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# Language or S-language in Indian Web Series

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**Abstract:** *Web series and online streaming content has become an integral part of everyday life. Web series and online streaming platforms have seen a great hike in the recent years in India; they have already pretty much replaced the television in western countries, and India is not far behind. Since the last decade, India has also seen a boom in web series and online streaming content produced in the country. The millennials have become glued to the OTT platforms which have led to many big companies like Amazon, Netflix, SonyLIV, Hotstar, zee5, MX Player, Eros Now and a host of like companies to invest heavily in regional content to increase the content variety and diversity. The race to create more content to attract viewers has resulted in major decline of the quality of content or rather has led to compromise of the value-added content in Indian web series on OTT platforms. This research paper consists of analysis of the content of various Indian web series and online streaming content on platforms like YouTube, Amazon, Netflix, SonyLIV, Hotstar, and MX Player etc. This research article examines the language being used in Indian web series with a focus on obscenity and vulgarity. The analysis shows that the content in Indian web series across various OTT platforms irrespective of the genre is obscene, and abusive in terms of the verbal and visual language. The article recommends an in-depth study on the relationship between vulgarity in the online streaming content and its impact on the audience.*

**Keywords:** *Abusive Language, Cultural Values, OTT Platforms, Verbal Language, Visual Language, Web Series*

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Life imitates art far more than art imitates life” — Oscar Wilde

Mass media is not a mere imitation of real-life but also holds the power to influence the conscious as well as subconscious state of mind.

Web series can be described as a series of short videos or episodes, released on online platforms. The episodes are presented on the portal consequently to narrate a story for the viewers over a certain period of time. The web series are similar to television soap operas in the sense that they are also episodic in form and are released over a certain period of time. The difference being in the medium used and that the content is wider and more diverse in web series in comparison to TV serials.

According to Wikipedia, A web series (also known as a web show) is a series of scripted or non-scripted online videos, generally in episodic form, released on the Internet, which first emerged in the late 1990s and became more prominent in the early 2000s. Web series and online streaming allow their audience to watch shows at their convenience in terms of time as well as content and place. The Web series and OTT platform have become a part and parcel of the young and adult generation today.

Over the top (OTT) is a term which is for to content providers that distribute streaming media as a standalone product directly to viewers over the Internet, bypassing telecommunications, multichannel television, and broadcast television platforms that traditionally act as a controller or distributor of such content, offer access to film and television content (including existing series acquired from other producers, as well as original content produced specifically for the service), including Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, TVF Play, ALT Balaji, MX Player, Voot, iZee5, Eros Now etc. (GIANCHANDANI, SHAH)

With the advent of digital media, accessibility has become a deciding factor when selecting the media format for consumption of news and entertainment programmes. Content customization and diversity are some major factors for the popularity of online streaming content. In the last few years, web series and online streaming content has gained popularity in India because they provide viewers what television does not. Following in the footsteps of the western countries, India has seen a drastic boom in the production and consumption of online streaming content; an effect of digital globalisation.

The concept of web series is not brand new in India but rather has been in usage since more than a decade with the first Indian web series, Permanent Roommates, being released in the year 2014 by TVF. However, what is new and slightly askew is the language, especially the abusive, foul, derogatory language that is being used excessively in Indian web series over various OTT platforms.

A report suggested that, on average, Indian viewers spend approximately eight hours 29 minutes watching online video content, which is far more than the global trend of six hours and 45 minutes. Web series have become a norm for the internet generation i.e., Generation Y and Generation Z.

The Internet generation includes Generation Y, also called the millennials (people born from 1980 to the late 1990s) and Generation Z (people born in the early 2000s and onwards). Teenagers, youngsters and adults spend hours of their time on binge-watching various series on OTT platforms, and such long term exposure is expected to leave some effect. And with the way the content creators and producers are exploiting the leniency given to digital media, the result can be quite catastrophic. It is only a matter of time before our younger internet-savvy generation will be sprouting abuse after abuse in their everyday conversations because they have become so accustomed to hearing those words via such web series.

