

A Study on OTT Content Versus Theatrical Released Cinema Preferences Among the Urban Population of Guwahati



Anindita Dey, Rahul Chanda

Abstract: In the year 2020 when the world was going through a period of lockdown due to Covid_19 and the shooting came to a halt, cinema halls were shut and film releases were suspended. It was then internet managed to create a new viewing experience where the mode of entertainment drastically shifted to the small screens known as Over the top streaming platforms where the user could be customized according to their taste and preferences. Also, this changed the way we will be viewing and this has created greatest fear for cinema hall owners. OTT is widely popular for its, fresh, latest content, good storyline, plot and focuses on the quality of work rather than depending on commercial success. The objective of this research is to find out whether over-the-top channels had created an impact on the urban population of Guwahati, Assam in comparison to other film viewing channels and theatres. This study tries to investigate if OTT has taken over the films on the basis of cost, content, characterization, and accessibility catered to its respective audience in the city. Many viewers are against the idea of censorship in Ott which is considered to be one of the major reasons for its increased viewership. In this research, the researcher tries to find out whether the preferences of the viewers are diverting towards OTT content or it remains with commercial cinema released in theatres.

Keyword: OTT (Over the Top), Cinema, Censorship

I. INTRODUCTION

Over-the-top channels or OTT are online media platforms that are also known as on-demand channels. These services are not connected to traditional pay-tv services like cable or satellite. This project also focuses on how OTT has taken over films based on cost, content, characterization, and accessibility tailored to their respective audience in the city. The entertainment industry had a difficult year in 2020-21, with cinemas closing and film shoots and daily soaps coming to a halt as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. As viewers were left with no other options for entertainment, the doors were opened for OTT platforms to flourish and reach a new level of popularity among viewers.

The audience was wooed by new releases that could be watched comfortably sitting at home as premium or VIP content on offer, created especially for the digital space. The content is available in different genres such as romance, thrillers, drama, science fiction, action, or comedy the webspace has been distributing quality content every minute and people who were eagerly waiting for fresh content were slurping up. Channels like Netflix, Voot, HotStar Amazon Prime, Sony Liv, and many other channels are currently present in the market and have managed to establish themselves in the mind of the viewers. The emergence of the OTT platforms has given new birth to writers who feel suffocated by the growing interference of the Censor Board and by moral policing. Here, not only the writers but the directors and actors, can come out of their comfort zones and experiment with their content. Since the content on such platforms has been selling like hotcakes, there has been an explosion of regional content as well as platforms that have entered the digital entertainment world. The regional platforms have not restricted themselves to series or movies, but also several celebrities' chat shows as well. Regional content's success is not limited to actors; in the years 2020-2021, streaming platforms such as Hoichoi Simply South (Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam), Film (Telugu), Planet Marathi (Marathi), and CityShor TV (Gujarati) Sun NXT, Aha Video (Telugu), have seen increased popularity. Because all platforms have blurred the line between international and national cinema by making them easily accessible, it is now a valid point for production houses to create narratives in a variety of regional languages as well. Direct-to-digital releases have resulted in the release of a new set of movies or series on OTT platforms. The OTT release ensures wider coverage of audiences across the whole globe. OTT releases have not been censored up to this point, but they have been the subject of several controversies. For a variety of personal reasons, we may be unable to watch our favorite movie at times. We may miss important details and later have difficulty understanding the rest of the story, but thanks to OTT, we can pause and re-watch from the point where we left off. It can also change the way films are made, where the screenwriter won't need to drag out a story for two-three hours just to deliver a good interval or pre-interval scene. No unnecessary songs and dances as we could easily skip them. And one of the most important factors is that in OTT, one doesn't have to impress all the viewers and not think about who is going to purchase tickets.

