Are You Still Watching:

An Overview of Streaming in India

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The rise of internet and digital technologies in the last three decades has transformed how individuals and societies consume, and make sense of, media. Digital penetration affects almost every aspect of social life, including the form, content and affordances offered by transnational media conglomerates. The post-2000s shift from traditional broadcasting to digital streaming has raised new set of questions about contemporary media technologies. This study, rooted in the theoretical framework of global media, political economy and cultural studies, enhances the existing scholarship around the concepts of hybridity and glocalization by analyzing the effects of the relatively new, dynamic technology of digital streaming in a rapidly digitizing economy of India. I will concurrently analyze the factors behind the global leader Netflix's relative struggles, and the emergence of Disney+Hotstar and JioCinema as the domestic leader in India. The present investigation argues that in the arena of global media, conglomerates, technologies, platforms need to localize their message, agendas, ideology for effective consumption, interpretation and adoption.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of internet and digital technologies in the last three decades has transformed how individuals and societies consume, and make sense of, media. Digital penetration affects almost every aspect of social life, including the form, content and affordances offered by transnational media conglomerates. One such phenomenon is the popularization of the contemporary, dynamic media form of digital steaming, led by the California-based Netflix Inc since 2007. A product of the dot-com boom of the 1990s, the company's role in this revolution is documented by its meteoric socio-economic rise credited to their user-friendly interface, data-driven technology, and innovative offerings. Netflix contravened customary technological limitations of time and space and increased its digital footprint to nearly 194 countries between 2007 and 2023. Between the same time, paid subscriptions increased from 7.5 million in the US to nearly 260 million worldwide which resulted in a concurrent rise in net profit from $67 million to $5.4 billion (Netflix Investor Relations, *2007 Annual Report*; Netflix Investor Relations, *2023 Annual Report*). This makes Netflix one of the most profitable companies in the world. While Netflix gets most of its subscribers from the Europe-Middle East-Africa region, the Asia Pacific market registers the maximum year-on-year growth in subscribers ("Netflix First Quarter 2024 - Letter to Shareholder" 7), which has made the platform identify India as a potential lucrative territory. An optimistic Netflix entered the Indian market in 2016 thanks to the technological and telecom advancements ushered in by the launch of Jio Platforms which saw India's smartphone usage increase to 1.18 billion, bridging the urban-rural digital divide (TRAI, *Annual Report 2020-21* 11, 16). Nearly 42 percent of these users have access to high-speed 4G+ mobile internet, which costs $0.09 per gigabyte—one of the cheapest in the world. Data consumption also touched 800 billion hours, as of 2022 (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 56; FICCI and EY, *Windows of*

Opportunity 73), which prompted Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings to declare that India would contribute the platform's next 100 million subscribers (*Next 100 Mn Users* 5:45-5:50). However, despite this optimism, subscriptions have hovered around 6 million and the platform trails domestic competitors like Disney+Hotstar and JioCinema in terms of userbase and market share. This study, rooted in the theoretical framework of global media, political economy and cultural studies, enhances the existing scholarship around the concepts of hybridity and glocalization by analyzing the effects of the relatively new, dynamic technology of digital streaming in a rapidly digitizing economy of India. I will concurrently investigate the factors behind the global leader Netflix's relative struggles, and the emergence of Disney+Hotstar and JioCinema as the domestic leader in India. My research argues that in the arena of global media, conglomerates, technologies, platforms need to localize their message, agendas, ideology for effective consumption, interpretation and adoption.

1. Existing Scholarship on Streaming

The shift from traditional broadcasting to the dynamic form of digital streaming has birthed a new set of questions about its socio-cultural effects and affordance which have been thoroughly analyzed in contemporary communications research. Much of this scholarship has focused on the social, cultural and economic aspect of Netflix. Observing the liminality between traditional and contemporary forms, Ramon Lobato called for a conceptual re-evaluation of media theories by examining the effects of streaming (*Netflix Nations* xii) as well as "content diversity within streaming services" ("Rethinking International TV Flows Research in the Age of Netflix" 241). Scholarship has also focused on the relationship between streaming's various affordances—binge-watching, ad-free non-serialized content—and audiences' consumption habits (Castro et al. 3; Sung et al. 417; Ford 100); industry practices (Pilipets 9; Lotz and Eklund 208; Havens

329); and psychological well-being and physical health (Steins-Loeber et al. 148; Flayelle et al. 2; McKenzie et al. 66). Another popular essay by Djoymi Baker (32) looks at how streaming companies purposely package binge-worthy texts, evidenced by the simultaneous release of multiple episodes or seasons. Taking this further, Sheri Chinen-Bisen (32) and Kathryn Pallister (3) have closely monitored the role of Netflix to tap the nostalgia zone of its consumers as an effective strategy to gain subscribers and maximize revenues. Political economists like Sylvia Harvey (107) and Guiseppe Richeri (142) discussed how Western countries navigated the streaming revolution by critiquing various state-led legislations and policies concerning the audiovisual industry. Similarly, Jane Shattuc argues that streaming has led to a "shift in technology, not companies" (163). There has been growing research on the social, cultural, political effects of digital streaming revolution in the global South, including the Indian subcontinent (S. Guha 17; Ahmed et al. 21; Sharma and Lulandala 66). Despite Netflix's positive cultural and economic outcomes across the world, its position and performance in India is relatively sluggish, warranting an investigation into the limitations of Netflix's strategies.

The affordances and structure of the contemporary media technology of digital streaming have confounded and, in many ways, blurred the traditional concepts of local/global, flow/contra-flow that global media scholarship has always relied upon as streaming giants like Netflix create "far more robust two-way flows than have existed in the past" (Gray and Lotz, chap.2). Netflix argues that its research shows subscribers want premium, cross-cultural and transnational content, which intensifies the debates surrounding global media flows and content. Regarding global television flows, media scholar Ramon Lobato suggests using the 'and' rather than 'either/or' approach—one has to analyze Netflix within both cultural imperialism and contra-flow/hybrid paradigms as active audiences move between the identification of local—

news and sports—and global—Bollywood, K-Pop, Japanese anime, etc.—in their daily lives (Lobato, *Netflix Nations* 159–61). The present investigation, thus, looks at the effects of digital or digitally enabled media forms on cultural texts, content, to study how this digital revolution has affected the world's most populous country of India. The study will focus on the revenue models and business structure of the US-based Netflix Inc, which operates like a diversified conglomerate like Disney and Comcast. It earns most of its revenue through subscriptions, like premium cable channels of HBO and Showtime, and not only builds on the video-on-demand service infrastructures perfected by cable providers, internet TV and platforms like YouTube but also deploys an updated version of cable TV's narrowcasting techniques. Netflix's operations also signal a return to pre-1948 Hollywood structure where studios like Paramount and MGM controlled all aspects of media production, distribution and exhibition (Alvarez Leon 52). While it is true that Netflix is not popular in all 190 markets it operates in (Lobato, *Netflix Nations* 11), it dominates the global digital streaming market—compelling legacy media conglomerates like Disney and Comcast, and tech corporations like Apple and Google to take the streaming industry quite seriously. The present investigation will also enhance the existing scholarship on global media tenet of hybridity and glocalization by analyzing the performance of a relatively new, dynamic and contemporary technology of digital streaming in a densely digital economy of India. Following a historic background into the rise of India's communication industry, and the rise of contemporary steaming led by Netflix, our concluding chapter will look at why and how the global leader Netflix suffered setbacks and their struggles to displace domestic leaders like Disney+Hotstar and JioCinema, through the lens of hybridity and glocalization, as well as other concomitant concepts such as cultural proximity.

2. Context of the Study: Brief History of Netflix and Streaming

Traditional legacy broadcasters noted the rise of internet radio platforms in the 1990s like Carl Malamud's Internet Multicasting Service and AudioNet; to peer-to-peer transmission of digital texts through Napster, which subsequently saw the proliferation of participatory Web 2.0 technologies, such as YouTube, in the mid-2000s. These developments ushered in new affordances where users could create, broadcast and view content. While YouTube was expected to disrupt the domination of legacy broadcasters—networks like ABC, NBC, CBS; cable channels like HBO and Showtime—it was a California-based mail-order DVD company called Netflix that threatened the domination of legacy media conglomerates in the contemporary streaming sphere. Netflix was founded in 1997 at the height of the dot-com boom which saw the widespread domestication and commercialization of the web to bridge the demand and supply of goods and services (Naughton 13–14). Netflix leveraged the internet to supply products that people consume regularly and frequently and, after much deliberation, settled on media content, thereby directly competing with the established brick-and-mortar giant of Blockbuster. However, they differentiated their service by offering users the then emerging technology of DVDs, which were easier to mail and ship, instead of bulky VHS tapes. Additionally, the company avoided charging a late fee by introducing a subscription model where users could pay a fixed rate upfront and consume as much or as little as they want. From a business standpoint, Netflix associated itself with companies like Sony and Toshiba who had introduced DVD players in the United States, which—in addition to legitimizing Netflix—led to the decline of VCRs and, eventually, Blockbuster (Randolph, chaps.2, 9). Around 2007, Netflix—in addition to its DVD business—decided to enter the then bubbling digital streaming market. Using its cutting-edge data-driven technology, it used its subscription revenue to first license content from legacy media and then, starting 2013, produce and distribute original content. Throughout its nearly 25 years of existence, Netflix took on established powerhouses, starting with Blockbuster, the video-on-demand service offered by cable TV providers, and—eventually—legacy media conglomerates. In 2013, Netflix once again disrupted the existing logic of capitalist broadcasting dictated by the West—consistent generation of massive revenue from a primarily elite audience by legacy media industries that entailed the invisibility of minorities and niche audiences. Instead of the weekly serialized model, Netflix decided to release entire seasons of their original content—starting with ace director David Fincher's *House of Cards*—which emancipated the service from the rigidity of Nielsen ratings. For filmmakers, Netflix also emerged as a platform where they could express themselves creatively through bypassing the constraints of box-office returns (Lidhoo et al.). Netflix Originals such as the *Never Have I Ever; Squid Game; Orange is the New Black,* and films like *Roma, The Irishman,* and *Marriage Story* have won multiple awards, garnered critical acclaim and millions of views. The high-production values, creative and interactive narrative styles of Netflix Originals have also engendered serious debates about the customary notions of genres and categories (Buck and Plothe 3–4). For example, *Never Have I Ever* may be categorized as an 'international' show by a legacy broadcast network, due to its situations and themes centered around immigrants. However, for Netflix, it may spill over into multiple genres of teen comedy, coming-of-age drama, LGBTQ+, among others. An insight into Netflix's streaming strategies revealed that the company remodeled the process of narrowcasting used by media companies during the cable revolution, as well as the collaborative filtering method used by Amazon and eBay, by capitalizing on the data and information generated from its mail-order DVD service to identify, license and offer the kind of content desired by its diverse audiences. Scholars have also argued that Netflix's data-driven technology and innovative programming also increased the visibility of communities, traditionally underserved by legacy media (Buck and Plothe 5; Novak 165–66).

Netflix's innovative affordances—binge-watching—traditionally associated with novel reading—and ad-free, on-demand supply of original and licensed content, and homogenized pricing—saw the California-based company grow from a national disruptor to a global giant in the streaming industry. Between 2001 and 2002, Netflix posted a revenue of $150 million, which increased to $1.2 billion in 2007, when it became one of the early movers in the digital streaming sphere. By 2023, Netflix reported staggering revenues of $33 billion. These figures improved to 7.5 million total subscribers generating a (*2002 Annual Report* 10; *2007 Annual Report* 27; *2023 Annual Report* 21). Netflix has 260 million paid subscribers in over 190 countries, across four major markets. The Europe, Middle East, and Africa market—or EMEA—with nearly 90 million subscribers contributes the largest share of Netflix's userbase. This is followed by the United States-Canada, or UCAN, market with 82 million and Latin America, or LATAM, market with 47.72 million subscribers. The Asia Pacific, or APAC, market contributes the least number of paid subscribers—47.50 million—and generates the least revenue for the platform, trailing UCAN, EMEA and LATAM respectively. However, Netflix registered the maximum year-on-year growth of eight million subscribers between January 2023 and 2024 ("Netflix First Quarter 2024 - Letter to Shareholder" 7), which exemplifies the platform's reliance on the APAC market for sustained growth. As such, India emerged as a crucial market for Netflix and its competitors.

3. Context: Why India

The 1990s dot-com boom in the West also complemented the emergence of India as an information technology industry. Following India's liberalization in 1991, state-led policies facilitated the creation of IT Parks and hubs in cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai which led to the emergence of India as a popular software outsourcing and IT consultancy destination. India's tech market touched a valuation of $250 billion in 2023-24, led by Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro Limited and Infosys Limited, which generate nearly three million jobs in over 75 countries (B. Sen, *Digital Politics and Culture in Contemporary India* 4, 48–49; Business Standard). The rise of India's tertiary sector also created a new population of English-speaking, aspiration, affluent middle-class people. Much like the *brown sahibs* of the British era, this new middle class bridged traditional values with cosmopolitan worldviews (Dwyer 222) which led to the decline of India's state broadcaster and the rise of private players like the foreign-owned STAR and Sony TV, and the domestic-owned Zee and Eenadu networks. In 1992, Rupert Murdoch's STAR TV—which introduced itself by offering *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Dallas* to upper-class Indian elites—partnered with Zee to localize Western sitcoms, talk shows and serials. This merger of Murdoch's capital and infrastructure with Zee's understanding of Indian audiences and their tastes benefited both STAR and Zee. The former got the expertise to tap the Indian audiences that eventually made the country to finally warm up to repackaged Western cultural imports whereas the latter epitomized 'media from below' as Zee became the first Indian network to operate in the US, UK and overseas market. The privatization of India's entertainment sector got another boost with the recent developments in the country's telecom policies that pushed India into an information state by bridging the digital divide through the availability of cheap, affordable, good quality smartphones and high-speed internet services (Agur 75). It was this optimism that led to Netflix entering the Indian market with much fanfare in 2016 with an investment pledge of nearly $400 million (Masih). However, the strategies and affordances that made Netflix capture the streaming industry in almost every other country necessitated a revisit in the world's largest population. The company, which had hoped to capture 100 million paid subscribers in India, is significantly trailing domestic competitors like Hotstar, now Disney+Hotstar, JioCinema, SonyLIV and Amazon Prime India, with a userbase of six million which eventually led to a $50 billion dip in the global leader's market cap (Sohn et al. B4). The present investigation will look at the relative performance of the global leader of Netflix vis-à-vis other streaming platforms in a rapidly digitizing country of India and argue that Netflix's wave of success halted in India which leads to a revisit of strategies, policies and affordances deployed by streaming platforms. My examination of the case of India will further shed light on the more general questions concerning global media, especially with regards to hybridity, glocalization, and cultural proximity. I will conduct a historical analysis and use the qualitative methods of textual analysis, semiotics, and document analysis to detail how contemporary streaming technology has perplexed global media scholarship. Broadly, the study contributes to the existing scholarship of political economy, cultural studies, and global media to examine how and why audiences consume the kind of media they consume. I argue that in the arena of global media, media conglomerates need to efficiently encode and smear their texts and forms with local aesthetics, beliefs, connotations and values for effective transmission, absorption and adoption.

4. Theoretical Framework

The present investigation is built on the existing theoretical frameworks of communication and media studies including political economy, global media, cultural studies and digital media. The roots of the subdiscipline of political economy of communications emerged in the 1960s in North America and Britain. The basic premise of political economy dictates that media conglomerates are, first and foremost, profit-driven businesses and they must be studied (Wasko 261) as investigating media ownership and control can explain power and class structures prevalent in society. Political economists argue that the media industry has become largely oligopolistic and concentrated where a few corporations own and control most media technologies, which further validates Marx's principle of ruling class and ruling ideas—those who control a society's economic force also influence its mental production (9–10).

Political economy of communications derives from the Marxist influence, including the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Grounded in Marxism, critical theory's line of inquiry deals with capitalist consumption and its social, political and cultural effects. Developed in Frankfurt, Germany, at the Institute for Social Research in the 1920s, scholars like Marx Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin witnessed the rise of Nazism through their control and ideological misuse of the instruments of mass culture, including mass media, which they also witnessed in the United States (Durham and Kellner 4). Horkeimer and Adorno (41–42) witnessed that American media, owned and controlled by large corporations, worked to promote and preserve the ideological hegemony of American capitalism. They noted that mass media, which they dubbed as 'cultural industries,' worked like any other capitalist industry, churning out a highly commercial line of mass-produced artifacts. The mass production and subsequent consumption of these cultural artifacts—radio, film, print capitalism, among others—seeks not only to suppress oppositional voices but also legitimizes a set of ideological values and lifestyle of the corporations who own and control this culture industry. This, ultimately, leads to the creation of a highly homogenous, passive proletariat masses, which is one of the key concerns of political economy—the production and commodification of masses, or audiences. Smythe labeled instruments of "leisure or free time" — such as radio, television, or newspapers or any new or remediated technology—as propaganda which "obscure and confuse… the respects in which people cooperate and resist the monopoly capitalist system" (246–47), further arguing that media corporations don't really sell time slots to advertisers but the people who are watching at that time slot (231). By doing so, consumers or audiences become the core commodity in a capitalist media economy and not the cultural text. In the present times, Netflix—and other digital streaming platforms—have identified 'sleep' as their primary competition "as it disconnects" the platforms' ability to "interact with technologies" and interrupt the constant flow of data and information needed to produce and provide the kind of content needed to keep their users engaged and addicted. Sleep—for streaming platforms—prevents consumers from performing what Smythe (233) discusses as "work" or the necessary labor that churns out the lucrative product or commodity for these platforms and their parent conglomerates—data. Accordingly, much like cable technologies deployed narrowcasting technologies to identify and sell segmented, niche but lucrative audiences to advertisers, streaming platforms tap into their market research and user-generated data to maintain their dominance over audiences (Novak 165–66; Pilipets 9).

Another pioneer of political economy in North America was Herbert Schiller who posited his theory of cultural imperialism in the 1970s as a response to the dominant paradigm that professed that newly decolonized and marginalized economies must mimic the growth models of the US-led West to modernize and develop (Demont-Heinrich 668). Schiller's cultural imperialism theory, also referred to as Flow, critiques the then-dominant modernization theory by highlighting the unequal flow of information, capital and technology that flows from the West to the Rest, thereby making the latter subservient and dependent on the former. Territorial imperialism has been replaced by cultural imperialism as the West-based transnational companies use their economic prowess and technological expertise to permeate, influence and replace Third World cultures, thereby undermining the cultural values of these regions. Schiller asserts that transnational corporations, including media conglomerates, act like militaries of the colonial era (295–96). These concepts were further explored by scholars like George Ritzer, Arian Dorfman and Armand Mattelart in their analysis of corporations like McDonald's and Disney. Ritzer (chap.13) notes most 'global' systems "are American creations that are being exported to the rest of the world" with the spread of McDonald's—and other corporations that practice McDonaldization—focused towards cultural homogenization. Similarly, Dorfman and Mattelart document how conglomerates like Disney espouse Western ideals and values through their cultural products—films, television, animation, comics, amusement parks. They argue how Disney's comic books, devised by adults, and targeted towards children, contain 'ideal' messages of "what a child is or should be" which are exported globally (125). Cultural imperialism, thus, centered around the West's mission to homogenize the Other.

Political scientist Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory in the 1970s criticized the high-income 'core' economies for exploiting the dependent but emerging 'peripheral,' and 'semi-peripheral,' economies for raw materials, natural resources, cheap labor and ensures that the latter is forever dependent on the former for capital and technology. Wallerstein further noted that the concepts of First and Third World, which he called 'core' and 'periphery' respectively, are not only evident on a global scale but they are also evident at the level of the state, adding that the Core-Periphery relationship is that of production, where one might identify core-like processes and peripheral processes, in all countries—developed, developing and underdeveloped (56–57). In a similar vein, the cultural globalization theory challenged the cultural imperialism theory in the 1990s. Cultural globalization or contra-flow scholars noted that the flow of communication and culture was not unilateral but multilateral. Cultural imperialism was criticized for the assumption that the mere existence or diffusion of American cultural artifacts—

Hollywood movies, amusement parks, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, among others—implied the national, regional or global acceptance or adoption of American ideology (Demont-Heinrich 670). Cultural globalization argues that formerly colonized countries like Brazil, Mexico and India have emerged as cultural giants as evidenced by the popularity of telenovelas, Bollywood and other cultural exports. The popularity of Latin American telenovelas, or soap-operas, has pushed Brazil's Globo TV as a media giant from the global South, with exports of 26,000 hours of content over 130 countries, recording a revenue of $4.7 billion. While many telenovelas were simply exported to other countries, many telenovelas were localized through dubbing or adaptations in Russia, Germany, United States and even India (Thussu, *International Communication: Continuity and Change* 204). India's first successful serial in the 1980s, *Hum Log*, was inspired by a Mexican soap-opera. A Colombian telenovela, *Yo Soy Betty*, inspired a popular U.S. sitcom *Ugly Betty* which further inspired another successful Indian soap-opera, *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi*, in the 2000s (B. Sen, "Big Brother, Bigg Boss" 203). Similarly, Thussu has documented the displacement of American popular culture products by Turkish dramas, particularly in the Arab world, as well as the rise of Al-Jazeera as an alternative voice to the Western BBC and CNN (*International Communication: Continuity and Change* 205, 213). As thoroughly detailed in chapter 1, while Indian movies were not extensively screened in the West, they became hugely popular in decolonized economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America through initiatives like the Non-Aligned Movement, bilateral trade policies and migration. In short, cultural globalization, or contra-flow, scholars argue that the flow of communication, technology, capital and culture is not unilateral—from West to Rest/East—but, rather, multilateral—East to East, East to West, West to West—and West to East is simply one 'node' in this process of globalization (Appadurai 587). Even Schiller (297) acknowledged that despite

America's dominance in global cultural flow, its economic and political prowess has waned, as predicted by Wallerstein (99).

Cultural globalization scholars also criticized cultural imperialism's over-reliance on cultural homogenization as well as the passivity of audiences (Demont-Heinrich 669). The globalization of culture concerns itself, unlike cultural imperialism, with cultural resistance and consumption. In accordance with Stuart Hall's thesis ("Encoding/Decoding in the Television Discourse" 272–74), globalization of culture argues that audiences are active consumers of cultural texts who read, interpret, decode, accept or resist—wholly or partially—the intended message or ideology encoded in the text. Cultural globalization, thus, calls for the active agency of local and regional cultural flows on a larger global cultural flow (B. Sen, "Big Brother, Bigg Boss" 202). This led to the analysis of the complex process of hybridity between global and local cultures, also referred to as glocalization. According to Arjun Appadurai (596), global messages of homogeneity need to be repackaged and molded into local packets of heterogeneity for effective adoption and consumption. Pieterse ("Globalization as Hybridization" 658) takes this further and examines that this process leads to a global mélange which is produced by the compromise between the global and local—or 'regional' and 'national'—and other nodes of cultural flow. This mixing or hybridization may produce a completely new cultural form or beliefs, as per Iwabuchi (40), or it may lead to a remediated form of a social practice, as with the rise of internet radio—which remediated the talk radio format of the 1980s and 1990s. The cultural proximity theory also explains the relationship between transnational media conglomerates and their consumption. According to Straubhaar, cultural proximity helps understand why audiences accept or reject certain media forms and texts. Audiences tend to consume and accept media forms and cultural texts they can relate to or form a cultural bond or affinity with. This is closely linked with the process of hybridity as global corporations tend to mold, smear and localize their messaging to gain acceptability and maintain their dominance in a new, lucrative—often untapped—market. Audiences form a likening or affinity towards a culture where they identify with certain cultural markets. According to Joseph Straubhaar, these may include, but are not limited to "linguistic commonalities, shared religious histories, gender roles…stereotypes, and ideas about genre, storytelling and pacing" (qt. in Min et al. 610). Cultural proximity theory has been used to explain the global appeal of Hallyu (Min et al. 604; Lu et al. 8); Hollywood's inability to penetrate the Indian box office until the 1990s (Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 287), and the significance of diasporic markets (Karim H. Karim 99–100). The cultural Proximity lens would help explain why certain streaming platforms are more popular in India than the global leader of Netflix. These concepts will be explored in the next three chapters, particularly the final chapter, which will bring all these concepts from political economy, global media, as well as cultural studies together.

If cultural imperialism borrows from critical theorists and political economists, cultural globalization and hybridity scholars borrow from cultural theorists who maintain that individuals and audiences are active agents in shaping and deciphering ideological texts and forms (Gray and Lotz, chap.2). However, both these approaches are rooted in neo-Marxism. Cultural studies emerged out of two distinct, clashing but dominant paradigms of 'culturalism' and 'structuralism.' Culturalists, such as Raymond Williams and E.P Thompson, focused on 'experience,' which consists of texts and practices, as the basis of culture. Structuralists, such as Louis Althusser and Claude Levi-Strauss, viewed 'experience' as an effect of an already existing dominant structure. In other words, culturalism stresses on the active role of humans in shaping and interpreting experiences whereas structuralists argue that humans are born into a pre-existing dominant structure which dictates how they must read experiences. However, despite these differences, both agree that culture is related to social relations of family, race, class, and other identifiers. They further agree that culture, which Althusser described as an 'ideological state apparatus,' creates power imbalances and is a site of power struggle. Eventually, Hall ("Cultural Studies; Two Paradigms" 66–68) called for a mediation between structuralism and culturalism by using Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a reference point. According to Antonio Gramsci (380–81), a dominant class's hegemonic longevity depends on its control over the coercive public institutes—state, judiciary, police—and the consent-building private machineries—institutes of knowledge, church, religion, family, culture and mass media. In other words, a dominant class's control ends once it fails to interpolate its ideology as the collective conscience of a community. This may help explain both why conglomerates entered the streaming revolution, as well as the factors behind Netflix's relative struggles in India.

Cultural analysis must distinguish and investigate potential links between the text, practice or content from the context, or structure. Cultural studies, then, seems to look at the relationship between cultural meanings—or frames—in texts and power. This would help explain how streaming platforms, which traditionally had been independent of oversight, navigate the strict regulatory patterns adopted by different governments and regimes, including our case study of India. Cultural studies is also responsible for infusing concepts of subcultures, race, sex, feminism, subalternate groups, among others, into communication studies exemplified by the various research published by scholars of the Birmingham School using semiology, critical textual analysis and other qualitative methods (Gray and Lotz, chap.2). Significant progress in cultural studies was also made in North America, notably by Chicago School scholar James Carey (28) , who called for communication scholars to adopt a cultural approach to study how people constructed texts and languages and, thus, their social reality. Contemporary political economy scholars have worked in collaboration with cultural theorists for a more holistic analysis of media's economic structures and power relations (Wasko 265–67). Media scholar Ramon Lobato (*Netflix Nations* 160) also called for an 'and' approach rather than an 'either/or' approach to investigate current television flows, thereby calling for a mediation between cultural imperialism and cultural globalization, or—by extension—a hybridity between political economy and cultural studies.

5. Methodological Framework

Marx's historical materialism posits that in order to understand society as a whole, one must understand its historical development in time, which includes social revolutions, struggles as well as how things are developing in the present (155). In other words, events and concepts need to be analyzed in the context, or process, of change. History helps one "explain the past in response to the present-day concerns and questions" (Tosh 29). As a discipline, history attempts to make the process of recall as accurate as possible to get "a resource with an open-ended application, instead of a set of mirror-images of the present" (Tosh, chap.1). Tosh has noted that contemporary historical practice relies on a reassessment of the past with all available evidence or sources, new and old. Historical sources include a variety of sources, ranging from written texts, to spoken word, cultural artifacts among others. In this vein, there has been a growth in studies mapping the past of communication technologies, in terms of form and content, which borrows heavily from a wide range of ideas, disciplines and practices—postcolonialism, cultural materialism, discourse analysis, to name a few. Such a method has come to be known as 'media archaeology', which stresses on "both the discursive and material manifestations of culture" (Huhtamo and Parikka 3). The scholarly work of Michel Foucault was among the earliest influences and precursor to the practice of media archaeology, which has enabled communication research to make transcending contributions across humanities, social sciences, and arts. For Foucault, there is no phenomena that is beyond the study of history and society (Rabinow 4). A Foucauldian analysis focuses on the 'how' rather than 'why'—how power is distributed and reinforced by analyzing the history, or genealogy, of the subjectification of individuals using social institutions and knowledge. Genealogy records the history of morals, ideas, concepts, knowledge and discourses as various stages of a historical process and can account for the creation of discourses, knowledge and power (Foucault 86). There has been a growth in studies mapping the past of communication technologies, in terms of form and content, and linking it with the present. James Carey called for communication scholars and historians to look at not just media texts but also consumers and the cultural context in which they coexist (24–27). This approach resembles the interpretative anthropological method proposed by Clifford Geertz (7) who called for a 'thick description' or a detailed look into a culture's semiotic formations to interpret human action and behavior. A thick description, in other words, focuses on analyzing the meaning, intention, or context, behind cultural actions. One must, then, put media systems at the center of media history as one could not only investigate technological as well as cultural shifts in a media form but also the coalescing of mediums across regional, national and international social structures (Bastiansen 102–04). Generations not only act as forces of continuity but also simultaneously work as continuity of change since they usually inherit less than the whole of its ancestral culture. The life of a new generation is distinct from the ones of their predecessors and history helps record and contextualize this liminality (R. Guha x). A historical analysis of communication technologies would answer and contextualize significant questions about how, and why, content, audiences and industries operated and copes with epochal shifts. Historical analysis could also identify socio-cultural similarities and differences in media's ritualistic practices throughout history. In essence, a historical analysis of communication technologies establishes the past—what it was; the present—what it is; and prophesize the future—where it is going. For this analysis, I shall deploy a range of qualitative methods, such as critical discourse analysis, textual analysis and document research.

