



Toxic Talk Or Artistic Freedom? A Critical Look At Gendered Slang, And Hate Speech In Indian Ott Media

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Abstract: Language is the primary medium of expression, communication as well as cultural transmission. It allows us to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas, enable meaningful interaction and collaboration. Stories, songs and rituals are preserved in linguistic form, maintaining cultural heritage and identity. The significance of language extends far beyond mere words, as it shapes our thoughts, influences our interactions, and forms the foundation of society. Indian OTT platforms reflect the country's linguistic diversity and serve a wide cultural flavour by producing content in regional languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and others. Dialogues, idioms, and slang enhance the relatability and believability of characters and stories with a touch of creativity. Slang can enhance the emotional impact of a conversation. It gives dialogue more force and authenticity, especially in dramatic or heated situations. The research illustrates how characters use language to assert dominance, control, and resistance within the narrative framework, often mirroring real-life socio-political power struggles. An aspect of the study is to focus on the portrayal of gendered vulgar language as a reflection of power dynamics and social hierarchies. Such portrayals can influence audience attitudes toward gender roles, perpetuate potentially harmful stereotypes, and justify abusive behaviour. Through a qualitative content analysis approach, the study will identify and categories examples of such kind of vulgar words used in content. This research paper is designed as descriptive research which primarily aims to study gendered slang and hate speech uses in different Indian OTT platforms. To achieve the objective, a survey of audience will be conducted. While acknowledging the importance of creative freedom, the study promotes responsible content creation that thoughtfully considers the possible consequences of inappropriate language. The research findings highlight the need for an understanding of the influential impact of using those words in creative narratives and call for a balanced approach to content regulation on OTT platforms.

Keywords: language, gendered slang, hate speech, Indian OTT, media, creative freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

The increase in Indian language content on OTT platforms reflects the huge cultural and linguistic diversity of the country and has redefined the face of entertainment across the country. While OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and regional players such as Zee5 and Aha roll out content in multiple Indian languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali to Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, and Punjabi, they would have a large and diverse audience characterized by varied tastes. Such linguistic inclusivity only serves to amplify regional stories that were otherwise sidelined and bring local cultures and narratives right to the center of mainstream discourse. It is in the popularity of this regional language content that makers have been further empowered to come up with more authentic stories, more relatable in nature, which not only resonate deeply with the local audience but also enthrall a global one that finds nuanced tapestry in Indian society. It has started democratizing entertainment, aided in the creation of a sense of cultural pride, and helped in the preservation and promotion of regional languages and identities in the digital age—all

because this linguistic OTT content has broken the traditional hegemony of Hindi-language cinema and television.

The slang language in OTT content hugely intensifies the emotional impact by adding authenticity and relatability to the narrative. It makes characters come alive, with dialogues that instantly connect with the audience in the manner people generally speak in different socio-cultural contexts. This colloquial, informal usage of language strengthens the connection viewers form with the story and heightens realism and emotional engagement. However, the rising level of gendered foul dialogue in the series is a cause for concern. It is intended to render some of the characters or situations realistic but continues to feed harmful stereotypes and normalizes offensive behavior. At stake is the alienation of segments of the audience and a contribution to a broader cultural tolerance of misogyny and disrespect. Therefore, while slang adds an extra dimension to the telling, it is always supposed to be highly considerate of the distinction between artistic expression and responsible making of content in order not to reinforce any bad gender norms.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Dhiman (2023) in his study “A Critical Analysis of Vulgar Language on OTT Platforms: A Systematic Review” Expletive language on OTT platforms has exposed the controversy because there are no regulations for traditional TV. With creative liberty giving way to bold content, often is created offensive material. The governments, including India's, have now put into force guidelines that look at balancing artistic liberty with responsible distribution of content in view of viewer concerns.

