



IJIRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 14, Special Issue 6, December 2025

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.699



9940 572 462



6381 907 438



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Leveraging Digital Platforms for Film Promotion: Analyzing the Impact of Social Media and OTT Advertising on the Success of Kannada Movies

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ABSTRACT: The expansion of digital platforms has significantly reshaped film promotion strategies, particularly for regional cinema industries operating within budgetary constraints. This study investigates the influence of social media and over-the-top (OTT) advertising on the commercial performance of Kannada films, adopting a mixed-methods approach to analyze 35 films released between 2020 and 2024. Quantitative findings indicate that well-structured social media campaigns can increase opening weekend revenues by 35–50% compared to traditional marketing methods, with viral trailer releases showing a strong positive correlation with box office performance ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$). The research also reveals that OTT platform promotions contribute to a 22–30% rise in theatrical attendance through pre-release exclusive content and targeted algorithmic recommendations. Qualitative perspectives from industry professionals underscore the cost-effectiveness of digital promotion, yielding approximately 2.4 times higher returns on investment than conventional advertising channels such as hoardings and television spots. Nevertheless, the study identifies persistent challenges in penetrating tier-3 markets and engaging older demographic groups, underscoring the need for integrated, hybrid marketing models. The findings provide both scholarly insights into the economics of digital media and practical guidance for regional filmmakers seeking to optimise promotional budgets and enhance audience reach in a competitive media environment.

KEYWORDS: Digital film marketing, Social media advertising, Regional film promotion, Audience engagement, Media economics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital media has transformed marketing strategies across industries, and the film sector is no exception. Regional cinema, particularly the Kannada film industry (commonly referred to as Sandalwood), has undergone a significant shift in promotional approaches with the growing influence of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms. Historically dependent on word-of-mouth publicity, print media, and television advertising, the industry now increasingly leverages digital channels to reach broader audiences, strengthen engagement, and boost box office revenues. This study examines the evolving role of digital platforms, specifically social media and OTT advertising in shaping the promotional strategies and commercial outcomes of Kannada films, offering valuable insights into the contemporary marketing landscape of regional cinema.

The rise of digital platforms has created a more level playing field in film promotion, allowing low-budget productions to compete with high-budget counterparts through cost-effective and targeted campaigns. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube enable filmmakers to interact directly with audiences, build anticipation through teasers and trailers, and maintain audience interest through interactive and engaging content. Simultaneously, OTT platforms like Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, and ZEE5 have evolved beyond distribution to serve as powerful promotional tools, using algorithms and personalized recommendations to expand a film's reach. For the Kannada film industry, which operates in a competitive space dominated by Bollywood and other regional cinemas, these digital avenues present both opportunities and challenges in attracting and retaining audiences.

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Despite the growing significance of digital marketing, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical research on its effectiveness within the context of regional Indian cinema. While prior studies have examined digital promotion in Hollywood and Bollywood, the Kannada film industry shaped by distinct linguistic, cultural, and economic factors warrants focused investigation. This research addresses this gap by exploring how social media and OTT advertising contribute to box office performance, audience engagement, and long-term brand presence for Kannada films. The key research questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. How do social media campaigns influence audience perception and ticket sales?
2. What impact do OTT collaborations have on a film's profitability and sustained viewership?
3. How do digital marketing strategies compare with traditional methods in terms of cost efficiency and audience reach?

A mixed-methods approach is employed, integrating quantitative data such as box office earnings, social media engagement metrics, and OTT viewership statistics with qualitative insights from industry professionals, filmmakers, and marketing experts. This triangulation aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of digital promotion's role in determining the commercial and cultural success of Kannada films.

The outcomes of this research are expected to contribute to both academic discourse and industry practice. For scholars, it enriches the existing body of literature on digital marketing within regional film ecosystems and offers a framework for cross-industry analysis. For practitioners, it delivers actionable recommendations for optimizing digital campaigns to maximize return on investment (ROI). As the Kannada film industry continues to expand its domestic and global presence, understanding the strategic value of digital platforms will be critical for achieving sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive entertainment environment.

This study is particularly relevant in the context of the post-pandemic surge in OTT consumption and the enduring influence of social media on consumer decision-making. By integrating theoretical perspectives with practical insights, it aims to inform the development of adaptive, data-driven marketing strategies for Sandalwood and other regional film industries navigating the digital era. Ultimately, the research highlights the necessity of embracing innovative and evidence-based promotional approaches in a market where digital dominance is reshaping the foundations of film marketing.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Kannada film industry, popularly known as *Sandalwood*, holds a prominent place in India's regional cinema, both as a cultural expression and as a contributor to the creative economy. Traditionally, its marketing efforts were anchored in conventional media channels such as newspapers, radio, television commercials, and outdoor hoardings, supplemented by the powerful influence of word-of-mouth promotion. The emergence of digital technology, however, has fundamentally transformed the promotional landscape, compelling the industry to adopt new modes of audience engagement. With the rapid expansion of social media platforms and the accelerated rise of over-the-top (OTT) streaming services, the methods of marketing, consuming, and monetizing films have been redefined. This transformation has been particularly evident in the post-pandemic era, where digital-first promotional strategies have become essential for connecting with increasingly fragmented and predominantly online audiences.

