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Use of violence and sexual content in the promotion of Crime web series in India: mix method to understand the marketing strategy and its effects

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Abstract

Crime and violence as a genre have always been popular in Hindi Film and Entertainment Industry. The Internet era and especially the pandemic has popularized with it all the social media entertainment platforms. Channels like YouTube along with other OTT Platforms are offering services where short films, films and web series are easily accessible in the comfort and safety of home. When it comes to OTT platforms crime web series popularity and craze are increasing day by day. Trailers of these websites play a very important role when it comes to the promotion and decision by the viewers to watch a series. The following paper is a content analysis of the trailers of the top 10 websites in India. The content of these trailers is studied to understand the strategy that is adopted in designing and presenting these trailers in order to capture and increase the reach. The finding about the content is presented according to the various categories of narratives and styles. A focus group discussion and a survey of (n=321) are also conducted to understand the effect these crime series are having on the views. The finding shows the use of crime and violence in the trailer correlated to the web series watching decisions of viewers. The focus group discussion added a qualitative aspect to the study which provided the viewer's perspective on the trailers of these crime series.

Keywords

Crime Web Series, OTT Platforms, Trailers, Focus Group, Marketing Strategy, content analysis

Introduction

The popularity of OTT platforms in India is quite evident and the popularity is highest when it comes to crime-related web series in India which is increasing day by day. Content and its presentation is a big factor when it comes to the popularity of these series but apart from these two factors how the consumers of these OTT platforms are targeted where these series are showcased is also a very important factor. It becomes very important to study how these Marketing gurus who are promoting these OTT platforms are targeting the audience to catch hold of the attention of the target audience so that they could be hooked to these series.

Crime as a genre is very popular in India. Observing the 2021 December IMBD Rating one can find out the Indian series that are high on the list either are crime based or they are a thriller. Series like 'Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story' with a rating of 9.5 out of 10, Illegal Justice-Out of Order with a rating of 8.3, Special Ops 1.5: The Himmat Story and Special OPS with a rating of 8.6, Mirzapur with a rating of 8.3 to name a few (IMBD, 2021). Statistics from Ernst & Young report show that there has been a mind-blowing boost in the business of digital subscriptions of these OTT Platforms i.e., a growth of 49%. And

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another fact that was presented by Ormax Media that was presented them by a survey makes it clear that web series are watched more and are more popular in comparison to movies or other content that is present on these OTT platforms (Bhuyan, 2021).

Trailers are a very effective way of promoting films and nowadays they are also used by the web series of these OTT Platforms. You can see these Trailers not only on these OTT platforms which it is free to watch. But they are promoted highly on alternate social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook etc. You can also see trailers as part of advertising on television and their audio form of advertising on FM Radio. Trailers and their effectiveness in grabbing the attention of the target audience have been used a lot when it comes to film promotion and marketing.

Through the following paper, an attempt was made to study the trailers of crime-based web series. It was studied by the research through content analysis the use of sex and violence used in the trailers of these series for promotion and the effects were studied through the survey and focus group discussion held. It also tried to explore how these trailers are promoted across social media.

Trailers and Promotion

Film trailers have always been a main part of Film promotion and marketing strategy of Movies and soap operas. These Trailers act as a small window that drags audiences to the cinema theatres or television to view the entire film or soap opera episodes. Film trailers are popularly known as previews. A trailer presents the series or a film in 2-3 minutes i.e., the entire storyline is presented in a creative way in order audience is attracted to see the full film/soap opera. The same principle is also applicable to the Web series that we see on OTT Platforms now a day.

Potential viewers' curiosity can be piqued effectively by using trailers. They offer a behind-the-scenes look at the plot, protagonists, and tone of the show. Trailers can create intrigue and excitement, enticing viewers to watch the series by carefully choosing compelling scenes and crafting an engaging narrative. Researches show that after seeing a trailer what convinces a consumer is a mix of internal and external factors i.e., the psychology of the consumer which included personality and the social environment of the person and the influence they have also is counted (Babin & Harris, 2012).

