

## Portrayal of women in web series: A study of viewer's perspective

<sup>1</sup>Shalini Prasad, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Rahul Amin,

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,  
Arka Jain University, Jamshedpur, India.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant professor and Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Arka Jain University, Jamshedpur, India.

<sup>1</sup>[Email- shaliniprasad.2050@gmail.com](mailto:shaliniprasad.2050@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[Email- amin79.dr@gmail.com](mailto:amin79.dr@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** It is of the common fact that the internet media has drastically changed the viewer's attitudes and perspectives towards audio-visual media usage and drafted a new dimension to entertaining media industry. New media has given rise to different online media platforms for the viewers in terms of entertainment as well as for information. The new media applications have given easier accessibility to users to view the media contents through online mode. In the recent past, due to pandemic a rising trend of online media usage and media selection has been seen among the viewer's especially video consumption relating to entertainment based media. Nevertheless, the growth of OTT platforms and web series are playing significant role in entertaining its users through online media services. Research studies find that OTT platforms are very popular among the youth for its easy access. This research paper focuses to find out the portrayal of women in web series from the viewer's perspective and also tried to find out the reasons for shifting viewers from television media to OTT media and their behavioral change towards new media. The researcher also seeks to assess the viewer's perceptions on the gender sensitivity and its representation on the web series. In this connection, researcher has carried out a sample survey for collecting primary data to assess the perceptions of the respondents.

**Key Words:** Portrayal of women, OTT Platforms, Web series, Pandemic, New media, Entertainment.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

OTT platforms became popular in India in the last few years. This platform is the result of the digital revolution in the global media market and communication technology. OTT platform stands for Over-the-Top. "OTT video services may be defined as the infrastructure of a last-mile broadband access provider unaffiliated with the online content provider" (1). This is the platform that provided content and services to the end-users and is accessible through open Internet. This platform gives us an option to streaming video across different devices whenever we want to watch. OTT platform provides news, serials, short film, web series, reality shows, documentaries, and much more video content over the internet. But after one year these platforms are stopped providing news content. In product placement research traditional media like television and film are decreasing and computer, online video, digital or online devices start rising as newer media. In Korea, this OTT platform gives a big challenge to the television distribution industry that has long been dominated by the traditional multichannel pay-TV providers (2). The OTT platforms have their app and website where a user can log in and get access to content by subscription. After subscription audience can watch from any device like mobile, tab, laptop, or television also. But Netflix provided different subscription plans based on video quality and accessing devices. The OTT platform delivered content only by request. Every device has a unique connection to the source of the OTT platform with an internet connection, which makes it 'unicast'. Unicast means delivering everyone specific device-specific content on-demand at the same time. If the audience subscribed to the platform they can log in with the same id on a different device at the same time. This doesn't work for other television series (3). If the audience uses cable TV for entertainment then they can only have time to watch TV when they are at home with their setup box. OTT platform provides entertainment without advertisement when you subscribe to the premium service. It saves viewers from show interruptions, time, and internet data wasted watching commercials. Noll (4) describes video streaming as a technology used for accessing television programs over the Internet and then watched in real-time, rather than watching television programs broadcast over the air or cable. Simply define watching conventional television programs obtained over the internet. Now day's websites and apps offer online video services on the internet which offer TV programs and videos, which is called internet TV (5).

## **OTT Platform in India**

Internet TV is like online programming it provides media content through a computer screen, laptop, and tablet. The global marketing research firm - The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled Entertainment Goes Online says that OTT (Over-the-top) players have changed the way we consume content and OTT market in India is pegged to reach \$5 billion in size by 2023. OTT players are taking a toehold in the huge untapped market such as India, now there are more than 5, 20,000 Netflix subscribers and 6, 10,000 Amazon Prime subscribers available in India. Indian audiences are like a flexible form of entertainment in their lives. According to IBEF, OTT platform 30% rise in the number of paid subscribers from 22.2 million to 29.0 million between March and July 2020, due to Covid 19 Lockdown. Redseer report says that the online content consumption in India grew 35% in April 2020 compared to January 2020. Inc42.com indicated that India currently has 95 online OTT platforms for streaming video, music, and podcasts. The average time spent by Indian users on OTT platforms has increased by 30-60% since early March 2020. In the new digital era; viewers use more than one medium to satisfy their needs. The bases of age and gender media uses are varied. Time will pass and when they get older, the usage of audio-video medium will increase (6) because of retirement and free time so they seek more information and entertainment for spending times(7).

## **Impact of OTT platform on viewers**

Panda and Pandey (8) find out the motivation for binge-watching is social interaction, escape from reality, easy accessibility to content, and no advertising during streaming. *“Such behaviour of binge-watching shows the addiction of viewers to virtual content that often leads to disturbances in their personal life whether it’s displaying anti-social behaviour’s, increased emotional sensitivity or disrupted sleep-cycles leading to various health issues amongst the bingers, usually youth.”* Dhanuka and Bohra (9) Research findings say that field experiment are that if youth watch violent scenes and acts on television programs they start acting aggressive behaviour, aggressive feelings, or aggressive sentiments than those who do not. As per the researcher, violent programs have great psychological impacts on youth most of the time these impacts are negative. Two third of television programs contain some form of physical violence which could be effect the somehow partially to the youth. Those people who spend the most time watching television are easily perceived the real world as the television world. In ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the television world, TV viewing creates an exaggerated belief in a mean and scary world. As the new audio-visual media OTT platform is now starting impact on the audiences and in this research study this statement get more cleared.

