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THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ERA; OTT PLATFORM IN THE TAMIL FILM INDUSTRY: AN EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

Dr. V. Raman

Associate Professor, School of Mass Communication

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, (Deemed to be University)

Pallavaram, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The first Tamil silent film, 'Keechaka Vadham', was made by R.Nataraja Mudaliar in 1918 is the germ of the Tamil film industry and he started the era of Tamil cinema in southern India. Now, the South Indian industry crosses the value of \$10 billion a year and the four main industries of South India, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Kannada, dominating the Indian film industry. Globalisation and technological development are forcing the industry into new changes and a new era. The efforts of the time began in 2013, but due to the strong opposition and agitation of Tamil film producers and Tamil theatre owners, the efforts become a failure. But as per the evolution theory the survival of the fittest will emerges and the era started in 2019 by 'Pon Magal Vanthal' the first Tamil film released in OTT platform and now the film platform going to touch the peak for certain films like Kamalhassan's 'Vikram', the OTT payment is rupees 200 crore and opened the gate widely to the Tamil films to OTT platform. This article will discuss in detail the evolution of the OTT platform for Tamil films and how the industry has changed and how film producers are taking advantage of it. The OTT platform market to the film industry and various OTT platforms will be detailly analysed and how this OTT platform try to eradicate the loss of 2.7 billion dollars per annum through film piracy will be discussed. Furthermore, discussed the reach of Tamil films to the global Tamil community and create the new market for film companies.

Keywords: OTT Platform, Tamil Film Industry, OTT Market, Film Piracy.

Introduction

Tamil cinema, also referred to as Kollywood, is an Indian Tamil-language film industry. It is based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in the Kodambakkam neighbourhood, the word being a portmanteau of Kodambakkam and Hollywood. The Tamil film era started with the first Tamil silent film, Keechaka Vadham, was made by R. Nataraja Mudaliar in 1918. The first talking motion picture, Kalidas, was a multilingual film directed by H M Reddy and was released on 31 October 1931, less than seven months after India's first talking motion picture Alam Ara.

Tamil cinema later had a profound effect on other filmmaking industries of India, establishing Madras (now Chennai) as a secondary hub for Hindi cinema, other South Indian film industries, as well as Sri Lankan cinema. According to the Wikipedia, over the last quarter of the 20th century, Tamil films from India established a global presence through distribution to an increasing number of overseas theatres in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Japan, the Middle East, parts of Africa, Oceania, Europe, North America and other countries. The industry has also provided inspiration for independent film production in Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora in Malaysia, Singapore and the western hemisphere.

It is estimated by the Manorama Yearbook 2000 (a popular almanac) that over 5,000 Tamil films were produced in the 20th century and after that every year around 200 Tamil films were produced until now. The Tamil films were also dubbed in other languages, reaching a much larger audience. The collection of Tamil films doing tremendous in the box office. For example, recently the "Vikram" of Kamal Hasan has collected over Rs.445 crores (55 million dollars) while the "Beast" of Vijay has collected over Rs. 250 crores (US 31 million dollars).

Over-the-top (OTT) Platforms

OTT Platforms, also known as **the Over-the-top platform**, are web-based services offering video and audio streaming content. With OTT platforms, you can pay for the kind of content you want to watch. You don't have to deal with a cable operator, satellite connection, or other broadcast mediums.

The best part that makes OTT more advantageous than traditional viewers is affordability and subscriber service. You can access international-level content from anywhere around the world. Internet-based streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon prime offer the best TV series and series that every movie-goer is glued to their screen. This wasn't possible about a decade ago. Forget paying monthly rentals for the cable, as OTT services offer you much better and much more than just entertainment.



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Provided everyone or anyone can access the top-quality content once paid for the subscription, there are many **advantages of OTT Platform**. OTT platforms thrived even more during the pandemic, playing a critical role in the revolution and development of information.

