

WHAT MILLENNIALS ARE WATCHING? AN ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL CONTENT CONSUMPTION IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The millennium era has created new horizons in the Indian entertainment landscape. A new segment of the generation cohort is born-The Millennials. Popularly known for their tech-savviness, carefree and high-risk takers, their entertainment and leisure perception is far beyond impossible to imagine. They are born in an era of the World Wide Web-where Internet and smartphone have become their addiction. The advent of globalization has witnessed the rise of smartphone penetration and high-speed broadband connectivity. Millennials are exposed to diverse, engaging, accessible, and rich digital content. They have access to superlative path-breaking digital services and products like mobile applications, video, and music streaming platforms. This has posed a massive challenge for digital content creation companies to focus on innovative entertainment storytelling techniques (Dimock, 2019).

Mendez and Mohedano (2017) dealt with how Spanish university students use their smartphones for their daily and audio-visual product consumption. The paper revealed that an average university student uses both study and leisure. It also revealed that there are discrepancies in terms of consumption in 4G mobile networks. There seems to have tendencies toward intensive video consumption. Music video clips and micro videos are used for visualization. Vivitsou (2017) attempted to examine Finnish and Greek students' different digital storytelling practices. They created an imagery identity, analyzed digital stories' different themes and subtitles, and added their comments to their peers. They had to view digital stories through different combinations of analytical techniques. In the case of multiple event stories, the focus is laid on human relationships through a more personal body language. While in the case of single event stories, they adopt a more practical approach to explain how things happen. It concluded that digital stories present different themes in a serial form. The objectives of the study explore the different genres of digital content consumption among millennials and examine the digital content consumption patterns between television viewers and digital platform subscribers with context to millennials.

METHODOLOGY

The research paper is qualitative and descriptive, where data collection was based on in-depth interviews of a select random sampling of 40 millennials in the age group of 15-22 years. The research primarily focuses on content analysis based on secondary data like blogs, websites, and media news portals. Based on an open-ended questionnaire and observation, the researcher opted for descriptive analytical techniques to discover the content consumption of television viewers and digital subscribers.

Part A of the research paper deals with the introduction to the concept of millennials and what makes them different from Gen-X & Gen Y in terms of digital content consumption. Part B of the paper deals with different aspects of digital content watched popularly by millennials. In terms of Millennials: What makes them different from Gen-X and Gen-Y?, Technology has been a vital force for defining and structuring generational lines. The term '*millennial*' has been expressed differently based on the year of birth or age for attaining adulthood during the Millennium era. Pew Research Centre has redefined the cut-off point constructively for the Millennials and Post Millennials for birth years. Defined that the Millennial refers to anyone born between 1981 and 1996. This means the age groups shall fall into adulthood between 23 to 38 years as of 2018. In terms of technology usage, the millennials belong to an era where the World Wide Web has been part and parcel of their lives. In terms of Millennials' personality traits at Entertainment and Leisure, Millennials are gifted with unique personality traits from the way they perceive entertainment and leisure. Says ambitious Sharma, a 17-year-old YouTuber, "I am a hard-core social media addict. I ensure that I upgrade my new smartphone every year. I cannot imagine my life without being addicted to Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. I am hyper-active in experimenting wide range of social media time-pass contents like blogs, podcasts and vlogs." In terms of Millennials' Television Viewing Habits, With the arrival of youth-centric television channels, millennials are drifting away from traditional programming content like reality shows or soap operas to diverse forms of online digital entertainment. Shrutika Sawle--19-year-old filmmaking student, stopped watching television five years ago when she was in Class Eleven. Reasons for her right decision, "Television content was limited to boring and repetitive television shows, episodes and movies. With each passing day, it has become lacklustre as there were repetitive episodes. Whether it was movies or travel shows, they had the same old content being broadcasted in regular intervals. Strangely on Hindi Bollywood movies channels, they were South Indian movies dubbed in Hindi. After that, I switched to erstwhile banned video streaming site Torrents and watched all my favourite movies."

She further said, "In the contemporary context, I have ample freedom to watch any favourite sitcoms, thrillers, and classics even at midnight, for which television channels do not. The USP of watching online is that you watch uncensored content, which is the weird trait of every millennial like me." According to the YouGov-Mint Millennial Survey conducted in 2018 to understand the behavioural preferences of digital natives, "Social Media networking platforms are proliferating big time among millennials. Around 34 percent of millennials and post-millennials depend primarily on news apps and websites. Interestingly, 48 percent share of the millennials watch online entertainment." In terms of Millennials and Rise of Video Streaming Platforms, over the last few years, over thirty video platforms have been launched in India. Practically, all media and entertainment broadcast and content production firms have set up a subscription and advertising-based video streaming platforms with over 100 million subscribers. The famous Indian video streaming platforms are Alt Balaji (Balaji Telefilms), Zee5 (Zee Enterprises), Hotstar (Star Corporation) Sony Liv (Sony Corporation) and much more. In terms of Millennials and YouTube Obsession, What is precisely driving millennials to log on to YouTube? An exciting survey finding on video content engagement by ComScore and YouTube identified that the millennials in the age group of 18-34 years are highly engaged and loyal YouTube users. They exhibit different viewing habits about watching on YouTube; Millennials (35 percent) consider YouTube for digital video consumption, both live and time-shifted, Millennials opted for YouTube as their first video destination of choice. One in eight millennials prefers to watch current season television shows. Regarding YouTube preference

