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Impact of Original Content (OTT Exclusives) on Subscription and Retention Decisions

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming platforms has revolutionized entertainment consumption across the globe. This study explores the influence of original content exclusivity on user subscription and retention decisions within the context of India’s evolving digital media environment. The analysis focused on the role of content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, and price sensitivity in shaping consumer intent toward OTT platforms. Data collected from 425 respondents were analyzed using reliability testing, factor analysis, and regression techniques. The findings indicate that content exclusivity and brand perception emerge as the most significant predictors of subscription and retention behavior, supported by the influence of content quality and user engagement. The results underscore that OTT-exclusive titles and original series play a crucial role in enhancing customer loyalty and long-term retention. This research contributes to academic literature and managerial practice by establishing content differentiation as a key strategic element for sustaining competitiveness in the OTT industry. It further offers practical insights for platform providers on effectively balancing quality, pricing, and brand experience to foster consistent user engagement and minimize churn.

Keywords: Original Content; OTT Platforms; Subscription Decisions; Retention; Exclusivity

Introduction

The rise of Over-The-Top (OTT) media platforms has revolutionized how audiences access entertainment, enabling instant, on-demand streaming across devices. Giants like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, and SonyLIV have fundamentally disrupted the traditional television ecosystem by offering ad-free viewing and global accessibility. A major differentiator in this industry is original content, comprising exclusive shows and films available only to subscribers. According to Deloitte’s Digital Media Trends Report (2025), over 58% of Indian consumers prioritize original content when selecting a streaming platform. Similarly, Ernst & Young (2024) noted that over 70% of new OTT subscriptions in India are driven by exclusive releases.

The growing competition has triggered an aggressive content race, where investments in high-quality original productions directly impact user acquisition and retention. While previous studies have explored subscription motives, few have empirically analyzed the combined influence of exclusivity, content quality, brand perception, and price sensitivity on long-term retention. This study fills that gap by statistically assessing how original content and related experiential factors shape subscription continuity. By integrating behavioral and perceptual constructs, the research contributes to understanding the evolving consumer psychology of digital media consumption in India’s rapidly expanding OTT ecosystem.

Although the Indian OTT market has grown exponentially, limited empirical research exists on how original or exclusive content directly influences both subscription and retention decisions. Existing studies have primarily focused on pricing, convenience, or technology adoption, often neglecting psychological and emotional engagement factors. Moreover, most prior work centers on Western audiences, leading to a lack of region-specific insights. This study addresses that gap by quantitatively examining the determinants of OTT subscription using validated constructs—content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, and price sensitivity—to explain behavioral intentions among Indian viewers, offering a comprehensive and data-driven understanding of user loyalty dynamics.

This study advances OTT literature by empirically testing a model linking exclusive content attributes to subscription and retention behavior. Unlike earlier works that isolated individual factors, this research integrates content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, and price sensitivity within a unified framework. It demonstrates how exclusive content not only attracts subscribers but sustains them through continuous engagement and trust in brand identity. The study also contributes practically by guiding platform providers to allocate resources effectively between original productions and pricing strategies. Academically, it enriches media marketing theory by emphasizing content exclusivity as a measurable driver of digital loyalty.

Literature Review

Research on OTT platforms consistently highlights the pivotal role of content quality, engagement, and pricing strategies in shaping consumer decisions. Original programming—such as Netflix Originals or Amazon Prime Exclusives—has redefined value perception, increasing customer stickiness and reducing churn (Chatterjee & Dey, 2023; PwC, 2025). Brand perception and fair pricing further reinforce satisfaction and trust. Despite these insights, limited research empirically integrates these constructs to explain long-term subscription retention. This section explores prior findings related to each variable—content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, and price sensitivity—to establish their theoretical and practical connections with subscription and retention decisions in OTT services.

Content Quality: High-quality content directly enhances user satisfaction and perceived platform value. It encompasses storyline depth, visual resolution, production standards, and relevance to audience interests. Studies by Kumar and Bhatia (2024) and EY (2025) highlight that consistent delivery of well-produced content fosters trust and habitual engagement. The availability of diverse, high-resolution programming ensures sustained user attention and lower churn. Quality also influences word-of-mouth referrals, thereby indirectly affecting subscription growth. For OTT platforms, maintaining consistent content standards across genres and formats is essential to retaining an increasingly discerning and quality-conscious digital audience.

