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Published in Mint
November 18, 2025

OTTs chase regional content with higher spends but viewership trails

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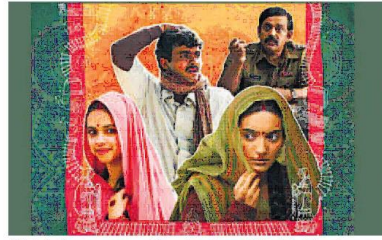
Regional languages are increasingly claiming a growing share of OTT investments. Major platforms are allocating nearly 30% of their budgets to non-Hindi content as regional audiences surge and demand for premium storytelling grows.

Experts say while budgets for regional content are substantial, they are investments to build the category and tap into the growing demand.

However, viewership trends remain chequered, and return on investments for these productions can be uncertain.

Platforms need to carefully consider their content strategies to ensure they are meeting the needs of their target audience. According to Ormax, the mid-year list of top 50 originals includes Tamil fiction series *Suzhal - The Vortex Season 2* (8.3 million), *Heart Beat* (7 million), Malayalam fiction series *Kerala Crime Files Season 2* (6.9 million), Tamil film *Test* (6.5 million), and Telugu fiction series *Devika & Danny* (5.2 million).

But they pale in comparison to viewership figures of the top Hindi originals *Criminal Justice: A Family Matter* (27.7 million) and *Ek Badnaam Aashram Season 3* (27.1 million). Per-season cost for regional



OTT platforms are now allocating about 30% of their budgets to non-Hindi content as regional audiences grow. MINT

web originals have risen from ₹1-2 crore to ₹5-10 crore on larger platforms. Hindi shows, however, are far costlier at ₹30 crore, led by broader national

marketing and talent costs.

However, the gap is narrowing, as regional markets have expanded and appetite for premium storytelling has surged

across the board, Siju Prabhakaran, chief business officer, ZEE5, said. "What we are witnessing, especially in the

southern states, is creators pushing the envelope with rooted yet cinematic storytelling, often requiring the same production values as mainstream Hindi shows. The cost dynamics may vary by region, but the creative investment and quality benchmark remain

uniform," Prabhakaran added. Over 65% of ZEE5's viewership comes from non-Hindi

languages. The company budget allocation for a regional show is in the range of ₹8-10 crore, said industry experts.

ROOTING FOR ROOTS

VIEWERSHIP remains uneven, with top regional originals far behind leading Hindi shows

REGIONAL web original budgets rise to ₹5-10 crore per season, Hindi shows cost over ₹30 crore

It is likely that regional language content budgets are lower due to the niche audience and limited geographical reach, said Rajat Agrawal, chief operating officer and director of Ultra Media and Entertainment.

"The return on investment for the productions can be uncertain, and platforms need to carefully consider content strategies to ensure they are

meeting the needs of their target audience," Agrawal added.

The challenges for regional content are twofold—accessibility and relevance. Viewers expect flexible and affordable plans, offering user experience in their language. The second is cultural relevance—each region has its own storytelling grammar, cultural nuances, and star ecosystems.

Charu Malhotra, co-founder and managing director, Primus Partners, a management consultancy firm said a section of regional viewers still watch OTT content through shared family accounts or bundled telco offers.

For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.