A content analysis of various web series such as Mirzapur, Aashram, College Romance, Inside Edge, Sacred Games, Jamtara was conducted to better understand this new trend of verbal abuse and hate speech on OTT platforms. Web series from different genres were taken which investigates that irrespective of the genre of the web series, slangs and profane language is still present. The cuss trend is not only limited to a particular genre on any OTT platform but is being widely used by the content creators irrespective of the genre the series belongs to. The verbal language of various characters in prominent and popular web series have been analysed to understand the increased rate of verbal abuse in the content on OTT platforms.

## II. LANGUAGE- A CULTURAL ASPECT

Language is a key determinant of a person and their personality. It is one of the most important aspects of one's impression and their representation of not only themselves but also of the culture, society, and the country they are a part of. Not only such extreme usage of swear words is leading to wrong impression and representation of our culture to the people across the globe, but it is also rendering normalcy to the mindset that swearing and abusing is common and correct.

Digital media has revolutionized the world and led to drastic increase in consumption of content factoring to the multiple platforms for the users. Human beings by nature are social animals and their need for socializing and engaging is instinctual. OTT platforms have become a popular trend today for the teenagers and young adults, due to the wide variety of content available which is westernised and globalised in comparison to the non-digital media forms such as television and film. Web series have taken over soap operas and television serials, and one major factor for its popularity is the feasibility and variety of content.

Content plays a major role in web series selection and consumption. With an array of series available on various OTT platforms, the attention-grabbing factor and what differentiates the various series from another is the content of that particular series. Content is the king when it comes to the kingdom of OTT platforms. Also, it is imperative to highlight that the quality of that deciding factor i.e., content, is going through a major downfall in the name of increased demand in quantity. The highly ranked and popular web series today are not the most ideal representation or role-model of our culture and language. The content is highly obscene and disproportionately vulgar and abusive. With the traditional media, the abusive language was censored and majorly limited to the villain or anti-hero of the stories, but that is not the case anymore. Whether it is the villain or the hero or a saint, the swear words become a part of their dialogues and character representation throughout the story. Whether the character is on professional grounds or personal, the mannerism is still missing. Whether the language being used is local, regional, national, or global, the creators still find a way to abuse the abusive words in the dictionary of that language.

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is enormous literature available on media and its effect on people, the language and society. Mass media plays a crucial role in shaping our culture. Media today is everywhere, and it is as necessary as food and clothing. Though media has an enormous role, it can be listed down to entertainment, education, information etc., but media plays an integral role in shaping the society. (Sharma, 2015) The society as a whole is impacted at large from various media forms, and as web series are becoming popular amongst the tech-savvy generation, it is examined and concluded in various studies that the influence of web series on the behaviour, language, psychological and physiological health is indeed there. According to Koravi(2019), "When grooming age youth would more focus the web series it means they are learning a lot of things from web series. In fact, the analysis shows that majority of youth psychologically affected through web series. Web series are not only changing their behavior toward aggressive but also changing their language and language is most important part of any culture. Smoking, drinking habits are fast increasing in youth. More use of web series as source of entertainment than the other physical activities. Obesity, depression, eyes disorders are commonly seen in youths. Findings shows that youth perceive the content of the web series shows is very against the ethics, culture and value of society."

The fast rise of over-the-top services in India, such as VOOT, Hot star, Netflix, and Amazon, is demonstrating development in the prevailing patterns and business models at the global level, according to her essay "Over the Top video service in India: Media imperialism after globalisation."

India has overtaken China as the world's second-largest market for "tech firms," such as Facebook and Amazon, raising concerns about growth, involvement, and influence in areas such as communication and culture. Scott Fitzgerald (2019)

Navsangeet Saini in "Usage of OTT Platforms during Covid-19 Lockdown: Trends, Rationale And Implications" talks about the way media propagates its content into the mind of consumers is what is actually needed to be studied and reading between the lines has become crucial for this generation to understand the way media shapes our culture.

Hot star, founded in 2015 and owned by Star TV (India's largest private broadcaster), is the most popular OTT platform in India, with a total loyal user base of 75 million individuals in urban and rural regions, followed by Amazon Prime Video with 11 million members (Aadeetya, 2018). While Netflix is only in third place with roughly 5 million users, it is a more fascinating research topic due to its various distinctions from other players and the more specific demographics it caters to – niche, English-speaking, wealthy, urban youth (Joglekar, 2018).