Chattopadhyay (2020) in her research “Web Series and Web Movies and their psycho- sociological impact on netizens in India” examined the affordability, flexibility in viewing, and exploration of technology combined with Indian culture are reasons why OTT platforms have changed the way people consume media. They influence viewer psychology, trying to solve socio-political issues without censorship, and are influenced by advertisers for revenues. However, addiction to web series can lead to such negative effects as anxiety, health problems, and some ethical concerns.

Kala (2022) in her paper “The Growing Popularity of OTT Platform And Its Impact on The Younger Generation” analysed OTT platforms' affect in multiple dimensions, distractions from studies, a decrease in the power of intellect, and a declination in physical well-being from indoor activities increasing along with declining outdoor activities. Poor internet controls lead to undesired content, violence, and increased vulgarity in the extreme form, which affects their morality. Getting addicted results in health complications; from abnormal sleeping patterns to poor vision. Though laws are developing in India, the regulation of content is ineffective on the OTT platforms, and recent measures are only toward self-regulation with a check from the government.

Ismail & Sharma in their paper “content analysis of indigenous web Series: a cause of psychosocial Concern” investigated Most of the Indian web series on OTT platforms are peppered with verbal abuses, hate speeches, objectification of women, or some other kind of vulgarity. Web series like "College Romance," "Jamtara," "Inside Edge," and other shows have raised objections for excessive usage of foul language, and legal and public objections have come to the fore about their bad impact on society.

III. METHODOLOGY:

This exploratory research paper followed the qualitative method to analyze clippings from five OTT series and a portion from reliable sites such as YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and other over-the-top (OTT) platforms. Selected situations and lines were then decoded based on the degree of slang or offensive language according to Indian society. For the purpose of the study, the random sampling was done.

Indian web series were chosen for content analysis based on the controversial content with gendered slang-

- 1) Mirzapur
- 2) Aashram
- 3) Tandav
- 4) Sacred Games
- 5) Jamtara - Sabka Number Aayega

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT:

1) Mirzapur

“Mirzapur” is a dark Indian crime thriller that showcases violent power struggles in the lawless town of Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. The series is notorious for its liberal use of gendered slang and vulgar language to show just how brutal and patriarchal the world the characters live in really is. Much of the derogatory terms used toward women, in particular, are by men who have been engaged in the criminal underworld to exhibit their misogynistic attitudes. The language used redounds with toxic masculinity and gender dynamics that underline so much of the violence and power plays throughout the series but bring into sharp relief some hard realities about the region it depicts. It contains highly repugnant words and actions on ethical and cultural grounds, especially the abusive and harsh exchanges of this main focus.

“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.”

“Bh****ke, Amar hain hum, Chutiye nah.

2) Aashram

It is an Indian web series bringing out the dark side of religious cults and how power gets misused by self-proclaimed godmen. It is enacted in the backdrop of a fictional ashram to depict corruption, exploitation, and other crimes that are hidden behind the veil of spiritual guidance. The series uses slang on women to show the amount of manipulation and control exerted over them in the ashram. It becomes evident, therefore, that this very language reflects deep-seated misogyny and toxic power dynamics at play in women’s vulnerability within these milieus of oppression. The use of this very rough language shall uncover how the series unveiled the debasing and objectification of women in the name of faith and devotion; therefore, it is touted to show the darker side of gender relations in these contexts.

“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”

3) Tandav

“Tandav” on Amazon Prime is a political drama, replete with heavy dialogues, and often gendered slang that reflect the raw power struggle and deep-seated patriarchy in its storyline. The series uses such language to project the ruthless and manipulative nature of its characters within the high-stakes world of Indian politics. The fact that it is sprinkled with gendered vulgarities, however, presupposes adding an air of realism and just goes to show the casual sexism embedded within these power dynamics. This kind of language tends to feed the gritty atmosphere but raises a question about the normalization of such expressions in popular media.

“jab ek chhoti jaat ka aadmi ek unchi jaat ki aurat ko date karta hai, toh sirf badla lene ke liye... sadiyon ke atyacharon ka, us ek aurat se.”

