

# The superpower of OTT platforms

Same Language Subtitling on all Indian language content is an opportunity to make meaningful contributions to reading literacy and language learning

**DATA POINT**

**Brij Kothari & Nisha Vernekar**

**O**n August 8, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan launched the 'State of Elementary Education in Rural India' report which shows that schoolchildren spend most of their screen time playing games, watching movies or listening to songs. Accessing study materials and online tutorials featured way down the order. **Chart 1** shows the findings from the survey. Of the 49.3% of parents whose children used gadgets, 76.7% said that their children mainly used mobile phones to play video games, over 56% said that their children used phones to watch movies, 35% said they used phones to access online materials, and only 19% said they used phones to attend online tutorials.

Instead of seeing this trend as a cause for concern, it can be viewed as a promising opportunity where education meets entertainment. Traditional media consumption has increasingly transitioned to OTT platforms, which have the ability to make meaningful contributions to reading literacy and language learning.

Captions were invented in the U.S. in the early 1970s to make television accessible to people with various degrees of hearing impairments. Viewers without hearing disabilities also came to appreciate the value of captions and same language subtitling (SLS) as it helped them follow the dialogues better. Caption and SLS are now available in around 40-50 countries. But a major benefit of SLS – improving mass reading literacy – has not been leveraged by any country yet.

The PlanetRead survey estimates that of the billion "literate" people in the country, 600 million are weak readers. The survey, conducted in four Hindi-speaking States, measured literacy using two methods – the census method which relies on self-reporting and

another which required people to read a Grade 2-level text.

An Ormax OTT audience report showed that India's OTT base in 2022 was 424 million people, with a nearly 80% penetration in metros. Future OTT growth will predominantly come from rural areas where the preference tilts toward Indian language content.

SLS on all Indian language content is, therefore, a massive opportunity. Universalisation of SLS may act as an automatic reading practice in the viewer's language. The Billion Readers initiative of the PlanetRead organisation is scaling SLS on TV and streaming platforms to achieve that. Moreover, under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, all OTT platforms are required to offer SLS with their content. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting framed the Accessibility Standards, 2019 mandating SLS on half the content on TV by 2025.

PlanetRead conducted a survey of 2,673 movies/shows produced in 2022-23 that are on India's top five OTT platforms - Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Zee5, and Sony Liv. Almost all English language content on OTTs is available with English subtitles. In contrast, SLS is missing from most Indian language content (**Chart 2**).

