

Research Article

Cinema Fans and Fandom Communities vis-a-vis Social Media Platforms

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A B S T R A C T

Social media is considerably a promising platform these days to communicate with people around the world. Cinema over past two decades has also seen drastic changes in terms of content, distribution, exhibition and presentation. Viewers are not dependent on the trailers and teasers being telecasted on television. The scope of getting information and entertainment has widened with digitalization. The cinema viewer shows very peculiar characteristics in relation to view and experience cinema from time to time. At one point the spectator needs to read and analyses the movie review and then decide accordingly whether to watch a film or not. But on the other hand, frequent posts and tweets on social networking sites when watched by the cinema viewer can change the mind and choice for viewing the movie. Cinema lovers and fans go beyond expectations while appreciating their star. They do various activities to show their love and respect for the star. Sometimes these activities reach to the masses and in turn help in acquiring the desirable social status for the star. The present research has explored the activities of various fans and clubs of superstar Rajinikanth. Two Facebook pages are taken for the study for the period of six months. The methodology of the study is content analysis where parameters for the analysis of the pages have considered. The researcher also tries to explore the activities of the cinema fans and their behavior while showing love for their star.

Keywords: Indian Cinema and Audience, Fandom, Cinema Fans, Fan Activities, Cinema Fan Clubs, Rajinikanth Fan Clubs

Introduction

If we look into the history of digitalization, then India got its digital status in the year 2015 declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. To understand the concept of digitization, one must know the difference between digitization and digitalization.

The two conceptual terms, 'digitization' and 'digitalization' are associated with each other and are often use interchangeable from time to time. The former refers to the action or process of digitizing which means the conversion of analogue data available in the form of images, videos and text into digital form. On the other hand, digitalization refers to the adoption or increase in use of

digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, country, for development and enhanced communication within the world (Narula and Rna, 2017, pp. 293). Today, world is digitalized by means of exchanging information, talking with peer group, seeking specialized information and maintaining connection with every person existing within the world. This is applicable to all the areas and fields existing in the society.

Social media is playing an important role in keeping humans update every second. The smart phone device has made the world within the size of a man's palm. Information cloud updates in every sixty seconds. The news which the person sees 5 minutes before elopes somewhere at the time of next login. This is the world of artificial intelligence where a human brain thinks and the very next second that word or the scene appears at his screen. You talk about something and social media display for you saving your time from shuffling internet sites from one to other.

18th century had experienced dawn for the moving pictures which made the whole world spurred to welcome the new age of art and entertainment. The beginning of Indian film industry can be dated back to 1896 when the legendary Lumiere Brothers of France exhibited six silent short films at the Watson Hotel in Bombay considered to be the birth of cinematography in the nation. Later, Hiralal Sen directed *Flower of Persia* in 1898, the pioneer short films in India that set the trend for rest of the filmmakers for next two decades (Hafeez, 2016, pp. 62).

After year 2000, cinema has faced new evolutions as far as technology and content is concerned. Directors and filmmakers had started experimenting with the content and themes of the cinema. Like *K3G* by Karan Johar depicting the larger than life canvas in the motion pictures was one of the milestones in the history of Indian Cinema. Movies like *Lagaan*, *Rang De Basanti*, *Swades*, *Chak De* showcasing patriotism in a very different way. Movies like *Robot*, *Koi Mil Gaya*, *Dhoom* had all technical aspects that allure the audience with newness in the cinema. This all creates a buzz in the minds of the audiences who are watching cinema with hopes and expectation.

The enjoyment of a film can also be affected by the pre and post-viewing experiences of the person who watches it and where and how they watch it. For example if a viewer watched all the trailers, promotional clips, interviews with the stars etc. before a film is released, that person may have extremely high expectations of the film. This might mean the film fails to meet these expectations. Comedies often have many of the best jokes in the trailers of the films and these jokes will not be as funny when they are in the final film if you have seen the trailer a few times. Similarly many trailers give a great deal of the story away and show many of the best stunts. The recent *Dilwale* starring Shahrukh Khan

and Kajol trailer seemed to have clips from all the major set-pieces and therefore there was no sense of surprise when watching the film.