Critical discourse analysis, or CDA, is a form of analytical research that primarily looks at how power, hegemony and inequality are manufactures, diffused, maintained and "resisted by talk and text in social and political context" (van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis" 352). For this analysis of power and discourse, van Dijk ("Critical Discourse Analysis" 355) identifies Gramscian concept of hegemony as a focal point and goes beyond looking at simple organization of words and phrases to analyze not only how language is used but also who uses it and why. In other words, critical discourse analysis helps understand how language is made sense of in a societal context. It connects dots between social practices and a discursive practice and, in a social context, helps bring out specific truths by analyzing the function of text, vocabulary and semantics (van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis" 363). Discourse analysis is usually supplemented by other techniques such as textual analysis, which is a standard method used in cultural studies to study how individuals and cultures make sense of who they are and how they view their place in the world, at the level of textual consumption. A text can be defined as a coherent symbol, or a cultural artifact—words, images, films, photos, television programs, among others (Gray and Lotz, chap.1). Textual analysis includes a variety of analytical methods, drawing from other disciplines—art history, linguistics and literacy studies, among others. One such method is semiotics, which is concerned with the study of signs and their function. Semiology has its roots in the works of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who noted that while language, and words, may seem as set or established, they often change over time. In other words, language is socially-constructed and concepts, ideas and society are created through and inside language rather than outside it (Silverman 4–14). The Birmingham School of cultural studies, which has its roots in the 1960s, looks at the relationship between cultural meanings—or frames—in texts and power. In their analysis of mass media, cultural scholars studied a variety of cultural discourses using semiology, textual analysis and other qualitative methods (Gray and Lotz, chap.1). For example, Hall ("External Influences on Broadcasting" 285–86) observed how broadcasters, under the guise of balance and objectivity, function within the power-ideology nexus and end up reproducing the dominant elites' ideology by pushing certain symbols and language within texts. Similarly, Van Dijk ("Race, Riots and the Press" 231) deployed textual analysis framing to study frames in newspaper editorials to see how they described, evaluated and contextualized a particular case, namely the British riots of 1985. Contemporary historical practice relies on a reassessment of the past with all available evidence or sources, new and old. Historical sources include a variety of sources, ranging from written texts, to spoken word, cultural artifacts among others. Sources can be primary or secondary, based on what and how the researcher uses them. A primary source is original and contemporary in that it was written or recorded by the direct stakeholders of an event or epoch. Secondary sources, on the other hand, are detailed analysis, assessment and interpretation of the primary source. Most primary sources are archived, or preserved, by governments and libraries which eases the data collection process easier (Tosh, chap.4). The present study would further analyze textual documents—primary sources such as business reports, newspaper reports, media releases, mission statements, annual reports—as well as secondary sources, such as newspaper editorials, stock market reports, interviews of content creators and business executives relevant to the study. The study also warrants a brief discussion on the entertainment industry of India and how they are responding to the global phenomena of contemporary streaming, led by Netflix.

6. Chapter Outline

The present manuscript, titled *Are You Still Watching: An Overview of Streaming in India*, examines the consequences of a post-2000s shift from traditional, linear broadcasting toward a digital, non-linear streaming of cultural texts that has raised a completely new set of questions about contemporary media technologies. Such phenomena have, additionally, complicated the tenets of cultural imperialism, globalization and hybridity that global media scholarship has traditionally relied upon. My dissertation investigates these queries using historical methods; archival, textual and document research; and discourse analysis.

The first chapter, entitled 'Communications in India,' draws on historical analysis and briefly analyzes ancient India's links with the world, colonial media flows, and the post-colonial export of Indian media in the global South. The chapter documents how the Indian independence activists, including Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, realized the potential of print capitalism and broadcasting, introduced in India by the British, to spread their message of decolonization and self-reliance. Gandhi, especially, leveraged global print culture and broadcasting to spread his message of *ahimsa*, or non-violent civil disobedience. Concomitantly, it also led to a nascent but thriving Indian film scene—which was a remediated form of Parsi theater and local Indian dance dramas—that complemented the endeavors of Indian nationalists by aggressively competing with British and American films. These domestic movies were smeared with metaphorical references to anti-Westernization, decolonization, economic and social upliftment, thereby managing to hoodwink strict British censorship. These themes of national pride and anti-Westernization continued in independent India which led to a pervasive disdain of Western cultural imports, including Hollywood. The state, whilst allowing Hollywood studios to operate in India, levied hefty tariffs, and import duties that largely dissuaded the West to ignore the Indian market. The central thesis of this chapter argues that independent India was highly resistant of foreign cultural imports especially from the West, which drastically changed since 1991 due to the rise of a new middle class and an alteration in their consumption patterns and lifestyle; the end of the state's monopoly over broadcasting and communication, and the mushrooming of 'glocalized' independent, private media networks like STAR and Zee, and—most importantly—an increase, or rather resurgence, of East-West interaction that was quite dormant between 1950 and 1990, that led to the accreditation of 'industry' status to India's disorganized entertainment scene.

The second chapter, entitled 'The Revolutionary Rise of Digital Streaming,' begins with a chronological overview of streaming beginning with the popularization of internet radio in the 1990s to the dot-com boom era convergence of forms and content that saw the rise of internet-based participatory platforms and services, legal and social discussions between old and new media. The chapter then moves onto the growth of streaming technology and platforms, especially Netflix, from a niche, nascent mail-order DVD service to a global giant to argue that the new and remediated affordances of these platforms have perplexed the traditional logic of broadcasting and communication flows dictated by legacy media. The chapter, through textual and document analysis, closely scrutinizes the socio-cultural implication and effects of these affordances through the lens of political economy and cultural studies. The chapter discusses why and how Netflix strategically positions itself as both a technology-based and media-centric corporation, competing with tech giants like Apple and Amazon, and conglomerates like Disney and Comcast. I will also investigate how legacy media conglomerates, who initially saw Netflix, as an ally or an ancillary, began to view it as a potential threat to their dominance and hegemony.

The chapter would conclude with a brief introduction of India's current communication landscape to argue that Netflix's wave of success that saw it dominate the global streaming industry hit a roadblock in the world's largest population.

The third chapter, entitled 'Global Leader, Local Challenges,' brings the chapters and arguments together by reviewing the performances of Netflix, Jio Platforms, Disney+Hotstar and other streaming platforms to conclude that the strategies that made the Netflix rule the global streaming market has come to halt in India—that led to a dip of $50 billion from their market cap. The chapter will examine how the streaming platforms are navigating the historic and present challenges posed by India's media industry in terms of content, pricing, challenges from telecom companies, among others. The chapter begins with the rise of India's digital footprint and the emergence of India as an information-state, sowed by state-led initiatives like the 1984 New Computer Policy; the National Telecom Policies of 1994, 1999 and 2012; the 2015 Digital India initiative. I investigate the rollout of Jio Platforms by Asia's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, that saw a drastic increase in smartphone penetration and decrease in high-speed internet costs. I argue that the Jio Effect, a byproduct of the Digital India initiative, pole-vaulted India's streaming industry from a dream to a revolutionary reality that is expected to, conservatively, touch $15 billion by 2030. The central thesis of this chapter looks at India's streaming and entertainment industry as well as the domestic streaming platforms through the lens of global media scholarship of hybridity and glocalization, and cultural proximity to investigate why the strategies and practices that make Netflix dominate the global streaming market failed to resonate with Indian audiences. The chapter will also briefly look at how the bane of the Covid-19 pandemic proved to be a boon for the entertainment industry, as well as some correctional methods deployed by Netflix to capture their intended 100 million subscribers in India. My dissertation, thus, looks at the streaming revolution in India to highlight that—in the arena of global media—conglomerates, technologies, platforms need to localize their messages, agendas, ideology for effective consumption, interpretation and adoption.

CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATIONS IN INDIA

In this chapter, I will present a historical overview of media in India, from the ancient times to the 21st century. Briefly touching upon India's communicative and cross-cultural links with the world throughout history—the spread of Buddhism and spice trade; the migration of scholars, travelers and merchants, to the introduction and adoption of electronic technologies during British colonialism—I maintain that India has, since ancient times, maintained dynamic, assimilative, cross-cultural links with the outside world. Additionally, I argue that post-1990s East-West collaboration or 'globalization' of capital, technologies, labor and ideas—particularly in India's entertainment industry—is not a 'new' but a resurgent phenomenon; early domestic films produced during the British era did see the involvement of non-Indian functionaries. The overarching point of my thesis, as I shall document, however, is the massive resistance of Western cultural imports, notably Hollywood, during the 20th century, due to Hollywood's inability to efficiently localize—or rather 'glocalize' their ideologies and agenda. India's culture industry, on the other hand, was loaded with anti-colonial and reformist symbolism that resonated with the nationalist sentiments of a newly decolonized country. Hollywood, finally, discovered the secret sauce to crack the Indian juggernaut in the 1990s and repackaged their messages in local aesthetics and languages, which resonated with a new, aspirational, cosmopolitan, emerging middle-class. While foreign-owned companies like STAR and Sony quickly managed to do that, Netflix—it seems—realized the importance of 'glocalization' the hard way. Before we get to the global rise of streaming and its socio-economic effects in a rapidly digitizing and emerging economy like India, it is important to familiarize oneself with India's communication history, which is the central focus of this chapter.

1. Pre-Colonial India

There is no denying that European imperial powers were responsible for spreading railroads, wireless telegraphy, postal system, and later cinema, radio and television—which originated in the West—to their colonies. However, the categorization of the contemporary global communication landscape as an effect of colonialism would, at best, be incomplete. In India, the British indeed reproduced many socio-cultural elements of Enlightenment and capitalism from their home country (Chakrabarty xviii) which included exploratory establishments like the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, which mostly documented and perpetuated an Orientalist and reductive view of the subcontinent and its people. These include James Mill's *History of India,* published in 1817, that became the dominant textbook about India in the West. Mill's work discounted ancient India's achievements in science, astronomy, mathematics, and shaped colonial attitudes and practices about India, including the promotion of Western education as well as the introduction of railways, telegraphy and radio to fulfill the Empire's needs and objectives (Thomas 35, 41; A. Sen 145–46). Despite the gradual decline of territorial imperialism in the twentieth century, Eurocentric views and discourses have continued to dominate which further complicates the history of former colonies. Subaltern scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that former colonies have been prescribed the position of an 'elsewhere' in the "first in Europe and then elsewhere" structure of time which subjugates the history of these territories to Western predispositions (8), which adds further credence to Edward Said's postcolonial thesis of Orientalism. Said merged the Foucauldian analysis of power with Gramscian analysis of hegemony to explain how the colonizers used institutes of learning and knowledge to make sense of the colonized Other by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling in, ruling over it" (69). The rectification of traditional narratives of such historicism by post-colonial scholars—notably the subaltern collective in the case of the Indian subcontinent—has provided a more holistic picture of time and space. In the case of media studies, a 'de-westernization' of the discipline has been advocated which involves a more receptive response to perspectives and issues from previously marginalized groups and regions (Waisbord 180; Bose and Jalal, chap.1). A revision of Orientalist views revealed that despite the British's introduction of telegraphy, press, radio, cinema in the subcontinent, India has been a significant locus in the global flow of culture, knowledge and technology since the ancient times. Archaeological excavations have revealed ancient India's sophisticated expertise in urban planning, immaculate architecture and open, democratic assemblies in a republican political structure. In fact, India's soft power prowess dates back centuries, the roots of which lie in trade routes established by the people of the Indus Valley civilization with other advanced civilizations of that era such as Egypt and Mesopotamia. Dynamism has been a core value of ancient Indian civilizations as seen from the migration of Aryans, now understood in linguistic rather than racial terms, to the Gangetic plains around 1500 BCE (Bose and Jalal, chap.2). One such example of this dynamism was the assimilation of an early variant of the Sanskrit language as a political and cultural tool to spread tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism to south and central Asia, Indonesia, and Alexandria in the West by travelers, scholars, monks and traders. While "India's soft power, historically, was not directed toward the West," Alexander's expedition to India in the 326 BCE marks one of the earliest interactions between the subcontinent and the West which led to the arrival of Greek thinkers like Pythagoras, Democrites and Pyrrho (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 10, 50, 53). India's Mauryan Empire and the post-Alexandrian Seleucids maintained a close contact, marked by the exchange of envoys, visitors and gifts. One such envoy was Megasthenes who composed the first European interpretation of an exotic India as *Indica* during the third century BCE. Interestingly, the text is now mostly found in historical footnotes and is supposedly laden with dubious descriptions of life in the subcontinent (A. Sen 39; Thapar 177). The third Mauryan Emperor, Ashoka, held the largest Buddhist council in his court where scholars from far-away regions were invited to discuss religious discourses, philosophical viewpoints, civic and social duties. These discussions were eventually recorded, translated and exported to Sri Lanka, Syria, Egypt as well as Greco-Roman North Africa and, eventually, China through an extensive Sanskrit-Chinese translation exercised by Chinese scholars Faxian and Xuanzang in the fourth and seventh centuries CE respectively (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 52–56). Historian Romila Thapar posits the global spread of Buddhism as a direct effect of the rise of mercantile activity in the post-Mauryan era as the Roman demand for silk and spices compelled Mediterranean traders to establish links with Indian traders who saw their religious affiliations, mostly Buddhists, blossom. Venetian traveler Marco Polo documented the lucrative trade relations between Indian kingdoms and the Arabs in the 1290s, reporting that south India exported diamonds and best-quality muslin cloth, and special charters were issued to protect the interests of merchants and traders (Thapar 245, 368, 384). Buddhism, which originated in India, also played a major role in establishing the global print culture with the publication of the *Diamond Sutra*—"first printed book that is actually dated"—in 862 CE, which is a 402 CE translation of a Sanskrit treatise by the Indo-Buddhist scholar Kumarajiva (A. Sen 82). Connections with the Arabs, through channels like the Silk Route, further led to the introduction of Indian numerals, decimal system, Sanskrit discourses on astronomy, philosophy and literature in Europe. The first Sanskrit text to reach the West was an Arabic translation of a fourth century CE composition of *Panchatantra,* which became the source for the 1483 German *Buch der Weisheit,* or the *Book of Wisdom*. The

Arabic translation was introduced, first, in Spain where it was further translated into Hebrew and Spanish in the thirteenth century CE; from Hebrew to Latin in 1480 in Germany, and in England in 1570 (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 49; A. Sen 144). The Mughals in the medieval era also continued the channels of communication with the Western world. Much like Ashoka, Akbar passed a series of secular decries, encouraged rational discussions, open dialogue and plurality. India's fabled products, artifacts, and resources led to the arrival of Europeans via sea, starting with the Portuguese Vasco da Gama in 1498 CE to the English East India Company in the 1600s. Until the onset of European colonization, India accounted for a fifth of the global economy (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 59; Bose and Jalal, chap.4).

In short, the Eurocentric notion that places the process of globalization as a relatively 'new' phenomenon must be contested. Globalization, in some form or another, has always existed, the earliest form of which can be traced to the Bronze Age (Pieterse, "Periodizing Globalization" 18). As political theorist Karim H. Karim posits, world history is "punctuated by a series of migration" (397) that includes centuries-old trade channels, fluid nomadic patterns, displacement due to violent wars and the spread of religion. In fact, much like the cultural globalization theory of communication, sociologist Martin Albrow states that there is no singular or unilateral process of globalization but rather plural, synonymous, multilateral processes through which "people of the world are incorporated into a single world society" (qtd. in Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization" 658). Thus, terms like the 'discovery' of India—or rather, the East—by European explorers in the fourteenth century onward discounts the historic achievements and significance of ancient Eastern civilizations in the centuries-old world socio-economic system. Accordingly, the academic field of area studies has been accused of denying the agency of history-making to the former colonies and thereby maintaining one-sided Western suzerainty over pedagogy, epitomized by politically loaded binaries like 'Us' and Them;' 'West and non-West;' 'developed' and 'undeveloped,' and terms like 'South Asia' and 'Latin America' (Waisbord 181) It would, then, be churlish to believe that the importance accorded to India by predominantly West-based media conglomerates—capital flows, mergers, productions, distributions, and exhibitions—is a new phenomenon. Instead, I propose that such cooperation, especially post 1991—as this section will later show—may be viewed as a 'resurgence' of a dormant East-West media interaction, a result of postcolonial liberalism, ease of trade and commerce post-1991. This begins with a historical account of the communications industry in India to understand the reasons behind the domestic audience's resistance toward 'Western' cultural forms and texts.

2. Colonial India

The English East India Company was granted permission to trade in India by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1619 CE. Initially, the English East India Company, and their Dutch, French and Portuguese counterparts, traded within the Mughal structure and their military and political influence was limited to a "few factory forts in coastal areas" (Bose and Jalal, chap.4). However, the Mughal Empire witnessed a series of internal and external conflicts in the 1700s—rebellions by the Sikhs and Marathas in the north and west; the Mughal-era governors of Bengal, Awadh and Deccan declared themselves as *nawabs*, or independent kings; the invasion by the tribal leaders from Central Asia and Iran, such as Nadir Shah, raiding Delhi's wealth. Consequently, the English East India Company turned from a "trade to a political dominion" by annexing Bengal in 1757 CE, thereby establishing the roots of British India (Bose and Jalal, chap.5). European interest in India surged during this time and Germany played a significant role in the establishment of Indic studies. A quarter century after the English East India Company's annexation of Bengal, the discipline of Indic studies was introduced by Friedrich von Schlegel, who initially had a positive view of Asia. In fact, Indian philosophy and literature found "powerful expression among thinkers like Herder and Hegel" with August von Schlegel, the first chair in Sanskrit at the University of Bonn, publishing the first European translation of the seminal Hindu text of *Bhagavad Gita* in 1823. German Indologist Max Muller became the first Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford and completed the translation of six volumes of the *Rig Veda Samhita.* He was subsequently commissioned by the British to translate major Indian works (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 61). Economist Amartya Sen believes that while Romantic thinkers like Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Herder initially viewed India as a land of superior wisdom, a lot of them eventually recanted their opinions after "not finding in Indian thought what they had themselves put there" (152). Contrary to the rationale of writers like Rudyard Kipling and William Archer, who justified colonial rule as a novel responsibility to uplift colonies to a stage of European modernity (Brantlinger 172; Archer 7, 318), the British crystalized divisions along social lines "which had been available in theory but had been often ignored in social practice" (Bose and Jalal, chap.8). Such exercises in historicism were complemented by several Bengali writers, commissioned by the East India Company, to curate textbooks on India to not just learn the vernacular language but also understand India. Political theorist Partha Chatterjee notes that these books, such as Mritunjay Vidyalankar's *Rajabali* of 1808, treated the British as the holy protector of the Indian *praja*—subjects—and the upholder of *dharma* (85). These dominant texts then dictated much of British policies and institutes in the subcontinent like the prison where inmates were classified along casteist, religious and gender lines in accordance with colonial mindset about Indian society (Arnold 158). Similarly, British administrator Thomas Macaulay (A. Sen 149) called for the promotion of Western education in India to create an English-influenced Indian middle-class, referred to as 'brown *sahebs*,' that would assist the Company in governance. These 'brown *sahebs*' mimicked the culture and values of the colonizers that leads to a normalization and institutionalization of the colonizers' socio-political structures, even after they're gone. Despite being English-educated and trained, the Indian middle class was not completely assimilated and accommodated by the colonizer, leaving them in a state of identical ambiguity—neither here, nor there; or as Homi K. Bhabha calls it, "almost the same but not quite" (122–23). Such mimicry continued since 1947; territorial imperialism has been replaced by cultural imperialism and the foreign colonizers have been replaced by the domestic elites. This selfish interest, creation of brown *sahebs*, however, also led to the rise of elite reformists such as Rammohun Roy who actively campaigned for Western education in India and pushed for socio-religious reforms. Colonial constraints notwithstanding, the period from 1820s and 1830s saw the production of high art, literature, socio-religious reform in the Bengal presidency that was subsequently replicated across British India. Interestingly, it was these socio-religious reforms in Bengal and elsewhere that harvested the first crop of resistance against colonial rule. The Western-educated reformers actively campaigned for a Company-assisted facelift of rudimentary Indian customs that social conservatives were vehemently opposed to as they viewed it as an intrusion into their private sphere (A. Sen 148; Bose and Jalal, chap.8).

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of a thriving print capitalism in colonial India, mostly by the English-educated Indian middle class who began to view themselves as communication middlemen—spokespersons for the oppressed and resistors against the rulers—the British and their upper-class domestic allies. Print capitalism led to the emergence of the press in colonial India, assisted by British machineries of telegraphy and railroads. Media historian Pradip Ninan Thomas notes that the era from 1790, when the *Bengal Gazette* was established in Bengal by James Augustus Hicky, to the 1857 Indian Mutiny—that formally transferred colonial India's governance from a mercantile company to the British Crown—saw the mushrooming of a thriving press that included the mostly pro-British English press and the anti-colonial, nationalist vernacular press. Additionally, British endeavors to suppress the influence of the pro-India newspapers only intensified the will of the nationalists (43). The diffusion of English-education and the bubbling of anti-colonialism led to several nationalist attempts of countering Mill-influenced historicism and orientalism concerning India from mid-nineteenth century onward. One such work was T. Chattopadhyay's *Bharatbarsar Itihas* that marked a shift from the erstwhile "history of the kings" to "history of the country" as the book juxtaposed the achievements of ancient India with contemporary rudimentary state of India. Scottish administrator Mountstuart Elphinstone's *History of India,* published in 1841, and the textbooks of Vincent Smith in the early twentieth century directly influenced nationalist thought in India, which further highlighted Indian achievements in science and philosophy (Chatterjee 95–100). While such efforts espouse the feelings of anti-colonialism, classical nationalists associated the achievements of ancient India with Hindus, and ruins of medieval India with Muslim rulers, which further intensified the divide-and-rule policy espoused in the works of colonial historians. These sentiments were quite overt during the anti-colonial movement, and its residues are still felt with the surge of an extreme, monolithic view of Hinduism (Chatterjee 109–10; A. Sen 140). Print capitalism became a key site of contest between colonizers and the colonized, which was also seen in the multiple Indian cinema scenes of the twentieth century.

2.1 Cinema in Colonial India and anti-Western Resistance

The first motion picture, the *Arrival of a Train at Ciotat Station,* produced by the Lumiere Brothers, was screened in India in July 1896, just six months after its debut in Paris. This successful screening, viewed mostly by the English and upper-class Indians, at a Bombay theater laid the foundation of Indian cinema as many Western studios eventually set shop in the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. These studios employed and trained technicians who would go on to become the first Indian filmmakers such as Hiralal Sen and S. Bhatavdekar. By the 1910s, there were nomadic exhibitors like Abdullaly Esoofally, who traveled across the country with projectors and reels, as well as fixed locales for film screenings—or theaters—which mostly screened Western films (Kohli-Khandekar 123–24). The British, on their part, got into India's cinematic market by producing newsreels and shorts. The earliest of these were produced by colonial Indian Railways as promotional films which put a positive spin on imperialism. Film historian Neepa Majumdar, however, cautions against terming these as 'Indian.' These films whilst produced in India, featured a largely Western crew; these were, rather, films about India and its experiences viewed from a Western lens (65). Pro-British messaging continued throughout the colonial rule, encoded in Indian communication enterprises of radio, newsreels, documentaries and films. As Britain's film industry matured, they viewed this new technology not just as an effective propaganda tool but also another lucrative finished good that they could market in the colonies. The Empire's divide-and-rule policy was quite evident in how and where it screened movies in India, deeming certain films and theaters 'unfit' for the colonized. This practice of segmenting the film-going audiences along social lines was vociferously opposed by nationalist leaders, which culminated in simultaneous decline of Western imported cinema and popularization of domestic cinema in India. Until 1947, films with nationalist and anti-colonial content were actively monitored through the 1918 Cinematograph Act and strict censor boards in major media centers of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras (Thomas 46; Pendakur, "India's National Film Policy" 156; Jaikumar 79). These British-instituted censor boards not only had to tackle the rise of Indian cinema but also significant competition from Hollywood.

The relationship between America and India emerges from the traditional territorial imperialism involving Britain: the settler colony of the United States and the non-settler colony of India. This would lead to heightened "intellectual and mercantile interests in India" by American capitalists through a series of detailed trips and investments through the 1840s (Melnick and Rubin 140). Such links also led to the arrival of Indian migrants, mostly peddlers, in the United States in the 1880s to fulfill the demand for 'exotic' Asian goods vacuumed by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. These peddlers, who would sell Indian-made compact commodities such as embroidered cotton; silk handkerchiefs; rugs and tablecloths, would eventually settle across Atlantic City, Asbury Park, New York, New Orleans and Latin America. Some of them also assimilated into the larger Black community through marriages and naturalizations. America's idea of India during the nineteenth century was marked by the branding of Indian products with images of royals, hookahs and dancing girls. Indian tobacco products were labeled as *Hindoo* and *mogul*; alley musicians composed popular show tunes such as *My Hindoo Man* and *Down in Hindu Town* while American burlesque and Broadway popularized the sexual image of the Indian 'nautch' girls; touring showmen featured 'nautch' dancers and *'fakirs.'* These were complemented by acclaimed literary works like Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Brahma* and Walt Whitman's *Passage to India* (Bald 33–36; Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 62). Indian monks like Vivekananda's participation at the Chicago World

Parliament of Religion also popularized Hinduism and Vedanta in the West. However, Indian monks were also targeted by a section of elites who painted them as money-minded sexual deviants in America's print culture, thereby mimicking British historicism (Melnick and Rubin 141–42). Additionally, Indian migrants in the early twentieth century who found work as factory and agrarian workers were pushed to unemployment through lobbying by an Asiatic Exclusion League which campaigned against a 'Hindu Invasion' of American jobs. The growing resentment against Asian immigrants led to the Immigration Act of 1917, which followed a series of concerted attacks against Indians, including an attack on makeshift colonies and workers in Bellingham, Washington (Chakravorty et al. 9). The 1917 Act was followed by the US Supreme Court judgment in *United States v Bhagat Singh Thind*, which further illustrates the racial ideology that dominated 1920s America. Thind, an Indian migrant who served in the US Army, was granted citizenship in 1918 under a 1790 law, which called for the naturalization of white, Caucasian, Aryan races on an ad-hoc basis. Despite dominant social scholarship classifying Indians under 'Aryans,' Thind's citizenship was revoked on the grounds he did not conform to the then-popular concept of whiteness. The US Supreme Court opined that US-born descendants of "Hindu parents would retain indefinitely the clear evidence of their ancestry" unlike children born to 'white' European—English, German, French, Scandinavian—immigrants who could "quickly merge in to the mass" of American population (qtd. in Chakravorty et al. 13). Thus, the Thind verdict synonymized race with nationality and lumped South Asians as invaders of the dominant social paradigm based on Western superiority. These sentiments were echoed in cultural texts surrounding India by Hollywood studios, starting with Edison's *Hindoo Fakir* in 1902, the earliest known India-centric film produced in the US.

Hollywood's growing global influence threatened the European cinema industry. The British Board of Film Censors was also concerned about how Hollywood portrayed the Empire, banning movies with excessive violence, sexual content and 'objectionable' portrayal of the British which could lead to unrest. Most India-centric Hollywood movies, however, were influenced by British historicism as they constantly portrayed the colonizers in a positive light, an endorsement of Rudyard Kipling's *White Man's Burden*. Accordingly, Indian kings were either painted as 'benevolent'—if they sided with the colonial government—or 'malicious' if they sided with the 'barbaric' tribes who fought to liberate India. Lavish palaces, glorious British Army establishments, temples, mountains with scenes of symbolling drawings on monasteries were the dominant locales depicted in these movies. India as an exotic land of religious mysticism and fanaticism was a popular theme and significant distinctions among India's plural faiths and lumped every religion—Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, among others—were distorted into a monolithic, fanatical cult that threatened the Western way of living (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 23; Jones 63–67). The mysticism of these films was also evident by the way Hollywood promoted these films. *Soul of Buddha* (1918) was promoted as "strange, mystic and grippingly tense" (Jones 53). Another common narrative theme was that of a tragic love story of an 'Occident' male savior and a helpless 'Orient' woman, in *Son of India* (1931) and *The Rains Came* (1939). However, these 'love' stories strongly dissuaded miscegenation of different races. These movies received critical acclaim and commercial success, with one review of *The Rains Came* applauding the filmmaker for capturing "the mysticism of India, and the feel of a strange land" (Jones 107). A movie journal described British actor George Arliss' brownface, caricaturist performance of an Indian royal in Hollywood's adaptation of the Scottish writer William Archer's *The Green Goddess* as the combination of "the veneer of white civilization with the cunning, craftiness and cynicism of the Oriental" (Sewell, para.18). Hollywood also adapted Rudyard Kipling's problematic India-based stories like *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) and *Gunga Din* (1939). Such representation of India and Indians were akin to the depictions of other racial minorities by Hollywood, including Blacks and Latino communities (Barnett and Flynn 29; Valdivia 85). Film scholar Nitin Govil notes that India was "often the last stop in the global trade of Hollywood film prints" in the 1910s. However, Hollywood—despite competition from British films and Indian cinema—managed to acquire a significant market share in India (*Orienting Hollywood* 3). Nearly 90 percent of the films screened in India in 1921 were imported from Hollywood, which supposedly dropped since the 1930s (Jaikumar 79) with the rise of a domestic film scene that eventually destroyed the dominance of Hollywood in the country.

Early Indian film pioneers learned cinema trade practices and techniques from Western studios but they managed to "differentiate their text from Hollywood" (Jaikumar 79) in a process that is reminiscent of the process of glocalization, or cultural hybridity, that has taken center stage in global media scholarship since the 1990s. This mixture of Western equipment, industrial practices and forms with Indian narrative styles, themes and sensibilities is evidenced by India's first full-length feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), an adaptation of a popular mythological tale about an ancient ruler who stood for truth and virtue. The film's director D.G Phalke viewed his movie as a cultural project wherein Indian and global viewers would get an accurate picture of India. He also saw cinema as a potential employment generator for the cash-strapped Indian technicians and workers (Gopal and Moorti 10). Despite Phalke's nationalist views, the texts produced by the nascent Indian film industry were marked by a series of Indo-Western collaborations, including technicians such as the American Duncan Ellis; Europeans like Franz Osten and E.D Ligouro; Iranian director Abdolhossein Sepanta. Western actresses like Mary Evans and Ruby Myers were presented as 'Indian' evidenced by their stage names of Nadia and Sulochana respectively. Indian-produced films were also routinely screened abroad including *Raja Harishchandra; The Light of Asia* (1925), and *A Throw of Dice* (1929). While Phalke turned down a lucrative offer to produce a film in London, other Indian cinema luminaries like Phani Majumdar and Himanshu Rai were actively involved in the production of international films. Between 1913 and 1931, the silent era, more than 1,200 films were made in India. The introduction of talkies and adoption of the Hollywood-style studio system ensured the migration of technicians across film centers of Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Lahore. This further led to the crystallization of India's thriving vernacular film scene which courted not just regional and pan-subcontinent markets but also foreign markets in southeast Asia and Africa (Gopal and Moorti 11–12; Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 131–32). Eventually, the popularity of domestic films coincided with the decline of Hollywood's influence in India, which started waning rapidly in the 1930s. In absolute terms, while Britain topped Hollywood's export list in 1933, India ranked eleventh on the list, ahead of Britain's predominantly English-speaking Oceanic dominions. By the 1940s, this was a completely different picture as World War II temporarily paused Hollywood's global influence. India, however, was the only foreign market that remained open and receptive to American film exports. However, it couldn't compete with the massive popularity of domestic films and Hollywood's market share in the subcontinent slipped from 45 percent in the early 1940s to 15 percent by 1945 and, ultimately, to three percent by the 1950s (Glancy 8, 17; Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 287).