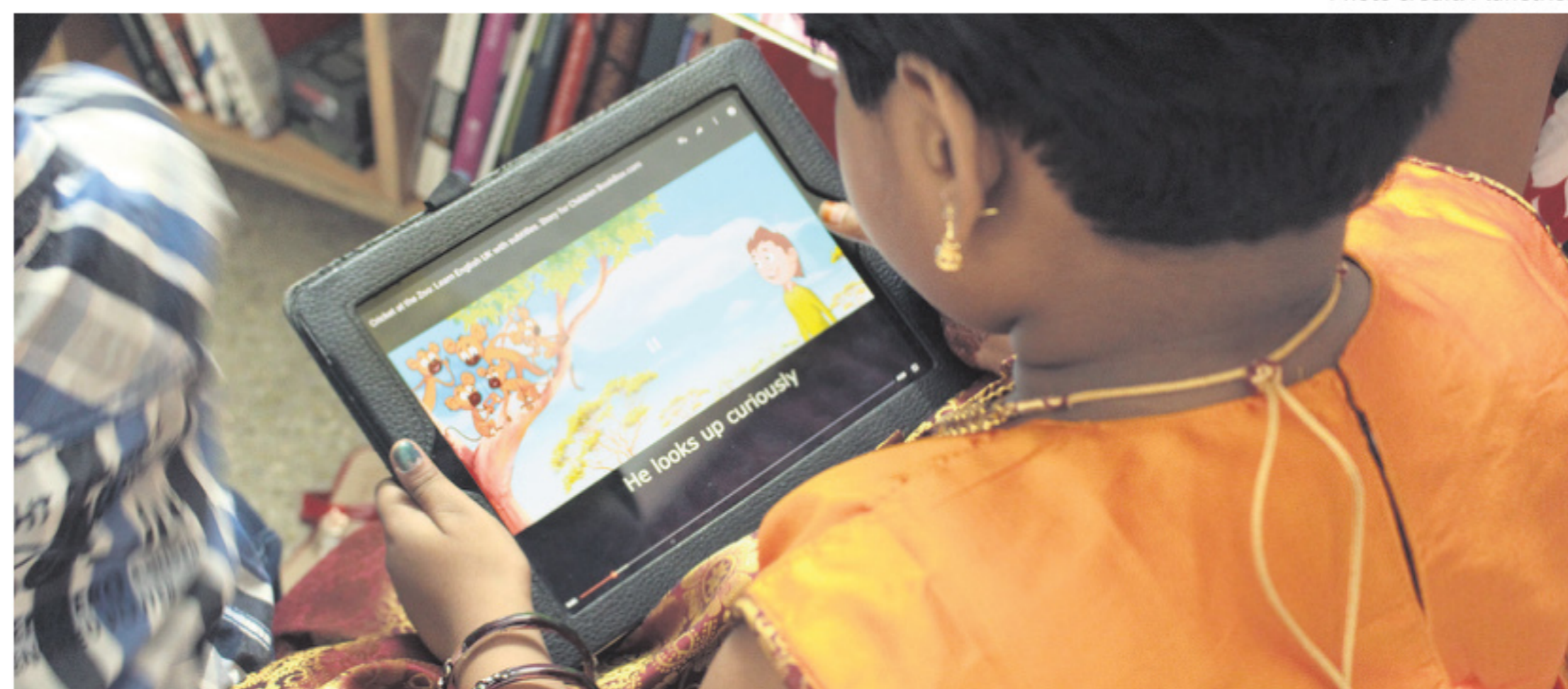
Netflix leads SLS implementation in Indian languages with one-third of the content having SLS (**Chart 3**). Amazon Prime is a distant second (10.1%), while the other big OTT platforms have barely made a start.

SLS penetration is higher on content produced by the platforms themselves. Of the original Indian language content produced by Netflix and Amazon Prime, SLS is on 92.3% and 81.8% of content, respectively (**Chart 4**). However, Hotstar, Sony Liv, and Zee5 are yet to implement SLS in their original Indian language content. This suggests that if content producers were to include SLS and caption files, OTT platforms may include these features.

