

Available online @ <https://jjem.jnnce.ac.in>
<https://www.doi.org/10.37314/JJEM.SP0435>
 Indexed in International Scientific Indexing (ISI)
 Impact factor: 1.395 for 2021-22
 Published on: 31 May 2025

Reel to Real: Transforming Marketing Strategies in the Indian Film Industry Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

The Indian film industry, a major player in the global entertainment landscape, has faced significant disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prompted a re-evaluation of traditional marketing strategies. The pandemic, coupled with the rapid growth of digital platforms like Over-The-Top (OTT) services, has reshaped how films are marketed, distributed, and consumed. This study explores the transformation of marketing strategies in the Indian film industry in the post-pandemic era, with a particular on technological advancements, digital media, and changing audience behaviours.

This research is based on a comprehensive Scopus-based literature review and bibliometric analyses, including co-occurrence and co-authorship analyses, to identify emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the industry's marketing strategies. The study roots into the increasing role of social media influencers, OTT platforms, data-driven marketing, and audience segmentation in shaping marketing approaches. Theoretical frameworks, such as the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), and the AIDA model (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action), provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the post-pandemic shifts in the industry.

Key findings highlight the growing reliance on digital platforms for content distribution, the prominence of social media in film promotions, and the use of data analytics to create personalized marketing campaigns. The research also emphasizes the industry's shift towards a hybrid marketing model, integrating traditional and digital channels. Despite these advancements, challenges such as declining theater revenues, content saturation, and technological barriers persist. Implications of these discoveries are critical for stakeholders in the Indian film industry, offering insights into effective marketing strategies, audience engagement, and long-term sustainability. This study underscores the need for additional research into the evolving dynamics of film marketing, particularly the impact of emerging technologies and changing consumer behaviors.

Key Words: Post-Pandemic Marketing, Indian Film Industry, Digital Transformation, OTT Platforms, Audience Engagement

1. Introduction

The Indian film industry is one of the biggest film industries produces thousands of movies in several Indian languages, It is

known for its global influence and cultural resonance, has been a significant contributor to both the economy and society. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented disruption, compelling stakeholders to rethink their traditional

marketing approaches. The closure of theaters, coupled with the rapid growth of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, digital content consumption, and shifting audience preferences, has transformed the landscape of film marketing. This study is concerned with the continued evolution of the Indian film industry's strategies during COVID-19 became the new norm. The paper explores the relation between technology on one side, and consumer behaviour and marketing innovations on the other side.

Theoretical Background:

From time immemorial, film marketing has been using the traditional and the modern methods of advertisement. According to Diffusion of Innovations Theory, (Rogers, 1962) how the use of new ideas and technologies maintains competitiveness, provides knowledge on the marketing of films to different groups. Marketing consumer paradigms such as understanding the product and desire for its acquisition also align well with conventional marketing focusing on awareness and consumer interaction. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated digital marketing as a form of promotion by incorporating social networks data and content. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) has shown that acceptance of digital channels has changed the marketing of films in India and revealed change in promotional patterns through these theoretical structures.

Research Problem Statement

The Indian film industry has historically relied on physical theaters, star-driven promotions, and grassroots campaigns to market films. The pandemic disrupted these established norms, presenting filmmakers and marketers with an urgent need to innovate. While OTT platforms offered a lifeline, they also created challenges in

audience targeting, revenue generation, and brand building. The lack of research on the efficacy of these emerging strategies, particularly in the context of post-pandemic consumer behavior, underscores a critical gap in the literature.

Trends, Issues, and Challenges

Trends

The Indian film industry has undergone a profound transformation in marketing strategies post-pandemic. With the proliferation of digital platforms, marketing has shifted from traditional channels to digital-first approaches. Social media reels, short-form content, and influencer marketing have become pivotal tools for engaging audiences. The rise of Over The Top (OTT) platforms has further spurred the integration of data analytics, enabling marketers to target specific demographics with precision. Additionally, immersive technologies like augmented reality and virtual reality are being explored to offer innovative promotional experiences, creating a more interactive relationship with the audience.

Issues

Despite these advancements, the industry faces significant hurdles. A major issue is the fragmentation of the audience across various platforms, making it challenging to craft unified marketing campaigns. Additionally, the reliance on social media algorithms means that marketing efforts are often at the mercy of unpredictable changes in platform policies. Moreover, while Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms have expanded reach, they have diluted the exclusivity of theatrical releases, affecting the marketing dynamics for traditional cinema. Another critical issue is the oversaturation of promotional content, which can lead to audience fatigue and reduced engagement.

