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## **Social media backlash no hurdle for OTT success as trashed titles grab top viewership spots**



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### **Article Content:**

OTT (over-the-top) platforms are increasingly finding that social media backlash doesn't necessarily hurt viewership. Shows like *The Royals* and *Nadaaniyan*, which faced heavy trolling online, have emerged among the top streaming originals in Ormax Media's mid-year list, with 15.5 million and 8.9 million viewers, respectively. Further, varying consumer tastes are often not adequately reflected in social media algorithms, where there might actually be an audience base for what some consider unwatchable.

"Social media chatter about long-form content, be it theatrical, streaming or linear television, can be misleading, because you can find yourself in an echo chamber that is not even remotely reflective of the real world," Shailesh Kapoor, founder and chief executive officer (CEO), Ormax Media, wrote in a blog after publication of the list.

Nitin Gupta, chief creative officer, Chaupal, a platform specializing in Punjabi, Haryanvi and Bhojpuri content, agreed that social media trolling does not always lead to a drop in viewership. "In fact, sometimes it creates a sense of Fomo (fear of missing out) among audiences, even those who criticize the content. Trolling often becomes part of a larger conversation. It highlights areas that may need improvement but also brings more attention to the show," Gupta added.

### **Backlash may help viewership**

Outrage on X or Instagram is loud, but it's rarely a perfect proxy for actual viewing behaviour, according to entertainment industry experts. Neelesh Pednekar, co-founder and head of digital media at Social Pill, a digital marketing agency, said the people who binge eight episodes on a weekend are not the same cohort crafting 20-threadtakedowns. "OTT platforms optimise for completion rates, watch hours, and repeat sessions, metrics that don't necessarily dip because a show is being roasted online. In many cases, backlash plateaus after 48-72 hours, while the title keeps quietly pulling steady (or even growing) streams. Unless the controversy hits a moral red line, such as calls for boycotts that spill into mainstream press, the impact is usually noise, not net loss," Pednekar added.

Further, most OTTs have a playbook now which includes sentiment dashboards and social listening to

separate genuine concerns from performative outrage, targeted public relations and creator outreach, such as giving interviews to the right journalists, seeding nuanced explainers and pushing “making-of” content to shift the narrative. They may also attempt product-side tweaks such as changing tiles or thumbnails, re-cutting trailers, or altering synopsis language to reset expectations.

Charu Malhotra, managing director and co-founder, Primus Partners, a management consultancy firm pointed out that in many cases, trolling ends up becoming free marketing. Controversy sparks curiosity and that is a real behaviour on OTT. When a show is being talked about, even negatively, people are more likely to check it out just to see what the trolling is about. For example, a show like Indian Matchmaking turned into a major online discussion point, mainly because of the social media criticism.

### **Controversy mongers**

A lot of online outrage can stem from bad faith, Aparna Ramachandran, head—digital originals, Balaji Telefilms Ltd, said. Some individuals create outrage simply to increase their own online visibility or position themselves as opinion-makers by targeting major media brands.

“Therefore, it’s essential to understand audience bias and parse through the noise for valuable signals. Platforms look for clear indicators—such as genuine criticism or a disconnect with the content or the brand—to determine their next steps,” Ramachandran said, adding content typically has a long tail—its value is often recognized over time as it becomes part of larger conversations and cultural moments.

Not all shows have benefited from controversies. Netflix’s *Leila*, for example, set in a dystopian future with the world ruled by a totalitarian regime, didn’t spark interest.

To be sure, even as Indian OTT platforms navigate extreme criticism through a combination of strategies, most also provide age ratings and content warnings to help viewers make informed decisions about the content they consume. Some platforms have introduced self-regulation mechanisms to govern their content and address viewer concerns. Rajat Agrawal, chief operating officer (COO), Ultra Media & Entertainment Group that owns OTT platform Ultra Jhakaas, said, on one hand, excessive trolling can create a toxic environment around a show or film, making it less appealing to audiences. But on the positive side, trolling can sometimes generate buzz and increase curiosity as well.

“We’ve seen titles, on our platform and elsewhere, benefit from what I call ‘controversy curiosity’. In today’s digital age, where everyone’s forming opinions in real time, the algorithm rewards engagement, whether it’s outrage or excitement. Sometimes, the best marketing is accidental controversy. That said, the content must ultimately deliver; if it doesn’t, the spike is short-lived. But if the storytelling has merit, trolling ironically ends up being free publicity,” said Kaushik Das, founder and CEO, AAO NXT, an Odia language platform.

As far as regional platforms and shows go, controversial subjects do not spark as much debate because the viewer base is limited. Titles on bigger platforms are usually trolled online.