Kuku TV Teardown

I worked on Kuku TV during my product internship there, here's how I'd read it as an outsider now.
(Some important screenshots are unavailable - Kuku TV blocks capture during video playback)

TL;DR: Kuku TV is built to convert and reactivate fast baiscaly autoplay, anchor pricing, aggressive notifications but personalization is still an afterthought, and that's the biggest risk to long-term retention

1. The Moment

"The first thing that hit me was the notification permission prompt, fired before I'd even logged in and see content. It felt like the team wanted to lock in a habit loop immediately, but also seemed to be prevent against me leaving before I experienced any value."

2. Business Context

- **Problem it solves:** Kuku TV serves Tier 2–3 cities with a vast vernacular library of shows.
- **Target user:** Tier 2–3 city users with internet access who want language-preferred (vernacular) content.
- **Competitors:**
  - **Quick TV** → Low discovery, no home subtabs, difficult categorization; only one plan (quarterly); no free episodes, no free trial, no lower-priced plans.
  - **Story TV** → UI largely similar to Kuku TV; fewer home subtabs, lower discovery; offers a 1-day free trial; yearly and quarterly plans available.
  - **ReelShort / DramaBox** (also present in the Indian market) → Global-first shows in non-Indian languages; coin system to unlock episodes and earn rewards; priced too high for the Indian audience (weekly plans starting at ₹620); cluttered UI.

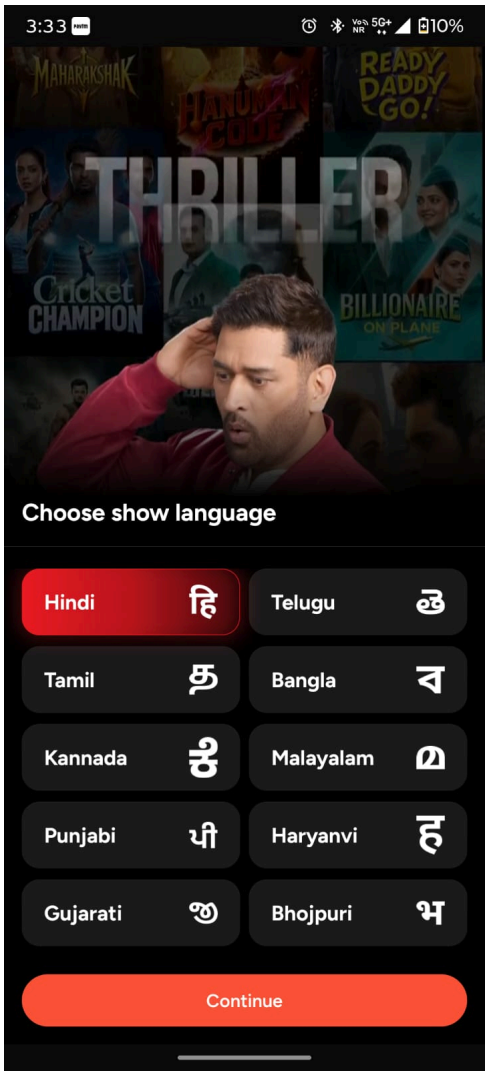
- **How it makes money:** Primarily subscriptions ₹699/3 months, ₹399/month (ad-free), or ₹199/month (with ads). For non-UPI users, Kuku TV also runs rewarded and interstitial ads alongside the premium plans.

