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AUTOMATION OF THE EVERYDAY: SCREEN CULTURES AND THE YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary times, irrespective of the media texts we interact with and consume, the form in which it is available to us, the form in which we consume it, i.e., the screen, remains a dominant one. We are interfacing with screens in everyday life and every screen that we consume brings with it and exists within certain cultural practices. The everyday lived experience of people is also progressively mediated by the screen. This paper looks at the increasing popularity of the smartphone screen as a ubiquitous device of the everyday, and its use by the youth for consumption of video content. Arguing that the everyday mediation of the smartphone screen occurs within a regime of automation, this paper suggests a deeply entangled relationship of co-constitution between the screen and the user in the automation of this mediation. Everyday life and screen then interpenetrate, where the screen becomes a site for practices and relationships, engaged by users to make sense of their worlds and the technology itself.

Keywords: Screen, Automation, Smartphone, OTT, Youth

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1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone alive today was born after the arrival of moving images, and consequently has had some or the other screen experience(s). In contemporary times, irrespective of the media texts we interact with and consume—be it news, games, films, television, advertisements or personal communication—the form in which it is available to us, the form in which we consume it, i.e., the screen, remains a dominant one. Monteiro (2017) In reflecting on 'the screen' calls it many things – a form, an interface, even a format (when content is specifically created for different screens). The screen then comprises of moving images or to 'make move', a modern form of our visual culture which is littered and mediated with screens – films, television, video games, billboards, computers, laptops, tablets and the smartphone. We are surrounded by screen media proliferated by screen technologies, producing screen cultures and practices around us.

Irrespective of the screen we refer to, it continues to exist within a technological structure evolving out of shifting socio-economic conditions and cultural practices. We are steeped in screens and images, the visual in many ways overtaking the print and oral. We are interfacing with screens in everyday life and every screen that we consume brings with it and exists within certain cultural practices. The everyday lived experience of people is also progressively

mediated by the screen. Not just for media production and consumption, but the mundane and banal is also negotiated through the screen. For instance, we can now study and teach, learn to cook and perform those recipes via the screen, and as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us, businesses can solely run by having its employees working virtually, or even marriages conducted online with both partners separated by distance, solemnized on a video call, all on the screen. The screens may be multiple but the social, cultural and technological importance of screen media in unfolding our contemporary times is uncontested. The screen then is a cultural technology that creates artefacts having economic value and generates meanings. And this interaction between screen technologies and media produces this screen culture.

With the evolution of multiple screens, the concomitant screen cultures have also changed. The very development of screen media from cinema (the mass culture of watching films in the cinema hall) to television (domestic and public viewing practices and its contexts) to mobile devices (individual screen experiences) demonstrate the transition of screen cultures as well. Mediated primarily by the smartphone screen now, our social networks and mobile applications have produced very specific and particular formations that have made possible the contemporary screen culture.

The increasing popularity of the smartphone screen as a ubiquitous device, points towards how it is at once an idea, media and technology, and our engagement with it in everyday experience has made it one of the dominant screens of our lives. The contemporary smartphone screen, in opposition to cinema, television, mobile phone, computer and laptop, signals towards new frameworks which determine the relationships between technologies, culture and individuals, and requires us to address the materiality and digitality of these technologies and techno-cultures produced.

Subsequently this study brings the questions of screen cultures produced and the forms of engagement specifically with respect to the smartphone screen in contemporary times. This research engages with the emerging screen cultures formed, expressed and negotiated in and around the smartphone screen, and played out on various applications and platforms that facilitate the formation, interaction and projection of the self, specifically with reference to the youth and OTT platforms. The contemporary screens are both a site of production as well as consumption, where users select, examine and produce visual information. The smartphone screen then becomes a route for receiving media content, producing our own content, and accessing other applications for communicating with others. This makes the screen an important object of study in contemporary social life. The youth forms the major user base of smartphone screens and by extension the Internet. This makes it crucial to study the interplay between formations of youth identity, cultural practices and the role of the screen.

