



# To what extent do marketing strategies influence the success of a film?

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## Abstract

The success of a film can be said to largely depend on the quality of the content being delivered, however, if a film isn't marketed the right way, how does it reach its target audience?

Marketing as a discipline involves all activities undertaken by a company to promote its products to the target audience. While the very gist of marketing continues to remain the same with regard to all industries, the strategies adopted by them tend to be varied. This paper carries out a thorough and in-depth analysis of the importance of marketing in the creative industries, particularly the film industry. In doing so, the paper highlights the various strategies adopted by the largest film industries and how they are modified depending on the type of film. There is also analysing of how these marketing strategies pertaining to cinema have evolved and revolutionized a template for themselves over the years.

## Introduction

“Understand your customers so well that you can produce propositions that they really want to buy. They get what they want, and your business makes a healthy profit. They're happy; you're happy: that's it. Simple”.

At its most basic level, marketing as a discipline involves all activities a company undertakes to promote and sell products or services to its target customers. Marketing aims to deliver standalone value for prospects and consumers through content, with the long-term goal of demonstrating product value, strengthening brand loyalty, and ultimately increasing sales (Twin, 2021). The importance of marketing can be seen through the brand image a company wants to convey. For example, McDonald's as a brand is seen as quick and inexpensive fast food that pertains to a large audience i.e., it is marketed in a way that creates an image in the minds of customers as affordable food with which customers are quite comfortable. They know what will be getting once they come to McDonald's (Shastri, 2022).

In a world where there is an endless supply of content and advertising vying for people's attention, finding an original or different way of tapping into the needs, wants and motivations of target audiences is critical in delivering results, which is why marketing is often times viewed as a creative field. But what is it that links marketing to all creative industries? The term 'creative industries' refers to a range of economic activities that are concerned with the generation and commercialisation of creativity, ideas, knowledge and information. There are thirteen sub-sectors that are popular within the creative industry. These include the art and antique market; crafts; design; designer fashion; film and video; interactive leisure software; music; the performing arts; publishing; software and computer games; and television and radio and film. It can be argued that the creative industries offer a new paradigm for marketing in a world where meaning and value are increasingly dependent on a shared experience of consumption (Parrish, 2018).

On the basis of the above, the aim of this paper is to analyse how marketing as a discipline links to the creative industries and specifically its sub-sector of film. Thus, this research paper aims to answer the question **“To what extent do marketing strategies influence the success of a film?”**

### **Marketing in creative industries**

“If you can't advertise yourself, what hope have you of being able to advertise anything else?”

The creative and media industries are recognised as big businesses. According to the most recent UK government statistics, the creative industries exported £21.2 billion of services in 2015, amounting to 9.4% of total UK exports of services. In 2016 the creative industries employed nearly 2 million people, 6% of all UK jobs (HM Government, 2018). However, even with their vast contributions to the world economy, creatives often tend to put their winning interests last. Even worse than doing nothing, some creative agencies fall into the trap of being run-of-the-mill and ordinary in their strategies which may not always be the most effective for creative sectors. Some creative agencies adopt the ways of famous theorists and their marketing strategies that while may be effective in other fields, may not always result in the desired outcome while promoting the arts.

Drucker and Philip Kotler for example, are respectively known as the grandfather and father of marketing. Drucker and Kotler offered similar strategic visions for marketing, they spoke of the strategic importance of marketing and innovation to a firm's competitiveness and survival. Both take a very customer-oriented approach to marketing. Peter Drucker claimed that there was only one correct definition of a business purpose: to create a customer because its purpose was to create a customer - "The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself... The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous" (Minchin and Alpert, 2017). Similarly, Phillip Kotler devised a model that recognised customers have five levels of need, ranging from functional or core needs to emotional needs. The model also recognised that products are merely a means to satisfy customers' varying needs or wants. Continuing with the example of McDonald's, in India, a country in which the cow is sacred by the majority Hindu population and Muslims don't eat pork, the menu features McVeggies or a Maharaja Mac

instead of hamburgers or beefburgers. By doing so they are able to meet the customer wants and needs of people across the globe and therefore appeal to a larger audience.

However, customer-oriented strategies may not necessarily have the same level of impact while promoting creative businesses. In the creative and media industries, ‘creativity’ is not enough – engaging with the social experience of cultural consumers is the only way to ensure the economic survival of cultural producers. This can be done by taking a more product-oriented approach which heavily relies on creative content to market the product to the target audience.