Mentioned in the Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies, Cinema fans are the group of individuals who gathered at a same place to watch and discuss cinema in a more appreciable manner. They may or may not belong to the same community or same fan club but their interest to applaud cinema caters the same purpose.

According to Cambridge Dictionary Fandom means the state of being a fan of someone or something, especially a very enthusiastic one. The term mainly deals to cinema fandom. Film fandom can involve participating in online discussion and posting to sites such as the Internet Movie Database like (imdb.com), joining film clubs or groups, or producing one's own fan magazine or "fanzine." Being part of organized fandom—whether for a certain film or star—is, first and foremost, linked to values of participation and production.

Henry Jenkins stresses that fandom's participatory culture "is always shaped through input from other fans and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a larger social and cultural community" (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 76). Those participating in socially organized fandom often watch their favoured films in fan groups, wanting to share the experience with others who they know similarly appreciate them. And fans also tend to wait together in long lines in order to see the first showings of blockbuster releases, again knowing that the audience will be full of fans like themselves with whom they will share an emotional experience and pleasure.

These highly communal experiences, responses and interpretations of fandom also translate into activities beyond simply viewing a highly anticipated and appreciated film. Film fans approach watching a film as just one stage within a wider process of consumption and production, with secondary texts such as promotional materials and reviews leading up to the moment of viewing, fanzine reviews and commentaries following the initial filmic encounter and repeated viewings and the collecting of DVDs with their special features. Film fandom is never about just "going to see a movie."

Scholars have analysed fan communities as sites of interpretation and evaluation, production and social and economic exchange. Subsequent sections consider fandom's potential contributions to education and politics, both topics that have surfaced in more recent research within fan studies. It also adopts a more global perspective, dealing especially with work that examines the Otaku Culture of Japan, highlighting its similarities to and differences from Western fan practices.

Unlike the individual fan, whose peer group or colleagues may coincidentally include like-minded film lovers, organized fandom involves fans specifically seeking out those who share their tastes, thereby becoming involved in a range of social, cultural and media activities that take this shared fandom as their starting point.

Social Platforms and Fan Clubs

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are playing an important role in dissemination of information and making a strong dialogue among communities. Headquartered in Menlo Park, California, Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, all of whom were students at Harvard University. Facebook became the largest social network in the world. In the initial years, it was used by friends and groups to interact with each other more of a personal communication. But with more information exchange, freedom of expression and a user friendly platform has given an advantage to become a commercial platform as well. Sharing of videos, election campaigns, hash tags and many more make it more like a small world to every user.

Twitter, online micro blogging service for distributing short messages among groups of recipients. Twitter incorporates aspects of social networking Web sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, with instant messaging technologies to create networks of users who can communicate throughout the day with brief messages, or "tweets." In addition, users can elect to track specific topics, creating a dialogue of sorts and pushing the number of followers in a given Twitter feed into the millions. Tweets may be on any subject, ranging from jokes to news to dinner plans, but they cannot exceed 140 characters. It was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams and launched in July same year.

Interestingly Instagram launched on 6th October 2010 in San Francisco by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Systrom was working in marketing and started doing engineering at night to help him learn how to code. He created a prototype app of an idea he originally called Burbn, which allowed people to check-in where they are on their mobile web app.

Not only these platforms, Facebook owned WhatsApp also created a lot of interest among the public by adding various features of sharing photos and videos in a single click.

For instance, Akshay Kumar has 40 fan clubs across the country and these clubs are organizing screenings, blood donation camps from time to time. Similarly, Rajinikanth, Cheeranji, Nagarjunasuperstars of South Indian Cinema are blessed to have numerous fans who are dedicated to appreciate and highlight their work in a very dedicated manner. Fans of Rajinikanth have always organized huge

public gathering on the first day of his movie release. Even in the year 2005, Sivaji-The Boss when released arranged early morning shows for audiences to get the huge response for the star.