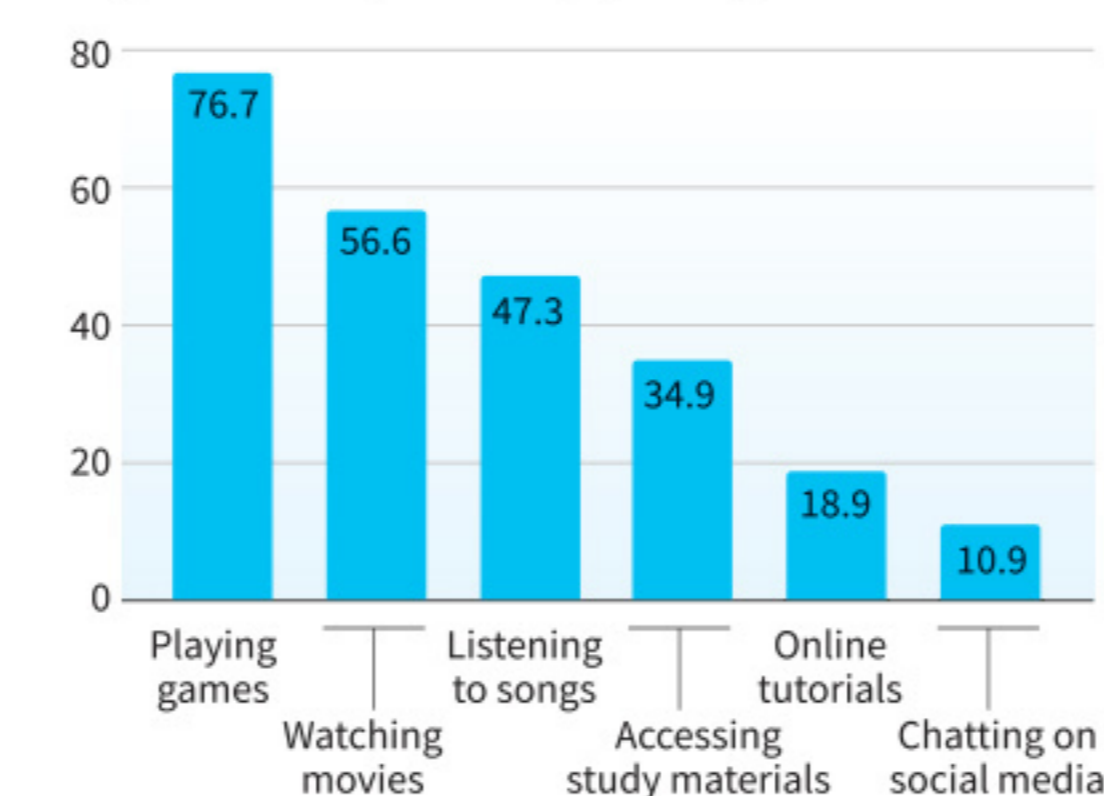
## Watch and learn

The charts are based on data sourced from the State of Elementary Education in Rural India report and the PlanetRead survey