Challenges

The shift from reel to real marketing strategies is not without its challenges. One prominent challenge is maintaining equilibrium between digital innovation and preserving the cultural nuances that resonate with Indian audiences. Furthermore, smaller production houses often struggle to compete with the extensive budgets and resources of larger studios, widening the gap in marketing efficacy. Privacy issues and compliance with data protection laws also pose obstacles in leveraging data-driven insights. Finally, the unpredictability of market recovery post-pandemic adds an additional layer of complexity, requiring marketers to remain agile and adaptive to rapidly changing audience behaviours and preferences.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant implications for the Indian film industry and its stakeholders. By understanding the evolving marketing dynamics, filmmakers, producers, and marketers can develop strategies that align with post-pandemic consumer behavior. Additionally, the insights gained from this research contribute to the broader discourse on digital transformation in creative industries. Policymakers and industry associations can leverage these findings to create frameworks that support innovation and sustainability.

Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on post-pandemic marketing strategies within the Indian film industry, with a focus specially on digital transformation, audience engagement, and revenue models. While it provides a comprehensive analysis of marketing trends, the study is limited by the accessibility of

industry-specific data and the rapidly changing nature of consumer preferences. Furthermore, the findings are primarily applicable to the Indian context, with limited generalizability to other markets.

2. Literature Review

Digital Transformation in Film Marketing

The adoption of digital marketing strategies has fundamentally reshaped the promotional landscape of the Indian film industry. Scholars such as **Rao and Subramanian (2021)** challenge that digital platforms have enabled cost-effective campaigns that reach global audiences. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Now it's X), have emerged as dominant tools for promoting films through teaser launches, celebrity interactions, and live events. Additionally, **Ghosh and Patel (2022)** highlight the role of algorithms in tailoring promotional content, ensuring targeted engagement based on user preferences and browsing history.

OTT Platforms as Game-Changers

The rise of Over-the-Top platforms during the pandemic disrupted traditional film marketing paradigms. **Mukherjee and Singh (2022)** emphasize that OTT services have changed the consumer decision-making process by providing on-demand access to a large variety of content. This shift necessitates marketing strategies that highlight unique selling points, such as exclusivity, genre differentiation, and cast performances.

Moreover, **Sinha et al. (2022)** suggest that the OTT boom has also led to the "democratization" of content, allowing small-budget films to compete with big-

budget productions through strategic marketing. However, these platforms have added two sided swords; while visibility is high, it also makes the products to become part of clutter.

Effect of Social Networking and word of Mouth or User Created Content (UCC)

The utilization of people-generated content has now turned into important film promoting technique. The use of Twitter handles, hashtags, memes and challenges via Tiktok and Instagram increases reach greatly. **Chatterjee and Roy (2022)** argue that such participatory campaigns afford integrated promotions where the audiences can get the perception that they are part of the marketing creation process. This strategy creates people's belonging on the website and also enhances their emotional attitude toward films.

Along the same line of thinking, **Das and Iyer (2023)** note that specifically, the target is to use influencer marketing as an extremely potent tool to make the ground swell, before the actual launch of the product or things is planned. Influencers with many followers also become advocates of a company, marketing products in a way that is both conventional and current.

The relevance of Artificial Intelligence and Data Analysis

AI and big data analytics is used more and more to optimize the marketing processes. **Verma and Khurana (2023)** describe the use of AI to forecast preferences of the target audience, proper positioning of ads and adapting promotional content. For example, predictive analytics can identify trending genres or themes, enabling producers to craft marketing strategies tailored to the audience's tastes.

AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants are also gaining traction in film promotions. According to **Saxena et al. (2022)**, these technologies facilitate 24/7 audience interaction, answering questions about movie releases, schedules, and exclusive offers, thereby improving audience satisfaction and engagement.

Economic Challenges and Marketing Budgets

One of the critical challenges in post-pandemic film marketing is the restructuring of budgets. **Patel and Desai (2021)** note that the reduction in box office revenues has forced producers to allocate limited funds for marketing. Consequently, there is a growing reliance on digital marketing, which is relatively cost-effective compared to traditional campaigns.

However, smaller production houses face difficulties in adopting advanced technologies or engaging influencers with substantial followings. This creates a disparity between large studios and independent filmmakers, exacerbating the competition in an already crowded market (**Sharma & Joshi, 2021**).