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In OTT, only those who have access to different applications will only watch and only see what they want to see and won't regret spending money, as they would do during a theatrical release. However, not all films have the same impact that one often experiences while watching blockbuster films and on the atmosphere. The amount of content available in the digital space is so vast that many good works of art may be overlooked, and moviegoers may not be able to view or experience the same magic at home. Now even the regional content holds big when it comes to the OTT market, platforms like Hoichoi, Asia Net Mobile Tv, Sun NXT, Aha, and many more are now available in various regional languages like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam to name a few. All these years, many regional OTT platforms have gained prominence. They have also started delivering high-quality content which is mostly original. Over the years, it has been observed that many viewers have opposed to the idea of censorship in Ott, which is considered to be one of the major reasons for its increased viewership, and audiences believe that films will not die anytime soon but that content design must be reworked rather than relying on stars and directors. Ever since content viewing shifted from a 70mm screen to a 5-inch mobile screen, the nature of the content has changed too. space where there are no restrictions and, encouraged by the popularity of certain shows, the makers felt free to incorporate graphic scenes and usage of language which may be restricted and rejected by the censor board as well as draw flak from the audience. Every other show soon followed, either for using unparliamentary language, offending religious sensibilities, or being too indecent. The idea of censorship has been both supported and opposed by several celebrities, such as actors, directors, politicians, and media critics. Moving forward, one should be certain that the post-pandemic scenario will be different for the filmmakers, where the templates that Bollywood has established, such as storylines and masala or item number formulas or creating remakes from films of different origins, will no longer work. Although the film industry will continue to flourish, thanks to streaming platforms, there are several options available when it comes to entertainment and hence audiences are spoiled for choice with a variety of choices.

II. STUDY GAP

Though there have been lot of research done on the impact of media content on youngsters but as OTT is a new format where the content is unregulated the researcher wanted to know the effect how youths are shifting their viewing preferences from theatres to the OTT platforms in Guwahati. Therefore, it is important for the people to understand the purpose and the impact of any new format of media in this market. The researcher observed that there has been no work done to find out the impact of OTT channel content in the northeast hence, the study is vital for the present digital age to media content viewership.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the popularity status of Ott channels in Guwahati?

2. What are the popular OTT channels among the Guwahati youths?
3. Do people prefer watching video content in OTT, TV or cinema halls?
4. Identifying viewers opting for OTT content than theatrical release content?
5. What are the reasons dominating the shift?

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the demand for Over-the-top content over TV and Cinema.
2. To Identity, compare and analyze the reason leading to the competition between OTT channels and cinema content.
3. Exploring the factors influencing the audience to watch films.
4. To understand if there is a demand for censorship in OTT content.
5. To study of OTT content is more entertaining than Films.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to an article that is the rise of *OTT players: Streaming platforms and the threat to the box office*, 2018 it was stated that Steaming platforms and OTT players have reached a new hike and to certain extend that it is a threat to the silver screen. Although Distribution income remains the largest source of revenue for producers, but if footfalls at cinema halls were to decline, it could seriously affect margins.

The cost of a subscription notwithstanding, streaming a movie is significantly cheaper than a night at the multiplex, and less demanding and time-consuming than watching a matinee on television with its bloated runtime padded by lengthy commercial breaks.

This online article "*How OTT Will Drive Innovation in 2018*" Bharat Berlia wrote an article on August 02, 2018 about how the government's Digital India Initiative is enabling even the most remote villages to stay connected. India already has over-the-top (OTT) media services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. In one of the articles in *Reasons to Watch Movies at Home than in a Theatre* it was highlighted that there were various would prefer staying at home and watch online content rather than visiting a cinema hall nearby. Since everybody would like to save money, no Spoilers, no restrictions, not every content is understandable- There are some scenes which needs a proper concentration, because anything and everything connects. There can be a home theatre as well. We can also have control in our hands, we can pause, play, fast-forward and rewind it, in case we have some disturbance or emergency and not miss any Vitol scene. OTT platforms and theatres will continue their parallel paths, according to a report by Manoj Mathew. It is expected that films that were previously released on OTT won't be released in theaters. OTT platforms will end the screening of films at theaters if they move from theatres to OTT platforms.



