



Anatomy of the anthology: An audience perspective

While streaming platforms seem bullish on anthologies in India, this analysis suggests the format holds little content or marketing value for the audience

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Summary

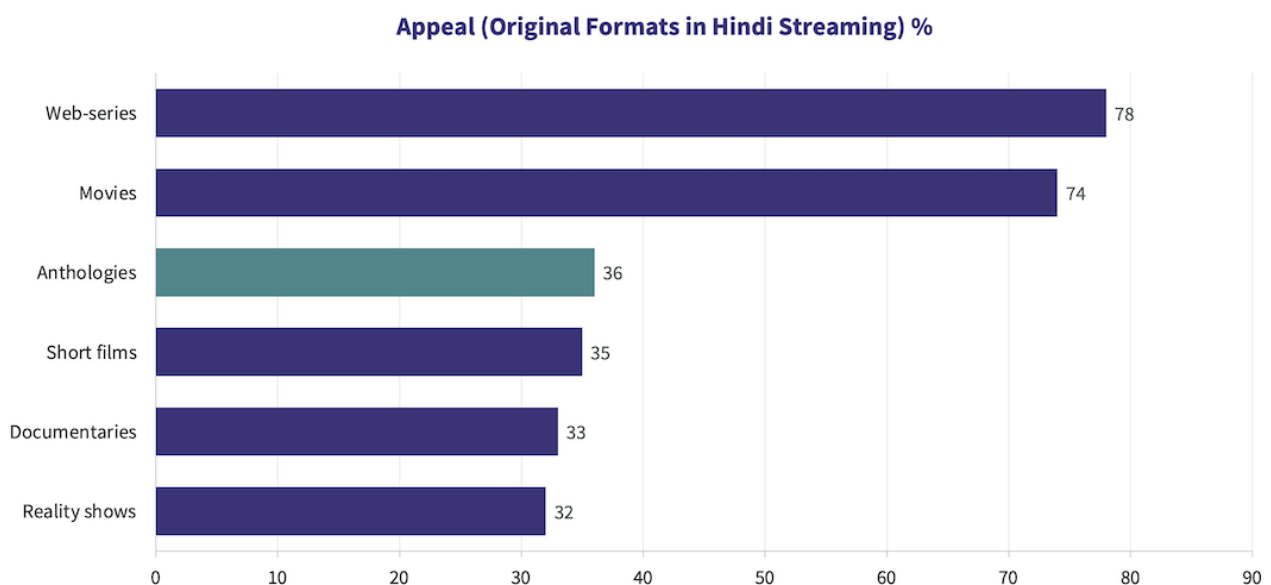
- The number of anthologies being dished out in the Indian streaming category is seeing an upward trend
 - However, most Hindi anthologies launched so far have not performed well on content or marketing metrics
 - A primary research of 1,200 Hindi streaming audience confirms that the anthology format holds niche appeal, only at the level of short films and documentaries
 - The author opines that the anthology format is not to Indian audience's taste, and relies on borrowed sensibility from the West
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When a streaming platform recently announced the release date of its upcoming anthology series, social media was abuzz with memes taking a dig at the number of anthologies being churned out in the streaming category in India. So, is the Indian OTT space seeing an overkill of anthologies? We decided to explore this question from a factual perspective.

Of the 139 original Hindi shows and films launched on major streaming platforms in India in 2021 so far, only 10 have been anthologies. At just 7% of the total original content launched, ‘overkill’ is not a word one would associate with it. But the trend is an upward one, with the number of anthologies more than doubling from just four in 2019 to double digit in 2020. And these are just the Hindi numbers. There have also been anthologies in languages like Tamil and Telugu, taking the overall count for the year to about 15. And most of these have been high-profile launches too, backed by major marketing spends.

Streaming players are making more anthologies with each passing year. But where does the Indian audience stand on this subject? We asked more than 1,200 regular Hindi streaming audiences about their disposition (Appeal) to watch different types of content on streaming platforms. The options were articulated to the audience in their language, with an anthology being described to them as “collection of 4-5 short stories or short films, each of 20-30 minutes”.

