

Intersection of Mythology and Technology: The Narrative Analysis of ASUR Series

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ABSTRACT

The rise of over-the-top (OTT) platforms engender various genres and becoming a significant component of Indian entertainment industry. The proliferation of OTT is propelled by the improvement in internet speed, variety of content and flexibility of the content selection. The pattern of storytelling in video streaming platforms illustrates the landscape that reflects the social issues, digital innovations and cultural mythologies. The platforms skillfully juxtaposed the objective nature of technological sophistication with the subjective aspect of narrative based on socio-cultural milieu. This qualitative study endeavors to understand the narrative analysis of crime and psychological thriller series ASUR. The series consists of 2 seasons and 16 episodes. The thematic analysis broadly illustrates the themes such as Hindu mythology, technological advancement, moral awareness and societal behavior. The web series succinctly portrayed the dystopian use of scientific knowledge that can be traced or linked back to lack of humanistic approach manifested in antagonist's past experiences. The OTT platforms become a digital culture in which societal beliefs and myths are disseminated. The digital terrains are pivotal to project the nation's soft power since these streaming services provide legitimization through production of content of narrative with respect to social reality. The findings are beneficial for academic scholars and national security experts to give significant consideration to contemporary technological advancements and digital media landscape. This study provides a framework on the basis of which future research may be conducted to critically analyze the 'OTT discourse' in the contemporary global media landscape.

Keywords: OTT Platforms, Mythology, Technology, Artificial Intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

The entertainment industry has undergone the tremendous variations from traditional means of consuming the media content in passive way to active consumption of content based on personalized preferences. The rise of OTT platforms demands an interdisciplinary approach that require new nodes of interactivity, and scholars have widely debated the impact of platforms on the traditional media (Thomas, Raj, & Suresh, 2022). The changes in the pattern on media consumption is substantially mediated by the rise of the over-the-top (OTT) platforms. The affordability, in terms of economic and content selection, provided by OTT platforms equally augmented among them the competition for audiences (Kulkarni, Konde, & Mangesh, 2022). Moreover, there are significant 'influencing factors' i.e., "user behavior", technological flexibility"

and “customer centric content” that accelerated the entertainment preferences (Patnaik, Patra, Mahapatra, & Baral, 2022).

The online media landscape undergone a transmutation in India, since India is a pivotal non-western marketplace. With its 1.4 billion population and strong media industrial base, India posit a pivotal destination for media companies, since the CEO of Netflix declared in 2018 that “the next 100 million [subscribers] for [Netflix are] coming from India’ (Bhushan, 2018). In contemporary entertainment landscape, there are multiple OTT platforms such as NetFlix, Hotstar, Voot, Amazon Prime Video, Disney +Hotstar, SonyLIV, ZEE5 etc. Netflix is not only a foremost node in the entertainment industry of India because of the presence of other powerful production nodes that adopted localization strategies to cate the local market (Rai, 2024). One of the significant factors behind the rise of OTT platform is Covid-19, that changed the entertainment ecosystem at global level. The exponential rise of OTT creates challenges for the traditional cinema due to the former encapsulation of diverse storytelling and representation of vernacular culture (Rani, 2025). However, the power of OTT platforms is overstated within the context of Indian media landscape since the different platforms adopt the indigenous (Indian) or contextual framework in their programs i.e., Disney +Hotstar. Hence, the Asia, owing to rich cultural, social, religious and linguistic history, provides a significant epistemic lens and communicative logic to understand the media content after the rise of OTT platforms (Rai, 2024).

It is equally important to analyze the different representation of media content, since media is a social institution that signifies a framework in which the societal myths and norms are propagated. Moreover, one of the major’s determinant of ideational framework is religion, since religious symbolism or scriptures exemplify the portrayal of binary identities in a social milieu. The literature illustrates the representation of religious imageries in an unfavorable manner that may impact the social harmony. The Indian web series such as *Ghoul* (2018), *Leila* (2019) and *Paatal Lok* (2020) portrayed the Hinduism in a negative way by employing the themes of “Hinduism as a violent cult perpetuating patriarchy”, imagery of Hinduism and negative portrayal of Brahmin community. The Hinduism is a major religion practiced by Indians; moreover, it encapsulates epic stories such as Ramayan and Mahabhart. The impact of these epics can be found in literature, stories and dramas. Apart from their symbolic value, the epic tales possess the media value because of the nature of content and their historical value (Chamoli, Khare, & Gupta, 2021). However, discourse exemplifies that media consumers still prefer traditional mode of entertainment, and demographic data have an impact on the preferences for the different OTT platforms (Choudhary, Dixit, & Govil, 2023).

In the contemporary media ecosystem, the aspect of information is considered as a strategic resource (Bebber, 2017) that may influence the cognition and public opinion. OTT platforms provides a significant arena through much media consumer interpret social reality. In the digital public sphere, the production of content has been democratized that have broaden the re-presentation of social issues, however, the content producers need to focus on the cultural and religious sensitivities. The thematic analysis of the epic tales illustrates the duality in social reality based on ideational aspects. This study endeavors to analyze the Indian web series *ASUR* that is based on the juxta positioning of Hindu mythology with the technological advancement. This research is beneficial for both the academic scholars and practitioners in the field of policy making especially national security and media professionals.

