

ANTI-TOBACCO MESSAGES ON OTT PLATFORMS

Need for a Strategic and Targeted Approach



Anti-Tobacco Messages on OTT Platforms

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Abbreviations

OTT:	Over-the-Top
MoHFW:	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
CUTS:	Consumer Unity & Trust Society
AI:	Artificial Intelligence
FCTC:	Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
IT:	Information Technology
UK:	United Kingdom
VADER:	Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner
n:	Sample Size
AV:	Audiovisual
COTPA:	Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act
WHO:	World Health Organisation
RIA:	Regulatory Impact Assessment

Contributors

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Study Team
CUTS International

Executive Summary

The expansion of Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming platforms in India has transformed media consumption habits, particularly among younger, mobile-first audiences. In this context, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's recent mandate to display anti-tobacco health spots, static warnings, and disclaimers on OTT content represents a significant shift in India's tobacco control strategy. This study, conducted by CUTS International, critically evaluates the effectiveness, user impact, and policy implications of such measures through a triangulated approach — combining a national survey of 1,200 OTT users, qualitative interviews, and statistical analysis.

Key Findings

- **Low Engagement and Perceived Intrusiveness:** Over 54 percent of users reported ignoring or skipping health spots. Only 20 percent found these messages informative, while 35 percent felt they disrupted the viewing experience, especially on mobile devices, which account for 41 percent of OTT usage.
- **Demographic Variance in Reception:** Chi-square tests revealed significant differences in message perception based on gender and age. Younger and women were more receptive, while older male users showed resistance, highlighting the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Viewer Backlash to Proposed Regulations:** In a hypothetical rollout of 50-second non-skippable disclaimers at platform launch, 37 percent of users said they would ignore the message, and 10 percent might stop using the platform. This signals a real risk of alienating OTT subscribers, especially on premium platforms.
- **Mixed Emotions and Complex Narratives:** Sentiment and thematic analysis showed that while some viewers supported anti-tobacco messaging for public health reasons, others viewed it as intrusive, ineffective, or a form of government overreach. Many advocated alternative solutions such as stricter tobacco sales regulation or tax increases.
- **Concerns Around Children's Exposure:** Over 60 percent of respondents felt that current messaging might confuse or distress younger viewers, suggesting the need for age-sensitive messaging formats.

Key Recommendations

- **Policy-Level:** Adopt a risk-proportionate and user-sensitive framework, incorporating skippable formats, age-based targeting, and adaptive message frequency. Ensure regulatory parity between content and online tobacco sales, and establish co-regulatory bodies for stakeholder collaboration.
- **Industry-Level:** Platforms should explore non-disruptive formats (e.g., animated banners, integrated advisories), use AI-driven viewer segmentation to personalise messaging, and co-create guidelines with public health experts. They should also pursue incentive-based compliance, including government recognition or tax benefits.
- A strategic, targeted, and nuanced approach is essential, as a one-size-fits-all model fails to reflect OTT platforms' diverse user profiles and content formats. Tailored, data-driven interventions will likely ensure health impact and viewer engagement.

This report concludes that while anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms remains a vital public health tool, its design, timing, and delivery must evolve to retain viewer engagement and respect user autonomy. Only through context-aware, evidence-driven strategies can India effectively advance tobacco control goals in the digital age

1 Introduction

1.1. Background

Tobacco consumption remains a critical public health challenge in India, contributing significantly to preventable morbidity and mortality. Beyond the individual health toll, the socio-economic burden of tobacco use disproportionately affects families and communities, especially in lower-income segments¹. Recognising this, the Government of India has taken increasingly assertive steps to reduce tobacco exposure across various media, including cinema, television, and, more recently, over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms².

As digital content consumption surges, particularly among young and tech-savvy audiences, OTT platforms have come under heightened scrutiny for the portrayal of tobacco use on such platforms. These platforms now represent a key space for implementing health messaging interventions aimed at curbing tobacco consumption, in line with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)³. The convention calls for stringent measures on tobacco imagery, including health warnings, content disclaimers, and age-based access regulations to limit exposure and reduce the social acceptability of smoking.

1.2. Recent Policy Developments in India

India has taken significant steps by extending its Cable Television Networks Act provisions to OTT platforms and by introducing the Information Technology Rules, 2021, which set up a three-tier regulatory and adjudication structure⁴.

In May 2023, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare mandated that any OTT content depicting tobacco products must include:

¹ <https://www.policycircle.org/policy/effective-anti-tobacco-messaging/>

² https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/health-ministry-plans-mandatory-non-skippable-anti-tobacco-spots-on-ott-124092100441_1.html

³ <https://smokefreemedia.ucsf.edu/research/key-reports/who#:~:text=FCTC%20Article%2013%3A%20Tobacco%20advertising%2C,for%20impleme%20Article%2013%20state>

⁴ <https://anmglobal.net/proposal-for-stricter-anti-tobacco-rules-for-ott-platforms/#:~:text=In%20May%202023%2C%20the%20Ministry,th%7D%20September%202024>

- A 30-second anti-tobacco health spot and a 20-second audiovisual disclaimer at the beginning and middle of the content.
- Continuous static on-screen warnings during scenes that involve tobacco use.

Building on these mandates, draft amendments issued in September 2024 proposed even stricter measures. Notably, they recommended non-skippable health spots displayed immediately upon launching a streaming platform, even before users engage with specific content. This marks a significant escalation in regulatory ambition.

1.3. Implementation Challenges and Potential Unintended Consequences

While the intent of reducing tobacco exposure through digital media is laudable, these policy changes raise complex implementation challenges. If enacted, these requirements could expose users to over 100 seconds of mandatory health messaging per viewing session. This could significantly disrupt the user experience and deter platform engagement for many, especially regular viewers.⁵

Moreover, the one-size-fits-all approach applies uniformly to all users, regardless of age, content preferences, or smoking/ tobacco consumption status. Research suggests that repetitive, fear-based warnings may desensitise younger viewers or even provoke resistance⁶. Further, for trauma survivors or individuals with mental health sensitivities, repeated exposure to graphic health messages may trigger unintended distress.

OTT platforms also face financial and logistical hurdles in enforcing these mandates. Retrofitting vast content libraries to include static warnings and timed disclaimers is resource-intensive. Smaller and emerging platforms may find these compliance demands prohibitive, leading to potential market distortions and unequal enforcement across the industry.

A further inconsistency arises when comparing this stringent regulation of content depicting tobacco use to the relatively lax controls over selling tobacco online. E-commerce platforms generally require only a cursory age verification and a pop-up health warning, raising critical questions of policy parity. If the primary goal is to reduce tobacco consumption, then both access and imagery must be regulated with equal rigour.

⁵ Purchase and continuation intentions of over-the-top (OTT) video streaming platform subscriptions: a uses and gratification theory perspective – ScienceDirect

⁶ <https://www.athensjournals.gr/media/2019-5-4-4-Chung.pdf>

1.4. Global Practices

India is not alone in facing the regulatory dilemma of managing tobacco portrayal on OTT platforms. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Singapore have adopted robust frameworks:

- **UK (Ofcom)**^{7,8} prohibits glamorisation of smoking in youth-accessible content.
- **Australia** bans tobacco product placements and enforces strict content ratings⁹.
- **Singapore** restricts tobacco depictions in children's programming unless for educational purposes¹⁰.

Despite these efforts, global enforcement remains challenging, and concerns regarding unintended consequences remain.

⁷ [https://ash.org.uk/law/media-](https://ash.org.uk/law/media-representation#:~:text=,eighteens%20unless%20there%20is%20editorial)

[representation#:~:text=,eighteens%20unless%20there%20is%20editorial](https://ash.org.uk/law/media-representation#:~:text=,eighteens%20unless%20there%20is%20editorial)

⁸ <https://www.medianama.com/2023/04/223-ofcom-regulate-ott-platforms-new-draft-framework/#:~:text=1,ground>

⁹ <https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-5-uptake/5-16-smoking-in-movies-tv-and-other-pop>

¹⁰ <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/managed-linear-tv-services-content-code-updated-29-april-2019.pdf>

In light of the evolving policy landscape surrounding tobacco depiction on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms and the increasing regulatory interventions proposed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, CUTS International seeks to critically evaluate the effectiveness, user impact, and broader implications of mandatory anti-tobacco messaging in digital media environments.

With the proliferation of streaming services as a dominant form of entertainment, especially among younger, digitally native audiences, India has entered a crucial phase in its tobacco control strategy. Recent policy proposals, including introducing non-skippable anti-tobacco ads upon launching platforms and during content playback, represent a significant shift from traditional awareness-building measures to more persistent and pervasive messaging techniques. These developments necessitate a data-driven and stakeholder-informed analysis to assess such interventions' proportionality, feasibility, and long-term effectiveness.

2.1. Key Objectives of the Study

This study is designed to gather empirical insights from the viewers to assess both the public health utility and practical impact of anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms. The following objectives guide the study:

2.1.1. Assessing Relevance and Behavioural Impact

Evaluate the efficacy of current and proposed anti-tobacco advertisements in shaping viewer perceptions, raising awareness about the harms of tobacco use, and ultimately influencing behaviour change, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and young adults.

2.1.2. Understanding User Experience and Engagement:

Analyse how mandatory health warnings affect the streaming experience, including viewer satisfaction, receptiveness to the message, and potential emotional or cognitive disruptions caused by repetitive, fear-based content.

2.1.3. Informing a Balanced Policy Framework

Propose actionable, evidence-based recommendations to inform future policymaking that ensure anti-tobacco messaging is targeted, impactful, and user-sensitive. This includes suggesting flexible implementation strategies such as skippable disclaimers, age-based customisation, innovative message delivery formats, and incentivisation for platform compliance.

2.2. Approach

Our approach comprises the following key components:

- **User Survey:** Surveying to gather quantitative and qualitative insights into user experiences and perspectives regarding anti-tobacco advertisements on OTT platforms. This will help assess audience receptiveness, perceived effectiveness, and potential disruptions to viewing experiences.
- **Comprehensive Report:** Synthesising findings from the user survey and roundtable discussion into a detailed report, highlighting key insights, trends, and stakeholder perspectives.
- **Public Summary & Recommendations:** Developing a concise summary outlining major concerns and proposed recommendations for a balanced regulatory framework.
- **Government Submission:** Preparing and submitting formal comments on the proposed regulatory amendments to the government, ensuring that stakeholder feedback is incorporated into the decision-making process.

This structured approach ensures a data-driven, multi-stakeholder analysis to inform policy decisions on anti-tobacco advertising in the OTT space.

2.3. Research Design and Methodology

To ensure a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the implications of anti-tobacco messaging on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey research, qualitative thematic analysis, and stakeholder consultations. This triangulated methodology allows for both breadth and depth in exploring user experiences, operational challenges, and regulatory perspectives.

