



Impact of OTT platforms on Malayalam Cinema

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Abstract: Malayalam Cinema industry is considered as one of the finest film industry in India and the world. This film industry based in the southern state of Kerala is well known for the production of critically acclaimed film which are very rich in content and also for the finest actors and technicians. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Malayalam cinema. Film production was stopped and theaters were closed for several months. The industry faced losses worth several crores and all the stakeholders were affected. Various OTT platforms came into the picture at that point of time and Malayalam films were widely released in OTT platforms. This created a source of income for the film producers and a new market was opened for the industry. The introduction of OTT platforms improved the revenue streams available for the film producers and also ensured international market and audience to a regional film industry like Malayalam film industry or Mollywood. This article analyzes the impact of OTT platforms on Malayalam cinema.

Keywords: OTT platforms, Malayalam cinema, mollywood, COVID-19.

Introduction

Malayalam cinema or mollywood is a main stream film industry in the country based in the state of Kerala. Kerala is one of the most developed state in the country and holds a significant position in human development index. The Malayalam film industry or Malayalam cinema holds a major position among the Indian film industries. Several Malayalam films received international recognitions and won several national and international awards. Malayalam cinema is widely accepted for its content, creative brilliance, technical superiority, making and scripts. The performance of Malayalam actors and crew are also were much appreciated by movie lovers across the country and the world. More than hundred films release every year in Kerala and Mollywood is the fourth largest film industry in India after Bollywood, Kollywood and tollywood. Malayalam cinema has fans and followers across the world. The first malayalm film was directed by Mr. JC Daniel and he is considered as the father of Malayalam cinema. Film industry is an integral component of Kerala's economy and the life style of its people. More than 700 theater screens operate in Kerala as of now and several theatres are currently under construction. Malayalam cinema industry earn revenue worth thousands of crores every year and it acts as a source of livelihood for several people.

Impact of OTT platforms

Malayalam cinema faced several challenges in the past. Various challenges were the introduction of TV's, pirated CD's, adult movies etc. This industry succeeded in overcoming these challenges and attracting audience to the theatres. But one of the major challenge was the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the outbreak of the pandemic, all the activities related to the cinema like shooting, post production etc were stopped and theaters were closed down in accordance to the lock down imposed by the Government. Several Malayalam films were awaiting theater release and all the works were completed. They had already done the theater chartings and announced release dates. But the pandemic completely shattered their plans. Theaters were not allowed to start the operations even after several months as the virus outbreak was increasing and thousands of people were dying. Film producers had to incur heavy losses and they were forced to pay huge amounts of interests for the money they have obtained as loans from financial institutions. All the stakeholders in the industry had to face this issue and uncertainty. Producers were forced to hold their films for a long period as theaters were their only option to release the films.

OTT platforms came to the rescue of film makers and film producers at that time. OTT platforms were there even before, but their services were not utilized by the film makers and none of them identified the true potential of these platforms. Various platforms like Amazon prime, Netflix, sony live, hotstar etc had their operations in India along with some regional players. Malayalam film producers sensed the opportunity and started approaching these platforms. Soofiyyum Sujathayum, a film produced by Mr. Vijay Babu under the Friday production house is the first Malayalam film that had direct Ott release or streaming. This film was very well accepted and the deal was profitable for the producer as well. Several other producers started approaching leading OTT platforms to release their films. It was just a beginning. Malayalam films started direct streaming through OTT platforms and these films received wide acceptance across India and the world. The non malayalee audience also started following these films and a new market was open to Malayalam cinema industry. Malayalam films were now easily accessible to all the movie buffs across the world. This was a big relief to film producers as they got a new source of revenue along with distribution rights, satellite rights and audio rights of the film. OTT platforms paid crores of rupees to the producers as the streaming rights and this helped the film makers to reduce the losses suffered by them due to the outbreak of the pandemic. Malayalam films like Drishyam 2, Minnal Murali, Great Indian Kitchen, Malik etc. received worldwide acceptance and critical acclaim.

The impact of OTT platforms are not only positive, it has negative impact also. During the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic the streaming platforms were in need of films and people were confined to their homes and they were desperately searching for entertainment sources. But after reaching the stage of normalcy, the OTT platforms changed their criteria for accepting movies. Many producers started making movies with low budgets for streaming platforms but these platforms stopped accepting these films citing their policy change. These platforms stopped accepting lower budget films or films without valuable or popular actors. They limited their selection process to films in which a popular actor act. They also reduced the direct streaming of films and focused more on original in house series. As per their new policy, the films which performed very well in the box office or theaters will only be accepted. Other films were rejected by the OTT platforms. This

seriously had an impact on the industry. Out of hundreds of films released in an year, only a few film will generate profit from theater release in Kerala. As a result of this majority of the film producers failed to attract streaming platforms to accept their movies.

OTT platforms also had a negative impact on theaters across Kerala. These platforms affected the revenues of movie theaters. As per the new rules enforced by the OTT platforms and as per their agreement, films had to be streamed in OTT platforms within 21 days of release. This is a very short period. People stopped watching films from the theatres as these same film will be available to them via streaming platforms within 21 days. This affected the theater revenues. Watching films in theaters is an expensive affair now. Tickets are very costly. Audience can watch unlimited films in a streaming platform if they the subscription charge once. So they prefer Ott platforms over theaters. As a result of this theater owners and film distributors faced heavy losses. Many theaters were forced to shut down its operations due to heavy losses and several reputed film distribution companies stopped their operations.

Conclusion

OTT platforms provided much needed relief to Malayalam cinema at the time of pandemic. It saved several producers from suicide and also helped in expanding the market of Malayalam cinema. Millions of non malayalees watch Malayalam films and admire those films due to the services offered by OTT platforms. These platforms gave confidence to film makers and film producers to dream big and to make films in huge canvas. These platforms provided significant contributions to Malayalam cinema but its drawbacks are hindering the industry now. As a result of these platforms the Kerala exhibitors or theater owners are facing a major issue. They are forced to close down the movie halls and stop its operations as people are not coming to theaters to watch and support cinema. Theater halls created huge hits and created superstars. They are the lifeline of any film industry. The down fall of cinema theaters will lead to the decline of the film industry and that will happen in the near future, if corrective measures are not implemented.