

Video streaming platforms bet big on regional content

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Last month, streaming service Amazon Prime Video launched its first regional web series in India, a Telugu dark comedy called *GangStars*. After dabbling in Hindi and Telugu markets, video streaming service Viu will enter the Tamil market in July with six new originals in collaboration with local production houses, while ZEE5, the streaming service owned by Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd, will release one original show every month in Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

With the exception of Netflix, which has restricted its India originals to Hindi, the regional market is a space that over-the-top (OTT) video streaming platforms are looking at closely in India, betting

about 30% of their annual budgets on content produced in these local languages, according to industry executives.

"While a considerable number of viewers in the metros like to watch content in Hindi or English, there is a majority of audiences who enjoy watching regional shows and movies as well," said Tarun Katial, chief executive officer, ZEE5 India.

According to the Ficci-EY media and entertainment industry report 2017, growth in India's Internet user base will be driven by rural consumers till 2021, who are expected to grow from 38% to 52%. This will have a significant impact on the type and language of content that will need to be developed. Not just within the country, regional content also reaches out to Indian diaspora elsewhere. For example, ALTBalaji's Tamil show *Maya Thirrai* wit-

Streaming services add local flavour

Except Netflix, which has restricted its India originals to Hindi, several other video streaming platforms are focusing on regional web series.



Amazon Prime Video
GangStars
(Telugu)



Viu
Pelli Gola-1 and 2 (Telugu), **Memu** (Telugu), **Guptha Rahasyam** (Telugu), **Pilla** (Telugu), **Tollywood Squares** (Telugu), **No. 1 Yaari** (Telugu)



ALTBalaji
Maya Thirrai
(Tamil), **Dhimaner Dinkaal**
(Bengali)



ZEE5
Nanna Koochi (Telugu), **Mehmaan** (Bengali), **America Mappillai** (Tamil), **Utsaha Ithihasam** (Malayalam)

-NAVEEN KUMAR SAINI/MINT

nessed traction across West Asia, the US and UK, which are home to huge sections of the Tamil population.

"While Hindi is a market with a very wide potential, it is equally cluttered," said Shantanu Gangane, chief marketing officer at Viu India, which has produced the Telugu comedy *Pelli Gola* and science fiction series *Pilla* recently.

"Having said that, regional content definitely gives you better uptake in terms of engagement, people usually take half the time to lap up regional content (as compared to Hindi or English)."

Manav Sethi, chief marketing officer at ALTBalaji, said a quick way to reach out to regional audiences is to dub Hindi shows into four or five

different languages. However, the appeal of an original regional language story with cultural nuances is much higher than that of a dubbed show. ALT is currently working on a Bhojpuri show with popular actor-singer Dinesh Lal Yadav, besides looking at scripts in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam.

"Regional tastes have evolved and audiences are craving for content that is not formulaic, regressive or low-brow," said Ashok Chierian, head of marketing and revenue, Applause Entertainment, which is looking to announce regional shows in the months ahead. "Good regional content will be an important play in the OTT space," he said.

To be sure, for some OTT

platforms that are owned by broadcasters, it is also a matter of capitalizing on their existing intellectual properties. For example, for VOOT, the streaming service operated by

Viacom18 Media Pvt Ltd, digital programming started with putting out full episodes from their general entertainment channels Colors Marathi, Kannada and Tamil, dubbing

them interchangeably and then moving to creating exclusive, unseen content centred around reality shows like *Bigg Boss Kannada*. "We've witnessed close to 200% increase in content consumption on VOOT, on the back of regional content over the last six months," said Akash Banerji, head of marketing, partnerships and licensing, VOOT.

Video streaming platforms have put about 30% of their annual budgets into local language content, say executives