2.3.1. Quantitative Component

A. User Survey

A structured survey was conducted among 1,200 OTT platform users across 15 Indian cities, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across geographic regions, digital penetration levels, and socio-economic strata. The sample encompasses:

- **Tier-1 Cities:** Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai
- **Tier-2 Cities:** Lucknow, Indore, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Bhopal
- **Tier-3 Cities:** Meerut, Siliguri, Jabalpur, Dhanbad, Rajahmundry

Figure 1: Survey Locations



Source: Generated by authors

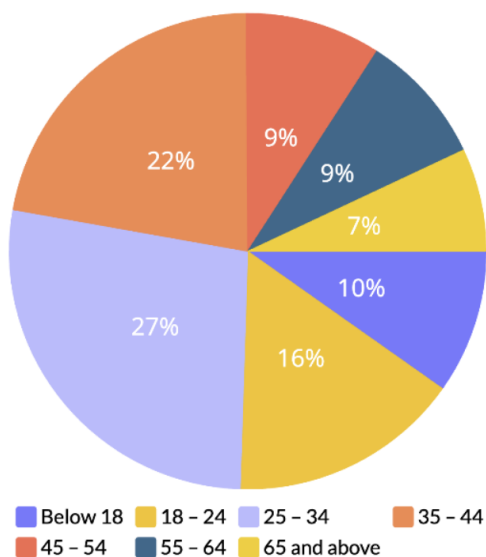
Each city contributed 80 respondents, ensuring equal distribution and facilitating comparative analysis across tiers.

B. Demographic Representation

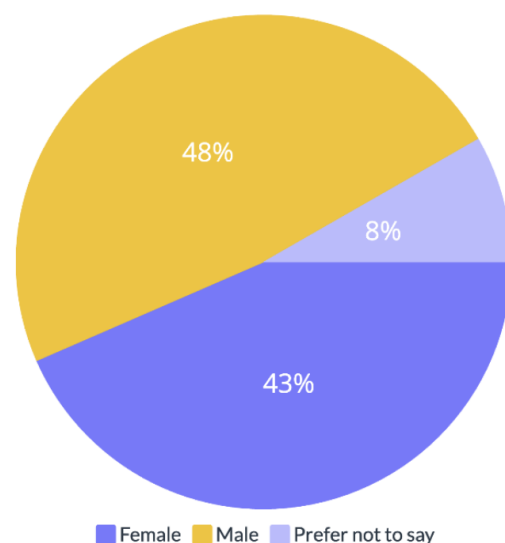
To capture varied consumer experiences, respondents were stratified by age and gender. Ten per cent of the sample comprised viewers under 18 years **old**, with the remainder spread across age categories. A balanced gender ratio was maintained to account for potential differences in media consumption and health messaging receptiveness.

Figure 2: Age & Gender Snapshot of India's OTT Audience (n=1200)

Age Snapshot (n=1200)



Gender Snapshot (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

The above charts offer a detailed overview of the demographic composition of the 1,200 OTT platform users surveyed across India, explicitly focusing on age distribution and gender representation. Participants were selected from diverse age brackets to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives, acknowledging that attitudes toward anti-tobacco messaging may vary across age groups. Notably, 10 percent of respondents were under 18, ensuring that younger viewers—a vital stakeholder group—were adequately represented. Additionally, deliberate efforts were made to achieve a balanced gender representation, contributing to a more inclusive and representative dataset.

C. Data Collection Method

To maximise outreach, the survey was conducted in person in public spaces such as shopping malls, markets, and community centres. A pilot survey with 100 respondents was first carried out to refine the questionnaire for clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness.

2.3.2 Qualitative Component

A. Open-Ended User Feedback

To complement the structured survey, 50 qualitative responses were collected from users across the sampled cities. Respondents were selected to reflect diversity in age, region, and OTT engagement levels. Open-ended questions enabled users to share nuanced views on their experiences and attitudes toward anti-tobacco advertisements on streaming platforms.

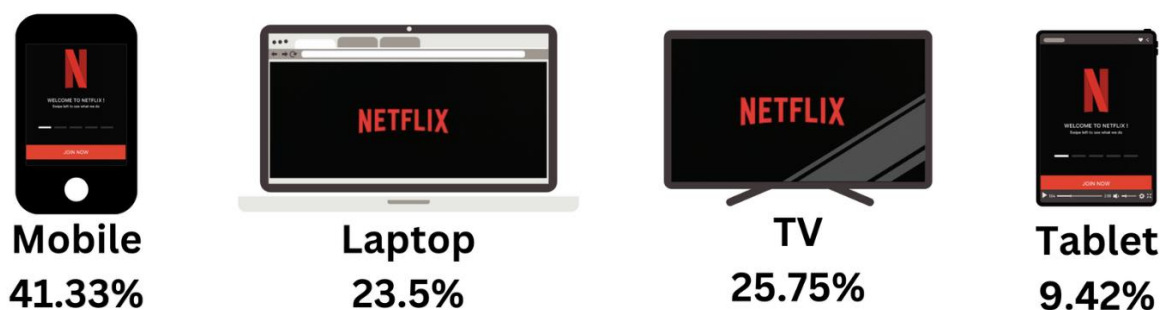
B. Thematic and Sentiment Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic coding framework for recurring patterns and emerging concerns. Using Python libraries such as TextBlob and VADER, Sentiment analysis techniques were applied to classify user responses into positive, neutral, or negative categories. This analysis provided an emotional dimension to the findings, helping to assess the broader psychological impact of the regulations.

3.1. Screen Size, Big Impact: Understanding Device Preferences in OTT Viewing

The mode of content consumption plays a pivotal role in how users engage with and respond to regulatory messaging, particularly in the context of anti-tobacco advertisements. Device preferences among users offer critical insights into the viewer experience, especially when considering the effectiveness, visibility, and intrusiveness of mandatory health warnings.

Figure 3: Where Do You Stream? A Snapshot of OTT Device Preferences



Source: Authors' analysis

Our survey reveals a clear preference for mobile devices, with 41.33 percent of respondents indicating that they primarily stream OTT content on their smartphones. This strong preference highlights the growing trend of on-the-go media consumption in India, enabled by affordable smartphones, widespread mobile internet penetration, and flexible data plans. The mobile experience is inherently personal, yet constrained by smaller screen sizes and limited functionality during content interruptions. This could make the display of non-skippable messages more intrusive, impacting user satisfaction, especially if such messages obscure subtitles or visual content.

Television (TV), used by 25.75 percent of respondents, ranks as the second most common device. It represents a more traditional, immersive viewing setup, typically shared among family members. Visual anti-tobacco disclaimers and static warnings may be more noticeable on large screens. Repeated interruptions — especially in communal settings — may detract from the overall experience, particularly if messaging becomes overly frequent.

Laptops account for 23.5 percent of OTT consumption, suggesting that viewers appreciate the flexibility of personal screens, the ability to multitask, and a controlled environment. The user experience can be compromised if pop-ups or banners disrupt functionality or viewing clarity.

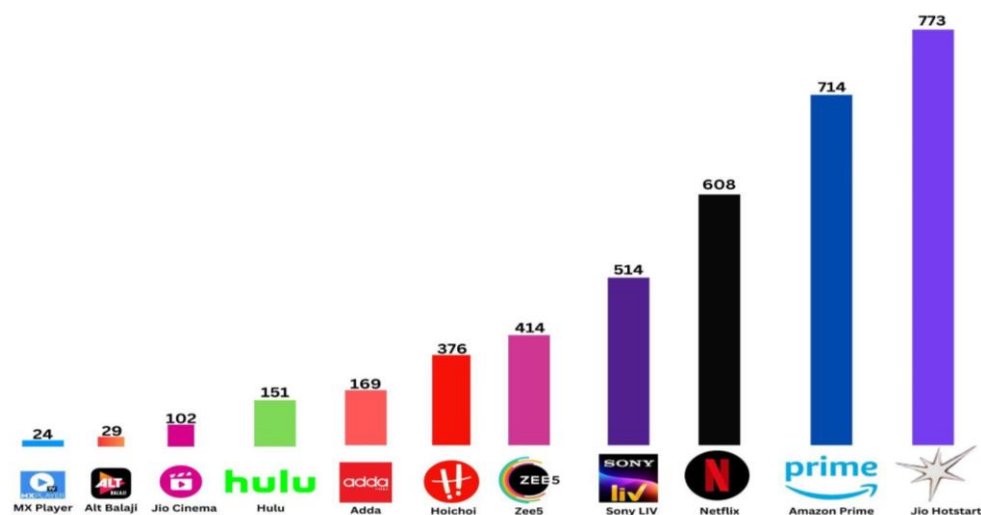
In essence, device type fundamentally influences how users perceive and interact with health messaging. This variation must be taken into account when designing content warnings and regulations. A one-size-fits-all approach may overlook user-device interactions and the nuanced ways that different platforms shape the OTT experience. Future regulatory frameworks should explore device-sensitive implementations that balance visibility with usability, enhancing message retention without disrupting viewer engagement.

3.2. Recognising diversity among OTT platforms

Understanding user platform preferences is essential for crafting targeted content regulation strategies, especially when evaluating the reach and impact of public health messaging such as anti-tobacco disclaimers. Streaming platforms cater to diverse demographics, viewing behaviours, and content expectations. Therefore, gauging which platforms dominate user attention provides crucial context for assessing the potential visibility and effectiveness of regulatory interventions in the OTT ecosystem.

To capture these dynamics, we surveyed 1,200 OTT users in 15 cities in India. Participants were asked to identify the platforms they use most frequently to consume digital content.

Figure 4: Most Frequently Used OTT Platforms Among Surveyed Users



Source: Authors' analysis

Platforms like Jio Hotstar, Amazon Prime, and Netflix emerged as the most popular ones. Their continued relevance in India underscores the appeal of high-quality international content.

The popularity of Sonyliv, Zee5, and Hoichoi reflects the substantial proportion of users seeking regional, family-oriented, or sports programming across languages. Adda and Hulu represent the emerging tastes among OTT platform users.

Overall, this analysis reveals a multiplicity of options for users and perhaps also indicates the potential for users to move towards smaller, less regulated/monitored platforms should comparatively popular platforms face stringent regulations leading to user inconvenience.