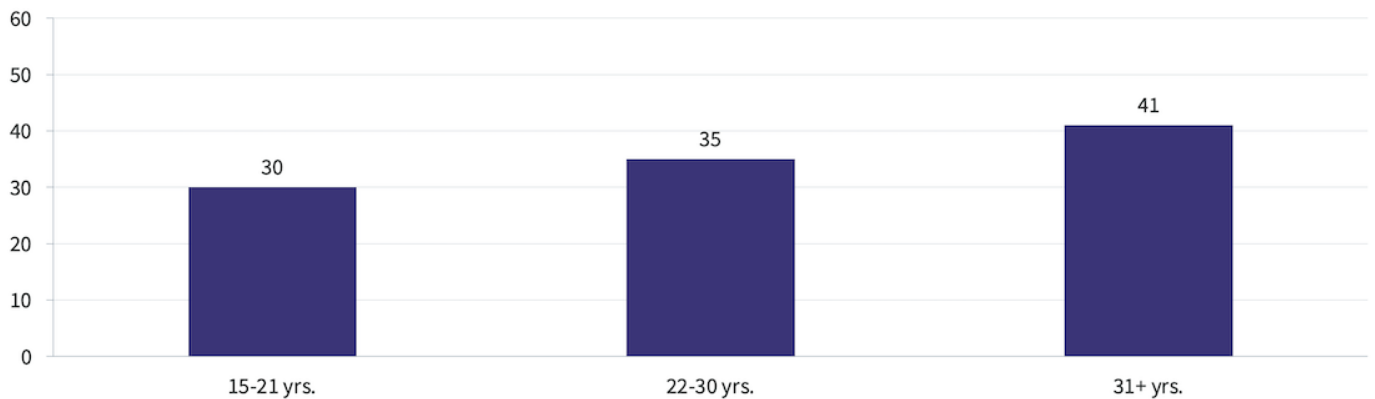
The chart below summarises the results.



While one would not expect the anthology format to feature at the same level as web-series or movies, the wide gap tells a story of its own. At less than 50% of the two most popular formats, anthologies are competing with niche categories like short films and documentaries, than in the mainstream space.

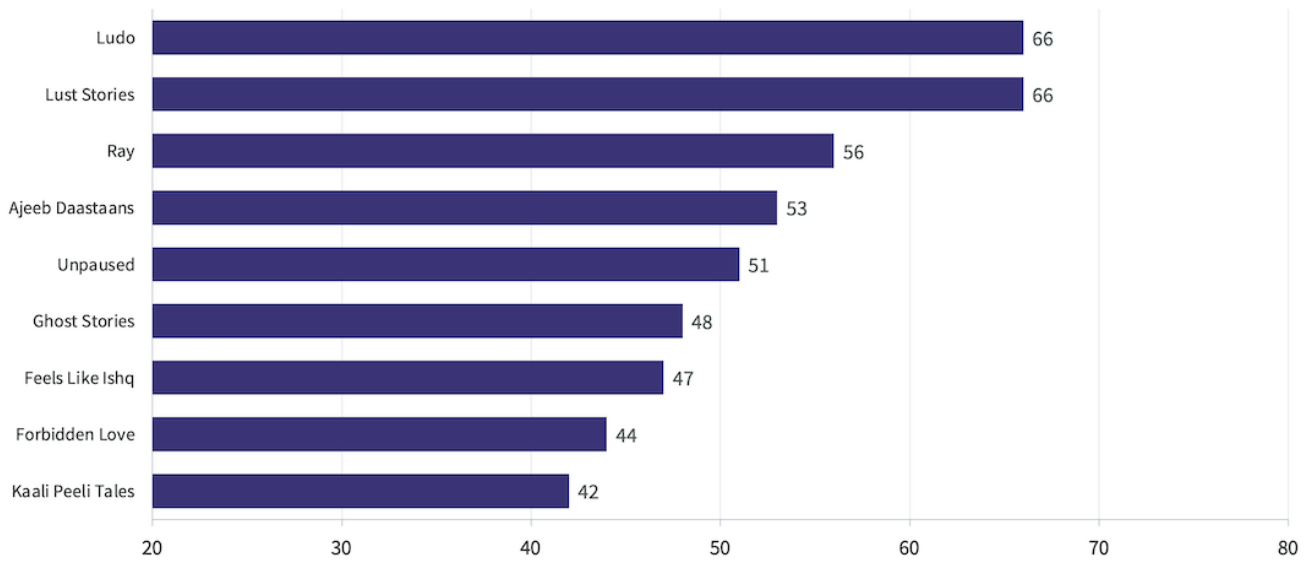
But do anthologies have a core target audience, which perhaps makes them a compelling option for at least an important cohort? While the Appeal for anthologies hovers around the 36% mark in most audience segments, the difference by age, as seen in the chart below, is interesting to note. The Appeal increases with age, though even in the oldest segment (31 yrs.+), it is well below web-series (75) and films (70).

Appeal for Anthologies by Age (%)



One could argue that lack of familiarity with the anthology format is leading to its low Appeal, but the content itself has been liked. The chart below lists the Ormax Power Rating (OPR) of some Hindi language anthology originals on streaming platforms so far. OPR is an audience likeability measure, and scores of 65+ translated into a “Loved” response from the audience.