## **Theoretical framework**

Luo (10) said that viewers choose technology to fulfil their certain gratification and needs. Nowadays people are start preferring OTT platforms for entertainment because they can watch anywhere anytime with the help of internet connectivity and technology. Uses and gratifications theory described that why and what people do with mass communication tools (11). The rise of mobile technologies with quality of mobility and getting higher connectivity of internet attracts the individual’s life. Every individual chooses to use their communication behaviours, media and content can be a source of influence. The social learning theory was pronounced by Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory describes that learning takes place through observing the behaviour of others. According to this theory, people can acquire some behaviour simply by observing and storing the observations as a guide to future behaviours. Social learning theory acknowledges that humans are capable of cognition or thinking they watch content over OTT and interpretative and store a variety of positive and negative behaviour. In the future maybe they applied to some situations. Observational-learning theory suggests that the viewers ‘age and gender can influence the extent to which they identify with the depicted aggressive characters, which may in turn influence learning and enactment of the observed aggression. Relatively low intellectual competence might intensify the effects of exposure when the story plots are fairly subtle and complicated. Media violence produced a high level of aggressiveness in audience by the observing the violent scenes. It is known that various viewer characteristics do make a difference.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

According to the ‘TV living: Television, culture and everyday life’ book viewers express concern that children should be protected from violence, sex, nudity, and bad language on television so that it will be the family entertainment medium. (7).

If people choose to watch OTT platforms in the future then the presentation of content is still not acceptable for developing a better society. The media always have direct effects on people’s social and psychological circumstances, motivation, and behavior. The researcher examines male and female aggression and television violence. The finding says that men who find television violence to be entertaining or relaxing may have a more calloused attitude or high tolerance for aggression (12).

Ukwuaba et al. said that the combination of sound and vision medium has made television influence in shaping the lives of students in tertiary institutions. This is medium is used to informing, educating, entertaining, and persuade. The result of this study is that television is a powerful force in determining the socioemotional and academic adjustments of students. The researcher also concludes that television program that has violent content can cause harmful effects on the youths. This kind of television violence content also increases antisocial behavior like encouraging violence and criminal acts. About this research, it would be clear that audio-visual medium had a good impact on socioemotional on the audience. So audience easily influences by the content whatever the OTT platform presents related to the presentation of women in society (13).

Dhanuka and Bohra find out in the report that the OTT platforms have a negative impact of binge-viewing on the emotional, physical, psychological, and social health of these young individuals.(9)

According to Khan &Sohail study concludes that web series programs contribute more damage than benefits. Web series programs may lead to aggressive behavior and violent behavior in youth minds affect self-development by the sleeping disorder because they might watch their favourite shows until late at night and have not enough sleep (14).

Chattopadhyay finds out that the unsolicited use of vulgar language, violence is embedded into the consciousness of the people and it has been inherited down the ages. More often we get to see that the contents of the web series and web films did trends to portray women in a new stereotyped manner, all of which can have a deeply negative impact on the minds of the young audiences (15).

After study all the literature I find out that as audio visual medium TV, OTT platforms also leave a strong impact on the audience. OTT platform presented nudity, violence; misbehavior for women which is somehow some time-release negative behaviour on the audience, and maybe they start adopting it. This study is known about the perspective of the audience on this topic.

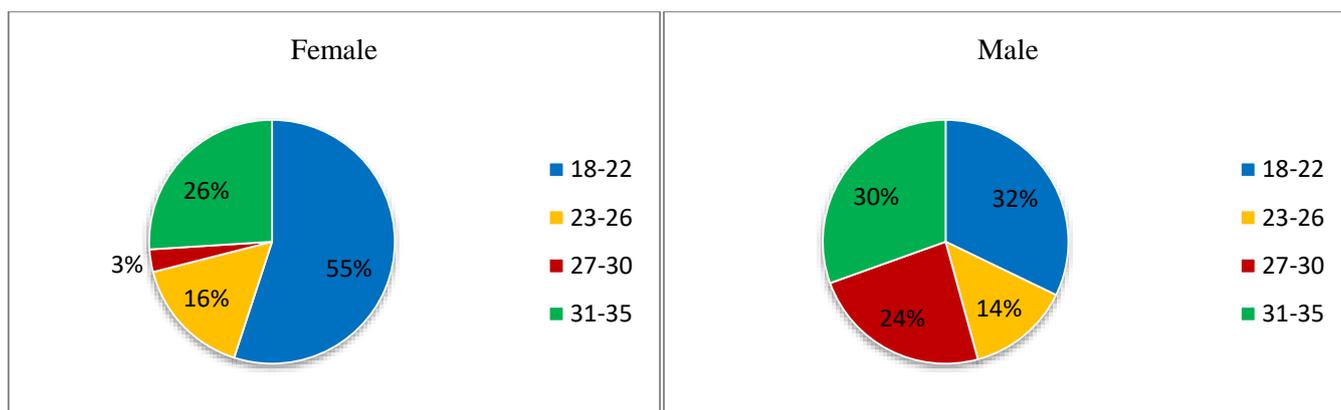
**3. METHODOLOGY:**

The survey method was employed for this study. The prime objective of the study is to know the viewer’s perspective on the portrayal of women in the web series. This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data collected with the help of a pre-ordained structured questionnaire followed by in-depth interviews and secondary data collected from reports, published articles, literature pertaining to research subject. A convenient sampling method has been followed for this study with a number of total one hundred sixty sample respondents from different age groups.