3.3. Audience Engagement with Anti-Tobacco Health Spots

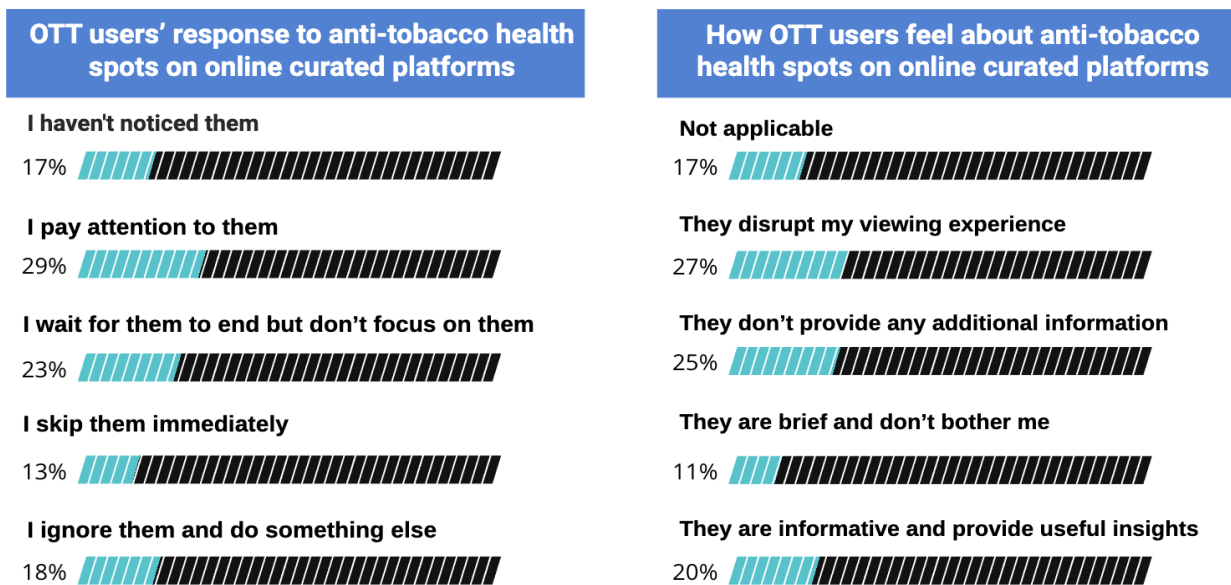
This section delves into how users of online curated platforms perceive and respond to anti-tobacco health spots, which are mandated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to appear across streaming content featuring tobacco use.¹¹

Anti-tobacco health spots are brief, impactful public service messages to raise awareness and discourage tobacco use. They commonly feature health warnings and striking visuals that illustrate the dangers of tobacco consumption and are typically shown across multiple media platforms.¹² The findings provide critical insights into the effectiveness, reach, and reception of such messaging in India's rapidly expanding OTT ecosystem.

¹¹ https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/health-ministry-plans-mandatory-non-skippable-anti-tobacco-spots-on-ott-124092100441_1.html

¹² Gadiyar, A., Ankola, A., & Rajpurohit, L. (2018). Awareness of anti-tobacco advertisements and their influence on attitude toward tobacco use among 16 to 18-year-old students in Belgaum city: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 7, 85. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_27_18

Figure 5: OTT Users' Reaction and Sentiment Towards Anti-Tobacco Health Spots (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

Data on users' reactions and feelings toward anti-tobacco health spots displayed on online curated platforms reveals that even today, health spots are displayed during various content on different platforms, and users have seen them.

In terms of reactions to these health spots 29 percent said they pay attention to those health spots suggesting that these anti-tobacco health spots successfully engage a portion of the audience, whereas the remaining users said they either wait for them to end but don't focus on them (23 percent), or skip them immediately (13 percent), or ignore them and do something else (18 percent) when these health spots are displayed. Consequently, over half of OTT users (54 percent) do not notice anti-tobacco health spots.

Let's look at the users' feelings about these health spots. We will observe that only 20 percent of respondents consider health spot information informative or helpful. This indicates that even though 29 percent of respondents pay attention to the health spots, not all consider it useful. It was observed that most respondents (27 percent) feel these messages disrupt their viewing experience. Many respondents (25 percent) feel these health spots do not provide additional information. However, 11 percent said that, given the messages are brief, they do not bother them, revealing that short, unobtrusive messages can be acceptable or even tolerable for some viewers.

3.4. Viewer Reactions to Anti-Tobacco Audiovisual Messaging on OTT Platforms: Engaged, Ignored, or Interrupted?

Understanding how users perceive and respond to anti-tobacco audiovisual messages on OTT platforms is vital in shaping effective and balanced public health strategies. Audiovisual disclaimers are mandatory, non-skippable video messages of at least 20 seconds that must be displayed at the beginning and middle of films, and online streaming content depicting tobacco use. These disclaimers are designed to educate viewers about the dangers of tobacco consumption and are part of broader efforts to reduce tobacco-related harm.¹³

On the other hand, health spots are longer, 30-second non-skippable video messages that must be displayed at both the beginning and middle of such content. They serve a similar purpose but are distinct in duration and placement.

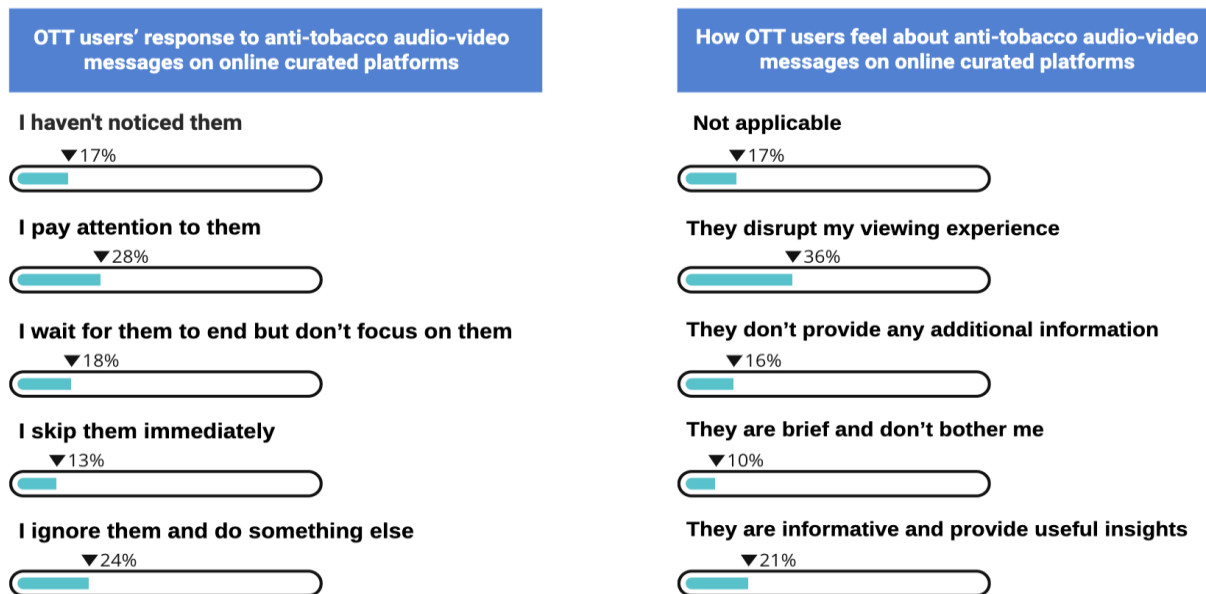
Both audiovisual disclaimers and health spots are part of India's comprehensive strategy to curb tobacco consumption. They are enforced under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Rules. As India strengthens its tobacco control regulations and expands their application to digital content, it becomes critical to assess whether these messages resonate with audiences or disrupt their viewing experience.

This analysis provides insights into such interventions' effectiveness, engagement, and emotional reception, helping policymakers, content creators, and public health authorities design more nuanced, impactful approaches that preserve user experience while advancing health communication goals.

The survey findings reveal how OTT viewers across India react to and feel about anti-tobacco audiovisual messages embedded within their streaming experiences. Even under the current regulatory regime, these messages are present across a range of content on OTT platforms. Yet, 17 percent of viewers stated they had not noticed them.

¹³ <https://assets.tobaccocontrolaws.org/uploads/legislation/India/India-G.S.R.-708E.pdf?>

Figure 6: Anti-Tobacco Audio Video Messages: How OTT Viewers React and Feel (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

When it comes to engagement, 28 percent of respondents said they actively pay attention to audiovisual warnings, signalling that these messages can capture a segment of the audience. However, a larger share of viewers engages passively or not at all — 18 percent wait for the message to end without focusing, 13 percent skip them instantly when allowed, and 24 percent ignore the message by switching attention to other activities. This suggests that for nearly half of the audience, the messaging fails to make a meaningful impression.

On the sentiment front, user opinions skew more negatively. The majority (36 percent) feel these audiovisual disclaimers disrupt their viewing experience, while 16 percent believe the information is redundant or fails to provide new insights. Only 21 percent consider the messages informative or valuable, and a small minority (10 percent) said the clips are brief and tolerable.

These findings suggest that while regulatory messaging has visibility, its perceived effectiveness and audience impact remain limited. The data reinforces the need for innovative, less intrusive, and more targeted formats to enhance public health messaging without alienating the core OTT audience.

3.5. Static Warnings on Screen: Subtle Messaging or Visual Disruption?

A significant yet often overlooked component of India's current anti-tobacco regulations on OTT platforms is the inclusion of static health warnings during scenes that depict tobacco usage. Static warnings refer to on-screen textual messages displayed during scenes in films, television shows, or online streaming content where tobacco products are shown or used. These messages are mandated under India's tobacco control regulations and typically include statements like "Smoking causes cancer" or "Tobacco use is injurious to health."¹⁴

Static warnings are designed to remain continuously visible throughout any scene that depicts tobacco consumption, without any accompanying audio or animation.¹⁵ They aim to give viewers an immediate and persistent health warning during tobacco-related content.

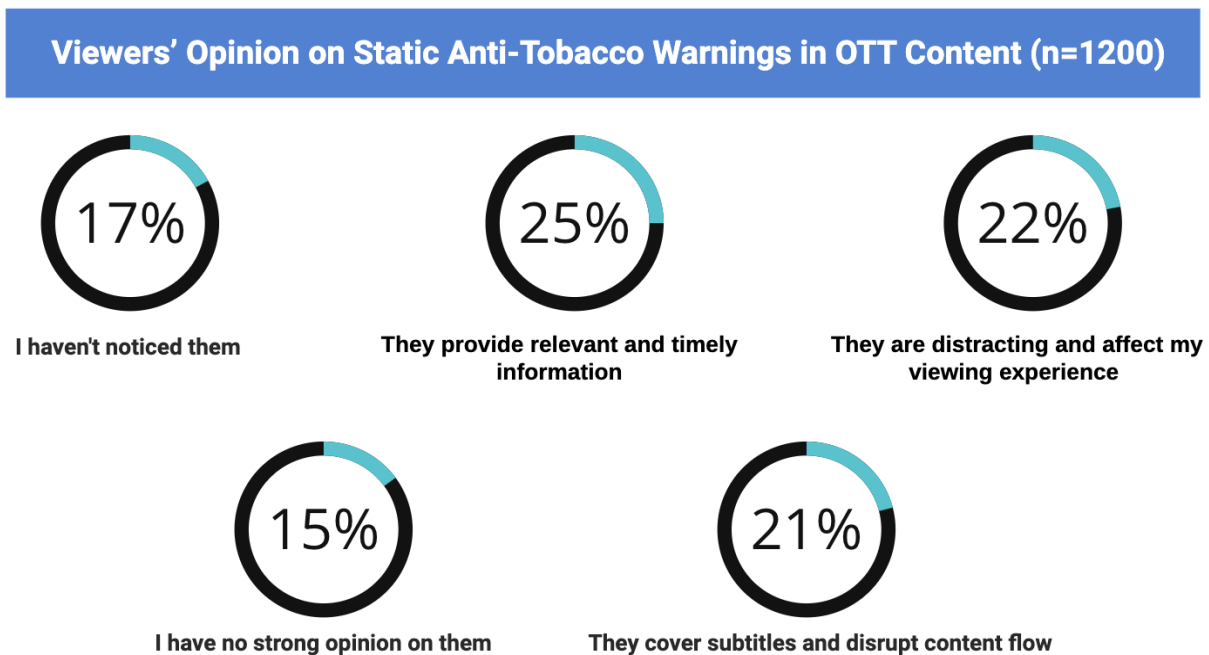
Unlike other forms of anti-tobacco communication, such as health spots and audiovisual disclaimers, static warnings are passive and text-only. Health spots are more elaborate—they are 30-second video messages, often dramatised, that are played at the beginning and middle of content that shows tobacco use. They combine visuals, narration, and emotional storytelling to educate viewers on the harms of tobacco.