The decline of Hollywood, and by extension, Western cultural products, in India can be attributed to the nationalist movement that peaked in the 1940s. The twentieth century saw pro-independence activists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak espouse the concept of *swaraj*, which roughly translates to 'self-country' or 'self-rule.' However, in the nationalist discourse this meant 'self-made' or 'country-made' and called for the boycott of colonial texts and goods in favor of domestic products. This culminated in the *Swadeshi* movement of 1905, following the partition of Bengal along communal lines, which saw the masses shun British textile, education institutes, and cultural products. Scenes of cloth burning were common as were student agitations in Bengal, which sporadically spread to the rest of the country through extensive tours by regional and national pool of mass leaders who used domestic cultural forms like religious festivities, dramas, plays, folk music to galvanize the populace. Additionally, the 1905 movement—while short-lived—led to a brief revival of Indian arts and crafts as well as the creation of domestic industries and nationalist colleges. Similar scenes were repeated nearly 15 years later in the Mahatma Gandhi-led non-cooperation movement which again saw a mass civil disobedience of colonial products, institutes, laws and taxes (Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, et al. 176–81; Bose and Jalal, chaps.11, 13). Before becoming *Mahatma,* Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an English-educated barrister, practicing in South Africa. In 1908, he wrote *Hind Swaraj,* considered his magnum opus, where he critiques and blames British industrialism and political institutions for the deprivation of India. He subsequently returned to India in 1915, after leading a successful non-violent anti-British movement in South Africa. He rectified the ambiguity of the Indian National Congress and undertook a year-long expedition across India to understand its social milieu. Gandhi's critical evaluations of society and colonialism earned him a generous mass following which also attracted the attention of the United States-led international press in

1919-20. According to Thussu, Gandhi was "assiduous in the way he dealt with journalists" (*Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 66) whereas seasoned BBC reporter Mark Tully calls him the "greatest journalist of the twentieth century" (xii). Being an effective newspaper editor himself, Gandhi understood the power and potential of the Western culture industry to gather support for the Indian cause. Most of Gandhi's essays and spiritualistic speeches, published in newspapers, both Indian and foreign, reflected ancient Hindu and Buddhist epithets and his *satyagraha* defined his "social political philosophy, applauded by the world at large" (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 67). Media historian Chandrika Kaul states that Gandhi "deliberately courted US opinion" by giving extensive and regular interviews, writing columns, as well as apprising journalists of forthcoming movements and agitations. His 1930 salt *satyagraha* received widespread coverage across global newsreels, newspapers, and broadcast—despite British ire. Gandhi was featured on the cover of *Time*, which named him 1930 Man of the Year (78–79). The soft-spoken Gandhi also didn't shy away from responding to American author Katherine Mayo's anti-Indian book *Mother India*, scathingly terming it as "a drain inspector's report" (qtd. in A. Sen 150). Despite censorship attempts by the British, the US media juxtaposed images of a toothless, scantily clad Gandhi to British aristocracy and might (Kaul 74).

Accordingly, the nascent but rapidly growing Indian cinema landscape in the colonial era coopted such socio-political narratives espoused by the Gandhi-led nationalist movement. One of the earliest movies censored by the British was the silent-era *Bhakta Vidur*, a tale adapted from the Indian epic *Mahabharata* where the protagonist's look and demeanor was supposedly based on Gandhi. Film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha documents the hysteria among British-dominated censors in India that every film made by domestic filmmakers was seasoned with a nationalism (chap.1). While that was certainly not the case, most films produced by Indian filmmakers, especially since the advent of sound, were adaptations of plays and dramas; song-and-dance sequences that were already popular among the masses. These stories and songs were part of India's centuries old cultural plurality that were passed down from generations to generations. This familiarity with the subject and story as well as the relative well-rounded representation of the homeland made Indian movies quite popular among movie audiences (Kohli-Khandekar 125). Vernacular studios and filmmakers challenged Western imports by identifying and catering to the socio-cultural distinctions and genre-preferences of their respective territories. The Calcutta-based Bengali studios produced literary films whereas Bombay's Marathi cinema focused on the production of mythologies. The popularity of these films also led to the concomitant and symbiotic rise of an indigenous music industry. Early film composers like Saraswati Devi and Pankaj Mullick introduced their own distinct sounds and musical expertise, most of which were "derivative of older forms" (B. Sen, "The Sounds of Modernity" 92). Himanshu Rai's Bombay Talkies was one of the pioneers during this era that consistently produced commercially successful, socially motivated films with popular music. The studio produced movies that tackled the then taboo and controversial social issues like caste-based discrimination—*Achhut Kanya* (1936); widow remarriage—*Jeevan Prabhat* (1937); national unity and community building—*Janmabhoomi* (1936) and *Izzat* (1937). The subliminal encoding of nationalistic and anti-colonial messages in these Indians films—and song and dance sequences—meant that they could bypass strict British censorship laws and easily deciphered by the illiterates who, by the late 1920s, formed the bulk of India's movie-going audience. The popularity of Indian films further enabled Indian actresses like Devika Rani and Nurjehan reclaim the concept of Indian femininity from 'white' Western actresses like Mary Evans and

Ruby Myers. Pre-colonial studios were also socially and culturally inclusive and diverse—actors, technicians, writers, filmmakers came from every stratum and class of society (Dwyer 223), espousing nationalist ideals of unity in diversity. Hollywood films of these times like *Gunga Din* and *Clive of India*, which were mostly rooted in British historicism, as well as the segmenting of movies and theaters, were vehemently opposed by the INC, which by the 1930s started demanding absolute independence and called for a complete boycott of Western cultural texts. These efforts were also complemented by the growth of Indian film journals that carried gossip and advertisements featuring Indian cinema stars who were subsequently translated and commodified into symbols of nationalism and juxtaposed with waning, alien Western sensibilities. They also criticized predatory economic policies that hurt many studios and distributors who were dependent on Hollywood for their survival (Govil, *Orienting Hollywood* 186; Jaikumar 79–89; Gopal and Moorti 11, 20). By 1947, geopolitical conditions, complemented by the dominance of Indian films as well as a post-independence fervor in the subcontinent that clubbed Hollywood with 'alien' and 'colonial' British symbols, despite significant cultural differences between the two—much like Hollywood had lumped India's plural faiths and ethnicities into a monolith—led to a significant disdain for Hollywood's cultural exports (Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 286; Jaikumar 92).

3. Postcolonial India: Cinema and Television

The independence of India in 1947 witnessed the replacement of a hegemonic foreign imperialist force by domestic elites. This new political elite, represented by domestic industrial houses, had formulated the Bombay Plan in 1944 which dictated economic policies of a decolonized India. These industrial houses, such as Tatas and Birlas, had made considerable fortune during the colonial rule but actively participated in the nationalist movement once the

British started “marginalizing the growth of Indian industry” (Thomas 42). The Bombay Plan recommended the consolidation of domestic industrial machinery to reduce India’s dependence on foreign capital and imports. Independent India adopted key elements of the Bombay Plan such as heavy import duties that sidelined foreign investment and, thereby, ensured the dominance of domestic industrial houses, that also took over remnants of the colonial press (Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee 445; Thomas 53, 61). However, the state kept private enterprise outside the broadcast and telecom sector until the 1980s. The state did not, initially, support and entertain the Indian film scene. India’s cinematic landscape in the 1940s was not as oligarchic as the American film industry. While the number of Indian films went up from 167 to 264 between 1939 and 1948, the number of producers—most of whom produced multiple films in a year—went up from 94 to 211 in the same period (37). However, by 1947, Bombay eclipsed other cinematic centers and had established itself as a pan-Indian mammothlike movie-making force.

If British colonialism started from Calcutta in the mid-eighteenth century, cinema in India started from Bombay in the late nineteenth century. Bombay has been categorized as a media capital that has certain social, political and economic traits in terms of infrastructure, institutionalization, entrepreneurial and job opportunities, and relative creative autonomy; traits it shares with other “powerful geographical centers that tap human, creative and financial resources within their spheres of circulation” such as Laos, London, and notably Hollywood (Curtin 117–18). In other words, these cities encompass and synthesize simultaneous cooperation, or rather exploitation, between key facets of a capitalist logic—the body, the mind, patterns of distribution and exchange that mostly transcends the locale of origin. This can also be viewed through the prism of Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory—media capitals are the cores that leverage peripheries for capital, labor and resources in the name of soft power and cultural exchange. One can argue that the Bombay-based Hindi-film industry, commonly—and sometimes pejoratively—referred to as 'Bollywood,' enjoys the same cultural and economic status in India, and certain in the so-called global South, that Hollywood enjoys worldwide. As a port city, Bombay has been a hub for cultural and economic exchange for centuries. The British consolidated the town as a major financial center by institutionalizing shipping and railroad systems and it soon became the subcontinent's gateway to the rest of the world. These developments, complemented by the creation of India's first stock exchange in 1875, established Bombay as a lucrative town in colonial India, that eventually saw the influx of merchants, traders, migrants and craftsmen that enhanced the city's socio-cultural capital (Curtin 119). Before the arrival and screening of the first motion picture in Bombay, the town also had a thriving theater scene dominated by the Parsi community—followers of Zoroastrianism that arrived in India from Persia in the eighth century CE (Thapar 333)—who amassed considerable wealth through colonial shipping and banking. Expectedly, the Parsis, who had mastered the high art of theater, were the first to migrate towards the new form of cinematic arts in India. These included J.F Madan, whose Elphinstone Bioscope—later renamed Madan Theatre—controlled 50 percent of cinema theaters in India by the 1930s and was a major importer of Hollywood films in British India (Kohli-Khandekar 124); actor-producers like Sohrab Modi and Ardeshir Irani. By 1938, India had over 1,500 movie theaters (Rajadhyaksha, chap.2) most of which exclusively carried Indian films. Parsi-led film studios and independent filmmakers adapted narrative styles and stories of performance theater—Shakespeare, indigenous song and dance, mythologies (Ganti, chap.1). The early adoption of cinema by the Parsis is another major reason for the continued dominance of Bombay as a creative hub. Additionally, Bombay's economic prowess meant that financing was not a big issue. As the financial capital of India, Bombay—facilitated by railroads—also attracted jobseekers and merchants from north and east India, mostly Hindi and Urdu speakers. Much like financial capital, cinema spread from Bombay—which has always had a sizable population of Gujarati, Marathi, Urdu, and English speakers—to the rest of India. This also ensured that Hindustani—a hybrid of Urdu and Hindi—became the "lingua franca of the bazaars" (Curtin 121). The advent of sound signaled that Indian studios now strived to make films that catered to the largest Indian socio-economic class, most of whom spoke Hindi. According to anthropologist Tejaswini Ganti, the development of Hindi cinema in "multi-lingual Bombay rather than the predominantly Hindi speaking north, disassociated it from any regional identification" (chap.1). This, along with the economic and migratory patterns, spread the Hindi-Urdu blend of Hindustani across India, eventually according to it with an informal national language status. This can be credited to the accreditation received by Hindi as official "national language" which permitted Hindi cinema to create a form of national cinema and "subsume regional cinema to a certain extent" (Gopal and Moorti 11). Another reason behind the Hindi-film industry's domination is the partition of India as it segmented the Lahore-based Punjabi film scene as well as the Calcutta-led Bengali film scene. Persistent sour relations between India and the new state of Pakistan also dissuaded any form of cultural exchange which saw Bengali film studios lose nearly 40 percent of its domestic audience (Ganti, chap.1). As a result, many Punjabi and Bengali film technicians and artists migrated to Hindi film studios.

The diversity and competitiveness of Indian cinema distinguished itself from the pre-1948 oligopolistic and vertically integrated Hollywood, where a handful of studios managed every aspect of film production, distribution, and exhibition. While Hollywood was undergoing a disruption following the 1948 *United States v Paramount* verdict which prevented the erstwhile oligopoly enjoyed by the powerful studios (Hall and Neale 129), Indian studios lobbied to get state support. During the 1940s, these studios expected that an independent Indian government would identify cinema's potential as an instrument of mass education. Inspired by Western efficiency in film production and distribution, these studios sought adequate institutional and financial support to counter anti-India representation spread by the United States-led Western information machinery. State-support, they argued, would also help studios that were on the verge of shutting down due to rising input and operating costs. While many studios shut down in the 1940s, the ones that survived resorted to dubious means to raise funds. Cinema also became an expensive affair in the immediate years following independence with many provinces charging as much as 75 percent as entertainment tax. Independent India's first government, led by the Gandhi-influenced INC, was keen to safeguard traditional art forms like dance, classical music, literature, paintings—art forms with "low commercial potential in contrast to popular culture" (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 128) through establishing state-sponsored institutes like *Sangeet Natak Akademy*, *Lalit Kala Akademy*, and National Center for the Performing Arts. These efforts were complemented by centers to promote and protect India's cultural heritage like *Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan*, patronized by nationalists like K.M Munshi, which now has branches in London and Dubai. The INC's initial opposition to offer state-support to Indian films stemmed from Gandhi's disdain of the medium which he likened to ill-habits like gambling. Furthermore, the government was concerned with the formulaic *masala* films churned out by the dominant Hindi-film industry which they viewed as vulgar, cheap and demoralizing (Ganti, chap.1). India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru believed that the development of cinema was not top priority for a poverty-stricken, economically weak country like India. However, his government did set up a committee in 1951 to study Indian cinema which eventually recommended the establishment of state-sponsored institutes to promote film culture.

Despite Hollywood's low market share in India, the government entertained offers from foreign studios, directors and actors to shoot and produce films in India. While the Indian government levied hefty tariffs on imports, they signed a contract with the Motion Picture Export Association of America in 1957 that allowed the release of a fixed number of Hollywood films in India. This saw Hollywood revenues in India increase from $1.9 million in 1955 to $3.2 million in 1963 (Pendakur, "The U.S. Film Industry in India" 60). However, this increase notwithstanding, India's contribution to Hollywood's global revenue was small due to the geopolitical conditions that saw tense relations between India and US, a postcolonial anti-Western sentiment in the global South, and misrepresentation of India on American screen. These included movies like United Artists' *The River* (1951), which featured a young Satyajit Ray as a crewmember; MGM's adaptation of Kipling's *Kim* (1950); and Warner Bros.' *The Diamond Queen* (1952), most of which—despite being shot in India—did not "necessarily serve the interests of India" due to the relative 'invisibility' of India and its customs (Jones 69). Realizing the need to counter such anti-India propaganda, the Nehru government built upon colonial machinery and commissioned the state-run Films Division of India to produce and screen newsreels and documentaries (Kohli-Khandekar 128; Prasad 32–33). The Films Division was entrusted with promoting ideals of nation-building and scientific temper among the newly-independent populace, evidenced by newsreels highlighting infrastructure development in a new India—dams, electrical appliances, growing economic position, and the relevance of a social elite-led government. However, much like the colonial era, the documentaries and films produced by the Films Division did not highlight the shortcomings of state-run institutions, political mismanagement, and conservatism that plagued India. By the 1960s, it was clear that the Films Division had effectively become a government mouthpiece as the contradictions between promises and reality were quite out in the open (Deprez 171–72). The Films Division, then, lost its domination to the rising independent film scene in India, which had taken upon them to promote Nehruvian socialism and push the state's nation-building agenda. Revisiting the recommendations of the 1951 committee, the government formally entered the mainstream film scene in India through the establishment of a Films Finance Corporation; and the Film and Television Institute of India, in the 1960s. While the latter provided technical training and education to budding filmmakers and students, the former provided state-support to independent filmmaking, which included both mainstream films and arthouse cinema.

Relations between the Indian government and the Motion Picture Association of America also soured over the government's strict policy which allowed Hollywood studios to remit a small portion of their Indian-earned revenues to the US. Despite earning a profit of over $1 million in India by 1963, Hollywood was allowed to remit only $400,000 to their head office in the US. Hollywood tried to remedy the situation by using these 'blocked funds' to shoot movies in India. Govil highlights how Steven Spielberg and Columbia Pictures used a portion of 'blocked funds' to shoot several scenes for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 288). Additionally, the Indian government alleged that Hollywood studios had not honored the 1957 agreement that stipulated equal distribution of films between the countries. Hollywood did not show any interest in acquiring and distributing Indian films in the West, countering that doing so would be a violation of US laws (Pendakur, "The U.S. Film Industry in India" 61). Such contentions between India and the US also led to prolonged periods of embargoes over Hollywood texts. Piracy also formed a major point of frustration with the

MPEAA claiming that studios yearly lost at least $10 million in India by the 1980s (qtd. in Pendakur, "India's National Film Policy" 152). However, despite these shortcomings, Hollywood movies proved to be popular in southern India by the 1960s due to the region's "adoption of English as an 'additional state language'," despite the dominant anti-West sentiment in the predominantly Hindi-speaking north India—which consumed Bollywood movies that decried the West (Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 288). It was not that Indian cinema, without state and/or Hollywood support, did not thrive in the initial years of independence. Post-independence, Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, dabbed its feet into international markets. When post-War geopolitical conditions compelled Hollywood to shift its focus on China and Japan (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 27), films from India started gaining some traction in international film festivals. In 1946, Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar*—which documented the rich-poor divide in Indian society—won the coveted Palm D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The dubbed versions of actor-director Raj Kapoor's *Awara*, produced in 1951, became a massive success in USSR, Middle East, Africa, and southeast Asia, due to its socially progressive and anti-capitalist messaging. A special mention must be made about *Awara*'s soundtrack which epitomizes postcolonial East-West interaction with its fusion of Indian and Western classical music. The songs from *Awara* are regularly performed at various music and dance competitions in Turkey and former Soviet states. Raj Kapoor's success encouraged other Indian filmmakers to dub and export their films, including Mehboob Khan, the director of *Mother India*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1957. The period also saw Satyajit Ray's Bengali-language *Apu* trilogy receive widespread critical acclaim. Ray and his contemporaries Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak pioneered a new-wave cinematic movement in India, characterized by shoe-string budgets and themes of social realism and middle-class issues, which led to their niche popularity among global audiences. Despite the acclaim, however, these movies were not widely distributed in the United States. Ray and his films were also criticized at home for 'aestheticizing' poverty and suffering (R. Majumdar 762). Such themes were also visible in Hindi-cinema, or Bollywood films, that garnered acclaim in the West, including *Mother India*, reinforcing US' view of independent India as being "too tied up in cultish beliefs and practices to be an independent nation" (Melnick and Rubin 146).

Until the 1970s, nation-building formed a core theme of mainstream Hindi films that pandered to Nehruvian socialism. This was particularly evident in *Mother India* where the newly independent poverty-stricken country is raised to the stature of a revered mother as many freedom fighters and renaissance writers had done during the colonial period. The protagonist, Radha—named after a revered goddess in Hindu culture—embodies the past and present of India whereas the postcolonial generation—the future—is represented through her two sons Ramu and Birju. Remnants of a capitalist, Western colonizer can be seen in the form of a conniving moneylender who offers to waive Radha's debts off if she agrees to succumb to his advances. Ganti notes that Radha's story is one of dilemmas and choices—between her husband and the moneylender; her sons—the virtuous Ramu and the rambunctious Birju; between her family and the community-at-large (chap.3). These were parallel to the issues Indian policymakers had to navigate in a Cold War geopolitical arena—the choice between the US-led capitalist West, or the USSR-led communist bloc. The government pushed policies and laws that focused on import substitution—reducing India's reliance on the West for information, finance, resources and technology. Similarly, in *Mother India,* Radha—the embodiment of India—does not succumb to the capitalist moneylender's advances and decides to take matters into her own hands. Thus, Radha's story becomes the story, or rather the imaginative aspiration, of a newly independent India. As the new bride, or the new country, Radha must endure hunger, poverty and drought to till and grow a piece of barren land to get out of debt in the hopes of raising a virtuous community—a message that was constantly pushed through the state-machineries of radio, newsreels and policies. Through Radha's journey from a young bride to an old matriarch, we can also see technological and generational changes—scenes of the villagers availing the benefits of state-sponsored policies like dams and schools. These nationalist messages were also spread through the meticulous use of song-and-dance sequences that effectively transcended linguistic and cultural barriers in a diverse India (Gopal and Moorti 13). The choice of a rural setting also resonated with the audiences as India was and continues to be a predominantly agrarian country. In the final act, Radha reprimands and shoots Birju for kidnapping the moneylender's daughter, thereby putting her patriotic duties above her filial love—a core message in the Hindu scripture of *Mahabharata*. This further raised the stature of *Mother India* to an epic—an informal national movie—which was subsequently exported to newly decolonized countries in Asia and Africa, where it was quite well-received (Gopal and Moorti 28; Ganti, chap.3) and subsequently nominated for an Academy Award. The *Mother India* trope of a mother's dilemma between her two children was replicated in many Indian movies such as *Gunga Jumna* (1961)*; Deewar* (1975)*; Ram Lakhan* (1989). Movies like *Mother India* were also complemented by the films of actor-director Manoj Kumar, who would don the character of Bharat Kumar in his films; *Bharat* being the ancient, Hindi name for India. His popular movies *Upkar* and *Purab aur Paschim* juxtaposed the concept of a rural, economically poor but morally superior *Bharat* with an urban, rich but socially deviant *India*. In a similar vein to the nationalist films of the early 1950s, the traditional colonial Western villain was replaced by a nouveau, postcolonial West-influenced villain. These were represented by either the Indian diaspora—especially in *Purab aur Paschim*—who were labeled as traitors, opportunists and abandoners of 'Indianness' or the materialist, city-bred lechers who had their eyes set on dishonoring the female protagonist; according to film scholar Anirudh Deshpande, this "clash of civilization takes place in the arena of female sexuality" (98). In many such movies, the female protagonists were devoid of any agency—they were, rather, helpless beings who needed to be saved from the city-bred deviants or falling prey to the 'illusions' of Western life. The songs of *Upkar* and *Purab aur Paschim* talk about the greatness of India's ancient civilization and nationalism which are popular even today.

There were also the tropes of social realism used in movies of Raj Kapoor such as *Awara* and *Shree 420* which were extremely popular in Soviet Union and newly decolonized countries, most of which adopted socialist policies. The former highlights the circumstances that force someone to take up a life of crime and how these 'criminals' are exploited by the bourgeoise for their own personal gains; the latter is a complex story about traditions and modernity, and the contradictions one finds in metropolises like Bombay. *Shree 420,* named after the Indian Penal Code 420 which criminalizes fraud, masquerades as a love story where the protagonist Raju is compelled to choose between two women—one representing traditional 'Indian' values of honesty and virtue: the second epitomizing principles of deceit and modernity, then associated with the West-influenced urbanites. Respectively, the two women are aptly named *Vidya*—the Hindi word for knowledge—and *Maya*—the Hindi word for illusion. Raju succumbs to the temptations and false promises of a luxurious life by defrauding his peripheral villagers off their hard-earned wealth at the behest of Maya and her suitors, who are part of the core bourgeois class of 'old money.' Eventually, Raju realizes his mistake and urges the villagers—supposedly breaking the fourth wall—to use their wealth and resources to contribute to the government's infrastructure and economic policies by building schools, roads and houses. Much like *Awara*, much of *Shree 420's* screenplay relies on song-and-dance sequences that blend Indian and Western musical styles. Film scholars Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti document how the songs in Raj Kapoor's movies symbolized the closeness of Soviet-India relationships, much to the ire of the US-led West, that further is evidence of a postcolonial hybridity where Raju sings that despite his English pants, Russian hat and Japanese boots, his heart beats for India (31). In one song from *Shree 420,* Maya urges Raju to not look 'back' at the virtuous past but rather focus on the seductive riches offered by the capitalists. The popularity of such songs, as well as the popular stereotypical trope of the city-bred, Westernized villain continued in many films that further added to the disdain of Western culture and, as an extension, Western cultural import including Hollywood films. Interestingly, while Manoj Kumar's movies juxtapose and vilify urban India with a rural *Bharat*, Raj Kapoor's early socialist movies take this concept further to highlight how every town, in true Wallerstein fashion, every street and neighborhood in India has both a core and a periphery.

Despite the anti-West sentiment, mass Indian migration to the United States resumed in the 1960s due to the Hart-Cellar Act, which restricted entry quota to highly skilled workers of India. Before the Act, there were 12,296 Indians in the US; the years between 1965 and 1979 saw the annual migration of nearly 12,000 highly educated Indians, mostly professionals and medical practitioners. The family members of these professionals eventually joined them between 1980 and 1995 (Chakravorty et al. 29–30). While the Hart-Cellar Act did lead to a substantial increase in South Asians, their representation in American media during this era was largely limited to depictions of cultural artifacts, comedic relief, and "alternative times… to avoid discussing the realities of the present for immigrants" (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice* *and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 29). Indian sitar maestro Ravi Shankar's popular performance at the 1967 Monterey Music Festival, however, provided a platform where counterculture American activists and hippies could confront the Vietnam War, anti-establishment, religion, as well as drugs and race relations. For this purpose, Shankar was incorporated into a new technique of marketing wherein the Indian diaspora was expected to relinquish some control over their culture and allow white America to 'borrow' music, religion, clothes (Melnick and Rubin 132, 138–39). Such fetishization of the East is evidenced by The Beatles' publicized spiritual tour of India and their use of sitar in songs like *Norwegian Wood* and *Love You To*; the American tours by Indian monks like Swami Prabhupada and Mahesh Yogi; and the popularization of Nehru jacket by comedian Johnny Carson and toy maker Mattel (Melnick and Rubin 132, 138–39, 152–53). While the 1960s counterculture movement led to the mushrooming of Indian experiences and characters, Hollywood movies still relied on white actors in brownface and using thick accents to represent the subcontinent. Examples of such practices can be found in the movies of British actor Peter Sellers in the 1960s and 1970s, such as *The Party*—one of the earliest Hollywood movies to portray an Indian immigrant in the West. The movie featured Sellers in brownface makeup to portray Hrundi Bakshi, who is mistakenly invited to a high-profile Hollywood party and is treated as the stereotypical 'Other'—characterized by his thick, high-pitched enunciation of English words; his bumbling physical mannerisms; his positioning as the butt of jokes. As the only non-white character in the movie, Hrundi is also mistaken for a Native American, when it is revealed that he is 'Indian.' This represents the "ambiguous racial position" diasporic Indians have faced for a long time (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 31). Despite Sellers' Indian characters being the protagonist in popular movies, they seemed to ridicule Indian experiences, rendering them inferior to the supposedly superior white race. American rock group Steely Dan, in their song *Bodhisattva,* mocked the hippies' appropriation of the East and paradoxical position on consumerism; Ravi Shankar also expressed displeasure at the misuse of sitar music in Hollywood movies to symbolize sex and drugs (Melnick and Rubin 159). The skilled and high-earning non-resident Indians, or NRIs, who benefited from Hart-Cellar Act, sought to create a modern India in the United States. One such endeavor began in 1970 with *India Abroad,* the first Indian immigrant newspaper, from New York. It became a strong vehicle through which NRIs highlighted pertinent issues and defined their identity in the adopted homeland. These NRIs created a pan-ethnic identity in the United States, unlike in India, where they were divided by caste, language, religion. This weekly newspaper not only helped NRIs overcome ethnic divisions, but it also kept religious and cultural affiliations alive, evidenced from the concurrent rise in temples, mosques, gurdwaras, in the US. The newspaper was the earliest instance of a media text produced by the Indian immigrant, for the Indian immigrant (Bhalla 121). The media consumption habits of NRIs played a major role in the piracy of Indian films, which in turn led to the spread and popularity of Indian films. While Hollywood studios lacked the will to distribute Indian films in the West, pirated copies of films—especially since the rise of VCRs and concomitant 'copying' techniques since the 1980s—made their way into these territories which were widely distributed via a network of Indian-owned shops and outlets. Piracy meant a loss in revenue for the film producers, but it enabled the diaspora to maintain links with their homeland and place of origin. Additionally, the piracy distribution network also led to the popularity of Indian films abroad—not just among the NRIs but also other diasporic and indigenous communities (Athique 44, 47). Eventually, the overseas market became a major source of revenue for Indian studios, especially since the 1990s.

The cultural proximity theory explains how audiences in one region or territory "experience intimacy toward a culture other than their own" (Min et al. 610) which—in turn—explains how soft power, described by political scientist Joseph Nye as "the ability to attract people to our side without any coercion," (qtd. in Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 3) functions. As one of the first decolonized nations, India took centerstage in global politics by forging close alliances with newly decolonized territories who shared a history of colonialism and underwent issues of hunger, poverty and social ills. This centerstage enabled India to sponsor and co-found the Non-Aligned Movement—an international group of mostly decolonized countries that decided to remain equidistant from the Western and Eastern blocs; instead striving to maintain good relations with the US and Soviet Union (Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee 190–91). While the Indian governments did not initially participate in commercial film financing and production, initiatives such as the Non-Aligned Movement, bilateral trades and migration of Indians facilitated sporadic socio-cultural interactions. Indian movies, soundtracks and music, thus, until 1975, were exported to the Caribbean, Singapore, south and southeast Asia, the Middle East as well as some Western countries (Gopal and Moorti 27–28). Despite being geographically distant, these nations—most of which were victimized by European imperialism—shared similarities in culture, values, and sensibilities that led to the warm reception of Indian films laden with shared themes of patriotism, social realism and anti-capitalism. These themes were complemented by Indian films' "larger-than-life characters, escapist melodramatic narrative style, and song and dance sequences" (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 132).

Subsequently, the Indian government formally entered the film business with the formation of National Film Development Corporation to support alternative cinema pioneers such as Shyam Benegal, Sai Paranjape, and Govind Nihalani. It also co-produced British filmmaker Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* in 1984 and Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* in 1988, two movies that were globally acclaimed. An analysis of NFDC financed films revealed that they complemented the Indian government's policy of using mass media as a nation-building and education initiative. While the Bollywood-dominated commercial cinema, in the 1970s and 1980s, provided a site for oppressed masses to vicariously escape their troubles, NFDC-funded films realistically depicted issues related to poverty and corruption that the Indian masses already endured. Despite the acclaim, the NFDC-funded movies did not do well at the box office as people, according to Deshpande, did not want to spend money to see their real self on screen but rather, the manifestation of their aspirations and dreams (97–98). The NFDC also aided in establishing theaters across the country and was also involved in the film acquisition and distribution business. Strict government policies meant that Hollywood studios were compelled to distribute their films through the NFDC which charged a "canalizing fee of 15 percent" on operating costs (Pendakur, "India's National Film Policy" 154), thereby ensuring a constant flow of revenue. This also enabled the NFDC—and by extension, the government—to oversee which and what type of movies were screened in India, which was another point of contention between Hollywood and India. By the 1980s, television emerged as a powerful medium that further reinforced the anti-Western narratives of the Indian popular culture through socially realistic programming as well as the rise of Hindutva-dominated nationalism that vilified the West.

