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Reality shows: OTT platforms' next big content battle with TV

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Streaming platforms are shaking up the non-fiction game. After years of tried-and-tested television formats, OTT players are betting on shorter, sharper and more experimental reality shows.

Amazon MX Player's *Hip Hop India* and *Rise and Fall*, and Netflix's *The Great Indian Kapil Show* prove that both viewership and brand adoption are strong for the category.

In the mid-year list of most-watched streaming originals by media consultant Ormax, although fiction attracted higher viewership, several non-

fiction shows also made it to the list. *Hip Hop India Season 2* ranked 15th with 11.1 million viewers, followed by *The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 3* with 10.9 million. *Shark Tank India Season 4* came in at 18th (10.3 million), while *The Traitors*—a Prime Video reality show hosted by Karan Johar—attracted 9.3 million views to secure the 24th place.

Industry experts said unscripted shows are uniquely suited for creating impactful brand integrations while offering customers entertainment that becomes part of everyday conversations. With daily or weekly drops, these shows often manage to create buzz, spark conversations and enter

the cultural zeitgeist.

"Unscripted programming is a critical pillar of our content strategy and we are approaching it with the intent of creating formats that feel fresh, relevant, and designed for digital audiences," Amogh Dusat, director and head of content, Amazon MX Player said. *Rise and Fall* debuted as the number one unscripted show during its launch weekend, a sign of growing appetite for fresh, digital-first formats, Dusat said.

Charu Malhotra, managing director and co-founder, Primus Partners, a management consultant, said non-fiction has started becoming a real area of focus for OTT platforms, because the audience profile on



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streaming is younger, urban and more experimental.

Unlike television, where the genre has been dominated by long-running shows like *Bigg*

Boss or *Indian Idol*, OTTs are actively experimenting with newer sub-genres.

"OTT can do a few things television cannot. So shows can be

sharper, shorter and more experimental. You do not need a 100-episode season; a six-part reality series works just fine online," Malhotra said.

OTT enables hyper-targeting, allowing you to create a reality format around dating, stand-up comedy, or even niche hobbies, and still engages audience.

Reality shows on streaming platforms tend to be more expensive per episode due to higher production values and more recognisable talent. But with fewer epi-

sodes per season, overall budgets can still be lower. TV shows can cost between ₹1 crore and ₹3 crore per episode, while OTT may be slightly higher.

Brijen Desai, associate VP at digital agency White Rivers Media, said non-fiction and reality have become central to OTT growth. What started as spin-offs of TV shows has evolved into digital-first formats across survival, dat-

ing, social experiments, comedy, and influencer-led programming.

"Formats can adapt quickly to cultural trends, explore niche and regional stories, and integrate social media directly into the experience. Interactive tools like live voting and gamification keep viewers actively involved, avoiding the predictability that plagues television," Desai added.

Sai Abhishek, head of content, factual, lifestyle and kids entertainment—South Asia, Warner Bros, said True crime remains one of the company's strongest genres, he added. Titles like *Hunt for Indian Mujahideen*, *Cult of Fear*: Asaram Bapu and *Money Mafia* have built passionate followings online.

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FORMAT SHIFT

OTT players are betting big on shorter, sharper and more experimental reality shows

OTT enables hyper-targeting, allows to create a reality format around dating or hobbies