

# Vanita Kohli on Mrigashira

## SPEAKERS

Vanita Kohli, Radha

**Radha** 00:02

Hi, Vanita. Welcome to Mrigashira. It's great to have you amongst us today. Thanks, Radha. How do you see, you know, the last couple of years from OTT perspective, and according to you, what are some of the typical success factors or formula?

**Vanita Kohli** 00:59

Okay, on just to put it in perspective, media and entertainment is a Rs 1.6 trillion industry. So, OTT is a small part of this, just to put things in perspective, because this this whole Hawa round will be you know, everybody's fascinated by it. OTT is roughly about 15,000 crore in size. 9000 Crore comes from advertising and maybe three 4000, maybe a little more from subscription. The journey is exactly what television has seen, of course, is a difference in the format. the journey of television was exactly what newspapers saw on the journey of newspapers was exactly what radio saw is a different format every time. So you know, radio offered an audio medium. But newspapers offered a depth and a wit, which was different, you could open the paper and scan any number of things, and television offer a depth and a bit, which is completely different from the newspaper. Cinema offers a different sort of perspective or a spectacle, which most of the media can't in terms of size and scale. Similarly, the internet offers completely different experience. And the depth and width again, has gone up several notches, because you can transact, you can talk, you can chat you can share. So you know, all the stuff we do while watching a show or a movie, I mean, that is added to the richness of experience, and therefore the format is different. But essentially, and so this is not to diss the fact that it has grown or that the form, but essentially the journey in every media remains the same. And since I look at it across media, you know the similarities hit me, and so do the differences. So Netflix game Amazon game, Disney Hotstar, of course, came much earlier as Hotstar in 2015. And even before that, you had YouTube, YouTube is the largest OTT, then there's MX Player, and then the others come in into. So this is the time when everybody is coming and putting their flags and marking that territories, I think, another seven, maybe 10 years from the time when you know you this industry will see some maturity. And that will come in at some scale. So when it becomes a 30-40,000 Crore industry, when it hits some sort of 3040 50,000 kind of scale is when you will see some, you know, players coming together. But right now, everybody's investing in content. Everybody wants to be seen as the guy getting the maximum amount of traffic, or the best subscription revenues. And everything is adding languages, adding territories, making changes to the product. I mean, that's roughly the same journey that TV went through in the 90s.

**Radha** 04:42

Absolutely, that's an interesting, observation you made, which is that, , there's a typical journey between different platforms from radio to TV. And also that meant that you know, what started off as one language medium became you know multimedia in the sense that the same player started in multiple languages

do you see more and more proliferation of vernacular OTTs and those vernacular OTTs taking over, you know, what is typically called as an English you know, player.

**Vanita Kohli 05:28**

You know, this is I don't know why we have this, whether it's an analyst or whether it's been film folk or TV folk. We have this big thing in our head that vernacular languages regional languages are not given their due. Please see the journey of newspapers, some of the biggest newspapers in India. We are in Bengal, Ananda Bazar. Patrika. We are in Malyalam Malyalam Manorama. We are in Hindi. So the whole journey of newspapers started with all languages. The whole journey of television started with all languages. I'm sorry ins SUN TV was among the earliest broadcasters in this country in 1993 91 your Star TV came 92 Zee TV came 93 Sun TV came. So you know this whole thing that people come and add languages. No, the languages themselves have been pioneers in their own markets. Eanadu TV started in mid 90s. Eanadu TV got acquired by colors, Mark TV got acquired by Star Zee TVs from the early 90s has had Marathi Bangla, it is done extremely well in languages see. It's only now that they've added Tamil Telugu to their portfolio but that much of that depends on how how strongly because Sun was so strong in the south, people were afraid to attempt the four South Indian languages, but Bangla, Marathi etc was available. Similarly, Punjabi Gujarati was available, but nobody added those languages, because they, those were easily duplicated with Hindi. And there was no advertising chasing Gujarati language television or Punjabi language television. Now there is, Please notice that Amazon offers language films across the board. And this is right from the beginning. I mean, first two years is always about understanding the market. So it's not that they're focused on Hindi are focused on English. Hindi is spoken by more people. It's spoken by roughly 10 times more people than any other language in this country. So obviously, it's a bit biggest market. But nobody gets shot except for sometimes I feel Netflix was a little late or star was a little late in touching non Hindi languages. But, you know, all the languages have started and they've all flowered this market. That's my point. And look at the number of only language Aha, Telugu language Ott, or joy. Bengali language, Ott, Marathi, there are some three OTT is in Marathi language is a Haryanvi Ott, there's a Assamese OTT. I mean, just see, and these guys will get acquired, eventually they will become moms. So like I said Radha, the same trajectory that TV saw newspapers, saw you will see in oddity you will, so languages will get added. But what happens you You do one thing, then you do another thing. So sometimes companies don't have the money to invest all in one go. But nobody can operate a media company in India and thing they can do it in one language. That would be foolish.

