



## **Christmas, New Year to boost film business, will set the mood of the industry for 2019**

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The end of the year, bringing in Christmas and New Year festivities, is a special time, particularly for the film industry. In fact, industry experts consider December as the 'golden month'. According to them, numbers touch new heights during this period for the cinema as well as the entertainment industry in India.

Experts are of the opinion that watching movies with family and friends have been one of the most preferred modes of entertainment in India as many cannot afford to travel abroad during this period. Christmas and New Year are said to set the mood of the entertainment sector in the country for 2019.

Talking to Moneycontrol, Siddharth Bhardwaj, CMO, UFO Moviez India, said, "The last 15 days of December will be decisive. The last ten days of the quarter leading up to the first week of 2019 – this is probably the most exciting period for cinema in any part of the country because in a span of two weeks you have more than 7-8 holidays."

It is during this time that new avenues open up for films of every language.

"Bollywood, as well as other big movies, get more traction in markets which were not accessible to them earlier. If you see the build-up of Zero, it was getting a lot of traction even in the southern parts of the country. A typical movie like Zero would not get traction beyond Hindi markets but such movies are seeing traction in southern markets and it is vice versa. Even movies from the south are getting traction in the Hindi markets. The whole cinema space is complementing each other. This overall helps drive footfalls in theatres more than the nominal amount," said Bhardwaj.

Industry sources estimate that revenue from domestic, overseas theatricals and in-cinema advertising in India is Rs 13,550 crore which is to shoot up by the end of the financial year 2019.

"On the advertising front, if you see a holiday period there's 25 percent offtake in terms of advertising. We should see 50-60 percent, even at times 100 percent, through this 15-day period. The inventory utilisation through these 5-6 weeks is disproportionately high vis-a-vis other weeks. If it is October 2, that week the advertising utilisation will go up 20-25 percent but through this period (during Christmas and New Year holidays) it goes up by 100-120 percent compared to average utilisation during normal weeks," added Bhardwaj.

Time and again, it has been witnessed that festival seasons in India have boosted the entertainment sector. When the enthusiasm for Race 3 amid the movie-goers was not the same like any other Salman Khan film, it was the Eid holiday that had helped gather big numbers. The same can be said for Aamir Khan's Thugs of Hindostan that recorded the highest opening day collection with Rs 50 crore, mostly due to Diwali holiday more than the hype for the film.

Single screens also benefit from the year-end period.

“I term them as uniplexes because it is one screen but multiple options in terms of content. And what happens in a multiplex is there are 2,000-2,500 screens across the country. They have a full week pre-programmed. However, uniplexes have dynamic programming. If they see a movie not doing well, then they reduce the number of shows and replace it with another movie, where they are able to monetise it better,” said Bhardwaj.

“Most of the screens are trying to maximise profits and they are agnostic to content. They want to sell movie tickets whether it is a regional movie or a Bollywood blockbuster – what matters to them is ticket sales. If you look at the week in which Thugs of Hindostan was released, footfalls dropped in a couple of days. Hence, the screens which had not programmed it in advance, had the option of dropping the show on a Monday and replacing it with other shows. Regional films that week had gained a lot of traction,” he added.

While multiplexes are growing, single screens still dominate over 70 percent of the box office revenue. From the 9,530-screen universe, 6,780 are single screens and 2,750 multiplex screens, according to a 2018 EY report.

Festival time means more holidays and that for the film industry is the time to release big-ticket films. Bollywood alone is not in the race, its regional counterparts too give a tough fight. For example, December 21 saw as many as four releases from the industry down south along with Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Zero.

However, could that mean it gets crowded, in terms of content, for the audience?

Bhardwaj thinks otherwise.

“People need choices and now there’s a system which can deliver choices to people. About ten years back, a screen was stuck with one movie for the full week (single screens). But now due to digitisation, even single screens are in the position to offer multiple movies through the day and through the week,” he said.

“If you see any cinema, it operates at 20-30 percent occupancy. When the occupancies are in that bracket, more the content the better it is. More content will only land up increasing the percentage occupancy of the show,” Bhardwaj added.