India is a country rich in diversity, culture, tradition, religious sentiments, heritage, and values and is well-known around the world for all the above. Generations upon generation of people have always mentioned the example of India when it comes to how culture, traditions, and values are being passed onto the next generation. Broadcast media: the television and films industry has always been prominent sources of infotainment and entertainment for the people in India. Also, they have been one of the essential sources to not only influence attitudes, thoughts, behaviour, values, and beliefs but also represent India on the global platform with its deeply enrooted and enriched cultural and social values. Now, that the digital media is converging traditional media forms with the web, the duty to carry-forward this responsibility of appropriate representation and impacting the audience falls on the shoulders of digital media.

Dr. Dhiman in his study "Psychosocial Impact of Web Series and Streaming Content: A Study on Indian Youth" has found that the content available on OTT platforms is filled with violence, sexual, and abuse and has caused psychosocial effects on Indian youth. And has also concluded that web series are changing the language and behaviour of the youth. The younger generation, especially kids and teens, it seems are the most impacted from consumption of online streaming content. The still-developing minds of the youth tends to learn the language, actions, instances, dialogues, songs from movies, shows and later it harbours a place in their mind for an extended period. And as a result, exposure to inappropriate and obscene content may lead to adverse effects and change in behaviour and language of the younger generation.

The new era of online video streaming content and web series based on quantity and revenue gain has somehow affected the value-added content on the streaming services. The quality of the content, on the pretence of originality and diversity has taken a major hit. This content contains too much abusive language, hatred, and vulgarity. According to Chattopadhyay(2020), the violence, use of vulgar language and sex are exaggerated in these web series in the name of authentic presentation of the real world, while morality is often compromised leading to negative impact on audience mind. Media is negatively influencing the attention capability, writing skills, verbal communication skills and critical thinking capacity hence the cognitive development is hampered (Bhadra A, Singh AK ,2022)

#### Popular Indian Web Series"

OTT platforms like Amazon Prime, Netflix, Hotstar, MX Player, Voot, ALT Balaji, zee5 etc, have plethora of content options for its consumers which brings in a greater number of viewers. Multiple OTT platforms across the world face this challenge of presenting new and interesting content to the users to retain them, which in turn leads to compromising with the quality of content to keep up with this pace of digital media consumption.

The web series across streaming platforms are brimmed up with obscene content, taboo words, profanities, vulgar scenes, and language. The on-going trend in web series indicates to this inclination towards aggressive and abusive physical and verbal language.

This study was conducted by analysing the content and aims to study the emerging trend of verbal abuse and hate speech in Indian web series on OTT platforms. For this purpose of the study, 6 Indian web series have been taken for content analysis focusing on parameters such as vulgar, abusive language and swear words, which were broadcast on various OTT platforms and showcased verbal abuse and obscene content. A qualitative understanding will come through an in-depth analysis of the contents of these Indian web series.

The researcher collected secondary data in terms of videos and clippings from trustworthy sources like YouTube, Netflix, and Amazon Prime, and other OTT platforms, and selected needed parts of scene and then decoding those scenes and dialogues with the perception of how much slangs or obscene content in the context of Indian society was present.

Indian web series chosen for content analysis based on the controversial content-

### 1) *Mirzapur*

The web series is one of the most popular made-in-India original crime series on Amazon Prime in India. It belongs to the genre action crime thriller and the season 1 was released in 2018 and season 2 was delivered in 2020. In both the seasons, same kind of content is depicted like excessive violence, sex, improper language, dark politics, and non-existing law enforcement. We study that the violence in Mirzapur is largely baseless, and the language is highly exaggerated, obscene, and mostly hostile after assessing the material on the provided parameters. The series is packed with sexual moments, gruesome killing, violence, and verbal abuse. The initial dialogue of one of the main characters is even filled with swear words and obscene profanity. It features morally and culturally deviant language and behaviour, particularly harsh and abusive dialogues, which are primarily highlighted.

“Oh Bhos\*\*\*i waley Chacha. Rest kariye, varna Rest in Peace ho jaoge!”

“Mata ji yahan hai, Behen yahan hai, Maa-Behen ek karne mein aasani hogi.”