3.1 Television in India

The UK and US already had a thriving television industry by the time the idea of television broadcasting was floated in independent India in 1951. However, it wasn't until 1959 that television really took off in India. Unlike cinema, television and radio were viewed by the

Nehru government as educational instruments which could facilitate their nation-building agenda, much like the state-supported public service broadcasting model in Europe. Thus, the colonial enterprises of broadcasting—radio and later television—became state-owned monopolies. While electronics manufacturer RCA led the television revolution in the United States, it was Phillips India and UNESCO that facilitated the television movement in India. After a demonstration by Phillips India in 1959, the government purchased 21 sets from Philips and 55 sets using a UNESCO grant and established 66 tele-clubs in both rural and urban areas in and around the national capital of Delhi. Much like early US television networks depended on radio services for content, the All India Radio and Delhi Directorate of Education were entrusted to produce educational programming—covering subjects like science, health, history, Hindi-language training and current affairs—for community viewing in these tele-clubs (S. Kumar 24–26). Following the expansion of broadcasting centers across India, general television services started between 1965 and 1975 with the assistance of grants and technical support from Ford Foundation and NASA's ATS-6 satellite for terrestrial transmission. The state-sponsored television network Doordarshan's development-driven programming was also supplemented by other genres like quiz shows, talk shows, news, and sports (S. Kumar 30). While programs like *Krishi Darshan* educated India's rural majority about the developments in agricultural sciences, the screening of Hindi films and concomitant programs like *Chitrahaar* led to the further popularity of Bollywood across the nation and abroad. *Chitrahaar* predominantly featured Bollywood song-and-dance sequences and was modeled after AIR's *Vividh Bharati* and Radio Ceylon's *Binaca Geetmala* which featured a countdown of film songs. Interestingly, the Indian government's disdain of commercial films also extended to film music when Nehru's broadcasting ministry ensured that AIR promoted India's cultural heritage by playing classical music instead of film music. However, the government had to reverse its decision after audiences regularly tuned into Radio Ceylon's *Binaca Geetmala* countdown of Hindi film songs. According to Sen, the Radio Ceylon affair represents the "limits to imposing culture 'from above'" (B. Sen, "The Sounds of Modernity" 90). The AIR, thus, created the *Vividh Bharati* service to compete which would go on to serve a model for *Chitrahaar.* Doordarshan also played a geopolitical role, especially in the regions of Kashmir and Punjab, in countering cross-border programming by beaming Indian programs, including film music, to cities like Lahore that further led to the popularity of Hindi films in Pakistan (S. Kumar 27).

3.2 Commercial Broadcasting and the IT Revolution

By the onset of the 1970s, due to tense relations between India and US, the Western agencies decided to significantly cut foreign aid to India. The West wanted India to liberalize its markets, abolish oversight on foreign capital, and devalue the Indian rupee. The Indira Gandhi-government, however, enacted a series of policies that choked the hegemony of multinational corporations and private industrial houses in India including land reforms, and nationalization of private banks, insurance, and mining. Indira Gandhi also enacted the 1969 Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act and the 1973 Foreign Exchange Regulation Act which restricted the operations and majority foreign shareholding of businesses operating in India (Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee 296, 459–60). Additionally, the government also investigated foreign companies, notably IBM for unfair trade policies. IBM had been operating in India since 1951 and was granted lucrative contracts by the Indian government for data compilation and machine consultancy. However, the US-based company treated India as a 'dumping ground' as it overcharged Indian companies and the government; leased out cheap, outdated machines. Following the investigations under FERA and curbing of foreign tech imports—which also affected Hollywood studios in India—IBM found it difficult to sustain its domestic business and exited in 1978 (Sharma 62–63, 68). Other US-based companies like Coca Cola and Kodak followed suit. Despite the government's mass outreach schemes, Doordarshan only reached nearly 15 percent of Indians by 1980 and was telecast for a few hours (Morcom 70), which necessitated a major expansion plan. Prime minister Indira Gandhi, in a sharp turn from her socialist-influenced agenda, decided to commercialize Doordarshan, starting with the 1982 Asian Games (Sen and Roy 3), held in Delhi under the supervision of her tech-savvy son Rajiv Gandhi. The Asian Games introduced color television to India and the government followed it up with the telecast of the 1983 Cricket World Cup—won by an underdog Indian team—as well as commissioning film practitioners to produce socially conscious Hindi-language soap operas starting with *Hum Log* in 1982, inspired by the format of Mexican telenovelas, which further illustrates the global East-West media interaction geographically, or the East-East interaction—sociologically. The show depicted the trials, tribulations, conflicts and harmony between three generations in a typical Indian joint family setting. Every episode would end with a social commentary from Ashok Kumar—a major Indian superstar of the 1940s. To connect with the diverse pan-Indian audience, Kumar would dub his commentary in several languages to not just promote *Hum Log* but also Doordarshan. As a result, *Hum Log* reached nearly 60 million viewers**,** created a new crop of television stars, turned Doordarshan into a money-making venture and catapulted the show's primary sponsor Nestle's Maggi noodles into a household brand in India (S. Kumar 32–33). *Hum Log* was followed by similar social dramas like *Buniyaad* and *Rajini;* sitcoms like *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* and *Dekh Bhai Dekh;* and adaptations of mythological epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata.*

While the blueprints for an IT revolution were prepared by the Indira Gandhi government, the roots of these reforms were sown by her father Jawaharlal Nehru. A firm believer in scientific temper, Nehru's pragmatism and farsightedness led to the establishment of centers of academic and technological excellence which further boosted India's engineering, space and nuclear programs. Nehru's grandson became prime minister in 1984, whose tenure is marked by the push toward digitization and commercialization, a major shift in the social and economic attitude of the Indian government. The Rajiv Gandhi government launched the New Computer Policy which saw ministries, education institutes, and industries adopt digitization. The Policy allowed private players, including foreign firms, to manufacture telecom equipment and electronics by reducing tariffs and duties. These complemented the government's mass literacy initiative of expanding television services and telephones to every rural area by the turn of the century (Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee 349), which is further explored in Chapter 3. Additionally, the vacuum left by IBM was filled by domestic companies like TCS, Infosys and Wipro, that would send professionals abroad for a short-term basis to cater to their foreign clients' technological needs onsite. While this process of body shopping was relatively cheaper for the client, the procurement of work visas, training and permissions proved to be expensive for the Indian IT companies. Eventually, state-led initiatives like Software Technology Parks in the mid-1980s led to the creation of IT hubs like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai which were populated by domestic and foreign firms, which further led to a socio-economic shift from body shopping of professionals toward outsourcing of digital consultancy. The efficiency, effectiveness and professionality of the Indian IT sector saw the software industry grow exponentially from a meager $50 million in the late 1980s to over $100 billion in 2013—of which $75 billion accounted for exports. Collectively, TCS, Infosys and Wipro operate over 500 centers across 75 countries, generating nearly three million jobs since their inception (B. Sen, *Digital Politics and Culture in Contemporary India* 4, 48–49; Sharma 154–55).

4. Media in India: 1990s onward

A balance of payments crisis in India in 1991 led to economic liberalization which saw the abolition of MRTP and the abolition of the erstwhile restrictions on foreign capital quotas. Consequently, India's economic growth grew eightfold to 6.2 percent between 1991-92 and 1993-94 fiscal years. By 1995, Indian stock exchanges recorded more publicly-traded companies than the United States (Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee 477, 479). Ease of foreign capital laws also saw multinationals, including IBM and Coca Cola, reenter the Indian market. The IT revolution and post-1990s globalization, along with the fall of the Soviet Union, saw the creation of a new, affluent middle class in emerging economies, including India, who saw their real income grow by nearly 80 percent between 1988 and 2008 (Milanovic 18–19). The commercial turn of India's broadcasting and entertainment sector in this era was largely influenced by the change in consumption patterns, tastes and fiscal attitude of this hegemonic new middle class (Dwyer 222). The liberalization of India ended the monopoly of the state sponsored Doordarshan and led to the rise of private transnational media operations. In May 1991, STAR TV started broadcasting four channels across India—Star Plus, Prime Sports, BBC World News, and MTV—and offered US-produced shows like *Dynasty* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on its satellite and cable TV platform, becoming popular among the English-speaking upper class in India. Media mogul Rupert Murdoch bought STAR TV in 1992 and actively pursued a 'think global, program local' approach (S. Kumar 6), also used by streaming platforms in the twenty-first century. To tap into the predominantly Hindi-speaking audience of India, Murdoch bought a stake in Indian industrialist Subhas Chandra's Zee TV—the first private Hindi-language channel—to broadcast soaps, sitcoms and talk shows in Hindi. According to television scholar Shanti Kumar, Chandra sought to make Zee the Hindi-language counterpart to STAR TV (S. Kumar 6–7). By the end of the 1990s, Chandra bought Murdoch out; Zee had emerged as a giant in the Indian media space; thriving in the UK and US market by catering Indian content including films to the lucrative Indian NRI audience (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 134).

Identifying the revenue potential of the diaspora, traditional production houses like YashRaj and Dharma carved a new genre in Indian cinema: NRI films, evidenced by the popularity of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* in 1995; and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* in 1998 (Gopal and Moorti 34–35). The portrayal of diasporic and NRI characters in these movies rendered the diaspora's version of 'Indianness' less transgressive and more as an acceptable variant, remapping sociocultural boundaries. These movies further blended a changing India, characterized by a rise in middle-class' economic aspirations, the mushrooming of malls and multiplexes, foreign fast-food chains, and designer stores, with erstwhile issues of nationality—loss and regaining of Indian ethos and values (Joshi 168; Davé, "Apu's Brown Voice: Cultural Inflection and South Asian Accents" 37). The presentation of NRIs in these post-1991 movies was in stark contrast to Indian movies of like *Purab aur Paschim* which scathingly denounces the Indian diaspora for 'abandoning' their homeland. The financial crisis led to India looking at diasporic entrepreneurs for development projects (Punathambekar 28), as evidenced by the many songs of the 1990s. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge,* or DDLJ, opens with a song titled *Ghar Aaja Pardesi Tera Des Pukare,* which translates to 'Come Home, Stranger, Your Country Calls You.' DDLJ masquerades as a love story but it is, rather, an appeal to the diaspora to return and help the country. Additionally, it highlights the clash of generations between two definitions of the term ‘first-generation’—the girl’s father who migrated to London to earn a living; and the foreign born-and-raised boy who, despite wearing designer clothes, values Indian tradition and honor. These Indian-made NRI movies were complemented by the rise of diasporic films in US and UK. Since the 1980s, UK witnessed an increase in the media representation of South Asian experiences, including sitcoms like *Tandoori Nights* (1985-87) and *Goodness Gracious Me* (1985-87), helmed by second-generation British-Asians—children of factory workers who migrated from independent India and Pakistan through the 1948 British Nationality Act (Tincknell 138–39). Diasporic filmmakers like Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair addressed real issues faced by diasporic communities—generational and identity shifts, culture shock, racism and expectations associated with being a ‘model minority’ in movies like *Mississippi Masala* (1991); *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993).

The visibility of Indian experiences in the West coincided with the rise of an affluent Indian diaspora in the US. The Indian community grew the fastest, by 68 percent, between 2000 and 2010 as India received over 50 percent of the H-1B visas issued since 2001. The 2019 US Census detailed the existence of 4.6 million Indians, the second -largest Asian group in the country (Budiman and Ruiz, paras.5, 15). Indian-origin students have won 26 of the last 31 annual Scripps National Spelling Bee, and Indian Americans are heading US-based multinationals, such as Microsoft, Google, and Starbucks. Eventually, Hollywood—which had a dismal market share in India—took note of the financial gains of investing in Bollywood and South Asia and, thus, Indian-origin characters gained traction on American cultural texts post-1990s. The most popular among them was the character of Apu, a recurring character of *The Simpsons,* represented a complex blend of the ‘American Dream’ and the ‘model minority’ clichés associated with the Indian diaspora. While Apu acts as the voice of reason and morality in many episodes, he has also been shown to be greedy and manipulative, going as far as forging documents to prolong his stay in the United States. Apu yearns for integration into the American society but despite his many attempts, he remains an immigrant, forever an Other (Davé, "Apu's Brown Voice: Cultural Inflection and South Asian Accents" 2, 37–38). The popularity and significant position of Apu as a cultural icon on American—and global—television meant that for nearly two decades South Asian characters were homogenized on American television as extensions of the Apu prototype.

However, Hollywood, which had a dismal market share in India until the 1990s, adopted Murdoch's 'global-local' policy to tap into the Indian market. Universal Picture's decision to dub *Jurassic Park* in Hindi proved beneficial and led to US-based conglomerates like Disney, Viacom and Fox to release dubbed versions of their movies—not just in Hindi but also Tamil and Telugu. They also started backing diasporic filmmakers like Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta and collaborated with India-based producers like YashRaj and Dharma (Punathambekar 197; Govil, *Orienting Hollywood* 8). Similarly, India-based companies also started investing in American studios—such as Reliance Entertainment's investment of over $500 million in Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks production company. Such ventures signaled the bridging of gaps between Hollywood and Bollywood. This is exemplified by the popularity of movies like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Lagaan*, the third Indian-produced film to be nominated at the Oscars. Hollywood also started producing satirical movies like *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* which address serious issues such as racial profiling of immigrants, especially Asians, post 9/11. The same movie highlights the racial position of first-generation Americans who, despite being assimilated in Western culture, cannot escape the ethnocultural bias in the West based on their skin color, religion and names (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and*

Racial Performance in American Television and Film 130). These satirical movies were also followed up with adaptations of books written by NRIs, such as *The Namesake* (2006); *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009); and the Oscar-winning *Life of Pi* (2012). They were soon followed by sitcoms like *The Office*, *New Girl*, and *The Good Place*. While the ethnicity of Archie Panjabi's Kalinda Sharma in *The Good Wife* was just one part of her larger, complex character sketch, Mindy Kaling's Kelly Kapoor in *The Office* often incorporated certain aspects of being a first-generational Indian. Kaling went on to create and act in *The Mindy Project* in 2012—the first Asian-American produced network television show since 1994 (Davé, "Apu's Brown Voice: Cultural Inflection and South Asian Accents" 156–57). Her success led to other Indian American comedians like Aziz Ansari and Hasan Minhaj, who started on American-produced shows like *Parks and Recreation* and *The Daily Show*, to produce their own shows such as *Master of None* and *Homecoming King*, on the then-emerging communication platform of streaming. Despite these positive developments, there were also movies like Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, which received a polarizing response in India for its glorification of American consumerism and reinforcement of colonial narratives of India in the twenty-first century. Critics noted how, despite employing Indian-origin actors and crewmembers, the movie's British screenwriter and director pandered to the Western audience and their predominant notions of India, its culture and experiences as backward and violent (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 153–54; Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 149). Similarly, NBC's *Outsourced* which, despite featuring a plethora of South Asian actors, was criticized—and subsequently canceled—for its racist overtones and perpetuation of white man savior and stereotypes. The mid-2000s saw the launch of MTV-Desi, a niche subscription-based channel, to tap into the advertising potential of the South Asian diaspora. However, MTV's lack of commitment to produce relevant programming, and the popularity of networks like Zee and ETV, led to the end of the venture (Punathambekar 162–63).

The post-1991 market reforms, the role of private television channels to promote Hindi and regional media, and the popularity of transnational networks like MTV and STAR in India led the BJP-led Vajpayee government in 2000, to formally accord 'industry-status' to the previously disorganized Indian movie scene, which enabled producers to procure foreign investments, industrial loans, and alliances (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 132). Premier Indian studios, such as YashRaj and Dharma now have offices and collaborations in the UK, US, UAE. Additionally, the Vajpayee government also started celebrating *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas,* or Indian Diaspora Day, in 2003 to commemorate the Indian diaspora and their contributions in nation building. The surge of Indian movie industry was also supported by a rise in global television and the adoption of Bollywood music and dance by Western DJs and musicians, the creation of Bollywood-themes parties and gatherings; the appreciation of Bollywood personalities like Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai and A.R Rahman in the West (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 132, 136). The relationship between Hollywood and Bollywood, or even Indian cinema, is strong. The United States and United Kingdom account for a fifth of Bollywood's global revenue. Its influence can also be seen with the induction of 'Bollywood' into the Oxford dictionary. Thussu states that Bollywood's influence must not be measured in terms of box-office revenue but the perception or representation of India and its experiences it paints. Bollywood also plays a crucial role in pushing India's foreign policy and secularism, especially India-Pakistan relations with cross-cultural events and collaborations. Many Bollywood premieres and events are hosted in Muslim-dominated cities of Doha and Dubai. The popularity and global effect of Indian cinema is also evident in non-Western and non-South Asian countries like Nigeria, Senegal, and Indonesia where Indian movies are routinely dubbed and adapted; thereby having a significant economic and cultural influence. (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 135–41). In short, one can see that the post-1990s liberalization whilst ushering in new possibilities for United States-India interaction; Hollywood and Bollywood; in terms of collaborations and joint ventures, as was the case with pre-colonial Indian cinema scene. Thus, one can then argue that post-1991 cooperation, due to market reforms and satellite technology, is rather a 'resurgence' or remediation of an East-West interaction that, albeit some developments, was predominantly dormant between 1950 and 1990 due to the resistance of Western policies and cultural texts by Indians. However, the effective implementation of 'think global, program local' evidenced by the Rupert Murdoch-Zee TV partnership and the decision by Universal Pictures to dub *Jurassic Park* led to a surge in India-US cultural and economic relationships. These methods of glocalization and hybridity were revisited by the private networks—foreign and domestic—to capture a new, emergent market of a post-90s individualistic, aspirational youth who developed an affinity towards mass consumption of media content through subscription-based streaming platforms. Accordingly, the next chapter will look at the rise and popularization of a contemporary global phenomenon of digital streaming, spearheaded by the California-based Netflix Inc.

CHAPTER 2: THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE OF DIGITAL STREAMING

The previous chapter looked at the history of India's complex but thriving communication industry that is evident from the global media tenet of regionalism and media from below. In addition, post-1990s economic development in India had a socio-cultural effect as audiences became more urbane, deterministic and individualistic in their consumption habits. In tandem with Bhabha's Mimicry theory (122–23), this audience—or the 'new' middle class—simultaneously blended the optimism of the future with values of the past (Dwyer 222). This development necessitated a proper understanding, amendments and upgradations in communication research concerning emerging audience cultures, and communication technologies. One such contemporary technology is that of digital streaming. The rise of digital streaming has birthed a new set of questions in communication research, including a revision of global media tenets of cultural imperialism, globalization, and hybridity. This chapter, then, contextualizes the study by outlining the roots of digital streaming, from internet radio and early pioneers like IMS and AudioNet to the proliferation of Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, buoyed by the cultural acceptance of peer-to-peer services like Napster. I will then analyze the rise of Netflix, and how it challenged and disrupted prevailing dominant televisual flows and consumption patterns, by taking on giants like Blockbuster and legacy media conglomerates, through new and remediated affordances. I deploy textual and document analysis to scrutinize the socio-cultural implications and effects of this relatively new form through the lenses of political economy and cultural studies. I will attempt to answer relevant questions like why and how Netflix strategically positions itself as a tech and media corporation, thereby inviting competition from legacy corporations like Apple, Amazon, Disney and Comcast. I will conclude by briefly introducing India's contemporary communications scenario, epitomized by rapid digitization, and argue that Netflix's wave of success hit a roadblock in a crowded and diverse market like India.

1. Early Streaming: The 1990s Boom and Internet Radio

A balance of payments crisis and post-Cold War geopolitical conditions compelled the Indian government to implement a series of market reforms in the 1990s that led to an era of economic liberalization and the rise of an Indian middle class, most of whom worked in IT services. The rise of India's IT sector is credited to pre-1991 factors such as investments in centers of scientific excellence, the expulsion of IBM and the rise of Indian expats and middle class. India's IT sector also benefited from the dot-com boom witnessed across the world (Basu 15), especially in the United States, that saw the rapid penetration and mass commercialization of personal computers, internet service providers and the digitization of retail services with the rise of companies like eBay and Amazon. Concurrently, the 1990s also saw the introduction of a new media technology of digital streaming through platforms like AudioNet and Napster—and YouTube and Netflix in the mid-2000s. The roots of this streaming can be traced back to the technological advancements in Real-time Transport Protocol, or RTP enabled delivery—streaming—of audio and video over internet networks in the late 1990s. These were initially used by "media players, which were used to receive video streams over the Internet" (Li et al. 33:2). This is referred to as client-server streaming, a popular form of the 1990s, characterized by an end-to-end, sender-driven transfer of content. One could, then, characterize the last decade of the twentieth century as the first phase of streaming, mitigating the spatial and temporal constraints associated with print, television, and radio. While an 85-minute-long *Wax: Or the Discovery of Television Among the Bees* became the first feature film to be transmitted over the internet in 1993 (Hayes and Chmielewski 19), the streaming revolution of the 1990s represented the convergence of traditional radio broadcasting and the internet, which had significant socio-cultural, political, and economic effects (Bottomley 27).

Much like radio technology, which preceded the advent of television in the early twentieth century, internet radio—a remediation of the traditional radio form—preceded the contemporary streaming revolution buoyed by YouTube and, eventually, Netflix. Technologically, one could surmise this convergence—internet radio—as the remediation of traditional radio. The first online radio service or cyberstation was the experimental brainchild of technologist Carl Malamud who set up the Internet Multicasting Service, or IMS, in Washington DC in 1993 at a time when internet was a nascent luxury accessed mostly by elite scientific institutions and corporations that had the resources and equipment to access and support audio playback. Malamud deliberately targeted these potential listeners by interviewing scientists and technocrats on IMS' flagship *Geek of the Week*, which mimicked the popular talk radio format of that time. Initial programming was not 'live' but rather asynchronous, pre-recorded low-quality episodic audio file formats uploaded on the UUNET server in Virginia and copied by local networks from where users could download and listen at their leisure (Bottomley 29–30), akin to the current phenomenon of podcasts, popularized by media personality Adam Curry and Apple's iTunes software. The IMS' growing popularity across 30 countries was directly proportional to the subsequent popularization of graphic web browsers, such as Mosaic and Netscape, and search engines like Yahoo between 1993-95. IMS went 'live' in 1995 after developing strong partnerships with Kennedy Center and HarperCollins to produce audio content from live performances and book recitations, original interviews with personalities such as Dalai Lama and Bob Dole. Content was highly derivative of traditional radio as IMS also carried syndicated shows from legacy radio networks such as CBC, Monitor Radio, and NPR. The IMS also became the first internet radio service to livestream US Congress sessions in 1995. Malamud, an open-source activist, modeled IMS after the not-for-profit motives of public broadcasting and received considerable financial and infrastructural support from early tech corporations such as Sun, MCI, and Interop. Malamud's experiment also fit the 'information superhighway' objectives of the Clinton-Gore Administration like a glove (Bottomley 33–37).

Around the same time as IMS, campus radio stations at Georgia Tech and Kansas managed 24x7, live internet streaming of their programming. But despite these experimental endeavors, traditional radio broadcasters were dismissive about the rise of internet radio, a sentiment that traditional television networks also followed in the 2010s with the rise of Netflix. While the niche IMS and campus-run internet radio managed to circumvent the bureaucratic oversight and constraints faced by traditional mainstream radio networks, their non-profit style of management did not blend well with the dot-com boom of the 1990s. IMS shut shop in 1996 and campus-run internet radio's growth and innovation was stifled by the music industry-backed Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or DMCA, in 1998 (Bottomley 54–55). The mid-1990s, however, saw the diffusion of early capitalist digital streaming corporations, notably Real Networks and AudioNet, that steered away from the not-for-profit motives and management styles adopted by IMS. Real Networks, established in 1993 as Progressive Networks, developed its RealAudio technology to help radio stations "rebroadcast programs, especially talk shows where high fidelity was not much of an issue" (Aspray 459). Essentially, Real Networks was the first to create a streaming audio software to compress high-quality content so that people with slow dial-up internet access could listen to—but not download—FM-radio quality audio, including music. Communications scholar Andrew Bottomley notes that RealAudio, launched with much fanfare in 1993, licensed much of its content from NPR and ABC News to stream on its platform to attract listeners (62), much like IMS did in its early days, and Netflix in the twenty-first century. Unlike Netflix, however, Real Networks only provided clips of these programs rather than full broadcasts. Despite these limitations, the company did usher in a media culture which managed to breach the space and time constraints of IMS as users could now listen to—and later view—content from a singular Real Player software at their convenience without downloading heavy files. Real managed to prosper by making their proprietary software available for free installation across Windows, Macintosh, and UNIX operating systems. Additionally, Real also dabbed its feet into audio simulcasts, first by livestreaming Bill Gates' opening address for a closed audience at the Windows 95 launch, and subsequently, a baseball game between Seattle Mariners—which Real founder Rob Glaser partly owned—and New York Yankees in September 1995. These affordances facilitated a growth in user downloads which increased from 600 in 1995 to nearly 95 million by 2000, as more radio stations and entertainment companies acknowledged RealAudio as the standard format, and its software as the default audio player (Bottomley 64).

Unlike Real Networks, AudioNet did not create proprietary software or hardware. Instead, it built off the work done by other tech companies, including the RealAudio server. However, it did revolutionize the nascent streaming business during the dot-com boom by marketing itself as a one-stop web-based content aggregator, much like Netflix, Spotify, Amazon Prime Video, and other contemporary audio-visual streaming services. Initially, the company used to record radio broadcasts on VHS tapes, digitize and upload them on their website, but eventually, it managed to simulcast content, starting with Dallas-based KLIF radio's coverage of a college football game by "employing an alpha-version of RealAudio 2.0 encoder and server" (Bottomley 68). Driven by the technology's success, AudioNet's millionaire co-founder Mark

Cuban set up and maintained a sophisticated but expensive broadcasting infrastructure, which traditional stations and networks were reluctant to invest in. Cuban's partner Todd Wagner, on his part, managed to bring other networks and organizations like CNN, BBC, CNBC, NHL, NFL, and NCAA on board. AudioNet held exclusive rights to digitally broadcast free content produced by these stations and organizations in exchange for airtime slots during simulcasts, which it would either solicit to other advertisers or use to market their platform. Additionally, AudioNet also profited by placing banner ads on its website—a one-stop platform that, in its heyday, enabled users to livestream content, for free, from over 400 recognized radio stations across the US (Bottomley 70). AudioNet, eventually renamed Broadcast.com, had a successful IPO in 1998, making Cuban and Wagner multi-millionaires. Yahoo bought the company in 1999 (CNN Money), before the bursting of the dot-com bubble, and eventually shut down in 2002.

While the technological sophistication and revenue models of companies such as RealAudio and AudioNet bypassed the limitations of quality and scale faced by Malamud's IMS, there was hardly any difference in the content produced by traditional radio networks and internet radio (Bottomley 89). The internet-based IMS, Real and AudioNet mostly carried audio—and in some cases, video—clippings of content produced by traditional networks. Even the original content produced by IMS mirrored the format, styles and tones of content produced by traditional stations like NPR. In fact, one could say there was a symbiotic relationship between online companies like IMS, Real and AudioNet and traditional networks. A company like AudioNet decided to sell-out at the right time—foreseeing the bursting of the dot-com bubble as well as the threat of content creators to potentially demand a controlling share in profits. In other words, early internet radio was at the mercy of content provided and licensed by traditional networks. This overreliance on traditional broadcasters and conglomerates was eventually overcome by contemporary digital streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, by using their subscription-based revenue to produce premium original content, explained in the subsequent sections. The dot-com boom of the 1990s also intersected with the with the advent of MP3 in 1995 and its subsequent adoption as the standard audio format by the end of 1990s. The proprietary constraints of Real Networks—its audio format and playback software—meant that it would not support other formats, especially the relatively open-source and superior MP3 format. In fact, tech companies like Nullsoft sought to establish the MP3 as the standard audio format whereas MP3.com sought to legitimize the internet-led distribution of MP3 files (Allen-Robertson 41). These were complemented by a model of peer-to-peer file-sharing, facilitated by Napster.

2. The Napster Effect and Web 2.0

The late 1990s saw the rise of peer-to-peer, or P2P, file sharing where internet users served as both clients and servers, unlike the client-server model where "end hosts were only able to consume" content (Li et al. 33:2). This technology was pioneered, with initial success, in 1999 by programmers Shawn Fanning and Sean Parker with the establishment of Napster. As a platform, Napster was an intermediary between different users who would link an open folder with MP3 files on Napster's centralized server. Users could then search and download these files; a direct transfer of data and information between users (Allen-Robertson 46–47). Napster did not charge users for its service, which became popular among teenagers but managed to sustain itself through investors who helped incorporation and proper management of its services. Due to a much-publicized copyright infringement suit filed against it by the recording industry, Napster's userbase grew from 1.1 million in 2000 to nearly 50 million at the time of its closure in 2002 (Allen-Robertson 54; Aspray 469). The recording industry, or the RIAA, viewed Napster as a threat to its traditional revenue stream of audio cassettes, CDs, and brick-and-mortar retail establishments. The RIAA argued that Napster had violated the DMCA, despite the platform itself not holding any music files but simply linking music files held by users in their central server. The trial and appellate courts ruled in favor of the RIAA and Napster was ordered to cease its illegal operations and pay millions in unpaid royalty to the record companies. Eventually, Napster declared bankruptcy in 2002 (Aspray 469). Other similar unicorn digital services, such as MP3.com and SX, also faced the wrath of the RIAA. But despite winning in judicial courts, the RIAA lost in the court of public opinion. The heavy metal band Metallica, one of the active supporters of the suit against Napster, faced significant backlash from fans and users. The suit also divided the music industry. While Metallica and Eminem vociferously resisted companies like Napster, artists like David Bowie, Madonna and Dave Matthews welcomed the synergy between music and internet (Aspray 478–79) as it also ushered in a revolution in spatial and temporal constraints associated with traditional media forms.