Additionally, the issue of media autonomy assumes significance here, due to the developments in the field of information and communication technologies, where the software has agency of its own, partly authorized by the subject though. Selling automation to consumers has ranged from water dispensers, to washing machines, refrigerators, watches, computers and the phone, among a long list of other products. We automate certain functions and processes because we feel they do not require human intervention, thinking and time. The smartphone screen carries out most of its functions automatically, for instance, using voice recognition to take voice commands to carry out tasks, such as messaging, replying to emails, searching on the Internet, playing music, answering questions, among others. These smartphones work as digital assistants, as little helpers to the users of the phone in the form of Google Assistant (available on most Android phones) and Apple's Siri.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the context of robots and automation a difference has been made between simulacra (devices that simulate) and automata (devices that move on their own) by distinguishing them and arguing that the former looks like a human whereas the latter does not need to as long as it works like a human (Baudrillard, 1997). Here he was offering a shift in the ideas of simulation and automation by suggesting that after the Industrial Revolution, there was a move towards non-human like machines that could work like humans, functionally by duplication. Technologies of automation then replace human labour with machine labour, where automata seem to possess their own agency by becoming relatively autonomous, i.e., artificial intelligence (AI). It can be called classical 'automation' when it seems to imitate human intelligence in machines, and 'connectionist' when it is concerned with producing machine intelligence regardless of whether it resembles human intelligence (Lister et al, 2009). This reveals that the tension of automation and choice can be resolved with the understanding that just as machines use tools to imitate human behavior and actions, humans can also be the tools for artificial intelligence machines. This does not suggest that technology does not evolve to human

needs and uses, but that there are possibilities and points of large-scale technological self-augmentation which produce a disruption or 'crisis' in technology (Ellul, 1977).

Andrejevic (2020) in his work on automated media presents a theoretical framework to understand digital media and algorithms. He canvases a wide breadth of contemporary technology platforms to argue that automated media are distinguished by a) pre-emption, b) operationalism and c) environmentality. He sees these characteristics as signaling a shift from representational to non-representational media and his productive analysis of the contemporary mediascape extends from these features. In discussing surveillance, he elaborates on how Artificial Intelligence systems make predictions on the basis of accessed data to move from documenting to pre-empting violence, for instance. In borrowing from Foucault, Andrejevic speaks of an environment of surveillance that now surrounds us, apart from the internalization of that sense of discipline. He exemplifies this with examples of smart home technologies that embrace this disciplining environmental power of surveillance. In discussing the contemporary non-representational mediascape, he speaks of how the machine and its codes collapse any difference between the signifier and signified, by working with an operational image instead. While this idea is seductive and compelling, it completely rejects the possibility of any abstraction, something that has been argued by for instance, Crawford and Paglen (2021) in their discussion on how data sets can be biased and highly structured. For Andrejevic there is no divide between reality and data, and building from a psychoanalytic framework, he suggests that automated media are bereft of any desire, for everything is already known to them. Hence by extension this very lack of desire threatens human agency for the machines pre-empt what the human body needs. Consequently, for him the machines will never develop their own desire or agency, but might eliminate ours. While Andrejevic's analysis might seem alarmist, he is not overfitting his arguments because the screen, the technology and the platforms treat data as the governing rationale, learning from pre-existing data, and eventually adapting to it based on their own logic, and this finally complicates the relationship between human and non-human agency during mediated screen experiences.

Taking AI and data-gathering perspectives further, Zuboff (2016) in her work on the current age of technology companies points out that we are now seeing a form of economic oppression via surveillance capitalism as opposed to the exploitation of labour and resources during industrial capitalism. She calls this 'instrumentarianism' of how contemporary companies collect information for analytics and programming, thereby privileging data over humans. She sees this as driven by a continuous need to possess and accumulate data, much like Harvey's (1990) 'digital dispossession'. For her then these companies mobilize human will and agency as a conduit to achieving their means. Her description of this process begins with incursion and habituation, followed by adaptation and redirection of users. To this purpose technology companies pretend to provide choice in tweaking the surveillance structure, something Apple has done recently in providing advertising-safety controls to its operating system users. However, she considers these tweaks as cosmetic changes masquerading as meaningful reforms, for these technology platforms exist behind opaque systems of closed codes, non-disclosure agreements and vertical organizational structures. While theoretically there are some fissures in her arguments, as she explicitly moves away from the economic determinism of Marx's critique of capitalism, but also goes on to argue against the 'technological determinism' of surveillance capitalists. Apart from some glaring issues such as these, her analysis of contemporary automated personal and home technologies in their pervasive influence, and data-gathering practices are coherent and real.