Similarly, audiovisual disclaimers are short 20-second segments combining visuals and narration, also placed at the beginning and middle of such content, but are more direct and instructional than health spots. These warnings are already mandated and appear across a wide range of content. However, the real question lies in their visibility, effectiveness, and overall impact on user experience.

¹⁴ <https://anmglobal.net/proposal-for-stricter-anti-tobacco-rules-for-ott-platforms-will-your-next-binge-watch-start-with-a-warning/>

¹⁵ <https://www.foxmandal.in/News/cotpa-rules-non-skippable-disclaimers-for-otts-on-the-anvil/>

Figure 7: Viewers' Opinion on Static Anti-Tobacco Warnings in OTT Content (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

The data reveals that 17 percent of respondents reported not having noticed these static warnings at all. This raises important questions regarding the placement, design, and visibility of such messages.

Encouragingly, 25 percent of users stated that the static warnings provide "relevant and timely information," indicating that a portion of the audience is being noticed and valued by these messages. However, this still represents only a quarter of the respondents, suggesting room for improvement in either messaging clarity, placement, or relevance.

Conversely, 22 percent of respondents expressed that these warnings distract and negatively affect their viewing experience. In addition, 21 percent said that the static messages cover subtitles and disrupt the content flow. These responses are particularly noteworthy, as many OTT viewers rely on subtitles to follow dialogues, especially in multilingual or non-native content, and watch such content on smaller mobile screens. If anti-tobacco messaging interferes with this, it could lead to frustration and diminished engagement with the platform overall.

Interestingly, 15 percent of the respondents mentioned they have no strong opinion about these static warnings. This may point toward a neutral stance, where users notice the message but feel neither positively nor negatively about its presence. This also

suggests that the delivery mechanism, while passive, may not necessarily provoke a strong reaction unless it disrupts content.

These findings reveal a mixed sentiment landscape regarding static anti-tobacco warnings on OTT platforms. While a segment of viewers finds them helpful and informative, a nearly equal portion finds them intrusive or ineffective.

This underscores the need for thoughtful design in public health messaging. Static warnings must be noticeable enough to inform, yet subtle enough not to obstruct or distract from the content. Any future regulatory amendments must consider this delicate balance to improve efficacy and user experience.

3.6. Hypothetical Rollout: How Viewers May Respond to Proposed 50-Second Non-Skippable Anti-Tobacco Messaging

As part of a forward-looking analysis aligned with the September 2024 draft notification by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, this section explores how users anticipate reacting to the possible implementation of a 50-second non-skippable anti-tobacco audiovisual message (a 30-second health spot + 20-second disclaimer) at the point of opening OTT platforms. This is not the current scenario, but a hypothetical policy measure being discussed. This inquiry aimed to gauge future user sentiment and behavioural intent in response to the proposed regulation.

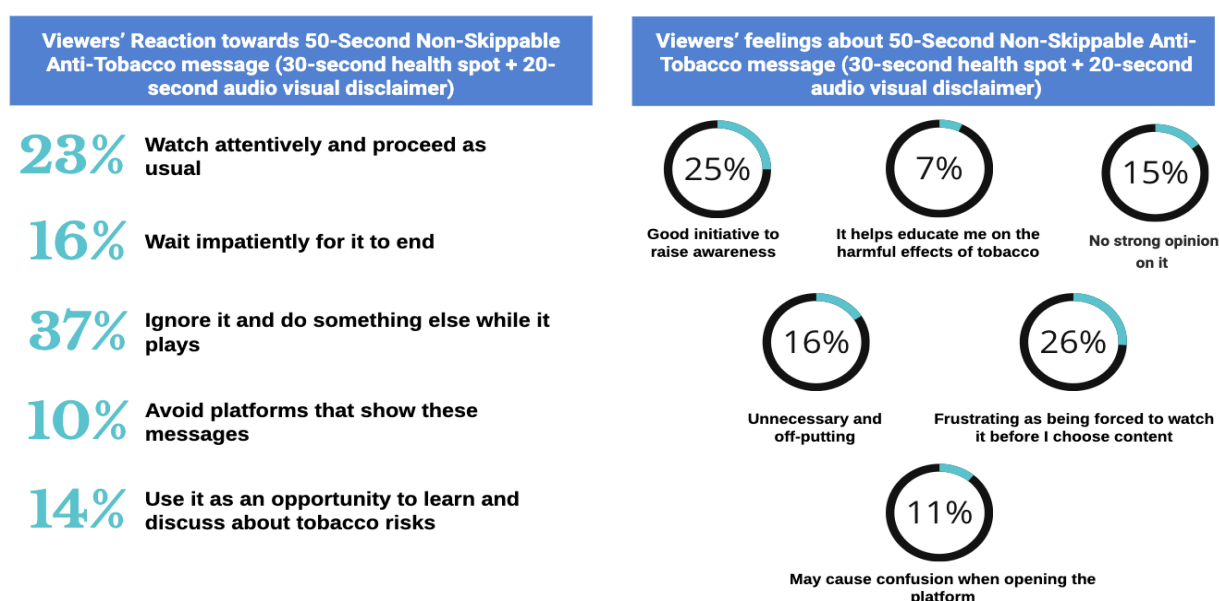
The rationale for this question lies in understanding whether such regulatory interventions, if implemented, could impact user satisfaction, content consumption habits, or platform preference. This is particularly relevant in the OTT ecosystem, where user experience is strongly linked to subscription retention. Studies in media consumption behaviour suggest that user irritation with mandatory ads or unskippable messages may affect satisfaction levels and even result in subscription churn, especially on premium, ad-free platforms, where users pay more to avoid interruptions.^{16,17,18}

¹⁶ Zha, W., & Wu, H. (2014). The impact of online disruptive ads on users' comprehension, site credibility evaluation, and intrusiveness sentiment. *American Communication Journal*, 16(1), 15–28.

¹⁷ <https://www.wired.com/story/pandora-learns-the-cost-of-ads-and-of-subscriptions/>

¹⁸ Aaker, D. A., & Bruzzone, D. E. (1985). Causes of irritation in advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(2), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298504900204>

Figure 8: How OTT Users React and Feel About the Proposed 50-Second Non-Skippable Anti-Tobacco Message (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

3.7. Anticipated Reactions: Passive, Active, or Avoidant?

When asked how they would react to this future scenario, 37 percent of users stated they would likely ignore the message and do something else while it plays, indicating a passive resistance. Another 16 percent said they would wait impatiently for it to end, while 10 percent said they might avoid platforms that implement such messages altogether. Consequently, over 75 percent of users do not derive any utility from such unskippable long messages. These reactions suggest a potential risk to user engagement and satisfaction if the policy is introduced in a rigid, non-customisable format.

Only 23 percent of users reported that they would observe the full 50-second message and proceed with their content viewing as usual, and 14 percent saw it as an opportunity to learn or spark discussion about tobacco-related health risks. This group represents the ideal target audience for such campaigns but remains a minority.

3.8. Perceived Impact on Experience and Messaging Value

On the perceptual side, 26 percent of users felt that being forced to watch the message before accessing content would be frustrating. An additional 16 percent deemed the message unnecessary or off-putting, and 11 percent feared it may create confusion at the point of platform launch, especially if users are unsure whether they are being

redirected or locked out of their chosen content. Consequently, over 50 percent of users do not favour such messages.

Only 32 percent found the initiative either a good awareness-raising tool (25 percent) or educational (7 percent). Meanwhile, 15 percent maintained no strong opinion. This signals a potential mismatch between regulatory intent and viewer receptivity, reinforcing the need to rethink messaging design for maximum impact with minimal intrusion.

3.9. Balancing Awareness and Engagement: Viewer Reactions to Non-Skippable Anti-Tobacco Messaging Both at the Beginning and the Middle of the Content

The graph presented captures viewers' anticipated reactions and feelings if non-skippable anti-tobacco messages are displayed at the beginning and the middle of OTT content. This analysis is particularly relevant as it reflects public response to a hypothetical regulatory scenario, helping policymakers anticipate how proposed content-level interventions might shape user experience and subscription dynamics.

Figure 9: Reaction and Feeling Towards Non-Skippable Anti-Tobacco Messages both at the beginning and middle of the content (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

Starting with reactions, the data shows a polarised response. The most common behaviour, indicated by 33 percent of respondents, would be to ignore the message and divert attention elsewhere while it plays. This disengagement highlights the risk of message fatigue or ineffectiveness when users cannot opt out. In contrast, 19 percent of viewers stated they would observe and proceed as usual, suggesting a portion of the audience remains open or indifferent to the interruption. Another 19 percent reported waiting impatiently for it to end, reflecting passive resistance to enforced messaging.

Crucially, 12 percent of respondents would avoid platforms altogether that impose such non-skippable content, pointing to a potential drop in viewership or subscriptions, especially on ad-free, premium platforms, where users expect uninterrupted viewing. Consequently, such messages may not work for more than 60 percent of respondents. However, 17 percent said they would use the message to learn and initiate discussions about tobacco risks, underscoring that for some, health messaging can provoke reflection and constructive engagement.

When it comes to viewer sentiment, responses are sharply divided. While 21 percent described the intervention as a "good initiative" to raise awareness, a larger share, 36 percent, found it "unnecessary and off-putting". This reveals a crucial trade-off: while public health messaging might meet regulatory goals, it could simultaneously undermine platform satisfaction for many users.

