of Bengali content in their digital repositories. Hoichoi (Figure 3) has a distinguished social media account, 'Hoichoi Minis' a page (Figure 2), which provides a large chunk of mini clips, snippets, and mini-series that can be availed for free of cost by the viewer. Moreover, Hoichoi has two separate social media accounts that are targeted at Bangladeshi and Hindi-language-speaking viewers (Social Samosa, 2023).

Figure: 2: Hoichoi Minis (Hoichoiminis, 2024)

Figure 3: Hoichoi content promotional post (Hoichoi, 2024)

Figure 4: Hoichoi's post on Bengali New Year (Hoichoi, 2024)

Hoichoi generally posts memes, short videos (Figure 2), and celebrity chit-chats based on their content and often ties up with local influencers and engages with the audience in an informal tone. They also target the local Bengali calendar events such as the new year, and local celebrations, and create unique posts that resonate with their content and brand image (Figure 4). The hashtags usually resonate with the content they intend to share. Hoichoi is active on all the popular social media platforms which include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, and their social media posts are simultaneously shared on all the platforms. Addatimes OTT generally posts short clips (Figure 6), audio launch (Figure 5) from their web series content library and regularly sends updates on festivals, and events and wishes celebrities through innovative captions and hashtags. To garner viewers from Bangladesh, Addatimes also features a separate social media page titled 'Addatimes Bangladesh'. Additionally, also post both stills and videos of their upcoming content regularly.

Figure 5: Addatimes promoting song launch of web series (Addatimes, 2024)

Figure 6: snippet from web series (Addatimes, 2024)

Similarly, other platforms like KLIKK, Platform 8, and Mukti Prime are also active on social

media platforms and post stories, short videos, and snippets related to their brand and content.

The addition of social media pages of the OTT platforms not only provides recommendations but also offers engaging content, aims for precise audiences, and generates a sense of appropriateness.

9. Challenges and hurdles for OTT-based social media recommendations

9.1 Ethical considerations of social media recommendations: To receive effectual personalization, there are certain hindrances. One of the most significant challenges is attaining a contended avenue between delivering individualized content recommendations and safeguarding the user privacy of consumers. As a consequence, ethical queries are raised due to the actuality that the platforms are gathering and examining the data of the users for enhancing their algorithms of recommendations. This creates the requirement to take a clear method of data application and deliver information control for users (Vijayakumar & Neyah, 2024).

The commercialization of attention where OTT platforms prioritize over engagement metrics over the user's well-being further worsens these ethical issues as youngsters are constantly exposed to targeted advertising. Moreover, the consequence of the filter bubble also creates an effect where the viewers are individually shown content according to their present likings, which elevates queries regarding the possibilities for restricting the finding of serendipity content and thinning viewpoints. To ensure that the personalization of content enhances the user experience of viewers without unintentionally suppressing the multiplicity and exploration, it is vital to address these significant challenges (Vijayakumar & Neyah, 2024). The idea of filter bubble was familiarized in 2011 by Eli Parisher (Pariser, 2011) which signifies the way computer systems apply information gathered from the browsing and online search history of an internet user to comprehend their preferences and offer personalized recommendations. Although the action fulfills providing the needs of the user this customized

bubble can also restrict in unmasking a broader assortment of information and guide to create a prejudiced or orthodox point of view (Chen, 2023)

9.2 On the psycho-social well-being of youth: The social media recommendations and their effect on youth is a multi-layered spectacle having overpowering consequences in society, culture, and the entertainment sector. Further highlighting the pointer, Tiwari (2019) in one of his studies, opines that the way language and content are implemented in OTTs instills a substantial impression on society molding how individuals consume media content, homogenizing the industry of entertainment and encouraging linguistic heterogeneity. Nevertheless, they also mirror and mold the standards and cultural viewpoints of the audience which can possess both bad and good influence on society. The Indian young population is strongly persuaded by their online streaming and web series content viewing patterns shaping their behavior, approaches, opinions, and ethics. The study also traced that susceptibility to scenes depicting violence, addiction to intoxicants, and explicit sexuality ushers a negative influence on psycho-social health, causing higher depression strain and anxiety levels. On the other hand, the study also found that web series viewing brings a positive effect on the social behavior of the respondents which increases the communication among family members and friends, developing new connections. Tiwari in his study recommends that the entertainment industry should be held accountable for generating content that fosters constructive morals and endorses the expansion of monitoring actions to ensure that the contents streamed online do not possess a damaging influence on the psycho-social health of the country's youth (Tiwari, 2019)