VI. METHODOLOGY

To complete the study, the researcher both primary and secondary methods. The primary method adapted was data collection which included a questionnaire. Both the methods were helpful while collecting the desired data and completing the study. The questionnaire was prepared on google forms so that it could be easily circulated online The questionnaire link was randomly distributed on various digital media platforms. Those were Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Gmail, and Messenger, some were collected by using the survey method. According to Joseph Check, Russell K Schutt, 2012 a survey method is defined as "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions", which consists of a variety of methods to recruit participants and collect data. (Check & Schutt, 2012. Not only the questionnaire link was randomly distributed on various digital media platforms but it was distributed offline as well. Platform's, where the link was shared, were Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Gmail,

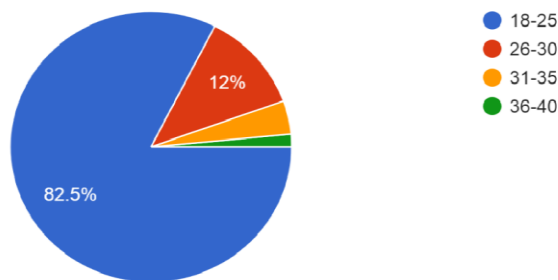
and Messenger. For the questionnaire, both convince and snowball sampling was used to select the respondents for the study as it could help in getting more respondents. Here the researcher has taken a sample size of 200 respondents who belonged to the age group of 18-40 mainly. This helped to find out the consumer's video consumption pattern, their preferences between OTT platforms and films released in the theatres, popularity of OTT channels and platforms amongst the youth of Guwahati. Also to understand whether censorship is required in the new platforms or not and also to study if Ott is more entertaining or not.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection was done online through Google forms. Around 200 responses. Out of which 99% do watch films and 1% were not movie lovers. The majority of respondents fell within the 18-40 age range.

Age:

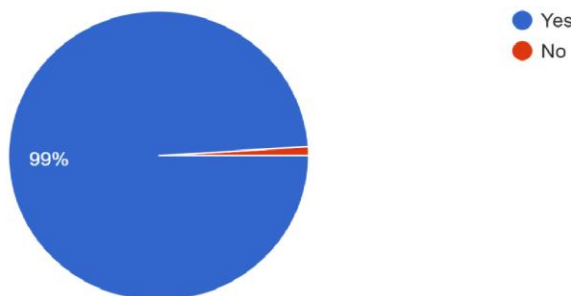
200 responses



This survey was conducted in Guwahati with views form 200 respondents out of which 82.5 % are between 18-25 years, 12 % are between 26-30 years, 4 % are between 31-35 years, 2 % belonged to the age group 36-40 years. They respondents belonged from varied professions like Student, teacher, Engineers, Government Employees, Homemakers, film makers, doctors, Public Relation employees, Architect, Entrepreneur, Journalist, Visual effects Artist, Communications Specialist and Training & Placement Officer.

1. Do you watch films?

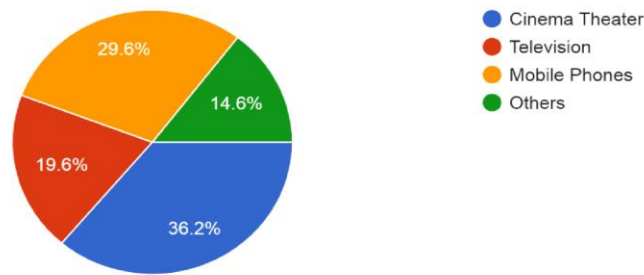
200 responses



1. It was found that almost entire Guwahati watch films leaving 1% of the respondent are not interested in film viewing.

2. Where do you watch it ?

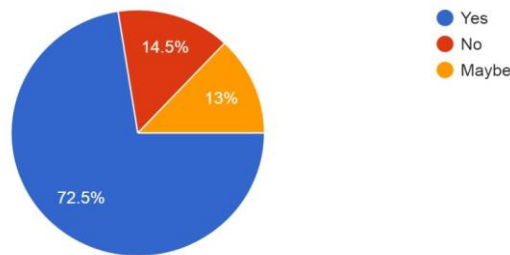
199 responses



2. The researcher found that most of the respondents (36%) watch films in cinema halls, while (29.6%) watch in their own mobile phones, around (19.6%) view it in television and (14.6%) of respondents use other mediums to watch films such as Laptops, Tablets and Projector. This shows that when it comes films, the viewers are not restricted to cinema halls, Televisions, mobile phones and other devices are also used as a medium to watch film in the present digital era.

