

The cogs in the entertainment wheel

The boom in content has had a ripple effect across the ecosystem with hundreds of little firms finding global work and relevance



MEDIASCOPE

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Walk into a small basement office in the heart of Delhi's Lajpat Nagar for a glimpse of what the boom in content has done to the entertainment economy. All the three tiny studios at Rahul

Bhatia's Business of Languages or BoL are occupied. On the screen of the first one I spot a National Geographic documentary being dubbed in Hindi and in another room an English script is being translated to Hindi. In a third one a very familiar sounding voice artiste is rehearsing her lines. (She is the voice of a popular kids character Shinchon, I am told later.) On an average BoL dubs and subtitles over 100 hours of content a month from English, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish to Hindi, Tamil, Telugu among other languages. That is up from 20 hours a month two years ago. Back then, 16 of those 20 hours was work for television. Now half of the 100 hours are for TV, 30-40 are for OTT and the rest is for Interactive Voice Response

Services. Check the credits on *The Protector*, *Trollhunters* (Netflix) or *It's not That Simple* (Voot) or *Permanent Roommates* (TVF) among other shows and you might spot BoL.

Alternatively, you might find other firms located in Delhi or Chennai or Hyderabad or Mumbai doing post-production or dubbing. The first happy impact of the boom in content creation is this huge rise in the demand for all the things that go into putting a *Sacred Games* or *The Family Man* on millions of TV, mobile, device screens across the world. These could be the multitude of languages in which content is now available, technical services, among scores of other things. The second impact is pushing up the value of talent. The third is bringing a

much-needed focus on training young and mid-level talent in India's ₹1,67,400 crore media and entertainment industry

Google, Amazon, AT&T, Disney, Comcast, Apple and Netflix among others are commissioning content from across the world in their search for audiences. It could be Indians watching *Narcos* (Spanish, Colombia), the French watching *Sacred Games* (Hindi, India) or the Turks watching *Dark* (German, Germany) among the millions of permutations possible. This search has led them to India — not just for its audience but also for its storytellers. Other than Korea, India is one of the few markets with authentic local stories to tell and an industry that tells them well. More than 90 per cent of what Indians

watch or hear is local.

And now it is finding favour globally too. In July 2018, *Sacred Games*, a Hindi show began streaming in 190 countries to Netflix's 125 million subscribers (then). More than a year later in September 2019, it was nominated for the International Emmy Awards along with *Lust Stories* (Netflix) and *The Remix-India* (Amazon Prime Video). They didn't win but *Sacred Games* made it to *The New York Times* list of the 30 best international series of the decade. According to Amazon Prime Video, one in three viewers for its Indian shows is from outside of India.

Not surprisingly, the wooing of Indian talent — from actors and directors to writers — has been relentless. From barely 20 hours in 2016 original content on the top 10 OTTs went to about 400 hours in 2018, says Media Partners Asia a Singapore-based consulting firm. It was estimated to go to over 1,000 hours by the end of 2019. That is about 300-500 new films or just under \$500 million worth of film-quality

content. At over 1,600 films India is the largest filmmaking country in the world but adding another 500 high-quality films to be watched by people of different sensibilities in different languages, is a tough ask. It creates some very sweet challenges.

"There is a lot of requirement for international languages from Indian companies in the last one year," says Bhatia. The availability of a variety of voices for stories with multiple characters is another issue. To tackle it, in August 2019 Bhatia launched SoL or School of Learning. It offers a two-month course for voice artistes, out of the same studio. Netflix is doing its bit too. In October 2019 it hosted a four-day post-production training programme on visual and special effects, sound, music, workflow among other topics. More than 30 working professionals took part in it.

India's creative ecosystem is buzzing with happy sounds, in many languages.

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