4) Sacred Games

It is a popular Netflix Indian web series wherein the viewers get acquainted with a gritty crime thriller while explicating the dark underbelly of Mumbai through the crossed destinies of a troubled cop, Sartaj Singh, and a notorious gangster, Ganesh Gaitonde. The show is known for its raw, unfiltered portrayal of rising violence, corruption, and power struggles, heavily laced with regional and gendered slang. Abused language, mostly towards women, underlines the bleak reality of the world in which the characters live—a world in which power is usually exerted through one form of abuse and denigration. As realistic as it makes the characters and their milieus, it also brings across the profound misogyny and toxic masculinity that characterizes such milieus. It uses this gendered slang to underline the brutality across the board in the world it portrays and asks important questions about the impact of the language used on its audience and society.

“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 buntay nahi”

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

5) Jamtara - Sabka Number Aayega

It is Indian crime drama about a group of young men hailing from a small village in Jharkhand who are involved in phishing scams. The series portrays a kind of raw and gritty realism, replete with gendered slang and vulgar languages to show the acrid, patriarchal environment through which these characters move. The slurs on women that are used by the male characters point toward some deep, inner misogyny within this community. Though the language is authentic, bearing an important distinction of just how entrenched the bias of gender and disrespect toward women truly are, it also relates to the power dynamics and toxic masculinity driving the narrative.

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

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

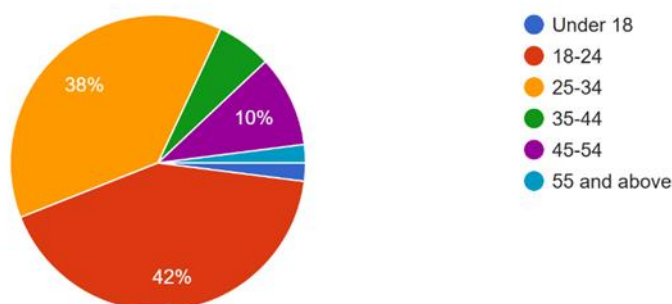
“Nahi utha rahi toh kaahe ke liye g***d mein danda kar rahe ho, Kaahe nahi uthayegi bey bhos****e, uski amma bhi uthaegi, arey amma uthaye toh humse baat karao”

V. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Audience survey analysis:

Age

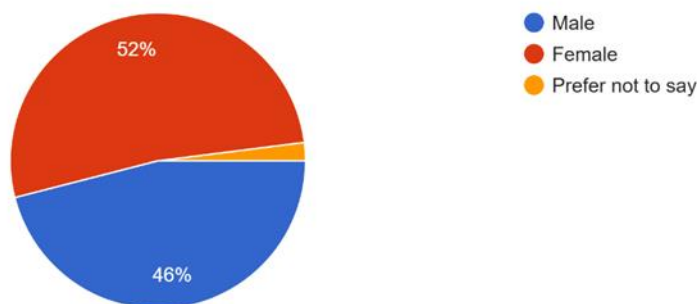
50 responses



The survey received 50 responses, with the majority (42%) from the 18-24 age group, followed closely by 38% in the 25-34 category. This indicates strong participation from young adults. The 35-44 and 45-54 age groups accounted for 6% and 10%, respectively, while respondents aged 55 and above were minimal. The data suggests that the survey primarily engaged a younger demographic, with lower participation from older age groups.

Gender

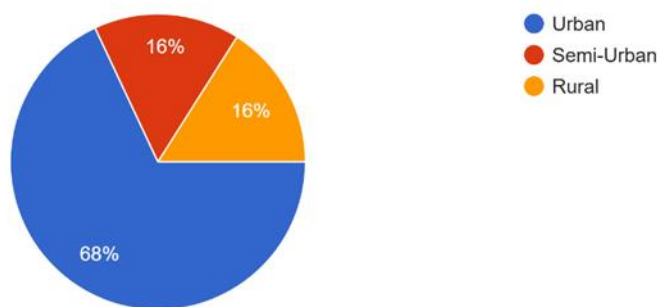
50 responses



The gender distribution of 50 survey respondents shows that 52% identify as female, while 46% identify as male. A small percentage preferred not to disclose their gender. The data indicates a balanced participation between male and female respondents, with a slight majority of female participants.

