

Amazon Prime Video in India: Is It Customer Engagement or Media Content Strategy?

Parijat Upadhyay*

Introduction

Amazon started as an online retail platform for selling books in 1994¹. Since then Amazon has grown both in terms of product catalogue and geographies. It started in India in 2013 as India seemed to be the next logical destination in terms of population and demand. Amazon is a late entrant in the Indian e-tailing² space but India is one of the largest markets for Amazon.

Driven by the initial success and growth opportunities in India, Amazon decided to explore Prime Video services in India in 2016³. They also launched Amazon Music recently in 2018. From the time of its inception, Amazon Prime Video has undergone significant improvement and its content has expanded a lot. The services are also being rolled out in different languages with local titles. Amazon Prime has started posing challenges to the established players in the online entertainment business. Global players in the online retail space eyeing a slice of the growing Indian e-commerce space. In the initial years, Amazon saw huge success with the US customers with its online business. As time passed, the market became saturated and Amazon started to look out in other countries for expansion. Should Amazon consolidate its services like Prime Video to help it effectively engage its customers in a seemingly competitive market?

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²[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_(company))

³Electronic retailing (e-tailing) is the sale of goods and services through the internet.

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Video

Over-the-top industry

In India, entertainment mode and medium have undergone disruptive transformation. One of such type of disruption is the introduction of over-the-top (OTT) entertainment and media businesses. Such businesses use platforms other than traditional to distribute media content by using internet-enabled platforms. In India, there are about 40 such players earning a revenue of around \$398.15 million (in 2018). The revenue has seen robust growth for almost all the players in this market (OTT market stands at \$648.15 million)⁴. As per a report by a leading consulting, the subscribers tend to spent 30–50 minutes⁵ of their daily viewing consuming media content from various OTT service providers.

The first Indian company to provide services based on OTT platform was BigFlix. Reliance Entertainment launched such services in 2008⁶.

Opportunities

South India has emerged as the focal point of interest for advertisers, movie studios, broadcasters, OTT players, and gaming companies.

Even as regional language content is the force powering media and entertainment businesses in the country according to the recently released report on Media and Entertainment (M&E) by KPMG⁷, the balance of power in the language matrix rests firmly with the southern states. Be it movies, TV or over the top (OTT) media, these states have demonstrated a near-insatiable appetite for content in the languages they speak, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. And this has made the region a magnet for content creators, producers and therefore, advertisers looking to peddle their brands along the risk viewership curve.

The south is a unique market, says Aparna Acharekar, programming head, ZEE5, adding we have seen great advertiser interest, the market is growing at a rate

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OTT_service_in_India

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OTT_service_in_India.

⁶https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/the-power-of-language-southern-states-fire-up-the-regional-grid-for-m-e-119082500704_1.html.

⁷https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/the-power-of-language-southern-states-fire-up-the-regional-grid-for-m-e-119082500704_1.html.

higher than HSM (Hindi speaking markets).” She believes that original content is going to be the biggest differentiator and the group is exploring partnership opportunities with regional producers. “We plan to launch 24 Tamil originals and 24 Telugu originals, which include both shows and films,” she elaborates.

Amazon products and services

Amazon.com, Inc., known as Amazon is an e-commerce company established by Jeff Bezos⁸ in July 5, 1994. Measured by revenue and market capitalization, Amazon is the largest internet retailer in the world. Amazon started with selling books online and later as the online demand increased it diversified into electronics, Apparels, furniture, food, toys, jewellery, electronics, Videogames, audio books, mp3 and videos. In 2005, Amazon started its prime services having a subscription fee of \$79.99 per year⁹. Prime members were offered with the free 2days delivery service. Later in 2011 a service called prime video was added to amazon prime service. All prime members got had an added service of Prime Video. It was a service that was offering video steaming of TV shows and movies like Netflix.

Amazon launched its services in India as Amazon.in in India in 2013. At the first day of Amazon in India, it booked 10,000 orders and is growing ever since. In 2016 Amazon launched its prime services which had 2 days’ free delivery plus video streaming following the same global strategy. Today Amazon in India is selling million products to million Amazon members from fashion apparels to mobiles, electronics etc. Amazon Also provide platform for Indian consumer to buy directly from US sellers. Today amazon delivers to almost all serviceable pin codes in India and has 20,000 Indian sellers, 41 fulfilment centres in 13 states. Amazon also acquired an Indian based firm Junglee in February 2012.¹⁰ It was an online platform which provided customers to search products from online and offline

⁸Jeff Bezos is an American technology entrepreneur, investor, and philanthropist. He is the founder, CEO, and president of Amazon.com, Inc. Bezos was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and raised in Houston, Texas.

