Why India doesn't make enough 3D films

Rajinikanth's '2.0' and director Vikram Bhatt's 2015 vigilante thriller 'Mr. X' are among few films in India that have actually been shot in 3D

3D viewing is increasing day by day in India. Photo: Reuters

New Delhi: In the run-up to the January release of its science fiction film *2.0*, starring Rajinikanth, Lyca Productions organized a "meet-and-greet" with exhibitors across Tamil Nadu earlier this week to make sure more screens become 3D enabled by the time the film arrives in theatres to maximize its box office prospects.

2.0, a sequel to Rajinikanth's 2010 hit *Enthiran* that has been made at a budget of Rs400 crore, has been directed by S. Shankar and also features Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar. Perhaps one reason the film is so particular about getting the right showcasing is that it has actually been shot in 3D. Most Indian films, however, convert to 3D from 2D during post-production to save costs which is one major reason, say industry experts, for 3D not really having caught on in the country.

"Even in the early phase of the 3D movie spurt, one of the difficulties in India was that people tried to ride the wave by taking a shortcut and converting films shot in 2D into 3D," said Rajesh Mishra, chief executive officer of Indian Operations, at cinema distribution network UFO Moviez.

Apart from rare projects like director Vikram Bhatt's 2015 vigilante thriller *Mr. X*, starring Emraan Hashmi, very few films in India have actually been shot in 3D.

"When you do that, the experience is limited to just creating a foreground and background with an overlayered image. A 3D film has to be shot in 3D but cost is a factor, shooting takes more time, the cameras required and the post-production work involved are different," Mishra said.

While action and spectacle-driven Hollywood films necessitate the 3D experience a lot more, typical Indian romances, comedies and family dramas hardly make for 3D films, Mishra said. Plus, production budgets could rise anywhere between 40-50% if the film is actually shot in 3D.

That is a risk few filmmakers are willing to take given the limited box office potential in India.

"Technically, I think we are capable of making quality 3D films, almost on par with Hollywood. But as far as exhibition is concerned, we have not grown so much," said Raju Mahalingam, creative head at Lyca Productions, the *2.0* producers.

At the moment, there are about 40,000 screens in China which they expect to rise to a figure of 50,000 by the end of the year, Mahalingam said. 3D-enabled screens account for nearly 50% of the count—about 25,000-30,000. Whereas, in India, out of the total 10,000 screens, 3D would be available in around 1,500-2,000.

"The cost involved in creating a 3D film is huge. If you don't have exhibition facilities, what is the point of making them? That is why we're making that effort for *2.0* but it's not just about this one film. Upcoming movies should also benefit," Mahalingam said. "Actually if we want to seriously fight piracy and increase the audience base coming to theatres, we'll have to give them an experience, which means not just the comfort of a theatre but also the best 3D technology."

To be sure, it's an equally risky proposition for exhibitors. It's often a challenge, particularly for single screens with their limited funds, said Preetham Daniel, senior vice-president, Asia, at movie screen manufacturing company Harkness Screens, to invest in products like 3D polarizers, an optional accessory within the projector that gives you the option to watch a movie in 3D format. But given the inroads that Hollywood has made into the country, it's only a matter of time before local movies catch up.

"3D viewing (in India) is only increasing day by day. Five or six years ago, for a film released in both 2D and 3D, collections would be divided equally between the two formats. Today, 90% of the people opt for 3D even when 2D is available," said Devang Sampat, director (strategic initiatives) at Cinépolis India. "3D has been gaining a lot

of momentum with Hollywood movies, it's only a matter of time before Bollywood or regional cinema comes up with content that also encourages the habit."