Another study initiated on the young people of Lucknow city found that web series shows are well-liked by them and they generate a substantial influence on their way of living, attitude, and conduct. Most of the content of these programs was found unsuitable for the young

audience and it can impact their social conduct and moral ethics. It is vital for educationalists and parents to be mindful of the content consumption habits of their children and to steer and encourage them to positive media viewing conduct. The study also showed that the maximum number of respondents view web content on smartphones and they generally favor OTT platforms due to the factors of reasonable cost, content diversity, and suitability. However, too much screen time can take a toll on mental and physical well-being and hence it is essential to encourage the balance of screen timing and other actions in a healthy manner (Chaudhury & Srivastava, 2022).

9.3 Issues on the development of shallow content: The race for attention can lead to the development of superficial, sensational, clickbait, or controversial content that provides short-term fads and shock value that can potentially corrode the quality and quantity of youth media consumption. Sharma (2021) in a study examined the depiction of gender functioning and how hate speech is represented in Indian OTT content. Three well-known Indian web series were analyzed and the representation of men and women characters and their observance of the accepted gender roles were examined. The study also observed the habit of offensive language and hate speech usage towards the ostracized communities in these contents. The study also presented findings proposing that these web series often support and emphasize the age-old gender roles where men are represented in the central position and women as docile characters. The study also observes that usage of hate speech and offensive language are common in the content of Indian web series that can have adverse insinuations for societal unity and discriminate against prejudiced attitudes (Sharma, 2021).

Kwak K et al (2021) in a study emphasize how extensive internet access has brought an upsurge in search engine and OTT service demand momentously. It also provides suggestions for establishments or policymakers on how to act in response to the transforming internet domain

and its influence on these marketplaces. The study also proposes strategies for organizations to stay inventive and competitive during the time of developing preferences of consumers and technological improvements (Kwak K. et al, 2021).

Chen (2023) observes that in the domain of new media, social media platforms are continuously refining their algorithms and recommendation systems to improve their engagements with users and extend their influence. These algorithms track the social behaviour and user's information details to precisely endorse content to viewers which comes up with the occurrence of filter bubbles. It causes an integration of content and information restraining the viewpoints of the users and causing group division. To lessen its adverse effects, media technology requires optimization to improve the learning capability of the algorithms of social recommendations and enhance the precision of algorithms. There is also a requirement to boost the diffusion of information diversity by refining media literacy, searching for dissimilar forms of information, and intentionally generating a background of diverse information (Chen, 2023)

10. Research objectives

1. Investigating the impact of social media recommendations on youth content consumption choices within the OTT platforms of West Bengal focusing on the factors influencing recommendation effectiveness

2. Exploring how social contexts shape youth preferences for OTT content based on social media recommendations, emphasizing the role of social interactions and peer influence

3. Identifying key determinants contributing to the efficacy of social media recommendations in influencing youth engagement with OTT content including an examination of perceptions regarding recommendations relevance and reliability

11. Theoretical Framework

The study emphasizes on the *uses and gratification theory* which focuses on how people actively select media content to realize exact needs and gratifications (E.Katz, Blumler, & Girevitch, 1974). This study can assist in comprehending why youth participate in OTT and social media platforms particularly in the context of content discovery and consumption influenced by social media recommendations. It also highlights on the *TAM (Technology Acceptance Model)* which explores the approval and acceptance of technology based on perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis F. D., 1989). It can be utilized to evaluate how the recommendations persuade the youth to engage with OTTs considering features like significance of content, dependability, and user experience. The study also highlights the *social influence theory* which scrutinizes how social influences like peer recommendations and interactions on social media affect individual action and decision-making (Kelman, 1958). It can offer insights into the significance of social context in molding the content preference of youth based on recommendations.

