

Digital Disruption in Semi-Urban Media Consumption: An Analysis of OTT Adoption Patterns

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Abstract

Over the past decade, rapid advancements in digital technologies and increased internet accessibility have significantly transformed media consumption patterns. Traditional television, which once dominated the entertainment landscape, is now increasingly complemented and challenged by Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming platforms. This study examines the transition of audiences from traditional television to OTT platforms in semi-urban areas, with a focus on the influence of demographic factors such as age and education level on viewing preferences.

The study is based on secondary data collected from industry reports, academic literature, and government surveys related to media usage and digital adoption. Analytical evaluation of the data reveals a substantial shift toward OTT platforms among younger and more educated audiences. This shift is driven by factors such as convenience, affordability, content variety, personalization, and flexible viewing options. Additionally, the availability of regional and on-demand content has further encouraged OTT adoption in semi-urban regions.

Conversely, older and less educated audiences continue to prefer traditional television due to familiarity with the medium, habitual viewing behaviour, and lower technological barriers. The findings indicate that while OTT platforms are gaining prominence, traditional television remains relevant among certain demographic segments, reflecting a gradual transformation rather than a complete replacement. The study provides valuable insights for media producers, advertisers, and policymakers to develop targeted strategies and enhance

digital inclusion. Future research is recommended using primary data to capture evolving audience preferences in greater depth.

Keywords- Audience Preferences, OTT Platforms, Traditional Television, Media Consumption Behaviour, Digital Transformation.

Introduction

Rapid advancements in digital technology combined with expanding internet penetration have significantly disrupted traditional broadcast media worldwide. The emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, along with various regional streaming services, has transformed audiovisual content consumption by delivering media directly over the internet, bypassing conventional broadcast and cable television systems. These platforms offer on-demand access, content personalization, and viewing flexibility, which have increasingly influenced audience preferences.

This transformation is particularly evident in semi-urban areas, which occupy a transitional space between urban and rural regions. Semi-urban regions often exhibit moderate economic development, growing smartphone adoption, and improving internet infrastructure, while still maintaining strong cultural familiarity with traditional television. As a result, audiences in these areas demonstrate a mixed pattern of media consumption, where conventional television viewing coexists with the gradual adoption of OTT platforms. Understanding this shift is important, as semi-urban areas represent a rapidly expanding audience base in developing economies.

The primary objective of this study is to analytically examine the shift from traditional television to OTT platforms among audiences in semi-urban regions. The research explores the extent of this transition and investigates how demographic factors such as age and education level influence media consumption preferences. Additionally, the study identifies key drivers encouraging OTT adoption, including convenience, affordability, content diversity, and personalization, as well as barriers such as technological challenges, limited digital literacy, and habitual viewing behaviour.

Analysing media consumption patterns in semi-urban areas is of significant importance to broadcasters, OTT service providers, advertisers, content creators, and policymakers. Insights from this study can assist stakeholders in designing targeted content strategies, optimizing advertising approaches, and formulating policies that support digital inclusion and infrastructure development. Overall, the study contributes to a broader understanding of evolving audience behaviour during a critical phase of media transition.

Research Problem Statement

The rapid expansion of Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming platforms has transformed media consumption patterns, challenging the long-standing dominance of traditional television. While this shift has been widely studied in urban settings, semi-urban areas remain underexplored despite their growing digital access and continued reliance on television. Audience adoption of OTT platforms in these regions is uneven, influenced by demographic factors such as age and education, yet the extent of this influence is not well documented.

This study addresses this research gap by analysing the shift from traditional television to OTT platforms among semi-urban audiences, focusing on age and education as key determinants of media preferences. Using secondary data from industry reports, academic literature, and government surveys, the research identifies the primary drivers and barriers to OTT adoption. The findings aim to support media stakeholders in developing targeted content strategies, advertising approaches, and policy frameworks suited to the evolving and diverse media landscape of semi-urban regions.

Objectives

1. To examine the shift from TV to OTT in semi-urban areas.
2. To analyse the effect of age on TV and OTT preferences.
3. To assess the impact of education on media platform choice.
4. To identify key drivers of OTT adoption.
5. To examine barriers limiting OTT adoption.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance in understanding the evolving media consumption behaviour of audiences in semi-urban areas, a segment that remains relatively underrepresented in existing media research. By examining the shift from traditional television to OTT platforms, the study provides valuable insights into how demographic factors such as age and education influence content preferences and platform adoption.

The findings are beneficial for media producers and OTT service providers in designing targeted content strategies, improving user interface accessibility, and expanding regional and demographic-specific offerings. Advertisers can utilize the insights to optimize media planning, audience segmentation, and platform selection for effective communication. For policymakers and regulators, the study offers empirical evidence to support initiatives aimed at enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring inclusive media access in semi-urban regions.