**4. DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS:**

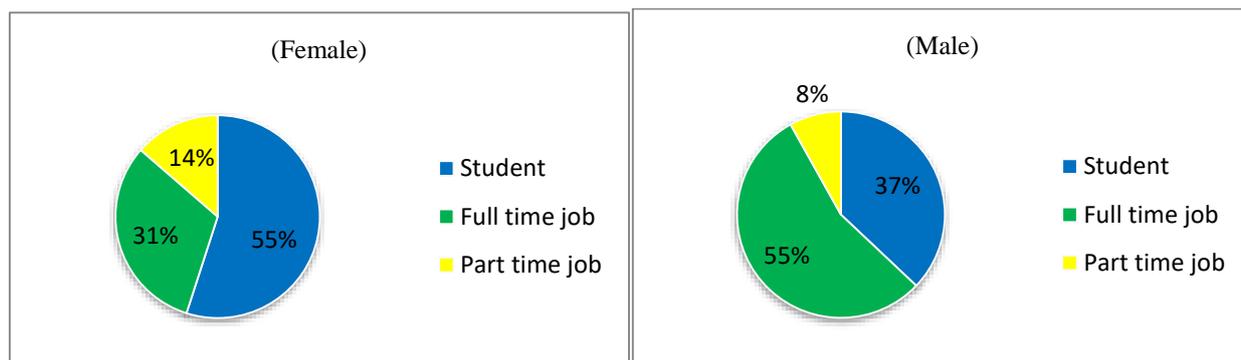
The researcher represented data with the help of chart and employed quantitative analysis method to find out the results.

Chart 1: Age wise distribution of respondents



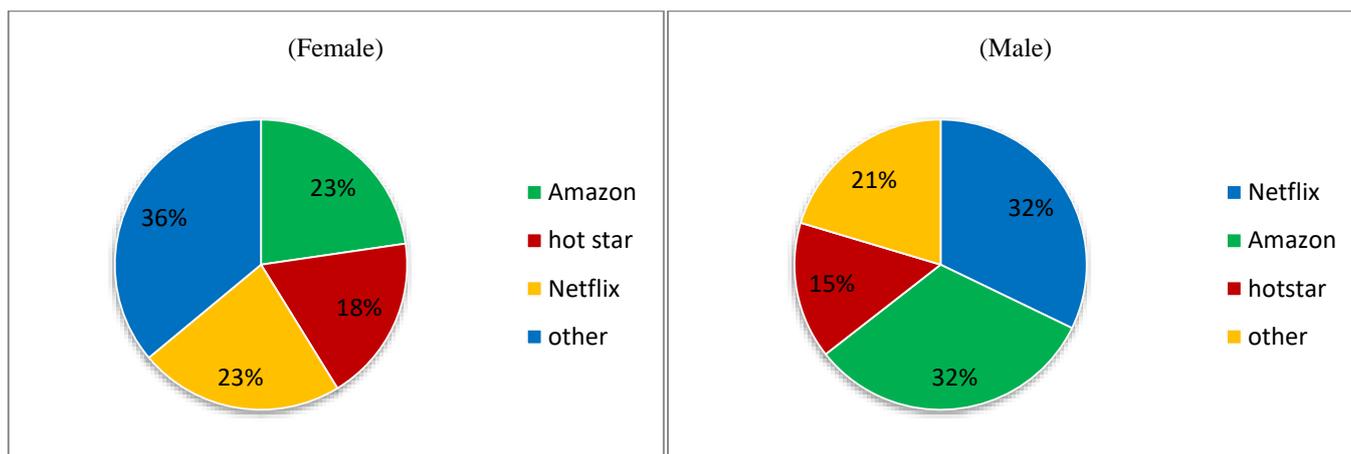
The above chart 1 reveals that the majority of the female respondents that is 55% falls under the age group of 18-22 followed by 26% under 31-36 and 16% of 23-26 category and 3% of 27-30 category. On the other hand, male respondents that is 32% falls under the age group of 18-22 followed by 30% under 31-35 and 24% of 27-30 category and 14% of 23-26category. However, it can be concluded by saying that the majority of the respondents from both male and female belong to 18to 22 age group categories.