One non-negotiable tactic and perhaps the most important tactic that creative businesses absolutely must engage in is to stand out and be more visible. In a recently conducted study by ascend2 marketers, it was said that video is the most effective content format for building relationships to generate leads that convert. One exceptional use of video is to be more transparent. Ever wondered what is appealing about YouTube influencers who let viewers in on every detail of their life? It’s transparency. People love to see the “reality” behind the facade and feel they can get it from one of these behind-the-scenes shows. Even though it is all cleverly managed and produced, it has an impact and sends its stars and the products they use to the top of the charts (Kirk, 2019).

Another strategy that is especially useful in Friday’s day and age is to be sociable. Films, for example, are about bringing people together and sharing ideas. Before the advent of social media, word of mouth was the only way of communicating films to the public. The most recent permutation can be found in modern-day social media. Social networks are an excellent location to build awareness and promote a film. Social media was what made it possible for the Star Wars: The Force Awakens trailer to garner over 1 million views in the first 23 minutes (Kirby, 2016).

Building creative partnerships is another effective way of reaching a larger audience. Finding a non-competitive partner in another creative field and working with them to help build one brand. For example, car manufacturer BMW and designer Louis Vuitton may not be the most obvious pairings. But if you think about it, they have a few important things in common. BMW created a sports car model called the BMW i8, while Louis Vuitton designed an exclusive, four-piece set of suitcases and bags that fit perfectly into the car's rear parcel shelf. Both brands knew their target market desired luxury and meticulous craftsmanship. By selling complimentary high-quality products, the brands successfully garnered attention from respective loyal customers (Bernazzani, 2013).

### **Film marketing**

As has been observed earlier, the marketing of a film is an important factor in its production. Without advertisements, no one will know a film exists. When a film is in progress, it must be sold in the same way as every other product is in order to entice audiences to watch it.

It wouldn't be entirely wrong to say that oftentimes a movie's box office collection depends more on how well the movie has been marketed as opposed to what the story is about. When making a movie, a producer's main objective is never to market the film. However, film marketing becomes the main selling point of the entire project, without which your movie is nothing but a mere two-hour-long video.

So how was the concept of film marketing established?

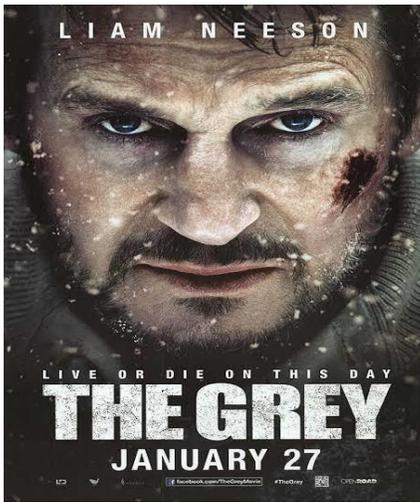


The cinema industry that grew in the 1910s and 1920s also resorted to marketing to sell its films to the largest possible audience. As production costs started increasing, marketing became a key component of film releases, and it has never stopped since then. Film Marketing moved past the era of posters and board signs that were used to promote movies and plays. Examples of this can be seen within the Hindi film industry as well. Post-independence Indian film industry gained momentum

and historians call the period of the 1950s the 'golden age of Indian cinema'. Movies released during this time mainly relied on hand-painted posters which were used for out-of-home publicity like billboards and wall posters. These were a few simple marketing campaigns used by producers to draw the attention of movie-goers. In those days the concept of Public Relations (PR) did not exist, and actors did not give interviews to the media, nor did they attend parties thus the movies at that time did not generate any hype or buzz (DAV University, 2018).

However, the 21st century demands Film marketing through new technology involving the digital world. The process of film marketing is closely related to the supply chain. The marketing process starts at the very beginning from the conception of the idea. Next, in the conventional film industry, producers sell their films to agents and distributors, who are then in charge of bringing the film and audience together. While a film's selling point will always be the content, the way it is marketed does have a significant impact on its popularity. A marketing campaign that truly engages and gains the interest of the people is going to gather buzz for the film. An interesting campaign makes the film itself appear interesting and will get people to want to go see it. If the promotions for the film are made interesting and gather a lot of attention, it is likely that the film will do well, if not only on opening weekend. On the other hand, if the marketing for a film does a poor job of gaining interest, that film is going to suffer for it.

An example of a badly marketed film is 'The Gray', starring Liam Neeson. All of the marketing material, from posters to trailers, centred on one image from the film: a battered Liam Neeson with broken bottles tied to his knuckles, getting ready to fight a pack of wolves. It was a thrilling image that promised another thriller from the thespian-cum-hero. One can imagine the immense disappointment audiences experienced when they realized there was no wolf



fight to be found in the film. Though the film certainly had a fair share of thrilling moments, it was much more of an intimate meditation on the lengths a man will go to for the sake of survival than it was your standard, by-the-numbers thriller. So, if a film is not properly marketed, the audiences are likely to become disappointed, viewership will drop and subsequently the profits will suffer (Jones, 2018).