Location

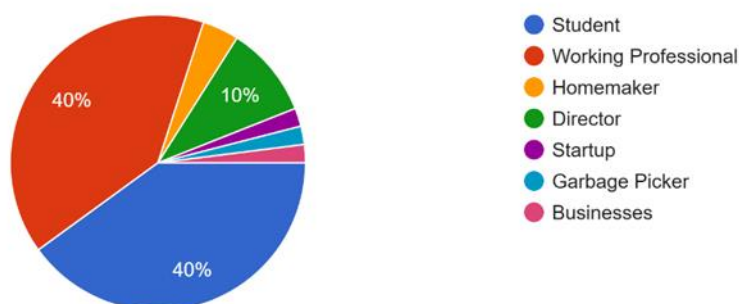
50 responses



The location distribution of 50 respondents shows that 68% belong to urban areas, while both semi-urban and rural areas each account for 16% of the participants. This indicates that the majority of the respondents come from urban backgrounds, with significantly lower representation from semi-urban and rural regions.

Occupation

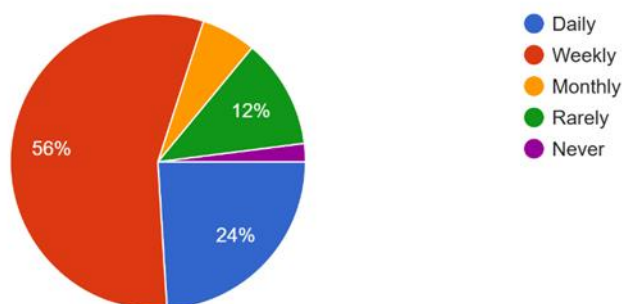
50 responses



The occupation distribution among 50 respondents reveals that students and working professionals each make up 40% of the sample, indicating a balanced representation between these two groups. Homemakers account for 10%, while the remaining respondents belong to diverse occupations such as directors, startup founders, garbage pickers, and business owners, each with a minimal share. This suggests that the majority of respondents are either pursuing education or engaged in professional work.

How often do you watch Indian OTT series?

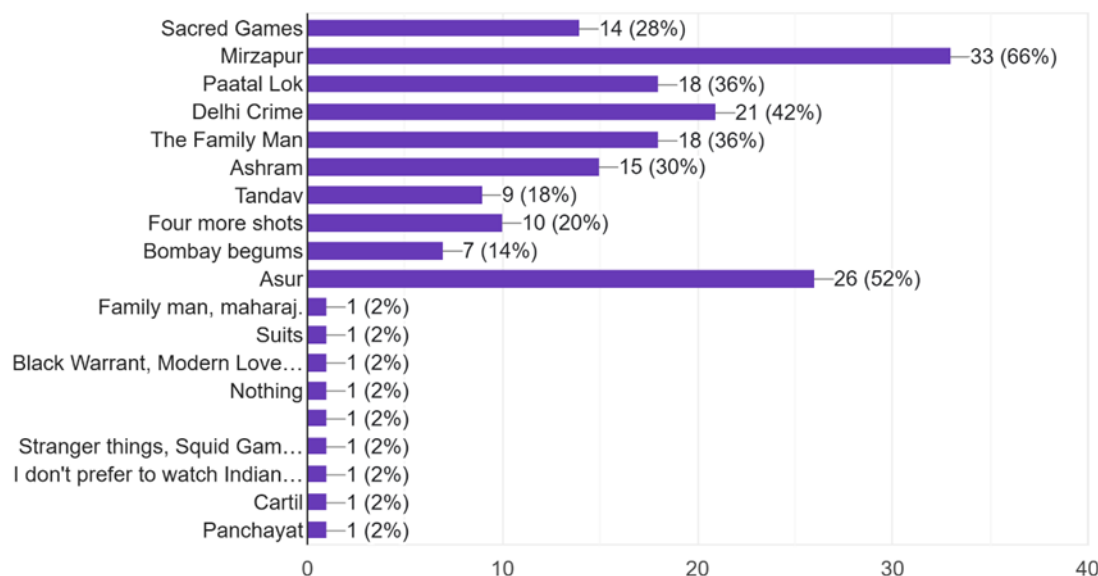
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The survey results indicate that the majority of respondents (56%) never watch Indian OTT series, while 24% watch them daily. Additionally, 12% of respondents watch Indian OTT series weekly, 6% watch them monthly, and a very small percentage watch them rarely. This suggests a significant divide in viewership, with a notable portion of the audience either engaging with OTT content regularly or not at all. The findings highlight a potential gap in audience interest or accessibility to Indian OTT content.