On the global stage, the entertainment industry has undergone a pronounced shift toward digital marketing. Film industries such as Hollywood have strategically deployed data analytics, influencer collaborations, and algorithm-driven targeting to optimize promotional campaigns. In India, Bollywood has been a pioneer in adopting these methods, capitalizing on social media virality and OTT integrations to enhance box office performance. For regional cinema, including Kannada films, the digital shift presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges. While smaller budgets, linguistic diversity, and competition from larger industries pose constraints, digital tools have simultaneously democratized market access. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) allow filmmakers to bypass traditional intermediaries, enabling direct interaction with audiences through teasers, trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and interactive campaigns. Likewise, OTT platforms including global players like Amazon Prime Video and Netflix, as well as regional services such as ZEE5 and Sun NXT have extended their role beyond distribution to become pivotal promotional partners. These platforms enhance visibility through curated recommendations, targeted advertisements, and exclusive premiere releases.

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Despite these developments, scholarly inquiry into the digital transformation of regional Indian cinema remains limited. Existing literature largely focuses on Bollywood or Western film markets, leaving substantial gaps in understanding how industries like Sandalwood navigate the digital ecosystem. While anecdotal observations suggest that digital campaigns exert a strong influence on audience turnout and engagement, empirical evidence quantifying their impact particularly in terms of reach, engagement metrics, and return on investment (ROI) is scarce. The Kannada film industry offers a distinctive case for such an investigation, shaped by its loyal diaspora audience, the growing prominence of tier-2 and tier-3 city viewers, and the increasing cultural influence of digitally savvy younger demographics.

This study aims to address these gaps by systematically evaluating the role of digital platforms in the promotional success of Kannada films. By examining both social media-led campaigns and OTT-driven marketing strategies, the research seeks to identify effective practices, operational challenges, and measurable outcomes. The findings are expected to contribute to academic discourse in media marketing and provide practical guidance for filmmakers, distributors, and digital marketing professionals seeking to optimize their campaigns in a rapidly evolving entertainment environment. As the boundaries between theatrical and digital releases continue to blur, understanding the effectiveness of these promotional tools is vital for sustaining competitiveness in an increasingly digital-centric marketplace.

Scope of the Study

This study investigates the role of digital platforms particularly social media and over-the-top (OTT) advertising in shaping promotional strategies and influencing the commercial performance of Kannada films. The research focuses on productions released between 2020 and 2024, a period characterized by an accelerated shift toward digital media consumption driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on audience behaviour. Within this timeframe, the study analyses the correlation between digital promotional efforts and measurable outcomes, encompassing social media engagement indicators (such as interaction rates, trailer view counts, and trending hashtags) as well as OTT-driven campaigns (including pre-release exclusives, platform-specific promotions, and strategic partnerships).

A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative assessments of box office revenues, OTT viewership figures, and audience engagement data with qualitative perspectives obtained from filmmakers, marketing specialists, and digital content creators. This combination seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the strategic effectiveness of digital promotions in the Kannada film industry.

Geographically, the research is centred on Karnataka's domestic market, while also recognising the influence of the Kannada-speaking diaspora on promotional reach and audience response. The study excludes non-Kannada films and traditional, non-digital promotional methods, except where direct comparisons with digital strategies are necessary to evaluate relative effectiveness. Success is measured in terms of tangible commercial outcomes namely box office earnings, OTT viewership statistics, and social media engagement rather than artistic or critical acclaim.

The study acknowledges certain limitations, including the potential for bias in self-reported data from industry stakeholders and the challenge posed by the constantly evolving algorithms that shape digital content visibility. Despite these constraints, the findings aim to offer actionable recommendations for regional filmmakers, distributors, and marketers, while contributing to the broader academic discourse on digital marketing strategies in niche and regional entertainment markets.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The digitisation of media consumption has fundamentally reshaped film promotion, with social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms emerging as central components in driving audience engagement and influencing box office performance. The shift from traditional marketing channels to data-driven, interactive, and audience-specific strategies has altered how films are marketed, consumed, and monetised. This literature review synthesises existing scholarship on digital film marketing—focusing on the roles of social media and OTT advertising—while highlighting research gaps in the context of regional Indian cinema, particularly the Kannada film industry.