⁹Home page of Amazon prime from online resource. Accessed from https://www.primevideo.com/?ref_=dvm_pds_amz_in_as_s_g_51906|c_198882620394_m_Qz8VIBMM-dc_s_

¹⁰This data has been compiled and taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_(company)).

¹¹<https://www.emarsys.com/resources/blog/prime-day-how-the-amazon-style-subscription-model-could-increase-your-bottom-line/>.

retailers in India. Today it provides Amazon a platform a virtual database to extract information about buyer and seller.

Business model of Amazon Prime

In order to rapidly expand its prime services. Amazon has started offering contents with local languages more than that of Netflix and the catalogue is further increasing. Where Netflix is offering the content based out of LA, prime video is showcasing regional content. Amazon has also tied up with Indian television to create original content for prime videos. Hence prime videos were able to surpass Netflix (in terms of subscriptions) within a month of its launch.¹¹

Other service benefits that Amazon offered to its prime subscribers are:

Free same day delivery

Amazon provides free shipping services to customers with prime subscription. The company tend to study shopping behaviour of buyers using online platform and seemed to get the insight that delivery at no additional cost will suit the buyer's behaviour.

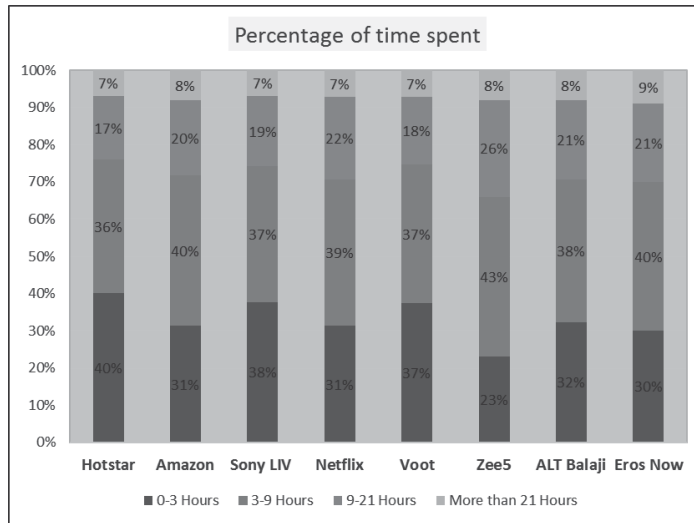
Prime Video: The prime video which offers original video content and it's a subscription-based service like Netflix. Amazon Prime offers unlimited streaming of tens of thousands of movies and TV shows.

Prime Music

Prime Music through which customers can get access to millions of songs for free on multiple devices. It provides ad free access to playlists and personalized prime stations. Prime members can play prime music on compatible devices that support amazon music including Amazon Echo.¹²

¹¹<https://www.emarsys.com/resources/blog/prime-day-how-the-amazon-style-subscription-model-could-increase-your-bottom-line/>.

¹²<https://www.pocket-lint.com/smart-home/news/amazon/138846-what-is-alexa-how-does-it-work-and-what-can-amazons-alexa-do>.



Sources: The Above graph has been compiled by Author from different published resources.

Figure 1: Average percentage of time spent

Prime photos

Amazon Prime members get unlimited photo storage and 5 GB of storage for videos, document, and other files in Amazon Drive¹³ and Prime Photos. The photos can be accessed anywhere and there are also options such as 100GB amazon storage plan and 1TB storage plan.

Prime Pantry

Prime Pantry is a store where members can shop for groceries and household products in everyday package sizes. The introduction of Prime Pantry allowed Amazon to expand its selection and offer thousands of items to Prime Members that are cost prohibitive to ship for free individually.

¹³<https://www.pocket-lint.com/smart-home/news/amazon/138846-what-is-alexa-how-does-it-work-and-what-can-amazons-alexa-do>.

Prime Early Access

Feature that gives Prime members 30-minute early access to Lightning Deals on Amazon.com. Prime Early Access Lightning Deals will say "Prime Early Access" when advertised on pages other than the product detail page.