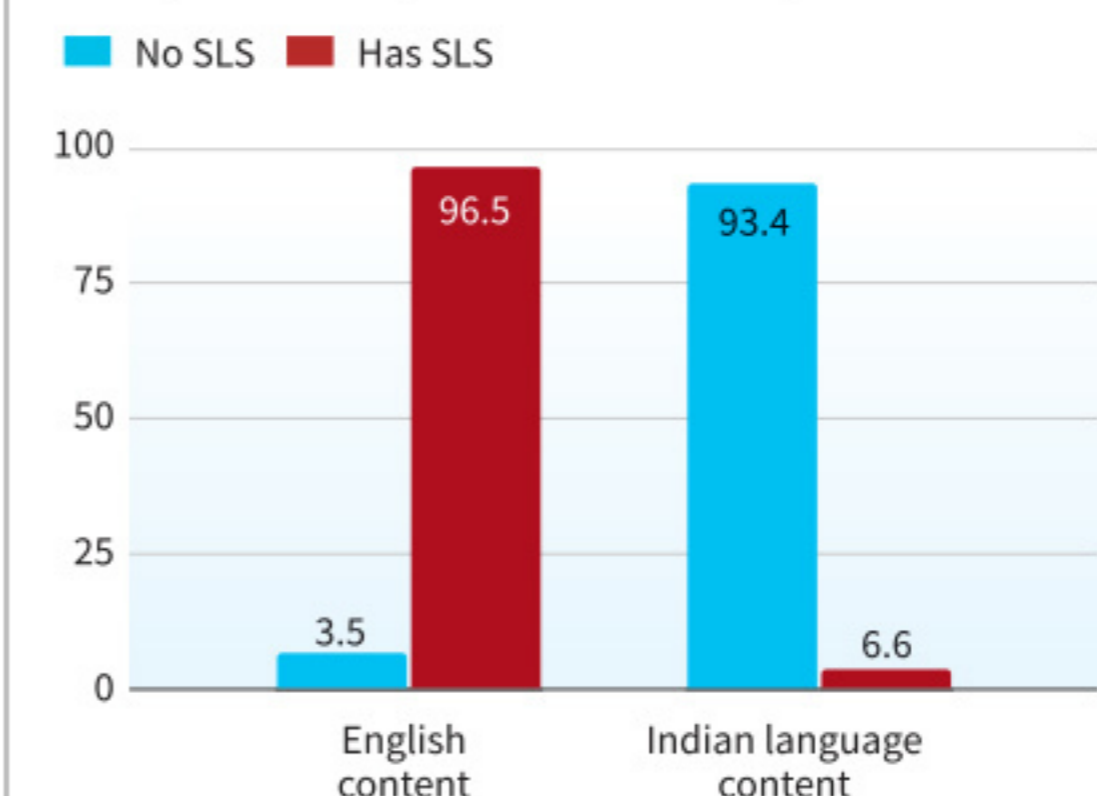
Photo credit: PlanetRead



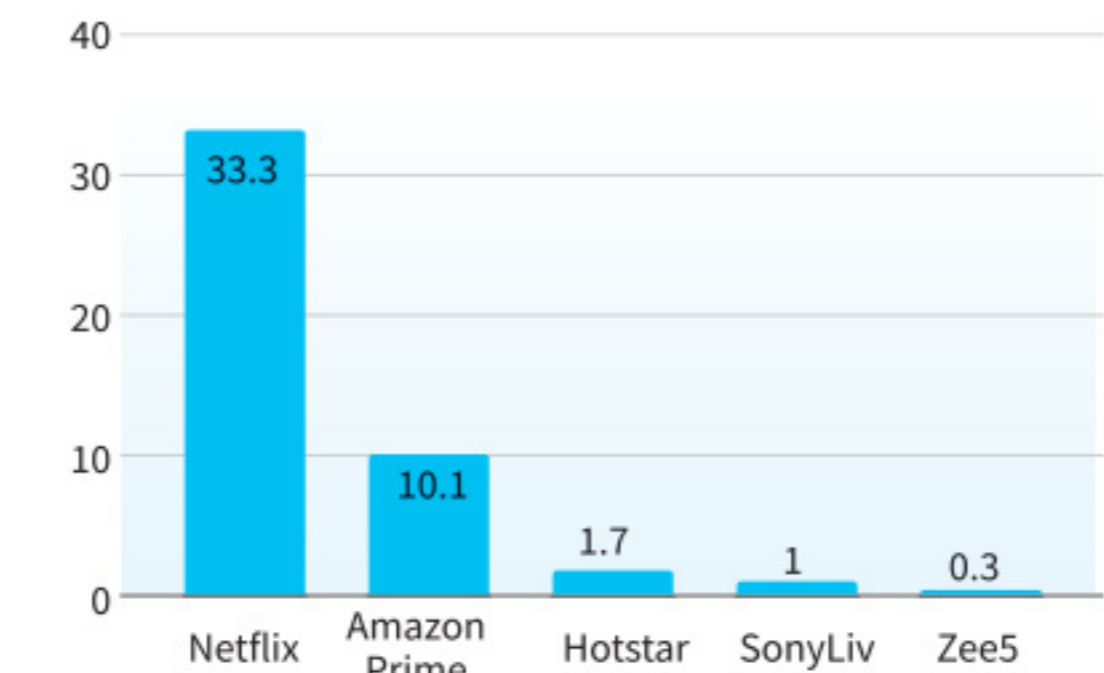
**Chart 1** | About 76.7% of parents said that their children mainly used mobile phones to play video games