Chart 1.1: Profession wise preference of Respondents



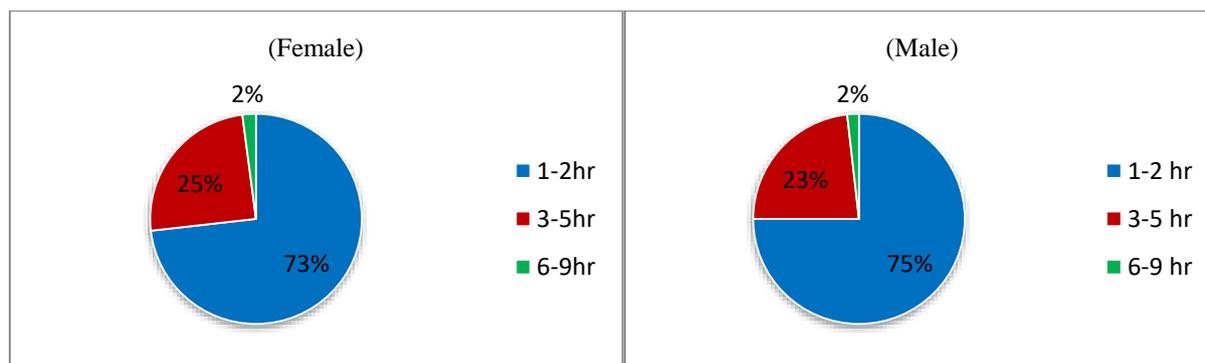
The above chart 1.1 described that the majority of the female respondents that is 55% fall under the student category followed by 31% of came under full-time jobs and 14% of fall under the part-time job category. On the other hand, male respondents that is 55% fall under the full-time working professionals and 37% under students, and 8% fall under the part-time working professional category. However, it can be concluded by saying that the OTT platform is mostly viewed by female students and male full-time working professionals.

Chart 1.2: Favourite online platform for streaming video content



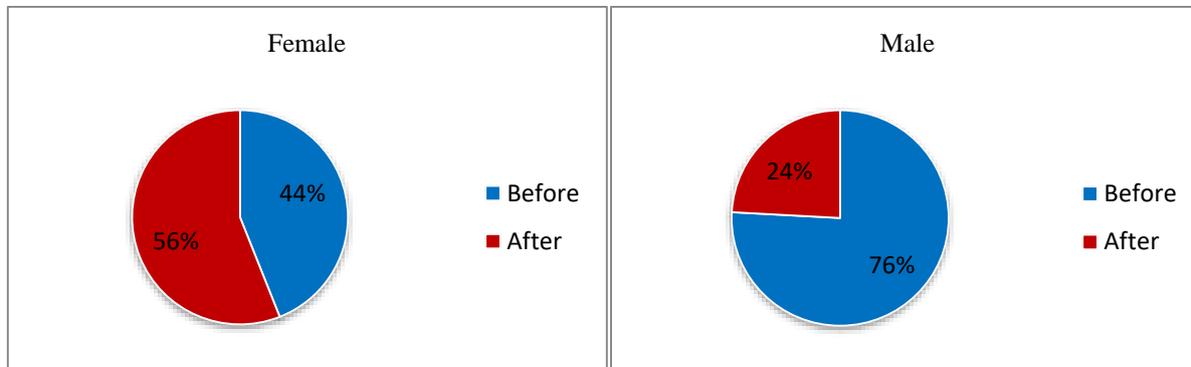
The above chart 1.2 shows that the majority of the male respondents that is 32% used Netflix and Amazon prime followed by 21% of respondents using other sources and 15% of respondents using Hotstar. On the other hand that is 36% of female respondents used other sources for consuming online video content and 23% of respondents used Amazon and Netflix, and 18% used Hotstar. However, it can be said that the majority of male respondents watched Netflix and Amazon prime, and most of the female respondents used other online sources for consuming video content.

Chart 1.3: Time generally spend on watching web series or other video content online every day



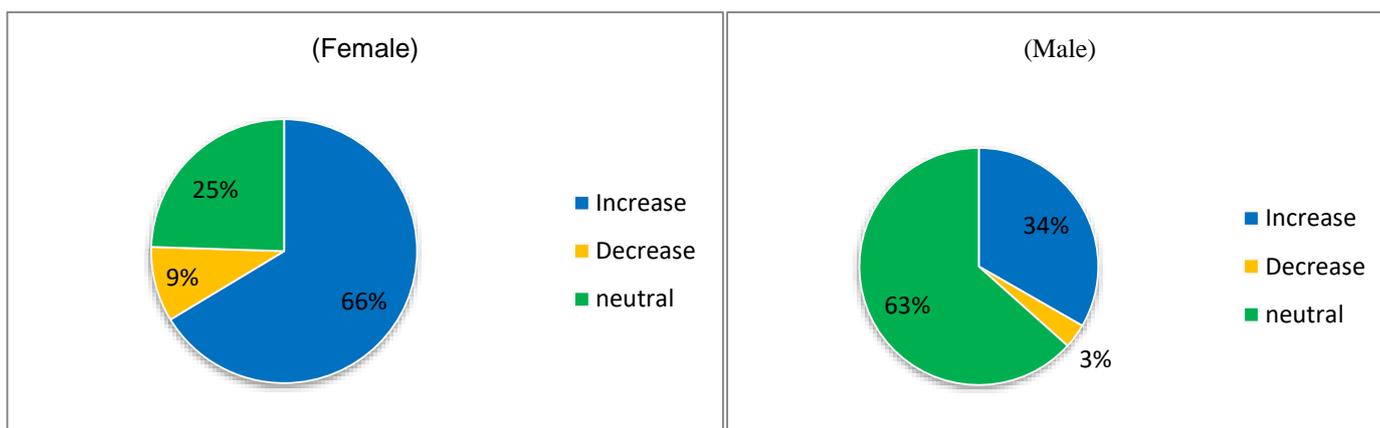
The above chart 1.3 explains that spending of time watching web series for the female and male respondents are same that is 1-2 hours. Followed by 25% female and 23 % male respondents spend 3-5 hours only 2% female and 23 % male respondents spend 6-9 hours spend for watching web series or other video content online every day. However, it can be concluded by saying that most female and male respondents spend 1-2 hours watching web series.