There is considerable scholarship that has emerged with respect to streaming of content online, emergence of transnational television and transformations in cinema production and distribution practices. The consolidation and concentration by traditional big media corporations has also spurred fears of media imperialism, a frame that has been used by Fitzgerald (2019) for instance to study the globalised development of OTT video services as a new international communication order. This has also been explored by Cunningham and Craig (2020) in discussing media globalization and emerging patterns of distribution and consumption, making key distinctions between social media entertainment (SME) and professionally generated content (PGC) such as those by streaming platforms. Mikos (2019) has also mapped the emergence and form of the transnational television audience with the coming of global distribution platforms such as Netflix and Amazon. Netflix has also been at the centre of a sustained examination from various perspectives, including but not limited to, its business model and conception of spectators (Zundel, 2019), its long-form programming and production practices (Jenner, 2014) and unpacking of its recommendation algorithm (Frey, 2021).

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Some of the explicit research concerns of this paper stem from the question of automation, data, human and non-human agency converging in streaming of video content or Over-the-Top (OTT) services as it's called. With a surge in smartphone sales and consumption of Internet data, a large share of OTT content is now being streamed on this screen alone (Rawat, 2019). As argued previously, the smartphone screen is embedded in everyday life, as a very intimate object, or extension of us if you like. This proximity to the screen with the subject for every other task also produces an automated content-viewing experience, guided by the algorithm, with constant notifications reminding us of watching the new releases on the application.

Over a period of time the algorithm learns the user, their behaviour, their taste, and predicts what they would like to watch and when - a personalized genre if you like. For instance, algorithms now automate classification of users into distinct categories, based on the data mined and fed to a machine (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). This in turn helps them understand and interpret human actions and possible behaviours. This assumes that non-human agency can automate human behavior to the point of offering specific content it thinks the user would watch, and maybe should watch. What are the points then, when users might challenge this arrangement, if at all they do? Are the possibilities of interactivity being realized? What are the experiential dimensions of streaming on screen and how are they different from previous mediums? How does opaque discoverability of content on these platforms shape the subject's experience of the content and the screen? How do memes, and other social media posts act as a reference funnel which might influence choice of content being watched on these platforms. This automation of curation of cultural content has also reconfigured production practices and signals a shift in terms of writing and narrative styles. Barring the existing television and cinematic content available on the platforms, what discursive formations are influencing the original content being created by these platforms? How are intimacies and the representations of these intimacies being mediated via the screen?

4. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted for the most part between 2020-2021. I have used an analytical framework with mixed methods, since the screen-object poses a theoretical challenge and demands the need for an innovative methodology to engage with it. I have pursed some of the implicit concerns in the phenomenology of media, which is approaching it via automation and non-human agency. Informed by approaches of hermeneutic phenomenology, my work moves away from the conundrum of doubleness of agency and technology, between choice and impact, as any neat separations will not be fruitful. The main argument is that relationship of the screen and mediation should not be placed in a hierarchy, as both the medium and experience cannot be reduced. Flowing from the theoretical framework which supports the ontological perspective of multiple realities, the self-reflexive methods used acknowledge the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon. The researcher is interactively and creatively linked with the conditions of mediated play experiences via the screen.