3. OTT channels are becoming popular these days. Do you know about it?

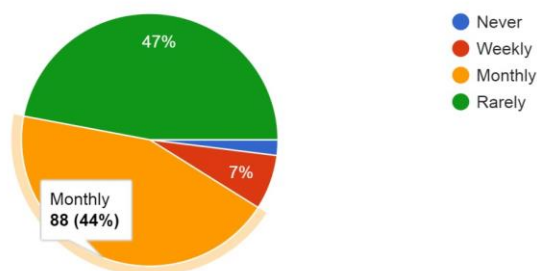
200 responses



3. The respondents around (72.5 %) did agree, while (14.5 %) disagreed with the statement and rest (13%) is not sure about their answer. This shows that majority of the respondents are aware of Ott channels (Over the top) Channels and OTT channels are gaining popularity among the urban population of Guwahati. Others (14.5%) disagreed and think cinema is still popular in this generation, while some could not be sure about their answer as they find both medium equally effective.

4. How often do you visit the nearby cinema halls on a new release?

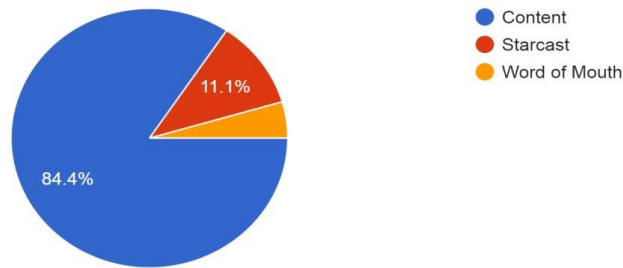
200 responses



4. Around (44%) do visit the nearby cinema halls on a monthly basis, while (47 %) Rarely visit cinema halls, (7%) visit on a weekly basis rest (2%) do not prefer visiting a movie hall after a new movie is released. This shows that the respondents visit once or twice in a month depending on the content as well as content of the film. Mostly it depends on the content and trailer of the movie whether it was interesting or not.

5. Do you watch film because of its content or star cast ?

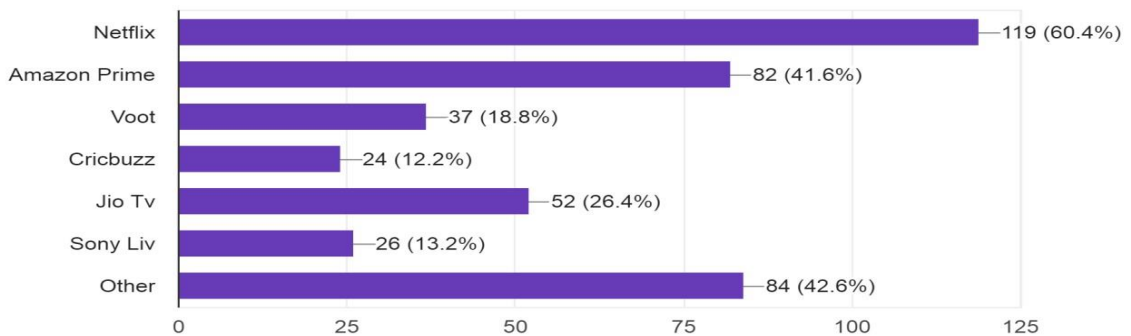
199 responses



5. Majority (84%) the viewers watch a particular film because of its storyline ,while (11.1 %) visit due to start cast and fan following and rest (5 %) view the films only because others have suggested probably who has watched it and gave a positive review. We can see that, however the audience viewing pattern may vary with both positive and negative response. If people do not give positive response then it may reflect at the box office collection.

6. Which Over the top channels do you watch and subscribe?

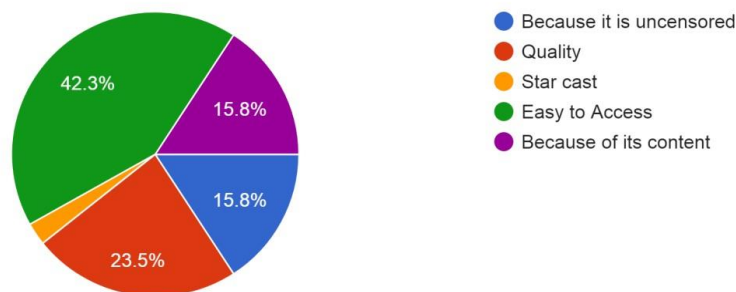
197 responses



6. Netflix has emerged as one of the popular channels amongst the rest (60.4%) had already subscribed it as well. While (41.6%) prefer Amazon Prime (18.8%) prefer Voot App Cricbuzz around (12.2%) , JioTv has (26.4%) , Sony Liv has (13.2%) , Rest subscribed to TVF, Airtel TV, Yup TV, Vodafone Play Gallery, TVF and Hotstar.