Research Design

This study employed qualitative research design to explicate the thematic frameworks in the selected Indian OTT series *ASUR* to identify patterns and themes. The selected series (season 2) has been viewed to identify themes, along with that, the analysis is supplemented by the secondary sources of data. The academic literature is consulted for the analysis of the identified themes. The themes are delineated and re-confirmed

by independent researcher to align the thematic categories with the focus of this study. The media content is taken as a cultural text through the portrayal on OTT platforms since the researchers such as Chauhan (2025) conducted the research by analyzing the representation of Dalits on the OTT platforms (Chauhan, 2025), and the mutation of mass communication into media studies is marked by the field of cultural studies to understand the popular culture (Erni, 2001).

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

This section deals with the qualitative thematic analysis of Indian OTT series *Asur*. The digital media landscape has treated the Indian mythological stories beyond the realm of sacredness. The adjoining of mythology with technological advancement reshape the framework of modern storytelling. According to the cultural approach, the meanings of representation in the era of digital media are socially produced through the signifiers (Hall, 1997), and the OTT is a contemporary representation system in which discourse is generated through visual and indexical frameworks since it is the role of agency i.e., humans, in a culture that integrates them into everyday (digital) life. The themes are inductively coded after watching all the seven episodes of the series (*Asur 2*). The themes are coded in order to understand the policy framework for security community to provide an empirical analysis related to the changing nature of security challenges.

The *Asur* series 2 sets in the backdrop of city of Varanasi, an important city in Hinduism. The series illustrates the team of technical experts, also the lead character, who must apprehend the serial killer, *Shubh*. The killer blends the Indian mythological interpretation with the technological advancement (AI and social media) to achieve its respective motives. As the lead characters said regarding the antagonist, “One doesn’t need to see him. One needs to understand him”. The antagonist perceives himself as the reincarnation of the Asura, a mythological demon. The series revolved around the integration of Hindu mythological symbolism and technological sophistication in the contemporary social reality. The thematic analysis is important to explicate the emerging OTT discourse in changing mediascape.

Representation of Mythology

The mythologies are represented in the popular media that codified the human interaction in the social world. The myth’s fictional content primes the audience to decode the connotative meaning of the content (Reid, 2007). The term myth when translated from the Greeks denotes the “word”. The literature illustrates that the interest related to the myth was prevalent in ancient Europe, especially Greek and Roman myths. Moreover, the aspect of religious rites and myth are closely related with each other. The discourse exemplifies the aspect of religion in shaping the social meanings of myths (B.Zh.Abdrakhmanova, T.A.Barakbayeva, & R.A.Kemerbay, 2022).

In the Indian context, the mythologies are re-presented as medium of interaction, in which the followers navigate the meaning of the context, and content of the signs and symbols (Kumar, 2016). In cultural studies, the discourse analysis of text includes not only the textual aspect or linguistic dimension, it also includes the cultural artifacts (Fairclough, 1995). In the contemporary age, the portrayal of mythology in the mass medium are leveraging the spatial and temporal dimension of epic tales. The Indian mythologies have their own ‘spiritual aura’ manifested in the form of signifiers possessing semantical values (Ibid). The mythological content possesses the potential to influence the shared experiences of society. In the *Asur* series, the emphasis on the invocation and contextual meaning of Hindu mythological signifier carries a significant role in the manifestation of the events. The reference to the mythologies and their characters such as Arjuna and Sage Vedavyasa, in some way, provides legitimacy to the actions undertaken by antagonist. The antagonist, *Shubh* iterated that, “It’s time to take Kali Yuga to its peak.” However, the

mythologies such as Ramayana and Mahabharata contain content that perpetuates the element of ‘impartiality and fairness’ (Upadhyay, 2025).

Along with the mythological dimension, the series conjoin the actions undertaken by antagonist with his psychological profile. The past of antagonist was devoid of happiness and he iterated to his grandfather that *“My presence or absence makes no difference in anyone’s life....that what your son [antagonist’s father] always thought I was. A demon”* (Translated text).

The legends and morals from mythologies provides moral compass through which followers perceive the social reality. The series skillfully shows the normative dimensions that a person needs to adopt for optimistic approach. In one scene, while the one of the lead characters was sitting in a Buddhist monarchy, a child came to him and said *“A person or an emotion can only trouble us when we give them the power to trouble us. Take the Burden of the past off your mind”* (Translated text). The representation of moral duality in a person’s mind is succinctly portrayed in the series through the employment of iconic and indexical signs.