The method will begin with a process of self-reflection (i) where the researcher's knowledge, assumptions and beliefs about the nature and conditions of mediated screen experience that are embedded in the interpretative process will be explicitly stated. This would entail including personal observations in juxtaposition with (ii) interpretation of information gathered from research participants via interviews and observations, as well as (iii) representation of these experience outside the context of this research including, films, memes, advertisements and videos. The guiding impetus for selecting research participants was based on the criteria that they be young men and women between the ages of 18-25. Additionally, it was crucial that they had a lived experience of the screen in terms of consumption of OTT content. The attempt was to include participants who were willing to talk about these experiences, and came from diverse backgrounds in order to facilitate a rich thick description and stories of their particular experiences. My interviews were held with middle-class and upper middle-class English speaking groups in Delhi, held over video calls, audio calls and in-person. I have used pseudonyms for my participants, and wherever names are mentioned I draw on in-depth interviews which are either paraphrased or reproduced as direct quotes.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In 2015, Hotstar, a streaming application for sports games launched in India. In 2016, the global giant Netflix started its operations in India, bolstered by high-speed broadband Internet and data and cheaper data plans and increasing smartphone and tablet usage. Close on the heels was the introduction of Prime Video, the streaming platform of Amazon in 2017. What followed after this was a proliferation of streaming platforms offering various genres, including television shows, films, original content, sports, among others. Streaming services have in many ways have complimented and overtaken traditional television and cinema watching, especially more so post the Covid-19 pandemic (Singh, 2021). They offer viewing practices different from linear forms. It is not just about binge-watching, a practice hugely different and a radical shift from television/cinema watching. The everyday practices of watching OTT content also get shaped and are informed by catalogue curation, algorithmic recommendations and conditioning certain screen behaviors very distinct from television and cinema. In a now legendary article published in The Atlantic in 2014, journalist Alexis Madrigal revealed how Netflix reverse engineered Hollywood, by classifying genres running into several thousand categories, and tagging (keywords) those genres in the video content, to help with predictive analysis of audience behavior and taste. "Now, reality gets coded into data for the machines, and then decoded back into descriptions for humans." (Madrigal, 2014). It is in effect the human intelligence of producing tags and logging them (meta-data) coupled with machine intelligence of understanding these tags and throwing relevant content to the user eventually.

As mentioned earlier, the OTT industry has been dominated by tech giants, in not just distribution of content, but also production. These companies rely on their ability to collect and use various kinds of data on and about their users, which helps them create, position and offer content accordingly. The tools that help OTT platforms and audience-user's decide what to watch include peer recommendations, site-generated recommendations, and robust, multidimensional search features which allow for genre, actor and director based searches for content, much like game-play. A deeply researched article in The Atlantic in 2014 had attempted to decode how Netflix categorized and labelled its content offering to viewers, including the factors on which its algorithm is based (Madrigal, 2014). After much research and interviews by the author of the article, it was established that Netflix had reverse engineered Hollywood, by breaking down every film into emotions and moods, using its employees to view content and inscribe and tag it with emotions that it evoked. This was followed by developing an algorithm which would learn to label, slot and categorize emotions under broader brackets, which are then used to offer the audience-users as recommendations, based on their previous viewing history. This level of automation, which identifies and categorizes emotions, and tags them with other similar emotions that can be experienced as adjectives, to then automate recommendations to audience users is often referred to as the Netflix Quantum Theory. This kind of human and machine intelligence hybridity is behind Netflix's list of 'Top 10 shows in the country now' and 'What is trending' lists when audience-users access the app. Since Netflix does not divulge absolute figures of its subscriber base or the audience figures for specific content, its rating system and recommendation feature continues to be notoriously opaque and vague.

Andrejevic (2020) in the context of automation of culture argues that the production, distribution and consumption of cultural content has been relegated to automated systems, which has led to the formation of automated cultural curation. Many of my respondents spoke about how they liked the film and television show suggestions given by OTT apps, most notably Netflix and Amazon Prime, on the basis of their previous watching experience. Shweta shared how she made a point to check the trending list to see what other audience-users are watching on the platform, in addition to suggestions given to her individually by the app. A respondent explained that, "Sometimes I know what I feel like watching, at other times it is too tiring to pick, so checking what is trending helps because I don't mind being told that this is popular enough to watch. I also search by genre, because I might know the kind of film or show I feel like watching, but cannot zero down on what exactly. I feel it is a pretty good thing to have options presented like that." (Shweta, personal communication, January 12, 2021).