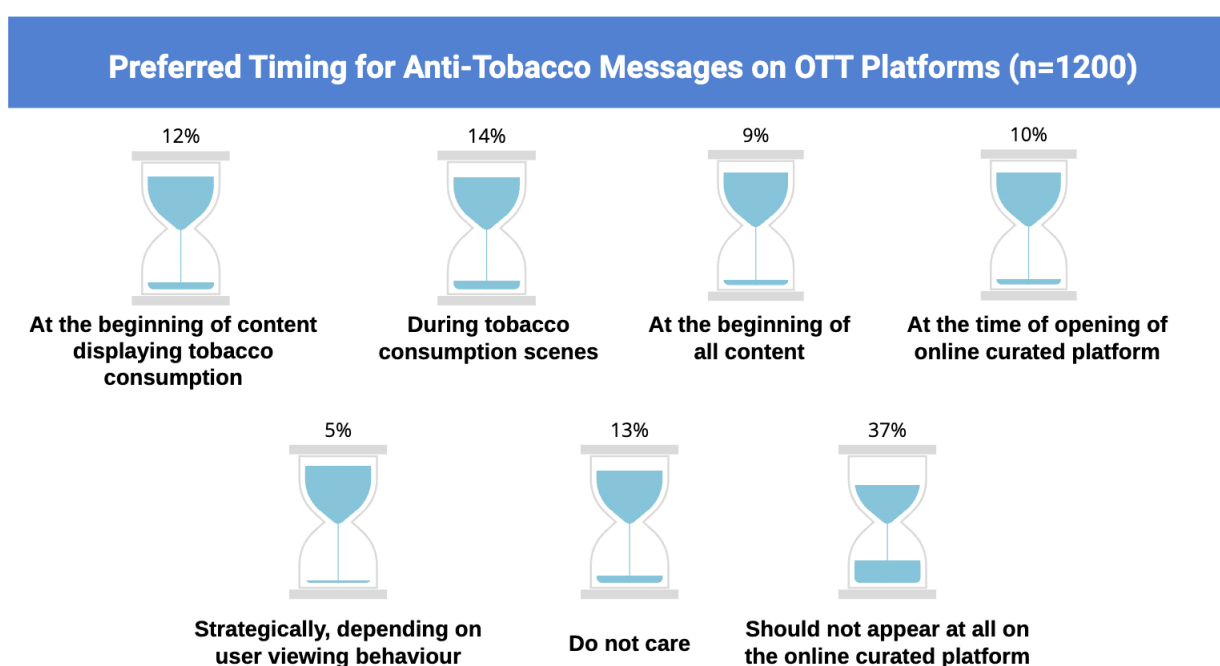
Furthermore, 15 percent found it frustrating to be forced to watch before continuing with content, a reaction that could diminish user retention on paid, premium streaming platforms. On the other hand, 11 percent believed the message would educate them about tobacco harms, pointing to some persuasive value, and 17 percent expressed no strong opinion, reflecting overall neutrality.

Together, these insights highlight that while some users may appreciate or tolerate anti-tobacco messages embedded throughout content, many others are likely to find them intrusive. Importantly, such emotional reactions can translate into behavioural choices like skipping platforms or switching services. For policymakers, these findings reinforce the importance of designing targeted, context-aware interventions that consider user expectations, especially on high-value subscription-based OTT platforms. Strategic messaging, skippable formats, or context-personalised nudges may provide a more effective and user-sensitive approach.

3.10. Timing Matters: Viewers' Preferences on When Anti-Tobacco Messages Should Appear

The chart below offers a detailed snapshot of user preferences regarding the most appropriate timing for displaying anti-tobacco messages on OTT platforms. As regulatory proposals evolve to mandate specific placement of such messages, it is crucial to understand the optimal timing from the user's perspective, balancing public health objectives with viewer satisfaction.

Figure 10: Preferred Timing for Anti-Tobacco Messages on OTT Platforms (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

A striking finding from the survey is that 37 percent of respondents believe anti-tobacco messages should not appear on online curated platforms. This points to significant resistance against mandatory messaging, likely rooted in concerns about user experience, content flow disruption, or message fatigue.

Nonetheless, among respondents who support such messages, preferences lean heavily toward content-specific and context-aware timing. For instance, 14 percent of surveyed participants prefer messages to appear during tobacco consumption scenes, ensuring relevance without blanket disruption. Another 12 percent support shows them only at the beginning of content that depicts tobacco use, again suggesting a preference for targeted warnings instead of platform-wide mandates.

A small yet insightful group — 5 percent of users — advocates for showing messages strategically, depending on user behaviour, implying an interest in personalised or adaptive delivery mechanisms, possibly powered by AI. Meanwhile, 13 percent indicated that they do not care when these messages are displayed, suggesting a neutral user segment that timing decisions may not significantly impact.

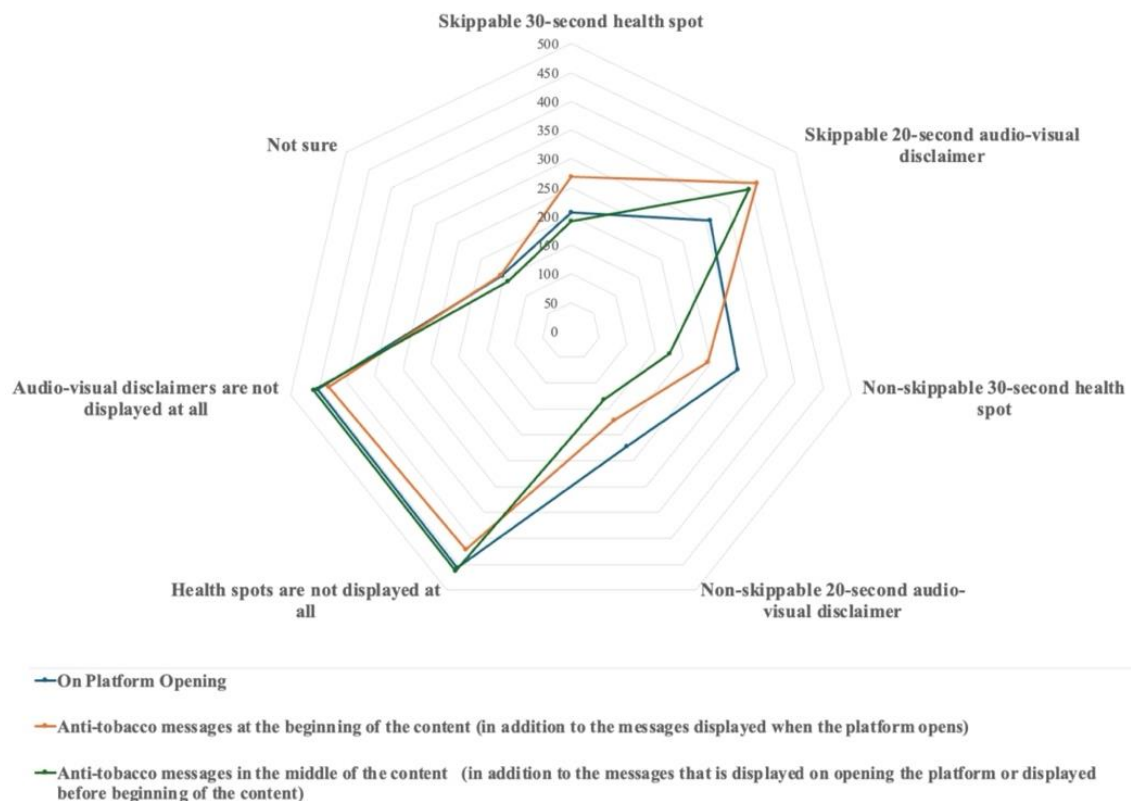
Overall, this analysis reinforces the importance of a nuanced, evidence-based approach to message delivery. A "one-size-fits-all" strategy is unlikely to be effective or welcomed by users. Instead, regulators and platforms should explore context-sensitive, content-specific, and user-personalised placements that maintain the integrity of the OTT experience while still meeting public health communication goals.

3.11. Understanding Viewer Preferences for Format and Placement of Anti-Tobacco Messages on OTT Platforms

Visualising multi-dimensional data can be challenging, especially when comparing variables across several categories. A spider (or radar) chart provides a convenient way to display multiple data series on a single circular plot, helping readers quickly grasp patterns, peaks, and dips across categories. In the chart shown, three different scenarios for displaying anti-tobacco messages — (1) on platform opening, (2) at the beginning of content, and (3) in the middle of content — are compared against seven categories reflecting how health spots and disclaimers might be shown or skipped.

This chart illustrates the frequency or acceptance of each display/placement scenario for a range of potential message formats (skippable or non-skippable, audiovisual disclaimers, no display at all, etc.). By reading how far each coloured line extends along the various spokes, we can see which display method resonates more prominently with each category.

Figure 11: Radar Chart Comparing Anti-Tobacco Message Formats and Their Placement



Source: Authors' analysis

In the above radar (spider) chart, each coloured line corresponds to a different scenario for displaying anti-tobacco messages: the blue line represents messages shown when the platform opens; the orange line represents messages shown at the beginning of the content; and the green line represents messages displayed in the middle of the content. The seven spokes — "Skippable 30-second health spot," "Skippable 20-second audiovisual disclaimer," "non-skippable 30-second health spot," "non-skippable 20-second audiovisual disclaimer," "Health spots are not displayed at all," "Audiovisual disclaimers are not displayed at all," and "Not sure"— reflect how frequently or strongly each format is employed or perceived.

Looking at the "Health spots are not displayed at all" and "Audiovisual disclaimers are not displayed at all" categories, we see that each line stretches toward the outer edge. This suggests a sizable portion of respondents or data points indicating that, under each scenario, health spots and disclaimers may often go unseen. It signals a preference for no additional messages or health warnings.

Focusing on "Skippable" versus "Non-skippable" categories, we notice a moderate range for both disclaimers and health spots, which implies that people generally will tolerate or expect short, forced-view disclaimers (non-skippable). Nevertheless, skippable formats appear nearly as prevalent. The chart's middle region shows that respondents have mixed perceptions—some might find non-skippable approaches intrusive. In contrast, others perceive them as an effective way to ensure that important messages are not bypassed.

In comparing when the messages appear, the blue line (on platform opening) favours scenarios where health spots or disclaimers are minimal or absent altogether. In contrast, the orange line (beginning of content) extends further outward in categories like audiovisual disclaimers, indicating that viewers might acknowledge them more often right before the main content. The green line (middle of content) sometimes peaks for non-skippable disclaimers or shows less extension where spots are not displayed, suggesting people may be compelled to watch them if placed mid-way through the content, or, conversely, that the warnings are skipped entirely.

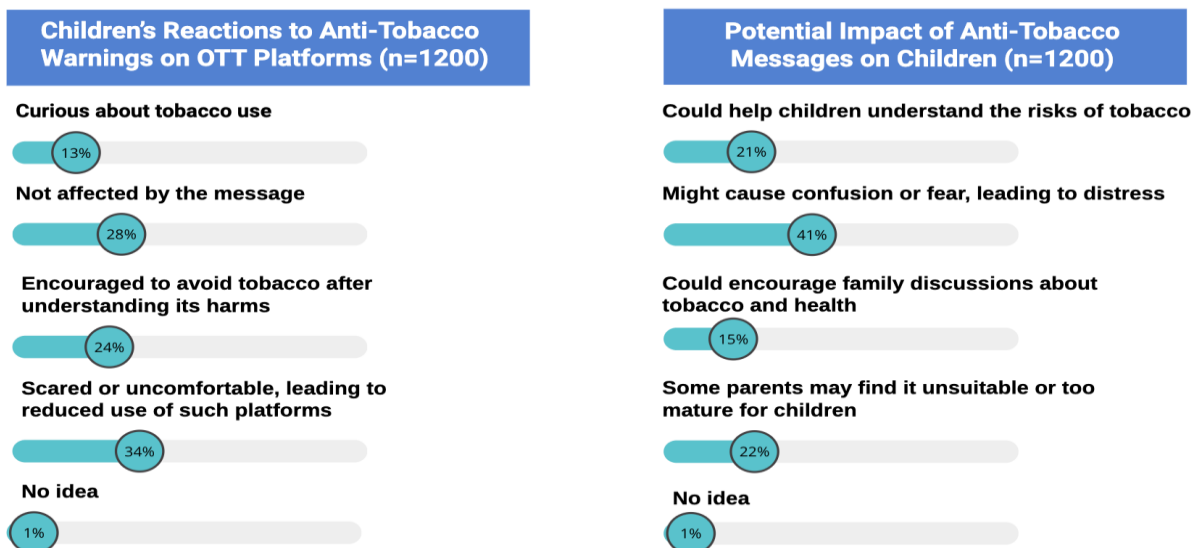
Lastly, the "Not sure" category shows moderate values for the three lines. This indicates a subset of respondents who may not recall or are uncertain about how or whether anti-tobacco messages will appear in each scenario. Such uncertainty underscores a need for more precise or consistent placement of health warnings, so viewers become more aware of these messages and their importance.