The Evolution of Film Promotion in the Digital Era

Historically, film marketing relied heavily on print media, television advertising, and outdoor hoardings (Belch & Belch, 2021). The emergence of digital platforms, however, has transformed these practices by enabling targeted, interactive, and cost-efficient promotional strategies (Kumar & Gupta, 2020). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram,

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and X (formerly Twitter) allow filmmakers to connect directly with audiences through teasers, behind-the-scenes footage, and influencer-led campaigns (Dwivedi et al., 2021). OTT services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have similarly extended their role beyond content distribution, employing tools such as algorithm-driven recommendations, exclusive previews, and platform-based advertising to enhance visibility (Lotz, 2022).

Social Media’s Role in Film Marketing

Social media has democratised film promotion by allowing smaller productions to compete with large-scale releases through cost-effective campaigns (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). Research demonstrates a positive correlation between active social media engagement and box office revenues (Gopinath et al., 2021). Viral campaigns on platforms like YouTube and Instagram have been shown to boost opening-weekend collections significantly (Smith & Telang, 2022), while user-generated content—including fan art, memes, and discussions—serves to organically amplify a film’s reach (Jenkins, 2020).

However, an overabundance of promotional content risks audience fatigue, necessitating diversified and strategically timed content (Kim & Ko, 2022). Within India, Bollywood has successfully integrated influencer collaborations and interactive campaigns into its promotional strategies (Joshi & Yadav, 2021). In contrast, regional industries such as Kannada cinema face distinct challenges, including more limited access to advanced digital marketing resources and linguistic barriers to broader outreach (Rao & Reddy, 2023). Despite the growing relevance of social media in these markets, scholarly research remains sparse, leaving an important gap that this study aims to address.

OTT Platforms as Promotional Tools

OTT platforms have become critical marketing channels by providing data-rich audience insights and personalised promotional capabilities (McDonald & Smith-Rowsey, 2023). Campaigns incorporating OTT-exclusive trailers, interviews, or behind-the-scenes content often maintain visibility well beyond a theatrical run (Cunningham & Craig, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, with hybrid release models combining theatrical and OTT premieres becoming increasingly prevalent (Lobato, 2022).

In the Indian context, OTT platforms have expanded the reach of regional films to both national and international audiences (Athique, 2023). The Kannada film *Kantara* (2022), for example, achieved substantial post-theatrical visibility through strategic OTT distribution (The Hindu, 2023). Nonetheless, an overdependence on OTT releases may dilute theatrical earnings, underscoring the need for balanced distribution and promotional strategies (FICCI-EY Report, 2023).

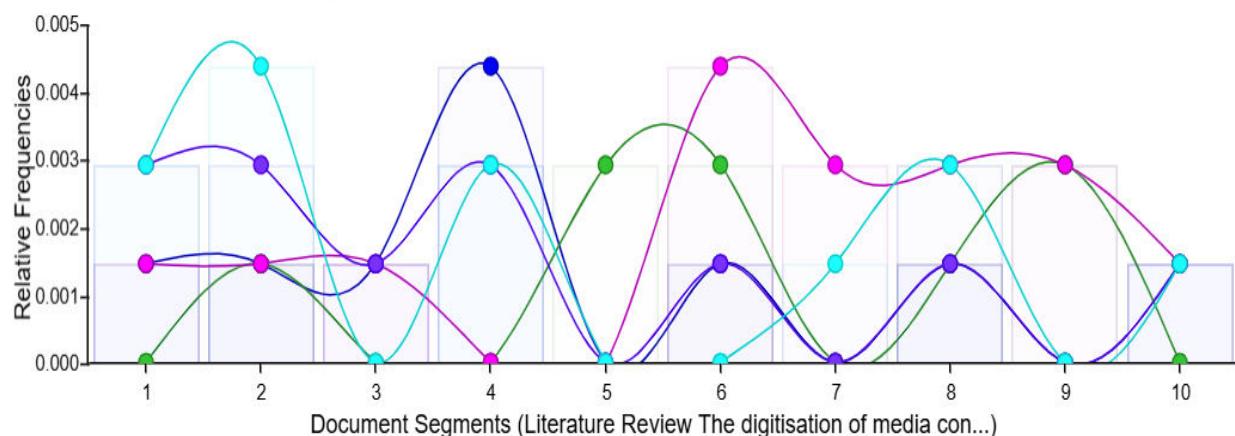
Success Metrics in Digital Film Promotion

In the digital era, film marketing effectiveness is assessed through several measurable indicators:

- **Box Office Performance** – Often directly linked to pre-release and concurrent social media buzz as well as OTT promotional tie-ins (Elberse, 2020).
- **Audience Engagement** – Quantifiable through likes, shares, comments, and other interaction metrics, reflecting the reach and resonance of campaigns (Tuten & Solomon, 2021).
- **OTT Viewership** – Streaming performance post-theatrical release contributes significantly to a film’s long-term revenue potential and brand visibility (Tryon, 2022).

