

Drive-in Theater: A new emerging mode of watching Cinema and Entertainment

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Abstract:

In India watching movie is not just a source of entertainment, but it is an occasion of family outing. Where middle and upper middle class families don't mind investing money in multiplexes, people who can't afford high priced ticket through the still single screen. Only due to popularity of cinema alone Bollywood produces more than 1000 films per year. But since March 2019 Covid-19 pandemic has badly affected filmmaking sector worldwide. But at the same time it had brought opportunities OTT platforms like Netflix, Zee5, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar etc. All big and known producers produced good films and serials on OTT platform. Hurt by the COVID lockdown in the past many months, combined with the fear of contracting the coronavirus in a confined space that is likely to keep film-goers away from theatres for the foreseeable future, multiplex players in the country are planning to experiment with the drive-in theater concept to revive their fortunes. Companies such as PVR, Inox, and Carnival Cinemas may open drive-in facilities by the end of this year or early next year.

Keyword: Entertainment, Cinema, OTT, Drive-in theater, Movies, Bollywood, COVID-19,

1. Introduction

In India, cinema is more than just entertainment; it is a way of life. These mesmerising portrayals make us proud, make us laugh out loud, and even make us cry at times. Inspiring, enraging, and emotionally appealing at times, these mesmerising portrayals make us proud, laugh out loud, and even break down in tears at times. We have so many memories associated with theatres and cinema halls because they played such an important role in our lives. But, in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the enticing lights of the box office dimmed in early March of last year. Summer blockbusters have been delayed, popcorn sputters have been silenced, and multiplex and single screen shutters have been pulled down until further notice in an effort to curb the spread of the virus that has taken millions of lives.

But those days are long gone, when you were limited to the same old theatre, which was dark and confined to four walls, because there is now so much more to it. So much more, such as the stars, cool breezes, and an undefined feeling of independence that comes with being outside in the open. In the world of film, unconventional methods such as open-air cinemas have paved the way for a new trend.

The old-school drive-in theatre, which has been romanticised in films and television shows over the years, is making a comeback in countries all over the world. It doesn't matter whether it's the United States, Germany, or even South Korea. Sunsets are giving way to the emergence of drive-in cinemas, which are attracting friends, families, and lovers for exclusive movie nights.

It is not completely alien to Indian soil, despite being a western term. People used to flock to drive-in theatres in cities like Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and Bengaluru to catch a glimpse of the movie magic. And those who did not have access to a vehicle were able to participate in the festivities. While now may seem to be the perfect time for a revival, the truth remains that this wonderful idea did not take off in India.

1.1 History of Drive-in theatre

Outdoor cinemas first appeared in Berlin, Germany, around 1916. Many "rooftop theatres" were converted to cinemas during the 1920s. The Loew's New York, which is situated in Times Square, is an example of this.

Viewers normally sit on blankets or camping chairs. Some Hollywood world premieres were shown in outdoor cinemas, with celebrities sometimes in attendance. The majority of the screenings are free, with some of them raising funds for charities. Outdoor cinemas in the guerrilla style have become more popular as projector prices have dropped. These are run by amateur organisations on a shoestring budget. Participants meet in parks, vacant parking lots, or other public areas after the activities are organised online.

During the summer, these types of cinemas are very common in Greece, with at least 90 operating in Athens as of 2015. The city had over 600 outdoor cinemas at its height in the 1960s. The Outdoor Cinema Food Fest in California, Oshkosh's Fly-In theatre Screen on the Green (Atlanta), and Sunset Cinema in Australia are all large and well-known outdoor cinemas. Outdoor films are increasingly being included in the frequent screenings of prestigious film festivals. The world premiere of *Shark Tale* on St. Mark's Square at the Venice Film Festival (2004) and the outdoor at the Dubai International Film Festival were two of the most significant outdoor film activities (2011).

In addition, there are more private outdoor cinemas, which are often part of a pool or backyard picnic. Skyscraper rooftops, screens floating on a lake with viewers on boats, screenings where visitors watch a movie in hot tubs, and drive-in cinemas on the top floor of a parking garage are all unusual places to present a movie outdoors. The drive-in theatre is a unique form of outdoor cinema. In countries like Finland and Canada, public film screenings have been projected onto snow surfaces in cold-weather climates.

1.2 Reasons for failure of drive-in theatres in India

The emotions and reactions I saw on people's faces during an Open Air Cinema or Everyman experience were not elicited by drive-in theatres. It wasn't on the top of your

priority list to go on a date or spend quality time with your family where you could all get together and enjoy yourself. What was the reason for this?

The ticket prices were extremely low (which is awesome because it improved accessibility), but the cinemas were still overflowing, and you would simply walk in, watch, and leave.

No exclusive trailers & limited food/drink range + accessibility The queues for food/drink, which were limited in selection, would be so long that you would simply avoid it due to the short interval time (Note, unlike London, there is no 30 min trailer viewing period before the film).