Chart 1.4: Respondent’s views in selecting time for watching web series



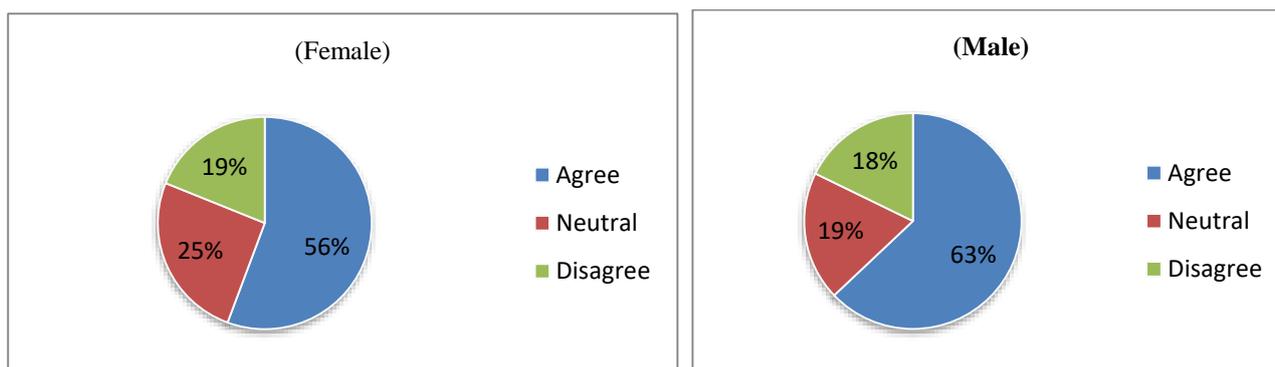
The above chart 1.4 explains that 56% of female respondents said that they started watching web series after lockdown and 76% of male respondents said that before lockdown. However, it can be concluded by saying that the pandemic helped to rise in the female respondents.

Chart 1.5: Respondent’s views on moral support while watching OTT platform during pandemic.



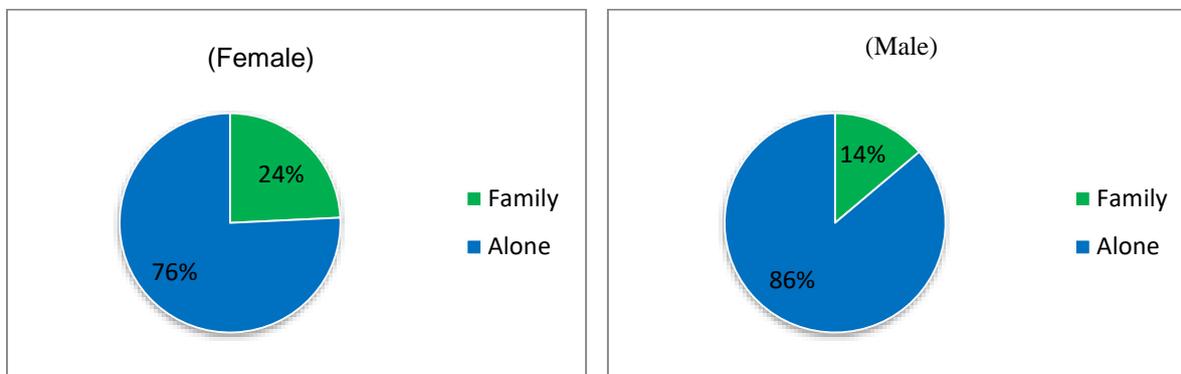
The above chart 1.2 shows that 66% of the female respondents' increase in moral support followed by 25% are respond neutral and 9% said to decrease. On the other hand, 63% of male respondents feel neutral after watching OTT platform followed by 34% of respondents' aid increase and only 3% of respondents said no. However, it can be concluded by saying that majority of female respondents said that web series other video content online during pandemic helped to increase their morale support but the male respondent feels neutral about it.

Chart 1.6: Respondent’s views on online contents psychological effects.



