

Chapter 24

Audiences 2.0: Online Movie Streaming Platforms and Cinema Audiences

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ABSTRACT

*From large screen to television to personal devices, experiencing cinema shifted from being communal to familiar and intimate. The emotions, perceptions, understanding, practice, and behaviour of watching movies are simultaneously transforming. However, in a multi-cultural multi-lingual country like India, still carrying characteristics of *Gemeinschaft*, what is the impact of transnational online streaming platforms on its audiences? The chapter explores the possibility of changes among Indian audiences as a result of exposure to online streaming platforms. In examining the transformation of viewers, the chapter addresses audiences' changing relations with the screen. It traces the evolution of audiences based on the concepts of spectator and performer proposing the digital audience is now a performer rather than just a spectator. The chapter navigates the changing flow of online streaming with active audiences. It raises the concern of digital capitalism and resulting politics of aesthetics in the transformation of regional or national audiences to transnational audiences.*

INTRODUCTION

The Infinity Mirrors exhibition of Japanese contemporary artist, Yayoi Kusama offers its audience to click selfies inside the immersive installations. Post it in social media as part of the participatory art exhibition; Troy Conrad Therrien commented, “the Kusama chamber selfie is the aesthetic of the tragic ecstasy of a broken world order running on fumes...” (Kwun, 2018). When the demystified society in its isolated unity given the comfort of an elusive autonomy, it plunges into self-absorbed collaborations breeding new forms of arts and aesthetics. This transformation of society and culture, witnessed in social media or to be more specific with the onset of web 2.0, has also been reflected in the change of various other spheres including business, politics and social psychology. The main characteristics of web 2.0 of

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being participatory, collaborative, open and sharing (O'Reilly, 2005; Flew, 2008; Gillmor, 2006) have influenced the development of new forms, structure, content, practice and platforms for media. The age-old dream of scientists to invent a black box that would be able to do everything has resulted not only into the convergence of technology but also into the convergence of culture (Jenkins, 2006). The cultural mainstreaming of the app-based society (Islam, Islam, & Mazumder, 2010) has given birth to a generation which has almost everything under its fingertips, ordered to be served at the doorstep, even cinema.

Like every other aspect of society, movie making, film distribution and consumption have also undergone crucial changes since the beginning of the new millennium. The changes are, at times intense enough for many to question the existence of cinema halls in the future (Buchanan, 2019). The upcoming mobile-based technology introduced not only the availability of video-on-demand services and social media-based video platforms, but it has also introduced dedicated applications for watching movies made for large screens as well as for mobile screens. The new era witnessed the world's first selfie movie - *Starvecrow* (BBC, 2016). The film shot on iPhone with 35mm lens.

Night Fishing (Soo-mee, 2011), the first feature film designed for mobile viewing - *Rage* (Chacksfield, 2009), the first feature film that encourages second screen interaction with a mobile phone app while watching cinema at theatre halls – *App* (Pearson, 2013) and so on. The emergence of interactive storytelling, mobile-specific movie-making techniques like long tracking shots, continual takes, hand-held fluid camera motions and screen within screen experiences are changing the way movies are made and watched. The technical revolution has left its impact on the content of the films, which together is shaping the audiences as well.

Audiences

There have been multiple studies on understanding the concept of audience, on the role of the audience, the behavioural patterns and preferences of viewers, audiences' opinions, audiences' relation with the screen, audiences' role as performer and as spectators, reception studies and so on. The understanding of cinema audiences has been explored by scholars like Roland Barthes (1986), Pierre Bourdieu, Wolfgang Iser, Jean-Louis Baudry, Hans Robert Jauss, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek and many more. The concept of audience can broadly be categorised in two ways (Christie, 2012). The first being the concept of imagined audiences which is created by the producers, directors and other stakeholders and the second concept is dominated by a commercial perspective which counts the box office numbers and considers audiences more as the crowd. However, the online streaming platforms have given birth to viewers who are isolated, separate individuals, rather than mass audiences of the last century.

Dixon and Foster (2011) find the audiences of the twenty-first century to be young and exposed to digital platforms, which choose cinema as a way to escape their increasing mundane existence. This audience is highly selective not only of content but also of the medium. The globalisation of the material through transnational streaming services has given rise to the taste culture (Lugg, 2011) which binds people simply based on the algorithm of their preferences, beyond the geographic, gender-based, age-based and religious barriers. The movie audiences thus have transformed into virtual digital codes, surpassing the physicality of the experience. The recent studies, therefore, challenge the traditional two ways' understanding of audiences and emphasises on the cultural identity of the audience beyond geographical limitation (Hashim, 2019). Osorio (2014) explains this formation of audiences as multiple configurations generating film culture through revolutions and gradual developments. To understand

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