Promoting crime-based web series requires a variety of strategies, including teasers, posters, social media campaigns, and interviews. They aid in spreading awareness of the upcoming series, its distinctive qualities, and the talent involved. Effective promotion makes sure that the show stands out from the vast selection of other content, increasing its visibility and potential audience (Anon, n.d.).

A carefully crafted trailer and a clever promotional campaign can build interest among the audience. The promotional material creates suspense and anticipation by hinting at important plot points, introducing intriguing characters, or emphasizing unexpected twists, making viewers eagerly anticipate the premiere of the series. Criminal-themed web series can stand out from the crowd in the increasingly competitive digital landscape thanks to trailers and marketing initiatives. These marketing strategies can set the series apart from its rivals and draw in viewers by using cutting-edge and imaginative techniques like distinctive visual styles, catchy taglines, or interesting social media campaigns (Rashmi and S Sood, 2021) (Sundaravel & Elangovan, 2020).

Effective marketing campaigns and trailers entice viewers to interact with the content creators, have conversations, and post about their excitement on social media. This increased engagement, which not only makes the series more visible but also encourages a sense of community and anticipation among viewers, is ultimately responsible for the series' success. How many people who subscribe to the streaming services that host the web series is directly impacted by its promotion? The platform's revenue from subscriptions, views, and engagement can be increased by attracting new viewers and persuading current viewers to check out the crime-based series. Promotional initiatives aid in building the crime-themed web series' brand identity. The marketing collateral aids in developing a distinctive brand image, making the series memorable and recognizable to the audience through consistent messaging, visual appeal, and original storytelling techniques (Habib et al., 2022).

The marketing and promotion of crime-based web series in India must include promotional campaigns and trailers. They are essential for a variety of purposes, including establishing a brand identity, raising awareness, fostering anticipation, standing out from rivals, and increasing viewer engagement. These techniques are used by content producers and streaming services to successfully promote and present their series, which ultimately helps to increase its success and popularity with viewers.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Film Trailers: Film Trailers are made with the expectation to promote the commodity which is a Film, Soap Opera or web series etc. to the audience. The main objective of this promotion activity which could come under advertisement is to convince the audience to buy tickets, subscribe to a particular DTH Channel or to subscribe a particular OTT platform etc. The main objective is to sell the experience of entertainment that could be purchased in different forms. Here the selling is happening in an indirect, creative manner by providing a glimpse of the whole entertainment commodity to be sold (Greene, 2012).

Elaboration Likelihood Model: The proposed research incorporates the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as a key perspective for understanding the persuasion process involved in the audience's decision to watch crime web series based on the trailers' content. The Elaboration Likelihood Model, which Petty and Cacioppo developed in 1986, is one of the most widely recognised communication models of persuasion. This model proposes two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route (J. Kitchen et al., 2014)

In this proposed research, a study is being done to entice the audience by serving content like sex and violence in the trailer of crime web series, in which watching the web series influenced by the trailer and Using the Elaboration likelihood method to measure the scales of the needs of depicting sex and violence., Using of this theory defines the audience's choice to watch the web series based on the content presented in the trailer. As the related approach analyzes the selection of the audience in two ways, Central and Peripheral, in the first type is where the viewer looks at the subject matter seriously, satisfies their objective, develops understanding then establishes a decision to watch the web series or not. On the other hand, under the peripheral model, the audience would make up their mind because someone suggested it or seemed attracted. By applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the research aims to establish a relationship between the persuasive strategies employed in the promotional trailers and the audience's cognitive processing routes, i.e., central and peripheral routes. This will provide insights into how the content presented in the trailers influences the audience's choice to engage with crime web series and how persuasion operates through these different routes (Li, 2018).