Advantages of OTT Platform

OTT platforms such as Netflix, HBO, Amazon prime Video, SUN NXT, Disney+ Hot star, ZEE5, Simply South, Zee 5, KODI TV, Voot, aha, soniliv Tentkotta etc., are increasingly becoming popular to a great extent. With the urge to get more and more on-demand entertainment, people are subscribing to the streaming channels even more. Here are some reasons that back up for online streaming services.

- 1. Reduced Cost is one of the Advantages of OTT Platform:** There are thousands of programs you can access with a monthly subscription. Freedom to access international web series, shows, live sports telecasts, and favorite flicks on the go is one of the greatest pros of streaming platforms. Also, there are no monthly bills for cable operators or interruption to face. Anyone willing to watch online digital content can register themselves and pay a monthly or yearly subscription amount, making it cost-effective.
- 2. Crisp Sound and Picture Quality:** Every OTT Platform keeps the content quality in High Definition. The higher your speed, the better will be auditory and visual content since the service is offered online. The video and audio quality of the movies are usually high, which is a great advantage of using an **OTT platform like HBO and Netflix**. On the plus side, you can customize the video and audio quality per your liking.
- 3. Instant Playback:** Instant viewing is another advantage of OTT platform as you can request to view any movies or shows, irrespective of their time of release, anytime. You can watch your favorite web series as many times as you like. There no hassles of waiting in long ticket queues in theatres or see those annoying advertisements during a movie on TV. You can immediate and unlimited access to the movies, even when you are on the road. Some platforms charge a flat monthly fee, and in return, you get full access to their programming.
- 4. Multi-Platform Service:** OTT platforms give you enough freedom to watch your favorite content wherever you want, however you want, and whenever you want. If you don't have time to log on to your laptop or desktop, you can binge-watch it on your smartphone. These media services can easily be accessed through mobile phones, laptops, smart TV, and other audio-visual devices with an internet connection. This service is synonymous with video-on-demand (SVoD) services, and digital content at the international level can be accessed.
- 5. Original Content:** Having an account on an OTT platform like HBO means that you will need to subscribe to the authentic services. By paying a little subscription amount, you get a wide variety of original content that can be accessed only upon authorization. Being the account owner, you can manage the stuff on your own without any intervention from external sources.

Disadvantages of OTT Platform

There are doubtlessly so many advantages of OTT Platforms. The main reason for this are the price factor, and a wide variety of content availability. There are a few cons that also count as the major **disadvantages of OTT Platform**.

- 1. Biggest of Disadvantages of OTT Platform is Online Limitation:** You can enjoy streaming platforms for as long as you have an internet connection. The downside of streaming media from a website is that the media is only available online. This option limits access to the material to people who don't have an online presence. You are also required to have an account on streaming platforms to be able to view your favourite program.
- 2. Poor Network can Impact your viewing:** Unstable connection is another disadvantage of streaming online. As the content is in HD quality, a poor network speed will make it rather difficult to let you watch the media uninterrupted. Streaming media requires a stable internet connection. If you want the HD experience, you should have a minimum of 2MBPS of internet connection, otherwise, you will experience buffering issues.
- 3. Online Security:** Besides HBO, Netflix, and other OTT Platforms, some are untrusted ones. Thousands of such platforms are unsafe for you as you are vulnerable to lose your confidential information while paying for a subscription. Also, Cybercrime can happen on platforms that ask you for your personal information, including your bank details. Even though many reputable platforms work on tightening the security, many require tweaking their security.
- 4. No Censorship:** OTT platforms operate independently and without following governmental policies. There are no age limitations for viewership either. The only purpose is to bring content that attracts more viewers on board. One of the concerning disadvantages of OTT Platform is that there is restrictions on the content. Such content may be harmful to underage users.
- 5. Users waste too much on OTT Platforms:** Given that there are plenty of web series, movies, and shows released every week, users are more likely to waste their time on OTT Platforms. As a web series ends, there's another one in the recommended segments. People spending more time on live video streaming are inclined to be addicted to online content rather than being socially active in real life.