“Ch\*\*\*\*a hain woh important Nahi hai. Hamara ladka hai, Woh important hai.”

“Middle class aadmi, aadmi nahi ch\*\*\*\* hota hai. Ch\*\*\*\*.”

“Jaati pratha kaahe banayi gayi, isiliye hi na ki power hamesha hum Brahamano ke haath mein rahe” “Bh\*\*\*\*ke, Amar hain hum, Ch\*\*\*\*e nahi...”

### 2) *College Romance*

This web series on Netflix released in 2018 is also one of the highest-rated Indian dramas. The series belongs to the comedy genre and is based on a group of young friends, their college life, and relationships. As the name suggests, the show looks at a bunch of teenagers who spend their college lives making memories that would last them a lifetime. With the central characters being youngsters and representing college students, the highest influence association of the web series would be with the teenagers and younger generation. The web series shows usage of explicit and extremely vulgar and abusive language. The creators have gone as far as to give the title of an episode as “Happily F\*\*\*ed up”. In March 2023, the Delhi High Court has ruled that the language used in web series “College Romance,” which is streaming on the over-the-top (OTT) platform TVF, is filthy, profane, and vulgar and will deprave and corrupt the brains of young people.

“Yeh ch\*\*\*\*a g\*\*\*\*u tak I understand lekin yeh muh mein l\*\*\*d de dunga kya hota hai”

“muh mein l\*\*\*d de dunga uska matlab hota hai maa c\*\*\*d dunga g\*\*\*\*d marr dunga”

“gaaliyan shabd nahi hai, bhawna hai mere liye”

### 3) *Jamtara - Sabka Number Aayega*

A crime drama web series released on Netflix in the year 2020. It is one of the best series on money scam, Jamtara – Sabka Number Aayega, uncovers of the deadliest scams in India, it is engaging and intriguing. The series revolves around the various phishing scams and how politics intersects with cybercrime, irrespective of the commendable storyline and creative elements used in storytelling, the only off-putting part is the excessive use of foul language throughout the series. While an abuse or two are becoming familiar territory, even for Indian web series on OTT platforms, this one is loaded with one too many.

“Ma\*\*\*c\*\*d ra\*\*\* ka aulad, uski g\*\*\*\* se gaana nikalenge hum”

“Aukaat mein raho bhos\*\*\*\*e, nahi toh g\*\*\*\*d marr li jayegi aur awaaz bhi nahi aaegi”

“Nahi utha rahi toh kaahe ke liye g\*\*\*\*d mein danda kar rahe ho, Kaahe nahi uthayegi bey bhos\*\*\*\*e, uski amma bhi uthaegi, arey amma uthaye toh humse baat karo”

### 4) *Inside Edge*

An Indian web series belonging to the genre of sports-drama. The season one was premiered on Amazon Prime Video in the year 2017. The series centres around a fictional story of spot-fixing by the owners of the cricket team. The story very clinically brings into light the corrupt and unethical practices entertained by the people pertaining to sports fraternity. It also deals with power play, moral-less actions, sexual scenes and extremely vulgar and violent verbal and visual language. The storyline, character development, narrative elements all are interwoven beautifully in the web series, the concerning part is the frequency of verbal abuse and swear words throughout the series. Dialogues primarily relevant for the study are highlighted.

“Tum ho bhos\*\*\*e, apni jath dikha diye humko dhoka deke ma\*\*\*c\*\*d”

“Arey maa ki c\*\*\*, maa ki bhos\*\* mein gaya behen\*\*\*\* baat vaat karna...tumhari g\*\*\*\*d todi jayegi abhi bhos\*\*\*e”

“L\*\*\*e mein gaya haq be\*\*\*c\*\*d, humari g\*\*\*\*d marr ke haq kamaoge, vayu bhi chala gaya ch\*\*\*\*a bana ke”

“Bahut ho gayi bak\*\*\*\*I kanoji, ab goli khaa ma\*\*\*c\*\*d bhos\*\*\*\*e”