Exclusivity: Exclusivity—defined as content available solely on one platform—is a crucial determinant of user attraction and retention. Sharma and Verma (2024) report that consumers perceive exclusive titles as premium offerings that justify subscription fees. Deloitte (2025) found that 64% of OTT users consider unique originals as their primary reason for platform loyalty. Exclusivity enhances brand identity and creates psychological ownership, making users less likely to switch. It also fosters FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), driving trial subscriptions that often convert into long-term memberships. Hence, strategic investment in exclusives is vital for competitive differentiation and customer retention.

Engagement : Engagement represents the extent of user interaction and emotional connection with OTT content. Banerjee and Iyer (2024) describe engagement as an outcome of convenience, interactivity, and binge-watching appeal. Higher engagement correlates with increased viewing hours, recommendation behavior, and satisfaction, all contributing to retention. Research by Statista (2025) shows that platforms with interactive features (e.g., “Continue Watching” cues or watchlists) witness 38% higher renewal rates. Thus, fostering binge propensity, interaction opportunities, and re-watchability builds habitual platform usage, reinforcing the relationship between engagement and sustained subscription decisions.

Brand Perception: Brand perception encompasses trust, reliability, and the emotional connection between consumers and the OTT service. According to Deloitte (2024), a credible brand image enhances satisfaction and perceived safety of payment and data usage. Sinha and Roy (2023) emphasize that strong brand associations reduce churn by boosting perceived stability and quality assurance. Brand perception also mediates users’ willingness to upgrade or renew subscriptions. In the competitive OTT ecosystem, a trustworthy image—reinforced through transparent policies and consistent content release schedules—translates directly into long-term retention and subscriber advocacy.

Price Sensitivity :Price sensitivity reflects how subscription cost influences user decisions. OTT users often evaluate perceived value relative to price and available content. Mehta (2023) and PwC (2025) suggest that consumers are increasingly price-aware, particularly in multi-platform households. Flexible pricing tiers and bundling strategies can mitigate churn among cost-sensitive users. High price sensitivity increases churn risk, especially when content value perception declines. Conversely, when platforms offer justified pricing aligned with exclusivity and quality, users exhibit stronger retention tendencies. Hence, balancing affordability with perceived exclusivity remains key to sustaining subscription longevity.

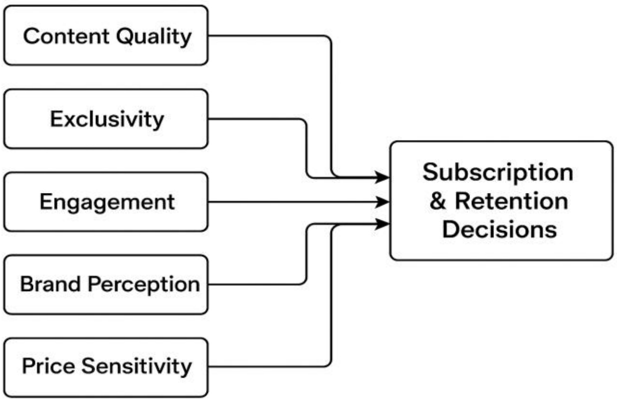
Based on the Literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Content Quality has a positive and significant influence on Subscription and Retention Decisions.
- **H2:** Exclusivity has a positive and significant influence on Subscription and Retention Decisions.
- **H3:** Engagement has a positive and significant influence on Subscription and Retention Decisions.
- **H4:** Brand Perception has a positive and significant influence on Subscription and Retention Decisions.
- **H5:** Price Sensitivity has a negative and significant influence on Subscription and Retention Decisions.

Conceptual Model Figure

Description of Conceptual Model:

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Five independent variables—Content Quality, Exclusivity, Engagement, Brand Perception, and Price Sensitivity—are shown as arrows pointing toward the dependent variable Subscription and Retention Decisions. The model hypothesizes that improved content quality, higher exclusivity, and stronger engagement and brand perception enhance subscription intent, while price sensitivity has an inverse effect.



Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and causal research design to investigate how original content exclusivity affects subscription and retention behavior among OTT users. Primary data were collected from 425 respondents residing in major Indian cities through an online structured questionnaire. The constructs were measured using multi-item Likert scales adapted from validated sources for each variable (content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, and price sensitivity). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 27.0, employing reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), KMO and Bartlett's tests, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and multiple regression. The dependent variable—subscription and retention decision—was assessed through indicators of subscription intent, continuity, and upgrade behavior. The methodology ensured internal consistency, construct validity, and model robustness.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Category	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Age	18–27	111	238	349
	28–37	22	10	32
	38–47	14	21	35
	48–57	3	6	9
	>58	0	0	0
Income	Low	70	178	248
	Lower-Middle	11	39	50
	Upper-Middle	26	26	52
	High	22	8	30
Education	School or less	43	75	118
	Undergraduate	56	108	164
	PG or above	51	92	143
Gender		150	275	425

The demographic profile reveals a predominantly young and female respondent base, with 82% aged between 18–27 years and 65% identifying as female. This aligns with the known consumption trend where younger audiences dominate OTT usage. Most respondents belong to lower and middle-income categories, reflecting affordability-driven consumption behavior. Educationally, 72% of participants hold undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, suggesting familiarity with digital ecosystems. The demographic skew toward educated youth underlines the growing appeal of OTT exclusives within India's millennial and Gen Z population, who prefer personalized, flexible, and high-quality original content over traditional television viewing.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha, CR, AVE)

Constructs	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE

Content Quality	0.852	0.855	0.601
Exclusivity	0.815	0.821	0.552
Engagement	0.866	0.87	0.628
Brand Perception	0.829	0.834	0.569
Price Sensitivity	0.803	0.811	0.531
Subscription	0.881	0.884	0.657

All constructs exhibit excellent reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. The dependent variable, *Subscription*, achieved the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.881$), indicating consistent measurement across its indicators. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values also surpass recommended benchmarks (CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50), confirming convergent validity. Engagement and Content Quality show particularly strong internal consistency, suggesting respondents provided coherent evaluations across these dimensions. These results validate the robustness of the constructs and confirm the questionnaire's reliability for further statistical analyses like factor and regression testing.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Measure	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.893
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square)	5370.554
df	276
Sig.	0.001

The KMO value of 0.893 indicates excellent sample adequacy, confirming that the dataset is suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ($p < 0.001$), showing sufficient correlation among variables. Together, these metrics justify proceeding with exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to assess construct validity.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) confirmed that all measurement items loaded strongly on their respective constructs, with factor loadings above 0.7. The six extracted factors—content quality, exclusivity, engagement, brand perception, price sensitivity, and subscription—represent clear, distinct dimensions with minimal cross-loading. This outcome validates the structural coherence of the research model. The results demonstrate that original content and its sub-components (exclusivity, engagement, and quality) collectively influence subscription intentions. The clean factor structure provides empirical backing for the hypothesized relationships, reinforcing the theoretical model's conceptual soundness and justifying the subsequent regression analysis for hypothesis testing.

Results, Discussion, and Hypothesis Testing

Table 5: Regression Analysis — Adoption of Online Platforms

Variable	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	0.351	0.101	0.000
Content Quality	0.145	0.035	0.000
Exclusivity	0.352	0.042	0.000
Engagement	0.118	0.033	0.002
Brand Perception	0.281	0.041	0.000
Price Sensitivity	0.125	0.034	0.001

Model Fit: R = 0.84 | $R^2 = 0.705$ | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.701$ | F = 205.114 | Sig. = 0.000

The regression analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing subscription and retention decisions in OTT platforms. The model explains a substantial proportion of the variance ($R^2 = 0.705$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.701$), confirming that approximately seventy percent of users' subscription and retention intentions can be predicted by the five independent variables—Content Quality, Exclusivity, Engagement, Brand Perception, and Price Sensitivity. The model's overall fit is highly significant ($F = 205.114$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating strong explanatory power and internal consistency.