Ormax Power Rating (OPR) of Hindi anthologies



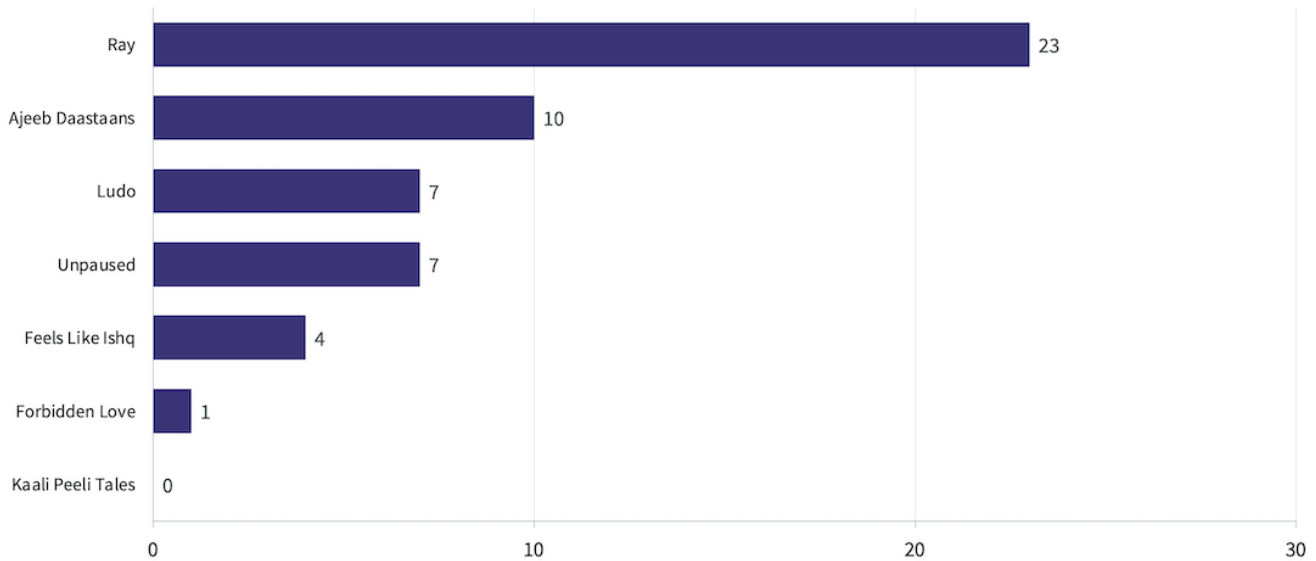
Not only is the anthology format low on Appeal, the material churned out so far has not broken through either, barring just two that managed to cross the 60-mark.

The third argument can be around anthologies being ‘buzz creators’. It can be argued that because multiple known actors and directors come on board in one project, the audience is bound to notice an anthology in the streaming clutter, where more than 135 Hindi originals have already launched in 2021. A quick look at the Buzz numbers from Ormax Stream Track is enough to reject this hypothesis.

Ormax Stream Track, launched in April 2021, tracks the Buzz (among other parameters) of new streaming originals being launched by major platforms. The average week-of-launch Buzz of the top 20 Hindi originals till date stands at 40%, i.e., 40% audience could recall the show at an unaided level. If one removes the franchise properties from this list, the average Buzz of the top 20 (non-franchise) Hindi originals stands at 29%.

The chart below captures the Buzz of Hindi anthologies launched since the start of Ormax Stream Track. Barring Ray, none of the other would have made it to the top 20 (non-franchise) list over the 18 months period for which this data is available.

Week-of-launch Buzz of Hindi Anthologies (Ormax Stream Track)



So far then, anthologies have very little going for them, either by the way of marketing or content. While the format may allow collaboration of multiple artists, the excitement of that idea is more within the industry than with the audience itself. Even historically, anthologies have had little success theatrically in India, with no stand-out box office hits at all. *Life In A Metro* (2007) is the only Hindi anthology to have found some box office success.

The root cause, perhaps, lies in how Indian storytelling has been through the ages, ranging from the epic tales of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, to the multi-starrer cinema of the 1970s, to the daily TV soaps over the last 20 years. Indian audience, while being extremely comfortable with multiple characters and sub-plots, still like the story to be around a singular, central narrative. The idea of multiple stories woven into a thematic presentation is based on borrowed sensibility from the West, and lacks the inherent simplicity of narrative that even the most complex Indian films and shows intuitively rely upon.

In a highly-competitive and cluttered category, where market growth is going to be a challenge within the next two years, anthologies are emerging as a somewhat wasteful idea. The anthology report card for the Indian streaming category looks poor so far, and

going by the data quoted above, one wouldn't bet on it looking any better in the coming years.

Platforms may need to tone down their eagerness to commission anthologies for the Indian audience. Unless they hope to change decades of audience conditioning in a couple of years!