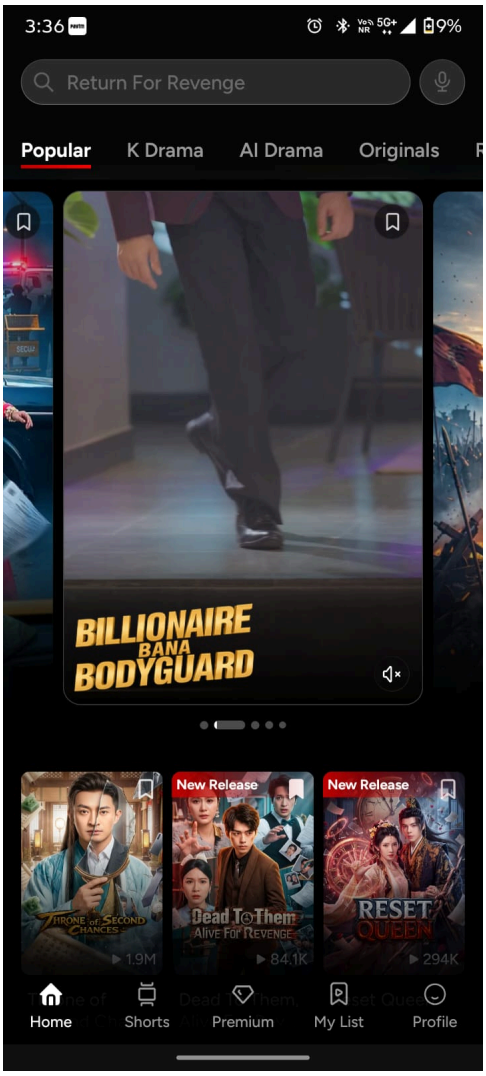
App	Entry/Cheapest Plan	Other Plans	Free Trial	Notes
Kuku TV	₹199/mo (with ads)	₹399/mo (ad-free) / ₹699 for 3mo	10 free episodes for all shows	Anchor-then-downsell to ₹299/mo
Story TV	699/3mo	999/yearly	1-Day Free Trial	Similar UI to Kuku TV
Quick TV	699/3mo	None	None	Only one plan option available
DramaBox	350/week	3050/year	9 free episodes for all shows	350/week for 1st week then 620/week 3050/year for 1st year then 5000/year

3. First 60 Seconds & Onboarding

Sign-up friction: Moderate, with one aggressive moment.

- Notification permission asked immediately on first open, before any content is shown → feels aggressive.
- Mobile number entry with Truecaller auto-fill → good, removes typing friction.
- No genre preference captured during onboarding → delays reaching the aha moment and leaves the home feed non-personalized.





The "aha" moment: Triggered on drop-off, not on arrival.

- Backing out of the first autoplay episode immediately triggers a guilt-style pop-up ("More Like This" / "Watch Now" CTAs).
- The real aha trigger seems designed to catch users *leaving*, not to guide them in, autoplay just forces them to see something random.
- Fast path to first content (autoplay within seconds of sign-up), but one friction point (the notification ask) sits before it, delaying actual value.

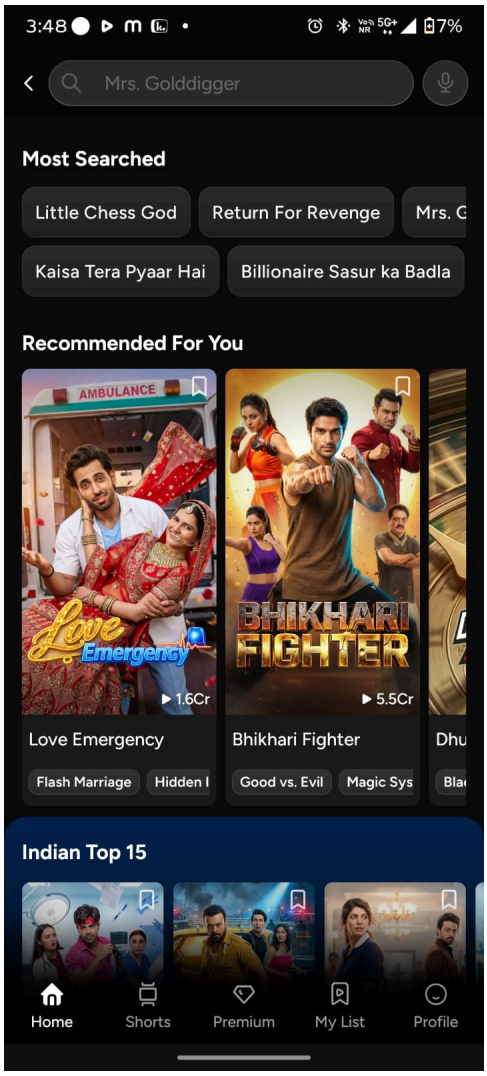
Notification behavior (continues post-onboarding):

- 3 push notifications within 30 minutes of closing the app in the first session.