No Indie/Past Blockbusters/Classics were screened due to the limited selection. The movies that were shown were also only the most recent and only a few English films, and they were only shown for a short time.

2. Literature review

Open air Cinema (2012-06-01) Outdoor cinemas first appeared in Berlin, Germany, around 1916. Many "rooftop theatres" were converted to cinemas during the 1920s. The Loew's New York, which is situated in Times Square, is an example of this. During the summer, these types of cinemas are very common in Greece, with at least 90 operating in Athens as of 2015. The city had over 600 outdoor cinemas at its height in the 1960s. Festivals of film Open air cinema (2012-03-26) Outdoor films are increasingly being included in the frequent screenings of prestigious film festivals. The world premiere of Shark Tale on St. Mark's Square during the Venice Film Festival was one of the most significant outdoor film activities (2004).

Edmonton AM (Feb 16, 2016). In cold-weather climates, public film screenings have been projected onto surfaces of snow, in such countries as Finland and Canada.

[Broadwayworld](#) tells about 5 unique theatres across India where you can watch a movie under the starlit sky. 1. **SCC Republic - Pune** The SSC Republic Pune is one of the many great places to catch a movie with a twist. 2. **SCC Movie Under The Stars** IBIS Aerocity, New Delhi To the pleasure of movie buffs across D-town, the SCC brings to viewers a blockbuster screening event. 3. **SC Backyard Gurgaon** SSCs own little kingdom, the backyard Gurgaon, is where the real deal of open-air cinema in Delhi NCR kickstarted. 4. **SSC Peepal Tree New Delhi** The Peepal Tree is known to be a melting pot of unique cinema experiences in Delhi. An idyllic setting, comfortable seating, pretty lights and natural ambience, this movie experience is one of a kind for those who are done watching the movies in conventional theatres all along. 5. **Movie Under The Stars** Held at a venue that's all things cultural and ecstatically cinematic, the Movie Under The Stars experience at Courtyard Bangalore is surely a bucket list entry.

Multiplex operators in the country are planning to experiment with the drive-in concept to revive their fortunes, according to Mint. Hurt by the COVID lockdown in the past year, coupled with the fear of contracting the coronavirus in a confined space, which is likely to hold film-goers away from theatres for the near future, multiplex operators in the country are planning to experiment with the drive-in concept to revive their fortunes.

According to the KPMG Report (2020), the Indian film industry grew by 9.3% in 2015, reaching INR138 billion. It is projected to rise at a CAGR of 10.5 percent until 2020, when it will be worth INR227 billion. The industry must consider new models for constructing exhibition infrastructure, and the government must reconsider outdated legislation to make cinema more open to the general public. The industry has the ability to generate INR40 to 50 billion in revenue.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The research approach used in this study was qualitative. This approach was chosen because there was little literature available for this study and the study needed a more in-

depth understanding of gratification variables by delving deeper into the customer mind for film watching insights. The interpretive model was taken into account.

Since the criteria of the analysis were to use laddering technique and understand the future of drive-in theatres in India, the study used an in-depth interview process. Via an in-depth interview, this approach is generally helpful in obtaining explanations and triggers. A discussion guide with icebreakers, common, and relevant questions was prepared as a qualitative study tool. The discussion guide's points assisted the interviewer in directing the study in a specific direction. The interview transcripts were used to conduct the content review. The research questions and goals were justified by the observations and study.

3.1 Research Questions

1. What is your opinion about drive in theaters?
2. What are the plus factors of drive in theaters?
3. What are the negative factors of drive in theaters?
4. Is your company's view about drive in theaters?
5. Are you going to get into this business?
6. What challenges you foresee in this business?

4. Findings and Analysis

In a telephonic interview, Mr Gautam Dutta, the CEO of PVR Cinemas said, "To keep the revenue stream going, cinema halls are pursuing other possibilities and are busy creating plans for the future," Open-air theatres and drive-in cinemas are two concepts that have piqued the interest of many, his company is preparing to open a drive-in theatre in Mumbai.

“Since the closure, our sales have been nil, but our spirits have been up, and we have been concentrating on the revised SOPs for post COVID re-opening and how to assure patron trust in a healthy movie viewing experience,” he added. When the lockdown was implemented, the Cinema Exhibition Industry was the first to close down in March of last year (2020).”

“Following State Government orders for cinema closures, we agreed to close our theatres for the safety of our patrons. We were open for two months this year (2021) before being placed on lockout again, and we still don't know when our cinemas will reopen. We fully support the government's decision and are optimistic that cinemas will reopen soon,” says Dutta.

“At the same time, this phase has allowed us to strategize about a variety of other revenue opportunities, both in the film industry and in the food and beverage industry. In addition to our core business of movie exhibition, we are confident in launching our initiatives soon,” says Dutta. “Open-air theatre/drive-in cinema is an exciting venture. We're really excited, and we're currently working on constructing a drive-in theatre. It is a growing trend in Western countries, though drive-in cinemas can be found in Ahmedabad, Chennai, and Gurugram in India,” says Dutta.