12. Methodology

To trace the factors influencing the effectiveness of social media recommendations for OTT Platforms and their relevance among the youth of West Bengal, the researcher has adopted the mixed method by merging qualitative and quantitative methods. Secondary data is collected from online journals, industry reports, books, and analytics to gather comprehensive data. To collect the primary data, an online survey comprising 108 respondents specifically students, falling under the age group of 18-30 from different parts of West Bengal has been conducted using close-ended questions.

13. Interpretation of data and analysis
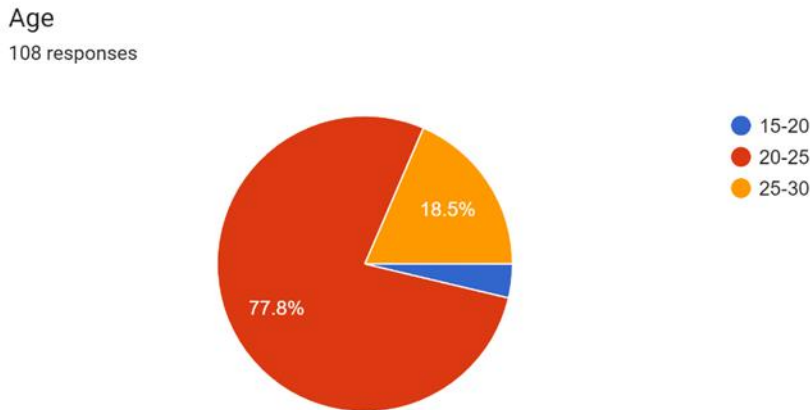
Respondent analysis

Age
108 responses

Figure 7 : Age

13.1 Age

The study was grounded on random sampling where it visibly shows that the maximum number of respondents in the survey fall under the 20-25 (77.8%) group followed by 25-30 (18.5%) and 15-20 (3.7%) (Figure 7). The age group falling under 20-25 has grown up in the digital age, where it is easy to get accustomed to technical gadgets and online platforms. Young adults in this age group are more likely to possess smartphones with easy internet accessibility to access OTT content. A major chunk of this age group is either pursuing their higher studies or beginning their careers. On-demand content is often exclusively available on OTT platforms, which further attracts this age group. Since they spend a significant portion of their time on social media, they are active on these platforms, which notably influences their content preferences. The 25-30 age group, on the other hand, also forms a significant portion of the audience due to their evolving content viewing habits and ease of technological usage. However, their engagement might be lower than the younger age group due to different

priorities, such as demanding careers or family responsibilities, which can restrain their OTT content consumption patterns. The 15-20 age group is still controlled by their parents and might have less liberty over their OTT content viewing choices. They are also expected to be more engaged in their academic and extracurricular activities.
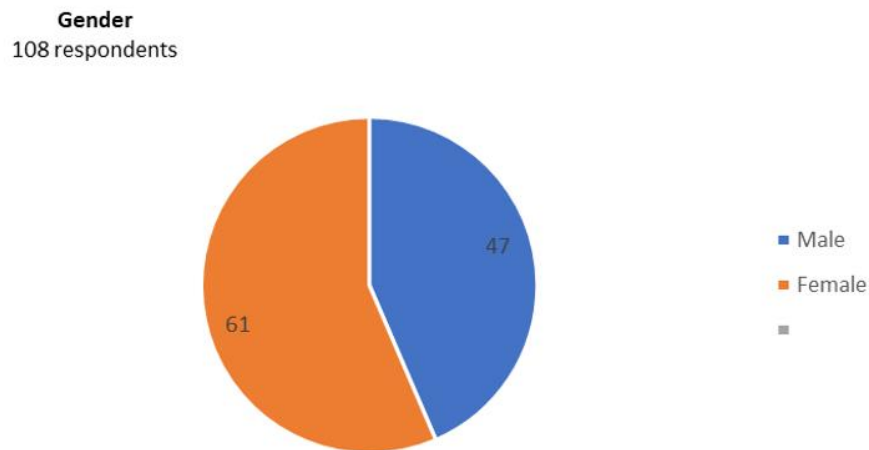