- They want the user back within a few hours of the session ending, which is good and bad thing both as during this time user might be most relevant to nudge and forget later or uninstall app.

4. Core User Journey

Step	What happens	What it's optimizing for
1. Content Discovery	Vertical scroll, home feed categorization, Search tab, Shorts tab, notification recommendations, "More Like This" popup	Fast, low-effort start; getting the user to their first show and to the aha moment faster
2. Episode Playback	Auto-plays next episode, swipe-up for next episode, episode selection, playback options (speed, quality), social proof (comments, likes)	Binge-watching; minimizing decision points between episodes; zero-effort switching
3. Paywall / Premium Plan	Appears after free episodes are used up, or when a locked episode / the premium tab is tapped; paywall features a Dhoni video plus benefits with social proof	Surfacing the paywall once the user has already experienced value; building trust via social proof that others are purchasing; reinforcing premium benefits



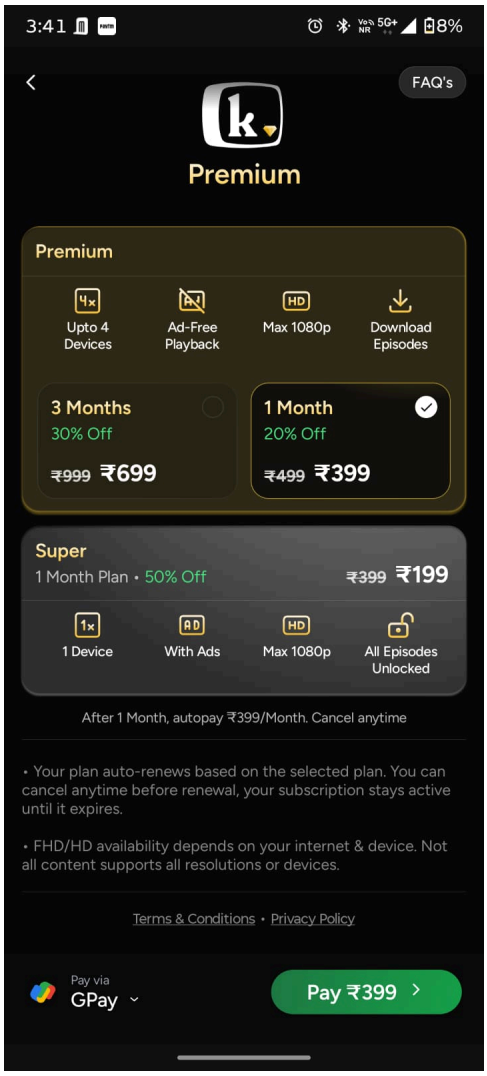
5. The Product's Point of View

Kuku TV's team seems to believe in doing everything for the user rather than letting them choose like autoplay over curated choice to reach aha moment, forced discovery over stated preference, urgency over patience in notifications. Their main goal should be revenue as all the journeys reflect that like guilt pop-ups, anchor-high pricing, frequent notifications as long as it drives near-term reactivation and conversion, though that surely will be short term only. In short: revenue and reactivation are optimized for first; personalization and trust is not priority for now.

