

How can we help MX Player grow and increase its retention?

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MX Player: A Snapshot

MX Player, originally one of the oldest and most popular video players for locally-stored media in the market, was acquired by Times Internet for \$140~\$200 million in 2018. Post-acquisition, Times Internet has added features like video streaming of original content, partner content, live channels, movies bundled with music, games and news. The OTT feature rolled out initially in the Indian market has been expanded to more than half a dozen markets like the U.S and U.K. The company is also targeting the Middle East and South Asia. The app caters to users across the tiers in India.

The entire streaming platform follows Advertising Video on Demand (AVOD) model and has not only carved a space for itself being a free OTT service among a plethora of paid ones but has also managed to top the category over the past few months.

Key metrics

- 1,50,000 hrs of premium video content, audio music and games, all for free.
- Largest market - India (175 MAUs, 75 DAUs), Globally - (280 MAUs)
- App Annie's Breakout Video Streaming App of 2019 (India), ahead of Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Reliance owned Jio TV. Also among top 10 publishers in India and incredible growth in Indonesia.

What has worked?

- Investment in original content has paid off for the organization. MX Player plans to have 50 originals on its platform this year.
- Web Series are the most consumed form of content followed by linear, traditional TV followed by movies.
- Great traction in the regional market with a deep focus on quality vernacular content. Also, dubbed international content has worked well for the platform.
- Conscious decision to avoid sports, English language and Kids content for now.

Ambition & Competitors

MX Player aims to become the number 1 app in its category beating out players like Netflix, Prime Video, Hotstar & ZEE5 by 2023. However, Youtube can be considered a competitor to the platform given the availability of free content, web series and music.

All of these platforms have a different pull. While Netflix thrives on its originals and content library, prime video is also focusing on the same with originals, movies and several value additions besides video. Hotstar leverages sports as its key growth driver with the recent addition of the Disney catalogue adding to its strength. Most of the other OTTs share their content across platforms.

MX Player has been able to amass a lot of users within a short period given its existing user base, acquisition capabilities of its parent company and by the virtue of being free. However, with OTTs regionally pricing their offerings for cheap, Youtube and easy availability of pirated content, MX Player needs to find a way to retain the existing set of users beyond the first few days. Being a casual video viewing platform, it also competes for watch time against players such as TikTok, Facebook etc.

The Retention Problem

Being an AVOD, it's critical for the app to not only increase its DAUs, D3, D7, D30 but also the watch time (session length, number of sessions). [Reports](#) suggest, apps lose over 75% of their DAU in the first 3 days. Also, [50% of subscribers lose interest](#) in a platform after a must-see series or sports. (While MX Player is free, the OTT might face the same issue in terms of users not returning to the app post a series).

"With a recent funding of \$110 million funding from Times Internet and Tencent, MX Player closed 2019 on a good note, however the challenge for the platform has been to get viewers to engage with its content library on a daily-basis." - ([Source](#))

Furthermore, while original content is a great pull, it may or may not solve the problem of daily retention as people binge watch a series and may not return until another series piques their interest. It's also expensive to produce original content vs optimising the product to build new user habits.

Decision Fatigue

A lot of content consumption on popular OTTs like Netflix and Prime is intentional. People come for a series and depending upon the strength of the recommendation, available time, the popularity of original or onboarded I.Ps, move towards a more casual watching experience. That initial intention helps users in overcoming decision fatigue which often leads to decision avoidance.

Decision Fatigue - In decision making and psychology, decision fatigue refers to the deteriorating quality of decisions made by an individual after a long session of decision making. It is now understood as one of the causes of irrational trade-offs in decision making.

Decision Avoidance - Decision avoidance is a choice strategy whereby decision-makers fail to make a decision, postpone a decision, or make a decision that does not involve action or change (Beattie et al. 1994; Luce 1998; see Anderson 2003).

For users who download the app for its local media playing capabilities or just give the app a try because it's free, the app can feel overwhelming for the first time user. The app can improve its entire user journey ranging from onboarding to engagement in terms of helping the user overcome that decision fatigue.

Understanding the value of above-mentioned content, Netflix has features built-in across the user journey from 'shows you like' during on-boarding to its globally appreciated recommendation engine.

While the app does have a 'Based on your viewing' section below the videos, the app's homepage is hardly personalized nor are the content recommendations.

Ideas to Improve Retention

Vertical videos and previews - Courtesy Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok, vertical videos now heavily influence consumption of video content. Netflix has toyed with the idea through story-like previews. MX Player can introduce short form vertical videos on its player. Not only does it have better marketability on social platforms, it can act as USP for the platform with the only one having premium vertical video content. Vertical video, with their ease of consumption, can click well with the casual audience of MX Player.

Kids Section - The team has consciously chosen not to on-board kids content, however, while Netflix might be the leading OTT platform, Youtube Kids has the highest time spent on the app per session ([Source](#)). Content consumption habits among kids are different than adults and they exhibit a disciplined viewing behavior (X amount of hours on a daily basis). Such content can definitely boost retention, first among kids followed by adults. It's the same reason the largest OTTs invest heavily into this category.

Focusing on niches - MX Player calls itself an 'Everytainment' app, that is, something for everyone. However, it can increase its retention by focusing on content verticals that would be considered niches but have a loyal audience, ex- anime. The loyal audience dedicated to these niches would stick with the platform for longer given their needs are uncatered on other platforms. Netflix, too, focuses on niches (Ex - Knowing it can't compete with Disney in terms of creating animated I.Ps, it has started onboarding the world's most popular anime I.Ps.).