Figure 8: Gender

13.2 Gender

Gender was categorized while conducting the survey and it has been found that female respondents (61%) were more enthusiastic participants in the survey as compared to males (47%) (Figure 8).

How often do you rely on social media recommendations to choose content on OTT platforms?
108 responses
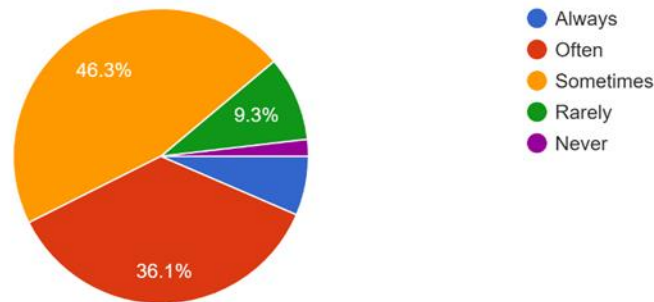
Figure 9: Reliance on social media recommendations

13.3 How often do you rely on social media recommendations to choose content on OTT platforms?

46.3% of the respondents mentioned that they rely on sometimes while 36.1% stated that they often rely on OTT recommendations via social media. 9.3% of respondents mentioned that they rarely require the recommendations while 6.5% of respondents stated that they always depend on social media recommendations (Figure 9).

Which of the following factors influence your decision to watch content recommended on social media?
108 responses
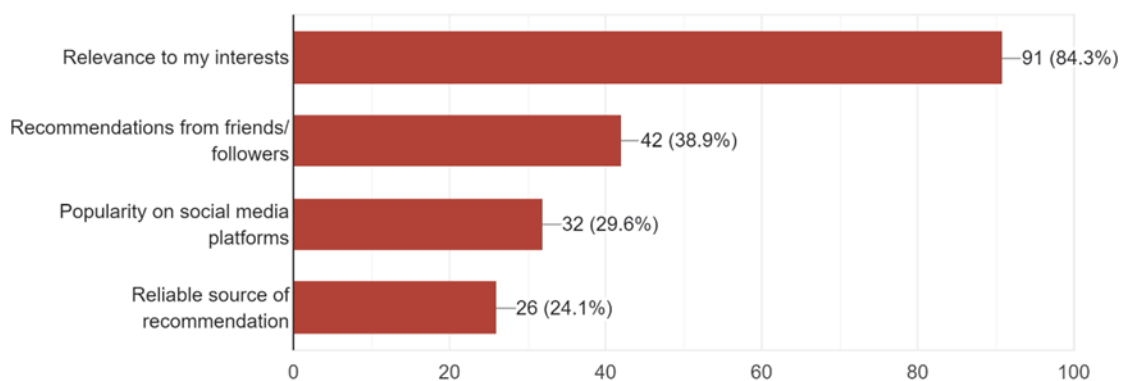
Figure 10: Decision-making factors

13.4 Which of the following factors influence your decision to watch content recommended on social media?

84.3% of the respondents mentioned 'relevance to my interests'. Viewing personalized content is highly preferred among OTT users. Social media platforms and OTT services implement algorithms that provide recommendations according to the viewing history and preferences of the audience. Thus, users depend more on the recommendations they receive that align with their personal viewing tastes. 38.9% of the respondents stated 'recommendations from friends/followers'. Peer recommendations often help in influencing content consumption, creating a network effect where users receive approvals from friends and family members to view particular content recommended via their social circle. On the other hand, 32% of respondents mentioned 'popularity on social media platforms. Popular and trending OTT content is often considered watchable. It generates curiosity among viewers to consume such content to stay updated with the latest viewing trends and conversations. The remaining 26% of respondents stated 'reliable source of information'. OTT content viewers generally look for credible sources before consuming content and hence are more likely to trust information from trustworthy sources, which can influence their content viewing choices.