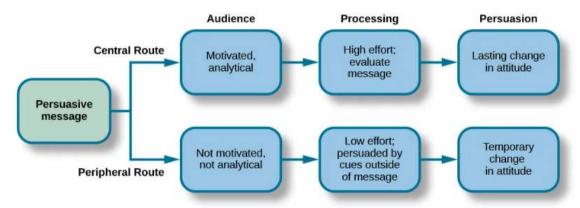


Figure 1: Elaboration Likelihood Model

Uses and Gratification Theory: The theoretical framework for the research incorporates the Use and Gratification Theory as a foundational concept. This theory provides a lens through which to analyze the motivations and effects of consuming media content, specifically crime web series, that employ violence and sexual content as part of their marketing strategies. The Use and Gratification Theory posits that individuals actively seek out and select media content to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. It emphasizes the audience's active role in choosing media and suggests that people use media for various purposes such as information, entertainment, social interaction, personal identity, and escape. This theory focuses on the psychological and social motives underlying media consumption and acknowledges that individuals have different needs and desires that they aim to satisfy through media usage (Ahad & Anshari, 2017)

The idea contends that people utilise media for a wide range of needs and motives, including entertainment, information, interpersonal interactions, and escapism, and that these needs and motivations influence the choice and consumption of media. The marketing strategy refers to the deliberate planning and implementation of techniques and tactics to promote and attract audiences to a particular product or service. In the case of crime web series, the marketing strategy involves using violence and sexual content as

attention-grabbing elements to generate interest and curiosity among potential viewers. This strategy aims to capitalize on the fascination with crime, suspense, and sensationalism to attract a large audience. The purpose of the study being proposed here is to determine how best to draw viewers to crime web series by providing explicit material like sex and violence in the trailers, weighing the needs for displaying sex and violence using the uses and gratification theory. Using this theory to identify people who deliberately seek out sex and violence in the trailer and use the OTT platform to gratify particular wants (Ray et al., 2019).

The objective of the research: The following research is an attempt to analyze the trailers of the top five Indian web series-crime category that is used for promotion on these OTT platforms. The research also aims at finding the effect these trailers have on the audience and what makes them choose to see these web series. It also tried to understand the amount of sex and violence used in the trailers as part of its content and the way it is projected. Lastly, the research aims to understand the marketing strategy used to promote these trailers.

Research Methodology: For the following research a mixed method of content analysis, Focus Group Discussion and survey method was done so that both the quantitative as well as qualitative aspect of the study was covered. A focus group discussion with ten participants was conducted; the respondents of the discussions were media students belonging to the age group of 17 to 20. To these participants, trailers of the chosen top five crime-based web series were shown and questions were asked through a semi–structured questionnaire designed. A survey was conducted with (n=323) participants across India. And a content analysis of these trailers was also carried out to have a qualitative understanding of the kind of content used in the trailers of these web series and how they are used. Table 1 shows the IMDb rating of the top five crime-based web series and the OTT platform in which they are available.

Name of the Series	IMDb Rating	Year	OTT Platform
The Family Man	8.8	2019	Amazon Prime
Sacred Games	8.6	2018	Netflix
Criminal Justice	8.2	2019	Hotstar
ASUR	8.5	2020	Voot/Jio Cinema
Mirzapur	8.5	2018	Amazon Prime

Table 1: IMDb Rating of Crime web series

Result and Discussions

Focus Group Discussion: The focus group discussion was carried out on ten participants. These participants were media students, who belonged to a media college in Bhopal, India. All the participants belonged to middle-class and lower-middle-class families with a mobile connection and access to the OTT platforms. These participants were shown the trailers of the five selected Crime –based web series and the following response was collected.

Name of the Series	After seeing the trailer whether participants are interested in seeing the web series	Reasons stated
The Family Man	Yes	 Interesting story and curiosity to know what will happen? To know how to manage family and job both Friends have suggested watching though abusive content was there but it is still accepted compared to nudity and violence.
Sacred Games	No	 The trailer showed too much of abusive words and Crime
Criminal Justice	Yes	 The curiosity is built to see the series through the Storyline as it seems interesting
ASUR	Yes	 The mythological touch in the trailer The content was decent no violence or sex in it Content-building curiosity
Mirzapur	No	Too much abusive language and violence

Table 2 displays the respondents' responses to the question of whether they would be interested in watching the crime-based web series after viewing the trailer. People who responded gave shows like The Family Man, Criminal Justice, and ASUR a thumbs-up. Table 2 lists the explanations, and one frequently cited explanation is that all of the series' trailers piqued viewers' interest in watching the show. Because of the violent content and abusive language, respondents said they would not like to see series like Sacred Games and Mirzaur.