But if it is the marketing plan of a film that determines its success, what restricts all filmmakers from investing in it greatly?

Film marketing comes with its limitations. An obvious one is the cost. Advertising a film can prove to be very expensive - it involves both high distribution and filmmaking costs. Therefore, small organisations may struggle to finance the production of advertisement films. It is also important to understand that certain marketing strategies that may be working very well for blockbuster films are not always feasible for others. Independent films rely heavily on critical reviews in niche media such as newspapers, magazines, and websites. Many feature films will have official accounts, news releases, trailers, and teasers, much like studio films. Film festival prizes will help draw new viewers and maximize the amount of cross-platform advertising attention a film receives. Independent films do not usually have merchandise or TV commercials to market them; instead, word of mouth and social media are used to promote them (NFI, 2021).

### **A compare and contrast of the film marketing in Hollywood and Bollywood**

While we have established that marketing in itself plays a vital role in determining the success of a film, be it independent or large studio production, film industries across the globe are vastly different and therefore take on a very different approach in terms of how their films are marketed. Hollywood and the Hindi film industry (Bollywood) for example, may both be star-centric, however, huge differences lie in their basic structure.

The film business in the United States and Canada made \$21.3 billion in 2020, making it the world's most lucrative sector. In 2021, the sector again saw an increase in revenue post-pandemic. Hollywood accounted for about 80.5% of the total growth in 2021 after the COVID outbreak. Hollywood has been dominant over the years in the international film industry but slowly Mumbai is emerging beyond providing local language films and television into domestic and international markets. Los Angeles remains the largest cluster in the world with Mumbai following second in the lead (exchange4media, 2002). Bollywood produces more than 1000 films every year. India is one of the world's largest cinema entertainment marketplaces, with the Indian film industry's total revenue surpassing 90

billion Indian rupees in 2021. India is the world's top film producer in terms of quantity. The bulk of Indian films is made in Hindi or English, allowing them to be exported. Bollywood is India's foremost film producer, producing Hindi films. Despite having a huge population and producing a high number of films, India has a small number of movie theatres compared to other major filmmakers. India has a screen-to-resident ratio of 1:96,300, while the United States has a screen-to-resident ratio of 1:7,800. In comparison to other nations, movie theatres are similarly below average (exchange4media, 2002).

Marketing of Bollywood movies has come a long way from the years of Raja Harishchandra and Alam Ara. Traditionally, marketing and publicity represented only five to ten percent of a film's success at the box office but today it determines up to fifty percent of a film's success. Now, every release has an improved marketing strategy in place. An industry like Hollywood has already mastered the art of movie making and marketing but Bollywood is catching up at a rapid pace. Raja Harishchandra used newspaper advertisements, handbills and publicity booklets to market the movie. Early years after Raja Harishchandra saw the emergence of posters as the main source of marketing a movie. Posters were usually hand painted on canvas and then used as the design source for printing on cheap paper. Since then, the emergence of television, the transformation of urban space, the expansion of the Internet and the arrival of newer technologies have made their mark on Bollywood, determining both its aesthetic impulse as well as marketing strategies.

A new breed of consumer has evolved with India's growing young population - their media consumption habits and preferences for niche content are driving marketers to provide innovative and direct platforms to get in touch with the audience. Around 81 per cent of the online Indian population, according to a report by Hungama Digital Media, engages in some kind of social interactivity on the web, making it an ideal place for film marketers to draw young crowds. Jyoti Deshpande, Chief Operating Officer and Commercial Director, Eros International, says: "Internet viral marketing is less about how much you spend and more about how effectively you spend." Today it's almost a norm to launch a website as well as a Facebook fan page for a movie simultaneously. Promoting movies through social networking sites such as Facebook, blogs like bloggers and micro-blogging sites like Twitter etc. helps to build a reputation, create real-time conversations, connect and at the same time engage the target audiences in the online world (Ahmed, 2010).

Almost every movie today has an official website launched much before its release. The cost involved in creating these websites is negligible and when we compare its usage to television, newspaper, and magazine ads we realize that websites, once launched, continue to stay forever, even after the movie is out of the market and serves as a continual promotion ground. For instance, Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na, a small-budget musical romantic comedy targeted at the youth was a major success online. The homepage [www.jaanetu.com](http://www.jaanetu.com) was very appealing in appearance with youthful graphics. The movie tied up with MSN India and came up with Bollywood's first eye-blaster technology-based advertisement. It used a concept where the male lead comes 'alive' to interact with the user. He walks on the

website while you work, looks around then knocks on your screen (asks for attention), dances to the tune of one of the songs from the movie and then walks back into the advertisement. This advertisement ended up having a click-through rate of 2.8% when the average of banner advertisements is 0.8%. Such innovative techniques are being used to make promotional websites (Ahmed, 2010).