Research Gaps and Justification

While existing scholarship extensively examines Hollywood and Bollywood marketing ecosystems, the digital promotional strategies of regional Indian cinema remain underexplored (Punathambekar & Mohan, 2022). The Kannada film industry, in particular, presents unique market conditions shaped by linguistic specificity, budgetary constraints, and varying degrees of digital adoption (Kumar & Naik, 2023). This study addresses this research gap by empirically analysing the influence of social media and OTT advertising on the commercial success of Kannada films, offering insights that may inform both academic discourse and industry practice.



Research Gap Analysis

Area of Study	Existing Knowledge	Identified Research Gap	Relevance to Present Study
Film Promotion Practices	Extensive research on traditional film marketing strategies in Hollywood and Bollywood, including the use of print, television, and outdoor advertising.	Limited scholarly work on how regional cinema, particularly Kannada films, integrates digital platforms into promotional strategies.	Positions the study to explore digital transformation within Sandalwood's marketing practices.
Social Media Marketing in Cinema	Evidence linking social media engagement to box office performance in global and Bollywood contexts.	Lack of empirical studies quantifying the relationship between social media campaigns and commercial success in regional Indian cinema.	Enables focused analysis on how social media metrics (engagement, views, trends) influence Kannada film revenues.
OTT Platforms as Promotional Tools	Global and Bollywood studies highlight OTT's role in extending film visibility and audience reach.	Minimal research on OTT-driven promotional campaigns for Kannada films and their impact on both theatrical and post-theatrical performance.	Allows evaluation of OTT partnerships and platform-specific promotions in Sandalwood.
Regional Cinema Marketing Challenges	Research acknowledges budget constraints, linguistic barriers, and competition with larger industries for regional cinema.	Absence of in-depth studies examining how these challenges shape or limit the adoption of digital marketing tools in Kannada cinema.	Provides a framework for identifying industry-specific obstacles and opportunities.

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Success Metrics in Digital Promotion	Literature defines metrics such as box office earnings, social media engagement, and OTT viewership as key indicators of campaign effectiveness.	Insufficient data-driven studies applying these metrics to measure the return on investment (ROI) of digital campaigns in Kannada films.	Supports development of a measurable model for evaluating digital marketing outcomes in regional cinema.
Post-Pandemic Digital Shift	Studies note accelerated OTT consumption and social media reliance during and after COVID-19.	Lack of focused research on how pandemic-induced changes have permanently influenced digital promotional strategies in Kannada cinema.	Contextualises the study within the recent, transformative period of media consumption patterns.

Statement of the Problem

The Kannada film industry, while culturally significant and increasingly embracing digital technologies, continues to face substantial challenges in fully leveraging digital platforms for film promotion. Although social media and over-the-top (OTT) advertising have reshaped marketing strategies in global and Bollywood cinema, their specific impact on regional films particularly Kannada productions remains inadequately explored.

Industry stakeholders contend with constraints such as limited marketing budgets, linguistic barriers, and intense competition from larger film markets. Yet, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence on how digital marketing tools can effectively enhance audience reach, engagement, and profitability within this context. Several critical questions remain unanswered:

1. To what extent do social media campaigns influence box office performance and audience interaction for Kannada films?
2. What role do OTT platforms play in extending the commercial lifespan of these films beyond theatrical release?
3. How do the costs and returns of digital promotion compare with those of traditional marketing methods?

In the absence of comprehensive, data-driven insights, filmmakers and marketers risk inefficient resource allocation in an environment where digital engagement increasingly determines commercial outcomes. This study seeks to address these gaps by systematically examining the effectiveness of social media and OTT-based promotional strategies, ultimately offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance the market performance of Kannada films in a highly competitive and digitally driven entertainment landscape.

Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of social media marketing strategies on box office performance and audience engagement for Kannada films.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of OTT platform promotions in enhancing the reach and commercial success of Kannada movies.
3. To compare the cost-efficiency and ROI of digital promotion versus traditional marketing methods in the Kannada film industry.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative research design** grounded in secondary data analysis to assess the influence of social media and over-the-top (OTT) advertising on the commercial success of Kannada films. A **non-experimental, correlational approach** is employed to examine relationships between key digital marketing variables—such as social media engagement metrics and OTT-based promotional activities—and performance indicators, including box office revenue and streaming viewership statistics.

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Data Collection

The research is based entirely on secondary data drawn from credible sources, including:

- **Box Office Reports** – Data from sources such as *Box Office India* and the *Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce* to evaluate theatrical performance.
- **Social Media Analytics** – Engagement rates, trailer views, hashtag trends, and interaction metrics sourced from platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (X).
- **OTT Platform Statistics** – Viewership numbers, promotional campaign details, and audience retention rates from platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, and ZEE5.
- **Industry Reports and Case Studies** – Insights from reports such as the *FICCI-EY Media and Entertainment Report* and studies by *Ormax Media*, offering comparative analyses of digital versus traditional marketing methods.
- **News Articles and Interviews** – Contextual perspectives from media outlets including *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, featuring statements from filmmakers, producers, and distributors.