Kindle First

Amazon First Reads (formerly Kindle First) is a program that offers customers early access to new books across popular genres from Amazon Publishing. Every month customers can choose one of the Kindle books selected by our editors for \$2.36,¹⁴ or Free for Prime members.

Launch of Prime services: The Indian video-on-demand-streaming (VODS) market

Amazon came up with Prime services to provide the subscribers a preferential treatment vis-à-vis non-prime member. Subscribers of the prime services were offered free shipping and delivery within 2 days. If a consumer wanted to buy an item as small as worth \$16, they don't have to pay extra \$10 as shipping charges. Amazon launched the prime video services in 2011 where global player like Netflix had already ventured. Still Amazon entered the Indian market with services like Prime Video.

Prime video has something unique that no other video streaming platform has, that it is attached to an e-commerce website. Prime is directly linked with the instant e-commerce delivery of Amazon. In December 2016, the US-headquartered e-commerce giant, Amazon.com (Amazon), launched its content streaming service, Amazon Prime Video (APV), in India. This happened almost a year after Netflix, another such popular service, was launched (in January 2015) in India. Analysts believed that with the tagline "India ka naya prime time"¹⁵ (India's new prime time), APV intended to communicate the message to the audience that

¹⁴Amazon Drive, formerly known as Amazon Cloud Drive, is a cloud storage application managed by Amazon. The service offers secure cloud storage, file backup, file sharing, and Photo printing.

¹⁵This plan of the company has been taken from the site <https://www.amazon.in/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1000847323>, on 26th August 2019.

Comparison of Amazon vs Netflix Business Model Canvas

	Amazon	Netflix
Key Partners	Amazon Amazon Kindle Digital Content Providers Kindle Owners Shipping providers	Cable, satellite and telecom operators High profile television networks Motion picture
Key Activities	Streaming digital content Shipping	Maintaining Own platform Creating & Acquiring new content Training, Innovation and service
Value proposition	Accessibility, Convenience Low price for combined services Unlimited Quantity Free trial of services	Original Content Multiple Viewing options Price Accessibility and Convenience
	Amazon	Netflix
Customer Segment	Online TV and Movie watchers Kindle Owners Amazon Shoppers	Online TV and Movie watchers Age group 24-35 Anyone with Internet Connection
Key Resource	Online content, Website Shippers Physical content servers Website	Warehouses, machinery, storage facilities Patent, trademark Financial strength
Customer Relationship	Self-service Advertising through amazon.com	Voice to rate Self-service model Technical support, online forms
Channels	Desktop/ Mobile devices, Website/App	Online streaming through website/Apps Physical DVD's
Cost Structure	Online content purchases Online content maintenance	Delivery costs, Machinery costs Warehousing storage, IT costs
Revenue Stream	Annual/Monthly subscription fee	Online streaming membership (Three different prices) DVD postal service Print advertising

Sources: The above table has been compiled by Author from different available resources.

they could 'watch latest and exclusive content, anywhere and anytime they want to, thus making any time – their prime time'.

Through this campaign, Amazon endeavoured to position APV as the go to service for content seekers, to enjoy quality streaming of content in their preferred genres and in different languages, without having to face limitations of time, place, and choice.