**Radha 08:49**

would that mean that, you know, television would somewhere sort of lose its prominence and become like, the way print is today?

what is wrong with print today people are paring down the number of pages circulation is dropping.

**Vanita Kohli 09:10**

People are reading them online. I'm sorry, I keep going back to history to answer questions on the future. When the radio came, live musicians went on strike. Okay, when the recording thing came, radio guys got very hassled. So when TV came the film and the newspaper guys got hassled, and there was strikes and stuff like that my point is, tell me one medium which has died out of all of these. No, So my point is,

every medium coexists with the other the rate of growth and their share of the audience may differ. Ott cannot obliterate all At the meeting, it will not everything coexist. So did you might have a larger share. But the same newspaper companies are migrating to OTT the same broadcasting companies, which are the largest OTT Disney Hotstar belongs to a broadcaster. So the same companies are migrating their businesses and they're taking this as they're adopting new technology. I'm not in favor of old technology not in. But I'm saying that we need to get some perspective, we get totally carried away with this whole thing OTT because we are watching so much OTT. And trust me a lot of small towns and villages also watching OTT but at the same time, free to air television is going through the roof. Look at DD free dish with that there are 50-60 million people homes. That's roughly if you take a factor of four but 200-214 million people on a free television, free three OTT MX Player 100 and 16 million uniques. So the fat and MX Player, by the way plays some linear channels also. So it is a very osmotic growth. It is you think any of these large news or OTTs, for example, will have survived without content from newspapers. So linear is subsidizing the growth of digital globally. And linear will also move there. So newspapers might become a small portion, the print portion might become very small. But the essential act of news gathering and reporting on news stories comes now in different forms. We are doing a podcast, there could be a short video, there could be a long form documentary, there could be a docu series. That's news, Right? News paper, the paper goes out of the news, but the news remains. So the paper might become lesser. That's my point.

**Radha 11:49**

we're talking about media organizations transforming themselves to newer medium. But what is also happening is, the younger generation need not necessarily be looking at these organizations, there is a strong, let's say influencer community or subject matter experts, who are probably individuals who are driving, , that is also increasingly the younger generation seems to be moving towards that. how prominent This is likely to be in the coming years?

**Vanita Kohli 13:00**

They are cognizant, I mean, see the investments going into the internet from mainstream organizations. They are all Cognizant what is times internet times internet is an arms of the arm the time Bhaskar, jagaran, Malaya Manorama, I mean, I interact with the digital arm. So all these companies, they are very focused on those businesses. And when you say that the young people go on to some other format, who knows that format is probably owned by the same media organization, when the IPL rights are up for auction, there is one particular element which is composite right, which is everything together. That's what star won the last time, right. That's why it had IPL on Hotstar, and on Star Sports. So everybody is cognizant of it now how slow how fast you are to react to it, and how well you react to it completely matter of how much capital you have, what brain power you have, what resources you throw at the problem. Newspapers were a little late about throwing resources at the problem. Television channels, and film studios have been very fast at throwing resources to the problem. That's why they they sort of on top of the OTT game. They're not behind. Globally, look at television companies and film studios are not behind on the OTT game. in India I think pandemic taught them a lesson pandemic gave them that shake. So you must realize Radha that when 90% of your profits are coming from a format, your ability to focus or push resources on something else is also you know, you're wondering why the hell should I throw so much money and stuff? You remember that? Most internet brands still don't make money? Yes. Okay. So the fact is, why should I throw good resources after bad resources? And so you. So now I think the

