

The Role of OTT Platforms in Globalizing Kannada Films

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Abstract: *The growth of OTT platforms has changed how regional films in India are distributed and watched. Earlier, Kannada films were mostly seen by audiences within Karnataka. Today, digital streaming platforms allow these films to reach viewers across India and even in other countries. This article studies how OTT platforms help Kannada cinema gain global recognition. It explains how streaming services increase audience access, provide subtitles and dubbing in different languages, and promote stories based on local culture. The study also examines how these platforms influence filmmaking and create new opportunities for Kannada filmmakers. Overall, the research shows that OTT platforms play an important role in connecting Kannada films with global audiences and helping them reach beyond language and regional boundaries.*

Keywords: OTT platforms, Kannada cinema, globalization, digital streaming, regional films, media transformation

1. Introduction

The global media environment has changed greatly with the growth of digital streaming platforms. OTT services allow people to watch films and television series anytime using the internet. Viewers can access content through mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs, or computers. In India, the increase in affordable smartphones and better internet connectivity has helped OTT platforms grow rapidly. Popular streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, ZEE5, and Disney+ Hotstar have become widely used, allowing audiences to watch a variety of films and programs from different languages and regions.

Regional film industries have benefited a lot from digital streaming platforms. Earlier, Kannada films were mostly watched by audiences in Karnataka. Today, OTT platforms allow these films to reach viewers across India and even in other countries. Many films are now available with subtitles and dubbing in different languages, which helps people from other regions understand and enjoy them. Because of this, audiences around the world can watch stories based on Kannada culture and traditions.

The growth of OTT platforms has created new opportunities for filmmakers, producers, and audiences. Kannada filmmakers can now reach a larger audience and gain more recognition. Therefore, studying the role of OTT platforms in globalizing Kannada films is important to understand how regional cinema is changing in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

Growth of OTT Platforms and Digital Media

Several scholars have highlighted the rapid growth of OTT platforms and their influence on the media industry. Tryon (2013) explains that digital streaming services have transformed the traditional film distribution system by offering on-demand access to films and television content. According to Tryon, OTT platforms allow viewers to watch

content anytime and anywhere, reducing dependence on traditional theatrical releases and television broadcasting.

Similarly, Lobato (2019) discusses how global streaming services have reshaped the geography of media distribution. The author argues that digital platforms have enabled content to travel across borders more easily, allowing audiences to explore films and series from different countries and cultures. This global circulation of content has contributed to the international visibility of regional cinemas.

In the Indian context, Athique (2019) explains that the expansion of affordable smartphones and internet connectivity has accelerated the growth of digital media consumption. The increasing availability of streaming platforms has changed audience viewing habits, encouraging people to access films and entertainment content through digital platforms rather than traditional television or cinema halls.

OTT Platforms and the Indian Film Industry

The rise of OTT platforms has had a significant impact on the Indian film industry. Scholars argue that streaming platforms have created new distribution channels and revenue models for filmmakers. Mehta and Pandey (2020) note that digital streaming has expanded the possibilities for film distribution by allowing producers to release films directly on OTT platforms. This approach became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when cinema theatres were closed and several films were released exclusively on digital platforms.

Research also suggests that OTT platforms have increased the demand for diverse and high-quality content. Dhiman (2023) points out that audiences using digital platforms often prefer original stories, realistic narratives, and culturally authentic content. As a result, filmmakers are increasingly focusing on content-driven cinema rather than relying solely on traditional commercial formulas.

Regional Cinema and Digital Distribution

Kumar (2023) observes that OTT platforms have increased the visibility of regional films by providing subtitles and dubbing in multiple languages. This feature allows audiences who do not speak the original language of a film to understand and appreciate the story. As a result, regional cinema has gained greater recognition in the national and global media landscape.

OTT Platforms and Cultural Globalization

Lobato (2019) explains that digital streaming services have changed the way audiences discover and consume international content. Instead of relying on limited theatrical releases or film festivals, viewers can now easily access foreign films through online platforms. This accessibility contributes to the global circulation of cultural products. Accessibility has contributed to the growing popularity of Kannada cinema beyond regional markets.

Moreover, the success of certain Kannada films on OTT platforms suggests that audiences are increasingly interested in culturally rooted stories and innovative narratives. Films that highlight local traditions, folklore, and social issues have attracted attention from viewers across India and abroad.

Despite these developments, academic research on the globalization of Kannada cinema through OTT platforms remains limited. Most existing studies focus on broader aspects of Indian cinema or examine other regional industries. Therefore, there is a need for focused research that explores how OTT platforms contribute to the global visibility and cultural impact of Kannada films.