So, what sets Bollywood aside is its innovative marketing campaigns. If there was an award for the most innovative marketing campaign, it would certainly be awarded to Ghajini which changed the dynamics of In-Cinema advertising. In-Cinema advertising was always limited to In-Cinema Slides and Television Commercials. However, what Ghajini did was unthinkable. They tied up with leading multiplexes in Mumbai wherein the staff was seen sporting the famous Ghajini hairstyle. This promotion was done when the audience went to watch Shahrukh Khan's 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi', which was released in theatres on 11th December 2008 whereas Ghajini was released about a month and a half later on 24th December. The crowd loved this unique promotion, and this became a talking point for quite some time (Indicine, 2014).

Hollywood on the other hand, with the help of decades of blockbusters, has revolutionized the template for what their film marketing essentials really are. At each stage of the film's life cycle, marketing's importance varies, with most efforts focused on the months, weeks, and days preceding a film's opening weekend. Depending on the film's initial box office performance, marketing can continue in lessened forms (if successful) or cease altogether (if unsuccessful) until the week or so preceding release on home video – which typically occurs two to three months after the film's theatrical run ends.

Over this period of a film's lifetime, several different marketing tools are employed. These marketing tools can be divided into four specific areas: research, paid advertising, publicity, and promotion. Before a marketing campaign can be put into effect and before most creative pieces can be engineered and released to the public, *market research* must be done. While research goes into the pre-production of films – before films are even cast or shot.

The second marketing tool is *paid advertisements*. Paid advertisements include any bought space or time on the major advertising mediums. The traditional mediums include newspaper ads, radio spots, and theatre signage – which include one-sheets, door panels, and lobby cards. These generally feature distinct imagery from the film, showcase the film's star power, and incorporate a clever tagline, much like a consumer brand and its slogan. According to a study done by Kantar Media in 2010, film studios and distributors dedicated a whopping seventy-three percent of their respective advertising budgets to television advertisements. The simple reasoning behind this overt favouritism stems from television potentially guaranteeing as wide an audience as possible when compared to other mediums (Herrington, 2015).



*Publicity* comes in as the third marketing tool and is generally seen as the most cost-effective but most unpredictable. Publicity – also referred to as earned media – is essentially free advertising because a movie release is considered newsworthy, especially when the director, stars of the film or film concept are popular and prominent. Publicity can include cast interviews on talk shows and various news outlets, creative and extensive publicity stunts – like the one described for *Gone with the Wind* – and heavy coverage of the respective film’s elaborate red-carpet premiere (Herrington, 2015).

*Film promotion*, the final stage, generally refers to movie tie-ins, product placement, merchandising, and word-of-mouth. Cross-marketing deals, such as action figures from a superhero film included in children’s meals at a fast-food restaurant. The reasoning behind this method lies in the benefits found on both sides of the relationship. The company hopes to increase sales based on the popularity of a film and the subsequent demand for children’s toys, and the film distributor (Herrington, 2015).

The Hollywood concept of 'Studios', which participate in the full chain and hence impact production and marketing is very different from Indian studios. Therefore, even though the strategies adopted by them may be similar in some ways, the success of the film is determined by how large the studio's backing is and how much aid they are willing to provide to market the film successfully.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of marketing is to understand the customer's needs and wants in a way that the product or service sells itself. Traditional marketing tends to take a more customer-oriented approach as stated by the likes of Drucker and Kotler. However, this approach may not always be as impactful, especially within the creative industries where a more product-oriented approach to marketing could be better.

With regard to the film industry, a sub-industry of the larger creative industry, marketing strategies have been around for decades and have evolved over the years to establish a certain template within Hollywood and the Indian film industry. While the success of a film does largely depend on how well made the film is, without these promotional strategies, no one would know the film exists, therefore making marketing an extremely important factor in its production

While it has been established that marketing in itself plays a vital role in determining the success of a film, the approach and strategies adopted by film industries across the globe, such as Hollywood and the Hindi film industry, Bollywood, are different. While both remain two of the largest industries, there are major differences in their basic

structure. Hollywood has managed to revolutionize a template for their marketing essentials and largely depends on the studios backing them for the promotion of their films as compared to Bollywood films and their innovative methods of film marketing.

Regardless of the industry or budget or size of the film, whether or not a film reaches an audience is determined by the marketing strategies a film adopts, therefore it can be said film marketing determines the success of a film to a great extent.

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