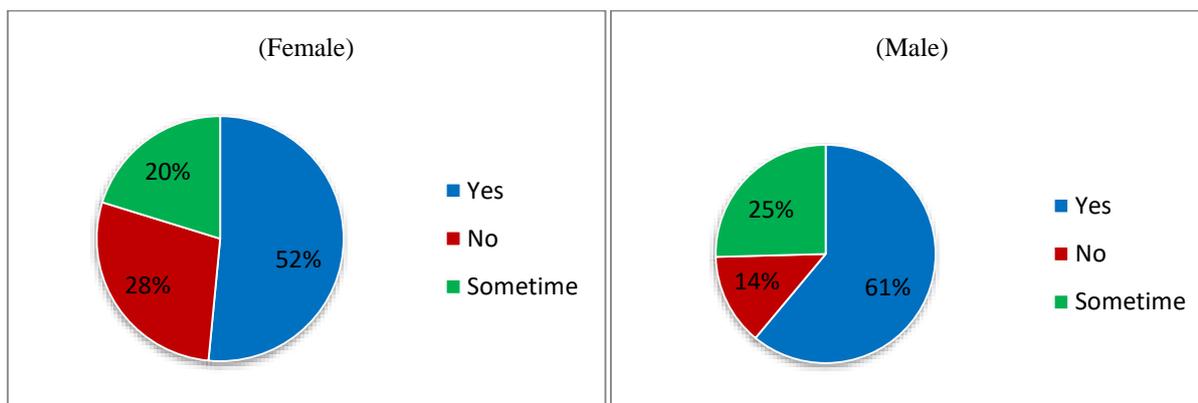
The above chart 1.6 shows that 56% of female respondents agree that web series and online content have a psychological impact followed by 25% of respondents feeling neutral and 19% of respondents disagreeing on psychological effects. On the other hand, 63% of male respondents agree that the web series and online content have a psychological impact followed by 19% feeling neutral, and 18% respondents feel disagree. However, it can be concluded by states that the majority of respondents agree that web series and online content have a psychological effect on them.

Chart 1.7: Watching habits of web series by the respondent.



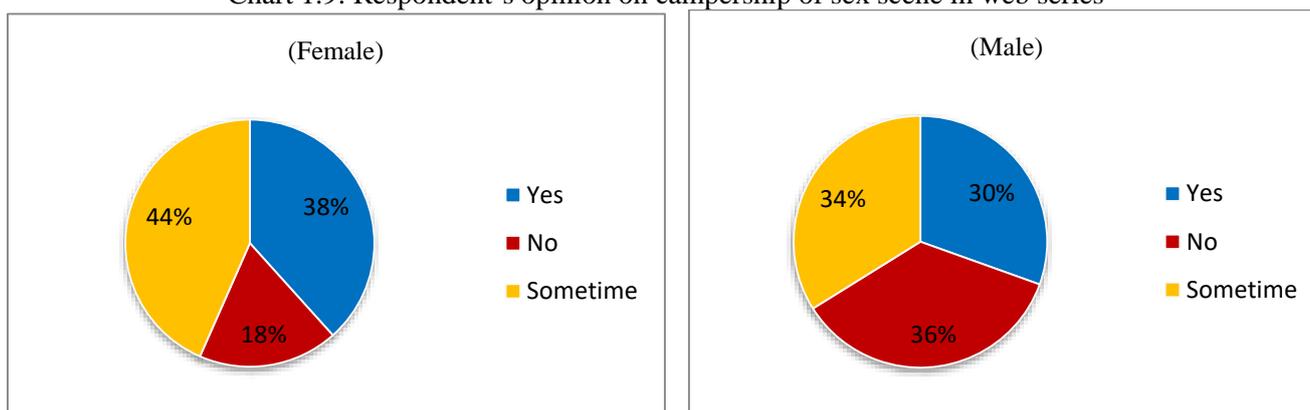
The above chart 1.7 describes that the majority of the 76% of female respondents like to watch web series alone and 24% of respondents like to watch with their family. On the other hand, 86% of male respondents like to watch web series alone and 14% of male respondents like to watch web series with family. However, it can be said that both male and female respondents like to watch web series alone.

Chart 1.8: Respondent’s opinion on the portrayal of women in web series as sex object.