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design to understand the role of OTT platforms in globalizing Kannada films. A qualitative approach is useful because it helps the researcher explore opinions, experiences, and industry perspectives in depth. The study also follows an exploratory and descriptive research design. The exploratory approach helps to understand new developments related to OTT platforms and regional cinema, while the descriptive approach helps to explain how these platforms influence the reach and visibility of Kannada films in global markets.

Objective of the study

- To examine the role of OTT platforms in expanding the national and international reach of Kannada films.
- To analyze how OTT platforms promote Kannada culture and storytelling to global audiences.
- To study the influence of OTT platforms on the visibility and popularity of Kannada cinema.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of OTT platforms has transformed the global film industry by changing the way films are produced, distributed, and consumed. Digital streaming services have made it easier for audiences to access films from different regions and languages. In India, OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, ZEE5, and Disney+ Hotstar have created new opportunities for regional cinema to reach wider audiences.

Kannada cinema, which was traditionally limited to regional theatrical markets, is now gaining greater visibility through these digital platforms. OTT services allow Kannada films to reach viewers across India and around the world through subtitles, dubbing, and online accessibility. This has contributed to the globalization of Kannada cinema by enabling international audiences to engage with stories rooted in regional culture and traditions.

However, despite the increasing presence of Kannada films on OTT platforms, there is limited academic research that specifically examines how these platforms contribute to the globalization of Kannada cinema. Many studies focus broadly on Indian cinema or on larger industries such as Hindi cinema, leaving regional industries like Kannada cinema relatively underexplored.

Therefore, it is important to investigate the role of OTT platforms in expanding the global reach of Kannada films. This study aims to analyze how digital streaming platforms influence the distribution, visibility, and cultural representation of Kannada cinema in the global media environment. Understanding these dynamics will help explain how regional cinema is adapting to the opportunities and challenges of the digital streaming era.

Research Method

The study uses multiple qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. The main methods include Case Study Analysis, Selected Kannada films that gained popularity through OTT platforms are analyzed to understand how digital distribution helped them reach global audiences. Document Analysis – Industry reports, media articles, and academic studies related to OTT platforms and regional cinema are examined to support the research findings.

Kannada Movies Which Grab the Global attention /Most Popular OTT Releases in Kannada

Kantara (2022) is a Kannada film directed by Rishab Shetty. The film is based on local traditions and folklore from coastal Karnataka. Initially, the film was released in theatres and later became available on Amazon Prime Video.

The OTT release helped the film reach audiences outside Karnataka. Through subtitles and dubbed versions in multiple languages, viewers from different parts of India and other countries were able to watch the film. According to the Release information on IMDB, the film Streamed in numerous Countries including India, UAE, France, Singapore, Canada, USA, and Spain. It Shows how OTT platforms help regional films gain wider recognition and promote local culture internationally.

Garuda Gamana Vrishabha Vahana (2021) yet another Kamanda film Directed by Raj B. Shetty, this film received critical appreciation for its unique storytelling and strong character development. After its theatrical run, the film was released on ZEE5.

Although the film had a limited theatrical audience, its OTT release helped it reach a wider group of viewers. Film critics and international audiences appreciated its realistic narrative and artistic style. This example shows how OTT platforms

provide an opportunity for content-driven films to gain recognition beyond traditional markets.

777 *Charlie*, (2022) directed by Kiranraj K, is another Kannada film that received global appreciation. After its theatrical release, the film was streamed on Voot.

The emotional story about the relationship between a man and a dog appealed to audiences across languages and cultures. OTT streaming allowed the film to reach viewers in different countries, including members of the Indian diaspora. The availability of subtitles and dubbing helped non-Kannada audiences understand the story easily. This case demonstrates how OTT platforms help Kannada films connect with global viewers.

KGF Chapter 2 (2022) The sequel, KGF: Chapter 2, continued the global success of the franchise. Directed again by Prashanth Neel, the film achieved massive theatrical success and was later streamed on Amazon Prime Video.

After its OTT release, the film reached international audiences who had heard about the movie through social media and online reviews. Streaming allowed global viewers to experience the film easily without geographical limitations.

3. Discussion and Findings

The case studies of *Kantara*, *777 Charlie*, and *Garuda Gamana Vrishabha Vahana* provide important insights into the role of OTT platforms in globalizing Kannada cinema. These films demonstrate how digital streaming services have transformed the traditional distribution system and created new opportunities for regional film industries to reach wider audiences. The analysis of these case studies reveals several significant findings regarding the influence of OTT platforms on the visibility, accessibility, and cultural impact of Kannada films.