On average, how much time do you spend on social media platforms daily?
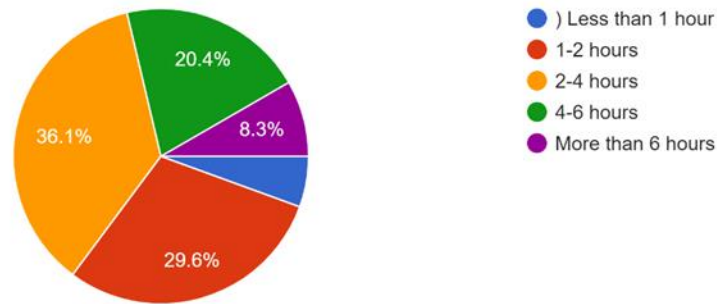108 responses

Figure 11: Time spent on social media platforms

13.5 On average, how much time do you spend on social media platforms daily?

Among the 108 respondents, 36.1% mentioned that they spend their time on social media platforms for 2-4 hours, while 29.6% stated that they spend1-2 hours followed by 20.4% of respondents who spend 4-6 hours and 8.3% spend more than 6 hours on social media regularly. 5.6% mentioned that they hardly spend an hour on social media regularly (Figure 11).

How often do you discover new OTT platforms or content through social media recommendations?
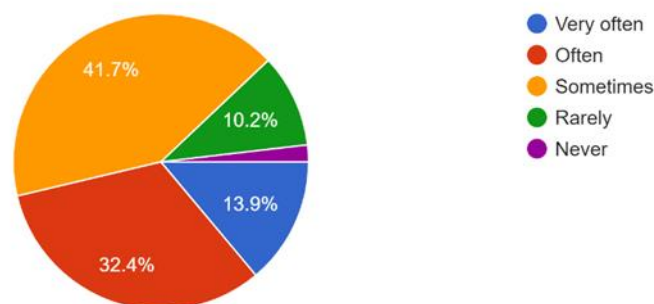108 responses

Figure 12: Content discovery

13.6 How often do you discover new OTT platforms or content through social media recommendations?

41% of respondents mentioned that they receive them sometimes and 32.4% stated that they receive recommendations often. 13.9% of respondents mentioned receiving recommendations very often while 10.2% of respondents stated that they receive recommendations rarely. 1.9% of the respondent population only mentioned the 'never' option (Figure 12).
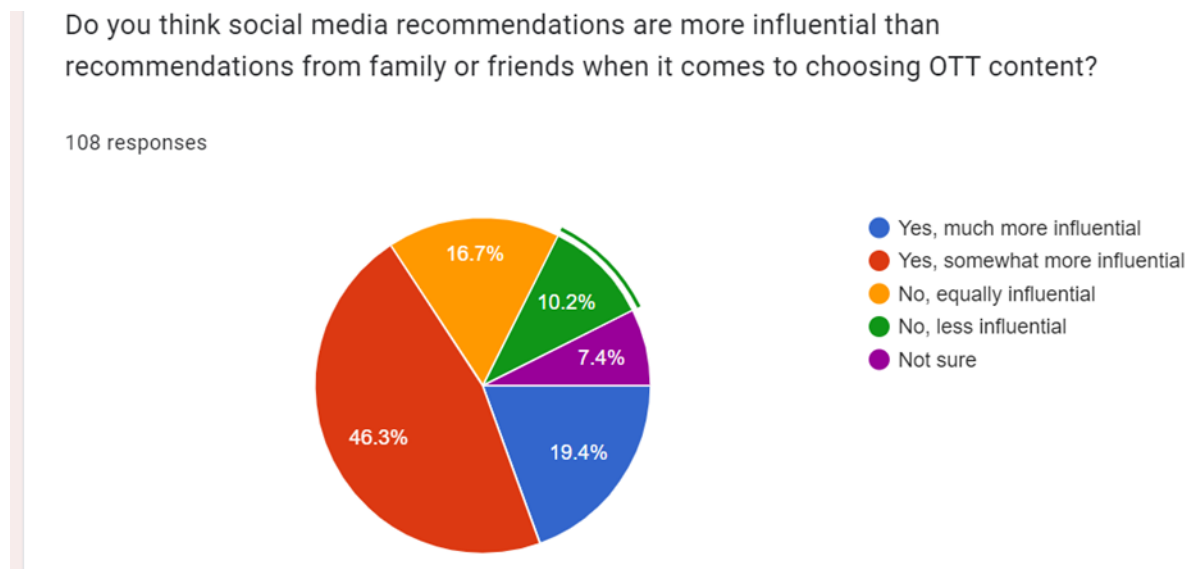

