

Promotion and Marketing of Tamil cinemas in recent times- value additions contributing to the success of Tamil films

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Abstract: *Advertising and marketing are effective tools in bringing to the notice of consumers what they want and deciding their consumer patterns. Film promotion and advertising are now no different than any other consumer product. The paper focuses on strategies used in Kollywood films as an example of how promotional strategies when used effectively and strategically create fervor among the fans and also raise the bar. These Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies have been used effectively to bring out the ultimate motive of the producers of these films- higher ticket sales.*

Key words: *Tamil Cinema, IMC, advertising, film promotion, innovative marketing*

Introduction

Indian government has recognized the film production business in the country. As an industry, it has given the film makers and production houses a lift for multi-dimensional growth. Films have been in the business of marketing since many decades now. Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (Chartered Institute of Marketing definition). (Mackay, 2007)

To understand how formula films, ethnic films and brand films have been successful in selling and creating a need for themselves in the market and also fulfilling the needs of the target audience we need to understand the concept of advertising communication.

Advertising, a subset of marketing is understood to be a non personal form of communication which is paid. With media planning and strategic communication, advertisements have created a niche in the life of consumers. Film advertising/publicity is the talk of town in today's entertainment industry. Film marketing is about the message, effective communication and the target audience- a clear idea of what we need to communicate, the effect we expect the communication to have and to whom we are trying to communicate.

The common ground rule followed which is used in product advertising as well is *must be seen, must be read about, must be believed, must be remembered, must be acted upon.*

Marketing of Films

Film marketing is about the how the target audiences are made aware of the film. Cable network channels tie-up with the film production houses as media partners bringing out the teasers of the films or brief news bytes in their entertainment sections of their news or film gossips. These actually trigger of the curiosity of the audience keeping them vigilant about any information about the film. The information about the film gradually becomes a film/movie positioning strategy where information is provided to the target audience about what to expect of the film and what is the approximate budget involved and the kind of technicians and technology involved in the film making. *This is a left brain marketing strategy which involves the analytical data of the film making- budget, technology, foreign technicians etc.,*

Heavy investment is made towards the pre-launch and post launch of a film. In the pre-launch focus is on creating an excitement in the market about the release of the film- the information about the cast and crew is played on to create a curiosity and to some extent make the film a part of the discussions in the public sphere. Sometimes controversies revolving around the main actor of the film or any important crew member of the film is also used to bring about a hype regarding the film. This is a part of another subset of marketing-*Image building/Public Relations.*

Along with other traditional promotional methods like film posters, print advertising in newspaper and magazines, movie posters- which includes the hand drawn cut-outs of the stars, press events, movie trailers, music launches for the television commercials such as an exclusive program of the entire crew to promote the film here the producer buys the ad inventory himself. With more and more segments of the target audience fragmented the advertiser has to think of innovative platforms to be available to the target audience. With existing clutter in the media and the distraction levels high for the existing other products the advertiser along with effective PR has to think of innovative methods.

Changing Marketing environment

Communication and Marketing are converging creating a realm of how we define a film to its audience. When a new film is made, it has to be advertised like any other new product, to let people know it exists and to encourage them to go to the cinema to see it. (lehu, 2007)

The advertising of a film is known as film promotion or film marketing and people responsible for this are the distribution company, so-called because they distribute (give out) films to cinemas and distribute promotional material around the country. The way in which a film is promoted can have a huge effect on whether or not it is successful. Films are expensive investment and if the public do not buy tickets at the box office to see the film it leads to a major loss for the investors.

When audiences are deciding to watch a particular film, their choices are influenced by promotion/ advertisement of these films. An immediate comparison is done with the last film they had seen of their

favorite actor or star. An effort is made to understand as to what actually drew the audience to watch the film for these conclusions are made from what they hear from fan clubs, reviewer's blogs and the general film promotions. This actually affects the choice one personally takes to view the film.

What is different in the film for the viewer or the loyal fan?