There are now websites which offer information on how to tweak Netflix, in terms of how to improve or change your recommendation list, or game the rules of play if you like. Amazon Prime caught up with the profiling and recommendation feature by adding the option of creating profiles, by asking 'Who is watching?' as recently as 2020. With individual profiles, Prime Video audience-users have access to their own watchlist, personalized recommendations, and the ability to track their own viewing progress, similar to rival services, like Netflix. Some other respondents also reflected on how they felt limited by the recommendations on the app, in some ways limiting them in a finite web of choices. The recommendation system on most OTT apps is driven by an algorithm which adapts to user tastes and

preferences. In some senses automating what they would like, and in many others limiting the offering based on their views. This kind of hyper-personalization increasingly uses gamification features. In the sense that it aims to customise play experiences of streaming content. A respondent complained that just because he watched a few gangster and mafia films, the app continued to recommend only that genre to him, unless he specifically made the attempt to look for another genre. He said, "It is very presumptuous of them to suggest that I will like gangster and mafia shows only. One day I watched Goodfellas and a couple of episodes of The Sopranos, after that I only get similarly suggested content. I had to go and search for a romantic comedy to break that chain of recommendations." (Nehill, personal communication, February 23, 2021).

Not just in the display of suggested content, but audience-user's consumption decisions on OTT are also becoming automatized playfully by using gamification. Amazon Prime and Netflix both have a feature that automatically starts the next episode of a web or television show when the current one finishes, very similar to games which take users to the next level automatically. Some respondents shared how this was useful, for traditional television never offered the possibility of watching the next episode, as they were aired either the next day or next week. This feature saves time in going and clicking on the next episode as well. Another respondent revealed that, "I think it is a great feature, what is not to like? It automatically starts the next episode, and you can continue watching without breaking the flow. And if you don't want to, then just close the app!" (Aamna, personal communication, February 15, 2021)

The celebration of automating the next episode notwithstanding, a few respondents also shared how they have developed new habits of audio-visual consumption. Often most licensed and syndicated shows available on OTT platforms includes all seasons and episodes, thereby giving audience-users the ability to decide which season and episode to watch, and for how long. Apart from all the seasons of licensed and syndicated shows available on OTT platforms, Amazon Prime, Netflix and Disney+ Hostar also release their own original programmes, by releasing all the episodes together, thereby leading to content abundance and also changing viewing practices, thereby introducing new terms for phenomenon such as binge-watching (Mareike, 2014). The term binge can be traced back to excessive indulgence in an activity, especially eating, drinking or taking drugs. The coining of binge-watching interestingly suggests an activity one has little control over, someone driving us to do it or automating us, if you like. A respondent also shared becoming possessed with the fear of a show or series' impending end when they binge-watch, producing sadness, unease and anxiety. Recently when the fifth season of the show Money Heist released on Netflix, an Indian IT company, VerveLogic declared a 'Netflix and Chill Holiday' for its employees to take a day off from work and binge-watch all the episodes. The CEO of the company was quoted as saying that he did not want to witness mass bunks and casual leave emails and hence took this initiative (PTI). A respondent explained that, "Sometimes It's like I have no control! I started Sex and the City again some time back, and I got so obsessed with it. Every episode is like 23 minutes, and they leave you hanging, and I would just keep watching till late in the night on my phone with the lights switched off. I think I marathoned for a week like this. I would only stop in the night when my phone would really heat up." (Nikhil, personal communication, March 12, 2021) . Another respondent also shared, "Like for the weekends I specifically look for shows that are binge-able you know, so I ask my friends or for recommendations, or search online for binge-worthy shows. I remember this meme about feeling guilty of bingeing and I so relate with that, I mean I can become a compulsive watcher sometimes, glued to my phone that my hand goes numb." (Rahul, personal communication, January 15, 2021).

