



## Small-budget movies: The saving grace for in-cinema advertising in 2018?

Success of films such as Badhaai Ho, Andhadhun, Raazi, Hichki, Sonu ki Titu ki Sweety and Stree has reinforced advertiser confidence in the credibility of small-budget movies

It's not every year that an army of small-budget movies come from nowhere and topple big blockbusters, bringing in cheer to the in-cinema advertising industry. Clearly, 2018 was the year when content trumped even big star power. And audiences chose 'actors' over 'stars'. The success of films such as Badhaai Ho, Andhadhun, Raazi, Hichki, Sonu ki Titu ki Sweety and Stree has not just prompted a scope for such high-content movies to come out as favourites among the audience, but also reinforced advertiser confidence in their credibility.

### The growth story

Saurabh Varma, Chief Marketing Officer, Inox Leisure, shares that in-cinema advertising has seen a minimum of 20 per cent growth this year. Varma states that the trend has impacted not just Hindi but content in all regions, including Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu films.

“In a star-struck world, it is heart-warming to see films with high content value performing well. This is despite minimal marketing spends and limited market for some of the regional films. In-cinema advertising has seen a minimum of 20 per cent growth,” says Varma.

The box office numbers also say a thing or two about how content-driven, smaller-budget movies have struck a chord among audiences. While the Rs 300 crore Thugs of Hindostan, an extravagant period drama that featured a never-seen-before combination of Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachchan, made just about Rs 150 crore, the modest Badhaai Ho raked in Rs 135 crore. Among the other scorers at the box office were Stree (Rs 125 crore), Andhadhun (Rs 73.5 crore) and Raazi (Rs 122 crore). The year proved that audiences were unwilling to go with mediocre fare, even if they had A-list stars in them.

Film trade analyst Atul Mohan reveals that low-budget movies have made big money, over 67 per cent of their investment. “2018 has proved that it is content that wins over everything else. A Sonu ki Titu ki Sweety that was made in Rs 17-18 crores earned over Rs 125 crores, which is a lot more than what 2018's big blockbusters have earned even after betting big bucks,” he says.

Seenu Kurien, VP Sales and Marketing, Carnival Cinemas, opens up that though advertising rates for blockbuster films are always 25-30 per cent higher than the regular releases, sleeper hits benefit industry players up to 15 per cent more

than the regular films. “Mostly all the major brands plan their yearly marketing calendar with certain advertising budgets based on the festival releases or films with A-list actors well in advance to get the maximum eyeballs. When a small or mid budget film becomes a sleeper hit or blockbuster, local or regional brands with flexible budgets, change their advertising schedule for those films. Sleeper hits benefit us up to 15 per cent more than the regular films,” explains Kurien.

Rahul Puri, MD, Mukta A2 Cinemas, hints that the whole point about such sleeper hits is that they are little unexpected and run for a long time. “As this is not something that advertisers expect to greatly shake the box office, they don't pre-plan for it. Neither do multiplexes. Small hit films bring in occupancy over a long period of time. Thus, advertising rates stay in place for a longer period of time, helping ad revenue over the whole period,” says Puri.

### **The coming of supreme content**

The message is clear- audiences are rejecting formulaic, starry ventures and accepting more of original online content. What's interesting is that stars such as Radhika Apte and Vicky Kaushal who owned the year with their movies and performances also straddled different platforms successfully. Apart from the big screen, they also had back-to-back digital outings on OTT platforms and made their mark there too.

Amit Chandrra - CMD of Trigger Happy Entertainment, a company that has been into the marketing of movies like Stree, Raazi, Sanju, says, “This has been the year for content-driven, well-marketed movies. Dinesh Vijan, the producer of Stree, had confidence that his content would resonate with the audiences, and so was our belief. Hence, he asked us to be extremely aggressive and innovative with the campaign. As such movies gain momentum and generate footfalls for the advertisers too, it's important to bear in mind that if marketed well, such movies not just open up with a good weekend collection but also lifetime collection.”

Industry experts are optimistic about the future of these movies and are confident that they will further peak advertiser interest and only increase the profit share for the industry. Siddharth Bhardwaj, Chief Marketing Officer - Head of Enterprise Sales, UFO Moviez, reveals that since this has been the first year when such movies have consistently done well, advertisers have definitely gained confidence in low-budget movies. “Advertisers come by the kilo during movies like Zero, Thugs. For low-budget movies, there have been fewer takers. But this year, advertisers who have put money on such movies have definitely gained immensely. Next year, more advertisers will put their money on these movies.” Bhardwaj remarks that next year, the dividend should be even bigger.

Varma echoes the sentiment. “Thanks to digital growth and social media, you can now make out whether a movie is performing. Also, advertisers are becoming proactive and keen to experiment and innovate with films that may not have star value but are looking rich in content, story and concepts,” he remarks.