On the industrial side, Bertelsmann, one of the original applicants in the suit against Napster, decided to purchase a controlling stake in Napster to legitimize it which led to a friction between Bertelsmann and other record labels (Allen-Robertson 58). Napster also ushered in a culture of free music and digital downloads amongst young internet users evidenced by the rise of subsequent P2P platforms like Kazaa and LimeWire which further facilitated unauthorized sharing of music as well as piracy and malware. However, identifying the revenue potential of this digital trend, Apple CEO Steve Jobs sought permission from the record labels to sell authorized digital music files through the iTunes service for as little as $0.99 per song. Users now had the option to download certain malware-free songs, in high-quality MP3 format, rather than spend $20 on a music CD. Researcher William Aspray contends that the record companies viewed iTunes as an experimental service and believed that Apple, which had a three percent market share in the global computer business, would not threaten the dominance of physical records and record stores (474). What the music industry did not anticipate, however, was how Apple's attempt to sell legitimate digital music was concomitant to the success of its portable multi-purpose iPOD media players, which led to Apple's resurrection in the 2000s. The record companies were taken by surprise by the popularity of digital downloads via iTunes, which Apple eventually made available for non-Mac users. Hence, Apple correctly identified the impact digital music would have and cashed in on the consumption culture ushered in by services like Napster. This experience and the subsequent digitization of the audio industry humbled the record industry, which saw their revenue from physical records dwindle from $23 billion in 2001 to $4.2 billion in 2020. Currently, the record industry's largest cash cow are subscription-based music streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Pandora, contributing $13.4 billion or 62.1 percent of their total $21.6 billion revenue (IFPI 11). Bottomley credits the popularity of these subscription-based platforms to the penetration of smartphones and high-speed mobile internet (145). Additionally, in a pattern mirroring the strategies adopted by Netflix, audio streaming companies like Spotify use their subscription revenue to sign exclusive and promotional deals with content creators ranging from celebrities like Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the Kardashians, podcasters Alex Cooper and Joe Rogan, musicians Katy Perry and Shawn Mendes (Plaugic; Spangler) to lure users. In short, Napster—despite losing in court—managed to shake the traditional foundations of the recording industry, which lost significant control over its business to digital aggregators like Apple and Spotify. However, one of its biggest contributions was the ushering in of participatory media, popularly characterized as Web 2.0 in the 2000s.

Napster's significant influence led to the prophecy of 'napsterization'—the unobstructed and free sharing of data over the internet—realized in Web 2.0 platforms such as the video aggregator of YouTube, photo sharing app Flickr, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, which can be accessed using standard web browsers. Web 2.0 platforms focused more on enhancing the online experience through greater sharing, interaction and interconnectivity among users (Fisher 45; Li et al. 33:13). It further breached the temporal and spatial constraints associated with Web 1.0, or commercial internet of the 1990s. In simple terms, Web 2.0 platforms—that also include social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook—were expected to facilitate "online community-building…and user-generated content production, diffusion, and consumption" (Fuchs et al. 3). This was best evidenced by the rise of YouTube in 2005. Unlike contemporary streaming platforms, YouTube primarily acts as an intermediary between users. The predominantly advertiser-driven platform allows individuals with a camera and a decent internet connection to produce, disseminate, and view amateur content, or user-generated content, which includes but is not limited to cooking videos, travel videos, personal home videos, and reaction videos, where users review video games, films, television shows, or any pop culture phenomenon. The operative idea behind YouTube is 'more'—the more hits/views a user or a user's video gets, the more they become popular. The more they become popular, the more money they can earn. Mainstream artists like Justin Bieber, The Weeknd, Lilly Singh, among others, were 'discovered' on YouTube. The platform also facilitates amateur content creators such as animator Dane Boe to create a million-dollar franchise with the *Annoying Orange* series, which has aggregated over eight billion views. Additionally, YouTube allows users to build networks through subscribing, commenting, liking or disliking, and sharing on social media platforms. Such "network-dynamics (e.g. in-links and hit counts) and offline social capital" that includes parasocial relationships and tastes dictate the popularity or 'virality' of YouTube content (Khan and Vong 629). Google bought YouTube in 2006 and subsumed the platform into its ecosystem that includes its eponymous search engine, advertising portals like Google Ads and AdMob, online communication tools like Blogger, Gmail, and Android-based smartphones. The increasing popularity of certain videos led Google to develop the YouTube Partner Program to educate users on popularizing their videos and 'channels' and earn money along the way. Under this Program, YouTube users—who meet certain subscription and watch time criteria—are integrated into a Google-operated algorithm that simultaneously "privileges particular creators and their content" and transfers power and control from users to YouTube/Google, thereby creating a complex symbiotic relationship (Kopf 4). These internet celebrities or 'influencers' are either paid or patronized by advertisers to create videos and endorse products, or they can have YouTube place ads onto their videos. YouTube, then, shares this advertising revenue with the influencers. As of 2021, Google earned approximately $30 billion from YouTube advertisements (Weprin). Media scholar Jane Shattuc rightly suggests that "YouTube has monetized amateurism" (153).

From a socio-cultural standpoint, there is a need to evaluate the promise of 'democratization' ushered in by Web 2.0. Despite connecting the world, virtual communities have members who share similar interests, and these communities serve as points of exit for the dissatisfied. The advancements in online communications and Web 2.0 platforms complicated and redefined the traditional notions of territorial boundaries, identities and 'community' as the parameters and arenas used by social communities to engender a public opinion are different from what they were decades ago. Indeed, Web 2.0 rendered information middlemen and gatekeepers—particularly traditional news media—obsolete (Bimber 138; Friedland 361). This is also complicated by the emergence of new elites following the dot-com boom who continue to discover new affordances of the internet. Political scientist Zizi Papacharissi noted that the virtual space is full of fragmented virtual communities that don't fit the Habermascian concept of the public sphere (19–20). Tech corporations have ensured that the internet is commodified and colonized by dominant power groups that further push their agenda through 'viral' videos and influencers and other affordances of internet-based communication platforms. For example, an influencer named PewDiePie, who has over 100 million YouTube subscribers, has often collaborated with Disney (Chokshi); Sony Pictures' *Spider-Man: No Way Home,* with over 300 million views, became the most-watched trailer on YouTube (Vary). These new elites, thus, dictate the terms and conditions of how the web is to be used which further leads to issues surrounding net neutrality, digital divide, misinformation, surveillance and hacking. YouTube and its parent company, as well as influencers, have been constructed as disseminators of fake news, disinformation and xenophobic content (Chokshi; Milmo). Commodification can also be viewed in Google's increasing reliance on YouTube which includes a futuristic concept to integrate e-commerce with the platform and an operational premium paid subscription service to compete with contemporary streaming platforms. However, the assumption that YouTube would disrupt the hegemony of legacy media has completely failed. YouTube ensures that legacy media corporations collaborate as well as compete with amateur video creators, thereby converting YouTube into an "aggregate of many money-making videos, not one big blockbuster with large profits" (Shattuc 154). In short, YouTube could not come up with a model to replace legacy media which treated YouTube as another avenue to promote their shows and generate revenue (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 149). However, an online-based mail-order DVD service's transition to digital streaming would potentially challenge the hegemony of legacy media conglomerates.

3. The Netflix Phenomenon

The success of Jeff Bezos and Amazon.com in the e-commerce space at the height of the dot-com boom inspired California-based entrepreneurs Marc Randolph and Reed Hastings to incorporate Netflix in August 1997 as an internet-based mail-order DVD service. According to Randolph, the founders had identified that the future belonged to the internet as one could "leverage it to sell things" that are more than "powerful hardware or more innovative software" (chap.3). Netflix started its operations in April 1998 and initially competed with Blockbuster which was operating a network of successful brick-and-mortar video rental stores throughout the United States. However, what differentiated Netflix from its competition was their product—high-quality DVDs instead of bulky, flimsy VHS tapes; internet-based strategy—ordering DVDs through a centralized website; and its subscription-based economic model. Netflix eliminated due dates and late fees as users paid a flat monthly fee upfront and consumed as little or as much serialized and queued media content as they wanted. Additionally, Netflix also "emphasized the individual" unlike Blockbuster by allowing subscribers to queue titles days in advance and discuss reviews with other users in online chatrooms (Hayes and Chmielewski 35). What also made Netflix stand out was its data-driven, algorithm-centric models of 'collaborative filtering' and 'narrowcasting' which had already been championed by premium cable channels and online aggregators like Amazon and eBay. Collaborative filtering matches users based on consumption patterns—people who buy the same products are expected to buy other products they respectively purchased. However, to mitigate the shortcomings and naivety of such a process, Netflix added another layer of data collection in the form of user ratings which further enriched their algorithmic suggestions. Narrowcasting popularized in the 1980s when television producers identified the need to transition from generalized to specialized content to fulfill the gratification needs of diverse audiences. Narrowcasting segments the audience universe into small subsets, based on consumption habits and content needs—much like collaborative filtering. Such segmentation of audiences not only led to targeted content production but also efficient, effective targeted advertising. The popularity of narrowcasting in the 1970s and 1980s also coincided with the cable revolution that saw the rise of HBO, CNN, ESPN, among others, that gathered a niche but loyal fanbase (Novak 165; Randolph, chap.14). Netflix's timing was also opportune as Sony and Toshiba had started exporting DVD players to the United States. From a business standpoint, it was only natural for Netflix to collaborate as these electronic manufacturers gave buyers access to free or discounted Netflix subscriptions. Randolph further notes that collaboration with Toshiba also accorded a layer of credibility to a nascent startup like Netflix. For Toshiba, the Netflix partnership allowed its users to "find something to play on their new machine" (chap.9). Collectively, the efficiency of collaborative filtering, user reviews, narrowcasting, and smart business collaborations allowed Netflix to take on Blockbuster and, eventually, win. Interestingly, Netflix invited Blockbuster to buy the company for as little as $50 million in early 2000 (Hayes and Chmielewski 35). Blockbuster passed on the offer and in 10 years, the brick-and-mortar video renter would file for bankruptcy.

3.1 Digital Again: Video-on-Demand and Cord-Cutting

Netflix was riding a wave of success evidenced by its exponential increase in revenues—$1.14 million to $997 million, and subscribers—107,000 to 6.3 million, between 1998 and 2006 (Netflix Investor Relations, *2002 Annual Report* 10–11; Netflix Investor Relations, *2006 Annual Report* 25–26). Growing popularity, technological optimism and cultural foresight encouraged the company to foray into digital streaming in 2007. Netflix exploited the sophistication of its data-driven strategy and rejuvenated the already existing process of narrowcasting by tapping into the information generated from its DVD-rental service to identify, license and offer the kind of content desired by its subscribers, a strategy that has since been adopted by its competitors (Novak 162). The platform initially built-upon the already existing video-on-demand service offered by cable service providers and offered a one-stop portal to access an unprecedented amount of on-demand content—films and television—on any screen they wanted: laptops, smartphones, tablets, smart TVs, gaming consoles, among others. On the way it added new avenues for viewers to access subtitled, commercial-free, premium on-demand content through any device: laptops, smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles. This strategy allowed Netflix to add nearly three million subscribers to its new online streaming service in 2009. Netflix also benefited from the rapid expansion of high-speed internet, which had already touched 51 percent of American households by 2007 (Hayes and Chmielewski 44). Unlike the video-on-demand services offered by cable providers, Netflix did not struggle to acquire diverse content. Before it got into original content production in 2013, most of Netflix's subscription revenue was spent on licensing content from professional content creators, including cable and broadcast networks. These include a billion-dollar, five-year deal with the cable channel Epix in 2010 which gave them access to a plethora of movies from Paramount and MGM. While films remain an important aspect of Netflix's economics, television has emerged as its core business (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 118; Hayes and Chmielewski 48–49). Initially, Netflix was not viewed as a threat by legacy media conglomerates. It was seen as an add-on service—an over-the-top, or OTT, distribution of television or films over the internet rather than traditional radio frequencies—to complement legacy networks. However, it did threaten the predatory relationship between cable providers and pay channels. Premium cable channels like HBO and Showtime were once considered OTT since it traveled over-the-top of a structure pioneered by cable providers. In Netflix, legacy media and cable channels got another avenue through which viewers could enjoy content, undermining the importance of cable providers. Additionally, while the VoD service offered by cable providers retained television's advertiser-based revenue model—as did YouTube—Netflix provided a premium experience by doing away with advertising of any kind. In short, with Netflix, subscribers did not need cable providers to view legacy media programs, which led to a phenomenon known as 'cord-cutting'(Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 126–32, 145). Pay TV subscribers in the US dropped from 95.5 million in 2012 to nearly 70 million subscribers in 2023. Between 2021 and 2022, cable providers lost 3.5 million subscribers, of which the industry leader, Comcast—which also owns NBCUniversal, lost over 2 million. However, Comcast did add over 200,000 users for its high-speed broadband service. As of 2023, in the United States, nearly 85 percent of all households have access to a streaming platform with half of them subscribing to four or more platforms, which are mostly shared with friends and family members (Leichtman Research Group 3–6). Netflix itself claims it has nearly 75 million subscribers in the UCAN—United States and Canada—market ("Netflix First Quarter 2023 - Letter to Shareholder" 8).

3.2 Global Expansion and Originals

After taking on the cable operators and winning the domestic market, Netflix decided to expand internationally in 2010, starting with Canada. The decision to start with Canada can be explained through the theory of cultural regionalization popularized by media scholar JungBong Choi. Despite the popular assumption that new media technologies have complicated the concept of territorial borders, Choi asserts that the rise of any regional or global phenomena can be explained across various factors, including geographical space. Choi claims that Korea's geographical space in East Asia allowed it to export its cultural products to its immediate neighbors. Furthermore, Hallyu managed to resonate in East Asian territories due to the shared proximity and likeness in geography, time zones, economic dependence, as well as colonial history, social and ethno-linguistic conditions and value systems (116–18). In a similar vein, cultural regionalization, therefore, can not only explain Netflix's decision to go international with Canada but also its relative success in every territory it entered between 2010 and 2015. Netflix went international with Canada, Latin America in 2011, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan by 2015. In short, Netflix first spread and popularized in countries the United States shared geographical and cultural proximities with—in terms of consumption habits, economic conditions and history. Once it managed to capture these territories—former imperialist nations during the colonial era—it decided to enter the former colonies of these states, most of whom retained significant socio-cultural traits and institutions of their colonizers. In 2016, Netflix announced that it was going live across 130 countries, including parts of Africa and Asia. By 2010, Netflix had already bankrupted Blockbuster and threatened the hegemony of traditional cable service providers. It also rapidly started expanding globally through licensing deals with legacy media. Collaborating with Netflix also allowed legacy media's content to reach domestic and international masses, as well as introduce these shows to a younger demographic, which increased the brand value of these shows. Netflix facilitated WarnerBros' *Friends* and the Comcast-owned NBCUniversal's *The Office* to become the most-watched sitcoms on digital media, clocking over 85 million hours, on the platform before they were pulled off by their legacy media owners (Porter and Goldberg). The drug-based drama *Breaking Bad*, which originally aired on the premium cable channel AMC, registered less than two million television viewers for its season 4 finale; on Netflix, it registered an estimated viewership of 10 million (Molla and Kafka): 'estimated' because Netflix is quite cryptic about viewership. However, Netflix's reliance on legacy media conglomerates affected its coffers as the latter would often charge hefty licensing fees from the streaming platform. Netflix initially paid $30 million to WarnerBros for the streaming rights for *Friends* which was raised to $100 million in 2018 (Lee). This compelled Netflix to spend aggressively on original content creation since 2013. Legacy media produced shows were subsequently pulled once Netflix Originals directly competed with legacy media, and legacy media was compelled to enter the streaming markets. Despite Netflix spending more on original content since 2013, it does spend heavily on licensed content, evidenced by the $500 million it paid Sony to acquire the global streaming rights to *Seinfeld* for five years (Porter and Goldberg).

Netflix's foray into original content creation mirrors the path undertaken by HBO and other premium cable channels in the 1990s. It wouldn't be unfair to suggest that Netflix had closely studied the growth of HBO since the cable network's inception in the 1970s. Netflix's subscription-based economic model mirrors the subscription-based model championed by HBO. Like Netflix, HBO also licensed advertisement-free content—movies—from legacy media, as well as pay-per-view offerings such as boxing and stand-up comedy, which proved to be quite popular among the masses. Eventually, HBO—which was taken over by TimeWarner—was offered as a premium bundle to cable operators which led to a regular revenue stream, which it used to produce high-value content such as *Dream On; The Larry Sanders Show*; *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos* (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 29, 41). HBO's model was subsequently followed by similar channels like AMC and Showtime. Premium cable shows were commercially and critically acclaimed for breaking the traditional assembly-line of networkoriented ‘safety’ shows in terms of narrative patterns, high-production values and sustainable growth. HBO continues to produce acclaimed shows in the streaming era such as *Game of Thrones, Succession, Euphoria* and *The White Lotus.* Emulating HBO, Netflix spent its subscription revenue to commission *House of Cards* boasting the involvement of prominent filmmaker David Fincher in 2013. However, unlike HBO, which “focused on producing cheaper versions of broadcast” shows, Netflix decided to go with buzz and “distinction” (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 145). The buzz around *House of Cards,* which was an adaptation of a 1990s eponymous BBC drama, was created when Netflix decided to disrupt capitalist broadcasting conventions put in place by legacy media conglomerates. Traditionally, producers would create and test one episode—referred to as a pilot—based on which networks would either produce more episodes or cancel it. Viewership ratings dictated advertising revenue, which in turn would dictate whether to keep a show on air or cancel it. Netflix, however, decided to commit $100 million and guaranteed two seasons of the political thriller without a single test episode. Additionally, it decided to release all episodes simultaneously further distinguishing itself from its competitors. *House of Cards* was critically acclaimed for its high-production values that mirrored big-budget Hollywood movies; unique narrative styles, as well as offering the show in multiple languages through dubbing and subtitling. The show laid the groundwork for additional ‘web series’ which are now emulated by almost every streaming platform. Netflix quickly followed *House of Cards* with other exclusives such as *Orange is the New Black; Narcos; Stranger Things*, and season 4 of the hit *Arrested Development* TV series. Additionally, it also produced award-winning original films such as *Beasts of No Nation; Roma; Bird Box,* among others. Between 2013 and 2018, Netflix produced nearly 700 Originals across multiple genres and languages which won 43 Emmy and two Oscars. It also expanded geographically and is currently available in over 190 countries (Shattuc 148–49), except China, North Korea, Russia and Syria. The success of Netflix Originals legitimized Netflix as an efficient and effective content creator which—after taking on Blockbuster and cable service providers—was ready to take on legacy media conglomerates.

Digital communication forms, especially streaming platforms, have compelled scholarship to review the television set's decades long position as the center of the household; to bring the family together (Spigel 37). While it is true that smart TVs have only enhanced the reach of streaming platforms, it cannot be denied that streaming platforms have mostly prioritized the individual over the household. Despite sharing the same account, family members—and friends—are now segregated into individual profiles that represent their personal tastes, aspirations, belief systems and frame of references. Netflix identified nostalgia as one of the important factors that determine why users prioritize, seek and consume a particular genre over others. This further enriched Netflix's database and dictated what kind of content Netflix would offer its userbase, through licensing and original productions. Netflix makes it possible for viewers to revisit the past either by disseminating content that is set in a past time in history—such as *The Crown, Stranger Things*—or cultural texts such as *Friends, The Godfather,* produced in a different time in history. Netflix acts as "both a producer of nostalgia and access point for nostalgic response" (Pallister 3) which allows the platform to boost its subscriptions by attracting the attention of past generations who seek content that transports them to the 'good old days' as well as new audiences who are discovering 'new old content.' *House of Cards* managed to repackage popular dialogs from the 1950s classic *Double Indemnity.* It also explains why Netflix spent millions on reviving the short-lived but popular sitcom *Arrested Development;* as well as producing spin-offs like *Fuller House*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie.*

The offering of ‘nostalgic’ content also accelerates the binge-watching and other affordances associated with streaming platforms (Chinen Biesen 41–42), explained in detail in the subsequent sections.

3.3 Affordances: Time and Space

With the rise of streaming platforms, the televisual experience has become highly personalized; every screen and device are a potential receiver and disseminator of content. Netflix’s offerings of on-demand, ad-free content—licensed as well as originals—ushered in as well as remediated socio-cultural televisual affordances and norms which has, since, been emulated by others. Firstly, it broke the dependence on time and space—users aren’t reliant on broadcast release schedules, and radio and terrestrial signals no longer dictate content availability. Users are also not dependent on traditional cable TV operators. This further confounds the traditional social experience of the entire family, and even nation, enjoying broadcast television shows at a fixed show time (Buck and Plothe 7–8). Netflix further confounded the traditional syndication policies practiced by legacy media which engendered an imbalance between producers and networks. Institutionalized in the 1960s, networks coerced producers—who had limited options—to bow down to the stringent demands of the networks in terms of production cost, broadcasting rights and revenue sharing. Global syndication rights were also predominantly negotiated between the foreign buyers and the US-based networks (Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 10). However, in terms of space and time, streaming platforms ensure that users can watch their desired content anytime and anyplace, depending on availability. While the availability of licensed content may vary from territory to territory, Originals are available across the 190+ countries Netflix operates in. For example, one may be able to watch shows like *House of Cards* or *Stranger Things* in these countries at any given time on any device. However, one can watch the WarnerBros' owned *Lord of the Rings* trilogy on Netflix in the Netherlands—at the time of writing—which is available on HBO Max in the US. This further incentivizes producers to sign deals with Netflix rather than legacy networks.

Such an affordance also forces scholars to revisit what constitutes 'domestic' and 'international.' Two good examples would be *Schitt's Creek* and *Squid Game*. One can explain the global popularity of these relatively 'foreign' content through the concept of cultural regionalization—especially in the case of *Schitt's Creek*—and, what seems to be a subset, the concept of cultural proximity, notably in the case of *Squid Game*. The Canadian show *Schitt's Creek* originally aired on the CBC network. Significant buzz and word-of-mouth compelled American broadcasters to take note of it. Pop-TV acquired the US rights of the series and viewership soared to three million (Adalian). However, the show gained worldwide acclaim and success once the creators Eugene and Dan Levy signed a distribution deal with Netflix. The show was eventually nominated for multiple Emmys, winning Outstanding Comedy Series in 2020. Eugene Levy thanked Netflix for being "the spark that seemed to start everything" for the sitcom (*72nd Emmy Awards* 5:18-5:23). The multiple award-winning Netflix Original *Squid Game* is the biggest Original series produced by the platform, with nearly 1.6 billion hours of viewing (Paul). The premise is easy to follow: 100 debt-ridden people compete in a series of popular playground games—tug-of-war; red light-green light, among others—for a prize money of 37 million won. The simplicity of the plot, along with audiences' high level of intimacy with the shared global social themes espoused in the show—social inequality, corruption, cronyism, sadistic pleasure, as well as social bonding, harmony and self-sacrifice. This coupled with the use of universally-popular playground games—which do add a level of nostalgia—can explain the factors behind the global popularity of the show. Netflix stated that their business and creative executives were quite active at every aspect of the series production—a practice they seem to replicate with every Original they commission—to assist content creations in domestic locales ("FQ1 2022 Pre Recorded Earnings Call Transcripts" 15). The series, originally produced in Korean, was also dubbed and subtitled in multiple languages including Hindi, Tamil, Arabic, Mandarin, Hebrew, among others. This hands-on approach then ensured that, despite a predominantly Korean—or 'international' cast and crew, the series—thanks to Netflix's global streaming infrastructure—managed to bypass issues traditionally associated with other internationally-produced content, which were niche in the West-led global media landscape. Netflix claims that Squid Game wasn't meant to be a "global thing" but they acknowledged that the platform wanted to highlight that "great storytelling from anywhere in the world can entertain the world" ("FQ4 2021 Pre Recorded Earnings Call" 6). The global popularity of Netflix Originals has also perplexed the traditional definitions associated with genres (Buck and Plothe 4). Unlike traditional cable service providers, Netflix primarily categorizes foreign produced shows like *Squid Game* as a 'drama' first and then 'Korean,' not the other way round. Netflix and streaming culture have ensured that *Squid Game* is, in fact, not a Korean dramatic thriller; it is a dramatic thriller that happens to take place in Korea. This confusion with genres is best evidenced by Netflix's dramedy series of *Orange is the New Black* which was nominated for Outstanding Comedy Series for its first season, and Outstanding Drama Series for all subsequent seasons. Similarly, *Narcos* and *Sacred Games* are drug-based thrillers that just happen to take place in Colombia and India respectively, which makes it easier for marginalized or regional media capitals to competently compete with Western hegemony.

3.4 Affordances: Visibility of Marginalized Groups?

The academic field of cultural studies introduced the concepts of subcultures, minorities, race, gender, sex, among others, into communication studies. Using the Gramscian concept of hegemony as a focal point, cultural theorist Stuart Hall argued that societies use race to grant someone an ‘identity’ through dominant notions encoded in visible markers such as skin color and cultural markets such as clothing and language which are then used to collapse categorize individuals into stereotypes which are seldom true and accurate (“The Multicultural Question” 109–10; Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” 171–72). It is here that binary constructs of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’; ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’; ‘Savage’ and ‘Civilized’ begin to formulate. European imperialists used institutes of culture and knowledge; disciplines such as philosophy, history, biology, among others; to formulate, crystalize, disseminate and indoctrinate views about colonies, thereby ensuring the constant authority over them (Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” 143; Said 69). Media scholar Angharad Valdivia uses the cultural studies paradigm to document the stages of representation of the ‘Other’ in dominant media discourse: *omission; binary; multiracial; hybrid,* and a utopian stage of *democratically-represented hybridity* (82–85). The *omission* stage is one of nonrecognition or complete invisibility of the ‘Other’ experiences in communication or cultural texts. It could, also, refer to the visibility of the ‘dominant’ all-white experiences in these texts. The previous chapter highlighted how early Hollywood films depicted Indians as relatively backward to British colonizers. The second stage of *binary* or *ridicule* is one where ethnic, non-white characters are visible in media discourse, but they are encoded as deviant and different to the dominant culture; represented through white lenses, epitomized in films like Peter Sellers’ *The Party*. The *multiracial* stage involves the depiction of a range of ethnicities and races, but they are still subservient to the dominant ‘West’ experiences. These may include shows like *The Simpsons* which, despite representing a wide variety of non-white recurring characters such as Apu and Carl Carlson, privileges white protagonists. The *hybrid* stage disrupts the representation of white/non-white, or Us/Them, West/Rest, with the addition of a potential mixed race. Aziz Ansari's *Master of None* and Mindy Kaling's *Never Have I Ever,* both on Netflix, feature multicultural, BIPOC and LGBTQ cast, crew and experiences. However, Valdivia cautions not to confuse hybridity with egalitarianism. Hence, a fifth, utopian, stage of *democratic hybridity* is devised where white privilege is not foregrounded, and hybridity is "more democratically represented rather than in relation to the assumed superiority of whiteness" (Valdivia 84).

Proponents of narrowcasting have argued that Netflix's original programming and global distribution patterns have increased visibility of groups traditionally underserved by legacy media such as women, people of color, queer, the disabled, among others. A textual analysis of Indian-origin characters in the CBS-distributed, American produced *The Big Bang Theory*, the most popular sitcom during its run (Fitzgerald), and the Netflix Original *Master of None,* co-created by Indian American Aziz Ansari, may add credence to this notion. The characters of Raj Koothrappali in the former and Dev Shah in the latter are contemporary fictional representations of Indian-origin characters co-created by Western media. Most of Raj's close friends include his fellow scientists at his workplace. Raj is seldom shown to spend time with South Asian-Americans and there is no depiction of another Indian-American —or ethnic minority—friend in the show, which is situated in Los Angeles, which has one of the highest African-American, Hispanic, and Asian populations in the United States (US Census Bureau). He is also depicted as suffering from selective-mutism and cannot communicate with women unless he is under the influence of alcohol. One of the biggest sources of *The Big Bang Theory'*s humor is derived from

Raj's inefficiency in getting a long-term partner, his parents and arranged marriages, his ignorance of Indian culture, as well as his metrosexual lifestyle (Noor). Thus, Raj, in the American produced and created *The Big Bang Theory*, ends up a token minority in an ensemble of white friends, who is often ridiculed for his ethnicity, accent, and other stereotypes associated with the Indian population.

Unlike Raj, Dev's friend circle is ethnically diverse, representative of real-life New York City. His best friends include a Taiwanese American, based on *Master of None* co-creator Alan Yang, a gay African American woman based on actor-writer Lena Waithe, and one Caucasian. While Raj is a token brown man in an all-white ensemble comedy, the character of Arnold on *Master of None* seems to be a token 'white' man in an individual comedy program which predominantly centers around the life of Dev. Eric Wareheim, who plays Arnold, acknowledged that the concept of the token white friend on American television was refreshing (Evans). Unlike *The Big Bang Theory*, there is also a fair representation of the Other on *Master of None,* including Dev's childhood Indian friends, parents and relatives among others. Dev is also active and confident, unlike the traditionally stereotypical portrayal of sexually regressive Indians (Davé, *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* 80), and humor is not derived from Dev's sexual mishaps or lifestyle. Dev also takes a stand when he is discriminated against by his dates for his ethnicity and religion. Unlike Raj's parents, Dev's parents do not push his son to get married, breaking the erstwhile dominant narrative of arranged marriages associated with South Asians (Hodkinson 202–03). While the show is not entirely about minorities in New York, some episodes do satirize salient issues such as racial and gender stereotypes, generation gaps, religion, among others (Ford 102–03), unlike *The Big Bang Theory*. Ansari, in his Peabody acceptance speech, appreciated Netflix for giving minorities a platform to increase visibility that is not limited to giving "a white protagonist a brown friend" (3:51-4:06). Other Netflix Originals, such as *Orange is the New Black*; *Dear White People;* stand-up specials, films and documentaries produced by and featuring members of the BIPOC community also highlight issues of racism, mental illness, gender inequality. Giving a platform to content creators from previously underserved communities are also essential to Netflix's global plans to tap into niche audiences as well as non-Western territories it operates in. As far as the Asian population is concerned, while MTV's attempts to launch dedicated channels—MTV Desi and MTV-K—failed (Punathambekar 157), Netflix supposedly hit the jackpot by commissioning BIPOC content creators who know the audiences' tastes well. This is evidenced by Netflix signing exclusive, lucrative deals with Hasan Minhaj, Ally Wong, Dave Chappelle, and Shonda Rhimes. So, while Korean filmmaker Hwang Dong-hyu's *Squid Game* was exclusively produced to increase subscribers in South Korea, its popularity added to the emphatic rise of Hallyu, complemented by films like *Parasite* and the music act BTS. It also led to Netflix licensing and producing multiple K-dramas. But arguing that streaming has indeed started from Valdivia's fourth stage of representation, striving toward the utopian fifth, doing so would be quite premature.

Shows like *Master of None*, and *Orange is the New Black* have indeed given a powerful voice to the Other, which they didn't have in the global media landscape (Ford 100), but there have also been significant lapses. Netflix has decided not to release the anime version of the popular manga series *Record of Ragnarok,* in India for its stereotypical and controversial portrayal of Hinduism. Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* was cancelled after two seasons for misaddressing issues of suicide and mental health. Viewers expressed shock over graphic depictions of suicide and violence, with many terming them as 'shocking' and 'excessive.'

