

MAHINDRA COMVIVA BETS BIG ON DIGITAL CONTENT SERVICES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Atul Madan, chief operating officer for mobile lifestyle solutions at Mahindra Comviva discusses how the company is helping operators in the Middle East address some of the challenges and trends they currently face - and could face in the future.

What key digital content trends do you see emerging in the Middle East market?

Atul: The digital service industry will grow rapidly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, with the rest of the GCC countries, as well as North Africa, following closely in their footsteps.

In the last five years the demand for Arabic language video content has increased by 40%, while the demand for Western drama has gone down by 55%. In the UAE 80% of viewers are viewing shorter video format on their smartphones.

The expected rollout of 5G in 2019 will drive new customer behaviour like video downloading. Similarly, the availability of high speed internet, with its low latency, will drive consumption of live streaming services, AR/VR, UGC (user-generated content). With the rise of UGC, new measures will have to be taken for mediating the flow of violent and inappropriate content.

With so much happening on the digital front, a digital management system thus becomes important to the emerging ecosystem.

What are the key challenges in the region?

In a highly competitive market, the operator needs to create compelling, profitable services, which would've to be timely, relevant, informative, engaging and at the same time, easy to find, retrieve, and consume according to the consumer's convenience and preferred channels.

From digital content perspective, the key challenge that is unique for the Middle East market is that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work here. A rich and diverse content catalogue that caters to users with different preferences in genres and

language is a must. 47% of users prefer to watch movies in English and 45% in Arabic language. However, when it comes to entertainment/TV series, 81% of viewers prefer Arabic. While comedy is the preferred genre for movies, drama seems to be the preferred genre for TV series. Such varied and unique customer preferences create a challenge to digital content offerings.

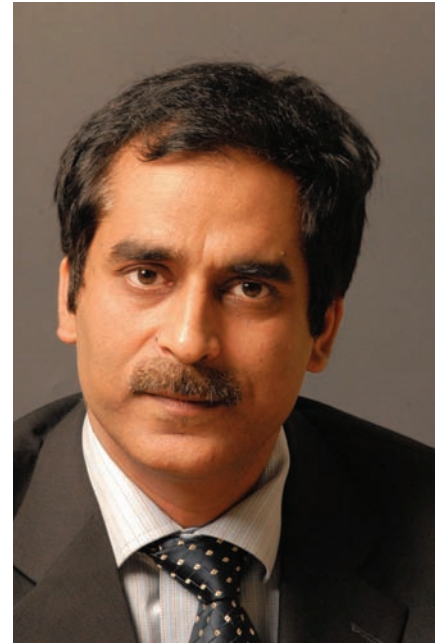
How are you helping the operators to survive?

With an eye on simplifying the content ecosystem, Comviva provides a multi-layered solution for operators, which include its technology platform (DSDP), Business Operations (BO), as well as expertise in content.

Our digital service delivery platform (DSDP) allows the operator to create new and exciting customer experiences by leveraging AR, VR, live streaming, e-sports, as well as supporting existing services like CRBT, gaming, music, video and so on. Comviva's DSDP platform reduces the time for service integration significantly thanks to its single mediating layer between the CP and the operator.

In business operations, we help identify and analyse key trends in consumer behaviour to help clients leverage these behaviours and preferences to their benefit. OTT players gain from 3-5 extra hours of viewership per day during Ramadan, as there is a 19 % point increase in viewing dramas; from 49% in 2016 to 68% in 2017. Religious content consumption increases substantially during this period. Such key insights help to design and implement overall digital content strategy.

Similarly, with big data and analytics enabled on our platform, the operators are able to provide content personalisation, which is able to drive a much higher level of



Atul Madan.

customer engagement than previously what was available.

Where do you see the industry five years from now?

In the next five years, the complete landscape of the content industry would have changed. By 2025, MENA is expected to reach 1.1 billion IoT connections, driving new usage cases for the consumers.

Smart devices like Alexa will change the rules of content discovery as well, as the way content is consumed or viewed. AR and VR will grow to a US\$40 billion market, while 8K and 360-degree viewing will further enhance user experience. Digital content will continue to see integration with social media, with 500 million daily views on Facebook, 10 billion daily views on Snapchat, and 82% of Twitter users watching video content. All these indicate a shift in UGC and overall digital content.