6. Strengths

Strength 1 → Freemium model evolution

- **What it is:** Kuku TV moved from an older model, a 1-day free trial that led into a ₹699/3-month payment mandate, with cheaper plans revealed only later → to a simpler model: 10 free episodes per show, then a straightforward premium unlock.
- **Why it works:** The old model likely converted well on short-term revenue but probably hurt trust which is visible in reviews from users who felt tricked by the mandate, which would've hurt retention. The new model lets users actually experience content before paying, building genuine intent instead of accidental conversion.
- **Metric it likely drives:** A trade-off, likely lower immediate conversion and revenue, but lower refund/complaint rates and better long-term LTV.



Strength 2 → Anchor-then-downsell upsell sequence

- **What it is:** Kuku TV first shows higher-tier plans (₹699/3 months, ₹399/month without ads, ₹199/month with ads), then after the user dismisses that paywall, shows a lower-priced ₹299/month (no ads) plan via a guilt pop-up.
- **Why it works:** This anchors users toward higher-price plans first, maximizing revenue per converting user. When a user tries to dismiss due to price, the lower-tier pop-up gives them one more chance to convert at a price they're more likely to accept.
- **Metric it likely drives:** Number of premium users increases, while overall revenue is a trade-off between higher-plan and lower-plan conversions.

Strength 3 → UGC content and creator tools

- **What it is:** Kuku TV allows open submissions of content from real users, shortlists them based on certain criteria, and publishes selected shows as user-generated content.
- **Why it works:** This creates natural marketing, as creators promote their own shows externally, while giving the platform a vast, fast-growing content variety without proportionally scaling production costs, building a broader creator ecosystem around the app.
- **Metric it likely drives:** Growth of the shows/content library.

7. Weaknesses & What's Missing

Weakness 1 → Aggressive notification workflow

- **What slowed down:** Received 3 push notifications within 30 minutes of closing the app in my very first session, nudging me to continue watching before I'd even built a habit of returning on my own.
- **Why I think it happened:** Likely optimizing for short-term reactivation/retention without frequency capping or timing based on individual user behavior.
- **Gap:** No visible smart frequency capping; notification timing doesn't seem to adjust to how a specific user actually engages, risking users disabling notifications entirely, which would hurt retention long-term.

Weakness 2 → Non-personalized home feed

- **What slowed down:** No genre or show preference was captured during onboarding, and the home screen showed no personalization → delayed activation and discovery.
- **Why I think it happened:** No preference signal exists for new users, and there's likely no algorithm surfacing a personalized feed based on recent activity for existing users either.
- **Gap:** No onboarding step to capture genre/taste preference, and no visible use of the ecosystem's other apps (Kuku FM, Storizz) to inform what's shown

to a user.

Weakness 3 → No growth or referral loop

- **What slowed down:** There's no real growth loop, only basic sharing of shows, episodes, and the app itself. No referral flow exists.
- **Why I think it happened:** The team's attention seems focused on retention/reactivation (notifications, paywall sequencing) rather than acquisition mechanics. Most users are probably coming from paid acquisition today.
- **Gap:** No referral incentive (e.g., free episodes, money or days for inviting a friend), so growth depends almost entirely on paid acquisition and creator-driven external promotion rather than user-driven virality.

8. Deep-Dive: My Recommendation

Chosen issue: Non-personalized home feed as this is the main reason new users can't start with a first show that fits them, and for existing users it creates friction in content discovery since everyone sees the same home feed.

Proposed fix: Capture genre preference during onboarding, right after language selection, and show new users a home feed built only from those genres. Autoplay should pull from that genre too. Over time, update the home feed based on user activity, surfacing shows similar to what the user has already completed.

Success metric: Number of episodes watched > 3 within 24 hours of installing.

How I'd validate first: Test in cohorts like new users, existing users, and binge users before rolling out broadly.

9. Closing Insight

Tearing this down and working in Kuku taught me that teams often make urgency for engagement like pushing users toward autoplay, aggressive notifications and notification permission even before login. The clearest signal here also was that even the "aha moment" was designed to catch people leaving rather than to guide them in how it jumps straight from login into an autoplay show instead of helping

the user get oriented first. Good onboarding should make users feel oriented before it tries to make them stay.