Despite Netflix adding multiple disclaimers, the platform was criticized over its lax attitude towards mental health prevention due to the antagonistic portrayal of mental health professionals (McKenzie et al. 66–67). Queer groups protested against the platform's decision to carry Dave Chappelle's controversial stand-up special in 2021 as well as the decision to categorize *Dahmer—Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* as LGBT content (Shaw; Del Rosario). The Netflix Original *Indian Matchmaking* is laden with statements like "You will only get 60 or 70 percent" (Dixit) and "Looks wise, she is okay but not photogenic" (Ellis-Petersen) which push and reinforce caste and religious discrimination, patriarchy and hypermasculinity, and colorism—as fair-skinned women are presented as desirable. In short, the reality series "propagates a certain self-policing and conservatism" that Indians are expected to practice (Ghosh 1). According to researcher Suryansu Guha, the 'trashy' production style and promotion techniques of shows like *Indian Matchmaking* could be a conscious decision taken by Netflix as the shock-and-awe and hate factor of such programs labors audiences "thereby exponentially augmenting a consumer product's reach" (17).

3.5 Affordances: Narrative Styles and Binge-Watching

Over the years, Netflix has spent more on 'long-form' television content than films, which reveals a lot about audiences' tastes and preferences in terms of narratives and production values. Between 2010 and 2020, Netflix's movie catalog dropped from nearly 6,755 to 3,730 whereas television content increased from 530 to 2,108. At the same time, Netflix also increased its focus on original content creation (Roberts 4–5). Some of the factors that led to this increase include narrative style, length and production quality of Netflix Originals that blur, or rather blend, the traditional distinctions between television and film. This, in turn, disrupts the traditional economic model of broadcasting that puts episodes over seasons. Netflix also releases all episodes of a season simultaneously which usually "results in an 8-hour or 13-hour long narrative" (Buck and Plothe 5) that also provides a lot of freedom to filmmakers, who have traditionally had to fit content into 20-minute or 2-hour blocks. However, one must be cautious before proclaiming that streaming has ushered in a democratic style of filmmaking. We have already seen how Netflix takes on a hands-on approach in the production of original content to ensure and maintain quality control. Furthermore, many in the film industry have raised certain concerns over the rise of streaming. Filmmaker Martin Scorsese said that there is a larger debate to be had about the relationship between art and algorithms. His contemporary Steven Spielberg also argued that streaming services pose a threat to the movie-going experience and supposedly suggested that films released exclusively on streaming platforms should not be eligible for film festivals and Academy Awards (Bradshaw). Director James Cameron stated that the success of *Avatar: The Way of Water* in 2022 across theaters proves that audiences "still value the theatrical experience" and stated that he's had "enough" of streaming (Sharf). Despite raising these concerns, Scorsese's neo-noir movie *The Irishman* was exclusively released on Netflix in 2019, registering over 25 million global viewers in its first seven days (Pallotta). He has also signed a multi-movie deal with Netflix competitor Apple TV+. Even Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment signed a multi-picture deal with Netflix in 2023.

The popularity of Netflix also ushered 'binge-watching' into the popular lexicon. Binge-watching, aggravated by the inclusion of multiple audio settings, commercial-free, good picture quality, has shattered the decades old broadcasting model hegemonized by legacy media, including premium cable. Even HBO and Showtime, despite their commercial free, good quality shows, practiced the weekly-episode turnout model. Netflix Originals, too, offer commercial-free, high content quality but they differentiate themselves by simultaneously releasing all episodes of a season which has further ushered in the social practice of #NetflixAndChill, which has far more implications than being a euphemism for casual sexual intercourse with Netflix content plating in the background. The ‘Chill’ factor has also been associated with the continuous watching of Netflix content, which has become a powerful alternative to boredom. This, in turn, has also led to criticism over binge-watching’s influence on physical and mental health—a notion also associated with another usual social practice associated with the term ‘binge’—the “excess and overindulgence” in alcohol consumption (Baker 32; Pilipets 8–9). In 2018, ‘binge-watch’ was entered as a new word into the Oxford Dictionary which defined the verb as “watching multiple episodes of a television show consecutively or in rapid succession” (Suh). However, there is a need to revisit this dictionary definition as ‘multiple episodes of a TV show’ seems quite reductive. Binge-watching could include continuous viewing of movies—or what Netflix considers films—as well as multiple TV shows. The rapid succession seems quite accurate, though, as the Netflix algorithm hardly gives viewers a time to enjoy credits as it plays the next episode—or content—within 10 seconds. In fact, binge-watching synonyms content viewing into an epic spectacle, which is further aggravated by Netflix’s association with trusted names like Shonda Rhimes or Martin Scorsese. Binge-watching, then, could be explained as the perfect balance between quality and quantity.

However, the supposition that Netflix invented the practice of ‘binge-watching’ would be incomplete; rather, one could say that streaming platforms have redefined or remediated it in a way that breaches the spatial and temporal limitations associated with the forms that preceded it. The rise of recording technologies—Betamax, VHS tapes to DVD boxsets—also ushered in a form of binge-watching where audiences could consume uninterrupted multiple episodes or movies back-to-back. Additionally, DVD boxsets also feature commentary, gag reels and behind-the-scenes outlook on their favorite content. Netflix, on its part, has digitized much of the televisual experience associated with DVD boxsets, which formed a core part of its initial internet-based business (Jenner 113). Complementary content such as gag-reels, behind-the-scenes interviews, promos, and commentary are now released through alternative means such as social media platforms Twitter and YouTube. One could even go back to the rise of print capitalism and argue that Netflix's binge-watching is, in fact, a remediation of the habit of reading a novel (Baker 35), for example, a suspense thriller. Much of the narrative styles of Netflix Originals are packaged as novels, which seduces the curiosity levels of audiences and compels them to give up sleep and keep watching. Netflix referenced sleep as its biggest competitor as it "disconnects" audiences from technologies and hinders the data collection process essential for its success (Pilipets 9). Studies have found that most Netflix users have cited relaxation, alleviation of boredom, escape, information, as well as social interaction and entertainment as their main motivation factors to binge-watch. Users mostly binge-watched dramas to relax and feel a sense of escapism whereas comedy was the preferred genre for those who wanted a relief from boredom (Castro et al. 12–13; Sung et al. 417). However, the practice of binge-watching has been criticized for its health hazards that may include, but are not limited to, issues of sleep disturbances, feelings of guilt, impulsiveness as well as negative work performances (Flayelle et al. 2; Steins-Loeber et al. 148). However, scholarship has also identified the positives of binge-watching such as "emotional enhancement, enrichment" (Flayelle et al. 8) as well as "distraction from negative thoughts" (Steins-Loeber et al. 147). Nonetheless, binge-watching was one of the major affordances remediated by this contemporary new technology of streaming, pioneered by Netflix, that not only led to Netflix touching over 200 million subscribers by 2020 but also compelled legacy media to compete.

4. Counterstrike: Legacy Hits Back

Netflix's good quality original programming, affordances and economic model also had a drastic impact on the workings of the global media landscape. Unlike traditional conglomerates like Disney and Comcast, Netflix has a unique positioning as both a tech-based and content-based company. As a tech-company, Netflix positions the sophistication of its data-driven, algorithm-based strategies by regularly participating in major tech conferences. At the same time, it constantly promotes its high-quality content and affordances that differentiates it from the standardized entertainment packaged by broadcast networks (Havens 329). Indeed, Netflix's success has had an impact on both the tech and entertainment industries. The entertainment industry saw a series of mergers and acquisitions, including AT&T's acquisition and subsequent spin-off of WarnerBros, which merged with Discovery Communications to form WarnerBrosDiscovery in 2022. In the same year, National Amusements also merged CBS with Viacom to form Paramount Global. Netflix also affected the tech industry as Meta Platforms—previously Facebook; Apple, and Google have entered the streaming industry. Disney CEO Bob Iger had to quit as Apple's board member once it was evident that the two companies would get competitive in the streaming sphere. In 2018, Netflix, with 70 original films, had released nearly twice the quantity of movies distributed by WarnerBros and Disney combined. The ease of Netflix's global reach and penetration, and its growing popularity, made it a popular destination for film producers and content creators. The lessons of the Blockbuster bankruptcy were fresh in Hollywood and, thus, Disney decided to bet on the streaming industry. Before launching Disney+ in 2019, the eponymous conglomerate completed a $71.3 billion takeover of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox which made Disney the owner of National Geographic, STAR

Network and Hulu (Hayes and Chmielewski 63). Disney leveraged its position as the world's largest media library and promoted Disney+ as a one-spot portal for every content ever produced by Disney—animation, live-action movies, documentaries, among others. Disney+ gave users access to content from Pixar, National Geographic, Marvel Studios—which produces the highly-profitable Marvel Cinematic Universe, and Lucasfilm—the owners of the *Star Wars* universe. Furthermore, it pulled all its copyrighted content off Netflix, a step which was also emulated by other legacy media conglomerates (Shattuc 146). Disney+ is offered as a bundle with its sister platforms of ESPN+, which offers live and recorded sports content, and Hulu. While Netflix has a subscriber base of 260 million, Disney+ has nearly 160 paid subscribers globally which increases to nearly 230 million when one also factors in the userbase of ESPN+ and Hulu (The Walt Disney Company, "First Quarter Earnings for Fiscal 2023" 5). In other words, Disney has emerged as Netflix's biggest competitor.

The decision to bundle ESPN+ and Hulu was smart on Disney's part as it differentiated their service from Netflix, which did not carry news or live sports. However, one could argue that streaming platforms have been unable to penetrate the spheres of live news and sports in the same way they have revolutionized the film, TV, and music industries. This is further evidenced by the spectacular failure of CNN+, launched by WarnerBrosDiscovery in March 2022 only to shut it down a month later. Despite the heavy promotions and involvement of high-profile personalities like Eva Longoria, Chris Wallace and Anderson Cooper, the service was shut down due to a dismal subscriber base of 10,000. CNN estimated that it lost $300 million on the month-long service, which included layoffs and hirings, promotions and high production costs. Additionally, CNN+'s failure could also be attributed to several factors including mismanagement and declining trust in the news media—which has significantly dropped to 35 percent (Gottfried and Liedke; Koblin et al.). Existing subscribers were either issued refunds or transferred to their parent company's HBO Max platform. Some programs exclusively produced for CNN+ such as *Eva Longoria: Searching for Mexico* and *Who's Talking to Chris Wallace* were broadcast on CNN and HBO Max. However, despite some streaming platforms carrying news content, it wouldn't be wrong to suggest that the news industry has a long way to go to navigate the streaming revolution.

Some streaming services, referred to as MVPDs, or multichannel video programming distributors, do carry live news channels on their platforms. Unlike most subscription-based VOD platforms, or SVODs, MVPDs bundle broadcast and cable channels (Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 168; Shattuc 162). MVPDs can be described as the cross hybridization of traditional cable TV providers and contemporary streaming. They are the cord-cutting version of traditional cable TV—instead of bulky set-top boxes, cable wires, or terrestrial antennas; one needs a high-speed internet connection. The first of such MVPDs was Dish Network's Sling TV, launched in February 2015. Sling TV—which is limited to the US—offers paid packages that carry multiple live channels including news, sports, children, as well as add-on bundled channels from Asia, Middle East and Latin America in multiple languages. Accordingly, companies like Apple, Sony, Disney, Google also entered the MVPDs space. As of 2020, Hulu with Live TV is the leading MVPD with 3.2 million paid subscribers, followed by Sling TV with 2.5 million users (Munson).

Hulu was legacy media's earliest attempt to enter the streaming market. In 2006, legacy media conglomerates Fox, NBCUniversal, Disney, and—what was then TimeWarner—established Hulu, an online platform to offer next day viewing of shows to their users. The former three held 30 percent each whereas TimeWarner held a minority 10 percent stake

(Shattuc 153) in the platform. By 2009, the ad-supported Hulu had a vast content library that featured shows currently on air as well as old, nostalgic shows produced by legacy media. Hulu was introduced as a free, ad-supported platform and it eventually adopted a hybrid model introducing ad-free plans as well as a Live TV plan in 2015. While Hulu tried its hand in original programming as early as 2013, it was the Emmy-nominated dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* in 2017 that it formally announced itself as competitor to Netflix's high-quality original programming. By 2017, Hulu registered 12 million US subscribers, which was far less than Netflix's 45 million domestic userbase (Jenner 3; Lotz, *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast* 163). Until the end of the 2010s, Hulu—much like Netflix's early streaming avatar—was operated as an add-on service, an ancillary for legacy media to complement their US-centric television operations and maximize their revenue streams. The conglomerates' decision to not roll Hulu out globally was strategic; they did not want to infringe on the institutionalized revenue generation from international licensing and syndication. In essence, Hulu also symbolized the cozy, cooperative relationship between competing US-based transnational media conglomerates, most of which characterized cross-ownership as they had the same shareholders and investors (McChesney 10). With Hulu, they now collectively owned and operated a vertical. Hulu's fluid position as an ad-supported VOD, SVOD, or MVPD, is dependent on what plan its users subscribe to. Disney's acquisition of Fox saw Disney virtually become the sole owner of the platform which it branded as a mature streaming platform as opposed to the family-friendly Disney+ (Shattuc 153), sustained by Marvel Studios' R-rated *Deadpool* film series, and *The Handmaid's Tale* which are available on Hulu but not Disney+. The company reported a loss of $1.1 billion on $5.3 billion revenue (The Walt Disney Company, "First Quarter Earnings for Fiscal 2023" 4).

Comcast, which also bid for Murdoch's empire, managed to outfox Disney when it bought the Europe-based Sky Group for $40 billion which gave Comcast access to Sky's profitable global business which also included live sports. Comcast launched its streaming service Peacock, named after NBC's famed logo, in 2020 and offered NBCUniversal's nostalgic and current shows, films, sports and news content across various free and paid plans. The launch coincided with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics which Comcast wanted to "leverage… for a massive promotional push" (Hayes and Chmielewski 198). However, unlike Disney+, Comcast maximized its cable TV and internet businesses by offering Peacock's premium tier as a free bundle to its existing users. Additionally, much like Disney+ and others, Comcast pulled most of its content, including the highly profitable *The Office,* off Netflix, and commissioned its in-house talent like Jimmy Fallon and the Kardashians to produce exclusive content for its streaming platform. Comcast claims that between 2021 and 2022, Peacock tripled its userbase to over 20 million paid subscribers in the US, which is the only country it operates, with a revenue of $2.1 billion, on which it lost nearly a billion in FQ4 2022. However, Comcast remains optimistic on Peacock's profitability in the long run (Weatherbed).

Amazon Prime Video, owned by Amazon Inc, also has a different model than Disney+, Comcast, Netflix, or any other SVOD or MVPD platform. It was launched in 2006 as Amazon Unbox where users could buy and download films and television content from legacy media conglomerates. This may sound a lot similar to Netflix's DVD service with the substitution of DVDs with digital mp4. However, video content was not, and some might argue that it still is not, Amazon's main business. Amazon started off as an online-based book retailer; currently, it sells everything from books, appliances, electronics, clothing, toys, among others. According to industry estimates, Amazon—which is the global giant in e-commerce—is set to become US' largest retailer by 2024, upsetting Walmart (Garfinkle). A major reason for Amazon's trillion dollar growth came in 2016 when it introduced a bundled Amazon Prime at an annual price of $99 which gave users access to faster deliveries, free Audiobooks and eBooks, and the streaming platforms of Amazon Music and a remodeled avatar of Unbox called Prime Video, to compete with Netflix. Amazon made a quick mark by bundling ancillary services, such as Prime Video, with its Prime membership; it acquired a vast userbase which was loyal and accustomed to Amazon's services, and by 2016, Amazon realized that one-fourth of Prime members signed up only for the Video service (151). Accordingly, Amazon spent billions to acquire, license and produce content such as *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* and *Fleabag,* both of which won Emmys for Outstanding Comedy Series whereas the India-based *Inside Edge* won an International Emmy for Best Drama Series. While Prime Video is still available as a bundle with Amazon Prime, the company also launched it as a standalone service priced at $9 a month. Additionally, it also announced that the platform plans to unroll a cheaper, ad-supported model. As of 2018, Amazon Prime Video acquired a userbase of over 100 million across 190 territories (Shattuc 147, 151).

Live sports is still a lucrative operation for television channels—the 2022 Superbowl registered 113 million viewers, of which 104 million watched the game on NBC whereas FIFA estimated a viewership of 5 billion for the 2022 edition of the World Cup (Hsu; Adgate). While news is still struggling to find its footing in the streaming landscape, the growth of Disney and Amazon, and the success of a niche-platform called DAZN only proves that sports has finally adjusted to the streaming revolution. One of the biggest differentiators between Netflix and other platforms is the inclusion of sports programming. Netflix said in an earnings call that it was unsure how adding sports would prove to be financially viable ("FQ1 2022 Pre Recorded Earnings Call Transcripts" 14). They only need to look at their competition. While the Disney+

bundle offers ESPN+ and Peacock's premium tier offers live sports, Amazon too invested billions to acquire sports content globally—these include signing exclusive and non-exclusive deals with organizations representing football, soccer, tennis and volleyball. DAZN was launched in 2016 by a sports media company Perform Group—now called DAZN Group. The platform has been termed as the 'Netflix of Sports.' It spent millions to sign regional, national and international deals with sports associations and offers a plethora of live and recorded games to its paid subscribers, that includes but it not limited to cricket, wrestling, boxing, soccer, football, basketball, netball, among others (Hutchins et al. 987), to its 15 million paid subscribers who streamed "1.2 billion hours in 2022 across 130 million connected devices" (DAZN). One could, then, surmise that the rise of DAZN since 2016 buoyed companies like Disney, Comcast and Amazon to add sports to their streaming platforms.

Most streaming platforms but Netflix have registered heavy short-term losses on its operations. However, one must note that conglomerates like Disney, Comcast and others like HBO Max as well as Apple TV+ and Amazon Prime have only periodically increased subscribers. Additionally, their other business verticals have been able to subsidize the incurred losses. Netflix, on the other hand, despite relying only on subscription revenue, registered a net income of $4.5 billion in 2022 on a $31 billion revenue (Netflix Investor Relations, *2022 Annual Report* 38). Also, despite the short-term losses, streaming has ushered in the promise of a return to a pre-1948 Hollywood era where legacy media enjoyed unprecedented privilege and hegemony. It is due to the Netflix revolution that media conglomerates are witnessing the resurgence of a vertical structure where studios own every stage of production, distribution and exhibition of content. Netflix also enjoyed an early mover advantage in the streaming business. It saw what YouTube promised but failed to deliver and took on Blockbuster, cable TV providers, and then legacy media content creators. It ushered in new affordances, remediated old ones, and disrupted the social, cultural and economic notions of a traditional capitalist model of broadcasting. However, despite riding an unfettered and unprecedented wave of enormous success since 2007, Netflix—the leader in the global streaming market—suffered a setback in the rapidly digitizing territory of India, where it faces tough competition from foreign-owned platforms like Disney+Hotstar, Amazon Prime Video and SonyLIV, as well as domestic players like JioCinema, and Zee5.

CHAPTER 3: GLOBAL LEADER, LOCAL CHALLENGES

The previous chapters discussed the communications landscape of India, and the global rise of a contemporary, dynamic media form of digital streaming and its affordances. The popularity of Bollywood and vernacular media, complemented by state policies, created a domestic contempt for Hollywood to capture a significant market share in the high-consumption territory of India, which changed in the 1990s. Netflix's offerings of ad-free, on-demand, uncensored content, as well as its revenue model made it the market leader across the 194 territories it operates in. This chapter blends the arguments together by reviewing the performances of Netflix, JioCinema, Disney+Hotstar and other streaming platforms to highlight Netflix's struggles in a rapidly-digitizing, socially diverse, industrial economy of India. The central thesis of this chapter argues that the strategies that made Netflix the global leader in streaming saw an abrupt halt in India—that led to a dip of $50 billion from their market cap. The chapter will examine the complexities of India's entertainment industry in terms of content, economic models, consumption patterns and habits, as well as competition, coopetition and challenges from telecom companies, state regulators, regional media, among others. The first section will discuss India's rise as an information-state through state-led legislations beginning with the 1984 New Computer Policy, post-1991 telecom policies, that subsequently led to post 2010s initiatives Digital India and the rollout of Jio Platforms. The chapter will also briefly touch upon the popularity of YouTube and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on India's entertainment industry, and the streaming market. The central thesis of this chapter looks at India's streaming and entertainment industry as well as the domestic streaming platforms through the lens of global media scholarship of hybridity and glocalization, and cultural proximity to investigate why the offerings and affordances that makes Netflix dominate the global streaming market struggled to resonate with

Indian audiences. In conclusion, I will prove that in the arena global media—conglomerates, technologies, platforms—need to localize their messages, agendas, ideology for effective consumption, interpretation and adoption.

1. India: The Information State

In 2018, Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings, speaking at a business summit, prophesized that the platform's next 100 million subscribers would come from India (*Next 100 Mn Users* 5:45-5:50). This optimism prompted Netflix to pledge an investment of nearly $400 million over the next two years to license, acquire and produce content coming from India (Masih), featuring stalwarts like Karan Johar, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Zoya Akhtar, as well as niche entertainers like Vir Das and Amit Tandon. Netflix also commissioned diasporic writer-producers to create exclusive content, which led to Hasan Minhaj's stand-up specials, Mindy Kaling's teen comedy *Never Have I Ever* and Richie Mehta's Emmy-winning drama *Delhi Crime*. According to Indian filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane, Netflix provided a global distribution pattern and a sense of creative independence to bypass constraints of producing box-office and ratings friendly content (qtd. in Lidhoo et al.). It seemed like a win-win situation for Indian content creators, audiences, and the world's largest streaming service. At a Netflix earnings call in January 2022, Hastings expressed his frustration over the service's sluggish growth in India ("FQ4 2021 Pre Recorded Earnings Call" 9), registering nearly 6 million subscribers, significantly trailing competitors Disney+Hotstar, Amazon Prime Video, JioCinema, among others. Subsequent missed targets and a loss of subscribers further led to a $50 billion dip in the company's market valuation (Sohn et al. B4). While Netflix has since recovered this drop, its relative performance in a high-consumption society like India paints quite a different picture. This warrants a comprehensive investigation into the global leader's socio-cultural and economic factors into Netflix's struggles to penetrate and dominate the Indian market through the global media tenets of hybridity and glocalization. In the arena of global media, conglomerates need to localize their strategies and messages for effective consumption and adoption, especially in a high information state like India.

It was the rapid digitization of the Indian economy that prompted Netflix and others to identify and target India as a lucrative market, as exemplified in chapter 1. India's emergence as a densely information state, according to Sen (*Digital Politics and Culture in Contemporary India* 13–14), is predicated on Rajiv Gandhi's computer revolution of 1984, Narasimha Rao's 1991 economic liberalization, and Manmohan Singh's 2009 UIDAI scheme which accorded a unique ID number to every Indian—similar to UK's National Insurance Number and US' Social Security card. Concomitant to these revolutionary projects was the dynamicity of India's telecom sector, especially since 1991. While the immediate effects in telecommunications with the New Computer Policy 1984 have been explained in chapter 1, an analysis of India's telecom sector from 1947 onward is significant to contextualize India's evolution as a lucrative destination for the global communication and broadcasting industry. Between 1947 and the mid-1990s, the state viewed telecommunications as an instrument of community building and connectivity, much like broadcasting and the postal service. Despite scarce resources, the state established telephone exchanges and public call offices by leveraging the high neighborhood penetration of post offices. However, the development of telephone services moved at a snail's pace and tele-density for a highly populated country like India was low. There were less than 100,000 telephones for 300 million people, a tele-density rate of 0.029 telephone sets for every 100 people in 1947, which touched 0.357, or 200,000 telephones for 700 million people in 1984 (Agur 67, 75). Telephones were considered a luxury enjoyed by the upper-class, much like television, and the state—which held a monopoly until the mid-1990s—controlled every aspect of telecommunications, from manufacturing and maintenance of devices and lines, pricing and policy; waitlists were long—years rather than months—and the service was quite substandard. While Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, assisted by his advisors Sam Pitroda and N. Seshagiri, eased some of the constraints associated with India's telecom policy. These included the separation of the Postal and Telecom departments, which led to the creation of a new Ministry of Telecommunications in 1985, and two public-funded enterprises MTNL and VSNL for domestic and international telephone services respectively. Private players were allowed to manufacture equipment and, between 1984 and 1991, tele-density improved to 0.6 with telephone sets increasing by nearly five million for nearly 850 million people. However, despite these victories, waitlists increased to 10.5 million by 1994, and the government singularly was unable to provide the required infrastructural and financial support to fulfill the demand. Efforts to create India's first cellular network in Mumbai also did not take off due to political opposition. Additionally, India's IT industry was riding a wave of success and it was only natural for the government to give up its overarching control of the complementary telecom industry which led to the National Telecom Policy 1994 which allowed private enterprises to bid for licenses to operate telecom services—which included paging, wireline and wireless services—starting with the four major metros of Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai and eventually to all states (Desai 74–75; Agur 73). The companies that benefited included legacy domestic conglomerates Tata and Birla, as well as Bharti Enterprises, which had emerged as a major manufacturer of telecom equipment since the 1980s. These domestic companies entered the bidding process either independently or in association with foreign corporations like AT&T, Bell Canada and Nippon. The first mobile service in India took off in 1995 with 77,000 subscribers, which increased to 3.6 million by 2000

(Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly 145–46). These efforts were further enhanced by the National Telecom Policy 1999 which expanded the eligibility of private players to bid for licenses, streamlined revenue sharing between the operators and the government, increased foreign investment limit in telecom, aimed toward reducing the digital divide—especially the urban-rural ratio—and an efficient convergence of teleservices. Subsequent legislations like the Broadband Policy 2004 and National Telecom Policy 2012 called for India to become a major player in the telecom sector and provide high-speed broadband to every citizen of the country (*Broadband Policy 2004*; *NTP 2012*). India's tele-density registered an unprecedented growth from 3.57 to nearly 80 percent between 2001 and 2015 (Agur 75), with the market-leader Bharti Airtel; the Birla Group-owned Idea Cellular, Reliance Infocomm, Hutchison Essar—which would become Vodafone India, and the state-owned MTNL and BSNL leading the revolution. However, in 2015, a significant initiative was announced that saw India take a giant leap towards rapid digitization and disruption of the country's communication landscape.

2. The Jio Effect: Data is the New Oil

In July 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Digital India to further transform the country into a highly sophisticated information society by leveraging digital literacy to address everyday issues concerning healthcare, education, welfare, infrastructure, basic amenities, law and order. For this initiative to succeed, the Indian government called on private industry to facilitate greater national connectivity among Indians by investing in electronic manufacturing, fiber optics, smartphone and high-speed broadband penetration (Najar). In other words, Digital India aims to turn India into a post-2000s info-nation where every aspect of social, political, economic and cultural life is augmented by a paradigm defined by Manuel Castells as electronic informational-communicationalism. Castells argues that this paradigm rose in the 1970s, a brief look into history seems to suggest that informationalism—simply defined as the capability to process and leverage information—has been the main catalyst for socio-economic change, in one form or another; the centuries between the Silk Route through the Age of Exploration and Industrial Revolution led to the spread of the material and abstract through trade, conquests and migration. However, it is true that, as Castells suggests, that rapid remediations in contemporary communication forms—radio, television, and now internet-based technologies—are constantly bridging temporal and spatial concerns associated with the spread of information which has, thus, especially since the second half of the 20th century, played a critical role in dictating or determining the public and private spheres (qtd. in B. Sen, *Digital Politics and Culture in Contemporary India* 7–8). These include the global circulation of American conservatism by Disney through its television and film programs (Dorfman and Mattelart 123); the CNN Effect which, according to many, led to the US' active humanitarian interventions in the Gulf War and Bosnia (Robinson 3); as well as the rise of internet which facilitated a densely informative but fragmented virtual public sphere as companies that deal with informatics—including and especially social media platforms—have been criticized for the spread of fake news and disinformation, and the concomitant rise of jingoistic echo chambers and xenophobia (Thussu, *International Communication: Continuity and Change* 243; Papacharissi 9). Hence, it is not surprising that governments and private enterprises are scouring to find ways to commodify, check and leverage user-data and information, which can be termed as a new age gold rush. It is under this context that private enterprises actively participated in the Digital India initiative; leading at the forefront was India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, the chairman of Reliance Industries Limited, which made much of his fortune in polyester and petrochemicals.

The second-generation Indian billionaire's early forays into the telecom sector came in the mid-1990s and 2002 when his company launched Reliance Infocomm, or RComm, which was ceded to his younger brother following a corporate split in 2004. In 2010, RIL bought Infratel Broadband, which would subsequently become the Jio Platforms, a glimpse of which was given to the Indian government and existing telecom operators at the Digital India event (2.10-2:19). In December 2015, flanked by Bollywood personalities Shahrukh Khan and A.R Rahman, Ambani laid out his plans for Jio— interestingly a mirror image of 'oil.' The billionaire stated that life is going digital, an allusion to Digital India's larger objective, and further smeared a coat of nationalistic paint by labeling Jio as an completely Indian start-up that sought to improve the nation's supposed dismal position in the global telecom index (13:20-15:16). The billionaire rolled out Jio nationally in September 2016 in a 90-minute speech articulating the rationale behind the name 'Jio' which means 'to live' and further philosophized that 'data is the oxygen of digital life' (5:16-5:44). Jio's bouquet of free voice calls, subsidized 4G internet and service bundles differentiated from its primary domestic competitors and disrupted India's telecom industry. At a time when most telecom operators in India were still navigating the full potential of 3G technology, Jio opted for and effectively scaled the higher 4G LTE technology (Curwen et al. 164), thereby reducing mobile internet costs from $3.5 to $0.7 per gigabyte, as well as offering free voice calls and omitting expensive 'roaming' costs (Karnik and Balachandran). Additionally, a standard, lowest-level Jio subscription included a wide suite of applications covering e-commerce, social media, messaging, news, finance and—more importantly—streaming. Ambani also leveraged the nationwide network of Reliance Retail to ensure the smooth accessibility, distribution and portability of Jio SIM cards as well as affordable 4G-enabled smartphones under his home-grown LYF brand (Mukherjee 176). The Jio effect wiped nearly $2 billion off the market capitalization of its competitors—Bharti Airtel, Idea Cellular, Vodafone and RComm—who had to rejig their strategies and offerings to stay relevant (Khurana 120). While Idea and Vodafone merged to create a new entity called Vi, RComm entered bankruptcy proceedings (Curwen et al. 176; Athique and Kumar 1424). By 2017, India became the second largest adopter of digital technology led by Jio which, by 2022, became the largest telecom operator in India with nearly 400 million users (TRAI, *January – March, 2022* x; Khurana 117). Ambani eventually termed data as the new oil and Jio eventually expanded to provide home internet and surveillance security, financial services, cloud computing and satellite technology—thereby indicating its intent to become a sophisticated tech company. These efforts were also complemented by Ambani's investments in India's entertainment sector such as his takeover of ETV, Network18 and Saavn. The success of Jio Platforms led to significant financial and strategic partnerships with tech giants Microsoft, Google and Meta. By 2023, the privately-held Jio Platforms was worth nearly $110 billion, contributing the lion's share of RIL's $211 billion market cap (Athique and Kumar 1425; Mukherjee 176, 189; Singh).