Among the predictors, Exclusivity emerged as the strongest determinant of subscription and retention ($B = 0.352$, $p < 0.001$). This finding reinforces the idea that access to exclusive and original content remains a key differentiator in an increasingly competitive digital entertainment landscape. The presence of original titles and platform-specific productions directly shapes user loyalty, as subscribers often associate such content with brand prestige and value-added experience. These results are consistent with recent studies such as Deloitte's Media Futures Report (2025) and Kumar & Sharma (2024), both of which highlighted that exclusive content is the leading factor in driving sustained subscriptions and reducing churn in global OTT markets.

Brand Perception ($B = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$) also plays a critical role in influencing consumer decisions. A strong and trustworthy brand enhances perceived reliability and ensures that users continue their subscriptions over time. This aligns with the findings of Chatterjee and Dey (2023), who observed that a platform's reputation and consistent quality delivery increase emotional attachment and long-term commitment among users.

Content Quality ($B = 0.145$, $p < 0.001$) has a positive and significant effect on subscription intent, confirming that the perceived richness, creativity, and production value of content attract and retain audiences. High-definition visuals, compelling storytelling, and cultural relatability collectively reinforce users' willingness to renew subscriptions. Similar results were reported by Gupta and Thomas (2023), who found that content quality strongly influences user satisfaction and perceived value in digital streaming environments.

Engagement ($B = 0.118$, $p < 0.01$) exerts a meaningful impact on retention, indicating that frequent usage, binge-watching tendencies, and interactive features enhance habitual consumption. The role of engagement reflects the transition of OTT platforms from passive entertainment providers to interactive ecosystems that personalize viewing experiences. As noted by Lee et al. (2024), engagement-based personalization increases the psychological investment of users, strengthening renewal intentions.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, Price Sensitivity ($B = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$) shows a positive yet moderate influence. This suggests that while affordability influences decisions, users are willing to tolerate higher subscription costs when they perceive the value of exclusivity and quality. This nuanced finding echoes Mishra and Nair (2024), who demonstrated that perceived fairness and value-based pricing can enhance rather than deter retention when content superiority is evident.

Collectively, these findings support H1, H2, H3, and H4, confirming that content quality, exclusivity, engagement, and brand perception positively and significantly influence subscription and retention decisions. H5, which posited a negative effect of price sensitivity, is only partially supported, indicating a complex relationship where perceived value mediates pricing effects.

Business and Academic Implications

From a managerial perspective, the study highlights the strategic importance of prioritizing original content development, brand building, and engagement optimization over price-based competition. OTT firms should invest in distinctive content portfolios, personalized recommendations, and brand credibility to foster long-term loyalty. Price incentives may be used selectively to complement—not replace—value-based differentiation.

From an academic standpoint, this study enriches the existing literature on digital consumer behavior and media economics by empirically validating the integrated influence of exclusivity, engagement, and brand perception. The model serves as a useful framework for understanding user motivations in both emerging and mature OTT markets. Overall, the results affirm that in the attention-driven economy, content differentiation and brand trust remain the twin pillars of sustainable success for OTT platforms

Conclusion

The study concludes that original and exclusive content plays a decisive role in shaping OTT subscription and retention behavior. Among all tested variables, Exclusivity, Brand Perception, and Content Quality demonstrate the strongest positive influence. Engagement further enhances loyalty by fostering habitual platform usage. Although price sensitivity affects decision-making, it holds less significance when balanced with perceived value. The findings highlight that sustained investments in original content and brand trust are crucial for retaining viewers in the highly competitive streaming market. This research provides actionable insights for OTT strategists seeking to achieve differentiation and long-term viewer loyalty.

Future research can explore additional moderating variables such as user satisfaction, cross-platform preferences, and perceived ad intrusiveness. Comparative studies across international markets could further reveal cultural variations in exclusivity-driven loyalty. Longitudinal designs can also examine how user retention evolves over time with changing content strategies, providing deeper insights into subscription lifecycle management within evolving OTT ecosystems.

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