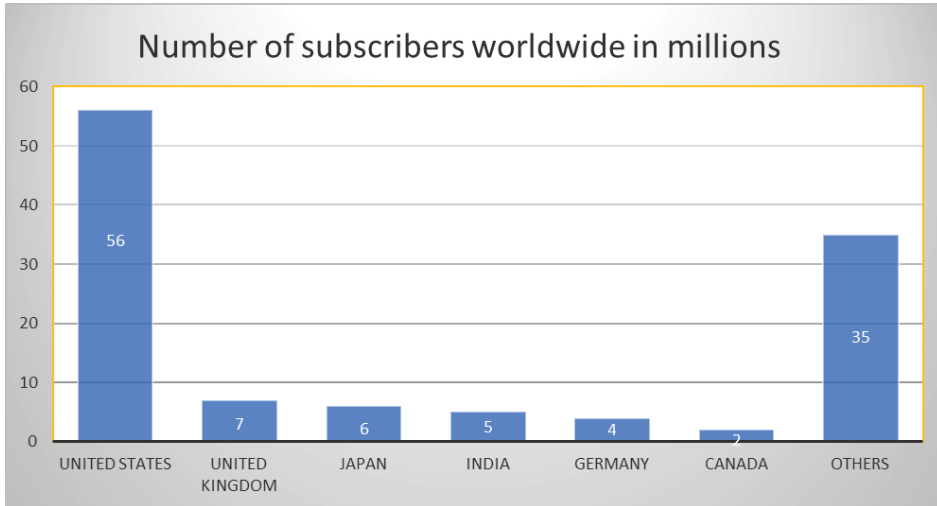
In February, 2018 Amazon has also launched Amazon Music in India. Jeff Bezos stated once that he wants Amazon to become a 360-degree platform, where an Amazon consumer does not have to go anywhere else for any of his/her any need. But this is not why Prime Video and Music took birth. Amazon Prime and Amazon Music was born to keep customer engaged to Amazon's Platform. Amazon is facing competition from other e-commerce platforms and hence would like to bring consumers to Amazon's site from all possible routes. Amazon Video therefor is an investment made for customer relation not that Amazon is willing to earn any profits out of it.

The Indian Audience

India is one of the fastest growing markets for Amazon. In India Amazon is continuously looking out the ways to expand Prime Video. They are planning expand its catalogue further in south India languages like Telugu and Tamil.¹⁶ In U.S Amazon has already started broadcasting sports, cricket runs in the blood of this country, they don't want to leave Indian cricket audience untapped. Soon prime videos will start live stream of cricket matches too. India is a diverse country with 23 languages, English is very popular in the country but still if Amazon wanted to reach everywhere then it couldn't have been done depending on one or two languages. Specially to capture female customers of tier 3 cities in mid age it's important to have more local content.

¹⁶https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/the-power-of-language-southern-states-fire-up-the-regional-grid-for-m-e-119082500704_1.html.

As FICCI¹⁷-KPMG Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2017, streaming audio contributed 10% total mobile Internet usage in India.¹⁸ With 300 million plus Internet-enabled mobile phones, the volume is expected to grow rapidly and 273 million online music listeners by the year 2020.



Competitors and Pricing

Currently India is the fastest growing market for prime video but the competition in India in video streaming is high. Hotstar is one of the biggest competitions followed by Voot and Jio TV. Amazon prime video has already posed tough competition to Netflix by providing more local titles in local languages. Whereas Netflix is still offering its shows as originally created for international market. Prime Video has already surpassed Netflix and has been expanding fast. The monthly subscription rate of Netflix stands at \$6.96 whereas Amazon prime video is being offered at \$13.91 per year. Amazon's decision to keeping its subscription

¹⁷The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry is an association of business organizations in India. Established in 1927, on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi by GD Birla and Purushottam Das Thakurdas, it is the largest, oldest and the apex business organization in India.

¹⁸KPMG: Media for the masses – The promise unfolds <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/in/pdf/2017/04/FICCI-Frames-2017.pdf>.

charges low as compared to Netflix seemed to have paid rich dividends as Amazon and Netflix are the players in U.S and there is an intense competition between them in the western market. Netflix has more subscriber base than Amazon and with the focus of amazon being on prime subscription, the number of users has increased significantly over the last few years.

At the time of prime video services launch, India already had some key players in online streaming such as Hotstar, Voot and Netflix. Netflix had a great opening in India when launched. But still Hotstar was a key player followed by Jio TV and Voot. Since India is a price sensitive country, Amazon launched its services at relatively very low prices. Where Hotstar was priced at \$2.77 per month and Netflix was priced at \$6.96 per month, Prime video was launched at \$6.95 per year (almost \$0.57 per month). Amazon has now increased the subscription charges \$13.91 per month.

Competitors and comparative study Indian Market

As per some industry reports, India's viewership stood at about \$160 million by the end of financial year 2016-17. With substantial growth in penetration of broadband and affordable data plans by JIO, Airtel and other mobile carriers, the number of video viewers are rapidly growing.

Both Amazon and Netflix aim is to capture the Indian market however the approach is quite different. Netflix plans are expensive while amazon prime offers bundled services at relatively less cost. Amazon Prime also offering its customers with several promotional and shipping benefits. They are obtaining rights to the regional contents and films while amazon has categorization based on the language while Netflix doesn't have such option.