One of the most important findings is the expansion of audience reach. Traditionally, Kannada films were mainly distributed within the state of Karnataka and had limited access to national or international audiences. The theatrical distribution system often restricted the availability of regional films due to geographical limitations and language barriers. However, OTT platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, ZEE5, and Voot have significantly expanded the reach of Kannada films. Through digital streaming, these films are now accessible to viewers across India and in different parts of the world. This broader accessibility allows regional cinema to gain recognition beyond its local market.

Another important finding is the role of multilingual accessibility in promoting Kannada films globally. OTT platforms offer features such as subtitles and dubbed versions in multiple languages, which help overcome language barriers. For example, the availability of subtitles in various languages enabled audiences from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to watch and understand films like *Kantara* and *777 Charlie*. This accessibility plays a crucial role in introducing regional stories to global viewers and promoting cross-cultural appreciation. As a result, OTT

platforms function as cultural bridges that connect local narratives with international audiences.

The case studies also highlight the promotion of regional culture and identity through OTT platforms. Kannada films often reflect local traditions, folklore, and social realities. For instance, *Kantara* presents the cultural practices and beliefs associated with the ritual of Bhoota Kola in coastal Karnataka. Through digital streaming, such culturally rooted narratives become visible to audiences around the world. This exposure not only enhances the global recognition of Kannada cinema but also contributes to the preservation and dissemination of regional cultural heritage. Therefore, OTT platforms play an important role in promoting cultural diversity in the global media landscape.

Another key finding is the extended lifecycle of films through OTT distribution. In the traditional theatrical system, the success of a film largely depends on its performance at the box office during a limited release period. However, OTT platforms provide an opportunity for films to remain available for a longer time. Even after the theatrical run, films continue to attract new viewers through digital streaming. For example, films such as *777 Charlie* gained additional popularity after their release on OTT platforms. This extended availability allows films to reach audiences who may not have had the opportunity to watch them in theatres.

The case studies also demonstrate that OTT platforms support diverse storytelling styles and genres. Unlike theatrical releases, which often prioritize commercially successful formulas, OTT platforms provide space for experimental and content-driven cinema. Films such as *Garuda Gamana Vrishabha Vahana* represent a different narrative style that focuses on character development and realistic storytelling rather than conventional commercial elements. Through OTT platforms, such films are able to reach niche audiences who appreciate artistic and innovative cinema. This suggests that digital streaming services encourage creative freedom and allow filmmakers to explore new storytelling approaches.

Another significant observation from the case studies is the global exposure for Kannada filmmakers and actors. OTT platforms provide an international platform where regional filmmakers can showcase their work to global audiences. As Kannada films become accessible to viewers worldwide, filmmakers gain recognition and opportunities for collaboration with artists and production houses from other regions and countries. This exposure helps strengthen the position of Kannada cinema in the global film industry.

The analysis also indicates that OTT platforms contribute to the economic growth of regional cinema. Digital distribution offers additional revenue sources through streaming rights and licensing agreements. For producers and filmmakers, this financial support reduces the risk associated with theatrical releases. As a result, filmmakers may be more willing to invest in innovative projects and unique narratives. The presence of OTT platforms therefore creates a more sustainable environment for the development of regional film industries.

However, the findings also reveal certain challenges associated with OTT distribution. One challenge is the high level of competition among films available on streaming platforms. Since audiences have access to a wide range of content from different languages and countries, regional films must compete with global productions for viewer attention. Additionally, the visibility of films on OTT platforms often depends on recommendation algorithms and promotional strategies, which may influence which films receive greater exposure.

Despite these challenges, the overall findings clearly show that OTT platforms have played a crucial role in transforming the distribution and visibility of Kannada cinema. By providing digital access, multilingual features, and global distribution networks, streaming platforms have enabled Kannada films to reach audiences beyond traditional regional boundaries. The case studies analyzed in this research demonstrate that culturally specific stories can achieve global appreciation when supported by digital distribution channels.

4. Conclusion

The discussion based on the case studies highlights that OTT platforms function as powerful tools for the globalization of Kannada cinema. They expand audience reach, promote regional culture, support diverse storytelling, and create new opportunities for filmmakers. As digital streaming continues to grow, OTT platforms are likely to remain an important factor in shaping the future of Kannada cinema and strengthening its presence in the global media environment.

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