Netflix recently experimented with the feature of automatic trailers, where the moment an audience-user opens the app, the trailer of a film or a television show begins, depending on what is trending in the region. Many respondents complained about the feature, while others did not find it that annoying, choosing to simply close and scroll down. One respondent also shared how he spent a lot of time searching for a film or a television show he wants to watch, and has often felt that majority of the times he does not find what he is looking for, eventually settling for whatever is available. He elaborated, "I don't feel there is that much of a choice. I don't find what I am looking for. I was searching for Thank You for Not Smoking and it's not available on any OTT app. Even some classic television shows also. So I just watch whatever catches my eye, much like how it was with television sometimes." (Ravi, personal communication, March 17, 2021)

The automation of when to watch what has also been captured by OTT apps as they send you notifications, nudging you to watch a show or a film, informing you of a new release. There was a sense of choice reported by many of my respondents, though the apparent freedom was also circumscribed by the app interface which prompted them to watch certain things and nudged them towards certain choices. However some respondents did not feel that they were being controlled by the apps or manipulated into watching something, feeling more agentic, say in comparison to traditional

television watching. Another respondent revealed that, "You know some times you are busy and you forget. Like I was keen to watch Wimbledon but I got so caught up that I lost track of time. Then I got a notification from Hotstar informing me of the first round. I was making tea in kitchen and started watching it on my phone there. So sometimes these notifications are helpful also." (Parikshi, personal communication, April 17, 2021)

Another sentiment, against the automation of audio-visual content was expressed by a respondent when he shared that there is a downside to the OTT revolution, as they are invested with much more power now. This comparison of OTT apps and audience-user subscription to their library offerings with a kind of life-long rent paying model has also been argued elsewhere as well by Fowler (2019) for instance. A respondent shared that, "Earlier I used to download shows and films, even buy DVDs and make my own collection. Now I've just lost the motivation because so much is already available on these apps, stored digitally. I don't have to buy additional cloud storage or carry chunky external hard drives. Like we will pay for this digital rent to them forever it seems." (Vinayak, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

The other important aspect is the implication of how our smartphones automatically track all our activities, including the news we read, the products we search for, the web links we click on and the sounds around us (Google Sound Search for instance). Similarly there are various data points collected by OTT platforms which also use this data to tailor the best match possible for their audience-users. Similarly, Netflix collects information on when and how many times a content was paused, when was it resumed, was the content watched at a go or abandoned, or how long did it take for an audience-user to finish an episode or a film. All of these go on to feed into analytic models which construct and predict very specific audience-user profiles. These data points also govern the production of trailers for series and films, with multiple options being produced keeping in mind different audience-users and their possible preferences. Nielsen, a leading international television ratings research firm has recently launched a new metric system, The Gauge in the US in June 2021, which gleans data from user's routers to study their Internet traffic, and their streaming activities and Internet habits. This new metric system has also earned the approval of Netflix, which has historically been notorious for not divulging audience statistics or trusting third-party audience measurement systems (Beacham, 2021). It has also spurned concerns of user privacy and data protection, with some users in India for instance raising questions about how Internet Service Providers are possibly spying on users by studying their Internet traffic behaviour by installing their own routers with every fibre internet connection (Ahmed, 2021).

Further, the choice argument of OTT which is premised on a huge library of audio-visual content across genres to access from is often cited as the driving force behind the increasing audience-user adoption. However, the abundant choice has also given way to another phenomenon many of my respondents spoke about - the decision fatigue. With cable and programmatic television, there was a schedule to adhere to, in terms of the content available, at a certain point of time, which is certainly limiting, but also takes away the need to decide what to watch. OTT platforms offer a plethora of content, which the audience-user must navigate in their library. This means that a lot of audience-users spend time scrolling through what to watch, as much as the time spent actually watching something. This has also resulted in most OTT apps offering tailor-made recommendations to easily pick from. Subsequently, the fatigue of choosing what to watch has encouraged Netflix to start its new feature 'Play something', released in April 2021, which allows the system and algorithm to make various permutations and combinations to offer the viewer something to watch, based on what the system has learned about the audience-user (Bursztynsky, 2021). Additionally in February 2021, Netflix introduced an automatic download feature, where the system would automatically download recommended shows for the user, though the user has the option to deselect that option. As I have also argued elsewhere with reference to fan practices around consumption of the popular television show Friends (Kohli, 2018), the abundance of choice and decision fatigue have also prompted many audience-users to go back to familiar content or re-runs of shows that they have previously watched on television. A respondent added, "I mean I like the huge number of options that now exist. But sometimes these options are so intimidating. I get so lost just scrolling through all the options, I feel maybe I'll find something better if I keep scrolling. So many times before I sit down to eat I end up spending a good 10 minutes to find exactly what I want to watch while I eat, sometimes I get so frustrated that I watch either Friends or The Office, which I must have watched a gazillion times already." (Sukriti, personal communication, February 10, 2021)