Figure 13: Influence of recommendations

13.7 Do you think social media recommendations are more influential than recommendations from family or friends when it comes to choosing OTT content?

46.3% of respondents stated that social media recommendations are somewhat more influential. 19.4% of respondents mentioned that they are much more influential 16.7% of respondents stated that social media recommendations are equally influential 10.2 % of the

respondents mentioned that the recommendations as 'no, less influential' while 7.4% of respondents stated as 'not sure' (Figure 13).

What types of content do you prefer to watch based on social media recommendations?
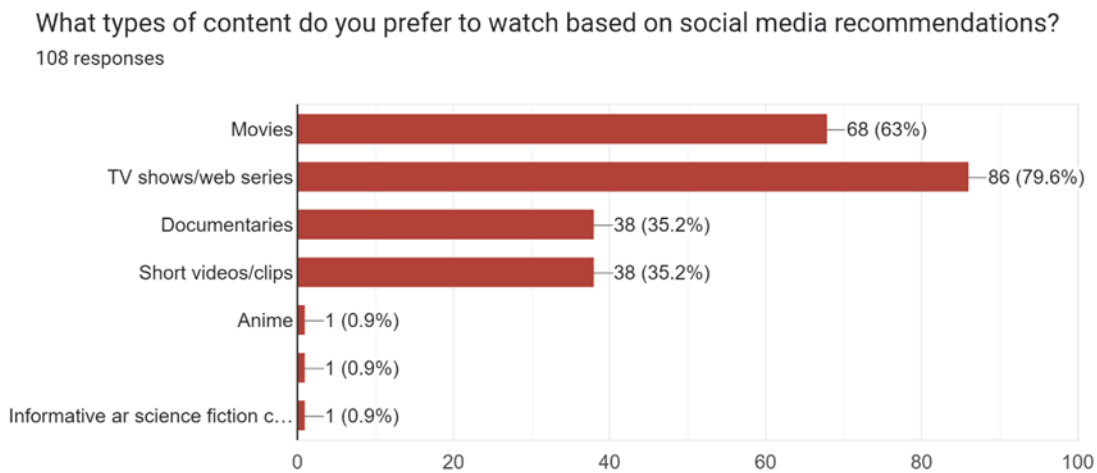108 responses

Figure 14: Preference-based on recommendations

13.8 What types of content do you prefer to watch based on social media recommendations?

86% of the respondents mentioned that they preferred to watch television shows and web series on OTT platforms, followed by 68% who preferred to view movies on OTT. 38% of respondents equally shared their preference for documentaries and short video clips, while the remaining 3% preferred other content (Figure 14).