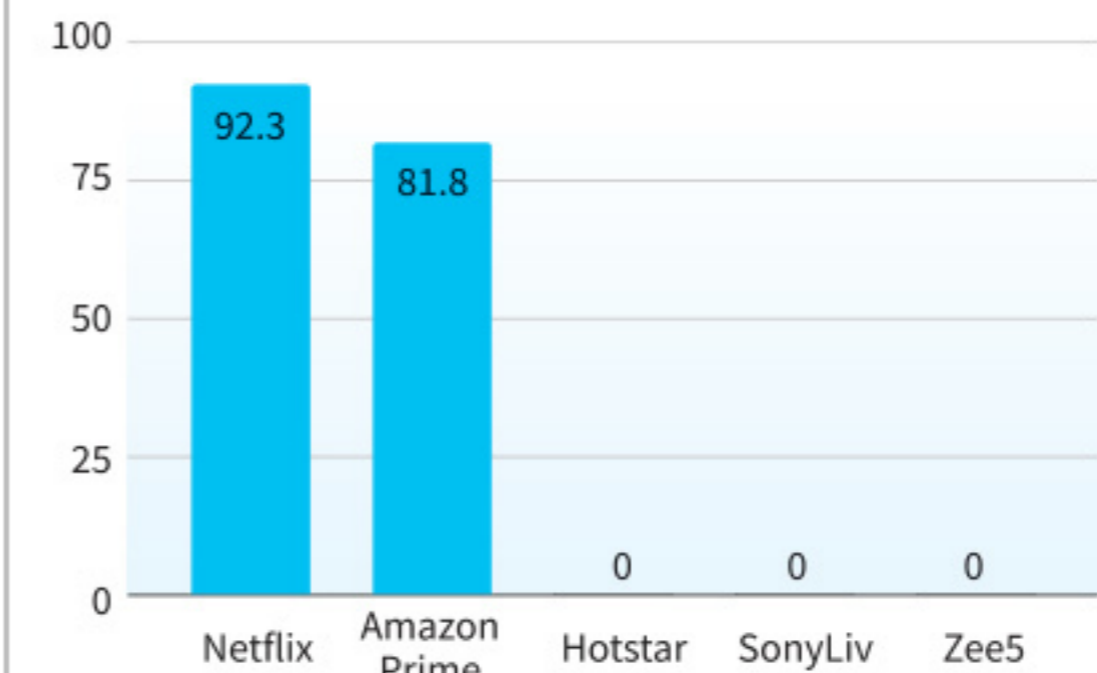
**Chart 2** | Same language subtitling (SLS) on Indian language and English content (as a % of total content)



**Chart 3** | Availability of SLS on Indian language content across OTT platforms (as a % of total content)



**Chart 4** | Availability of SLS on original Indian language content produced by OTT platforms (as a % of total content)



Brij Kothari and Nisha Vernekar are with the Billion Readers (BIRD) initiative at PlanetRead. BIRD is supported by Co-Impact and the Rohini and Nandan Nilekani Philanthropies

**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

**The Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 22, 1973

## IIT admissions govt. enquiries into complaints

New Delhi, Aug. 22: The Union Minister of Education, Prof. Nurul Hasan, to-day expressed his "concern" in the Rajya Sabha that representation of students from certain States in the five Indian Institutes of Technology was "very low indeed". Prof. Hasan was replying to Mr. P. Subramania Menon, who had complained that only two students from Kerala were selected for IIT this year. Even these students could not get admission because they could not get their pre-degree certificates in time, he said. Prof. Hasan assured the House, that he making enquiries to find out how this had happened. Sometime the States board of secondary education did not announce the results in time. Also the structure of courses in the secondary education in the States was not on the all India pattern. In spite of the recommendation by the Union Education Ministry, the State Governments had not been able to apply their mind to bring about these changes, particularly in science and mathematics courses. He said he proposed to have further consultations with the State Education Ministers on this question. Replying to Mr. Krishan Kant, Prof. Hasan told the House about the action taken on some of the complaints received on the working of the Indian Institute of Technology. The students of Kanpur institute had passed a resolution that the institute was in a state of decay and in all probability be ruined unless matters were looked into immediately. The board of governors took notice of this and had appointed a number of teams to look into the functioning of the institution. In regard to the IIT, Madras, he said a charter of demand was forwarded by the employees association.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 22, 1923

## Spanish defeat

Madrid, August 20: Military critics attribute the recent Spanish reverse in Morocco to their holding a big salient. The Spanish base at Afrau on the coast is now isolated and Tifaruin has been surrounded. The garrison is holding out and reinforcements are on their way thither. A Spanish Military Aeroplane manned by two officers crashed today in rebel territory near Tifaruin. Their fate is not known.