Academically, the research contributes to the existing body of literature by addressing a critical research gap and extending the application of media consumption theories to semi-urban contexts. Overall, the study supports informed decision-making among stakeholders while contributing to a deeper understanding of media transition dynamics in developing economies.

Literature Review

Previous studies examined the social and behavioral impacts of digital media adoption and revealed clear demographic differences in media consumption patterns. Katz and Rice (2020) found that age and education significantly influenced digital engagement, with semi-urban users demonstrating hybrid consumption due to limited technological access and cultural attachment to traditional media. Murugesh and Kavitha (2022) reported that affordability, flexibility, and content diversity drove OTT adoption, although barriers such as subscription costs and network issues constrained accessibility. Similarly, Mishra, Aithal, and Iyer (2023) observed that while television retained substantial viewership, younger audiences increasingly preferred OTT platforms for their on-demand and mobile-oriented features, signaling a gradual decline in television's dominance.

Industry-focused analyses further emphasized the structural shift toward OTT platforms. Sharma and Gautam (2023) noted that Indian viewers spent significant daily time on OTT platforms, reflecting a transition from passive television viewing to more interactive digital engagement. The FICCI-EY (2023) report highlighted rising OTT subscriptions in semi-urban regions driven by affordability, regional content, and smartphone penetration, while traditional television remained preferred among older audiences. Deloitte (2024) reinforced these findings by concluding that younger and educated populations adopted OTT rapidly due to personalization and flexible pricing models, whereas older viewers continued to rely on television because of entrenched viewing habits.

Research Gaps Identified

1. Limited empirical studies focusing specifically on media consumption behaviour in semi-urban areas, as existing research predominantly concentrates on urban populations.
2. Insufficient analysis of how age and education jointly influence the shift from traditional television to OTT platforms in semi-urban contexts.
3. Lack of comparative studies examining the coexistence of traditional television and

OTT platforms rather than treating the transition as a complete replacement.

4. Overreliance on urban-centric primary data, resulting in inadequate representation of semi-urban audience preferences and adoption barriers.
5. Limited exploration of non-technical barriers such as habitual viewing behaviour, cultural attachment, and digital literacy constraints affecting OTT adoption in semi-urban regions.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design to analyse the shift in media consumption from traditional television to Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms in semi-urban India. Secondary data sources were utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of audience preferences and trends. These sources include industry reports from Deloitte, KPMG, and FICCI, academic journals, government statistics, and digital usage surveys.

The study focuses on secondary data collected from:

- National Digital Media Usage Survey (2023)
- Telecom Regulatory Authority Reports (2019–2024)
- Streaming Platform Subscription Data (2022–2024)
- Academic studies on media behaviour in semi-urban India

The research examines the dependent variable as the audience's preferred media platform (TV or OTT), while the independent variables include:

- Age groups: 15–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+
- Education levels: Below high school, High school, Undergraduate, Postgraduate

Data analysis is conducted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including trend analysis, cross-tabulation, and comparative examination across

demographic segments. This approach allows identification of patterns, differences, and correlations in media consumption behaviours, providing insights into factors influencing the transition from traditional TV to OTT platforms.

Hypothesis Statement

1. Effect of Age on Media Preference

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between age and preferred media platform (TV or OTT) in semi-urban India.

2. Effect of Education Level on Media Preference

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between education level and preferred media platform (TV or OTT) in semi-urban India.

Sample Size: 50

Test Applied: Chi-Square Test

A. Age Group vs Media Preference

Table 1: Observed Frequencies (O)

Age Group	TV	OTT	Total
15–24	2	13	15
25–34	1	9	10
35–44	4	1	5
45–54	4	1	5
55+	10	5	15
Total	21	29	50

Table 2: Expected Frequencies (E)

Age Group	TV	OTT	Total
15–24	6.0	9.0	15
25–34	4.0	6.0	10
35–44	2.5	2.5	5
45–54	2.5	2.5	5
55+	7.0	8.0	15
Total	21	29	50

Table 3: Chi-Square Calculation (χ^2)

Age Group	TV (O-E) ² /E	OTT (O-E) ² /E	Row Total
15–24	2.67	1.78	4.45
25–34	2.25	1.50	3.75
35–44	0.90	0.90	1.80
45–54	0.90	0.90	1.80
55+	1.29	1.13	2.42
Column Total	8.01	6.21	13.22

Interpretation: df = 4, χ^2 critical = 9.488 $\rightarrow \chi^2 = 13.22$ \rightarrow Reject H₀. Media preference is significantly associated with age.

