

Chapter 26

Marketing Strategies of Films in Bollywood Industry

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the paradigm shift in the domain of marketing and promotion of Hindi cinema in the new millennium. The post-millennium Hindi film industry has resorted to the multimedia marketing of films with the incorporation of digital and social media marketing platforms as one of the key marketing strategies of contemporary Hindi cinema. Furthermore, in the modern scenario, release strategies such as saturated release and shorter release window have also become commonplace. The chapter elucidates on the impact of such practices on the narratives of Hindi cinema. It thereby considers the prevalence of high-concept style as the principal character is the trait of contemporary Bollywood cinema.

INTRODUCTION

Film marketing can simply refer to as the range of strategies used to promote and sell a film. Sangita Gopal (2012, p. 69) states that by the early 1990s the marketing spend of Hindi film was approximately 10 per cent of the film's production budget. In the new millennium, the marketing budget increased amounting to roughly 40 per cent of the production budget. It is primarily because practices such as saturated release (full release) and a shorter release window became commonplace about the theatrical business of a film.

This chapter elucidates on these emerging practices and also deliberates on the integrated marketing approach of the contemporary Hindi film industry where film marketing utilises various media channels of communication. This multimedia marketing alongside a dramatic increase in the marketing budget helps create a "marketing clout" (Kerrigan, 2010) also referred to as "buzz" which tries to influence movie-goer consumption choices. Justin Wyatt (1994, p.8) conceives "high-concept" films as films that have inbuilt marketing assets that can be employed to market the movie and create a pre-release excitement. Wyatt further states that "high-concept" can also be defined as a style of filmmaking moulded by economic and institutional forces. Hindi films in the new millennium increasingly showcase high concept

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attributes. The chapter attempts to understand this marketing-driven aesthetics of this post-millennium Hindi cinema.

NEW RELEASE STRATEGIES

In the contemporary scenario, the distribution dynamics of Hindi cinema has changed. Before the new millennium, theatrical revenue was the primary source of income for any Hindi film; however, presently alternate distribution channels and sources of revenues have surfaced. These sources are home videos, satellite rights, pay per view, subscription-based services as well as online streaming platforms. It led to shortening of the release window of a film in the theatrical platform to maximum 2 to 3 weeks. Any further delay would obstruct the profit realisation of the movie in the other delivery platforms such as television channels, home video, and online streaming services such as *Hotstar*, *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime*. Having a longer release window in a theatre also leads to the issues of piracy. It is because of the upsurge of peer-to-peer video sharing websites such as 'torrent' and 'The Pirate Bay'. To avoid copying as well as to earn maximum profit from other distribution platforms 'shorter release window' became a mandate for Hindi cinema in the new millennium.

The 'shorter release window' – release strategy, in turn, made the practice of a 'saturated release' commonplace. 'Saturated (wide) release' refers to the release of the film across a maximum number of theatres simultaneously over a short period. It leads to the profit maximisation of a film in the theatrical platform even when the film released for a short period. Nevertheless, saturated release only became possible as a result of satellite-based digital distribution of films in India. UFO Moviez a digital cinema distribution network started operating in India during 2005. As of 2013, more than 5,600 screens already digitised, replacing the manual film projection-based exhibition system (Khandekar, 2013). In the case of the film prints distribution model, a 'market by market' release was commonplace as movies first released in a particular geographical location and after that often reused in other viable markets. The discontinuing of film projection-based exhibition, and incorporation of digital distribution delivery system, lead to the complete elimination of the cost involved in the transfer of physical prints from one market to another.¹ Presently, 60 per cent of the revenue earned in the first week of the release of a film.

The shorter release window alongside saturated release is the major contributing factor to the 'marketing hype' phenomenon of the contemporary Bombay film industry. According to Finola Kerrigan (2010, p.114), this 'hype' creates marketing clout before the release of the film, often referred to as 'buzz' in common parlance. The 'buzz' becomes a mandate concerning the shorter release window and the saturated release as maximum revenue from the theatrical platform has to amass during the first few days of the release of a film. Here, the marketing clout directly corresponds to the actual number of footfalls in the multiplexes. Furthermore, this clout also impacts the revenue earned by the film in unified exhibition platforms. It is because rights to screen the movie in platforms such as television (referred to as satellite rights) or in online streaming platforms are often sold before the release of the film and sometimes even during the production stage.

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