Which Indian OTT series have you watched? (Select all that apply)

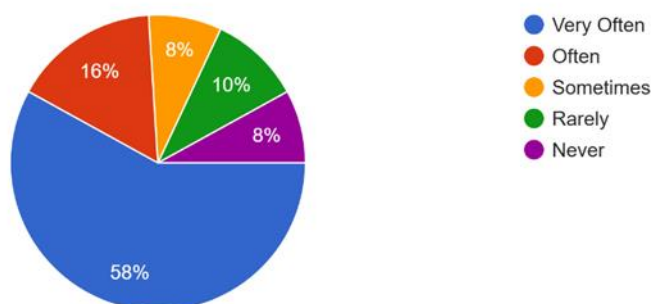
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The survey results indicate that Mirzapur is the most-watched Indian OTT series, with 66% of respondents having seen it, followed by Asur (52%) and Delhi Crime (42%). Paatal Lok and The Family Man are also popular, each with 36% viewership. Other notable series include Ashram (30%), Sacred Games (28%), and Tandav (18%). Less popular series like Bombay Begums (14%) and Four More Shots (20%) show moderate viewership. A small percentage of respondents mentioned watching international series or not preferring Indian OTT content. These insights highlight strong audience preferences for crime thrillers and action-packed narratives.

How often do you notice the use of gendered slang or vulgar language in these series?

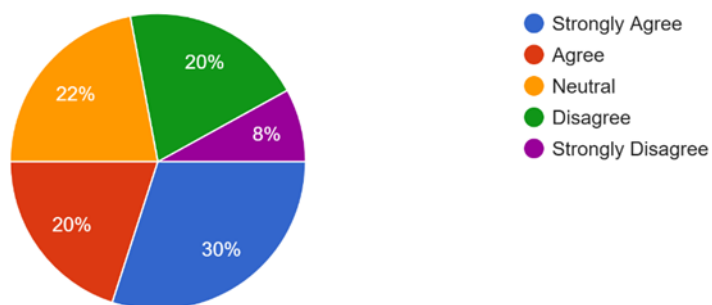
50 responses



The survey results indicate that a significant majority (58%) of respondents notice the use of gendered slang or vulgar language in Indian OTT series very often, while 16% observe it often. Additionally, 10% of respondents notice it sometimes, whereas 8% rarely come across it, and another 8% never notice it. These findings suggest that explicit or gendered language is a prevalent feature in many Indian OTT series, with most viewers being highly aware of its usage. This insight highlights the impact of language choices in shaping audience perceptions of realism and content appeal.

Do you think the use of gendered slang and vulgar language enhances the realism and authenticity of the series?