When asked whether youngsters should watch such series the Focus group gave the following response:

- No, because youngster gets influenced by the series and it can affect their lives.
- Restrictions should be below the age of 18 for such series and should be followed strictly.
- > The jargon and language of the trailer are not appropriate and censorship should be there even in the trailers.
- > Some students said they get influenced by the activity shown in the series like smoking and alcohol (In this age such things as alcohol and smoking make us cool) and whereas some deny they didn't get influenced.

When asked "Do you watch trailers before watching web series?" the following response was collected:

- ➤ Yes, sometimes we watch when our friends like it or sometimes, we don't when personally we don't like the concept.
- Most of the time friends suggest watching so no need to watch the trailer.
- ➤ One student said she doesn't watch the trailer because the trailer spoils the story.
- ➤ The concept of the story matters a lot more than the nudity, Smoking and foul language so many times it is present in the trailer if the storyline is good, they watch the series.
- > Most of them agreed that a creative trailer makes them see the series.

Students also debated though in their family abusive language is not considered good so they may not watch the series with abusive language but if a friend suggests that it is good, they are compelled to see it.

Content Analysis

Table 3 shows the content analysis conducted of the all five selected crime-based web series. Apart from the two series i.e. The Family Man and Sacred Games, all the series showed domestic violence. All the series showed political content for violence, Harassment and Assault were there in the storyline, Guns and knives were shown in the series as part of violence, and Hate crimes like (disability, faith, gender, gender identity, race or sexual orientation) is shown, Murder/robbery was also a part of all the series studied and all showed the use of drugs and alcohol. Except for The Family Man and Criminal Justice, one can also find the use of sexual appeal in all the series.

To conclude all the factors mentioned in Table 3 form an important part of the content of crime-based web series which further has a lot of socio-psychological impact on the viewers.

	Crime Categories							
Name of the Series	Domestic	Political	Harassment /Assault	Gun and knife	Hate crime (Disability, faith, gender, gender identity, race or sexual orientation)	Murder/Robbery	Drug and alcohol	Sexual Appeal
The Family Man	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sacred Games	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

| Criminal Justice | Yes | No |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ASUR | Yes | No |
| Mirzapur | Yes |

Table 3: Content analysis of the web series

Survey

Figure 2: Gender

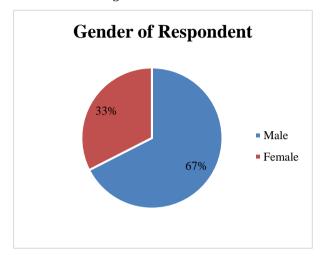
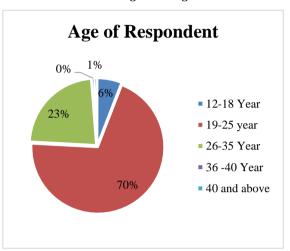


Figure 3: Age



The survey included (N=323) respondents. *Figure 2* shows that out of the Total respondents, 218 (67.5%) were males and 105(32.5%) were females. The following made the data male-dominant. Looking into the demographic *Figure 3* the age one can find out that the majority of the respondents were from the age group 19-25 years i.e., 226 (70%), then belonged to age group 26-35 years 74(22.9%, after that comes 12-18 years 19(5.9%) and the respondents from age group 36-40 and 40 years and above 2 each i.e. (0.6%). The data captures the majority opinion of the young minds i.e., from the age group of 19-25 years.