AHA moment previews instead of a trailer , can be curated -In the game live-streaming community, there are tools that pick up the best parts of an esports match or a fight to create marketable content from larger videos. On social networks, funny snippets from comedy series/movies/ erotic scenes from erotic series/ action scenes from regional or international cinema often goes viral. MX Player can create such snippets from its existing library, promote it on the home screen with a call to action of "Watch this series". These videos are enough on their own for entertainment, but can also be a strong pull for watching further content. Such content will have higher shareability as well.

Top YouTubers on the platform - One-click export - MX Player competes with Youtube by the virtue of being free. MX Player can open up its platform exclusively for top Youtubers providing youtubers an additional platform for monetization. This on-boarding can be made easy by creating a one-click export tool/chrome extension that allows youtubers to take all of their existing videos on the platform.

Watch with friends - People want to watch shows together even if not together. This is evident by the growth of apps like Netflix Party, Kast that allow users across the world to watch content together. If MX player can natively support this feature on mobile/web or both, it can not only improve its retention (people sticking to the platform because it's the only one where they watch content together) but also open a new organic acquisition channel (people referring their friends to watch content together)

Better Filters - There are no means for people to filter content on MX Player even through something as basic as genres. There are curated lists but one cannot access desired content easily. Ex - Movies -> Horror.

Family-friendly mode - There is a bent towards erotic content on the platform. This works for a lot of platforms, especially the ones focusing on early adopters and casual audiences. However, a simple option to turn off non family friendly content can help the platform find a new audience. Ex - Traditional TV has taken a hit and a lot of mid-upper age women are looking at other platforms for content. However, the featured content on the platform might be a turn-off for this traditional, loyal, linear TV audience.

Coins for merchandise - Coins on the platform can be exchanged for series/movies related merchandise. Bookmyshow has been trying to capture the same segment. The audience is

likely to find physical gifts more appealing and spend more hours watching content to earn more coins.

Missions for coins - Currently, the implementation of gamification concepts is too weak and passive within the app. You keep accumulating coins without actually making a conscious effort. Furthermore, people may not find these coins valuable enough because earning them requires virtually no efforts. They are not 'building' these achievements or 'investing' any effort in achieving them hence a lack of *IKEA effect* within users. The entire app experience of using the app can be converted into a game, instead of 'Unlock coins for watching X hours of content', users can have missions like 'Unlock X bonus coins for watching this series', 'Unlock X Bonus coins for watching 5 movies in the comedy genre'. Each mission can be linked to a different reward as well. Ex - You have to watch X hours of Bollywood movies to unlock the latest blockbuster. This nudges the user to explore a variety of content as well.

Subtitles - The team has chosen not to have subtitles on the platform, however, it's more of a norm among other OTTs and can boost viewership a bit.

Early Recommendations - People often come to platforms for watching just one specific show. Assuming MX Player has identified key audience pulling shows, it can focus heavily on recommending similar shows as the user is about to complete the series. Ex - Trailers and snippets from relevant shows on the last couple of episodes of the user's first series.

One-tap to add to watchlist - A long press on a series' poster allowing users to add the show to their watchlist. The homepage starts feeling more customized and users would have made a certain investment in the platform (Watchlist).

Personalized homepage - Take more user preferences during on-boarding to show more relevant content. Ex - Genre, Popular I.Ps that users like, Content Filters etc.

Prioritizing Ideas

To ensure bias-free prioritization of ideas, I utilised the RICE framework for prioritization with some educated assumptions in place.

RICE Framework - *The RICE scoring model is a prioritization framework designed to help product managers determine which products, features, and other initiatives to put on their roadmaps by scoring these items according to four factors. These factors, which form the acronym RICE, are reach, impact, confidence, and effort.*

Formula - $(R+I+C)/E$

Scoring of Ideas based on RICE Framework

Idea	Reach	Impact	Confidence	Effort	RICE Score
Curated Snippets	5	4	4	2	6.5
Coins for merchandise	2	2	2	1	6
Kids Section	4	3	4	2	5.5
Better Filters	5	2	3	2	5
Focusing on Niches	2	3	4	2	4.5
Family-friendly mode	4	3	2	2	4.5
Vertical Video and Previews	5	4	3	3	4
Personalized Homepage	5	4	3	3	4
Early Recommendations	4	3	4	3	3.67
Missions for coins	3	3	3	3	3
On-tap to add to watchlist	2	2	2	2	3
Watch with friends	3	4	4	4	2.75
Subtitles	4	1	2	3	2.33
On-boarding top youtubers	3	2	2	4	1.75

From the scoring above, curated snippets from existing libraries can be a quick win for the team to increase retention and will also support the acquisition of new users. Casual users can simply scroll through and consume/share these snippets even if they don't want to commit to the platform. However, based on the type of content a user likes, these snippets can pull users towards watching new series and exploring more series on the platform leading to increased engagement overall.

Impact on Metrics

All the above mentioned ideas should impact the retention metrics such as D3,D7 and D30 for good. Besides this, some of these ideas may improve metrics such as session length, screens/session, bounce rate and acquisition metrics as well. It is to be noted that since the monetization is hugely dependent on how engaged the users are, these ideas can positively impact the monetization/revenue metrics as well.

Summary

MX Player has been off to a great start and has a strong pull for the users by the virtue of being free and original/exclusives. While great content is the key for the growth of an OTT,

it's not necessarily a great competitive advantage or at least not the cheapest one. Having a superior product experience can help MX Player in cutting through the noise and emerging as a winner well before its targets. In this document, I focused on the decision fatigue that a user might have on the platform and ideas that can help cut through that problem improving retention metrics.