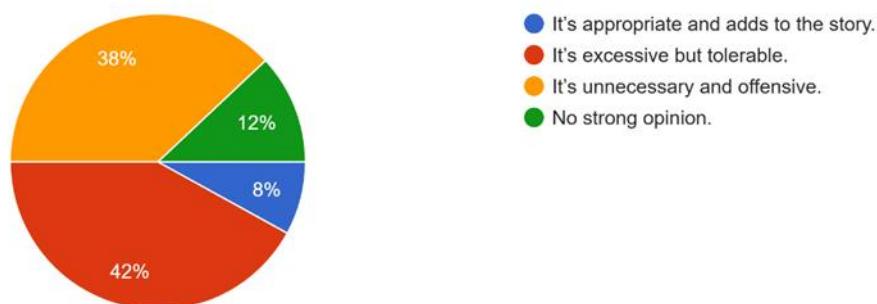
50 responses



The data indicates that gendered slang and vulgar language are prevalent in Indian OTT series, with 58% of respondents noticing it very often and 16% often. A smaller portion, 10%, observes it sometimes, while 8% rarely notice it, and another 8% never encounter it. These findings suggest that explicit language has become a common feature in digital content, influencing audience perceptions of realism and storytelling. The responses highlight how linguistic choices in OTT series shape viewer experiences and raise questions about the impact of such language on cultural representation and audience reception.

How do you feel about the use of gendered slang and hate speech in these series?

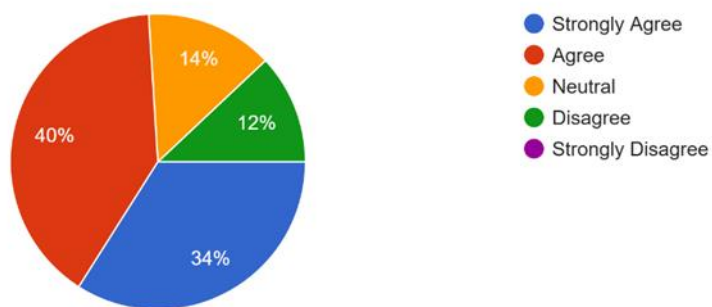
50 responses



The data reveals mixed opinions on the use of gendered slang and hate speech in OTT series. While 42% of respondents find such language unnecessary and offensive, 38% consider it excessive but tolerable. A smaller proportion, 12%, has no strong opinion, whereas only 8% believe it is appropriate and adds to the story. These responses indicate a significant concern about the presence of derogatory language, with a majority either tolerating or disapproving of it. The findings suggest that while some viewers accept it as part of storytelling, many perceive it as problematic, raising questions about its impact on audience perceptions and societal norms.

Do you think such language can influence viewers' attitudes towards gender and social behavior?

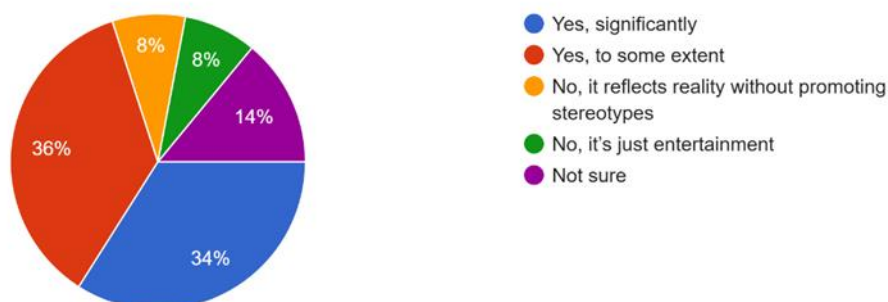
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The data indicates that a significant portion of respondents believe that gendered slang and hate speech in OTT series can influence viewers' attitudes towards gender and social behavior. A combined 74% (34% strongly agree and 40% agree) acknowledge its impact, suggesting that such language plays a role in shaping perceptions and reinforcing societal norms. Meanwhile, 12% remain neutral, and only 14% disagree, indicating that the majority recognize the potential of media language to affect social attitudes. These findings highlight concerns about the broader implications of derogatory language in entertainment content.

In your opinion, does the use of this language perpetuate negative gender stereotypes?

