

There are a number of applications that let users wade through the clutter of videos online and find those of their choice, finds **B Pradeep Nair**

Online videos are booming. An amazing number of them are generated, uploaded on to networking sites and shared among friends. If the youth were addicted to TV for the past two decades, they are now hooked on online videos. But very often, finding the video that the user wants is like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Not surprisingly, efforts are directed at helping the growing number of users get to the videos of their liking.

One of them is Boxee, a device that lets users find their favourite videos – be it on websites or on social networking sites – and plays them on TV. It also gets recommendations from the users' friends on Facebook and Twitter. Another option allows users to send videos from websites to Boxee for watching later.

Videos on DEMAND

ALWAYS THE FAVOURITES

The latest to join the bandwagon is HP, who last week announced the public beta release of its "personalized video" application. The application helps users personalize their online video experience through user-generated channels. Users can create channels on topics of their choice and the application will deliver multiple videos by matching the keywords and video metadata.

"We believe that video will dominate the internet in India primarily due to the ease with which content in local languages can be accessed. We are piloting the application to un-

derstand user preferences and also receive feedback for future enhancements." said Sudhir Dixit, director of HP Labs, India.

Once the user creates a channel of his choice, for example, 'Lata Mangeshkar songs', the application will learn the user's preference via an in-application rating mechanism and adapt to the user's preferences. The videos will play back to back, reducing the effort by the viewer to start each new video individually.

MARK REFERENCE POINTS

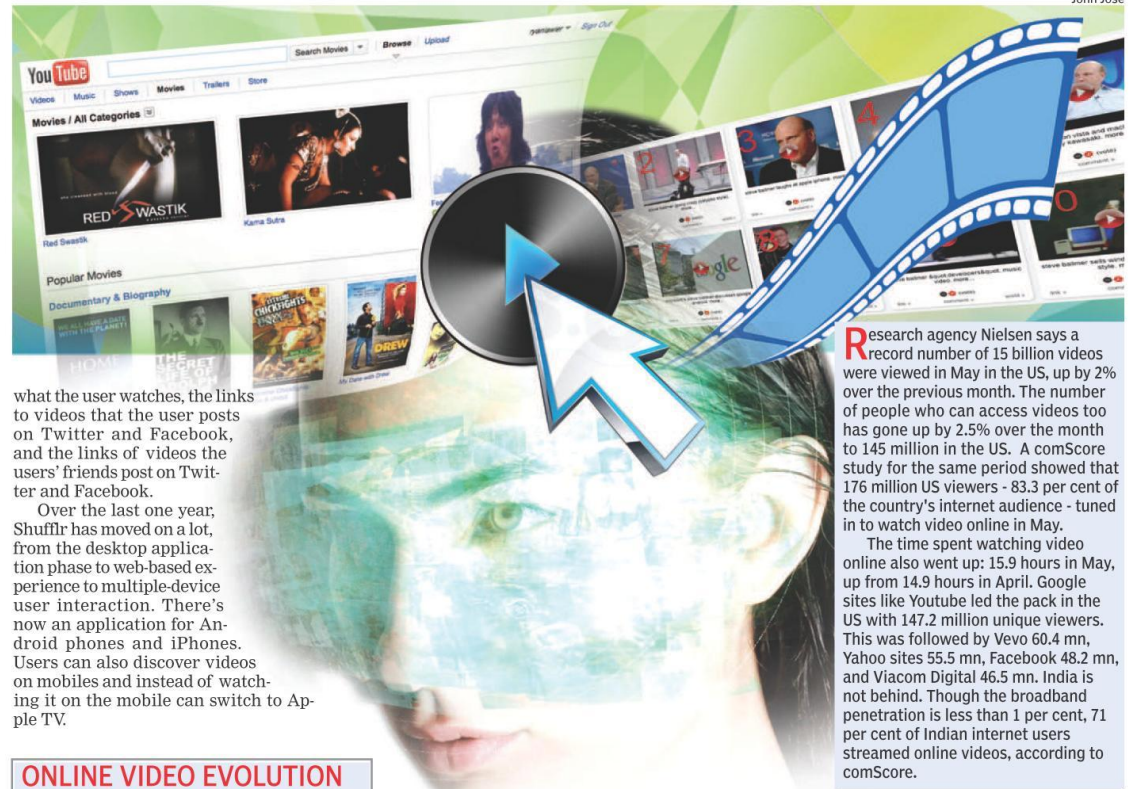
The application also provides for annotation – at any point the viewer can stop the video and mark it with a comment. Krishnan Ramanathan, a senior research assistant at HP Labs, said, "A series of such reference points – a timeline of sort -- can be made in the video which will allow the user to go back to those points and view again. For example, it works well with a video on recipes. Important annotation (or reference points) in the preparation of, say samosa, can be made, so that viewers can go back easily to those points and view again, rather than locate those points on the video by guesswork or trial and error."

This application also allows users to find related webpages. "If you are watching a video on how to make samosa, you can click on a button to go to a food guide webpage. The choice of the webpage is done by using the keywords of the video that is being watched," says Ramanathan.

DISCOVER, DON'T SEARCH

Much of what HP is attempting is already being done by Bangalore based Althea Systems for about a year now, with their application called Shufflr. "We follow a discovery approach as different from search. Search is useful when you know what you are looking for. But in the discovery model, it is all about finding accidentally videos that you like," says Vinod Gopinath, CEO of Althea.

Shufflr discovers videos in many ways: from



John Jose

Research agency Nielsen says a record number of 15 billion videos were viewed in May in the US, up by 2% over the previous month. The number of people who can access videos too has gone up by 2.5% over the month to 145 million in the US. A comScore study for the same period showed that 176 million US viewers - 83.3 per cent of the country's internet audience - tuned in to watch video online in May.

The time spent watching video online also went up: 15.9 hours in May, up from 14.9 hours in April. Google sites like Youtube led the pack in the US with 147.2 million unique viewers. This was followed by Vevo 60.4 mn, Yahoo sites 55.5 mn, Facebook 48.2 mn, and Viacom Digital 46.5 mn. India is not behind. Though the broadband penetration is less than 1 per cent, 71 per cent of Indian internet users streamed online videos, according to comScore.

what the user watches, the links to videos that the user posts on Twitter and Facebook, and the links of videos the users' friends post on Twitter and Facebook.

Over the last one year, Shufflr has moved on a lot, from the desktop application phase to web-based experience to multiple-device user interaction. There's now an application for Android phones and iPhones. Users can also discover videos on mobiles and instead of watching it on the mobile can switch to Apple TV.

ONLINE VIDEO EVOLUTION

- Search for favourite videos is getting simpler
- There are devices and apps that customize search
- They track video watching trends of users and their friends on social networking sites so that the user can easily find the videos of his or her choice.
- Selected videos can be watched on mobiles or TV

VIDEO TWITTER

The Shufflr user's account is linked to Twitter – and the user's Shufflr account profile reflects his Twitter account, showing the numbers of 'followers' and 'following'. Once the user has signed in, he can browse through a number of channels to discover the videos.

One is the 'featured channels' that list out video channels like BBC, Vimeo and Biography. There's the social channel, where the user can see what videos top sports personalities,

authors, bloggers, singers etc are watching.

Another channel classifies videos according to categories like music, lifestyle, food and comedy. There is a trending section called Buzz that aggregates most watched videos, and a 'recommended' page of suggested videos for the user. Favourite videos can be queued, which is nothing but a bookmark and will appear in the My Queue page. On the 'Discover People' page, you get a list of people with tastes similar to yours, and a list of top Shufflrs.