

The great entertainment shift



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It is no news that globally non-linear media is fast overtaking traditional forms in terms of entertainment consumption. Researches in the West show a clear, steep shift to digital, on-demand content over the likes of television and radio, and the markets there are quickly adjusting to the shift.

But that is all in the West, with their Netflix and Amazon and Spotify and whatever new app or service that just popped up today. In a country like Bangladesh, that is still some distance behind the first world in terms of Internet connectivity coupled with a vast rural population outside the online/digital content consumer demographic, we must ask if it is a significant transition yet, or will potentially be in the near future?

Prepare to be (at least mildly) shocked.

A single company in Bangladesh alone has a daily YouTube consumption of four million minutes. To put that into perspective, imagine yourself watching YouTube videos 24 hours a day; if you did that every day for more than seven and a half years - that would make four million minutes.

That is the daily content consumption of all channels by leading TV channel Ntv. They have 14 YouTube channels, according to Khandakar Fakaruddin Jewel, Head of Ntv Online.

The channel anticipated the potential of YouTube before many others, back in 2014, and now uploads all its television content for the streaming service, with great success. Their biggest channel, Ntv Natok, has over 100,000 subscribers, with other channels providing content such as talk shows, lifestyle shows and even films.

"People are now not just watching content on YouTube, but many are buying smart TVs to watch YouTube content on their televisions," says Jewel.

He also identified the main reasons people are switching to the web-based service over traditional television and their cumulative effect makes a strong case.

Firstly, there is no interruption of adverts while watching on YouTube; secondly, it can be viewed at the viewer's own preferred time and finally, they can watch it anywhere with the choice much more varied.

Flexibility and control are the two biggest

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benefits that YouTube (or any other web-based content streaming service) provides to the user. Why would someone wait for a specific time to sit in their living room and sit through two hours to watch a 40-minute drama? Especially when they can choose what they want to watch from a large selection, watch it sitting anywhere they want, at their own leisure time, without the interruption of advertisements?

Another major advantage that users on YouTube get, according to Jewel, is to discuss and comment on the content.

"Many people tell me that they first read the comments before watching a film or TV play, to know if it's worth their interest," he says. "The ability to express their opinions and interact with other people watching the same video is something that also draws the audience to it. You can never do that on TV."

The library of Bangladeshi entertainment content is also quite massive on the Internet. On YouTube alone, a number of channels are created by CD and DVD companies where they upload TV dramas and films on a daily basis and the consumption is massive.

At the top, there are single-episode TV dramas about 45 minutes in duration that have a daily average view of 40,000-50,000. The same is with films. Bangla films, for all audience tastes, are available in abundance, uploaded by the CD and DVD companies themselves and they rack up big viewership numbers in no time.

And that makes for another very interesting epiphany: it is not just the upper class of society that's consuming the entertainment content on the web. With smartphones becoming increasingly cheap, cellular operators offering mobile Internet at various packages and relatively good speeds, and even Wi-Fi becoming a common concept among people of all social classes, it's not just the social elites who are glued to YouTube.

Lower-income people are also increasingly finding their daily dose of entertainment on the Internet. Everyone has a smartphone (and in some cases, one of those non-branded Chinese tablets) and many of them are cooperatively getting an Internet connection with a Wi-Fi router. And the demographic that is coming under the 'digital entertainment' umbrella is growing. It is already starting to spread among the people in

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