Such is the level of automation, that there are now third-party apps, which will sense if the audience-user has fallen asleep (due to screen inactivity), and will automatically close the OTT platform, very similar to Netflix asking, "Are you still watching?" Numerous memes now exist on social media referencing this feature and how often audience-users keep playing the content on OTT platforms in the background, while they attend to other tasks, only to be prompted and asked,

if they are still watching. This shows that screen viewing practices have transformed from being a single activity, to an activity which involves the distracted audience-user, doing multiple tasks at the same time and also watching online content, sometimes falling asleep, or just leaving the room.

Earlier when cable television connections would interrupt or stop working, one would file a complaint with the provider or check the antenna or the dish cable. Now with fluctuating levels of bandwidth connection and speed, the OTT platforms automatically decrease the resolution of the content without interrupting the streaming process. The medium then is intelligent enough to interpret the technical noise that might occur during the streaming process and adapts itself accordingly. Much like many other apps and services, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar and Netflix get auto-renewed every year, unless the audience-user intervenes. Amazon Prime has faced multiple lawsuits over the years for automatically renewing, and even deceiving customers by charging them for an Amazon prime membership, with most users not being aware of buying the subscription in the first place (Cappellino, 2022). The ways in which OTT platforms automate viewing practices, points to the ways in which it strives to become seamlessly integrated in audience-user's everyday lives, working invisibly, undetected, prompting not much reflection, and needing minimum intervention, a hooked user, if you like. A respondent revealed that, "If my internet speed goes slow for some reason, then the app automatically switches to lower quality or Standard Definition, and I don't mind that, I mean, rather than buffering or stopping, I can continue watching no. Plus at home all of us are sharing an internet connection and the bandwidth gets shared, so the app optimizes the picture quality accordingly. True these apps are data guzzlers, but that is the nature of the beast." (Rishi, personal communication, April 17, 2021)

In many cases, the OTT library was being fully used to re-watch older shows that had debuted on television earlier, rather than watching new content being produced by OTT platforms. Many respondents shared that the fatigue of choosing what to watch, among a range of choices available was a deterrent in watching new shows, as they would settle for the comfortable familiarity of shows and films they had already watched, unless it came highly recommended by a friend. This also revealed that a few respondents did not get convinced by let's say Netflix's percentage match (the label which is based on Netflix's algorithm which arrives at a percentage match of how much the content is aligned with the audience-user's viewing taste) nudge, or trending in India statistics, or Amazon's 'Suggested Watch', relying more on prior experience. Broadly they felt more agentic in comparison to traditional television and cinema consumption, but also reflected on how this automation of their viewing practices was shaping their cultural experiences as well. A respondent shared that, "Whenever a new show is released there are so many reviews about it, either trashing it, or making fun or raving about how good it is. My Instagram and Twitter is flooded with memes and sometimes I have to pause and research because I don't even know the context of that joke. In any case I end up watching a new show if people review it favourably, otherwise I just don't want to waste my time. I remember this show 'Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Lives' was ridiculed so much on social media that most of us watched a few episodes just to confirm how bad it was, and it was really cringey!" (Ananya, personal communication, May 9, 2021)

6. CONCLUSION

The relationship between everyday technologies (such as the screen) and identity is at once material and imaginary. The thick descriptions in the previous section has demonstrated the complexity of the automated screen experience. In many instances audience-users invite the automation of their viewing practices (knowingly and unknowingly) and at other times firmly resist how the screen automates the mediated experience. It is evident that in many cases the audience-user possesses the knowledge of the technological processes running in the background, actively giving in and sometimes resisting the co-option. This suggests a deeply entangled relationship of co-constitution between the screen and the user in the automation of this mediation.