The present study is based on the use of social media by cinema fans and clubs to appreciate their favourite stars. Many online clubs and communities are actively engaged in various social work and reforms in the name of their star. Two Facebook pages have taken into consideration for the present study. The study was conducted for four months from April 2019 to July 2019.

Rajnifans.com is a dedicated Facebook page of Super Star Rajinikanth's fans. It is one of the largest E-Fans associations for South Indian superstar who has made an impact in Tamil Nadu politics as well. The members are doing non-profitable social works for the upliftment of the society. They have themselves in numerous social activities and contributed generously. In an event organized by the fan club, named as National Poet Bharathithe charity money was used to build schools and for education of children. The page was created in the year 2010.

Rajinikanth Fans Club is another active Facebook page created in the year 2017. This fan page is also doing lot of social work and gatherings to pay honour to their superstar.

Objectives

- To study social media as an active medium for cinema fans to show love and respect to star
- To analyze the frequency of posts and messages being posted by the fan club facebookpage of Superstar Rajinikanth.

Review of Literature

Literature review is designed to give a base of knowledge and understanding of the available sources which the researcher seeks to explore for the research purpose. It gives an access to the available literature in the form of books, journal articles, newspapers reports, website content related to the of study so that researcher reads and understand the base of his present study.

S.V Srinivas (2000) in his essay Devotion and Fan Activity explained the fan associations of superstar Cheerajivi in Andhra Pradesh. The year 1983 gave a special reference in the essay when 'Khaidi' was released. The movie became the turning point in the actor's life and it was observed that his fan following increased drastically. Here the writer opined about the free publicity given to the stars and related projects like politics, NGOs, by his fans. Due to the imposition of the slab system of tax on the exhibitions of films, that year distributors of the movies highly dependent on other elements of the movies like music, comedy, action and star's popularity. That time these categories help to

attract the repeated audiences who watch movies more than one time because of their association as a fan with the star.

One mesmerized study by Shalini Kakar highlights the fact that devotees are worshipping their favourite stars as Gods and also temples and worship places have been built by admirers. For instance, a case of Tatanagar, where a bhakt (devotee) has built Maduri Dixit Temple which is owned by its priest itself named as Pappu Sardar. The place is actual a chaat corner of Pappu Sardar and the place is also utilized to conduct various cinematic activities by an admirer of Madhuri Dixit. Large numbers of posters are pasted on the walls alongside the images of Maa Durga and Guru Nanak Dev Ji. (Kakar, 2010, pp. 391-392).

Philips (2011) in his study explained the fan culture and associations with regard to Kevin Smith Fan base. The study reveals that fan community becomes a family where the members planned their meet-ups and becomes more associated with each other. Their activities and discussions both online and offline started with Kevin Smith discussion which eventually becomes secondary and they behave more like a virtual group which is connected with the world as a family.

Donna Kaudel (2016) in her blog Status and Cultural Capital in Fandom opines that fandom of each and every media its television, cinema or social media has its own ways of doing things and own issues to tackle with. She also explained the highbrow and lowbrow characteristics of fandom that prevailed in early 1900s. But this scenario has changed a lot over the period of time and today, fans are no longer seen as mindless consumers of Media but are in many ways the poster children for active engaged and highly sophisticated media users.

success of the movie, cutting cakes and distribution of food to the poor people are major activities that are seen being conducting by fans. Idols and statutes are being prepared by professionals and clay artists in Magadi. This craziness of fans is very prominent on southern parts of India.

Result and Analysis

The table clearly depicts that both fan groups have ten thousand above followers who are getting news feed and information regarding the superstar. Also sharing of the news feed to other groups and individual's Facebook wall is done by the followers. Not only the founders of the fan clubs but other associated members and followers also hit like, share emoticons to express their gratitude towards the star.