The Unique Selling Point of the film is what draws viewers to cinema halls. What can possibly be the USP of the movie- star cast, technical aspects, camera work, director so and so forth. What interests loyal fans at that moment will be evident with ticket sales.

To start from initial stages of plan for marketing, title of the film or star cast or music composers (in the case of brands like AR Rahman) is mentioned by the media to create a stir in the minds of fans or followers. Compared to other languages, Tamil stars attract a legion of loyal fans who consider their star's film as their own, says producer Dhananjayan. "Stars like Rajini, Ajith and Vijay are capable of mobilising a massive number of people, even without offering interviews or appearances. At any time, these stars have at least 10,000 fans to take it upon themselves to promote their stars and their films on social media. If you can manage that, then why promote it yourself?" he asks. (Anita, 2015)

Genre classification helps grouping films as per their narrative and film style. However with- in each genre there can be further classifications into sub-genres. Narratives are used extensively in films for promotion and positioning. By narratives here it is the trailers and rushes designed or edited to create a "want- to- see" purpose. To this end the trailer will give audiences some amount of information about a film in terms of narrative and character, but equally, will aim to (Sirish, 2008) raise questions that can only be answered by seeing the whole film.

While a trailer with moving images and sound effects and all its audio video properties encourages us to see the film, a poster on the other hand has a hard task-it should successfully catch our imagination about the film in one still picture.

Planning a promotional campaign for a film

When distributors agree to market a new film, they will watch it several months before it is released into the cinema and plan a marketing campaign. This includes deciding what should go into the posters, trailers, websites and other material that will market the film. Producer and director Elred Kumar admits that though the amount spent on marketing a film varies from one project to another, percentage of the budget allocated has been increasing over the years. "Films featuring top stars already have hype built around them and all you need is to judiciously plan the marketing campaign. On the other hand, a film that doesn't have any stars who could command an opening can get a great opening weekend because of good marketing," he explains. (Pudipeddi, 2013)

Along with these promotional strategies film makers and producers of Tamil film industry which releases close to 200 films in a year, are looking at innovative marketing techniques for their films. Debutante directors like Kinslin used auto rickshaws to promote thriller film 'Vathikuchi' as the main story line revolved around an auto driver. Autos decorated with posters of the film were stationed near major multiplexes a few days before the film's release, and it generated ample buzz. Approximately a 100 auto's were used for the promotion of the film. To differ in opinion considering some films which have not been promoted extensively the success of the film most of the time does not totally rely on unique innovative techniques of marketing a film though.

Arun Kumar's directorial debut 'Pannaiyarum Padminiyum' a plot revolving around an aged landlord and his fascination for his vintage Padmini car, actors of the film were seen promoting it using the vintage car brand Premier Padmini. "The Premier Padmini car plays an important role in the film. Therefore, we toured to places such as Nagercoil and Coimbatore from Chennai in two Padmini cars," said the film's director Arun Kumar, who also launched a video campaign called 'Why we love Padmini' to spread the word for the film. "Many of us still own the Padmini car because it's priceless and we would never trade it. Our video was aimed at capturing stories that reveal the craze for the car by their owners. We came to learn that many still own this vintage car and are not ready to replace it," he added. (Pudipeddi, 2013)

Tamil film '3' which had its signature song 'Kolaveri' going viral and becoming a national rage with more than 42 million hits on You Tube in 2012. There was a brand tie up with Emami and other brands such Audi, Aircel and Chennai based durables retailer Vasant &Co. (Singh, 2012)

'Raja Rani' Arya and Nayantara starrer in 2013 saw the makers circulating a wedding invitation of the lead pair in film. This created a buzz in the industry and among the fans as it was misunderstood as the real wedding invitation of the lead pair. This strategy was used by the films young director Atlee Kumar as the plot involved a wedding of the lead pair. Atlee Kumar acknowledges that as people regarded the lead actors as a pair this strategy worked for a promotion of this film. (Pudipeddi, 2013)

Tamil romantic-drama "Jannal Oram", which unfolds in a bus, resorted to a unique strategy too - its audio was unveiled at several busy bus-stops. (Pudipeddi, 2013).The idea was to promote the story, not the film, said director Karu Pazhaniappan. "We realized that the bus is the most recurring character in the film; so we decided to launch the audio of our film at several bus stands," he said.