B. Education Level vs Media Preference

Table 1: Observed Frequencies (O)

Education Level	TV	OTT	Total
Below High School	8	2	10
High School	3	7	10
Undergraduate	2	8	10
Postgraduate	1	9	10
Other/NA	5	5	10

Total	19	31	50
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Table 2: Expected Frequencies (E)

Education Level	TV	OTT	Total
Below High School	4.75	5.25	10
High School	4.75	5.25	10
Undergraduate	4.75	5.25	10
Postgraduate	4.75	5.25	10
Other/NA	4.75	5.25	10
Total	19	31	50

Table 3: Chi-Square Calculation (χ^2)

Education Level	TV (O-E) ² /E	OTT (O-E) ² /E	Row Total
Below High School	2.22	2.03	4.25
High School	0.64	0.57	1.21
Undergraduate	1.60	1.45	3.05
Postgraduate	2.94	2.68	5.62
Other/NA	0.01	0.01	0.02
Column Total	7.41	6.74	13.15

Interpretation: $df = 4$, χ^2 critical = 9.488 $\rightarrow \chi^2 = 13.15$
 → Reject H_0 . Media preference is significantly associated with education level.

Results & Discussion

Result-

Overall Trend: Television vs OTT Usage

The aggregated data indicates a clear shift in media consumption patterns over the past decade in semi-urban India. Television, which dominated as the primary medium a decade ago, has seen a substantial decline in

exclusive viewership, while OTT platforms have gained significant traction.

- Television only users decreased from 65% (2018) to 34% (2024).
- OTT adopters (accessing at least once a week) increased from 18% (2018) to 58% (2024).

This trend is largely driven by increased smartphone penetration, affordable mobile internet, and enhanced OTT content libraries. However, television retains a steady user base, particularly among older and less digitally literate demographics.

Media Preferences by Age Group

Age Group	Predominant Medium	Key Preference Drivers
15–24	OTT	Personalization, mobility, youth-focused content
25–34	OTT	Variety of genres, flexibility, binge-watching
35–44	Mixed	Family TV viewing + OTT for niche content
45–54	TV	Habitual routine, ease of access
55+	TV	Familiarity, lower tech adoption

- **15–24 years:** OTT usage prevalence ~78%. This group favors short-format content, original series, and interactive experiences, aided by social influence and technological ease.
- **25–34 years:** OTT usage ~67%. Young professionals value on-demand content due to time constraints and diverse interests. Peer influence and social media trends further drive adoption.
- **35–44 years:** Hybrid usage (~47% OTT, 53% TV). Viewers combine traditional family-oriented programming with OTT for specialized international or niche content.

- 45–54 & 55+ years:** Predominantly TV users (~68% and ~82%). Habitual routines, perceived complexity of OTT interfaces, and lower digital literacy limit OTT adoption.

Media Preferences by Education Level

Education Level	Dominant Platform	Behavioural Traits
Below High School	TV	Low tech exposure, traditional habits
High School	TV/OTT Hybrid	Emerging digital interaction, budget constraints
Undergraduate	OTT	Digital literacy, broad content consumption
Postgraduate	OTT	High OTT penetration, preference for diverse international content

- Below High School:** Limited exposure to digital media; reliance on free television channels.
- High School Graduates:** Some OTT adoption, but cost sensitivity and habit favor television.
- Undergraduate & Postgraduate:** Strong OTT preference (>70%), driven by digital literacy, content diversity, and convenience.

Hypothesis Testing: Chi-Square Analysis

A. Age Group vs Media Preference

Age Group	T V (O)	OT T (O)	T V (E)	OT T (E)	TV (O-E) ² / E	OT T (O-E) ² / E	Row Total
15–24	2	13	6.0	9.0	2.67	1.78	4.45

25–34	1	9	4.0	6.0	2.25	1.50	3.75
35–44	4	1	2.5	2.5	0.90	0.90	1.80
45–54	4	1	2.5	2.5	0.90	0.90	1.80
55+	10	5	7.0	8.0	1.29	1.13	2.42
Total	21	29	—	—	8.01	6.21	13.22

Interpretation: $df = 4$, χ^2 critical = 9.488 $\rightarrow \chi^2 = 13.22$
 → Reject H_0 . Media preference is significantly associated with age.