The study highlights the activities and work done by the cinema fan clubs. Fan clubs are using social platforms to highlight the works of their superstar. Also they are showing their respect and love to their superstar by taking initiatives for the welfare of the society.

The results show that Rajni fans club focus more on the movie release dates, clippings and videos of superstar Rajnikanth and posters of upcoming movies. They are more in to the admiration of superstar as per his roles in various movies. On the contrary Rajnifans.com focuses more on fan meetings and social gatherings.

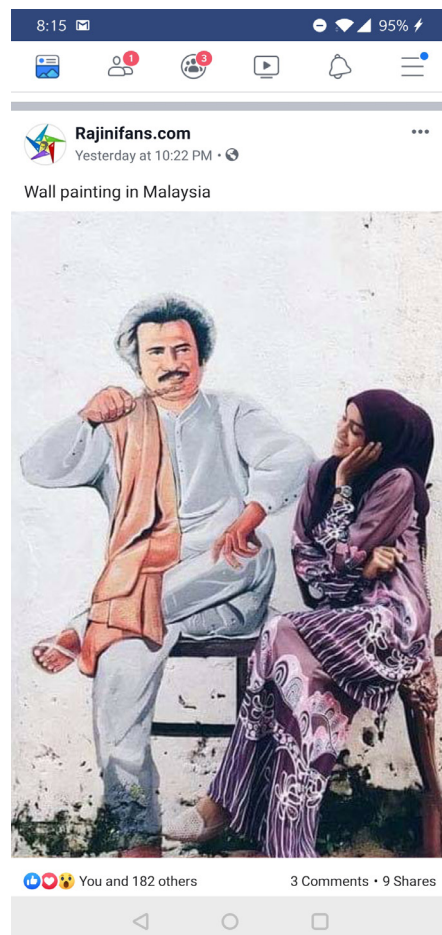
They also arrange meetings and gatherings with their star. Ranjikanth fan groups are actively involved in doing the same work. Societal works like tree plantation, orphanage visit, food distribution all done from time to time to support the goodwill and fame of their star. The social media is playing a big role to lessen the burden of showcasing the good deeds done by people who are doing

Table I

Parameters	Months	No. of likes per post	No. of stories per day	No. of shares per story	No. of comments per story	Reviews Per page	Emoticons per post	Followers per page
Rajinifans.com	4 April 2019-July 2019	75 average	6	15	9 average	15	2	249,420
Rajinikanth Fans Club	4 April 2019-July 2019	60 average	5	12	20	10	2	25,167

Murlidhara Khajane (2016) in his article *Height of Fandom* has explained the excitement of fans on the eve of the release of the movie 'Kabali'. The fans were so much overjoyed that they had made arrangement for the grand welcome of their Superstar 'Rajinikanth' on the release of 'Kabali'. Special show was organized at 5am at Natraj theatre; conducting pujas at Thiruvannamalai for the

good work for the society. Fans under the name of their superstar are doing social work for good cause. Feeding the poor, plantation, climate change discussions, blood donation, books donation and above charity for educational institutions. Cleanliness activities, awareness camps about sanitation and maintaining cleanliness also taken up the fan clubs these days.



Conclusion

With years Fandom has become a trend in cinema where fan meets, gatherings, question answer round and screenings are done by the members of fandom communities. Not only this with feeling of societal betterment they have indulged themselves in various social work engagements. Individuals treating their superstars with gifts and letters are also the part of fandom. Birthday celebration, release of the movie, hit numbers, completion of 100 days at the movie theatre all reasons are enough for any fan club or fandom community to have a gala event for their superstar. The online platforms not only created an environment for political and economic discussions and agendas but also in the field of art and aesthetics. Cinema fans, fandom communities and various fan clubs are active and serving the society for the betterment. These fan clubs are doing services in honour of their stars, favorite cinema and genre to maintain the essence of cinema within the generations. Their style of serving the audiences, society is different from various other online communities.

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