7. Why do you like Ott?

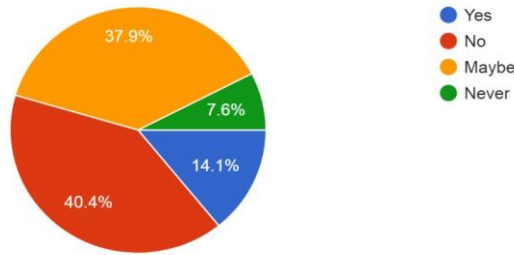
196 responses



7. It is found (42.3%) watch Ott channels because of its easy access, while (23.5%) because of its quality in terms of pixels, (15.8%) respondents think that the content which are shown in Ott channels are better than the shows and films screened in television and cinema halls. Another (15.8 %) watch the series only because it is uncensored and bold around (3 %) due to their favorite stars.

8 .Do you think Ott channels needs to have a certain censorship regarding its video and audio content?

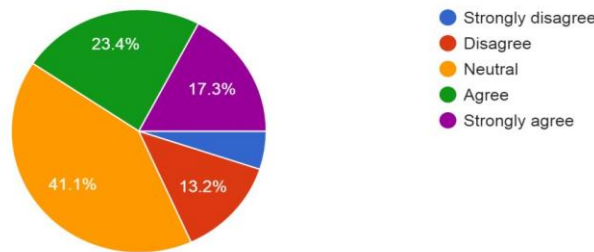
198 responses



8. The researcher observed that maximum Guwahatians (40.4%) do not want the content shown in OTT channels to be censored, while (37.9 %) are not sure, (14.1%) do agree and want some kind of restrictions should be done, Rest (7.6%) they don't want any kinds of small or big censorship effect on its content. This shows that the OTT viewers are open to new and bold content. Series like Mirzapur, Ghoul, and Made in heaven and Sacred Games are some of the Indian series which consisted scenes which were a taboo in the society in the past but are accepted now.

9. Watching movie in cinema halls is more costly then subscribing to Netflix and Amazon?

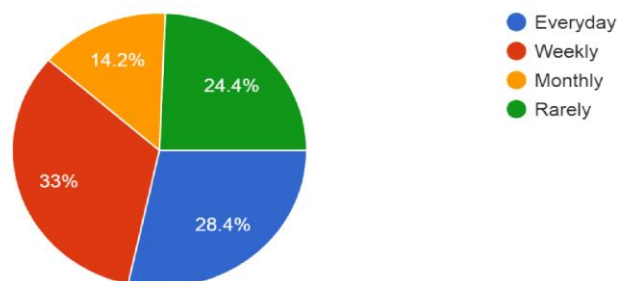
197 responses



9. Almost (41.1 %) opted for neutral when asked if they found the total expenditure of visiting cinema halls less expensive than subscribing various OTT channels such as Netflix and Amazon. While (23.4%) Agreed to the statement, (17.3 %) strongly agreed and are happy with subscribing OTT channels rather than visiting cinema halls , (13.2%) strongly agreed while rest (5%) strongly disagreed and still watch films at the cinema hall because according to them only halls with loud speakers and big white screen can provide a real life experience.

10. How often do you watch OTT channels?

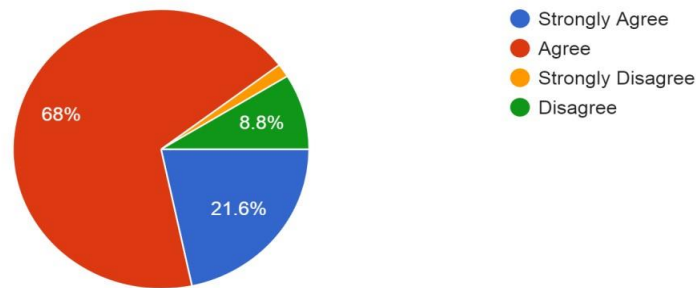
197 responses



10. 28.4% watch almost every day of the week, 33% watch it on a weekly basis where they collect the entire series and watch it at the weekend, 14.2% watch it on a particular month if a certain series they find interesting streaming at that particular time, and 24.4% rarely watch Ott channels.