The Jio effect also saw India's mobile subscriptions increase from 1.03 billion in 2016 to 1.18 billion in 2021, bringing the urban-rural subscriber ratio to 55:45 (TRAI, *Annual Report 2020-21* 11, 16). India emerged as the world's second largest smartphone market behind China, (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 59), as mobile internet prices also dropped to less than $0.09 in 2020, providing nearly 720 million people—42 percent of India's total population—with access to 4G-enabled mobile internet. Indians also emerged as the second highest internet users in the world, aggregating over 800 billion hours of data consumption in 2021 across social media, news and streaming platforms (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 56; FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 73), adding credence to Ambani's coinage of data as the 'new oil'

(0:07). It was the Jio Effect that prompted indigenous and transnational conglomerates like STAR, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Balaji Telefilms, Hoichoi, among others, to compete in India's streaming industry. In fact, it was the Jio Effect that jumpstarted India's nascent streaming market—which is expected to touch $15 billion by 2030—into a refined stage of scaling as data consumption touched an average 14 GB per user per month (BCG and CII, *Blockbuster Script for the New Decade* 32–35), which is estimated to reach a monthly rate of 54 GB by 2028 (FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 93). As of 2022, there are nearly 40 streaming platforms in India that cover an audience base of nearly 425 million, which includes 130 million paid subscribers (Ormax Media, "India's OTT Universe"). However, Netflix, the global leader in streaming, has struggled to fare against the domestic leaders, led by Disney+Hotstar and JioCinema.

2. The Crowded Streaming Market

According to media scholar Ramon Lobato, India's adolescent streaming market was quite 'crowded' by the time Netflix entered the country in January 2016 (*Netflix Nations* 122). Leading the pack was Hotstar, which had debuted a year earlier, as well as other foreign-owned platforms like Amazon Prime Video, SonyLIV, and domestic players like EROSNow, and Spuul—which launched as early as 2013. These were followed by the launch of JioCinema, ALTBalaji and Hoichoi between 2015 and 2016, most of which adopted hybrid models, competitive pricing and effective synergy between verticals. In fact, one can say that it was the Rupert Murdoch-owned STAR Network that introduced Indians to contemporary digital streaming by leveraging the Jio Effect. Just like STAR, as the first privately-owned television channel in India, seduced the country's post-1980s thriving middle-class with its cutting-edge cable and satellite technology and innovative programming, Hotstar targeted their children, or the next generation—the urban millennials, who grew up on malls, multiplexes, and multimedia. This is evidenced by Hotstar's 60-second promo video which focused on individualism, or the individualistic determinism of digital streaming compared to the bulky television set that, according to Lynn Spigel (38), was the center of a household. The promo, in mixed Hindi and English, not only highlights the temporal and spatial constraints of linear television but also the societal pressures associated with community-viewing—with parents, roommates, friends in various settings of home, bars, outdoors, etc. In the promo, the millennials, who are compelled to watch content that they are not interested in, break the fourth wall and address the audience with statements like "I am not my mother," "I don't like action," and "I am not the gang." The visual then changes to the protagonists subscribing to Hotstar with voiceovers like "I am not him, I am not her, I'm me" and "My eyes, my entertainment" and ends with the platform's introductory tagline "I don't go with the flow, I go solo" (*Hotstar - Watch Movies, Serials & Sports for Free*). On the management side, a US-based Indian executive Varun Narang, who oversaw Hulu's product management, was hired as the chief executive of Hotstar. Launched in February 2015, Hotstar was another offering by the STAR Network that already included 60 television channels, across genres like entertainment, sports, news, lifestyle, in multiple vernacular languages. The platform registered over 25 million downloads and 200 million views in its first six months, owing to its free, advertiser-supported model and access to local content. Additionally, Hotstar not only tapped the nostalgia zone by offering access to old shows that their users grew up on but also offered next day viewing of every program broadcast on STAR's television operations. By doing so, STAR ensured that Hotstar complements STAR's lucrative television operations rather than stifle it, much like Disney treats Hulu in the United States Interestingly, STAR became a subsidiary of Disney following its acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019 and the streaming platform was rebranded as Disney+Hotstar. By 2022, Hotstar became India's largest streaming platform in terms of subscribers and revenue combined (FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 78). Disney+ is Netflix's biggest competitor at the global level, with a global subscription-base of nearly 150 million. However, the lion's share of these subscriptions—nearly 40 percent—comes from Hotstar (The Walt Disney Company, "Third Quarter and Nine Months Earnings for Fiscal 2023" 5). Prior to this takeover, Disney's existence in India was predicated on a series of joint ventures and partnerships with domestic conglomerates that included Modi Group, UTV Software Communications, STAR India and YashRaj Films. In 2012, Disney India acquired UTV, which operated a production and distribution studio and entertainment channels in a deal worth $454 million (Govil, *Orienting Hollywood* 1). The STAR takeover only consolidated Disney's position as India's premiere media outlet; although this domination would be short-lived as Ambani's Reliance Industries would buy Disney's India operations in a deal worth $8.5 billion in 2024 (Nicolaou and Kay).

It is yet to be seen how Ambani's merger with Disney India factors in—would Hotstar and JioCinema combine as a single unit, or would they operate as two independent entities. Either way, the new conglomerate is expected to "control about 40 percent of advertising" revenue in India's entertainment market, which analysts have termed "monopolistic" (Nicolaou and Kay). JioCinema is a relatively new entrant in India's growing streaming landscape, is offered as both a standalone, and bundled service to all Jio telecom and home internet customers, along with its sister platform of JioTV, collectively registering a domestic market share of 30 percent (Khurana 122), which results in nearly 240 million active users per month "of which 33 million are daily active users" (Sn and Farooqui). JioCinema also complements Reliance Industries' other digital applications and services which includes JioSaavn for music streaming;

JioTV which, like Hulu, is an MVPD, JioGameslite for online gaming; JioMart for e-commerce among others. In addition to Jio Platforms, Reliance Industries also owns Network18 and ETV since 2018 which competes with Disney-STAR, Zee Media and Sony India and other regional networks in the linear television sector; two film production and distribution studios with Jio Studios and Viacom18—in partnership with US' Paramount Global, and news outlets like *Fortune India*, *Autocar* and CNN-News18—a joint venture with WarnerBrosDiscovery. Reliance's interests and influence in India's entertainment sector also includes investments in cable and internet operators like Hathway, DEN Networks; production houses like Eros International and Balaji Telefilms Limited, both of which also run their independent streaming platforms (Nagaraj). ALTT—formerly ALTBalaji—has a subscription base of 3.8 million, which excludes gains from partner apps, with a cumulative viewership of 1.2 billion minutes (Balaji Telefilms Limited). Platforms like ALTT and others like ErosNow are interesting examples of production houses operating their own streaming services whilst forging partnerships with the likes of Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Jio and Hotstar. Consequently, while most streaming platforms offer a diversity in content and affordances—multiple devices, genres and languages—there are also platforms in India that cater to a niche, vernacular, linguistic audience. For example, Hoichoi—the streaming arm of the Calcutta-based SVF—offers Bengali-language content to not just the Bengali speaking population in India, but also globally. This is reflective not just in their programming but also partnerships with Bengali filmmakers and actors. Bengali is the seventh most spoken language in the world and is an official language in India and Bangladesh—which has emerged as Hoichoi's largest market. Nearly 40 percent of its 2.06 million subscribers come from Bangladesh, its largest market, while Western markets of US, UK, Canada and Australia contribute more revenue (Lotz and Eklund 204; Mehta 108;

Farooqui). The popularity of Hoichoi and other similar ‘regional’ platforms are strong examples of the cultural proximity theory that explains why audiences are more receptive to products encoded with familiar and shared cultural identifiers (Lu et al. 2).

There are also other networks like Zee and Sony that compete with Star and Network18 in the television and film distribution industry of India. They are now also aggressively competing in India’s streaming market with Zee5 and SonyLIV catering nearly 17 million subscribers each. Interestingly, Zee and Culvert Media—Sony’s India arm—had entered advanced talks to merge their businesses which failed in 2023 (Lotz and Eklund 124; Nicolaou and Kay). Domestically and globally, Amazon has emerged as a big player in not just the e-commerce sector but also cloud computing and, significantly, the entertainment industry. In India, Amazon announced an investment plan of $26 billion by 2030, part of which will be used to compete with Reliance Retail in e-commerce and brick-and-mortar retail sectors (Reuters). Additionally, Amazon Prime Video is giving a stiff competition to Netflix and other popular streaming platforms. In India, the platform is second only to Hotstar with approximately 20 million paid users, or a five percent viewership share. It is also India’s second most downloaded streaming platform behind MX Player, which is predominantly a video-on-demand service (Media Partners Asia; FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 78).

These are just a few of the 40-odd streaming platforms operating in India, offering new and old programs, across various genres, including sports and reality TV, in multiple languages, that are giving Netflix a tough fight. However, despite the global leader’s relative domestic struggles, the socio-cultural effects of Netflix on India’s media landscape cannot be ignored. Netflix, the fifth best performing app in India in terms of revenue, has been credited with popularizing Indian content globally which have won critical acclaim and awards. These include the animated *Mighty Little Bheem*, the suspense drama *Delhi Crime,* the stand-up special *Vir Das: Landing* and the ecological documentary short *The Elephant Whisperers.* Additionally, Netflix also revolutionized the visual effects industry with popular titles like *Decoupled* and *The White Tiger* by signing strategic deals with VFX companies like ReDefine and philmCGI (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 87, 175). Socio-economically, Netflix has been credited with creating a new crop of superstars—like Jaideep Ahlawat, Pankaj Tripathi and Nawazuddin Siddiqui—most of whom were traditionally marginalized and relegated to playing small characters in popular Bollywood movies. Most streaming platforms globally are also led by women executives, which in turn, has also led to a rise in feminist and well-rounded women-oriented stories and content which would not traditionally not enjoy a wide theatrical release (Bamzai, chap.6).

2.1 A Note on YouTube

In chapter 2, I discussed how YouTube did not quite fulfill its prophecy to disrupt the hegemony of legacy conglomerates, there is no denying that it did usher in a set of affordances and consumption norms like no other. YouTube's localized India avatar was launched in 2008 amid concerns over piracy and copyright. However, over the years, the platform has been leveraged by legacy corporations, advertisers as well as amateur broadcasters—who emerged as superstars and social media influencers (Mohan and Punathambekar 322). These include the likes of singers like Shraddha Sharma and Arman Malik; comedians like Abhish Matthews and Vir Das, as well as collectives like AIB and The Viral Fever, who went on to produce some of the earliest legitimate Indian content on streaming platforms. Currently, YouTube—the second largest media app in India in terms of revenue, behind Hotstar—reaches over 500 million monthly average users, bridging the urban-rural divide by reaching over 600,000 small towns and villages. India has emerged as “the highest reach and time spent of any country” for YouTube, which is also India’s preferred app for audio consumption and, as per an industry report, half of India’s YouTube content creators are involved in gaming, generating nearly $500 million for the gaming industry (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 22, 62, 64). The YouTube+social media segment—with 130 million viewers—is second only to the AVOD audience base in India’s streaming landscape. This means that 27 percent of India’s 450 million streaming, or OTT, audiences only consume content on YouTube and other social media platforms. This segment recorded the highest growth of 30 percent between 2021 and 2022 (Ormax Media, “India’s OTT Universe”). In terms of time spent and unique visitors, YouTube is the largest streaming platform in India, with 440 million unique visitors, consuming nearly 310 billion minutes of content, with a revenue of nearly half-a-billion dollars, as of 2021 (Kohli-Khandekar 272, 277). However, as explained in chapter 2, despite YouTube’s large audience base and viewership, it doesn’t quite directly compete with the likes of Hotstar, Netflix and other popular streaming platforms. While YouTube—much like streaming platforms—uses a data-driven technology and algorithmic filtering to offer amateur and professional content, it can be viewed as predominantly an advertising company, which is its largest source of revenue. In fact, many streaming platforms leverage YouTube’s reach and affordances to promote their brands and content. For example, Netflix employed the services of popular Indian comedian Tanmay Bhat to promote one of its popular Original reality shows *Indian Matchmaking* in the form of reaction videos. While Bhat and his colleagues mocked the contestants and the banality of the show’s format, this “form of marketing through cross-platform pollination” generated quite a buzz and interest among subscribers to watch the show (S. Guha 17). Similarly, Netflix also promoted its latest offerings like *Bhakshak* and *Jaane Jaan* by releasing exclusive behind-the-scenes and panel discussions on YouTube. Interestingly, Bhat's popularity can be attributed to his association with the AIB collective whose satirical videos garnered millions of hits on YouTube. Furthermore, while the global news media is struggling to navigate the streaming revolution—evidenced by the CNN+ debacle—they have found an ally in YouTube with many outlets registering eight-figure subscriber base and viewership. In fact, many news outlets—including India-based NDTV and CNN News18—also offer live streaming of its television news broadcasts. In India, MVPDs like JioTV are, so far, allowed to carry live news channels whereas Hotstar, Zee5 carried live news channels until 2021 before the Indian government prevented streaming platforms from carrying news. However, platforms have commissioned and carried programs, documentaries and films based on real-life current events and subjects like war, finance, agribusiness, and disease, including and especially the coronavirus pandemic.

2.2 A Note on Covid-19

The onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic since December 2019, which has resulted in nearly two million deaths globally, affected every aspect of social, cultural, political and economic life. Individuals, businesses and governments had to adapt to the growing challenges of this deadly virus that subsequently led to new societal norms based on social distancing, travel restrictions, home quarantine and working-from-home (Dharani et al. 251–52). The pandemic also had quite an effect on the entertainment industry and its ancillaries, including advertising and brick-and-mortar theaters. To stay relevant, companies found innovative ways to distribute their product, turning to direct-to-consumer, or D2C, model rather than going through an intermediary, or B2B retailer. According to a Harvard study, nearly 25 percent of corporations enabled a D2C feature on their platforms, leveraged aggregators like eBay and Amazon, and—notably—social media sites like Facebook and Instagram to advertise their product. Additionally, e-commerce was gamified through rewards and creative innovative programs, a sector that is "expected to grow from $9.1 billion in 2020 to $30.7 billion in 2025" (Moorman et al.). The pandemic also affected India's brick-and-mortar theatrical industry which saw revenues plummeting to $250 million in 2020 from a high of $1.2 billion in 2019. PVR, India's largest theatrical chain, registered a loss of $25 million with the company comparing the situation to "a restaurant with no food" (Arora and Singh). Fearing closures, theaters dropped ticket prices, maintained social distancing and limited seating and show schedules. While theaters nearly doubled this revenue in 2021, when lockdown restrictions were periodically eased, most of their revenue came from the limited release of 'regional' cinema. With many Bollywood films shelved, delayed or released straight-to-streaming, it was 'regional' cinema, especially from the South, in the languages of Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam that capitalized and threatened the decades old pan-Indian hegemony of the Hindi-film industry. In the peak-pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, Bollywood's contribution to theatrical revenues halved from the 2019 figure of nearly 45 percent. However, following the lifting of lockdowns, as of 2023, the theatrical business, as well as Bollywood, have recovered much of its erstwhile dominance, with revenues and market share touching pre-pandemic figures, thanks to successes like Shah Rukh Khan's *Jawan* and *Pathaan*, and jingoistic features like *The Kashmir Files* and *Gadar 2* which were also dubbed in Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam (Ormax Media, *The Ormax Box Office Report 2023*; Arora and Singh). In a 2023 interview, Karan Johar, one of India's leading filmmakers, said this resurgence of theaters post-pandemic was also due to a feeling of nostalgia, community-building and socializing facilitated by multiplexes. He did add—in 2023—that theaters and streaming platforms can both coexist (26:26-26:50).

While the pandemic instilled an environment of fear and paranoia among the theater owners and distributors, it did wonders for the global streaming industry as people—locked in the confines of their homes—spend more time on smartphones and digital devices, binge-watching and content consumption to keep them busy, sane, informed and entertained. Between the pre-pandemic year of 2019 and 2021, online based consumption of entertainment apps grew 52 percent—the third highest in the world after Indonesia and Japan—driven by work from home and online schooling restrictions. Interestingly, Germany and China recorded a negative growth in consumption during the same time (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 62). Nearly 65 percent of audiences in India acknowledged the importance of internet and streaming platforms; there was a 50 percent increase in gaming applications and a 42 percent increase in consumption on video apps, especially streaming platforms who saw their subscriptions increase from 22.5 million to nearly 30 million between March and July 2020, mostly in urban areas, which indicated a resurgence of the paid subscription model, traditionally associated with print capitalism. YouTube itself registered 300 billion hours of consumption in the early lockdown months, nearly 70 percent of which were dominated by millennials and Gen Z. Approximately, 90 percent of these viewers were watching on smartphones, which also boosted India's telecom industry (Sridhar and Phadtare 176, 178; Sharma and Lulandala 65–66). Internet consumption in India touched 1.4 trillion minutes in 2021, up from 872 billion in 2019 whereas subscriptions to streaming platforms increased by 35 million between 2019 and 2020, resulting in a combined revenue of $1.2 billion (Kohli-Khandekar 271–72). On the industry side, streaming proved to be a savior for many producers, as the mandatory release gap of eight weeks between a film's theatrical release and streaming release was reduced to four-weeks with many made-for-multiplex films like *Coolie No. 1, Gulabo Sitabo, Laxxmi,* and *Shakuntala Devi* getting straight-to-streaming releases. This strategy somewhat mimicked Hollywood's response to the pandemic with studios releasing films like *Wonder Woman 1984* and *Black Widow* simultaneously in theaters and streaming platforms. While Disney India stated that the pandemic conditions offered a challenge and an opportunity to increase output and "grow the market," studios like Red Chillies, owned by Shah Rukh Khan said the pandemic ensured that filmmakers turn to modes of virtual filmmaking based on animation and VFX (Jha). Streaming platforms witnessed a massive surge of 80 percent consumption between March 2020 and May 2020. Even Netflix, which had struggled to acquire subscribers, registered an increase of 2.3 million new paid users in the lockdown (Akram and Bhoyar 628). Netflix acknowledged that the pandemic led to the platform expanding their slate with content that "members would have otherwise enjoyed…after a theatrical release" (Arora and Singh). In an earnings call, the company said that it was "humbling to be a place" that affected audiences turned to for comfort and escape (Netflix Investor Relations, "FQ1 2020 Earnings Call Transcripts" 5). Despite these gains, however, Netflix did not quite manage to topple domestic competitors, led by Disney+Hotstar. The next section investigates the cultural and economic factors behind the global leader's relative domestic challenges and inability to penetrate the world's largest population within the global media frameworks of hybridity and glocalization.

3. The Cultural Aspect: Content, Nostalgia, Vernacular, Sports

Much like STAR's foray into the Indian media industry in the early 1990s, Netflix seemed to target India's niche upper-class audience exemplified by the type of premium content they offered. Netflix, initially, struggled to acquire popular Hindi and vernacular titles—most of which were already available on other existing platforms. Eventually, Netflix decided to acquire, license and commission locally produce content as part of their aggressive long-distance localization process which also includes translations and subtitles. According to media scholar Ramon Lobato, this was done keeping “local connotations and visual aesthetics” of regions in mind (*Netflix Nations* 119), not too different from Rupert Murdoch’s “think global, program local” approach which enabled STAR to become the premier television network in India (Thussu, “The `Murdochization’ of News?” 595–96). Nearly 90 percent of Indians prefer consuming media in Indian languages, which saw the likes of Hotstar, Amazon Prime Video, JioCinema, and others acquiring, licensing and producing content in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, among others. Additionally, content diversity and innovation in storytelling and narratives were cited as major reasons for a preferential shift towards streaming platforms, especially among the youth, who found streaming’s original content to be more realistic and in-sync with their backgrounds and experiences. In addition to the originality in narratives, the ease and option of subtitles and dubbings in multiple languages, especially vernacular dialects, was also another reason for the huge demand in streaming platforms(Sharma and Lulandala 72–73; Sridhar and Phadtare 181–82). Karan Johar, observed a symbiotic, empowering relationship between streaming platforms, writers and filmmakers as the serialized format allows them to develop backstories and narratives that they couldn’t have done so in a traditional setting (24:55-26:25). In other words, while the pandemic crystallized streaming as a ritualistic and habitual practice among Indians, it was the fusion of good, localized stories and innovation in filmmaking that led to the Indian audience retaining their streaming subscriptions even after the pandemic.

Netflix released their first Original from India in 2018 with the series *Sacred Games,* an adaption of author Vikram Chandra’s drug-based noir drama, and a romantic comedy *Love per Square Foot* starring Vicky Kaushal, then a promising Bollywood star. Since then, they have aggressively pursued the Indian market through licensing and production deals with established and niche filmmakers. While comedian Vir Das has created exclusive stand-up comedy specials, auteur filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has enjoyed a long relationship with the platform, producing *Sacred Games* and the off-beat *AK vs AK*—cited by Netflix as global successes coming from India (Lidhoo et al.). Additionally, Netflix adapted author Arvind Adiga's Booker Prize winning *The White Tiger* into an Oscar-nominated movie starring Indian actors Priyanka Chopra and Adarsh Gourav, whereas diasporic filmmaker Richie Mehta's *Delhi Crime*, based on the 2012 Delhi gangrape incident that was widely covered in the local and foreign press, won the International Emmy Award for Best Drama in 2020. Shah Rukh Khan signed an exclusive deal with the platform that led to the production of a feminist dark comedy, *Darlings*, centered around domestic violence, also referenced by Netflix as one of their best performers in 2022 (Netflix Investor Relations, "Netflix Third Quarter 2022 - Letter to Shareholder" 6). An animated series *Mighty Little Bheem* was also the subject of a UNESCO campaign to promote Indian heritage (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 167). Despite these efforts, Netflix still struggles relatively against the competition from Hotstar, JioCinema, SonyLIV, and others in the content department.

Unlike its domestic competitors, Netflix lacks a rich library of both local and international content across diverse genres including sports which others like Hotstar, JioCinema, and SonyLIV offer. Hotstar started with over 35,000 hours of content licensed and produced by STAR and other Murdoch-owned companies, which increased to over 100,000 hours following the Disney takeover, across 18 vernacular languages (Disney Star). Hotstar, until 2023, also exclusively licensed programs from conglomerates that hadn't launched their streaming platforms in India, such as HBO and NBCUniversal; these programs are now available on JioCinema. Hotstar had also started experimenting in premium original content as early as

2015 under its ‘Specials’ moniker. It has adapted and localized non-Indian shows like *The Good Wife, Criminal Justice,* and *Penoza* with the involvement of popular Indian actors like Kajol, Pankaj Tripathi, and Sushmita Sen. An example of this localization could be seen in Tripathi’s *Criminal Justice* series. While the first two seasons were based on the first two seasons of its original BBC source, the third season of the Indian adaption was a completely new story. Additionally, unlike the BBC series, which featured a fresh cast every season, the Indian adaptation centralized the series under Tripathi’s character of a lowly lawyer by the name of Madhav Mishra. Similarly, Hotstar’s adaptation of *The Good Wife*, titled *The Trial: Pyaar Kanoon Dhokha*—which translates to ‘Love Law Deceit’—altered or dropped episodes from the original source that are prominently centered around voir dire, as the Indian judiciary system does not allow jury trials. Furthermore, to boost the subscription revenue of their streaming platforms, many companies have transferred some of their popular television programs as exclusive streaming content. Disney India, for example, aired the previous two seasons of the popular *Koffee with Karan* talk show on Hotstar; Sony India aired *Shark Tank India* and *Masterchef India* on SonyLIV and eventually on their YouTube and television channels. Jio, for its part, produced a sister product to *Bigg Boss,* titled *Bigg Boss OTT,* whose competitors were mainly online influencers and personalities. In fact, reality TV and unscripted shows have emerged as a major revenue generator for India’s streaming industry in 2023. The second season of *Bigg Boss OTT*, hosted by Bollywood superstar Salman Khan, registered 19.5 million views; and JioCinema’s *Temptation Island India*, registering 13.5 million views. Hotstar also took a piece of this pie with *Koffee with Karan S8* registering a viewership of 15.4 million. Netflix, on its part registered 6.3 million views for *Indian Matchmaking S2*; its success influenced a spin-off called *Jewish Matchmaking* in 2023. Hotstar, JioCinema, SonyLIV, and others also tapped into the nostalgia zone of the Indian audience by offering old—and new—shows, ranging from India-produced soap operas, talk shows, game shows, reality TV in multiple languages that users grew up watching. For example, Hotstar carries all 1,833 episodes of Ekta Kapoor's hugely popular *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* soap drama. It can also be found on Kapoor's ALTT platform, along with original programs and all other shows produced by Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms. Similarly, JioCinema carries every season of the Indian edition of Big Brother, titled *Bigg Boss* and Zee5 carries every episode of the long-running *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa* singing competition. While Netflix managed to tap this nostalgia zone by rebooting *Arrested Development, Gilmore Girls* and *Full House* in the West, they had not been able to do so in India.

Netflix's domestic competitors also offer next day streaming for programs currently telecast on their television channels. By doing so, they actively try not to step on the profitability of their companies' television operations. This approach seems strategically sound as, streaming's growth in subscriptions and viewership notwithstanding, television registered an increase from 165 million households in 2019 to 180 million households, predominantly supported by the popularity of vernacular media (BCG and CII, *Blockbuster Script for the New Decade* 12–13, 18). In fact, Netflix stated that the affordability and stability of cable television in India was a hindrance to maximize its growth (Netflix Investor Relations, "Netflix Fourth Quarter 2021 - Letter to Shareholder" 6). Netflix was late to realize the revenue potential of India's regional market, which in recent years has threatened Bollywood's decades old hegemony. A report by FICCI and EY prophesied that regional media will dominate 60 percent of India's television market by 2025 (*Tuning into Consumer* 15). Fifty percent of all original content, and 70 percent of all films available on Indian streaming platforms were in regional, or non-Hindi, languages, with over 50 percent of consumers of regional media came from outside the origin state. The heads of Netflix India, Zee5 and ErosNow lauded the streaming revolution for the pan-Indian and global popularity of India's regional content (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 56, 74, 98). With streaming breaching the spatial and temporal constraints of theatrical distribution and television broadcasting, regional cinema cannot be labeled as 'regional.' In fact, 'regional' cinema is quite a pejorative term as it supposedly situates cinema coming from Chennai, Calcutta, Bangalore, in non-Hindi languages as subservient and subpar to the dominance of the Mumbai-based Hindi cinema. As highlighted before, Hoichoi taps into the Bengali speaking population not just in India and Bangladesh, but worldwide. Similarly, Tamil is not only a widely spoken language in India and Sri Lanka, but it is one of the official languages of Singapore. The global popularity of *RRR* also highlights the domination of the so-called regional cinema. Netflix managed to get digital rights to the Hindi-dub of *RRR* which it subsequently dubbed in Portuguese, Korean, Turkish, and Spanish. The movie was among Netflix US's Top 10 "most watched titles for nine consecutive weeks" in 2022 (Abrams) and won its composers Chandrabose and MM Keeravani an Academy Award for the superhit track *Naatu Naatu* which went viral worldwide. Hotstar, on the other hand, had the exclusive rights to carry *RRR* in its original Telugu as well as other Indian languages, which boosts its presence in the domestic market. In fact, Hotstar, JioCinema, and others dub and subtitle their India-centric content in Hindi, English, Tamil, Malayalam and other regional and international languages. Through an active presence and popularity in India's regional markets, Netflix's domestic contenders tap into their large vernacular and other content library to capture not only India's lucrative regional audiences but also the diasporic market.

The long experience of the domestic companies in India's entertainment landscape has made them quite conscious about the heterogeneous patterns of media production and flow in

India, which is quite different from the homogenized patterns that Netflix supposedly focuses on. For example, while Netflix commissioned Karan Johar, one of India's most powerful filmmakers, to produce exclusive films like the anthological *Lust Stories* and *Ajeeb Dastans,* the filmmaker did not renew his exclusive contract with the California-based streaming service reportedly "over too much interference" (Laghate and Kumar). Companies like STAR, Sony India and Zee, as well as Reliance, Balaji Telefilms and SVS have been operating in India for a long time and—understanding the power balance in India's entertainment industry—maintained good relations with content creators who like to write, produce, distribute and exhibit films a certain way. While one may be able to watch Karan Johar's magnum-opus *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* on Netflix; a Hotstar subscriber can not only access Johar's entire filmography but also his popular *Koffee with Karan* chat show, and the drama series *Showtime* produced by his Dharmatic Entertainment. Lobato notes that "censorship is a delicate issue in India" as channels like Comedy Central and Fashion TV have been taken-off air for violating the Cable Television Regulation Amendment Act (*Netflix Nations* 123). Streaming platforms were formally unregulated in India until March 2021 when the government decided to bring them under their purview through an amendment in India's IT Act. Thus, Netflix—which had committed to broadcast uncensored content in India—has been forced to follow the government's censorship and regulation laws. Many have criticized the Amendment for curtailing freedom of speech and expression. Discussions on the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill 2023 which intends to strengthen the government's regulatory and censorship powers over streaming platforms is still ongoing in the Indian parliament. In 2021, right-wing activists filed cases against Amazon and the makers of *Tandav,* a political drama, for allegedly defaming the Indian government and the Hindu religion. The makers apologized and Amazon had to delete the 'objectionable' scenes.

The series has reportedly been canceled by Amazon. Similarly, Netflix executives were issued summons for hurting ‘religious sentiments’ over an interfaith romantic angle on *A Suitable Boy* (Schmall; Masih; The Hindu Bureau). In wake of these controversies, Netflix has shelved the release of award-winning filmmaker Dibakar Banerjee’s completed political drama *Tees* and rethinking frequent collaborator Anurag Kashyap’s *Maximum City* whereas Amazon Prime Video has stalled the second season of crime drama *Paatal Lok* (Shackleton). Other platforms too have had to adhere to the government’s guidelines. Hotstar—and now JioCinema—did not air HBO’s *Last Week Tonight* episode criticizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi whereas content like *While We Watched*, a documentary highlighting India's declining press freedom, did not get buyers. By adhering to such pressures and laws, streaming platforms, including Netflix, are intensely “territorialized” given the revenue potential of the region. In other words, rather than backing its producers and their freedom of expression, streaming platforms are likely to tow the authorities’ official line and resort to geo-blocking practices (Khalil and Zayani 206). This is especially true for Netflix, which has not been in India for as long as other platforms—through their parent companies, that have significant investments in India.