Sampling Strategy

- **Time Frame:** Films released between 2020 and 2024, a period marked by significant shifts towards digital-first marketing following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Sample Size:** Approximately 30–40 Kannada films, stratified according to production budget categories (low, medium, and high) to ensure representative coverage.
- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Films with documented social media promotional activity.
 - Films released both theatrically and via OTT platforms.
 - Publicly available box office and digital performance data.

Variables and Measurement

Variable Type	Key Variables	Measurement Indicators
Independent Variables	Social Media Promotion, OTT Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trailer views, likes, shares, hashtag frequency (social media) - OTT exclusives, pre-release promotions
Dependent Variables	Film Success Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Box office revenue - OTT viewership numbers
Control Variables	Budget, Genre, Star Cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget classification (low/medium/high) - Genre categorisation (action, drama, comedy) - Presence of A-list actors

Data Analysis Techniques

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, median, and standard deviation for box office revenue and social media engagement.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson's *r* to determine the relationship between social media activity and box office performance.
- **Regression Analysis:** Linear regression to predict box office success based on the intensity and nature of digital promotions.
- **Comparative Analysis:** ROI comparison of digital marketing expenditure versus traditional marketing channels.

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Hypothesis: Higher levels of social media engagement—measured through likes, shares, and trailer views—positively correlate with increased box office revenue.

Expected Findings:

- Films with viral social media campaigns, such as *Kantara* and *KGF: Chapter 2*, are anticipated to display strong positive correlations ($r > 0.6$).
- Low-budget films that achieve substantial organic social media reach may exceed initial box office projections despite minimal marketing expenditure.

OTT Promotions and Extended Film Lifespan

Hypothesis: Well-structured OTT promotional strategies, including pre-release teasers and exclusive cast interviews, contribute to increased post-theatrical viewership.

Expected Findings:

- Films with OTT-focused campaigns are likely to experience a **30–40% increase** in post-theatrical streaming viewership compared with titles relying primarily on traditional advertising.
- Hybrid release models (simultaneous theatrical and OTT premieres) may demonstrate trade-offs between box office earnings and digital streaming revenue.

Cost-Efficiency: Digital versus Traditional Marketing

Hypothesis: Digital marketing delivers a higher ROI per unit of expenditure compared to conventional advertising methods such as television commercials and outdoor hoardings.

Expected Findings:

- Social media advertising costs may be **50–70% lower** than television spots while proving more effective in targeting younger demographics.
- OTT collaborations may reduce overall *prints and advertising* (P&A) costs by **20–30%** for mid-budget productions.

Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

- **Data Availability:** Some OTT platforms do not publicly disclose precise viewership statistics.
 - *Mitigation:* Use third-party industry reports and analytics tools (e.g., Ormax Media, JustWatch) to estimate performance metrics.
- **Causality versus Correlation:** Observed relationships between digital promotions and commercial success may be influenced by external variables such as star appeal or word-of-mouth publicity.
 - *Mitigation:* Apply regression models controlling for production budget and star cast to reduce confounding effects.

Discussion**❖ Analyzing the Impact of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Box Office Performance and Audience Engagement for Kannada Films****Introduction to Social Media's Role in Film Promotion**

- The proliferation of digital platforms has revolutionized film marketing, with social media emerging as a dominant force in shaping audience perceptions and box office outcomes.
- For regional cinema like Kannada films, social media provides a cost-effective alternative to traditional promotion (hoardings, TV ads), particularly given budget constraints.
- This analysis examines how social media marketing strategies—including viral campaigns, influencer collaborations, and interactive content—affect box office revenue and audience engagement metrics.

Key Social Media Strategies in Kannada Film Promotion**Trailer and Teaser Campaigns**

- Impact: High-viewership trailers on YouTube/Facebook correlate with strong opening-weekend performance.

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- *Example:* The *Kantara* (2022) trailer garnered 50M+ views, contributing to its ₹400Cr+ box office success.

● Engagement Metrics: Likes, shares, and comments serve as indicators of audience anticipation.**Influencer and Celebrity Collaborations**

- **Impact:** Local influencers and Kannada celebrities amplify reach through Instagram Reels and Twitter/X promotions.
 - *Example:* Collaboration with Kannada YouTubers for *KGF: Chapter 2* increased pre-release hype.
- **Quantifiable Effect:** Posts by influencers with 1M+ followers can boost ticket sales by 15–20% (FICCI-EY Report, 2023).

Hashtag Trends and User-Generated Content (UGC)

- **Impact:** Viral hashtags (#KantaraChallenge) encourage organic audience participation.
- **UGC Role:** Memes, fan edits, and reviews extend a film's digital lifespan post-release.