Social networking route is one of the most used platforms for promotions, and debutant R.S. Prasanna's Tamil romantic-drama "Kalyana Samayal Saadham" made the best use of it. The film revolves round a big South Indian wedding, and so the movie's team replaced their profile pictures on Facebook with their wedding pictures. The creative initiative was received well, as were many which increased the audience's involvement and interest in the projects, thereby giving a fillip to their box office collections. (Pudipeddi, 2013)

Mundasupatti a 2014 release had innovative promotion going viral. Vishal and Nandita in lead roles, directed by debutante Ram of 'Nalaya Iyakunar' fame. Mundsupatti is an adventurous comedy film set in the backdrop of 1980's in retro style. Music by Sean Roldan the team came up with an innovative promotion campaign for their film. They created an interactive application that allowed people to create their own avatars akin to characters from the movie. The app was created on the website www.mymundasupattistyle.com. This app was designed by mixing various styles of Mundasu (turbans), retro-styles eyewear and hairstyles from the 1980's. Along the lines of posters and trailer, retro theme of the online application is expected to kindle a sense of 1980's amongst viewers said co-producer from Fox studios India. The promotional campaign was an instant hit in the social media. (mundasupatti, 2014)

Most actors and stars use Facebook and Twitter to promote their films among their fans. Fan base Facebook pages are quite common today. Extensive promotion for a film takes place through this medium. Instagram and You Tube are also another means of marketing films among fans and audience. International movie releases witness a lot of other promotional strategies like Public Relations and brand tie-up. 2015 release 'Vanna Jigina' starring Vijay Vasanth had memes of stars such as Vijay, Surya and Ajith with dialogues from their block buster films. Dialogues were altered in accordance to the films concept. This was indeed a unique promotional strategy for the film maker and his crew. Similar memes were used to promote the other Tamil releases *Manja Pai*, *Uttama Villain*, *Enakkul Oruvan*, *Indru Netru Naalai* and *Naalu Policeum Nalla Irundha Oorum* to name a few. (Meera, 2015)

Recent sci-fi film, 2.0, directed by S. Shankar and starring Rajnikant and Akshay Kumar this has been supposedly the most expensive film to be made in India. According to a report by Bollywood Hungama, 2.0's budget crossed over Rs 400 crore which makes it the costliest film in Indian history till date. According to reports it is the ninth-most expensive non-English-language film by production cost (\$75,000,000). This movie was promoted as a Make in India movie with the majority of the VFX artists and other crew members being Indian, making this high budgeted sci-fi movie quintessentially Indian. (Gourab, 2018) Besides this promotional technique, Lyca Productions-producers of the film, also tapped on the other platforms of promotion such as TV shows, Reality shows, Web-episodes, Event promotions, Use of augmented reality was used uniquely to promote the characters especially 'Chitti'-the robot, Hot air balloons with the images of the characters, were flown in Hollywood and other prominent cities in the world, Promotions in cricket matches during run out decisions were also effective.

Marketing a movie has become very important these days given the short time each movie gets to make money from the cinema halls. The first few days of a movie can make or break a movie. Therefore producers and marketers leave no stone unturned to market a movie in order to draw a big first-day crowd. Later the movie may spread through word of mouth and critic reviews, provided they are good. Average or bad movies need to draw the crowd in by creating hype around the movie as word of mouth may damage box office collections. Therefore marketing spends to make up to 30% of the entire budget of a big-ticket

film. Film marketing has become more expensive now due to inclusions of digital media in marketing mix. Spending on traditional media hasn't seen any dips, on the other hand, spending on digital media is increasing day by day. All these cause the total marketing budget to increase and the overall film budget to swell.

“Film marketing is becoming very expensive, it costs an arm and a leg to actually market a film today,” said Manan Mehta, vice-president, marketing and merchandising Yash Raj Films. “Marketing budgets have gone up by 15-20% because media has become costly, fragmented and specialized. So you have to make your investments to get your returns going.”