Portrayal of Modern Technology

The contemporary digital era theorizes the employment of technology such as augmented reality and holograms, as narrative devices. As a response to evolving digital environment, the convergence from multi-dimensional fields of ICT are employed by OTT platforms for visual grammar and its effects (Park, 2023). The employment of social media as “weaponization” tool suggest the impact of online divisiveness on the offline social reality. While the digital technology offers numerous opportunities in almost every sphere of life, however, the negative implications of digital media, if conjoined with social media ecosystem, may contribute to instability by non-state actors through leveraging the data-mediated reality (Guay, Gray, Rhynard-Geil, & Inks, 2019). In the series, the employment of technological sophistication by the antagonistic illustrates the dystopian version of social reality in which the technology ‘made by human’ is used against the human. The past traumatic history of antagonist, coupled with his higher level of intelligence, determine the unfolding of story in which, in spite of higher analytical skills the antagonist employ technology against the common people. The normative dimension can be inferred which highlights the aspect of civic responsibility regarding the savior of humanity since the users of OTT platforms desire conformity to ethical and social values in the media content (Kumari, Singh, Mishra, & Tiwari, 2024). One of the characters conveyed his apprehension regarding the technology as:

“This tech is a double-edged sword. If it can predict someone’s behavior, it can also manipulate that person.” (Translated text)

Subsequently, antagonist asked from the scientist about his aim regarding the technological project and he replied:

“[it] is to predict human behavior and stop the crime, violence and possible wars in our society.... but without empathy and moral understanding this is not possible.” (Translated text)

The antagonist frames the use of technology on the basis of his experiences. According to antagonists, *“Morality is nothing but show-off to me. You [scientist] want to improve mankind, but the improvement will be possible only when we accept reality.”* (Translated text)

The narrative analysis of the series illustrates the dystopian employment of technology by antagonist, who conceptualized and manifested the artificial intelligence devoid of empathy, however, this narrative is equally levelled by the constructive manifestation of state apparatus i.e., forensic science, law-enforcement

agencies, for the benefit of collective good. The content in the series portrays about how the technology impact the life of the online users, especially with reference to data privacy.

EMERGING DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the digital landscape, the ever-evolving spectrum of innovation and challenges demands the re-evaluation of policy guidelines regarding the discourse on counter terrorism. As discourse on counter-terrorism in the age of ‘extremist warfare’ illustrates, security experts need to develop an innovative approach to analyze the artificial intelligence and big data to extract useful information to combat extremism (Baloch, 2021), since artificial intelligence is employed by contemporary violent actors to propagate their views. Hence, this require sufficient digital literacy and skills to critically decipher the underlying meaning of the content. As succinctly pointed out in the recent report, “prevention should encompass people of all ages, but youth in particular need to be aware of the context and risks of online interactions” (OSCE, 2024). The continuous evolvement in the landscape of digital public sphere, the social media is a strategic driver behind the national security decisions. The simulation exercises in the virtual environment based on multi-dimensional scenario building is instrumental to ensure the comprehensive training, and to understand the nature of effective mechanism of threat mitigation. The series illustrate the intersecting role of technology experts, media professionals and understanding of ideational framework for effective counter -terrorism strategy.

Moreover, the role of social media intelligence (SOCINT) for effective counter terrorism is illustrated in the series, since the digital content may engender the propogandist tendency to undermine the state authorities, as succinctly argues by Oakley and Rogg that “social media is rapidly emerging as a medium for both propaganda and censorship simultaneously” (Oakley & Rogg, 2024, p. 548). The social media intelligence is the process of collecting and analyzing the data from the social media platforms. The discourse also illustrates that the challenges to security officials stems from the episodic understanding of terrorist activity, however, the act by violent non-state actors need to be conceived in holistically manner that equally require engagement across different platforms by policymakers and practitioners, since social media is pivotal tool to influence the public opinion. In the *Asur* series, the computer expert iterated that “It’s the same platform [online] which turned Kesar and Rasool into national heroes. All the hashtags, propaganda and petitions, it’s all started from here”. This series also highlighted the privacy concerns regarding the user’s pictures and videos by focusing on the access given by user to microphone and camera.

Over the period of time, the large digital infrastructure and evolvement in the disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and big data likely to impact the multifaceted contours of state’s national security. The security apparatus of a status may encounter difficulties to navigate the intelligence operations against the hard targets because of the surveillance technologies leveraged by digital networking (Dylan & Stivang, 2025). The narrative analysis of the series illustrated the capacity building of the state’s security apparatus to develop a preemptive capability in order to protect both the kinetic and non-kinetic domains.

CONCLUSION

This research article seeks to explicate the intersection of mythology and technology in the changing digital public sphere that posit the spectrum of discourse from audience to policy makers. In the evolving technological landscape, the policy makers need to emphasis on the contemporary digital advancements that may manifest in kinetic and non-kinetic domains. This study illustrates the dearth of relevant literature in the OTT discourse with respect to its theoretical and conceptual connection with national security policies. The findings illustrate the importance of ideational framework behind the acts of violence that provides legitimacy to the actions undertaken by violent non-state actors. The growing nature of artificial intelligence and quantum computing brings in new challenges that needs to be analyzed by augmenting the

perimeter of data collection through the inclusion of OTT platforms. This research is beneficial for the policy makers to understand the information ecosystem in which the non-state actor propagates their narrative and how to curtail this emerging issue. Future studies can be undertaken to analyze the narrative construction in the OTT discourse and how media professionals can augment digital literacy to critically evaluate the media content.

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