

Cinema Advertising: The Recovery, Rebound & Rebuild post Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Purpose: This research paper seeks to throw light on the traumatized cinema advertising due to the corona virus outbreak and its revival and comeback post-pandemic. This paper also focuses on the tough competition being faced by the cinema industry and in turn cinema advertising, the competitors being Over-the-Top (OTT) giants like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hot star making Video-on-Demand (VoD) available through online streaming services. The paper will also emphasize on the recovery, rebound and rebuild of cinema advertising which has been cited by many exhibitors and advertising agencies as one of the best traditional advertising medium to promote brands with a targeted reach and zero fraud.

Findings: Covid-19 has had devastating effects on the social and economic infrastructure worldwide. Almost all business sectors have been affected directly or indirectly. The entertainment industry was also hard-hit and is coping to come back. Amongst the marketing & advertising media, the cinema advertising was the biggest casualty. With cinema theatres shut down during the lockdown, the moviegoers switched to VoD and streaming online content furnished by the OTT platforms. The cinema advertising business had a steep fall seeing a slump of approximately 85% as the catastrophic result of Covid-19.

The current situation is getting back to normal with declining number of corona virus cases and accelerated pace of vaccinations. Cinema halls have reopened across India and are running with 100% occupancy. Cinema theatres have opened with a bang with frequent theatrical releases of big ticket movies luring the audience to watch movies on the silver screen thus giving a major push to exhibition industry and cinema advertising. The footfall has been increasing ever since the reopening of the multiplexes and theatres.

Originality/Value: Not much of study and survey has been done with respect to the recovery and comeback of cinema advertising. Cinema advertising is an underrated and underutilized advertising media and thus it hasn't been given much of focus and attention. My study will try to decipher insights on the rebound and rebuild of cinema advertising post Covid-19 pandemic. I will also try to throw light on what the future holds for cinema advertising.

Research Methodology: The research is based on secondary data. The research is a descriptive research. I have fetched the data through research papers, various new reports and articles and also from previously done surveys and questionnaires.

Keywords: Covid-19, Cinema Advertising, Film Industry, Post-pandemic Recovery, Video-on- Demand (VoD), Over-the-Top (OTT)

Introduction:

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a havoc raising a ruckus around the globe. The cinema industry, the exhibition industry and thus cinema advertising faced the repercussions in the form of complete shutdown of the cinema halls. People were forced to remain indoors and this is how increased demand of online streaming stepped in. But the cinephiles waited desperately for the theatres to reopen. The appetite for the larger than life ads-free movie screening has all the more increased during the lockdown period which lasted for around 18 months. At first instance, people were hesitant and cautious to sit in an enclosed space with strangers for long duration, but the number of attendees has been escalating lately; reasons being many-fold. The Dolby digital surround sound, the immersive, captive and dark surrounding, the technological innovations like IMAX, 3D, 4D coming into play and the overall experience account for the returning back of the viewers to get up from their couches and indulge in the pleasure of viewing movies on the big screens. The hunger for the social outings with the loved ones, have tempted people to turn up in good numbers for movies in cinema theatres. Many of the starry big-ticket movies released recently have broken many records. There are many more extravagant releases in the pipeline. Such releases hitting the silver screens have definitely increased the craving of the viewers and fascinated them to visit the multiplexes and theatres again after their reopening. People from all the demographic age groups are returning back to the silver screen. The unique storytelling and the rich content of the films have attracted attention and have started pulling the diverted audience back to the theatres.

Research Problem:

Covid-19 hit the world badly forcing people to stay indoors. This led to the proliferation of online streaming. Vod and OTT which was already becoming popular due to digitization and low internet tariffs even before corona outbreak; gained momentum and became the most prominent form of media consumption. How will cinema, exhibition industry and cinema advertising overcome this setback? How will they recover the losses? How will they survive the competition?

Research Statement:

The rebound and the comeback of cinema and cinema advertising post-pandemic looks promising. Grabbing the attention and compelling the viewers to visit the cinema theatres with big bang releases. The experience of watching movies on big screens is unreplaceable. Online streaming versus cinema exhibition is convenience versus experience.