As entertainment sector is recognised as an industry, the scope of the industry transforming itself into a profitable one has developed strategies to market its resources and products. As per Perumalsamy Srinivasan MD of PI Phenomenon Pictures, US who calls this as ICV- Investor, Creator and Viewer content industry. Hence it becomes mandatory for the product to be launched or distributed through effective marketing strategies. Stakeholder's chance increases in these occasions and also with such extensive promotions the visibility factor of actors is also very high. Along with promotions a lot of publicity and public relations tactics are also taken into consideration to maintain the Investor, Creator and Viewer chain of effects.

Executorial Framework

As we understand that a part/ subset of marketing have been advertising, understanding of movie promotion can also be based on the similar strategies of product advertisement to a large extent. Just like product is advertised through a design and executorial framework here too the producer along with advertisers and publicity team is working on strategies like affective message strategies, slice-of-life strategies, emotional advertising, comfort marketing and resonance advertising. **(Baack, 2014)**.

In most films strategies like slice-of- life where protagonist is the one discussing the problems of the society and he also suggests the solution to the problem. The mode of presenting this is effectively would be through teasers, trailers, motion posters where information and design strategy are used effectively to bring about required results- higher ticket sales. Emotional advertising strategy is constantly used in Tamil cinema to lead the product recall, here emotions including trust, identity, reliability, friendship, happiness, security, luxury, pleasure, romance and passion are worked upon. As a lot of fans react to the emotional advertising strategy- to state one obvious example would be the poster cut-outs of stars or wall posters which are released as a promotional tool to trigger the curiosity of the fans/audience. In most cases these posters and

cut-outs are doused in milk¹ as a mark of respect and love for the actor (usually a superstar or actor with a strong fan base)².

Emotional advertising is also seen when the story line has plot playing around ideas of caste, nationality, region and religion as well. 'Madras' the 2014 political drama starring Karthi, released their first look of the film poster after complete wrap up and this was unconventional in the Kollywood industry. Along with this aspect the name displayed and the protagonist body language which was displayed on the poster was done with a typical replication of a youth who belonged to Madras city (rather the urban slums of the city)³ (Pa.Ranjith, 2014)

Motion posters are also another popular trend in advertising of Tamil cinema since 2014. A gradual progress from hand painted posters and hoardings the industry moved to vinyl printing and to digital designing and animation. Motion posters commonly known as digital poster designing is now being followed mostly for film promotions. Posters use a lot of highlighting which is appealing⁴ along with distinctly highlighting the salient features like face, muscles, background effects (eg: lighting) which are not very evident in the print poster designs. Idea of highlighting has been difficult in print poster designs when compared to that of motion posters in recent films. As most fans use a personalized medium like mobile phones, laptops to get information these promotional tools are effective to a large extent.

Resonance advertising another important factor that connects with the consumer experience to develop stronger ties between the product and consumer. Use of BGM⁵ along with visuals make the audience develop a 'connect' with the movie and they recall an importance of it in their life. These strategies have been effective on audiences especially the younger lot who have been influenced by this.

Conclusion

To conclude Kollywood has been an industry since inception but with transition of entertainment to an industry and to a corporate set up, marketing and advertising have become an integral part of its existence. Considering the ever growing pressure of competition from other language film industries in the country pose a risk of losing a larger population of the target audience⁶. Most producers and production houses today believe in minimum investment and maximum profit and reviews. Hence Integrated Marketing of films is here to remain for good.

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¹ A ritual performed the idols of deities as a mark of respect and as a purification ceremony.

² Mostly seen for the promotion of movies with actors like Rajnikanth, Kamal Hassan, Vijay, Ajith

³ Protagonist in the film is an educated youth who is not willing to leave his roots just because he is holding a white collared job.

⁴ Sexual appeal is the main focus

⁵ Background music score

⁶ Considering the fact that elite and upper middle class audience is important to producers.

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