This radar chart shows that the display of anti-tobacco messages varies widely based on the format (skippable vs. non-skippable, audiovisual vs. health spot) and the timing (platform opening, beginning of content, middle of content). By observing the shape and extent of each polygon in the radar chart, stakeholders can better understand which formats of anti-tobacco messaging will be relatively better tolerated by viewers across different points of content delivery.

3.12. Potential Impact on Children

This section explores viewer perceptions of how children might react to anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms, from the perspective of diverse survey respondents. The findings shed light on the complex emotional and cognitive responses that such messages could evoke in younger audiences, and the implications these may carry for content regulation and parental concerns. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, especially as India considers broadening the regulatory scope of health warnings in the digital entertainment space.

Figure 12: Perceived Impact of Anti-Tobacco Messaging on Children: Audience Reflections and Concerns (n=1200)



Source: Authors' analysis

3.13. Emotional Responses and Behavioural Implications

The first chart captures respondents' perceptions of children's likely reactions to anti-tobacco warnings. The most prominent concern, cited by 34 percent of respondents, is that children may feel scared or uncomfortable upon encountering such messages, potentially leading to reduced platform use. This anxiety-driven avoidance behaviour underscores a key tension in public health messaging: how to communicate risks without triggering unintended emotional distress among vulnerable audiences.

However, a smaller but significant 13 percent expressed concern that these messages might incite curiosity about tobacco among children, contrary to the intended goal. While this segment remains in the minority, it draws attention to the risk of unintended consequences if messaging is not age-appropriate or fails to engage younger audiences effectively.

3.14. Parental Perspectives and Perceived Educational Value

The second chart deepens the analysis by capturing what respondents feel could be the broader impact of these messages on children. The leading concern, cited by 41 percent of respondents, is that anti-tobacco warnings may cause confusion or fear, leading to emotional distress. This aligns with earlier findings and reinforces the need for age-sensitive content design.

An additional 22 percent believe that parents may find such warnings inappropriate or too mature for children, reflecting broader anxieties about the developmental suitability of graphic or fear-based health messaging. Consequently, more than 60 percent of respondents did not find such messaging suitable for children. These views highlight the importance of consulting with child psychologists and education experts when designing regulations that touch younger audiences.

Despite these concerns, 21 percent of respondents viewed anti-tobacco messaging as an opportunity to help children understand the risks associated with tobacco use. A smaller segment (15 percent) felt the messages could spark meaningful family discussions around health and tobacco, underscoring the potential for constructive dialogue if the messaging is well-calibrated.

3.15. Strategic Implications for Policymakers and Platforms

This simulated response pattern underscores a critical insight: the success of public health messaging depends on its content and delivery mechanism. Platforms with high-value subscriptions and no-ads policies may see a direct clash between user expectations and regulatory compliance, unless carefully balanced with content design and consumer psychology.

Since OTT services operate in a highly competitive and choice-driven environment, viewer satisfaction becomes a key determinant of platform loyalty. As such, bluntly imposing long, non-skippable health messages may undermine the very goal of public health advocacy if they alienate users or push them toward unregulated alternatives.

Hence, any move to introduce such measures must be complemented by flexible implementation guidelines, such as allowing for shorter durations, age-based customisation, platform-specific exemptions, or even creative integration of messages into content flow. Doing so can help align regulatory mandates with user-centric design and business sustainability.

This section thus provides critical input for policymakers and platforms alike to reconsider the contours of anti-tobacco communication in OTT spaces, keeping in mind not only public health imperatives but also the nuanced behaviours and preferences of digital audiences.

These findings point to a central policy dilemma: How can India maintain strong anti-tobacco communication while minimising potential distress or unintended curiosity among children? As OTT platforms continue to reach younger viewers, balancing

educational intent with sensitivity to cognitive and emotional development is imperative.

The results suggest a pressing need for regulatory strategies that account for content context, platform parental controls, and differentiated messaging based on viewer age. Messages targeting children must be informative but non-threatening, ideally supplemented by interactive formats or family-facing content that encourages co-viewing and discussion.

Ultimately, understanding viewer perceptions about how anti-tobacco messages affect children offers insight for shaping responsible, inclusive, and effective public health policies in the OTT era.

One Message Does Not Fit All: Demographic Dynamics in OTT-Based Tobacco Warnings

This chapter presents the statistical analysis conducted to assess the influence of demographic variables — namely gender and age group — on individuals' responses to and perceptions of anti-tobacco messages displayed on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms. Chi-square tests of independence were applied to determine whether any significant associations exist between these variables and respondents' attitudes toward statutory anti-tobacco health warnings and messages commonly shown before or during digital content on platforms.

4.1. Chi-Square Test: Gendered Perspectives on Anti-Tobacco Health Spots

4.1.1 Hypotheses: Responses to anti-tobacco health spots

To determine whether gender influences how individuals respond to anti-tobacco health spots on OTT platforms, a Chi-Square test of independence was conducted. The test compared participants' gender with self-reported responses to statutory anti-tobacco health warnings displayed before or during digital content on platforms.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant association between gender and individuals' responses to anti-tobacco health spots on OTT platforms.

4.1.2 Test Results

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests (n=1200)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	71.94 ^a	8	0.000
^a All cells had an expected count ≥ 5			

The Chi-Square test yielded a value of 71.94 with 8 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000, far below the 0.05 threshold. This provides strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It confirms that there is a significant association between gender and response to anti-tobacco health warnings on OTT platforms.

The results show that respondents across different gender identities engage with or perceive these statutory warnings differently. For instance, males may be more likely to ignore or skip such messages, while females may view them with more concern or awareness. Other gender identities may show unique patterns in receptivity or scepticism.

This insight has practical relevance for public health communication design. A “one-size-fits-all” approach may be ineffective. Instead, tailoring anti-tobacco messages based on gendered preferences—such as format, tone, and placement—could significantly enhance message impact and audience retention.

4.1.3. Hypotheses: Perception of Anti-Tobacco Health Spots

This analysis investigates whether there is a statistically significant relationship between an individual’s gender and their perception of anti-tobacco health spots shown on Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming platforms. These health spots typically include visual warnings or messages highlighting the harmful effects of tobacco use, presented either before or during digital content.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant association between gender and perception of anti-tobacco health spots on OTT platforms.

4.1.4. Test Results

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests (n=1200)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	101.51 ^a	8	0.000
^a All cells had an expected count ≥ 5			

The Chi-Square test yielded a χ^2 value of **101.51** with **8 degrees of freedom** and a **p-value of 0.000**, far below the standard significance threshold of 0.05. This strongly indicates a **statistically significant association between gender and perception** of anti-tobacco health spots on OTT platforms.

This result leads us to **reject the null hypothesis** and accept the **alternative hypothesis**, confirming that gender does influence how individuals perceive such messages.

The statistical significance implies that responses to anti-tobacco health spots—ranging from finding them helpful, neutral, annoying, or dismissive—vary notably across gender groups. For instance, some respondents may perceive these warnings as critical public health interventions, while others may see them as intrusive interruptions to entertainment content. The degree to which these messages are accepted or resisted may differ between male, female, and non-binary respondents.

4.2. Chi-Square Test: Age-Related Perspectives on Anti-Tobacco Messages

A Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to assess whether individuals of different age groups perceive anti-tobacco messages differently when watching content on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms. The test compared respondents' age group with their stated perception of these messages, which often appear before or during streaming content.

4.2.1 Hypotheses

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant association between age group and perception of anti-tobacco messages on OTT platforms.

4.2.2 Test Results

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests (n=1200)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	589.84 ^a	24	0.000
^a All cells had an expected count ≥ 5			

The test returned a Chi-Square statistic of 589.84 with 24 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000, well below the standard threshold of 0.05. This provides strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, the result is highly significant and indicates a meaningful association between age group and perception of anti-tobacco messages on OTT platforms.

This means that viewers perceive these health warnings differently across age groups. For example, younger respondents (such as those in the 18–24 or 25–34 age brackets) might find these messages more relatable or educational, particularly because they frequently use streaming platforms. In contrast, older age groups may either ignore them, find them repetitive, or already be informed about the health risks of tobacco use. Alternatively, certain age groups might view these messages as disruptive or irrelevant, especially if they believe they are not the intended target audience.

The magnitude of the Chi-Square value also points toward a substantial divergence in perceptions across age groups, not just a marginal difference. This suggests that age is an essential demographic factor influencing how these public health messages are received and interpreted.

While the quantitative findings offer valuable statistical evidence on user behaviour and platform trends, they only tell part of the story. This study incorporated a qualitative research component to capture the nuances of viewer sentiment and better understand the "why" behind the numbers. This section presents insights from open-ended responses gathered during the survey, aiming to contextualise user attitudes toward anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms.