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OTT platforms follow one of the four revenue models to make profits. Users will have to watch unskippable advertisements in the middle of their content, which might hinder the movie experience.

The popular OTT revenue models are

1. **SVOD** – SVOD means Subscription Video on Demand. In this model, the OTT applications earn through the subscription money that is paid by the users to view the content. The subscription value changes from platform to platform. This model is adopted by online streaming giants like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Sony Liv.
2. **AVOD** – AVOD means Advertising Video on Demand. This model allows the subscribers or users to view the content for free. These platforms earn through the Ad revenue model, where they charge brands and companies for posting ads on their platform. This model is adopted by Voot & MX Player.
3. **Hybrid** – This OTT business model is a combination of both SVOD and AVOD. In this model, the OTT platform offers both free and paid subscriptions to its users and generates revenue through both models. This pattern is followed by Hotstar plus, and Zee5.
4. **TVOD** – TVOD means Transaction Video on demand. This model comprises two steaming options that can be chosen by the subscriber as per their needs. This kind of revenue model is followed by Sky Box Office, Apple’s iTunes, and Amazon Video Store.

The Emergence of OTT Platform in Tamil

The lockdown caused by the new coronavirus pandemic has had a significant effect on the entertainment industry. With theatres shut indefinitely, many filmmakers now are resorting to digital streaming platforms to make their content available to the audience who can consume it from the comfort of their homes.

But Kamal Haasan was one of the first actors in India to make an effort to bring movies straight to your home. Back in January 2013, Haasan faced the wrath of theatre owners, distributors, filmmakers and even producers when he decided to release his most controversial film, Vishwaroopam, on DTH (Direct-To-Home). The Tamil version of the film was priced at Rs 1,000 and the Hindi version (Vishwaroop) was priced at Rs 500.

The film was supposed to premiere on DTH a day before its theatrical release. However, as theatre owners continued to protest and threatened to boycott the film, he announced that he will release the film on DTH and in theatres simultaneously. In an interview back then, Haasan had said, "Some good friends in the film fraternity advised me to release the film on DTH and theatres at the same time to maintain a better ecosystem and give them both an equal status."

According to the Hindustan Times, Haasan had organised a huge press meet to defend his stand of a DTH release. He argued that he wanted to do this in order to adapt to the new technology and even predicted that theatrical releases will reduce in the future. "Technological growth is inevitable and we have to adapt to it. We all had faced similar situations before when there was a surge in satellite television. Many feared that satellite TV will spoil their business. But it didn't. I am doing a fair business here, keeping distributors and exhibitors in mind. My decisions won't affect them. Nobody has the right to stop me from releasing my film on DTH," he had said.

He sent a legal notice to a few people in the association who constantly threatened him and forced him to stop this movement. The actor had insisted on the fact that he did not seek to disturb the ecosystem that benefits many. "I am just trying to make use of the technology which is right in front of me. A farmer should understand that a tractor would only help him to increase the yield. He should neither fear nor avoid it. I think that's what I am trying to do. Everybody wants to watch films in the comfort of their home and I think that will be the future of cinema."

However, due to various other reasons, Kamal Haasan couldn't release the film on DTH as planned. The film released worldwide in theatres, excluding Tamil Nadu, on January 25, 2013, while the Hindi version was released on February 1, the same year. The controversial plot of the film invited protests from various Muslim organisations. The film was banned for 15 days in Tamil Nadu.

Haasan's fight bears a striking resemblance to today's scenario. In 2020, when actor Suriya announced that his production venture, Ponmagal Vandhal, will have a digital premiere in May 2020, many warned him against it. R Paneer Selvam, the general secretary of Theatre and Multiplex Owners Association sent him an open threat saying his films will not have a theatrical release in the near future if he goes ahead with the OTT release.