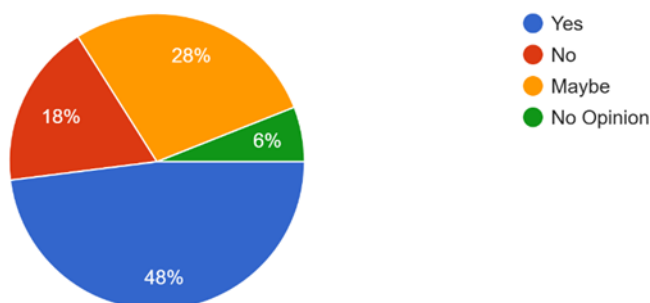
50 responses



The data reveals that a majority of respondents believe that gendered language in OTT series contributes to negative gender stereotypes. A combined 70% (34% significantly and 36% to some extent) acknowledge its role in reinforcing stereotypes. Meanwhile, 8% feel that such language merely reflects reality, and another 8% dismiss it as just entertainment. A small portion (14%) remains uncertain. These findings indicate a strong perception that media language influences societal attitudes, highlighting the need for critical discussions on content regulation and representation.

Do you believe there should be stricter regulations or guidelines for the use of such language in OTT content?

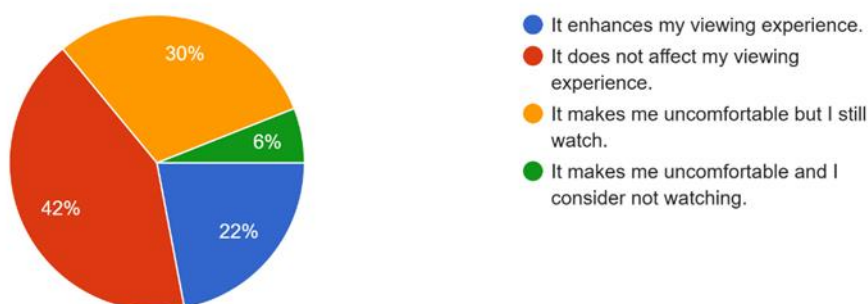
50 responses



The survey results indicate that nearly half of the respondents (48%) support stricter regulations or guidelines for language use in OTT content, highlighting concerns about its influence. However, 28% oppose such regulations, emphasizing creative freedom or differing perceptions of media influence. Another 18% remain uncertain, suggesting a divided perspective, while a small portion (6%) holds no opinion. These findings underscore the ongoing debate between content regulation and artistic expression in digital media.

How does this language affect your viewing experience?

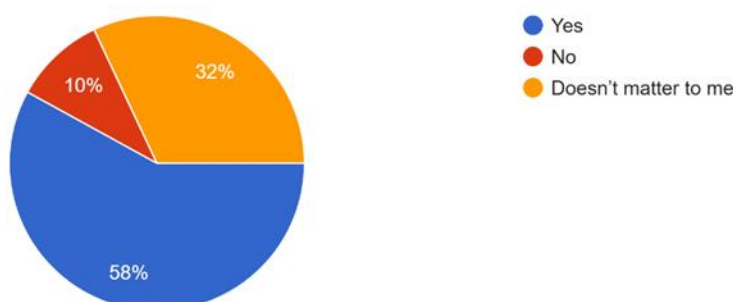
50 responses



The survey results indicate varied audience perspectives on the impact of language in OTT content. While 42% of respondents stated that such language does not affect their viewing experience, 22% felt it enhanced their engagement. However, 30% admitted feeling uncomfortable but continued watching, and 6% were significantly uncomfortable to the extent of considering not watching. These findings suggest that while a majority may tolerate or even appreciate the use of such language, a notable portion of the audience experiences discomfort, highlighting the ongoing debate over its necessity in entertainment.

Would you prefer content with less use of vulgar or gendered slang?