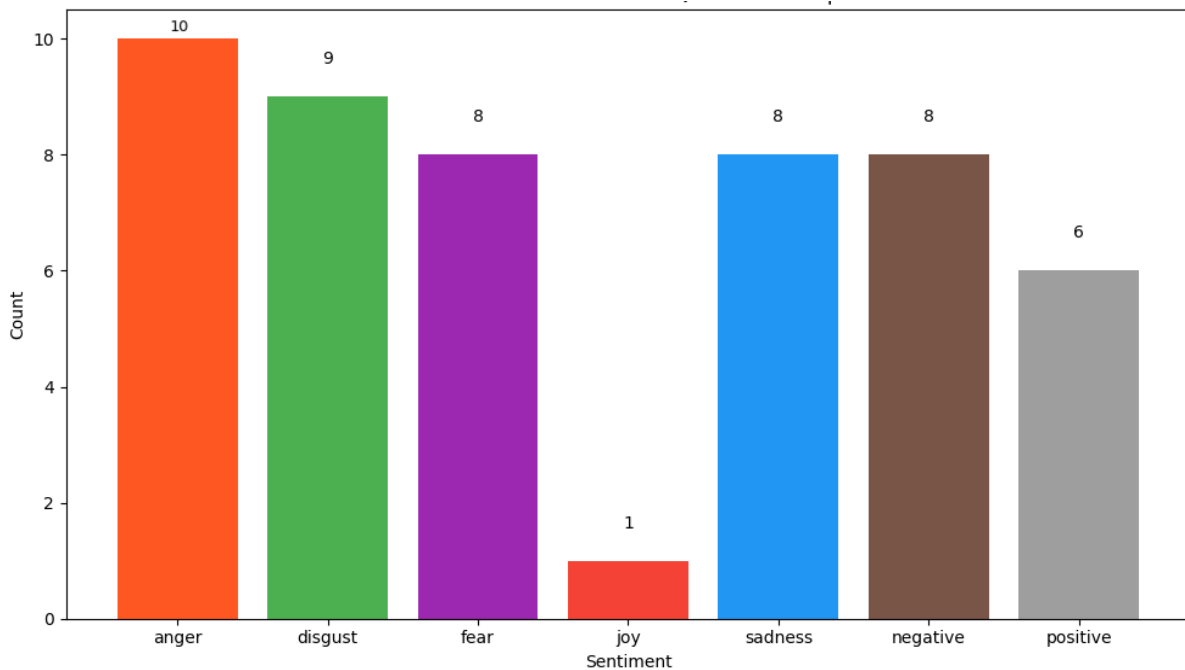
These narratives offer more profound reflections, ranging from emotional responses and personal experiences to critical opinions on health disclaimers' effectiveness, fairness, and delivery in digital media environments. By analysing these perspectives thematically, the report highlights the layered and often conflicting sentiments that viewers associate with government-mandated health warnings in entertainment content. This qualitative layer enriches the overall analysis, ensuring that user voices are not reduced to statistics but are instead understood in their complexity and emotional depth.

5.1. Emotional Pulse of Viewers: Sentiment Distribution from Qualitative Responses on Anti-Tobacco Messaging

To complement the quantitative findings and gain a deeper understanding of how viewers emotionally perceive anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms, a sentiment analysis was conducted on 50 open-ended qualitative responses. This approach helps capture the nuanced emotional landscape — ranging from frustration and disengagement to appreciation and concern — that often underpins user behaviour but may not be reflected in closed-choice survey formats.

The analysis sheds light on the affective undercurrents shaping public reactions by classifying responses into categories such as anger, fear, disgust, joy, sadness, and broader positive or negative sentiments. These insights are crucial for designing more empathetic, user-sensitive communication strategies that resonate effectively with diverse viewer segments.

Figure 13: Sentiment Analysis of the Qualitative Responses



Source: Authors' analysis

The sentiment analysis reveals a predominantly adverse emotional reaction to the government's anti-tobacco regulations on OTT platforms. Anger (10) and disgust (9) top the list, suggesting that many users view these mandatory health spots as intrusive or unwelcome. Fear (8) and sadness (8) also rank high, indicating that some individuals may feel distressed or uneasy about the regulations, possibly due to perceived overreach or the gravity of tobacco-related health risks.

Interestingly, eight responses are broadly categorised as negative, implying a general dissatisfaction that doesn't necessarily manifest as anger or disgust but reflects unfavourable sentiment. Meanwhile, positive (6) and joy (1) together form a smaller segment, suggesting that only a handful of participants appreciate or approve of these measures, potentially valuing the public health benefit or finding them minimally disruptive.

The sentiment analysis underscores a negative reception to the new OTT anti-tobacco regulations. While a few respondents see value in these health spots, the majority express strong adverse emotions, ranging from annoyance to deeper concerns about how these measures impact their viewing experience and personal freedoms.

Figure 14: Diverse Sentiments on Anti-Tobacco Messages in OTT Platforms



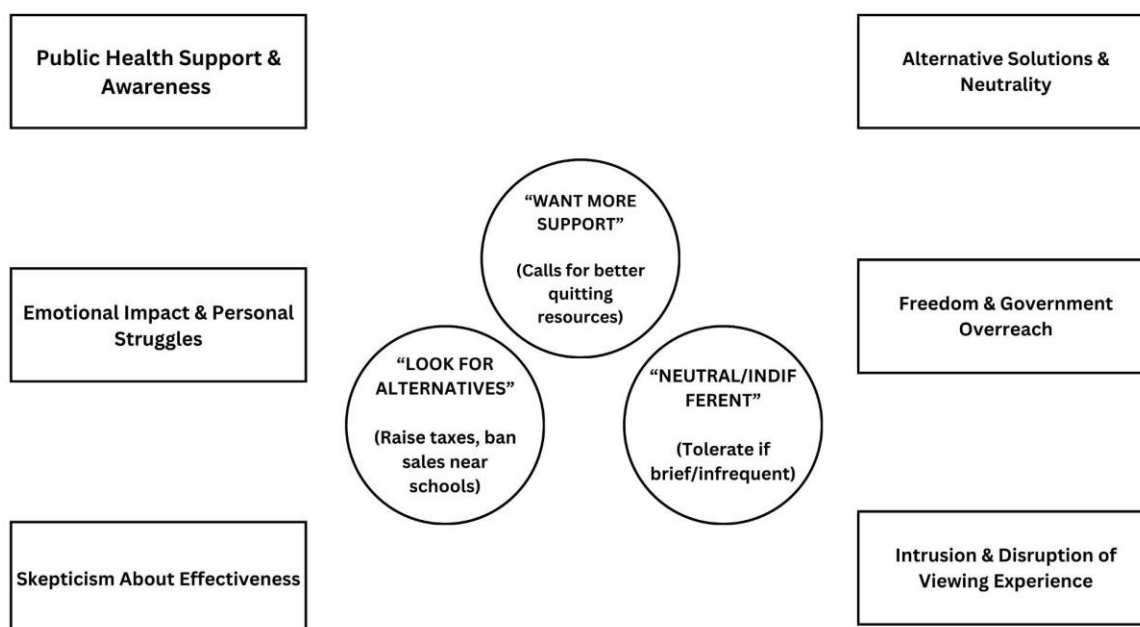
Source: Generated by Authors

The above infographic highlights a range of viewpoints gathered from in-depth qualitative interviews regarding government-mandated anti-tobacco messages on OTT (Over-The-Top) streaming services. The quotes illustrate varying degrees of acceptance and scepticism—from those who view the warnings as intrusive and unlikely to influence behaviour, to others who consider them essential in raising public awareness and deterring tobacco use. Some respondents emphasise policy-level interventions, such as taxation and sales restrictions, as more effective strategies. These differing perspectives underscore the complexity of public sentiment, forming a foundation for sentiment analysis to assess how policy measures are perceived and where communication efforts might be refined or supplemented.

5.2. Thematic Analysis: Key Narratives from Viewers

To delve deeper into public perceptions surrounding anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms, a thematic analysis was conducted on 50 qualitative responses. This approach moves beyond sentiment to reveal the underlying narratives and concerns shaping viewer attitudes. The study identified eight key themes reflecting a broad emotional, practical, and ideological spectrum.

Figure 15: Thematic Analysis: Key Themes & Sub-Themes



Source: Authors' analysis

This diagram presents six major themes — public Health Support and awareness, Emotional Impact and personal Struggles, Scepticism About Effectiveness, Intrusion and disruption of Viewing Experience, Freedom and government Overreach, and Alternative Solutions and neutrality —drawn from qualitative responses about mandatory anti-tobacco messages on OTT platforms. Each rectangle on the outside represents a distinct category of opinion or concern identified in the data.

In the centre, three overlapping circles — "WANT MORE SUPPORT," "LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVES," and "NEUTRAL/INDIFFERENT"— indicate recurring sub-themes or action points that emerge across multiple major themes.

For instance, participants who question the effectiveness of on-screen warnings often suggest alternative regulatory strategies such as increasing taxes on tobacco products

or implementing stricter sales and distribution policies, like limiting retail outlets, enforcing age verification, or restricting proximity to schools. These respondents believe that economic deterrents and structural restrictions would likely have a more tangible impact on reducing tobacco use than passive warnings displayed on screen, which they view as easily ignored or ineffective in changing behaviour.

Others who have personal ties to tobacco addiction or health crises often emphasise the need for expanded quitting resources ("WANT MORE SUPPORT"). Meanwhile, those who do not feel strongly positive or negative about the warnings or tolerate them if they are brief fall into the "NEUTRAL/INDIFFERENT" category.

By placing these sub-themes at the centre, the diagram illustrates how various major themes converge on similar desires or viewpoints—whether seeking more comprehensive support systems, advocating for alternate policy solutions, or remaining largely unbothered by short disclaimers. Overall, the diagram highlights how different perspectives on anti-tobacco messages can intersect, offering valuable insights into the range of public reactions and potential policy or communication strategies.

5.2.1. Public Health Support & Awareness

This theme captures the perspective that anti-tobacco messages serve a vital public health function, raising awareness about smoking's dangers. Respondents in this category often view on-screen warnings as necessary interventions, particularly for impressionable audiences like teenagers. Many draw parallels to existing cinema hall disclaimers, arguing that if these measures prevent even a small number of individuals from starting or continuing to smoke, they are worthwhile. While some acknowledge the inconvenience, they prioritise collective health benefits over viewing comfort.

5.2.2 Emotional Impact & Personal Struggles

Individuals within this theme emphasise personal or familial experiences with tobacco, such as losing loved ones to smoking-related illnesses or struggling with addiction themselves. Because of these firsthand encounters, they may support anti-tobacco messages out of concern for others who could face similar outcomes. Conversely, some find these warnings stressful or guilt-inducing, highlighting the complexity of addiction and the emotional toll these prompts can have. Overall, the emotional weight of tobacco use—whether supportive of warnings or resentful of constant reminders—falls under this theme.

5.2.3 Skepticism About Effectiveness

Under this theme, respondents doubt the real-world impact of mandatory anti-tobacco health spots. They note that warnings already exist on cigarette packs and in movie theatres, yet smoking persists. Some view the government's approach as more of a symbolic or PR move rather than a genuine deterrent. They argue that people who want to smoke will continue, regardless of disclaimers, and that more robust solutions (e.g., stricter sales laws, higher taxes) are necessary. Their scepticism stems from seeing little evidence that such warnings effectively change behaviour in the long run.

5.2.4 Intrusion & Disruption of Viewing Experience

This theme centres on respondents who resent forced interruptions in what they consider a premium, ad-free environment. They feel that on-screen messages break their immersive viewing experience, undermining one of the core appeals of OTT platforms—uninterrupted content. Some may tolerate short, unobtrusive warnings at the beginning or end of content, but they grow frustrated if these spots become frequent or lengthy. Essentially, they see these mandatory messages as a nuisance rather than a helpful public health measure.

5.2.5 Freedom & Government Overreach

Those in this theme believe that adults should be free to decide about tobacco without what they perceive as government interference in entertainment content. They argue that if the government is genuinely concerned, it should ban or heavily regulate tobacco rather than mandate disclaimers. This viewpoint also suggests that OTT platforms, often prized for their unregulated and diverse content, should remain less subject to top-down policies. Respondents here may feel these messages infringe on personal autonomy or represent excessive moral policing.