Have you ever encountered a situation where the content recommended on social media did not match your expectations or interests?
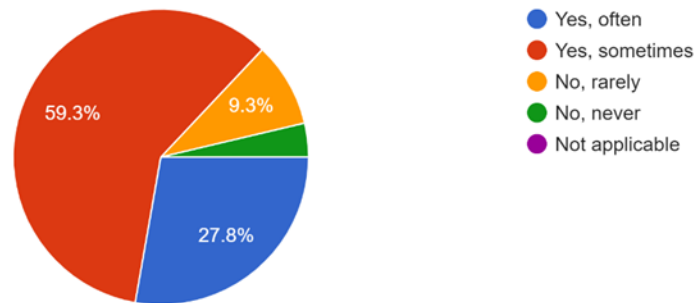
108 responses

Legend:
- ● Yes, often
- ● Yes, sometimes
- ● No, rarely
- ● No, never
- ● Not applicable

Pie chart values: 59.3%, 9.3%, 27.8%

Figure 15: Content recommendation contrast

13.9 Have you ever encountered a situation where the content recommended on social media did not match your expectations or interests?

59.3% of respondents mentioned 'yes, sometimes' they encounter such situations while 27.8% stated 'yes, often'. 9.3% mentioned 'no, rarely' while 3.7% stated 'no, never' (Figure 15).

How likely are you to explore a new OTT platform based solely on social media recommendations?
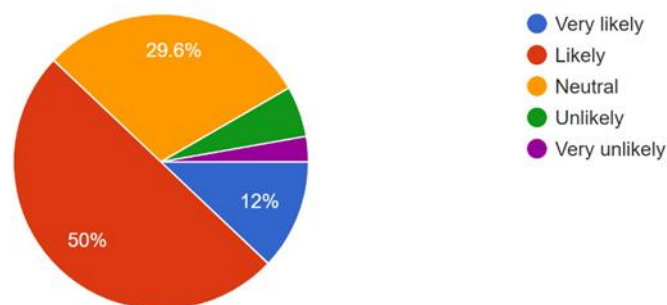
108 responses

Legend:
- ● Very likely
- ● Likely
- ● Neutral
- ● Unlikely
- ● Very unlikely

Pie chart values: 29.6%, 12%, 50%

Figure 16: OTT exploration

13.10 How likely are you to explore a new OTT platform based solely on social media recommendations?

50% of respondents mentioned likely while 29.6% stated to be neutral. 12% mentioned very likely and 6% mentioned unlikely. 3% mentioned very unlikely (Figure 16)

Would you prefer personalized content recommendations on social media based on your viewing history and preferences?
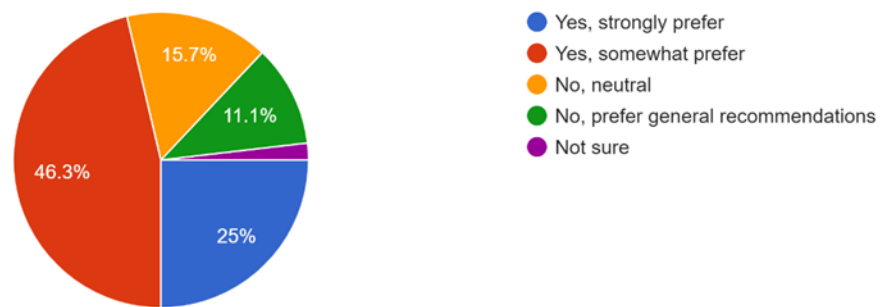108 responses

Figure 17: Content personalization

13.11 Would you prefer personalized content recommendations on social media based on your viewing history and preferences?

46.3% of respondents mentioned 'yes, somewhat prefer' while 25% stated 'yes, strongly prefer'. 15.7% of respondents mentioned it as 'neutral', and 11.1% stated 'no, prefer general recommendations'. 2% of respondents were 'not sure' (Figure 17).