11. Ott has more demand than the commercial films these days?

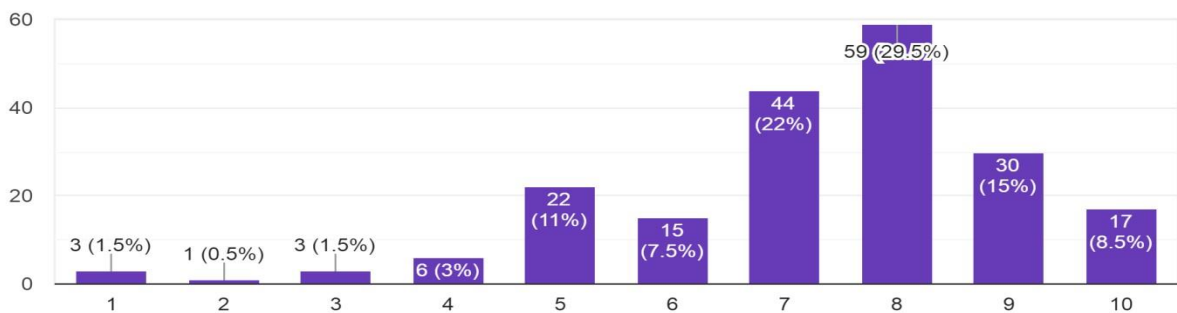
194 responses



11. Around (68%) agreed that the Ott channels did create an impact on commercial films. (21.6%) strongly agreed to the statement. While (8.8 %) Disagreed with the statement and rest (2%) Strongly disagreed with the statement, they don't think an Ott channel has overtaken the commercial films yet.

12. How satisfied or dissatisfied you're with the performance of the Ott channels over Films?

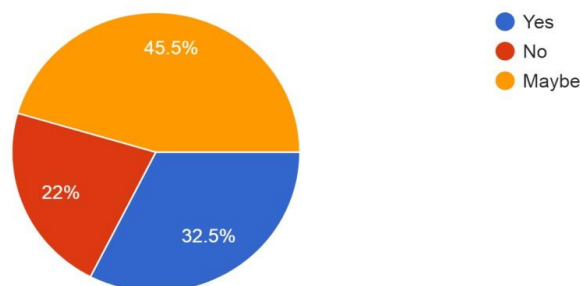
200 responses



12. When the respondents were asked to rate the performance, 29.5 % of the respondents rated it as 8 out of 10 , while 22% rated it as 7 out of 10, 15 % rated as 9 out of 10 ,7.5 % rated 6 out of 10 , rest 17.5 % rated them between 1-5 out of 10.

13 . Streaming platforms are threat to box office.

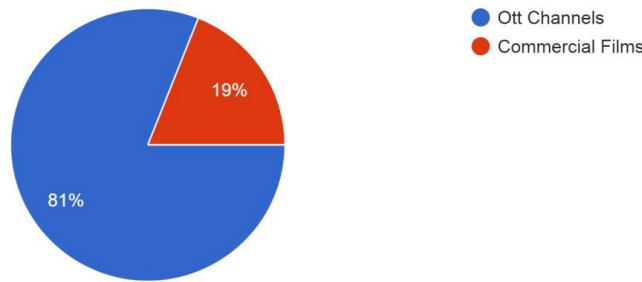
200 responses



13. It was found that around (32.5%) did agree that the Ott channels are coming up with new ideas, veteran actors, amazing soundtrack, background score and brilliant story line which had more of realistic content, which still appeal to its viewers. Around (22%) did not agree that the commercial film will be able to survive strongly despite the invasion of the new media and rest (45.5%) is not clear about the statement.