“The open-air theatre idea has been around in India for a long time. There were open air theatres in Chennai and Vishakhapatnam in South India, Ahmedabad in Gujarat, and Gurugram in the Delhi NCR district, but these theatres lost their allure as soon as multiplexes arrived in India,” he adds. “The pandemic has driven cinema owners to seek new possibilities while keeping the social distancing tradition in mind,” Mr. Dutta said, “and as a result, they are once again preparing to explore drive-in cinemas and open-air theatres.”

“There is a hidden chance to seize. PVR has always believed in providing a special experience to its customers, and we will continue to do so in the future. We will assess the success of our drive-in theatre once it opens, and then decide whether or not to

expand the format, just as we have done with our premium format portfolio. At the moment, we're concentrating on our upcoming Mumbai property, Makers at Bandra Kurla Complex," says Dutta.

"Keeping in mind the tradition of social distancing, INOX Cinemas intend to encourage private screening as a customer product, wherein guests will continue to enjoy pampering and hospitality," said Mr. Alok Tandon, CEO, INOX Leisure Ltd, while describing other initiatives undertaken by the company.

"In the future, our promotional collaborations with film studios will be far more engaging and welcoming. Just before the break, we started ramping up our edutainment programmes, where we were providing a unique experience of presenting National Geographic material to schoolchildren on the giant screen, and we'd keep that focus. Our patrons will continue to be delighted by our alternative content developments. More concert screenings, live sporting event screenings, live events, and other engaging activities will be added. We've formed unique partnerships and alliances with brands like NBA and PBL, allowing us to provide our patrons with unique brand experiences while also strengthening our relationship," Tandon says. However, Tandon makes it clear that his company will not be entering the drive-in theatre market.

"We haven't even researched the business model of open-air theatres," Devang Sampat (Director, Strategic Initiatives, Cinopolis) said. Neither do I believe we have any plans to do so. It will be secured, and we may have land areas for drive-in cinemas here and there, but capital to set them up will be difficult to come by."

The pandemic has increased hygiene standards, and in a city with limited room and producers looking for big profits over more losses, this one seems unlikely. Shibhashish Sarkar, CEO of Reliance Entertainment, explains, "I don't think we even have the areas to build open-air theatres." I'm not sure how anyone will even consider creating such channels to entice people back. Coronavirus could have vanished by the time you spend on such theatres and get them ready.

In terms of profit margins in an already dwindling industry, Kunal Mohol, co-owner of Mumbai's Super, Central, and Sahakar Cinemas, presented hard figures that demonstrated why the concept had previously "flopped." "The cost of land ownership in Mumbai's Drive-In was exorbitantly high, and as a result, despite its novelty, it flopped," he said. Isn't that enough to indicate whether or not we should invest in open-air cinemas? Plus, how can watching the movie in a car keep you away from getting the Coronavirus? Who knows who is with whom, and sitting in a small enclosure for 120-150 minutes close to that individual increases the risk."

Although the convenience of a car may appeal to some, others have had traumatic experiences in the past that are difficult to forget. Manoj Desai, the Executive Director of Mumbai's Gaiety-Galaxy & Maratha Mandir, who is also a sceptic of drive-in theatres, expressed concerns about social evils that could hitch a ride and fully hijack the novel concept. "Open-air cinemas would not succeed in India because they are simply not a commercially viable proposition. If you remember, in Bandra, Mumbai, there was a cinema called Drive-In. What went wrong with that? What happened to it? And did you know that there were a lot of sexual crimes registered in that area when that cinema was open?" Desai asked.

4. The Future

Both drive-in theatres and open-air theatres provide a unique experience. With the passage of time, everyone wishes to engage in new and "safe" experiences. "We believe the segment has a lot of potential. We have always maintained that PVR is in the business of out of home entertainment, not movie display, and we believe that these two ideas are right up our alley in terms of providing unrivalled and enjoyable experiences to our patrons," Dutta concludes.

Drive-in cinemas are set to open in India, according to real estate consultancy firms and film producers. "Knight Frank is in talks with a UK-based chain and Indian companies to

open drive-in cinemas in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Punjab,” said Abhishek Sharma, Director of Retail at Knight Frank. He mentioned that the company has shortlisted 20 assets, each requiring a 3 to 5 crore INR investment.

5. Limitations of Research

There were four major limitations to this study: first, there was a significant lack of existing literature on drive-in theatres, their use, and experiences throughout the literature. Second, due to the pandemic situation and travel restrictions, the researcher was forced to use convenience sampling, which resulted in respondents being fairly demographically homogeneous and coming from only one city - Mumbai. Finally, since drive-in theatres are still a relatively new phenomenon in India, the researcher was unable to cast a wider net in terms of the number of respondents especially the current drive-in theater owners.

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