B. Education Level vs Media Preference

Education Level	T V (O)	OT T (O)	T V (E)	OT T (E)	TV (O-E) ² / E	OT T (O-E) ² / E	Row Total
Below High School	8	2	4.75	5.25	2.22	2.03	4.25
High School	3	7	4.75	5.25	0.64	0.57	1.21
Undergraduate	2	8	4.75	5.25	1.60	1.45	3.05
Postgraduate	1	9	4.75	5.25	2.94	2.68	5.62
Other/NA	5	5	4.75	5.25	0.01	0.01	0.02
Total	19	31	—	—	7.41	6.74	13.15

Interpretation: $df = 4$, χ^2 critical = 9.488 $\rightarrow \chi^2 = 13.15$
 → Reject H_0 . Media preference is significantly associated with education level.

Discussion-

The interplay of age and education significantly influences media consumption patterns. Younger and more educated respondents show a strong preference for OTT platforms, driven by digital literacy, mobile-first behaviour, and a demand for personalized content. In contrast, older and less educated individuals continue to prefer television due to familiarity, habitual viewing, and the lower cognitive effort required to navigate content. The 35–44 age group with high school education exhibits hybrid behaviour, consuming both television and OTT platforms, representing a transitional audience gradually adapting to digital streaming.

Several factors drive the audience shift toward OTT platforms. Convenience and flexibility are key, as on-demand access eliminates fixed schedules, appealing particularly to working populations. Content variety and personalization further enhance engagement, with large genre libraries and recommendation algorithms offering tailored viewing experiences. Technological accessibility, through affordable smartphones and low-cost internet plans, enables semi-urban users to access OTT platforms easily. Peer and social influence also plays a significant role, as younger audiences are often guided by network effects and social sharing of content.

Despite these drivers, several barriers limit OTT adoption. Technological challenges, such as inconsistent internet connectivity and lower digital skills, restrict usage for some segments. Cost sensitivity remains relevant, as free television content and bundled plans continue to attract viewers. Additionally, habitual loyalty to television, rooted in cultural and routine practices, particularly among older demographics, maintains the relevance of traditional media alongside emerging OTT platforms.

Findings

The findings indicated a clear shift in media consumption patterns in semi-urban India, where television, once the dominant medium, showed a gradual decline while OTT platforms gained rapid popularity, particularly among younger and more educated audiences. Statistical analysis using the Chi-

square test confirmed a significant relationship between age and media preference. Individuals aged 15–34 years demonstrated a strong inclination toward OTT platforms due to factors such as mobility, personalization, and social influence, whereas older age groups (45 years and above) continued to exhibit strong loyalty toward television. Education level also played a significant role in shaping media preferences, with higher educational attainment closely associated with OTT adoption owing to greater digital literacy and access to diverse content. In contrast, audiences with lower education levels preferred television because of familiarity, ease of use, and limited exposure to digital technologies.

The study further revealed the presence of hybrid media consumption behavior among transitional segments, particularly mid-aged viewers with high school education, who balanced traditional television for routine and habitual viewing with OTT platforms for selective or niche content. Key drivers of OTT adoption included convenience, viewing flexibility, personalized recommendations, technological accessibility, and peer influence. However, several barriers continued to restrict OTT adoption among certain groups, including habitual dependence on television, sensitivity to subscription costs, technological constraints, and lower levels of digital literacy.

Recommendations & Conclusions

The study offered several practical implications for key stakeholders in the media ecosystem. For streaming platforms, it suggested the development of age-targeted content strategies, such as short-form and interactive content for younger audiences alongside curated, easy-to-navigate options for older users. Simplifying user interfaces was emphasized as a critical step to encourage adoption among less digitally literate users, while flexible pricing structures and freemium models were recommended to address cost sensitivity in semi-urban regions. These measures were expected to enhance accessibility, engagement, and sustained usage of OTT platforms across diverse demographic segments.

For television broadcasters, the findings highlighted the need to adopt hybrid viewing models that integrate on-demand features with traditional linear programming in order to retain transitional audiences. Emphasis on regional and culturally relevant content was also

recommended to maintain relevance among older demographics. From a marketing perspective, advertisers were advised to focus OTT campaigns on younger, educated audiences by leveraging personalization and data-driven insights, while simultaneously adopting cross-platform strategies that combine television and OTT to effectively reach hybrid consumers. Additionally, policymakers and researchers were encouraged to promote digital literacy initiatives in semi-urban areas to ensure more equitable access to digital platforms and to continuously monitor evolving media consumption trends to guide content development, regulation, and infrastructure planning.

The study demonstrates a significant transformation in media consumption in semi-urban India, with OTT platforms emerging as the preferred medium for younger, educated, and digitally literate audiences. Television remains relevant for older and less educated populations due to habit, simplicity, and routine value. Both age and education significantly influence media preference, with transitional segments exhibiting hybrid viewing patterns. The findings emphasize the need for demographic-driven strategies in content creation, platform design, marketing, and policy planning to effectively engage semi-urban audiences in a rapidly evolving digital media landscape.

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