3.1 A Note on Cricket and Live Sports

Any analysis of streaming platforms in India is incomplete without an investigation into sports broadcasting. Disney India owns the exclusive Indian rights to broadcast English Premier League and Wimbledon on its several sports channels. India is the largest consumer of online sports in the word, with a consumption of 1.9 billion hours or “almost a third of global time spent on sports apps” (FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 80), which contextualizes Disney’s need to livestream games on Hotstar, differentiating the service from its competitors. Eventually, platforms like SonyLIV and JioCinema also delved into offering live sports. However, it is the live streaming of cricket which was, until 2023, the jewel in Hotstar's crown. The colonial game of cricket enjoys a prime position in India's cultural psyche, triumphing over other sports and cutting through divisions of caste, class, and religion. The advent of commercial television in India coincided with the country's underdog victory at the 1983 Cricket World Cup, which turned cricketers into national icons. Between 1987 and 1999, India's cricket board—BCCI—experienced an approximate 60 percent increase in broadcasting and sponsorship revenue (B. Sen, *Of the People* 23–24, 40–41). STAR's association with Indian cricket started as early as 1993 when it was allowed to broadcast matches played in India. This synergy further propelled India into a cricketing goliath both on-and-off the pitch, contributing nearly 60 percent of the sport's global revenue (Thussu, *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* 164). The intense trolling of tennis player Maria Sharapova in 2014 for not recognizing Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar displays the revered status of cricketers in India. At the same time, cricket—as soft power—has often played a key role in normalizing tense relations between India and Pakistan. Indeed, cricket is a perfect example of cultural hybridization—a game developed in the West but appropriated and popularized globally by India. One such appropriation is the creation of a quick and short T20 format, evidenced by the Indian Premier League which has taken global sports broadcasting by storm. The IPL is modeled along the lines of sports leagues in the West; the tournament is owned and operated by the BCCI, but the teams are privately sold as franchises. Team owners include Bollywood personalities like Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta, billionaire industrialists like Mukesh Ambani and Sanjiv Goenka, and transnational hedge funds like CVC Partners and RedBird. In its inaugural 2008 season, eight IPL franchises collectively generated $724 million for the BCCI. As of 2022, the number of franchises has gone up to ten, averaging a valuation of $1 billion each, registering the highest year-on-year growth rate of 24 percent among all sporting teams. Much of IPL's success is accorded to its high viewership numbers. Nearly 650 million tuned in to watch the tournament's 2021 edition, of which 260 million live streamed matches on Hotstar (Ozanian). As such, IPL is the convenient fusion of television, cricket and Bollywood—identified as "fundamental constituents of Indian popular culture" (B. Sen, *Of the People* 23).

The success of IPL, especially on Hotstar, encouraged other conglomerates and streaming services—Amazon, a Zee-Sony joint-venture, Jio Platforms—to bid for IPL's 2023-2027 broadcasting rights. The BCCI's decision to invite separate bids for television and digital rights is also a strong evidence of India's steady shift in televisual culture—from linear television to non-linear digital streaming. Collectively, the broadcasting rights fetched a record $6.2 billion for the BCCI; while Disney India—through STAR—retained the television rights, it lost the digital streaming rights to a Jio and Paramount Global consortium (Yasir B3). In yet another disruptive strategy, Jio announced that their users could stream IPL 2023 tournament for free, and added affordances like 4K picture quality, multi-camera viewing, visual interactions, that saw 32 million concurrent viewers, 120 million total viewers, and an average watch time of 60 minutes (0:10-0:40). IPL 2023 earned a record $1.2 billion, most of which was shared between the BCCI, broadcasters, franchise owners, and fantasy gaming (F. Khan). Despite losing out on the streaming rights, STAR, however, held on to the digital rights of other tournaments like the T20 World Cup and the 2023 Cricket World Cup to ensure constant flow of sports to Hotstar users as—despite the claimed library of 100,000 hours—live cricket remains the most watched content on the platform. Mimicking Jio's strategy, Hotstar allowed free streaming of the 2023 Asia Cup and the 2023 Cricket World Cup. Despite the CWC final registering 59 million concurrent viewers, Hotstar lost nearly 22 million subscribers—or a 24 percent drop—between

April 2023 and July 2023. This was accorded to their failure to retain IPL's digital rights to the IPL, as well as their competitors' successes in acquiring other sports tournaments (Vengattil and Kalra; The Walt Disney Company, "Third Quarter and Nine Months Earnings for Fiscal 2023" 5). While Jio won the streaming rights to IPL, all Indian cricket team matches, the FIFA World Cup and the upcoming 2024 Paris Olympics; SonyLIV holds the rights to all tennis grand slams but Wimbledon, UEFA Champions League football, the WWE, and cricket matches played by England and Pakistan—India's traditional cricket rivals—and livestreamed the 2022 Tokyo Olympics.

Netflix, however, consistent with its global strategy on live sports, decided not to bid for the IPL or Indian cricket. Instead, it has focused on exclusive sports-adjacent programming which blur the distinctions between documentaries and reality television like *Formula One: Drive to Survive* and *Take the Ball, Pass the Ball* to cater to both fans and non-fans alike. Netflix's sports adjacent programming also includes cricket-centric content such as their adaption of Arvind Adiga's *Selection Day,* a documentary on women's cricket titled *Beyond the Boundary*, and a documentary on the cricket match-fixing controversy of the 1990s *Caught Out: Crime, Corruption, Cricket*. So, while Hotstar, and JioCinema live stream IPL, Netflix produced an exclusive docuseries on the inner functioning—interviews, strategy meets, athletes'' stories—of the IPL's most successful team, owned—interestingly—by Mukesh Ambani, in *Cricket Fever: Mumbai Indians*. While Netflix said that it was unsure how live sports would increase revenue ("FQ1 2022 Pre Recorded Earnings Call Transcripts" 16), the success of live sports on Hotstar, JioCinema, SonyLIV, and even Amazon Prime Video complicates this notion. Amazon has invested heavily in both live streaming football and tennis matches in the UK, as well as sports-adjacent programming with their successful *All or Nothing* docuseries, and the Emmy-nominated cricket-based *Inside Edge* drama. Similarly, the London-based DAZN—termed as the 'Netflix of sports'—offers live and on-demand streaming of major sports tournaments including football, rugby, cycling, field hockey across 200 territories, thereby posting a revenue of $2.3 billion in 2022 (Walsh). Thus, the successful adoption of live streaming of sports by Indian audiences must compel Netflix to review their position on sports broadcasting.

4. The Economic Factors: Model, Pricing and Synergy

Netflix's relative inability to penetrate the Indian audiences could also be attributed to the economic factors. Most of the streaming platforms operating in India—domestic-owned and foreign-owned—introduced themselves by adopting hybrid models, competitive pricing and effective synergy between verticals. Unlike its competitors, Netflix had no major revenue stream other than user-generated subscriptions, most of which it spent on licensing and producing content. While Netflix expected that their loyal audience base would subsidize its operating costs, trends in India do suggest otherwise. The growing competition in the global streaming market and rising production costs have led Netflix to increase its subscription rates which led to a fluctuation in users and, thus, operating revenue. Despite earning a total revenue of $30 billion in 2021, Netflix announced that its Q4 2021 net loss increased to $403 million from $138 million a year ago ("Netflix Fourth Quarter 2021 - Letter to Shareholder" 1, 6). A major factor behind Netflix's sluggish performance in India has been attributed to its traditional insistence on a global homogenized pricing policy that made it the market leader elsewhere. It did not realize that, in 2016, India's streaming market was in a nascent stage of evolution as internet plans were expensive and audiences were reluctant to pay extra on subscription-based video services, looking at other cheaper—as well as illicit—alternatives such as bootlegs and piracy (BCG and CII, *Blockbuster Script for the New Decade* 32–33; Lobato, *Netflix Nations* 126). Linear television also remains a profitable venture in India with nearly 200 million pay television households, thanks to sports and vernacular content (BCG and CII, *Shaping the Future of Indian M&E* 20).

Unlike Netflix, domestic streaming services, especially Hotstar, realized the pulse and attitudes of the local audiences and launched themselves as an advertiser-supported free model to complement STAR's television operations rather than bypassing it. It was only following the Jio Effect that Hotstar introduced premium but cost-effective subscription-based plans. In other words, while Netflix in India still relies predominantly on paid subscriptions, Hotstar operates as a hybrid model offering both advertiser-supported free plans, as well as premium subscription-based options to its users—a successful strategy that has been mimicked by others including SonyLIV, JioCinema and Amazon Prime Video. Netflix was launched at a relatively high monthly fee of $7.50, which led to its branding as a premium, foreign, imperial service catered toward the upper-class. In 2021, Netflix attempted to rectify their pricing policy by slashing its costs by 60 percent in India as well as introduced a cheaper smartphone-only option—given the fact that India is the world's second largest smartphone market where 70 percent of its 800 million users consume nearly 500 billion hours of video content (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 59–60). Despite the slashing of prices, Netflix's plans still range between $2 or $10 per month, or $120 annually, for 4K-high resolution picture quality and a maximum of four supported devices. This is still quite high compared to Hotstar and JioCinema—who offer the same resolution, more content—more local content specifically, multiple device support for a yearly price of $20. Additionally, most streaming platforms operating in India are offered at discounted rates or bundles through India's leading telecom providers of Jio, Airtel and Vi; as well as satellite and cable TV providers like Tata Play, Airtel Black, and Hathway. This process of ‘coopetition; ensures a win-win situation for both the telecom operators and streaming platforms. The former provides the affordable, high-speed home and mobile internet—smartphones in the case of Jio LYF—needed to access and view content whereas the latter taps into the telecom userbase to increase their viewership and revenues. Such coopetition also helps relatively smaller platforms to gain subscribers and stay competitive (Bouquillion and Ithurbide 8). For example, Jio's multiple prepaid plans offer access to nearly 15 streaming platforms, including Hotstar and its own JioCinema. Vi's basic $7 monthly cellular plans come with a free or discounted annual subscription to Hotstar premium and Amazon Prime Video's smartphone only plan. Even the state-owned BSNL offers discounted subscriptions to multiple streaming plans. As of 2021, nearly 325 million subscribers "consumed bundled content offered by telcos" (FICCI and EY, *Tuning into Consumer* 75). But while Hotstar, SonyLIV, Zee5 are mostly offered by these telecom providers across their prepaid and postpaid plans, Netflix was—for long—offered mostly by Airtel, Jio, Tata Play on their higher-end, expensive postpaid plans. This further hampered Netflix in meeting their financial targets in a country where 93 percent of mobile owners prefer the cost-effective prepaid service bundles to postpaid plans (TRAI, *January – March, 2022* 52). However, this coopetition between telecom operators and streaming platforms is far from perfect. Despite the symbiotic relationship, telecom operators in India, including Jio, have demanded that streaming platforms and tech companies like Amazon and Meta, collectively termed as ‘large traffic generating' platforms, pay a fair share to use their networks. The telcos collectively stated "disproportionate amount of data traffic on the network" (Abbas) used by these LTGs is borne exclusively by the telecom companies which, according to them, affects their capacity to contribute and enhance India's digital infrastructure. According to Jio, this share should be decided mutually, on the basis of "volume of traffic, turnover threshold, number of users and other criteria" (The Times of India). This would likely affect the economic performances of Netflix, Amazon, Zee and Sony and most streaming platforms in India that do not operate cellular services. If this proposal is agreed, JioCinema would have to share revenue with its parent company as well as Airtel and Vi. Additionally, Jio would also—due to its position as India's largest cellular operator—accumulate receivables from JioCinema's competitors which would ensure Jio enjoy a prime position in India's entertainment and broadcasting sector.

In addition to partnering with telecom operators, Netflix's competitors opted for innovative strategies to boost subscriptions. Much like Netflix did in its early DVD days, Zee Media partnered with electronic companies like Samsung, LG and Xiaomi, who not only offered Zee5 subscriptions at discounted rates but also carried the platform as a preloaded app. This strategy of preloading streaming apps also ensured the survival of the television industry as the smart TV sales increased to 25 million sets, as of 2022, which is expected to reach 40 million by 2025 due to the pan-Indian rollout of 5G technology (FICCI and EY, *Windows of Opportunity* 48). Streaming platforms also roped in tech companies to strengthen their AI-based algorithms and increase reach by forging Hindi and regional interfaces. They also organized elaborate marketing events and features such as watch parties, and simultaneous interactive quizzes, polls and sing-alongs to boost their userbase, all of which proved beneficial (Sharma and Lulandala 70–71). In addition to these strategies, some platforms also signed collaborative deals to maximize their reach and revenues. For example, Balaji Telefilms' content is available not only on their ALTT platform but also Zee5, SonyLIV, Hotstar and JioCinema. This brings us to another key economic factor behind Netflix's struggles in India.

While most streaming platforms in India operate at a loss (Taurani), they have recorded a steady increase in subscription revenue during and following the Covid-19 pandemic. However, most of these platforms, except Netflix, are largely subsidized by other profitable ventures of their parent companies. As explained earlier, Disney views Hotstar as a complementary service to its portfolio which includes a thriving television network of nearly 60 channels across genres and languages. Disney also owns Fox Star Studio, a film production and distribution subsidiary, and has significant stakes and investments in Indian Super League football and pro-Kabaddi League—thereby ensuring a constant flow of sports broadcasting. It also has a minority stake in Tata Play, India's largest satellite TV service provider (TRAI, *Annual Report 2020-21* 50). Much of these were inherited by Disney through its acquisition of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox, which also makes Hotstar a significant asset in Disney's global operations that further includes theme parks, merchandising, comic books, film and TV, animation studios and venture funds. Similarly, Sony and Zee—much like Disney-STAR and Network18—operate multiple channels across genres, own a thriving television business across genres, across multiple languages. Sony, interestingly, also benefits from its global operations that also include consumer products, especially smart TVs and PlayStation gaming consoles which now come with streaming and gaming apps inbuilt. In addition to electronics, Sony also owns Columbia Pictures, Crunchyroll—which produces anime, and Sony Music—which integrates worldwide, including India, to subsidize and boost its presence in the streaming market. Balaji Telefilms Limited was established in 1994 by the Emmy-winning Ekta Kapoor, the 'queen' of Indian television. The company has produced some of the most-watched, longest-running, revolutionary soap operas on Indian television (Gopal 187), since the mid-1990s. Over the years, Balaji has diversified into motion pictures and digital streaming. While Balaji does not own television networks and channels, it produces profitable primetime soap operas for Network18, Disney-STAR, Zee and Sony. These programs—current productions and past offerings—are broadcast not only on their ALTT streaming platform but also the streaming platforms of the first-run network. By doing so, ALTT ensures a friendly relationship with operators but also a constant flow of revenue sharing from these platforms. ALTT also, on the other hand, carries exclusive content, some of which it uploaded to their YouTube channel for free to attract subscribers and boost revenues. Kapoor has been criticized for her television serials which have been termed as 'regressive' but she contends that her audience and her critics come from two different strata of society (Matzner 1249). However, she does acknowledge that streaming—unlike television—is not "one size fit all" and the streaming audience wants more edgy content compared to the "vanilla" content offered by linear television (Ramachandran). So, while Balaji Telefilms makes daily soaps like *Bade Achhe Lagte Hain* and *Kundali Bhagya* for television, they produced web series on subjects like queer rights—*His Story* and *The Married Woman;* nationalism—*Code M* and *Bose: Dead/Alive*; and sexuality—*Gandi Baat* and *XXX.* Balaji also gains from the influence of Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries, which has a 25 percent stake in Kapoor's company.

Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Limited has a market capitalization of $245 billion, which is not only more than the GDP of oil-rich economies of Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, but also more than the market cap of Disney and Comcast (S. Khan). Reliance started as a textile trading company in 1966 and eventually diversified into oil and chemicals, energy, retail and broadcasting. While Reliance formally entered the media business through its investment and subsequent takeover of Network18 in 2012, it did traditionally wield considerable economic—and political—influence over media houses. According to business scholar Paul Caussat, Reliance resorted to "intimidating yet questionable legal actions" (215) against publications that critiqued their business interests and practices. While Caussat labels Reliance's business practices as dubious (Caussat 216), the company positions itself as a nationalistic enterprise. Reliance's late founder Dhirubhai Ambani likened the company's success as "a reflection of India's capabilities" (1), a sentiment that was echoed by Mukesh Ambani's launch of Jio and linking its growth with the development of Digital India. Reliance celebrates Dhirubhai's birth anniversary as Family Day wherein Mukesh Ambani addresses stockholders, consumers and employees as Dhirubhai's family members (C. Kumar), thereby blending traditional Indian values of community with contemporary ideals of individual growth. In fact, one could surmise that Indian consumers resonate and connect with Reliance's nationalistic branding and Dhirubhai Ambani's rags-to-riches story—further buoyed by the value-for-money offerings—that makes them trust and adopt Reliance's goods and services. In addition to Jio Platforms and its other media verticals discussed earlier, Reliance's flagship oil-to-chemicals business generated a revenue of $72.4 billion in 2022-23 which supplements its other verticals (Reliance Industries 3). Reliance is India's largest offsite and online retailer in terms of reach. According to their 2022-2023 Annual Report, Reliance Retail Ventures Limited registered a consolidated revenue of $32 billion; it not only controls the India operations of global brands like GAP and Pret A Manger but also complements the JioMart app offered by Jio Platforms (2, 10). Reliance also funds the multi-purpose conventional auditoriums like the Jio World Center and the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Center, which host indigenous art and cultural exhibitions and global events like the 2024 Miss World pageant, thereby bridging local and global values and practices. The company also owns the Mumbai Indians, the most successful franchise of the IPL and is a majority stakeholder and organizer of the Indian Super League football. Reliance also revealed investments in other ventures including Welspuns, Ritu Kumar Fashion, East India

Hotels, and Balaji Telefilms Limited (Reliance Industries 434, 439).The Seattle-based Amazon is a trillion-dollar tech enterprise whose interests ranges from e-commerce, AI and cloud computing, home security and satellites. Traditionally, Prime Video was one of the bundled services offered to Amazon's premium Prime subscribers which included faster deliveries, e-book loans, Amazon Music, audiobooks and photo storage. Furthermore, Shattuc views Amazon as a predominantly film producer than a television producer due to its high proportion of original, exclusive films on its platform, which also differentiates them from Netflix—which is focusing more on television titles than films (151). This is also evidenced from Amazon's $8.5 billion acquisition of the 4000-film rich MGM Holdings, which makes them the exclusive owners and carriers of the James Bond and Rocky franchises (Diaz). Amazon Prime Video has carried as many as 70 India-centric original films, and nearly over 20 original series which are offered in multiple languages. Despite not investing much in television production, Amazon Prime Video had India's most-streamed television series in *Farzi* with a viewership of nearly 40 million (Ormax Media, *Streaming Originals in India* 5). Amazon was also among the first streamers to exhibit mainstream Bollywood films like *Gulabo Sitabo* and *Coolie No.1* affected by the theatrical closure during the pandemic. As early as 2016, Amazon realized that "about one-fourth of the Prime signups are primarily for the video streaming" (Shattuc 151) which prompted the company to offer Amazon Prime Video as a standalone service worldwide. In India, Prime Video can be accessed through an annual Prime subscription, which costs as little as $20 per year, or as an annual standalone service for as little as $7—cheaper than a basic Netflix subscription. Amazon also boosts revenues though its brick-and-mortar retail business, as well as through their Fire Stick device which not only transforms 'unsmart' television sets into smart televisions, but also comes with pre-installed Amazon apps, including Prime Video.

5. Netflix's Recent Attempts at Rectification

In recent years, Netflix has attempted to shed their premium, foreign-owned, imperialist image by localizing themselves through acquisitions, partnerships, hiring experienced Indian executives and raising investments. Netflix tried to localize their price and slashed subscription costs by nearly 60 percent in 2022. Currently, their lowest one-screen, SD mobile-only plan costs $2 per month, or $20 annually, and their highest four-screen, UHD Premium plan costs $8 per month, or $100 annually. Despite slashing prices, however, its pricing is still steeper than its domestic competitors—in a crowded streaming market—who offer the same affordances as well as more that differentiate themselves from Netflix in terms of content and business models. Netflix, globally, is also experimenting with an ad-supporting model, a significant shift from their initial position of being commercial-free. The company also decided to prevent sharing of accounts and is contemplating charging extra for shared accounts. These strategies saw Netflix's subscription base increase to 260 million worldwide, adding 13 million in the fourth quarter of 2023. It also registered record revenue growth of $33.5 billion, and profit of $5 billion ("Netflix Fourth Quarter 2023 - Letter to Shareholder" 1; *2023 Annual Report* 39), which it attributed to "the benefits of paid sharing, our recent price changes and the strength of our underlying business driven by a strong slate" ("Netflix Fourth Quarter 2023 - Letter to Shareholder" 2). The company diversified its genre portfolio to include unscripted game shows as well as live events, including sports, evidenced by the airing of the Screen Actors Guild Awards and an exhibition tennis match between Spanish stalwarts Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz. The company, in a reversal of a previous position, signaled their intention of foraying into live programming by announcing an exclusive partnership with WWE. Interestingly, Netflix entered the mobile gaming industry in November 2019 to diversify its revenue stream. The company said that while it was early to gauge the profitability of their games, it was making significant investments, through their subscription-generated revenue, in the sector through acquisitions and developing a gaming studio ("FQ4 2021 Pre Recorded Earnings Call" 14). Netflix intends to move into 'casual and core gaming genres' based on user's data-driven engagement patterns ("Netflix Fourth Quarter 2021 - Letter to Shareholder" 5), much like their streaming business' narrowcasting strategy. The company not only introduced games based on their successful titles like *Stranger Things* and *Money Heist*, but they also licensed mobile versions of *Football Manager* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Netflix said that they were "stoked with the performance of GTA" which exceeded their expectations ("FQ4 2023 Earnings Call Transcripts" 11). Netflix also announced that it would publish a bi-annual report that would reveal the viewership of their original programs, that would potentially increase transparency and complement its ad-tier business. In India, they have also started localizing their content and entered the vernacular business; some of its popular titles in the past year include the unscripted *Indian Matchmaking* and *The Romantics* documentary, registering nearly 6 million views each in India, and global consumption of 7.6 million hours and 10 million hours respectively. Six India-centric Original films also featured in the top 20 most-streamed movies of 2023, all of them crossing 9 million views each (Ormax Media, *Streaming Originals in India* 6–7; Netflix Inc). The long-term effects of these strategies on their performance in India and globally are yet to be seen. However, there is no denying that the socio-cultural affordance that once made Netflix dictate and run the global streaming market suffered a reality-check in India.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Netflix's domestic competitors—JioCinema, SonyLIV, Zee5, Hotstar—did not feel the need to 'introduce' itself to the Indian masses as it banked on the popularity and influence of their parent companies. They used their extensive experiences in India to basically transfer their television and film businesses onto an advertiser-supported, affordable digital platform and eventually to a premium subscription model at opportune times. Unlike Netflix, these companies identified the "potency and even the primacy of the local" (B. Sen, "Big Brother, Bigg Boss" 202) by catering to every Indian audience's need—live sports, news, regional cinema, television as well as international content. It is due to their effective strategies of hybridity and glocalization that has made them dominate the world leader in a country of one billion.

The cultural hybridity framework builds upon Stuart Hall's thesis wherein he prioritizes the agency of the receiver in either accepting or rejecting, partially or completely, of an encoded cultural text and Bhabha's theory on the 'mimicry' of the colonizers' culture by the colonized. The framework posits that information flow is not unilateral but multilateral and such globalization of culture cannot be synonymized with just a singular, homogenous node of Americanization; rather, it is one of the multiple competing nodes of globalization. Appadurai argues that this fluid process of globalization, while deploying the instruments of homogenization, are 'absorbed into local political and cultural economies' and repackaged into 'heterogenous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise'(596). Such hybridity involves concepts of mixing and assimilation of ideas and values between a dominant cultural member's identity and the larger society which, in turn, gives birth to a 'global mélange'(Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization" 658). Iwabuchi invokes hybridity as a form of transculturation, defined as an uneven mélange of differing cultures thereby creating a fresh cultural style or product(Iwabuchi 40). Such transculturation or hybridity or 'glocalization' transcends and agglomerates the local, regional, national and the global, evidenced by the developments in India's entertainment sector following the 1991 liberalization which broke the state monopoly over broadcasting. Liberalization also saw the emergence of an aspirational, affluent, English-speaking middle-class which made the densely populated India a desirable market for transnational media companies(Dwyer 225; Thussu, "Mapping Global Media Flow and Contra-Flow" 222). Hybridity took centerstage in their revenue-generating strategies which included Universal's decision to dub *Jurassic Park* in Hindi, and the Rupert Murdoch-owned STAR's partnership with the India-based Zee to repackage Western programs with Indian values. Cultural hybridization, or the successful symbiosis of global capital and infrastructure with local aesthetics, in India is evidenced by the establishment of American-style multiplexes, lucrative distribution deals with domestic and diasporic producers, and institutional support (Govil, "India: Hollywood's Domination..." 286, 289; S. Kumar 6–8). Another example of such hybridity can be found in Sen's analysis of reality TV formats, which may be predominantly 'Western' but the content it produces—or the implementation of the formats—is a highly localized process. The format of *Big Brother* remains homogeneous; 12 participants locked in a house, menial tasks and weekly eliminations but the text created is heterogeneous based on geographical, social and political conditions. While the Dutch version sends winners to a 'wealthy house' and losers to a 'poor house,' the blind adoption of such a text could prove controversial in an emerging economy like India. Similarly, the Indian version, *Bigg Boss,* has always been hosted by Bollywood stars, unlike the UK or US versions, due to India's high level of celebrity culture (B. Sen, "Big Brother, Bigg Boss" 207—208). Accordingly, the failure of American subscription-based networks like MTV-Desi has been attributed to the broadcasters' inability to successfully hybridize and understand the consumption habits of the larger, diverse South Asian diaspora (Punathambekar 157). These examples add credence to Kraidy's assertion that hybridization of cultural products is inevitable in a neoliberal world to dominate local, and thereby global, markets (Kraidy 333). In other words, there can be no globalization of culture without successful localization of culture and the present study investigated just that by looking at the rise of India's media landscape, the rise of streaming revolution, and the economic and cultural and economic factors behind the performances of Netflix and its competitors in India. Netflix's premium pricing, lack of vertical integration, inability to read the Indian audiences' sensibilities, lack of vernacular content and everlasting reliance on subscription revenue affected its performance in India. It wouldn't be unfair to say that the strategies that made Netflix dominate the streaming industry in the world came to an abrupt but logical halt in India.

CONCLUSION

This present study examines the consequences of a post-2000s shift from traditional, linear broadcasting toward the digital, non-linear streaming of cultural texts that have raised a completely new set of questions about contemporary media technologies. Such phenomena have, additionally, complicated the tenets of cultural imperialism, globalization and hybridity that global media scholarship has traditionally relied upon. My thesis attempts to investigate these queries using historical methods; archival, textual and document research; and discourse analysis. The first chapter is an overview of communications in India where I draw on historical analysis to highlight that the subcontinent, until the 1990s, was highly resistant to foreign cultural imports, especially from the West. The liberalization of India's closed economy altered the Indian middle class's consumption patterns and lifestyle which saw the end of state-owned broadcasting and the mushrooming of glocalized media networks, notably Rupert Murdoch's STAR network which is now owned by Disney. The chapter also analyzes India's centuries-old links with the world, colonial media flows, and the post-colonial export of Indian media in the global South. The second chapter moved onto the growth of streaming platforms, especially Netflix, from a niche, nascent mail-order DVD technology to a data-driven global giant to argue that the new and remediated affordances of these platforms have perplexed the traditional logic of broadcasting and communication flows dictated by legacy media. This chapter also looks at Netflix's strategic positioning as both a technology-based and media-centric corporation and scrutinizes the tapping of India's media industry by Netflix, Disney and other streaming giants. The third chapter brings the two arguments together and examines how streaming platforms are navigating the historic and present challenges posed by India's media industry in terms of content, pricing, challenges from telecom companies, among others. By reviewing the performances of Netflix, Jio Cinema, Disney+Hotstar and other platforms, I conclude that the strategies that made Netflix rule the global streaming market came to a halt in India, which necessitated some revision of their cultural and economic strategies.

Netflix has taken some remedial steps to counter slow growth, maximize revenues and fend off competition from domestic and global platforms. In addition to investing in mobile gaming, they have also decided to charge extra for people sharing subscriptions. Netflix, which had once vowed to remain ad-free, also succumbed to performance pressures and rolled out a beta ad-supported plan. In India, they have also taken the 'regional' market seriously, evidenced by their aggressive dubbing and subtitling of popular Bollywood acquisitions and productions like *Jawan* and *Guns and Gulaab*; as well as vernacular content like the Punjabi-language *Kohrra,* and the Tamil-language *Leo*. The platform also taps into the current affairs genre by producing 'newsy' crime-based documentaries like *Bad Boy Billionaires; Buried Truth: The Indrani Mukerjea Story,* and *Curry and Cyanide*. It's not just Netflix that struggles in India; Disney+Hotstar, which is still the domestic leader, suffered significant losses in subscribers due to their inability to renew the digital rights to Indian cricket and the IPL, as we have explained in the previous chapter. This loss in subscribers, combined with boardroom pressures and target misses worldwide, led Disney to merge its India operations with Mukesh Ambani's media business. This new $8.5 billion entity would be majority owned by Reliance Industries, with Disney, James Murdoch and former STAR CEO Uday Shankar, who would head this new company, as minority partners. The socio-cultural effects of Netflix's remedial methods, as well as the performance of this upcoming Reliance-Disney platform; in addition to the ongoing shifts in digital technologies—new questions surrounding augmented and virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and a rejuvenation of age-old questions of capital and infrastructure flows, convergence and media oligopoly—could be further lines of inquiry, that would add to the discipline of communication research.

As far as this study is concerned, I have contributed to the existing scholarship on global media by analyzing the effects of contemporary communication technologies— in this case digital streaming—on traditional media practices. The roadblocks that Netflix encountered in India suggest that platform studies, or technology studies, need to be complemented by global media studies to get a complete understanding of new forms. The relative struggles of Netflix in India—and the effective techniques deployed by Hotstar, JioCinema and other platforms compel us to revisit key aspects of global media studies. Scholarship must focus on local conditions, not just in terms of culture and ideology but also in the socio-economic sense—investigating what kind of products and distribution channels are likely to succeed in specific markets and locales. In conclusion, my investigation of the streaming industry in the digital-friendly territory of India proves that in the arena of global media, conglomerates and technologies must smear their messages, platforms and texts with local aesthetics, rituals, and values and for effective diffusion, consumption, and adoption.

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