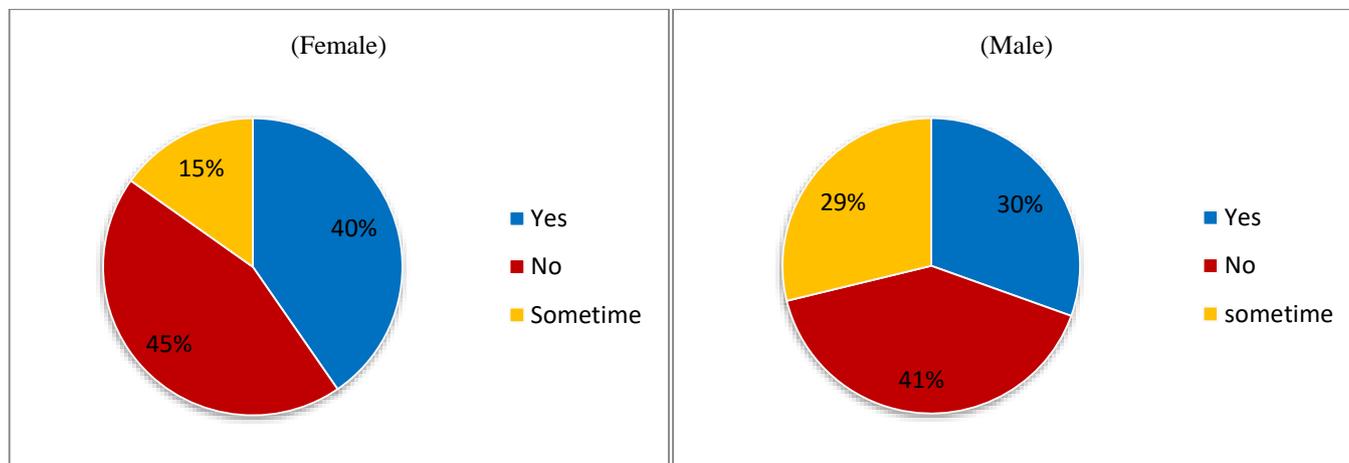
The above chart 1.8 describe that 52% of female and 61% of male respondents feel that web series exposed women as a sex objects or desperate for sex. Say, 28% female and 14% male said no and 20% female and 25% respondent says sometimes. However, it can be summarised by saying that the male and female respondents agreed on the presentation of women in web series are as sex objects.

Chart 1.9: Respondent’s opinion on campership of sex scene in web series



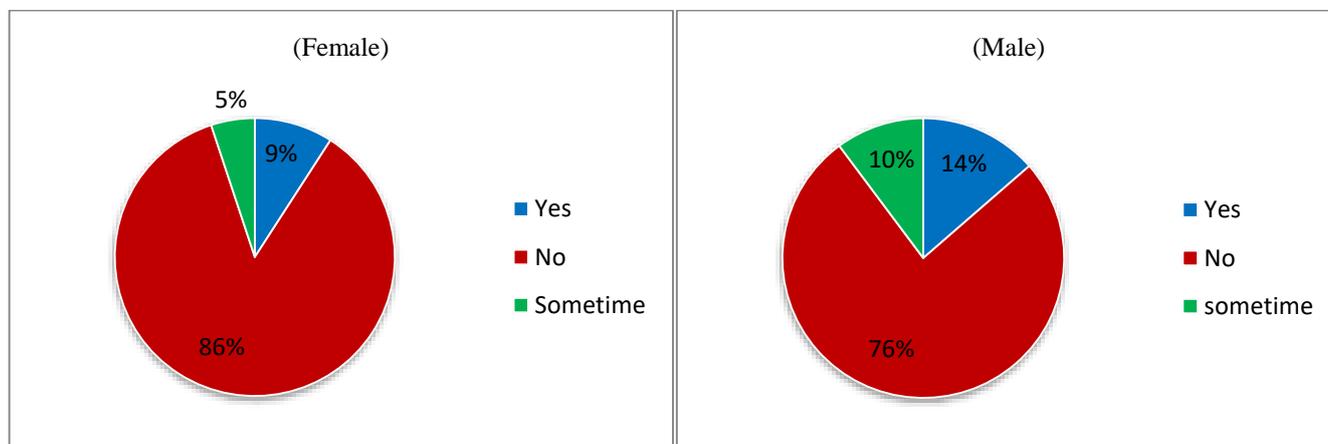
The above chart 1.9 explains that series 44% of maximum females feel sometimes sex scenes should be censored from web series followed by 38% said yes and 18% said no. On the other hand, 36% of maximum male respondents said no need for censorship of sex sponce in web series followed by 34% saying some time and 30% said yes. However, it can be concluded by saying that most of the female respondents agree that Censorship is needed in web series.

Chart 1.10: Respondent’s opinion on the impact of web series motivated you to lavish lifestyle.



The above chart 1.10 explains that any web series motivates respondents for lavish life than 45% of females said no followed by 40% said yes and 15% said sometimes. On the other hand, 41% of male respondents said no and 30% said yes and 29% of male respondents said sometimes. However, it can be concluded by saying that if the researcher adds some time and yes then male and female respondents feel little motivated with the lavish lifestyle of web series.

Chart 2: Effect of alcohol and smoking among the respondents after watching web series.



The above chart 1.11 describe that 86% of female respondent said no to being attracted to alcohol, smoking, or drugs after watching them on web series and other online video content then and 9% said yes and 5 % respond sometimes. On the other hand, 76% of male respondents said no and 14% said yes and 10% respond sometimes. However, it can be concluded by saying that male and female respondents declare a denial attraction towards alcohol, smoking, and drugs after watching web series.