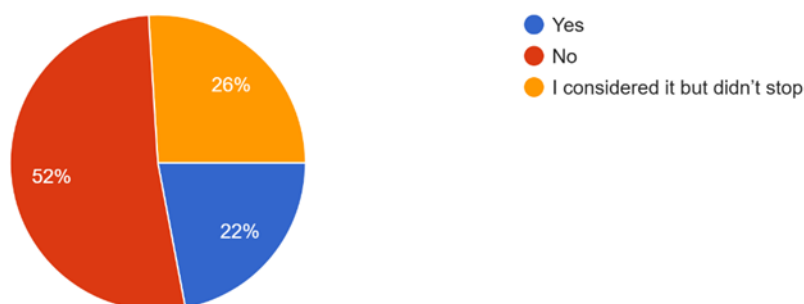
50 responses



The survey results reveal that a significant majority (58%) of respondents prefer content with less use of vulgar or gendered slang, indicating a preference for more refined language in OTT content. Meanwhile, 32% stated that such language does not matter to them, suggesting a degree of audience tolerance. However, only 10% explicitly opposed the idea of reducing such language. This highlights that while a segment of viewers is indifferent, a considerable proportion desires cleaner language in OTT content, reflecting concerns over excessive slang and offensive language in digital entertainment.

Have you ever stopped watching a series because of the use of offensive language?

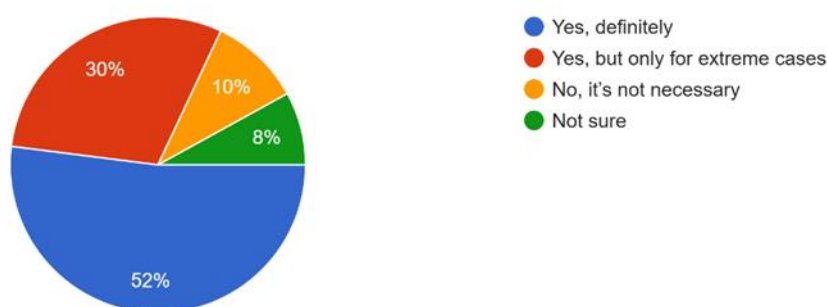
50 responses



The survey results indicate that 52% of respondents have never stopped watching a series due to offensive language, suggesting a level of tolerance for strong or explicit content. However, 22% have discontinued viewing due to such language, reflecting a segment of the audience that is sensitive to offensive speech. Additionally, 26% considered stopping but ultimately continued watching, indicating that while some viewers are uncomfortable with offensive language, it is not always a decisive factor in their viewing choices. This data highlights a mixed reception to explicit language in OTT content, with varying degrees of acceptance and discomfort among viewers.

Do you think OTT platforms should provide content warnings for gendered slang and hate speech?

50 responses



The survey results indicate that a majority of respondents (52%) believe OTT platforms should definitely provide content warnings for gendered slang and hate speech. Additionally, 30% support warnings but only for extreme cases, highlighting a concern for particularly offensive content. Meanwhile, 10% feel such warnings are unnecessary, and 8% are unsure. This data suggests that while there is a strong preference for content warnings, opinions vary on their necessity and extent, reflecting diverse viewer sensitivities towards language in digital content.

VI. CONCLUSION:

The paper brings to attention the multi-levelled and complicated perspective of gendered slang and vulgar expressions in Indian OTT media. Even though it could be writerly and realistically taken up to add to the authenticity of the characters and setting, the same facts which bring it on this light do give rise to serious concerns about the ethics related to its impact on societal order and perpetuation of gender-based discrimination. These results from the survey show that, while a small portion of the audience realized the narrative value the language added, a much larger portion thought it inappropriate or offensive, therefore placing the delicate balance between artistic freedom and social responsibility squarely in the face of content creators. This detail, therefore, makes the general implications of the OTTs, specifically on gender matters, and the normalization of harmful speech contents, specific. This contribution underlines the need for an ongoing debate on and the critical scrutiny of mechanisms through which language is used in the media for the creation of an inclusive and respectful cultural landscape.

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