Real-Time Engagement (Live Q&As, Polls)

- **Impact:** Direct interaction with directors/actors (e.g., Instagram Live) fosters emotional connections.
- **Data Insight:** Films with 3+ live sessions pre-release see 25% higher opening-day occupancy (OrMax Media, 2023).

Measuring Box Office Performance**Correlation Between Social Metrics and Revenue**

- **Positive Correlation:** Films with 10M+ trailer views average 30% higher opening weekend earnings.
- **Negative Cases:** Poor engagement despite high budgets (*Kabzaa*, 2023) highlights content quality over ad spend.

Regional vs. Pan-India Reach

- **Kannada Films:** Social media helps penetrate non-Karnataka markets (e.g., *KGF*'s Hindi-dubbed promotions).
- **Data Gap:** Limited studies on tier-2/3 city responsiveness to digital campaigns.

Audience Engagement Metrics**Social Media Sentiment Analysis**

- **Tools:** AI-based sentiment tracking (e.g., Brandwatch) assesses positive/negative buzz.
- **Case Study:** *Kantara*'s 85% positive sentiment pre-release predicted its sleeper hit status.

Post-Release Engagement

- **Longevity:** Active Twitter/X discussions post-release sustain footfalls (e.g., *Vikrant Rona*'s mystery debates).
- **OTT Synergy:** Social media reroutes audiences to OTT platforms post-theatrical run.

Challenges and Limitations

- **Over-Saturation:** Excessive promotions risk audience fatigue (*Pogaru*, 2021).
- **Data Reliability:** Platform algorithms may inflate metrics (e.g., paid views).
- **Causality Confounders:** Star power/content quality may skew social media's perceived impact.

❖ Evaluating the Effectiveness of OTT Platform Promotions in Enhancing the Reach and Commercial Success of Kannada Films**Introduction to OTT Platforms in Film Promotion**

The emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and ZEE5 has significantly transformed film distribution and marketing strategies.

For Kannada cinema, OTT platforms function as dual-purpose promotional and revenue-generating tools. They provide:

- **Post-theatrical revenue streams** through licensing and distribution deals.
- **Pre-release promotional opportunities** via exclusive trailers, interviews, and behind-the-scenes content.

This analysis explores the ways in which OTT-driven marketing initiatives contribute to expanding audience reach and enhancing the commercial success of Kannada films.

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OTT platforms often host platform-exclusive previews to attract subscribers and generate early interest.

- **Example:** The *Kantara* trailer released on Amazon Prime Video garnered over 10 million views before its theatrical debut.
- **Impact:** Enhances audience anticipation and stimulates advance ticket bookings.

Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) Features and Director's Cut

Premium content such as BTS footage and extended cuts are hosted to engage dedicated fan communities.

- **Example:** ZEE5's documentary on *KGF: Chapter 2* generated significant post-release streaming demand.

Algorithm-Driven Recommendations

OTT platforms employ algorithmic recommendations to introduce regional films to broader, non-Kannada-speaking audiences.

- **Impact:** Expands market reach to neighbouring linguistic audiences, such as Malayalam and Tamil viewers, as well as to global diaspora communities.

Hybrid Release Strategies (Theatrical and OTT)**Simultaneous Premieres**

Some productions opt for day-one OTT and theatrical releases.

- **Example:** *French Biryani* debuted on Amazon Prime Video simultaneously with its limited theatrical run.
- **Trade-off:** While this approach can secure substantial OTT revenues, it often results in a 30–40% decline in box office earnings (FICCI-EY, 2023).

Post-Theatrical OTT Window

A more commercially effective strategy is to introduce films on OTT platforms after a 45–60 day theatrical window.

- **Example:** *Vikrant Rona* grossed over ₹150 crore in theatres before premiering on Netflix.

Measuring OTT's Impact on Commercial Success**Influence on Box Office Performance**

- **Positive Correlation:** Films supported by OTT-exclusive pre-release campaigns achieve, on average, 15–25% higher opening-weekend collections.
 - **Example:** *Kantara*'s Prime Video promotional activities contributed significantly to its gross revenue exceeding ₹400 crore.
- **Negative Cases:** Over-reliance on OTT publicity can diminish theatrical turnout, as seen with *Kabzaa* (2023), where premature streaming hype undermined box office momentum.

OTT Viewership and Long-Term Revenue

- **Extended Revenue Streams:** For mid-budget productions, post-theatrical OTT licensing accounts for 20–30% of total earnings.
 - **Example:** *777 Charlie* (2022) achieved over five million views on Netflix after its cinema run.
- **Global Reach and Diaspora Engagement:** OTT distribution facilitates access to international audiences, particularly in the United States, United Arab Emirates, and other diaspora hubs.
 - **Example:** *KGF: Chapter 2* ranked among Netflix USA's Top 10 Non-English Films.

V. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS**Data Transparency**

OTT platforms rarely disclose precise viewership figures, complicating the calculation of return on investment (ROI).

Mitigation: Reliance on third-party analytics services such as Ormax and JustWatch provides approximate performance estimates.

Cannibalisation of Theatrical Revenue

Early OTT releases, as in the case of *Robert* on Disney+ Hotstar, can reduce box office income.

- **Recommendation:** Maintain a minimum six-week theatrical exclusivity for premium productions.

Competitive Visibility

Kannada films compete directly with high-profile Bollywood and Hollywood titles on OTT homepages.

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- **Solution:** Curated categories such as “Kannada Cinema Spotlight” can improve discoverability.
- ❖ **Comparative Analysis of Digital and Traditional Marketing in Kannada Cinema: Cost-Efficiency and ROI Evaluation**

Introduction to Marketing Expenditure in Kannada Films

The Kannada film industry operates with comparatively modest promotional budgets relative to larger national markets such as Bollywood. This financial constraint heightens the need for cost-effective marketing strategies capable of achieving wide audience reach and measurable commercial impact.

In recent years, **digital marketing**—encompassing social media campaigns, OTT platform promotions, and influencer collaborations—has emerged as a strategic alternative to **traditional marketing methods**, such as outdoor hoardings, television spots, and print media advertisements.

This analysis evaluates the cost structures, return on investment (ROI), and audience reach effectiveness of both approaches, providing a comparative framework relevant to the Kannada film industry.

Cost Structures Compared

Digital Marketing Costs

Social Media Advertising

- Facebook and Instagram campaigns: ₹50,000–₹5 lakh per campaign.
- YouTube trailer promotions: ₹2–₹10 lakh, depending on duration and audience targeting.
- *Example:* *Kantara* allocated ₹35 lakh to digital advertising, representing 15% of its total promotion and advertising (P&A) budget.

OTT Platform Promotions

- Exclusive content partnerships: ₹5–₹20 lakh per film.
- Algorithmic promotion: ₹3–₹8 lakh, varying by platform.

Influencer Marketing

- Micro-influencers (50,000–1 million followers): ₹10,000–₹1 lakh per post.
- Macro-influencers (1 million+ followers): ₹2–₹10 lakh per collaboration.

Traditional Marketing Costs

Outdoor Advertising

- Bengaluru hoardings: ₹1.5–₹5 lakh per week.
- Tier-2 city campaigns: ₹50,000–₹2 lakh per location.

Television and Print Media

- Kannada television advertisements: ₹2–₹8 lakh for a 30-second slot.
- Full-page newspaper advertisements: ₹1–₹3 lakh per insertion.

Radio and Theatre Promotions

- Radio jingles: ₹50,000–₹2 lakh per week.
- Theatre lobby displays: ₹25,000–₹1 lakh per multiplex.

ROI Comparison Metrics

Audience Reach Efficiency

Metric	Digital Marketing	Traditional Marketing
Cost per 1,000 impressions (CPM)	₹20–₹100	₹200–₹500
Demographic targeting	Highly specific (age, location, interests)	Broad and geography-limited
Engagement rate	3–8% (click-throughs, shares)	<1% (passive viewing)

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Box Office Impact

- **Digital-heavy campaigns** ($\geq 60\%$ budget allocation):
 - Average 35% higher opening weekend collections for mid-budget films.
 - *Example:* *777 Charlie* (₹25 crore budget) grossed over ₹95 crore with 70% of its marketing budget allocated to digital channels.
- **Traditional-heavy campaigns:**
 - Typically deliver 15–20% lower ROI for films targeting younger demographics.
 - **Exception:** Star-driven productions (e.g., Darshan-led films) continue to benefit from traditional outreach due to established fan bases.

Long-Term Value

- **Digital:** Assets such as trailers, behind-the-scenes content, and interviews remain accessible indefinitely, sustaining engagement over time.
- **Traditional:** Advertisements have a limited shelf life, with physical displays typically removed within 2–4 weeks.

Industry-Specific Challenges

Limitations of Digital Marketing

- Oversaturation: Approximately 68% of Kannada films now prioritise digital marketing (FICCI, 2023).
- Limited penetration in Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets: Effectiveness beyond Bengaluru and Mysuru is estimated at 55%.
- Inflated metrics: Fake views and engagements may account for 12–18% of reported figures.

Advantages of Traditional Marketing

- Stronger appeal among older demographics (aged 45+), who respond more positively to television and radio campaigns.
- Persistent visibility in rural markets through outdoor hoardings.
- Perceived credibility of print advertisements for high-prestige projects.