14. According to you which media gives original and realistic content?

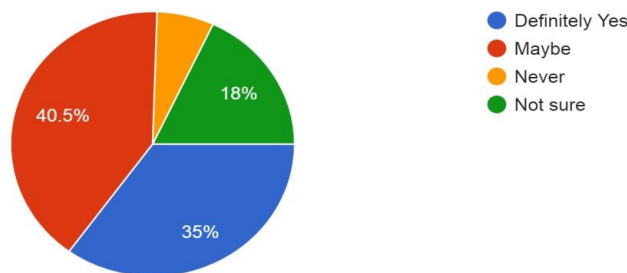
200 responses



14. Almost 81% agreed that Ott channels like Netflix, Amazon, and HotStar do provide more original screenplay rather than films which consist of fiction / fantasy which may not resemble the real life. Rest (19%) still think commercial films are still giving tough competition to the several OTT channels.

15. Would you rather sit at home and view Ott in a mobile than visiting the cinema halls?

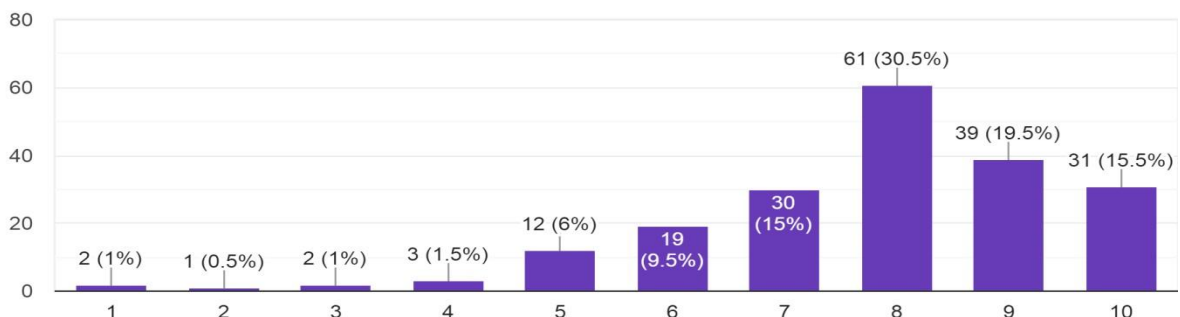
200 responses



15. Almost around (40.5%) may or may not sit at home and view mobile rather than visiting the nearby cinema halls. (35%) opted for yes and they are willing to sit back home, relax, wear comfortable clothes , order food from nearby cafes and restaurants and find a cozy place to enjoy and watch favorite series and movies. However (18%) are not sure it depends whether a good film has released or good series. Rests (7%) are never going to sit back and watch on their phone.

16. How would you like to rate Ott as an entertaining medium?

200 responses



16. It has been observed that 30.5 % of the respondents rated the OTT channels as 8 out of 10, 19.5 % respondents opted for 9 out of 10. While 15.5 % respondents rated 10 out of 10, 15% rated 7 out of 10. 9.5 % respondents opted 6 out of 10. Rest 10% rated within 1- 5.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

To conclude it can be stated that the majority of the respondents do watch films. When it comes to selecting film viewing platforms, the viewers are not restricted to cinema halls, platforms like Televisions, mobile phones and other devices are also included as a medium through which films are screened in this digital era. The viewer's now have several platforms to view films in television, laptop, mobile phones, film screens and tablets. OTT Channels are gaining popularity among the urban population of Guwahati City. The popularity ratio reveals that in coming days the OTT channels are further expected to dominate the video content scape in Guwahati. Now days the audience visit the nearby cinema halls only if they find the content and trailer interesting. The content is the king and therefore the storyline and cinematography matters. If the audience does not accept it then they would give negative reviews. The researcher observed that OTT channels are gaining momentum because of the creatively designed content, therefore it can be said that the film directors have a challenge of further developing their content. After the study it can be said that creatively design video content shown in any platform is dear to the audience. Also censored and regulated content is unwanted to the audience. Therefore, the Ott channels are getting popular because they have creative, uncensored and youth related content. Ott has been found to be most entertaining medium for providing fresh and desirable and not stereotyping in their content. Therefore, according to the research, Ott did have a certain amount of impact on the urban population in Guwahati and it is also the future of urban content viewing not only in Guwahati but also rest of the country.

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