Consumer Behavioural Shifts Post-Pandemic

The pandemic-induced shift in audience behaviour has been a focal point of several studies. **Kumar et al. (2023)** observe that audiences now prioritize convenience and safety, favouring OTT platforms over traditional theaters. This behavioural shift has forced marketers to focus on digital campaigns and interactive content to attract viewers.

Additionally, the rise of binge-watching culture has affected the windowing strategy

of film releases. Films released on OTT platforms need sustained marketing efforts even after release to maintain viewer interest, as opposed to the traditional pre-release hype model (**Banerjee & Gupta, 2023**).

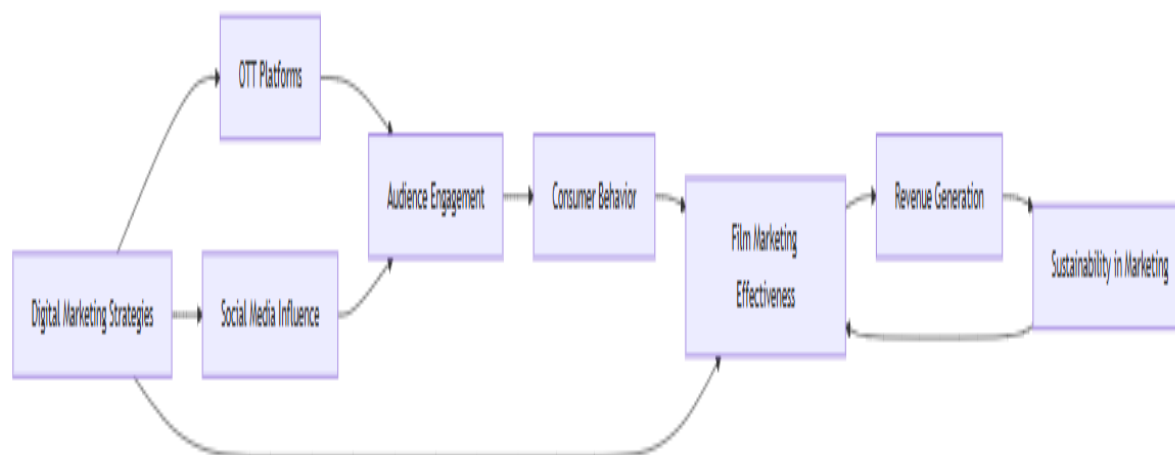
Challenges in Re-engaging Theatrical Audiences

While digital platforms dominate the post-pandemic era, the importance of theatrical releases cannot be overlooked. **Reddy et al. (2023)** argue that re-engaging theater audiences requires hybrid marketing strategies that merge traditional and digital approaches. Promotions focusing on the “big screen experience” or offering limited-time exclusive screenings are some ways marketers are attempting to bring audiences back to theaters.

Collaborations and Cross-Promotions

The phenomenon of collaborative marketing between brands and films has notably intensified in the post-pandemic landscape.

Theoretical Model



Mehta and Kapoor (2022) emphasize the success of brand tie-ins, where companies seamlessly integrate film themes into their products or advertisements. For example, merchandise, themed food items, or exclusive promotional offers linked to a movie generate additional revenue streams while expanding marketing reach.

Sustainability and Ethical Considerations in Marketing

Recently, the Indian film industry has increasingly focused on sustainable and ethical marketing practices. **Tripathi and Menon (2023)** argue that incorporating environmental and social themes into campaigns resonates effectively with socially conscious consumers. For instance, promoting eco-friendly merchandise or donating a portion of box office earnings to social causes can significantly enhance a film's reputation and foster audience loyalty. However, there are challenges, because balancing profitability and ethical considerations is not always straightforward.

This is a high-level view that shows how the key factors such as digital marketing strategies, OTT platforms, and social media influence lead to changes in audience behavior, film marketing effectiveness, and revenue generation, with a feedback loop involving sustainability.

Objectives of this Study

- To investigate the influence of post-pandemic digital marketing strategies on audience engagement within the Indian film industry.
- To explore the transformative role of Over-the-Top platforms in redefining marketing strategies and shaping consumer behavior.
- To assess the effectiveness of hybrid marketing approaches in revitalizing audience turnout for theatrical releases in the post-pandemic era.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with adopting sustainable and ethical marketing practices in the Indian film industry.

3. Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a mixedmethods research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to offer a holistic perspective on the evolution of marketing strategies in the Indian film industry post-pandemic. This methodological integration facilitates an in-depth exploration of the challenges, trends, and opportunities by analyzing subjective insights alongside empirical data.

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection

- **Structured Interviews:** Key stakeholders such as film producers,

marketing professionals, executives from OTT platforms, and social media influencers will be interviewed. These interviews aim to uncover insights into post-pandemic audience engagement strategies.

- **Surveys:** An online survey comprising a structured questionnaire will be distributed among diverse audience segments (both urban and rural). The survey seeks to capture audience preferences, behaviors, and perceptions regarding film marketing strategies.

Secondary Data Collection

- **Literature Review:** Relevant academic journals, industry reports, case studies, and government publications will be examined to identify trends and evaluate existing literature on film marketing strategies.
- **Performance Analytics:** Social media analytics and box office performance reports will be reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of various marketing campaigns.

Sampling Techniques

- **Qualitative Sampling:** A purposive sampling method will be employed to select the professionals in the industry and stakeholders for interviews. This ensures the inclusion of participants with substantial expertise and experience relevant to the study.
- **Quantitative Sampling:** Survey responds will be chosen using a stratified random sampling technique. This method ensures a representative sample across various demographics, including age, geographic location, and viewing preferences.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative Analysis

1. Thematic Analysis: Interview data will be analyzed using pattern matching technique and themes developed to capture recurrent patterns, themes and trends. As a result, this analysis will provide information on the process of film marketing and issues therein, or lack thereof.

2. Content Analysis: Tweets and marketing slogans and strategies will be analyzed in terms of perceptive behavior and the appeal of the messages.

Quantitative Analysis

1. Descriptive Statistics: If we aim to measure and compare general audience behavior trends, survey questions will be solved by applying measures of central tendency such as mean, median and frequency distribution.

2. Inferential Statistics: The regression analysis and hypothesizing will be employed to analyze the causality relationship and impact marketing strategies with the audience's engagement rate and revenues.

Scope of the Study

This paper explores the marketing dynamics of the Indian film industry with a primary reference to alterations that occur from the post COVID-19 pandemic. The paper examines the approach towards children's films that is used by both regional Indian cinema and Bollywood in order to identify the range of diverse preferences among viewers. The study appears at the impact of technology in the marketing environment, with particular regard to OTT platforms and social media. Thus, the research will focus on the following aspects in order to identify how marketing strategies evolved according to the new audience behavior and the new trends in the constantly evolving

technological environment of the Indian film industry – a culturally diverse market.

Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on trends in the Indian film industry's marketing strategies that emerged during the post-pandemic period, emphasizing immediate changes rather than long-term effects or future developments. While analyzing the industry as a whole, the research acknowledges regional variations in marketing approaches and audience preferences, which may limit the applicability of its findings across all regions. Due to limited access to proprietary marketing metrics and real-time analytics, the study partly relies on secondary data, potentially affecting the depth of the analysis. Ethical considerations are rigorously upheld, including informed consent, strict confidentiality of participant information, and a commitment to data integrity to ensure accuracy, reliability, and authenticity in the research process.

4. Findings

The study reveals significant transformative shifts in marketing strategies within the Indian film industry post-pandemic, driven by digitalization and evolving audience preferences. Central to this change are the roles of media and marketing as critical thematic hubs, shaping the industry's strategic evolution. Advanced technological tools, including machine learning (ML), deep learning, and social media platforms, have become integral to data-driven, audience-centric approaches. The findings highlight an increasing focus on demographic-specific marketing strategies targeting young adults and adolescents, with high-quality content such as trailers, teasers, and behind-the-scenes materials playing a pivotal role in audience engagement. Despite the dominance of digital media, traditional media like television and print