Currently Amazon Prime has established itself in the Indian market while Netflix still has long way to go, Before the launch of services by Netflix and Amazon Prime Video in India, there existed quite a few home grown video streaming service in India, but almost all of them failed to offer new-age content to attract audience.

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO VS THE OTHERS			
Categories	Hotstar	Netflix	Amazon Prime Video
Price	Rs199/month	Rs500/month	Rs499/year
Time Spent in India (App Annie estimates)	7886 million minutes (Nov'16)	633 million minutes (Nov'16)	NA
Languages	Hindi, English, Malayalam, Tamil, Bangla, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Marathi	English, Bangla, Hindi, Tamil	Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, English, Bangla
Popular shows	Game of Thrones, Modern Family, The Night Of, Silicon Valley, Divorce	The Black Mirror, Stranger Things, The Crown, Narcos, Jessica Jones	Transparent, The Grand Tour, Mozart in the Jungle, Fear the Walking Dead, The Night Manager
Original titles	NA	Paranoid, Designated Survivor, River, House of Cards, Outlander, Shooter, Marcela	The Man in the High Castle, Bosch, Mozart in the Jungle, Transparent, Hand of God, Gortimer Gibbon's Life On Normal Street

Sources: The pic above has been taken by Author from online available resource.

Figure 3: Status of Amazon prime video at the time of launch in India

Services like Voot provided by Viacom 18 or services like Sony LIV (launched by Sony Figuretures Networks), and Hotstar (provided by Star India) only had a limited catalogue of content and were primarily comprised of digital contents of their widely viewed current and recent past digital content.

This space also has players like Eros Now and Spuul (offering mainly movies!) and Ditto TV (focusses on live coverage of TV content), but these are predominantly supplementary services in nature.

Indian Video Market

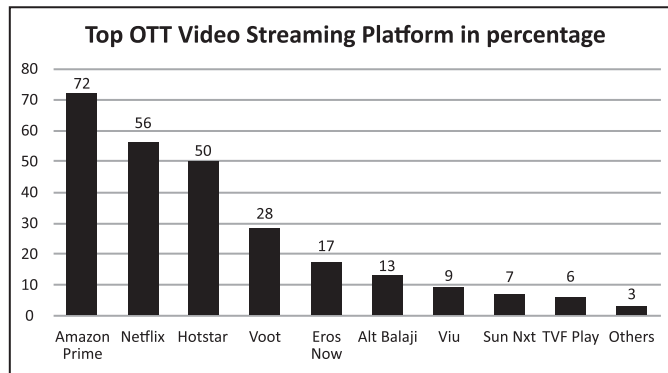
The video streaming market of India is about \$280 Billion and there is a significant growth in the number of users and subscribers in the video market. Video segment is expected to grow to 74 % of all Internet traffic in India by the year 2019. The major players in the Indian Market are¹⁹ Netflix, Hotstar, Amazon Video, Sony LIV, Voot, Zee TV. There are few others players such as BIG FLIX, Eros Now and JIO is also in the market with JIO TV that stream movies and videos.

¹⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OTT_service_in_India.

Amazon Prime: The Challenges and Way forward

With growing internet penetration and subsequent consumption of digital content by a significant portion of the population, India has emerged as significant market for global players. Regulatory barriers imposed by countries like China has constrained the growth plans of global players. India in terms of population and growth of online buyers was the next strategic move to start online media content service. Amazon had a huge success in India hence to get deeper into the market Amazon brought their global strategy of engagement-Prime Video. Prime video is doing well in comparison to its competitors. In such a short time of 2 years, it has grown rapidly. India is the fastest growing market for Amazon. Amazon has so far invested a lot in prime video Indian content.

Amazon wants to touch its customer base in tier 3 cities, where 40 plus homemakers is its main target. To get to that target segment, Amazon has invested in local content in local languages. To attract the customer base, it has also tied up with local film and television makers to release Amazon originals. Amazon is capturing its consumer in all areas by having a 360-degree view. The Amazon customer in today's world is connected to Amazon's platform even if they are not buying. Amazon has been successful so far in capturing their desired audience. With the already established brand and e-commerce delivery attached to it, prime video has an advantage that no other player in video streaming segment has. In India currently Hotstar is the main competitor of Amazon Prime video with more than double active users. In future Jio TV could be a threat to prime video. To eliminate these threats, prime video has to minimize the use of data (internet) while video streaming, also Hotstar stream cricket which is the heart of the nation. Amazon prime video is trying to get cricket contract for IPL since 2017 to capture this market. Amazon is already taking care of these two aspects with reference to the Indian context. By continuing with prime video as an engagement strategy, Amazon will continue to grow and capture the market even in the future.