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But Suriya soon revealed that the streaming rights of the film have been secured by Amazon Prime Video. Within a few days, the makers of Keerthy Suresh's Penguin also announced that their film will have an OTT release. Many films down South including Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam are now eyeing digital releases. The battle between theatre owners and OTT players has intensified as the former fear that digital releases are bad news for business. Bollywood is in a similar situation with Amitabh Bachchan and Ayushmann Khurrana's Gulabo Sitabo and Vidya Balan's Shakuntala Devi both releasing on Amazon Prime Video.

However, despite Haasan's failure, today's filmmakers are moving forward with a digital debut. Clearly Haasan was right in his prediction - movie viewing will evolve. And it has.

Actress Jyotika's Tamil film Ponmagal Vandhal had its world premiere on Amazon Prime on May 29, 2020 feels OTT platform is a parallel avenue during these tough times as theatres are closed. In her interview to Cinema Express, Jyotika has opened up about the theatre versus OTT debate and why Ponmagal Vandhal is a film close to her heart.

On Ponmagal Vandhal opting for direct-OTT release, Jyotika said: "Nothing can replace the joy an actor or filmmaker gets when people cheer in theatres. Ten months or a year down the line, after we have beaten the coronavirus, theatres will gain back glory and they will become again the prime sources of entertainment. OTT platform is a parallel avenue during these tough times."

Ponmagal Vandhal becomes the first mainstream Tamil film to directly release on OTT platform, bypassing theatrical release. The decision was taken recently keeping in mind the current Covid-19 pandemic situation.

Following the decision to release Pon Magal Vandhal directly on Amazon Prime, theatre owners in Tamil Nadu expressed immense shock and disappointment. However, the opposition from theatre owners didn't stop the makers from revoking their decision to go ahead and release directly on OTT.

After Ponmagal Vandhal, 185 films released through OTT platform in the year 2020 and more than 210 films were released in the year 2021. Some of the films like Soorai pottru (recently bagged a total of five honours at the 68th National Film Awards for 2020), Mookuthi Amman are entered in the box office. Soorai pottru Budget is 20 Crore and the movie Collected Rs. 174.69 crore (worldwide gross). The budget of Mookuthi Amman hasn't been revealed yet but it would be reportedly over 8 to 10 crores easily. It would have definitely earned over 35 to 40 crores nett and could have been considered as super-hit. The DT Next newspaper revealed that Kamal Hasan's recent film Vikram sold for Rs. 200 crores for OTT release and it is the recent super-duper hit film and effortlessly entered in box office.

Viewers of OTT

Based on Dinamalar survey, in India the viewers of OTT platform are constantly increasing and research results says that in 2023 it becomes 35 to 50 crore viewers. The youngsters are the main viewers of OTT platforms. Now the Disney Hot star has 4.3 crore viewers and Amazon prime has 1.7 crore viewers. The Pandemic period also one of the major reasons to increase the OTT viewers. The upcoming 5G network will increase the OTT viewers to all the OTT platforms and the market will reach to peak in coming years.

Eradication of Film Piracy

The OTT platform is widely open the door to film piracy eradication gates. The loss of 2.7 billion rupees to the film industry through the film piracy is reducing slowly because of OTT platforms. Theatre ticket costs, other expenditure to watch movies is one of the reasons for developing film piracy. The low-cost access to the OTT platform is saving times to the viewers and watch the high-quality print without any disturbance is increasing and reducing the film piracy rate. If it continues the film piracy market will vanish soon.

Apart from that the global community of Tamil diaspora is getting the movie in the same day without any strain. This international market gives more profit to the producers and now OTT platform is another source to collect the production money for the producers. Therefore, now many producers are adding OTT platform release with satellite rights and distributing films to OTT companies with international release rights.



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Conclusion

The emergence of OTT platform is become another major resource for film distribution and enter in the box office. This also eradicating the film piracy and viewers easily getting high quality print to watch with family. The OTT platform is one of the major platforms for Tamil films now and it will create the new zone and history in Tamil film industry in soon.

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