#### 5) *Aashram*

The Hindi-language drama web series belonging to the genre of crime and political thriller was released in year 2020 on MX Player. It focuses on the biased fallacies pertaining to Babas and political leaders. The story metaphorically explores the exploitation of religious beliefs and faith placed by the common man on such spiritual and political leaders. Religious emotions of the audience are wounded by beguiled pretence in the name of spirituality and mingling narcotics in prasad boxes. The web series is a whirlwind of sexual exploitation, drug fostering, communal division, pretentious saints, and corrupt political community. There are instances in which the Baba himself abuses women and takes advantage of the ashram's female residents and engages them in in-consensual sexual activities. The language of the Baba, who is considered as a cultural and religious symbol of the Hindu belief system is unacceptably offensive and abusive. The visual and verbal language of the series includes vulgarity, and obscene profanity. Dialogues which are most highly highlighted are

“Shareer ke liye har ang zaroori hai upar waala bhi aur neeche waala bhi”

“Jahaan noton se hoti hai kanoon ki aesi ki taisi, usiko kehte hain India ki democracy

“Baba sa\*\*a ma\*\*\*c\*\*d”

“f\*\*\*ing dhongi baba ch\*\*\*\*a be\*\*\*c\*\*d I hate this f\*\*\*ing baba ch\*\*\*\*a f\*\*k o\*\*, nikalo yahan se be\*\*\*c\*\*d get the f\*\*k out”.

#### 6) *Sacred Games*

A popular Indian web series that became the pioneer of web series culture in India and it gained immense popularity amongst the audiences. The drama series was premiered on Netflix on 6 July 2018 and was released across 191 countries; it is an adaptation of the novel written by Vikram Chandra. The story revolves around religion, politics, corruption, violence, a popular city, and its dark side. The web series was the first Indian series on Netflix and was acclaimed worldwide for its portrayals of gendered politics, women, patriarchy, communal violence, gangsters, politicians, mafia, businessmen and the Mumbai Police. The web series though widely acclaimed, is filled with obscene profanity, and inappropriate language and visual imagery.

“Kitne aadmi se pil kar aayi hai meri bail karane ko, tere jaisa ch\*\*\*\*a bhai ho toh dhanda hi karna padta hai ghar chalane ko”

“Dekh lega m tere ko ma\*\*\*c\*\*d, teri g\*\*\*\*d mein chattri daal ken ahi khola na m, toh mera naam bunty nahi”

“Teri g\*\*\*\*d mein jagah hain na vese bhi.... aur laal batti tu apne l\*\*\*e pe laga le....”

### IV. CONCLUSION

The online streaming content has undoubtedly taken the world by a storm. The convergence of media has brought in a drastic change in the consumption and production of mass media and the online content. One changing trend is the web series and their popularity amongst the millennials. Ease of accessibility, diverse options, reality-based, and originality are some major factors which have affected this popularity, but a major concerning factor is the content quality of these web series. A prominent after-effect of this up-and-coming trend of uncensored usage of swear words and abusive language, which is being side-lined, is that the quality of the content has been outpaced by quantity. The language usage in the Indian web series on OTT platforms is highly degrading, abusive, vulgar, foul, and obscene, with extreme usage of swear words, sexual innuendos, and derogatory remarks for various sub-sections of the society.

The content analysis of Indian web series across different OTT platforms is a testament to the degradation of the language on this popular mass media which is representative of the country, its people, and their culture across the globe. Despite of some limitations in the study, it is unequivocally clear that extremely insensitive, inappropriate, abusive, and demeaning language and content has become a part of this on-going trend in Indian web series which needs to be put under scrutiny. These OTT platforms are generating immense profit at the expense of distorted representation of India and its language. India is being portrayed as an uncultured, violent, and ill-mannered society in front of the global village. The Indian ethos, social qualities and cultural values are in jeopardy among the youth by presenting film, TV and web content overwhelmed with the hostile, abusive and oppressive verbal, and visual language.

India has always prided itself for its rich culture, heritage, and values. But, when the representation of this culturally rich country across the globe is undergoing a downward spiral, it becomes of utmost importance to understand that value-added content should be the focus of the content creators. Further research can be conducted based on the findings of this study about the unsolicited use of vulgar and abusive language in Indian web series and its impact on audience. The production and broadcast of such inappropriate and obscene content has led to degradation of everyday language of the viewers; it has impacted the mindset of the Generation Y and Z that using degrading and swear words is acceptable to the society.

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