Research Questions:

1. Can the recovery and the comeback of cinema advertising be a V-shaped one?
2. Are VoD, online streaming and OTT platforms killing the cinema theatres?
3. How is movie screening at theatres tackling the competition given by the online content streaming?
4. What does the future of cinema advertising as an advertising media hold post Covid-19 Pandemic?

Objectives:

- To uncover the fact if the exhibition industry and cinema advertising would be able to recover post-pandemic.
- To gain knowledge on the recovery process and comeback of cinema advertising.

- To learn the impact of online streaming and over-the-top media service providers on exhibition industry.
- To find answers to what the future of cinema advertising as a promotional tool holds.

Originality of the Study:

Not much of study and survey has been done with respect to the recovery and comeback of cinema advertising. Cinema advertising is an underrated and underutilized advertising media and thus it hasn't been given much of focus and attention. My study will try to decipher insights on the rebound and rebuild of cinema advertising post Covid-19 pandemic. My study will also try comparing the competitors of cinema theatres; that is the OTT platforms and whether online streaming is hurting the exhibition industry and in turn eating out the profits of theatres, multiplexes and film studios. I will also try to throw light on what the future holds for cinema advertising.

Need for this Research:

Cinema advertising has always been given the smallest share of the marketing budget. But it has proved its mettle by providing the advertisers the opportunity to target the customers in an ads-free, immersive and captivating environment. The advertisers get to showcase their brands in a dark background with the access to the power that star celebrities hold. The catastrophic damage caused by the corona virus outbreak, was very much visible on the cinema industry with shuttered cinema theatres. But now, the situation being under control, and things coming back on track, cinema halls and cinema advertising are coming back to health and to our surprise are doing quite well. With cut-throat competition amongst the brands, the changing consumer behaviour and technological innovations post-pandemic, the need for advertising has grown even more. Advertising has always been an important point in the management agenda of the companies. The brands have been eyeing on to invest in through cinema advertising as the theatres and multiplexes reopen with lockdown being lifted and the restrictions eased. Through my study, I would like to throw light on the effectiveness of cinema advertising, its recovery post-pandemic in this era of online streaming and how important it is for the brands.

Discussion based on Literature Review:

Online streaming and cinema exhibition are not harming each other in the current scenario. Watching movies anytime while sitting at home at your convenience has definitely made things easy but it cannot match the experience of watching movies on the big screens with a conducive environment. The media consumption habits of the consumers have surely changed during the last few years because of the growing popularity of VoD and PVoD. Then happened the corona virus outbreak leading to lockdown which gave a major push to online streaming during the last 2 years. With a good stock of content in the form of movies and web series on the OTT platforms, online streaming has forced viewers to get hooked on to their couches and watch them as per their convenience. In these last few years, we have seen movie makers/producers adopting a direct-to-digital strategy, wherein after being released in theatres, the movie goes to the streaming platform. During this lockdown period, there have been instances where the OTT giants have directly acquired the movie by paying the streaming rights to the movie makers. When surveyed, people cited that watching movie in cinema theatres, is one of the social activities which they very much desire for once the lockdown is lifted ranking movie watching as same as holidaying and vacationing. Consumers long to sit back, relax and enjoy an uninterrupted and ads-free movie with a big box of popcorn sharing with family and friends. The communal experience that the audiences

witness while watching a movie in cinema theatres is irreplaceable. The in-theatres experience is non-replicable. Online streaming does offer convenience and comfort but it fails to deliver the extraordinary experience which is the unique selling point of the cinema theatres. The big screens help in showcasing the great showmanship assisted with great picture quality, great sound and a great experience at the movies. As soon as the audience stepped inside the theatres, so did the advertisers. Many brands didn't advertise in the last two years, looking for opportunities. With big-ticket releases this year, the advertisers have grabbed the golden chance of premium as well as mass advertising.

Research Methodology:

The research is based on secondary data. The research is a descriptive research. I have fetched the data through research papers, various new reports and articles and also from previously done surveys and questionnaires.

