



Digitization has changed the script for Indian film industry. Here's how

Digitization is the use of digital technology to project motion pictures and also to distribute them. This means that India has moved from analogue content to internet distributable media.

Along with other sectors, the film industry also benefited from the digital revolution in India. The industry's love story with digital technology began somewhere in 2005-2006. But it came into full force only in 2008-2009. As of now, 100 percent screens in India have been digitized.

But what is digitisation?

Primarily, digitisation is the use of digital technology to project motion pictures and also to distribute them. This means that India has moved from an analogue content to media, that can be distributed online. The use of digital technology is not restricted to conversion from an analogue to digital prints, it is also used for marketing and merchandising.

But how is digitisation turning out to be a game changer for the film industry?

Talking to Moneycontrol, Pankaj Jaysinh, COO, UFO Moviez, listed few benefits of digitisation.

"One cost we earlier had was of maintaining negatives. If not stored properly they go bad. Now storage of content is digital which will remain in the same condition year on year. So, the cost has come down drastically."

Thanks to digitisation, there are multiple pan-India releases, there is the flexibility of programming, which makes it cost-effective, Jaysinh said.

The cost of showing a movie has also come down due to digitisation, Jaysinh added.

The cost of an analogue print is somewhere around Rs 45,000-50,000. On the other hand, digital prints cost around Rs 12,000.

"Moving the print from point A to point B is not required for a digital print and can be sent via satellite. While shifting from one point to another, the film can get pirated so even that gets eliminated due to digitisation. It is a huge cost saving, both directly and indirectly."

Adding to this, Siddharth Anand Kumar, VP, Films and TV, Saregama and Yoodlee Films said that digital distribution not only helps the viewers to watch the film simultaneously all across the country but also helps film producers to reach relevant audiences and increase the number of prints without any additional costs.

He cited a few examples. Akshay Kumar-starrer Singh is Kinng was released via digital distribution. The film had released simultaneously in around 400 odd digital theatres. In 2008, Ghajini, starring Aamir Khan, released with the maximum number of prints in India – 1,200 (both digital and analogue versions). In 2013, Dhoom 3 released with 4,500 prints, and almost all were digital. This upset the apple cart completely and the exhibition process of films wasn't the same, he said.

Privacy proof

But according to Jaysinh, the biggest saving from digitisation is cut down of piracy. "Cinema has opened up in the vaguest of the places and smallest of the towns. In such places, there were video parlours. Now there is no need for it because at the same price people can watch the movie legally. You cannot 100 percent eliminate piracy but you can dilute it."

According to a research paper titled The Digitisation of Bollywood: Adapting to disruptive innovation, incorporating watermarks which are invisible to the naked eye is one way to deal with the issue of piracy.

"UFO Moviez has digital cinema systems that provide watermarking in each cinema wherein the system creates a unique fingerprint when projecting the digital movie on the screen in a non-intrusive manner," said Rajesh Mishra Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Indian operations, UFO Moviez.

Mishra further said that using this technology security feature, it is possible to trace, from a pirated CD or DVD, the name and location of the theatre where the film was illegally videographed, along with other co-ordinates like time, date, thus, helping to crack down on piracy.

Another way to deal with the menace of piracy is a simultaneous release in a large number of theatres. This also leads to a larger reach of cinema.

Same day theatrical release of films in urban, rural and sometimes even overseas cinemas reduces the scope of piracy. Along with that, digitisation helps in multiple pan-India releases and there is the flexibility of programming which makes it cost-effective.

"Digitisation ensures that the film is released at the same time, on the same day all across India. Earlier the single screens in small towns would have a film release almost 2-4 weeks post the actual date of release. With the advent of digital prints, this gap was bridged. In single screens, digitisation ensures superior quality of the prints, but this, of course, needs the single screens to spruce up their exhibition facilities to support the new age prints," Kumar said.

Advantage single screen

Digitisation has made a huge difference to single screens. Jaysinh said that due to this change "multiple programming is happening in single screens".

In addition, due to the digitisation, single screens have come under one roof which helps them to increase their advertising revenues. Before digitisation, to advertise in individually owned theatres an advertiser would have to meet that many theatre owners. This changed after digitisation as companies like UFO Moviez and Qube centrally perform the selling, display and serving of advertisements to their respective networks.

Digitisation has also helped small films as they are making it big in the market because of this new wave.

"It (digitisation) saves costs in its (smaller films) pre-production and post-production stage. With digitisation, one can see and rectify glitches in the shoot on the go, and this is tantamount to saving costs in re-shooting - something that small films don't find it easy to bear."

Better marketing

The marketing push for films also got a boost with digitisation as trailer and music launch started happening on social media platforms. Films create a lot of buzz with their promos/teasers and music prior to their release. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube are essentially used for online marketing.

"With the advent of digital production of films, producers can target the relevant markets where they want to release the film. Given that the film is allowed the same day and date release all over, marketing communication and strategy is effectively channeled for its release," Kumar said.

Also, when it comes using the digital content on multiple platforms like internet or mobile, which are expected to emerge as major contributors to the film industry's overall future revenues, digital content is less complex.

New genres are being tried by the filmmakers thanks to digitisation. For example, animation was nearly non-existent in Bollywood before the advent of digitisation but that has changed. Animation as a sector is growing in the industry.

Digitisation has made a difference in all the three stages of film-making. "From the very way a film is conceptualized, to the whole process of shooting and finally what comes across as the finished product - digitisation has changed the whole filmmaking process," Kumar explained.

"Be it the pre-production stage, where the story is developed; the production stage, where one can actually look into the footage that is shot and correct it on the spot or the post-production stage where the entire film can be given a new look/tone/texture - digitisation has been influential at every stage," Kumar said.