Sources: Author

Figure 4. The main competitor for Amazon and Netflix is Hotstar in the Indian Market

Amazon Prime Video in India: Is It Customer Engagement or Media Content Strategy?

Parijat Upadhyay*

Teaching Note

This teaching note was written by Parijat Upadhyay (Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Nagpur). It is intended to be used for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation. The case data has been compiled from secondary sources.

Case Synopsis

In India, serving media content for entertainment has undergone disruptive transformation. One such disruption is the introduction of over-the-top (OTT) entertainment and media business. There are many prominent players in this market but a major online e-tailer has used this platform to supplement its online retail business. Amazon started in 1994 as an online retailing platform selling books. Since then Amazon has grown both in terms of its product catalogue and geographies. Global players in online retail space are looking for a slice of the growing Indian e-commerce space. In the initial years, Amazon saw huge success with the US customers. As time passed, the market become increasing competitive and Amazon started to look for strategies to attract customers to its platform and to retain the existing ones. In such a scenario, Amazon started Amazon Prime. Amazon Prime offers free delivery and subscription to various media content, which the customers seem to like. Given the growing popularity of Amazon Prime, should Amazon continue its services like Prime Video as a part of their online business to help it effectively engage its customers in a seemingly competitive market or turn it into a new media subsidiary?

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²[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_(company))

³Electronic retailing (e-tailing) is the sale of goods and services through the internet.

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Video

Learning Objectives

1. To understand over-the-top mode of business.
2. To understand the business dynamics of media content distribution.
3. To appreciate the business strategy deployed by e-tailers.
4. To understand various approaches to retain customers in the online space.

Target group

Students undertaking post graduate level courses like Digital Business / E-Business / IT Marketing / Business Strategy

Teaching Strategy

The instructor may choose to open the case discussion by taking a poll as to how many students in that class shop online from Amazon. Also, the students may be asked to offer their opinion about the online video streaming facility provided by Amazon. After opening the discussion, the instructor may elicit responses from several students as to why Amazon provides this 'prime' services. The instructor may then ask some of the students who shop online from other e-tailers about their online shopping experience. The various strategies adopted by e-tailers may be discussed then in the class. The pros and the cons of the strategies may be summarized and the effectiveness of Amazon's Prime Video service in retaining its customer base may be discussed.

Questions for discussion

1. What are the various modes and methods being adopted by OTT business to distribute media content?
2. What are the typical business challenges for ensuring customer retention for OTT business models?
3. How an OTT business can ensure customer attention?
4. Should Amazon hive off Prime Video as an entity independent of its e-tailing business?

Do it yourself: Critical thinking questions

1. **Discuss:** The present scenario in India as far as media and entertainment are concerned along with the regulatory environment.

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Abrahamovitz , M. (1965). Output and Productivity Trends in US Economy from 1901 to 1956. *American Economic Review*, (88)2, 110-122.

Edited Book

Ravallion, M. (2007). Transfer and Safety nets in poor countries: Revisiting the trade offs and policy options. In V. Abhijit, R. B. Banerjee, & D. Mukherjee (Eds.), *Understanding poverty* (pp. 203-230). Oxford University Press

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Pawlak, Z. (1991). *Rough sets: theoretical aspects of reasoning about data*. Norwell, MA : Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Geddes, K.O., Czapor, S.R., & Labahn, G. (1992). *Algorithms for Algebra*. Boston: Kluwer Publishers.

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Outbreak news. (2001, February 23). *Weekly Epidemiological Record*, (76), 57-64. Retrieved February 28, 2001 from <http://www.who.int/wer/pdf/2001/wer7608.pdf>

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Ulrich, T. (1997, September 22). Linking an Amish hereditary disease with cerebral palsy, a pediatrician challenges a dark inheritance. *Time*, 150, 30-33. Retrieved March 1, 2001 from InfoTrac/Expanded Academic ASAP database

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