Figure 4: Employment Status

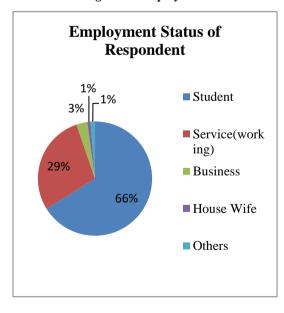


Figure 5: Education

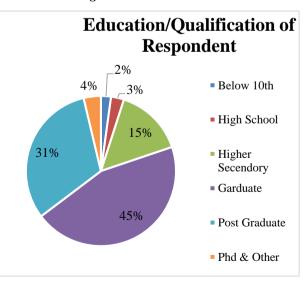


Figure 4 shows the employment Status of the Respondents i.e. 213(65.9%) were students. 92(28.5%) were who were job, 10(3.1%) were doing business, 3(0.9%) house wives participated in the survey and 5(1.5%) opted for the category others. **Figure 5** shows the educational qualifications of respondent's statistics show that the majority were graduates 145(44.9%), then were postgraduates 102(31.6%), Higher secondary

48(14.9%), respondents doing PhD 12(2.8%), High School 9(2.8%) and lastly below 10th 7(2.2%). The following data tells that the majority of the respondents are school-going youngsters.

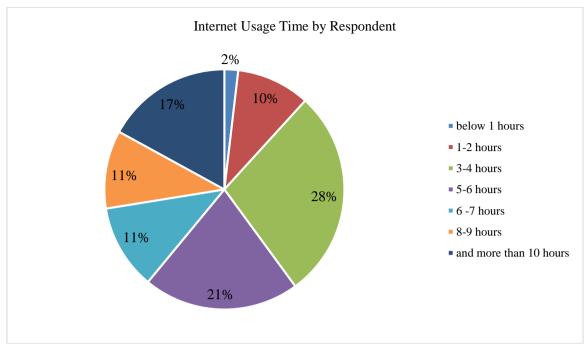


Figure 6 Internet Usage Time by Respondent

Figure 6 showing the Internet usage habit of the respondent by observing the data one can find out that 21% of the respondents use internet for 5-6 hours which is not good for mental health according to past studies ("The Mental Health Effects of Being Constantly Online"). 11% uses internet for 6-7 hours and another 11% for 8-9 hours show a very unhealthy way of spending time which is bad for mental health of individuals. An alarming figure of 17% could be observed in the table 5 which shows respondents who use internet for more than 10 hours a day.

Figure 7: Information Source

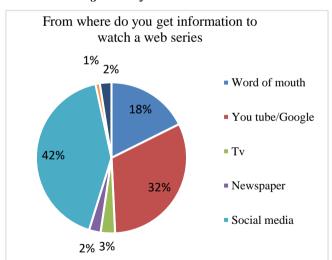
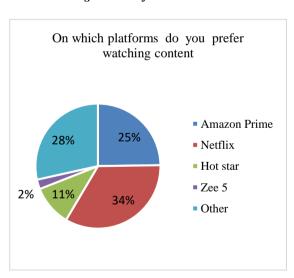


Figure 8: Platform



By observing *Figure 7* it becomes clear that social media is the biggest information channel from where the respondents get updated regarding the information to watch the web series. 42% opted that they get information from social media. YouTube and Google provide 32% of information and 18% by word of mouth. *Figure 8* shows that the Majority i.e. 34% prefer watching Netflix and 25% refer to watching Amazon Prime and 11% to Hotstar.

		Yes	No	Total
Gender of Respondent	Male	99	119	218
1	Female	16	88	104

Total 116 207 323

Table 4: Have you ever watched any web series or online content just because of sex scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in the trailer?

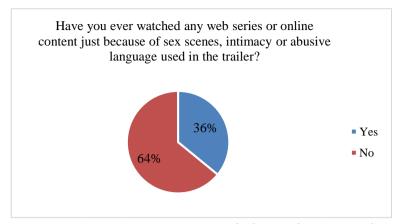


Figure 9 Have you ever watched any web series or online content just because of sex scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in the trailer?