The significance of OTT consumption on the smartphone screen as an important site of exploration also emerges from how embedded it is in the practice of everyday life, reconfiguring earlier assumptions of medium-specific content, and medium-audience engagement, disrupting all other conception of how content is distributed, consumed and received. Playing of media content on the screen has emerged as a highly individual and private practice, within the regimes of automation, mobility and sensing of the smartphone screen. It has offered immense possibilities of choice and freedom, and at the same time automating audience-user's experience with the screen by automation of routine activities and experiences. The algorithms employed by these platforms, coupled with the automation features of the smartphone screen predicts and replicates possible behaviours and actions and perhaps also reduces interests and experiences of media consumption into datafied categories and genres to predict audience-user behaviours and choices. Non-human

agency of platforms, technologies and devices is evident in not just how they mediate human perception but also in how they interact with each other.

Everyday life and screen then are interpenetrating where the screen becomes a site for practices and relationships, engaged by users to make sense of their worlds and the technology itself. This use and consumption also to a certain degree transforms social conditions of the users, individually and collectively. The screen also becomes a site for production of new knowledge and for cycling through shifting identities. The screen can be seen as enabling, in how it compels users to communicate and interact with it and the apps inside of it. The screen has agential capacities to amplify the user's experiences and choices, even in relation to the screen itself.

APPENDICES

Table 1: Respondent Details

No	Pseudonym	OTT Duration on Smartphone Screen (per day)	Gender	Age	Screens (in order of OTT use)	OTT Platforms used
1	Richa	2-3 hours	Female	25	Smartphone, Laptop, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Sony Liv
2	Ajay	4 hours	Male	19	Smartphone, Tablet, TV	YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Zee5, Sony Liv, Voot
3	Shweta	1 hour	Female	18	Tablet, Smartphone	Amazon Prime, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar, JioTV
4	Rama	2-3 hours	Female	18	Smartphone, Tablet, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, MX Player, Eros Now, Voot
5	Tanvi	4 hours	Female	19	Smartphone, Laptop	Netflix, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar, Voot, Alt Balaji
6	Rahul	2-3 hours	Male	23	Smartphone, Tablet, Laptop, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Eros Now, Voot
7	Sama	3-4 hours	Female	18	Smartphone, Laptop	Netflix, Sony Liv, Disney+ Hotstar, Alt Balaji
8	Arjun	2-3 hours	Male	20	Smartphone	YouTube, JioTV
9	Ananya	2 hours	Female	26	Tablet, Smartphone, TV	YouTube, Netflix, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar, Voot
10	Aamna	1 hours	Female	28	Smartphone, Laptop, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar, Eros Now, Alt Balaji
11	Ravi	1-2 hours	Male	22	Smartphone, Tablet, Laptop	Netflix, JioTV, Sony Liv, Disney+ Hotstar
12	Parikshi	1-2 hours	Female	24	Smartphone, TV	Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Zee5, Eros Now
13	Aman	2 hours	Male	18	Smartphone, TV	Netflix, Voot, Zee5, Sony Liv
14	Rishi	2-3 hours	Male	19	Smartphone, Tablet, Laptop	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar
15	Nikhil	2 hours	Male	22	Laptop, Smartphone	Amazon Prime, Zee5, JioTV, Voot, Alt Balaji
16	Nehill	1 hour	Male	29	Smartphone, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Sony Liv, Zee5, Disney+ Hotstar
17	Sukriti	3 to 4 hours	Female	21	Tablet, Smartphone	Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Eros Now, Sony Liv, Voot, Alt Balaji

18	Vinayak	2 hours	Male	27	Smartphone, Laptop, TV	YouTube, Amazon Prime, Zee5, Sony Liv, Voot

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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