pandemic has brought us to a point in history where it makes sense. And I think everybody's decided that, you know, and many of the language newspapers are now refusing to talk to me about their digital strategy, because now they've become very serious, they are experimenting with several things, several things are running in beta versions. So you don't know what's going to come out of this churn. But remember, we have very strong newspapers, we have newspapers with a lot of cash. So I would not write them off. And not, by the way, TV is about what 70-80,000 crore, like I said, very profitable, very profitable means about 13-15% margins, happy industry. and this lot of juice left in that business. So I'm trying to say this is not to take away from the growth of Ott, which is there, people are turning to it. And the formats in which they're consuming is very interesting.

**Radha 16:24**

one of the things that happens when anybody and everybody thinks that, they can create content and put it out there is in terms of, the factual content, accuracy of the content, So how is that dynamics changing? Because is hate and fake news, in a way becoming an extension of yellow journalism as we used to know it?

**Vanita Kohli 16:54**

you know, sometimes I wonder if the heat was inside us. And it's just been unleashed by technology, or whether technology has created that heat. but the yellow journalism is the scale at which the amplification happens. The amplification possible is something can destroy people's lives and careers But at the same time, it gives you a tool to bring justice. So my point to you is that it's, it's not the same as yellow, yellow journalism was a one off thing. This is at another scale, a level rather,

**Radha 20:29**

So you made a statement, which said Indian firms have brought so much credibility to India and its growth. I just wanted you to elaborate on on that particular point.

**Vanita Kohli 21:05**

I've said this in like dozens of columns, I've said in dozens of pieces. I say it again, and I put my professional reputation on the line here. Please watch and Indian films. Anybody making these comments about Indian films has not watched. I watch Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bangla Hindi all films. Please watch Indian cinema. Why do you think they have an entire week at Cannes going on right now? Yeah, we make good films. If you're going to judge all of 1600 turns on the basis of one film, then I'm sorry, your mind is whopped. You go abroad people ask you about Amitabh Bachchan Shahrukh Khan and the face and it's very good, I'm very happy. How many other countries can boast of having a cinema which has a face for unknown people across the world? Yes, China would give an arm and leg to have a cinema like that or to have soft power like this. And here in our country, we keep dissing our own cinema. We keep pulling it down. We keep running hashtags. You know saying that this is bad,. And it cinema is a creative interpretation of the real world. Or it may be fantasy. Just go and enjoy it. Don't judge it from 700 year old prisms of history or your own social conditions, conditioning or some book mentality that you have just see it. even even you Kyuki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi. You make them slowly you push the envelope. Halke Halke Dhire Dhire. You know that there's a study which says that cable television is empowered rural women in India. Why is London talking about putting up a statue for Raj and Simran from the Dilwale

Dulhaniya Le Jayenge? Why does Japan celebrate Rajinikanth more than we do? You know, we have to ask ourselves, we have national treasures here and we keep pulling them down. Other countries will make money from them and will take away via we should be you know we should be creating a whole more industry around our soft power, adding to our GDP and leveraging it globally. That's what the UK did. By the way. It brings in 40% of the software stuff content exported across the world comes from the UK because they decided the creative industries are a focus point for government policy.

**Vanita Kohli** 25:39

Remember, for more than 100 years, Indian cinema has had very little state support, no state support, it has had no subsidy, no quota system, you know that Japan, China has this quota of 34 or 37 films which can be imported France has as we have nothing, anybody can any spin which passes a censor certificate can come in and screen in India, yet 90% of what is sold and watched in India is Indian films. We are 1.4 billion people, we still prefer our own cinema. It says something about us now with and it is not a protected cinema. Yeah, given a choice, we prefer our own cinema. So what does that tell you about the strength of our storytelling?

**Vanita Kohli** 26:37

**Radha** 27:45

Absolutely, So thanks a lot Vanita. it was actually great talking to you.

**Vanita Kohli** 29:11

Thank you so much for calling. Thanks that was fun.