5.2.6 Alternative Solutions & Neutrality

This theme encompasses respondents who propose alternate strategies or express neutrality about the warnings. On one hand, some call for different policy measures (e.g., raising tobacco taxes, banning sales near schools, or enhancing age verification) rather than focusing on disclaimers. On the other hand, a portion remains indifferent or only slightly bothered, stating they can handle brief warnings without major complaint. They do not outright oppose the initiative but question its impact, suggesting there might be better ways to address tobacco use.

Each of these themes offers a unique lens on the perception of viewers about anti-tobacco messages on OTT platforms. The themes identified through the qualitative

responses are closely aligned with insights drawn from the national survey conducted as part of this study. For instance, the theme of *"Intrusion & Disruption of Viewing Experience"* reflects the study's findings that 27 percent of respondents felt that anti-tobacco messages disrupted their OTT viewing.

Likewise, scepticism about the effectiveness of on-screen warnings — captured through the theme *"Scepticism About Effectiveness"*— is supported by data showing that many viewers either skipped or paid little attention to these messages. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative inputs, the analysis offers a well-rounded understanding of user sentiment, highlighting how viewers react and why they hold those views. This triangulated approach strengthens the evidence base for more effective and audience-sensitive health communication policies.

This research examined the effectiveness, reception, and implications of government-mandated anti-tobacco messaging on India's OTT platforms. Through a triangulated methodology — combining a large-scale user survey (n=1200), in-depth qualitative responses, and a rigorous statistical analysis — the study presents a comprehensive portrait of how audiences engage with, respond to, and perceive anti-tobacco health spots and disclaimers embedded in digital content.

The findings underscore a critical insight: while the visibility of anti-tobacco messaging has increased in the OTT space, its perceived value, emotional resonance, and behavioural impact remain inconsistent and deeply fragmented across demographic lines.

Chi-square analyses confirm that both gender and age group significantly influence user responses and perceptions. Males, females, and non-binary individuals show distinctly different levels of receptiveness, ranging from active engagement to resistance or disengagement. Similarly, younger users — particularly digital natives — are more likely to notice and reflect on such messaging, while older audiences often view them as repetitive or ineffective. These insights challenge the notion of a one-size-fits-all regulatory framework and call for demographically nuanced communication strategies.

Sentiment and thematic analysis further reveal that the message content and delivery **shape user reactions**. Viewers who support public health goals express concern over excessive repetition, graphic warnings, and disruption of the viewing experience, especially on mobile devices or premium, ad-free platforms. Conversely, others emphasise the importance of such messaging, particularly when tied to personal experiences of tobacco-related harm. Notably, many viewers advocate for alternative policy approaches such as stricter regulation of tobacco sales, tax increases, or access to cessation support, instead of relying solely on audiovisual warnings.

The study also highlights the complex emotional landscape surrounding anti-tobacco messaging, ranging from fear, anger, and disgust to support and indifference. These reactions are not merely anecdotal but carry policy significance, as they influence user behaviour, content preferences, and platform loyalty.

Furthermore, the proposed implementation of non-skippable 50-second messages at platform launch or in the middle of content appears especially contentious. Many users indicate that such measures would frustrate or alienate them, potentially driving some of them away from regulated platforms. This insight is particularly relevant for India's evolving media regulation, where the challenge lies in balancing public health objectives with digital user autonomy and platform viability.

This study clarifies that mandated anti-tobacco messaging in OTT platforms is at a critical crossroads. Its future effectiveness will depend not only on enforcement but also on how sensitively and smartly it is designed and targeted. The findings advocate a shift toward flexible, context-aware, and user-sensitive communication models—such as age-based customisation, skippable formats, message personalisation, and platform-specific adaptations—that preserve viewer engagement while advancing tobacco control goals.

India's regulatory landscape must now evolve to reflect these realities, ensuring that anti-tobacco campaigns are as effective in communication as they are in intention.

6.1. Policy-Level Recommendations

The empirical evidence presented in this report, drawn from quantitative surveys, qualitative feedback, and comparative regulatory analysis, underscores the urgent need for a recalibrated approach to anti-tobacco messaging on OTT platforms in India. While current regulations mandating non-skippable health spots and static warnings are intended to align digital content with national tobacco control goals, our mixed-method analysis — including survey responses, thematic narratives, and rollout simulations — indicates that such blanket interventions often compromise viewer experience.

For instance, over 35 percent of surveyed users reported feeling disrupted by the current format of mandatory health spots, and only 20 percent found them genuinely informative. The qualitative themes, such as *"Intrusion & Disruption of Viewing Experience"*, further reinforce these sentiments, especially among frequent OTT users. Moreover, in the hypothetical scenario of a non-skippable 50-second message, 37 percent said they would ignore the warning, and 10 percent indicated they might stop using the platform entirely. This empirical evidence suggests that the public health returns of current message delivery formats may not be commensurate with the disruption they cause to user experience.

As the survey findings demonstrate, over 35 percent of viewers reported feeling disrupted by mandatory health warnings, and only 20 percent found them informative. These reactions are particularly acute among younger, mobile-first audiences, who form the backbone of India's OTT user base.

To address these concerns, policymakers must move beyond rigid mandates and adopt a risk-proportionate, user-sensitive framework. This entails deploying age-based or user-profile-driven targeting mechanisms to ensure that anti-tobacco messaging is concentrated where it is most impactful. For instance, adolescents, who are both digital natives and vulnerable to tobacco influences, could be exposed to more frequent and tailored health messages. In contrast, mature adult viewers who primarily engage with content that does not depict tobacco use, such as family serials or sports shows, could receive less intrusive interventions.

This differentiation can be enabled through existing user profiling mechanisms such as age-gated logins, parental controls, content preferences, and platform-level behavioural analytics, allowing a risk-sensitive, data-driven targeting strategy that aligns with digital consent frameworks.

Additionally, the report's hypothetical rollout analysis of non-skippable 50-second messages reveals a clear risk of user alienation, with over 37 percent of respondents indicating they would ignore the message and 10 percent stating they might avoid platforms altogether. In light of this, policymakers should permit skippable disclaimers after a brief mandatory exposure period (3–5 seconds). This approach aligns with India's digital consent frameworks, ensuring that health communication does not devolve into viewer antagonism.

The study also highlights the regulatory asymmetry between content depiction and online tobacco sales. While OTT platforms face heavy compliance burdens, e-commerce channels operate under minimal restrictions, requiring only token age verifications and pop-up warnings. This inconsistency risks undermining the very purpose of tobacco control. The report suggests that regulatory parity across content and commerce must be enforced. This ensures that online tobacco sales platforms are held to the same rigorous standards, including robust age verification mechanisms and persistent health disclosures.

Moreover, the report emphasises the importance of co-regulatory models, wherein the government collaborates with platforms, civil society, consumer groups, and public health experts to establish codes of conduct and compliance, which is monitored by a

body representing different stakeholders. This would allow OTT platforms the flexibility to innovate and adapt their messaging strategies while meeting baseline health objectives. Additionally, as advocated in this report, Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) should be institutionalised to evaluate the real-world implications of such policies, assessing both their public health impact and their effect on industry sustainability.

In sum, this report's findings call for a flexible, evidence-based regulatory model — one that targets health messaging where it matters most, respects user experience, and ensures consistency across digital ecosystems. Such an approach would enhance the efficacy of India's tobacco control initiatives and preserve the creative and economic vitality of its burgeoning OTT sector.

6.2 Industry-Specific Recommendations

Parallel to the policy recalibration, OTT platforms must leverage this report's insights to reimagine how health communication is delivered. The sentiment and thematic analyses presented herein highlight a fundamental disconnect: while a segment of viewers acknowledges the importance of anti-tobacco messaging, the majority perceive it as intrusive—a finding consistent across user sentiment data, where emotions such as anger, disgust, and frustration were predominant.

Recognising this, OTT platforms should view anti-tobacco messaging not as a regulatory checkbox, but as an opportunity to innovate, foster user trust, and demonstrate corporate social responsibility. The report's device usage analysis shows that mobile devices account for over 40 percent of OTT consumption in India, making the format, placement, and design of health messages critical. Static text warnings that block subtitles or visual elements, especially on small screens, can erode user satisfaction. Platforms should thus invest in dynamic, non-disruptive message placements — such as context-aware banners, animated disclaimers, or, where feasible, integrated storyline advisories developed in collaboration with content creators — that align with content genres and avoid disrupting the narrative flow.

The report further advocates for data-driven personalisation of health messaging, leveraging the AI-driven viewer analytics capabilities already embedded within OTT platforms. This would enable platforms to tailor message frequency, duration, and format based on user profiles. For example, a viewer exposed to multiple full-length disclaimers could be shown shorter reminders in subsequent sessions, while first-time tobacco-related content consumers could receive more comprehensive interventions. Such adaptive messaging models, informed by the viewer segmentation insights in

this study, would ensure that public health communication remains relevant and practical without alienating core audiences.

Additionally, industry and consumer group collaboration is vital in this report. To co-create self-regulatory standards and best practices, OTT platforms should spearhead the formation of multi-stakeholder working groups — bringing together content creators, behavioural scientists, public health experts, consumer groups and civil society organisations. This collaborative governance model aligns with the co-regulation frameworks recommended at the policy level and enables platforms to tailor interventions that reflect local content dynamics and user sensibilities.

Other jurisdictions have successfully employed such adaptive models. For example, Singapore's content rating system allows for context-sensitive health messaging, while the UK's Ofcom prohibits glamorisation of smoking but does not impose blanket disclaimers. Learning from these examples, Indian platforms can develop culturally nuanced, audience-specific communication models that achieve public health objectives without stifling creative expression.

Finally, the report calls for incentivised compliance mechanisms, which a recommendation platform should actively pursue. By investing in awareness campaigns, tobacco cessation partnerships, and innovative messaging formats, platforms can exceed compliance standards and position themselves as champions of public health. Recognition through government awards, tax benefits, or promotional visibility could further incentivise these efforts, creating a virtuous cycle where business and public health goals reinforce one another.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Location	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Delhi	80	6.7
Kolkata	80	6.7
Bengaluru	80	6.7
Pune	80	6.7
Chennai	80	6.7
Lucknow	80	6.7
Indore	80	6.7
Guwahati	80	6.7
Bhubaneswar	80	6.7
Bhopal	80	6.7
Meerut	80	6.7
Siliguri	80	6.7
Jabalpur	80	6.7
Dhanbad	80	6.7
Rajahmundry	80	6.7
Total	1200	100.0
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 18	118	9.8
18 – 24	188	15.7
25 – 34	328	27.3
35 – 44	265	22.1
45 – 54	110	9.2
55 – 64	107	8.9
65 and above	84	7
Total	1200	100.0
Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	522	43.5
Male	579	48.25
Prefer not to say	99	8.25
Total	1200	100.0

Annexure 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.791	18

Note 1: The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.791 indicates good internal consistency among the 18 items included in the scale, suggesting that the items reliably measure the intended construct.

Note 2: Demographic questions were excluded from this analysis, as they do not contribute to scale reliability assessments.



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