Result & Findings:

Amongst the marketing & advertising media, the cinema advertising was the biggest casualty. The cinema advertising business had a steep fall seeing a slump of approximately 85%. With frequent releases of blockbuster movies, the recovery of cinema and cinema advertising looks very promising finally ending the drought caused by corona virus and filling in the vacuum created. History has repeated itself and it has been witnessed that cinema has adapted to the situation very well and bounced back. Cinemas experienced great number of footfalls post the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 and World Wars and videos instigated more interest in people for cinema. After several months locked up indoors, watching films on the television screens or the mobile screens, the experience of watching a movie in cinemas, the way they were originally meant to be seen will be incredible. The technical quality of a film projected in the cinema is unmatched and the home screens like television, laptops and mobile screens cannot touch that level. The overall global box office has been rising lately. With record-breaking box office performances of regional movies in western countries, cinema has turned into a globalised enterprise. Majority of the films put their release dates on ice waiting to have a full theatrical premiere. The indefinite postponement of releases have led to a stockpile of films which are now hitting the cinemas in a row hence marking the emblematic end of the Covid-19 pandemic for the hard-hit theatre owners. Not only cinephiles but viewers of all demographic sects are craving for the premium experience. They are ready to pay for the premium formats. They just want to step out and encounter the unparalleled experience on the silver screens. The young males were the first ones to come back to the theatres. As each day is passing by, we are leaving the pandemic behind us. As the pandemic is fading away, so is the fear and anxiety leading to the growth of businesses. But the biggest challenge that the industry needs to fulfil would be round-the-clock releases of movies with rich content with a just and equitable theatrical window from the studios. The cinema and exhibition business will explode if such rational measures are taken care of.

Contribution to the body of knowledge:

Since this study is all about the recovery and comeback of cinema and cinema advertising, it will surely benefit the cinema sector, the exhibition industry, advertising agencies and brands in deciding about incorporating cinema advertising as one of their promotional tools mix. It will also guide the advertisers and organizations as to what share of the marketing spends should be invested in advertisements through cinema; depending on the class of the movie, its theatrical window and the footfall of the audience. The study will also help the academicians

and students pursuing marketing and advertising as their specialization in understanding the ins and outs of cinema advertising.

Scope of future Research:

Covid-19 has broken the backbone of the cinema industry, striking the exhibition industry and cinema advertising badly. More studies in an extension to my study, can be done on the recovery and rebuild of cinema advertising. Surveys can be done as to what approach the movie makers, screen owners and the exhibition industry should plan, to make the experience richer and to pull the audience back to the cinema theatres. Such studies and surveys will aid the advertising agencies and the brands to plan out their marketing and promotional strategies. These future studies will also help the students in marketing and advertising department in obtaining insights with respect to the fall and rise, comeback and recovery of the cinema.

Conclusion:

Human beings are social animals and they cannot live without socialization. Cinema advertising did face slump and losses but it has bounced back with big-buck flicks hitting the big screens. Cinema industry and thus cinema advertising is building back better and stronger and is all set to regain momentum over the next few months. Many star-studded Bollywood films like Sooryavanshi, 83, Gangubai, Kashmir Files; regional movies like Pushpa, RRR, KGF 2 and Hollywood flicks like F9, Shang-chi, Spider-man, No time to Die, Venom have been breaking multiple records ever since their releases after the reopening of the drought-hit cinema theatres. Viewers, not willing to wait for these movies to release on OTT platforms are thus ending up landing at multiplexes and single screen theatres to witness the astounding experience. These blockbuster movies with creative elegance of craft and workmanship, are meeting the pent-up demand and expectations of the hungry viewers leading to powerful attendance at the box office. The theatrical windows have shrunk over the years, taking a leverage during the lockdown. The theatrical windows have shortened to around 8-10 weeks depending on the movie budget, star cast and its performance at the box-office. The cinema has pulled through pandemics, world wars, technological innovations, audience behaviours and still survive and thrive and will sustain in the future as well.

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