content type, 79 percent of millennials prefer to watch videos uploaded by people, followed by brands, companies, and institutions (74 percent). One of the leading online video production companies—Contagious Online Media Limited of the popular YouTube Channel—The Viral Fever fame has started a lifestyle YouTube Channel—The Timeliners. It is a millennial focussed lifestyle channel with over 5.7 million subscribers, which traces different stories on the day-to-day millennials' way of life. Webisodes like *Flames*, *The Royal Palate*, *Stags*, and *Just Indian Things* focus on millennials with the quirkiness of Indian society. In terms of the Dominance of Mobile App Consumption, according to the survey findings by MoMagic—a data science-driven company- India is the largest market in mobile applications by app downloads. The majority of millennials consume this digital content. It is the foodies, fashionistas, and travellers that drive the millennials crazy. The average app usage time has increased phenomenally. Interestingly, more than half of the Indian millennials prefer watching online entertainment on OTT apps.

Part B of the research paper deal with different aspects of digital content watched popularly by millennials and discuss as follows. In terms of Novel, Bold and Engaging Storylines, censorship norms predominately control film and television storylines. However, in the case of digital content, filmmakers have ample scope to express their emotions, creativity, and storylines. Hence, the millennials are open to bold, fresh and engaging storylines in fiction and non-fiction storytelling formats. This could be to the extent of themes ranging from relationships, sex, love, gay communities, sitcoms, travelogues, thrillers, and out-of-the-world documentaries. Millennials are mature enough to defy all societal norms regarding provocative and objectionable content. In terms of Web-series - Variety is the Spice, webisodes, popularly known as web series are a rage among millennials. Says Ronan Nagpal, a 23-year-old web-series viewer, “Web-series offers refreshing experiential entertainment. What is more intriguing is that every webisode has a suspense and thrilling climax which connects every contemporary millennial lifestyle.” In India, web-series thrillers like *Sacred Games*, *Inside Edge*, and *Lust Stories* have earned critical acclaim worldwide. Interestingly, the Indian web series has a lot to offer in terms of loud language and semiotics. For example, ‘*Pitchers*’ subject is on business and economics, ‘*Fours More Shots Please*’ focuses on modern-day relationships, and ‘*Little Things*’ touches upon the lifestyle of a millennial when he chooses to make Mumbai his dream city to attain stardom. For instance, *Sacred Games*, directed by Anurag Kashyap, is the film adaption based on Vikram Chandra's novel; the plot is set in Mumbai. The eight-part webisodes highlighted how the power of crime, corruption, and political influences the underneath of India's financial reawakening. It is a story of Sartaj Singh—A vexed police inspector who receives a call from a gangster Ganesh Gaitonde—who has been missing for over 15 years. It is an epic masterwork of rich and famous that deals with rich and influential classes of people. In terms of Stand-Up Comedies: An Infotainment Food for Thought, India is a country where there is marvelous talent in stand-up comedies. Indian Stand-up comedians like Zakir Khan, Vir Das, Kenny Sebastian, Sapan Varma, and many others have reached international heights. Comedy groups like All India Bakchod (AIB) and The Viral Fever (TVF) on YouTube Channels have a few million followers on video-sharing sites.

Thus, what tickles the funny bones of the millennials today? Says an 18-year-old hard-core stand-up comedy fan, Mohit Bajaj, “After my Class Ten examination, monotony hit me when I surfed YouTube to watch real entertaining stuff. One day, I glanced through the comedy clip of Abish Mathew, which changed my outlook on stand-up comedy forever. Loud prime-time

debates are a *passé* for me. Besides the funny bone element, comedians express honesty, which is relatable in our day-to-day lives.” Mohit further stated, “Most stand-up comedies are hilarious and informative. For example, mental illness is one subject no one dares to express openly, even though it is a silent killer. In his popular show ‘*Shadows*’ on YouTube, Comedian Daniel Fernandez deals with mental illness by interacting with patients in a soothing environment. At the same time, he times his dialogues so that people lucidly connect their perspective.” In terms of Gaming Videos: Cult in the making, Digital gaming is the next in-thing with the newly arrived generation. According to the first edition of the Indian Millennial Gaming Report, every gamer is below is under 24 years of age. At the same time, the vast majority are glued to their digital games for over 30 hours a month, as against 90 minutes for shopping.

What is fascinating is that the new gaming technologies like Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality have taken the Indian millennials by storm. The classic illustration to prove this case example is PUBG and Pokémon Go.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study could be concluded as follows; technology is the vital force that has redefined millennials' new digital content consumption patterns, and social media addiction is what millennials are living in the moment. Hence, viewing short clippings online or posting a status or two on social media networking sites is their regular activity, there is a structural shift from television viewership to digital consumption patterns across all age groups, Digital consumption is a more personalized and interactive medium, Emerging genres of digital content are web series, documentary series, stand-up comedies, and gaming videos are popular among millennials, Millennials are open to bold and contemporary compared to Indian *saas-bahu* operas and reality shows variety is the spice of life—it is the millennial's new mantra for watching fresh content. Millennials prefer to stay abreast with the latest happenings and issues through stand-up comedies and fictional web series. The researcher concludes that future areas of research should emphasize in-depth each digital content in detail through a series of accurate life content and its comparative analysis.

Keywords: Digital content, digital consumption, entertainment storytelling, millennials, video streaming platforms

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