

## **Understanding the emerging Integrated Marketing Communication strategies used in Marketing Tamil films**

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**Abstract:** Advertising and marketing have been effective tools in bringing to the notice of consumers what they want and how their needs can be satisfied by consuming these products. Film promotion and advertising have been no different than any other consumer product except for the fact that the movie stars use cinema as a tool also in political propaganda. The paper focuses on strategies to promote Tamil films in the recent times. Recent blockbuster films of Kollywood are an example of how promotional strategies are used in South Indian cinema which are trending to create fervor among the fans and also raising the bar among the films released during the period. 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

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### **I. Introduction**

With the government of India recognizing the film production business a 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. The formulaic understanding of film marketing is about:

- A precise definition of to whom we are trying to communicate
- A clear idea of what we need to communicate
- Some understanding of what effect we expect the communication to have

It is followed by some common ground rules of:

Must be seen, must be read about, must be believed, must be remembered and must be acted upon. This is almost the same for product advertising as well.

### **II. The Film marketing process**

Film marketing is about the how the target audience is 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 graduates into 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., The producer today invests heavily on 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.

### **The 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 the people who are responsible for this are the distribution company, so-called because they distribute (give out) the films to the cinemas and distribute the 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, a lot of money will be lost.

While the audience is deciding to watch a particular film, their choices are influenced by the promotion/ advertisement of these films. An immediate comparison is done with the last film they had seen of their favourite 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 the viewer to the cinema halls. What can possibly be the USP of the movie- the star cast, technical aspects, camera work, director of the film so on and so forth. What interests the loyal fan at that moment will be evident with the ticket sales.

To start from the initial stages of the plan for marketing, the title of the film or the star cast or music composers (in the case of brands like AR Rahman) is mentioned in the media to create a stir in the minds of the 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 the audience some amount of information about a film in terms of narrative and character, but equally, will aim to raise questions that can only be answered by seeing the whole film. (Sirish, 2008)

While a trailer with the 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 the 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, the 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 the 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 the thriller film 'Vathikuchi' as the main story line revolved around an auto driver. Autos decorated with the 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 the unique innovative techniques of marketing a film though.

Arun Kumar's directorial debut 'Pannaiyaram Padminiyum' a plot revolving around an aged landlord and his fascination for his vintage Padmini car, the 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)

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

'Raja Rani' the 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 film's young director Atlee Kumar as the plot of the film involved the 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 the film. (Pudipeddi, 2013)

Recently released 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 the film's 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.

The 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 was directed by debutante Ram of 'Nalaya Iyakunar' fame. Mundsupatti is a adventurous comedy film set in the backdrop of the 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](http://www.mymundasupattistyle.com). The app was designed by mixing various styles of Mundasu (turbans), retro-styles eyewear and hairstyles from the 1980's. Along the lines of the posters and the trailer, the retro theme of the online application is expected to kindle a sense of the 1980's amongst the 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 the film takes place through this medium. Instagram and Youtube are also another means of marketing the films among the 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. The dialogues were altered in accordance to the film's 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)

'Ai', which was speculated to be a high grosser of the year 2015, was released on the 14 January on Pongal<sup>1</sup>. Director Shankar's blockbuster film 'Ai' took to extensive promotion of the film through flash mobs at popular malls to releasing videos of the lead actor's health regime followed for the movie. They also focused on overseas promotion of the film targeting the Indian diasporas more particularly director Shankar and actor Vikram's overseas fans. They were keen on getting the overseas Tamil speaking population into the groove. Music and rushes of the film were released months before the launch of the film. They also focused on star interviews and appearances on popular Television channel shows. With the concept of worldwide premiers it has become mandatory that every film which is looking at overseas releases focuses on the overseas marketing.

The film promotional strategy included a mega music launch which had Hollywood actor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Indian actor Rajinikanth for the event. The event had lead actor Vikram performing and

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<sup>1</sup> Pongal is the Harvest festival for Tamils. Most film producers consider this to be an apt time for releases as the State government declares a 3 day holiday for the celebration and most people spend the time with family watching new releases in cinema halls/multiplexes.

along with him there were body builders who walked the ramp. The idea gelled well with the plot of the film which had the male lead as a body builder. The strategy here was maximum visibility for the film and also the crew with two iconic actors one from India and other from Hollywood been seen together for the promotion which drew a large crowd mostly fans and followers. The music of the film turned out to be popular and was rated number one in the local music charts<sup>2</sup>.

As the 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 in 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. The stakeholder's chance increases in these occasions and also with such extensive promotions the visibility factor of the actors is also very high. Along with the promotions a lot of publicity and public relations tactics are also taken into consideration to maintain the Investor, Creator and Viewer chain of effects.

### **III. Executional Framework**

As we understand that a part/ subset of marketing is advertising, the understanding of movie promotion can also be based on the similar strategies of product advertisement to a large extent. Just like the product is advertised through a design and executional framework here too the producer along with the 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 the 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 the teasers, trailers, motion posters where information and the design strategy of the information are used effectively to bring about the required results- higher ticket sales. Emotional advertising strategy is constantly used in Tamil cinema to lead to 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 milk<sup>3</sup> as a mark of respect and love for the actor (usually a superstar or actor with a strong fan base)<sup>4</sup>.

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)<sup>5</sup> **(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. The motion posters commonly known as digital poster designing is now being followed mostly for film promotions. The posters use a lot of highlighting which is appealing<sup>6</sup> along with distinctly highlighting the salient features like face, muscles, background effects (eg: lighting) which are not very evident in the print poster designs. The idea of highlighting has been difficult in print poster designs when compared to that of motion posters recent films like Burma (2014), Katthi (2014), Pulli (2015) and Ai (2015) are just a few films to name. As most fans use a personalized medium like mobile phones, laptops to get the 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 the consumer. The use of Bgm<sup>7</sup> along with the visual makes the audience develop a 'connect' with the movie and they recall the importance of it in their life. The 2015 release 'Ai' (Vikram and Amy Jackson starrer) had attractive motion posters and also the Bgm which complemented it. This had an impact on the audience especially the younger audience.

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar winner A R Rahman is the music composer for this film.

<sup>3</sup> A ritual performed the idols of deities as a mark of respect and as a purification ceremony.

<sup>4</sup> Mostly seen for the promotion of movies with actors like Rajnikanth, Kamal Hassan, Vijay, Ajith

<sup>5</sup> The 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.

<sup>6</sup> Sexual appeal is the main focus

<sup>7</sup> Background music score

#### **IV. Conclusion**

To conclude Kollywood has been an industry since its inception but with the 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 the other language film industries in the country pose a risk of losing the larger population of the target audience<sup>8</sup>. As most producers and production houses today believe in minimum investment and maximum profit and reviews. Integrated marketing of films is here to remain for good.

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<sup>8</sup> Considering the fact that elite and upper middle class audience is important to producers.