Table 4 and **Figure 9** show the data of the respondents when asked have they watched a web series because of sexual scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in trailers. Figure 8 shows that 36% said yes and 64% said no. Table 4 further elaborates those men prefer watching the web series-based on the following factor more over females.

		Yes	No	Total
	Male	105	113	218
Gender of Respondent	Female	36	68	104
_				
Total		141	182	323

Table 5: Have you ever watched any web series because of the crime shown used in the trailer?

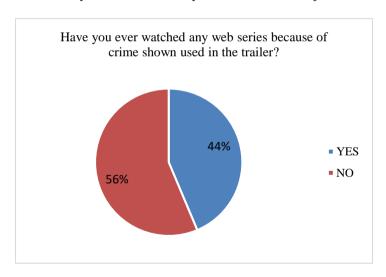


Figure 10: Have you ever watched any web series because of crime shown used in the trailer?

Figure 10 shows that 44% said yes when asked whether they have watched a web series because of the crime shown in the trailer and 56% said no. Further analyzing this table by looking into table 5 one can find out that 105 men over said yes and 113 said out of total 218 men participated in the survey. Whereas only 36 females said yes and 68 said no out of total 104 females participated in the survey.

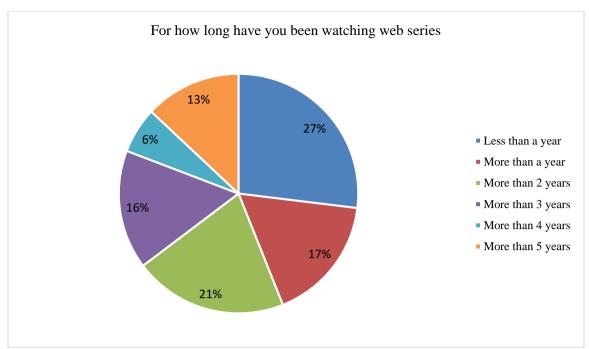


Figure 11: For how long have you been watching web series?

Lastly, *Figure 11* shows that 27% of the respondents were watching the web series less than a year and 17% are seeing it more than a year and 21% more than 2 years. In total, the concept of web series is not more than five years old for Indian audiences and is still being accepted by many and has a big market scope.

Conclusion

This research paper examines the marketing techniques used by such series and sheds light on the use of violence and sexual content in the promotion of crime web series in India. The results of this study show a number of important findings. First off, it is clear that web series with a criminal theme are highly influenced by their trailers. These shows' captivating and intense trailers draw viewers to them, demonstrating the value of employing successful marketing techniques to increase viewership.

Additionally, this study reveals a gender preference gap, with men showing a stronger propensity for crime-based web series than women. This finding highlights the need for a deeper comprehension of the underlying factors influencing gender-based media consumption preferences. The chosen crime-based web series' content analysis reveals the recurrence of specific thematic elements. With the exception of The Family Man and Sacred Games, domestic violence emerges as a recurrent theme in all of the series. Knives, firearms, harassment, sexual assault, and political content are all frequently represented as forms of violence. Also prominently highlighted are hate crimes that target different characteristics like sexual orientation, gender, race, gender expression, or disability. In addition, the series frequently features murder, robberies, and drug and alcohol use. In addition, every series, with the exception of The Family Man and Criminal Justice, has a strong sexual appeal in the content.

For viewers, the inclusion of these elements in crime-based web series has significant sociopsychological ramifications. It highlights the importance of conducting critical analysis and having a dialogue about how such content affects both people and society as a whole. A more ethical and balanced approach to the creation and promotion of crime-based web series can be encouraged by having a thorough understanding of these effects and developing responsible guidelines for content producers and platform providers.

The study's overall findings highlight the variety of crime-themed web series and content trailers used for marketing in India. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role that media plays in influencing societal attitudes and behaviours by revealing the prevalence of violence and sexual content as well as their potential effects on viewers. In order to ensure responsible content creation and consumption in the evolving web-based entertainment landscape, further research in this area can explore potential mitigating measures and delve deeper into the socio-psychological impacts.

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