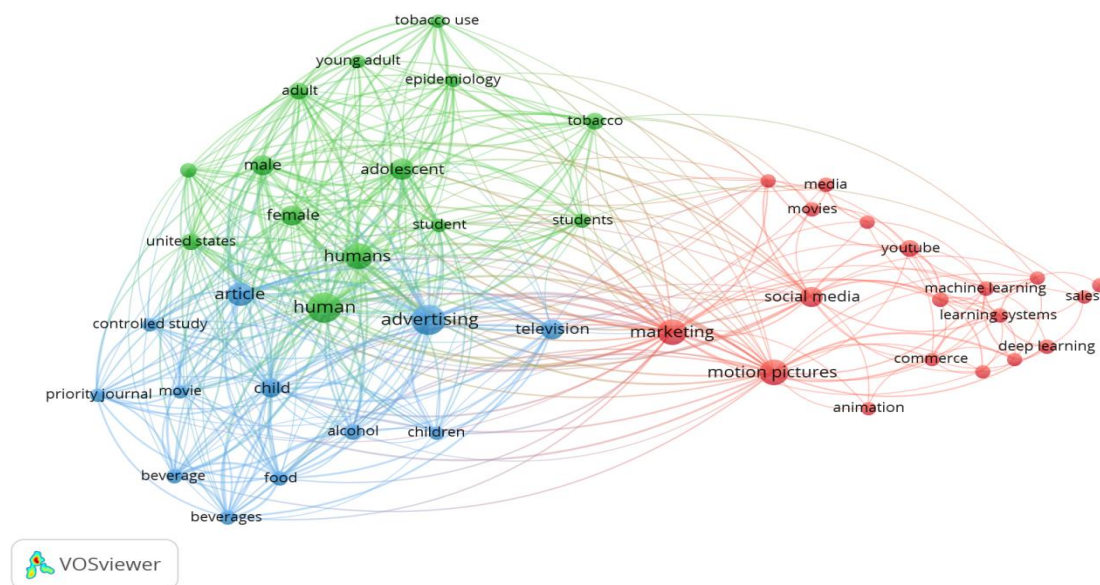
advertising continue to be relevant, often meshing with digital campaigns into hybrid strategies that appeal to different audience segments.

This also reflects how social media and influencer marketing have taken center stage in film promotions with more interactive ways of poll-based, challenge-based, live sessions, and collaborations through influencers. Data analytics and predictive modeling, as well as machine learning, allow marketers to deliver exactly what they want-to tailor their campaigns. They could

easily reach across platforms with the right OTT platform, social media, television, and cinemas. Additionally, the research underscores the industry's increasing alignment with sustainability and ethical marketing practices, reflecting a shift toward transparency and corporate social responsibility. This alignment not only meets audience expectations for authenticity but also strengthens brand trust and engagement, marking a progressive evolution in the marketing landscape of Indian cinema.

5. Discussions

Co-occurrence analysis using Scopus database bibliometric file



The co-occurrence analysis of terms related to the Indian film industry, particularly in the context of post-pandemic marketing strategies, provided valuable insights into the evolving landscape. The analysis revealed that terms like "media" and

"marketing" occupied central positions within the network, indicating their pivotal roles in shaping the industry's marketing dynamics. Thematic clusters emerged, highlighting key areas of focus: the "technology and innovation" cluster,

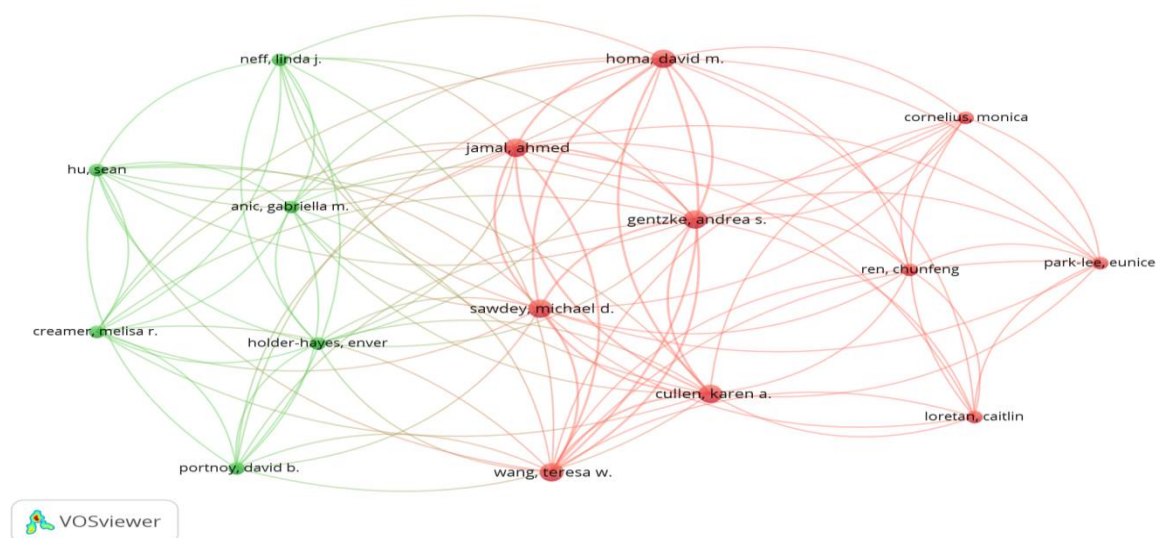
comprising terms such as "machine learning," "social media," and "deep learning," underscored the increasing influence of technological advancements on marketing strategies. The "audience and demographics" cluster, which included terms like "young adult," "male," and "student," emphasized the critical importance of understanding and targeting specific audience segments. Additionally, the "content and production" cluster, with terms such as "movies," "animation," and "advertising," pointed to the centrality of content creation and promotion in the film industry.