How satisfied are you with the overall quality of content recommended to you on social media for OTT platforms?
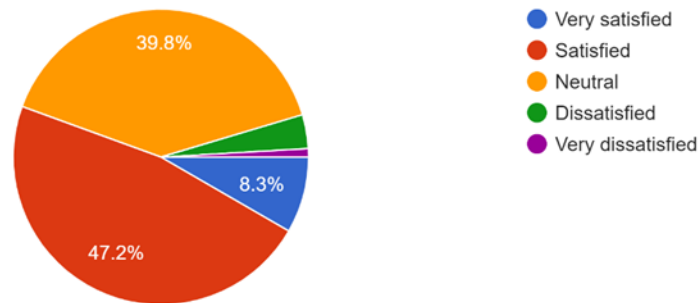
108 responses

Legend:
- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

39.8%
8.3%
47.2%

Figure 18: Content recommendation satisfaction

13.12 How satisfied are you with the overall quality of content recommended to you on social media for OTT platforms?

47.2% of respondents were 'satisfied', 39.8% were neutral and 8.3% were very satisfied. 4% were dissatisfied 1% of respondents fell under the 'very dissatisfied' portion (Figure 18).

14. Findings and conclusion

The findings suggest that a significant proportion of respondents rely on social media recommendations to choose content on OTT platforms and the rest of the other proportion of respondents are often relying on them or relying sometimes. The maximum participation of female respondents in the survey can be attributed to their active internet usage and presence on social media platforms, as well as the cultural shift towards inspiring women to participate in digital activities and encouraging their digital presence. Social media platforms provide OTT content recommendations from influencers, vloggers and film reviewers who promote content, create viewing curiosity and generate online community interactions which significantly influences on the OTT content viewing choices of an individual. Social media

recommendations also help in identifying the niche and trending content and making it simpler for the audience to select their preferred content. Active usage of social media platforms helps in the discovery of new OTT contents and tailor-made recommendations based on the viewing interest of the user and browsing habits further ensures the relevant personalization of content and precise content discovery.

The most influential factor for respondents in deciding to watch content recommended on social media is its relevance to their interests. Recommendations from friends/followers and popularity on social media platforms also play the role of significant deciding factors and depending on a reliable source of information is also kept in mind before the young viewer watches recommended content. A majority of respondents spend around 4 hours on social media platforms regularly and a major part of them believe that social media recommendations are somewhat or much more influential than recommendations from family or friends when it comes to choosing OTT content. Television shows and web series are the most preferred types of content followed by movies, documentaries, and short video clips. Watching serialized content on OTT platforms, especially originals and web series, helps in the development of the plot, narrative, and characters, which garners more interest among viewers. The diverse variety of television content also caters to the viewing tastes of the audience. Movies, on the other hand, have been a significant source of entertainment for many years, and viewers continue to crave them on OTT platforms. Moreover, feature films form a major content category on Bengali OTT platforms, which garners a significant amount of viewership. There has been a growing interest in documentaries due to their informational and educational significance. Meanwhile, short video clips have become increasingly popular with the advent of social media platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, reflecting the rise in preference for quick and simple viewing content.

A significant proportion of respondents have encountered situations where the content recommended on social media did not match their expectations or interests sometimes but half of the respondents are likely to explore a new OTT platform based solely on social media recommendations. A greater part of respondents prefer personalized content recommendations on social media based on their viewing history and preferences and overall, respondents are moderately satisfied with the quality of content recommended to them on social media for OTT platforms. These findings suggest a strong dependence on social media recommendations among youth in West Bengal, with a preference for relevant and personalized content recommendations. However, there is also a notable proportion of respondents who encounter mismatches between recommended content and their interests, indicating potential areas for improvement in recommendation algorithms or content curation strategies.

Limitations of the study:

Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to fully capture the entire youth demographic population of West Bengal, which could have yielded more comprehensive insights into the final results. To further enhance the depth of understanding, beyond utilizing the provided secondary data, incorporating expert interviews with industry professionals could have offered additional and accurate observations. The inclusion of these elements would have further strengthened the validation and reliability of the outcomes, paving the way for more insightful findings in future studies in the same domain.

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