**5. MAJOR FINDINGS:**

Data show that majority of respondents both male and female falls under18-22 age group. In this study maximum number of viewers that is 66% are female students and 54% are male respondents who are full-time working professionals and researcher finds that the OTT platform is mostly viewed by female students in comparison to male students followed by a full-time male working professionals. The study shows that 32% of male respondents used Netflix and Amazon prime, 36% of female respondents used other content from the internet. Most of the female respondents are students and they were not able to spend money on subscriptions and for that, they prefer another platform that does

not require subscription or cost less in comparison to other platforms. The male majority of viewers are working professionals that's why Netflix and Amazon both have a major choice of OTT platform for male respondents. In this study duration of time watching web series for the female and male respondent are almost the same. The majority of the respondents say that they spend 1-2 hours watching web series. However, 56% of female respondents said that they started watching web series after lockdown and 76% of male respondents said that before lockdown they already have been watching web series. It is seen that the rise of watching web series increased during lockdown among women respondents. The majority of the female respondents said that web series and other online video content during lockdown helped them to entertain and increase their morale support while the male respondent feels neutral after watching web series other video content online during a lockdown. The majority of respondents agree that web series and online content have a psychological effect on them. From this data, the researcher finds out that both the male and female respondents agree on the psychological impact of watching web series. Both male and female respondents prefer to watch web series alone. Both male and female respondents feel that some web series exposed women as a sex objects or desperate for sex. Most of the female respondent thinks that some web series need to be censored while most of the male respondents think not necessary. Male and female respondents declare the denial of attraction towards alcohol, smoking, and drugs after watching web series. According to data male and female respondents feel little motivated with the lavish lifestyle of web series they watch.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Each mass media has its advantage and disadvantages. There are so many scopes to study and understand the impact of new media technology on the audience. The OTT platform provides global content to the audience. Television is called the family medium of entertainment and while OTT platform became the personalized medium of communication. This platform gives the option to the audience to choose the content whatever they like to watch. Sometimes OTT platforms are provided negative content which people don't like to watch and it creates a bad impact on the viewer's minds. As content providers, OTT platforms should come up with good content which addresses socio-cultural issues through entertainment. Parenting lock should be must in every OTT platform app. It should minimize the cost of subscriptions to give more accessibility to the audience and also may come up with its internet network connectivity policies to provide faster bandwidth for good streaming.

## **7. CONCLUSION:**

Most of the female respondents are students and they were not able to spend money on subscriptions and due to that they prefer other platforms which do not need a subscription or they need to spend less compared to other platforms. The male majority of viewers are working professionals that's why Netflix and Amazon both have a major choice of OTT platform for male respondents. The pandemic help to rise in the female viewers. The majority of female viewers said that during pandemic or lockdown web series and other video contents helped them to entertain and increase their morale support. This clearly states that the majority of male and female respondents agree that web series and online contents have a psychological effect on them. OTT platform is still not becoming the family medium and people like to watch alone. The viewers of the OTT platform feel that some web series exposed women as a sex objects or desperate for sex. Most of the female viewers of the OTT platform think that some web series need censorship but the researcher did not get a clear response from male viewers. The presentations of lavish lifestyles attract the viewers for adaptation. Audiences clearly declare the denial of attraction towards alcohol, smoking, and drugs after watching web series.

## **REFERENCES:**

1. Park, E. A. (2018). Business strategies of Korean TV players in the age of over-the-top (OTT) video service. *International journal of communication*, 12, 22.
2. Skot, T. A. (2014). *Value chain dynamics and evolving consumer demographics in the American television industry* (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).
3. Roshan. (2017, July 11). 5 benefits of video on demand over traditional TV. Retrieved from muvi: <https://www.muvi.com/blogs/5-benefits-video-demand-traditional-tv.html>
4. Noll, A. M. (2004). Internet television: Definition and prospects.
5. Schechner, S. and Stewart, C. S. (2012). Hulu to create more original dhows. *The Wall Street Journal*.
6. Harwood, J. (2007). Understanding communication and aging: Developing knowledge and awareness.
7. Gauntlett, D., and Hill, A. (2002). TV living: Television, culture and everyday life. Routledge.

8. Panda, S.; Pandey, S. Binge-watching and college students: Motivations and outcomes. *Young consume*. 2017, 18, 425–438.
9. Dhanuka, A., and Bohra, A. (2019). Binge-watching: Web-series addiction amongst youth. *The management quest*, 2(1).
10. Luo, X. (2002). Uses and gratifications theory and e-consumer behaviours: A structural equation modelling study. *Journal of Interactive advertising*, 2(2), 34-41.
11. Katz, E. (1959). Mass communications research and the study of popular culture: An editorial note on a possible future for this journal. *Public communication*, 2, 1-6.
12. Haridakis, P. M. (2006). Men, women, and televised violence: Predicting viewer aggression in male and female television viewers. *Communication quarterly*, 54(2), 227-255.
13. Ukwuaba.L.C. , Elechi N.C. , & Okenwa G. N. (2016), The influence of violent program on social behaviour of ENUGU state university of science and technology (ESUT) *students international journal of advanced research (IJAR)* ISSN 2320-5407, 20 December 2016.
14. Khan, A.A. , Sohail, A.Q. (2020), “An increasing trend of web series & their effects on youth”, M.phil thesis, [https://www.academia.edu/42027174/ An Increasing Trend of Web Series and Their Effects on Youth](https://www.academia.edu/42027174/An_Increasing_Trend_of_Web_Series_and_Their_Effects_on_Youth) Institute of Communication Studies
15. Chattopadhyay, A. (2020). Web series and web movies and their psycho-sociological impact on netizens in India. *The asian thinker*, volume: VII, july-september.