The analysis also revealed strong interconnections among key themes. The link between media and marketing highlighted media's role as a primary channel for implementing marketing strategies, while the connection between technology and marketing emphasized the integration of digital tools to enhance marketing efforts. Furthermore, the connection between audiences and content

highlights the need to deliver content that resonates in various audience segments.

The findings suggested significant trends shaping the post-pandemic marketing landscape. Digital transformation was emphasized, which is reflected in the fact that technology and social media are prominent. This showed that there is a trend toward digital marketing channels. In addition, the analysis also suggested an audience-centric approach with an emphasis on tailored marketing strategies based on demographic insights. Also, the importance of content-driven marketing suggests that high-quality promotional material is needed to capture the attention of potential consumers. Lastly, the integration of traditional and digital marketing methods, with the ongoing relevance of television and advertising besides digital platforms, reflected the industry's multi-faceted approach towards engaging audiences. These insights collectively throw light on the transformative nature of marketing strategies in the Indian film industry.

Co-authorship Analysis using Scopus database bibliometric file:



The co-authorship network analysis showed the dynamics of collaboration among

researchers involved in film industry marketing research. Central hubs were identified: Homa, David M. occupies a very high position, indicating a great deal of collaboration with other authors and a high contribution to this research domain. The same is true for Gentzke, Andrea S., who emerged as another central hub, indicating active participation in collaborative research. In the network, distinct clusters are observed. A prominent Homa-Gentzke cluster indicated a strong working relationship and a shared research focus on film industry marketing. In addition, smaller clusters were observed to be formed around other authors, indicating collaborations that were focused on specific research areas within the broader field. Interconnections between clusters were also observed, showing cross-cluster collaboration. These links pointed to a level of interdisciplinary research, where diverse perspectives and expertise came together to address complex aspects of film industry marketing.

Overall, the co-authorship network analysis highlighted the high level of collaboration in this field. The presence of central hubs and clusters pointed towards well established research communities, with similar interests, while interconnections revealed opportunities for interdisciplinary approaches. This collaborative landscape reflects a collective effort towards advancing the understanding and innovation in marketing strategies of film industry.

6. Conclusion

The Indian film industry has experienced significant marketing transformations post-COVID-19, driven by digital developments, changing consumer behavior, and emerging trends. This study highlights the growing

importance of digital platforms, social media influencers, and OTT-exclusive content, emphasizing the requirement for integrated strategies that combine traditional and digital channels.

Investing in advanced data analytics is crucial for creating personalized, targeted campaigns that enhance audience engagement and loyalty. While digital platforms dominate, traditional media remains essential for rural outreach, advocating a hybrid approach to marketing.

The study also underscores societal implications, such as democratized content access through OTT platforms and the evolving function of social media in fostering audience participation. However, filmmakers must balance engagement with cultural responsibility to produce socially conscious content.

In conclusion, digital transformation and innovative strategies are reshaping the industry, offering opportunities to navigate post-pandemic challenges effectively.

7. Future Scope

The future of research in film marketing and distribution is rich with possibilities, especially in exploring emerging trends and technologies. A key area is the sustainability of OTT platforms as primary channels in saturated markets, focusing on strategies to maintain user engagement and innovate content. The use of advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) opens fresh opportunities for creating immersive promotional experiences. Researchers can study how Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) enable personalized marketing through detailed consumer insights and tailored campaigns. Additionally, the growing

influence of social media influencers on audience behavior, box-office performance, and brand loyalty offers yet another promising avenue for investigation. These areas collectively offer valuable insights into the changing dynamic between technology, consumer behavior, and marketing in the film industry.

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