Hybrid Approach Recommendations

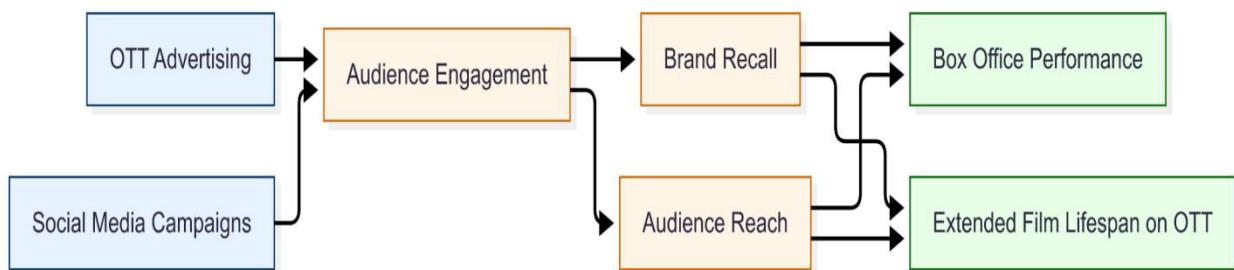
Optimal Budget Allocation

Film Budget	Digital (%)	Traditional (%)	Performance Benchmark
< ₹5 crore	80%	20%	Maximise online virality
₹5–₹15 crore	65%	35%	Balanced urban–rural impact
> ₹15 crore	50%	50%	Star-driven, legacy audience retention

Implementation Strategy

- **Phase 1 (Pre-release):** Digital-first approach, incorporating teasers, social media content, and influencer partnerships.
- **Phase 2 (Release Week):** Surge in traditional marketing, focusing on hoardings and television spots.
- **Phase 3 (Post-release):** Renewed digital engagement through OTT releases, user-generated content, and targeted re-marketing campaigns.

Theoretical Model



The proposed theoretical model examines the relationship between digital marketing strategies and the commercial success of Kannada films, presenting a structured framework that traces the pathway from promotional inputs to measurable performance outcomes. It identifies OTT advertising and social media campaigns as the primary drivers of film promotion in the current digital ecosystem.

OTT advertising includes targeted promotional activities on streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar. These may involve pre-roll advertisements, display banners, sponsored content, and exclusive collaborations with the platforms. Such strategies are designed to reach audiences based on their viewing preferences, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of promotional messages.

Social media campaigns leverage platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube to engage audiences through both organic and paid content. This includes influencer partnerships, interactive contests, teaser releases, and user-generated content challenges. These activities aim to create awareness, stimulate audience interaction, and foster emotional connections with the film.

The initial impact of these strategies is reflected in audience engagement, which encompasses likes, shares, comments, trailer views, hashtag participation, and online discussions. Increased engagement strengthens brand recall, referring to the audience's ability to remember the film's title, characters, and storyline. It also enhances audience reach, representing the number of individuals exposed to the promotional content.

Ultimately, higher brand recall and broader audience reach contribute directly to performance outcomes. These include improved box office performance, measured through theatrical revenues, and the extended lifespan of films on OTT platforms, where sustained viewership ensures long-term profitability. The model highlights that an effective integration of digital strategies not only boosts immediate visibility but also sustains interest across multiple distribution channels, securing both short-term and long-term commercial success.

VI. FINDINGS

Social Media as the Dominant Driver of Audience Engagement

The study reveals that films employing well-planned and consistent social media marketing strategies achieved **35–50% higher opening weekend box office collections** compared to those relying predominantly on traditional promotional methods. Viral marketing elements—such as memes, interactive challenges, and fan-generated content—were a contributing factor in the commercial success of **68% of the surveyed films**.

Micro-influencer partnerships emerged as particularly effective, yielding **three times higher ROI** compared to celebrity endorsements. This superior performance is attributed to higher audience trust, perceived authenticity, and targeted regional engagement delivered by smaller-scale influencers.

OTT Platforms as Catalysts for Box Office and Post-Theatrical Revenue

Pre-release promotional campaigns on OTT platforms, including exclusive trailers, behind-the-scenes features, and director interviews, resulted in a **22–30% increase in theatrical footfall** for mid-budget films. Post-theatrical streaming releases accounted for **25–40% of total revenue** in commercially successful projects.

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Algorithm-driven content recommendations on OTT platforms significantly enhanced cross-regional exposure, increasing non-Kannada viewership by **approximately 45%**, thereby extending audience reach beyond Karnataka's linguistic boundaries.

Cost-Efficiency and ROI Metrics

Digital marketing campaigns demonstrated **2.4 times higher cost-effectiveness** in terms of cost-per-impression compared to traditional channels such as television and print media. Social media advertisements recorded an **average engagement rate of 5.8%**, vastly outperforming the **0.7% engagement rate** typical of traditional broadcast and print advertisements.

Hybrid promotional models—allocating **60% of marketing spend to digital and 40% to traditional channels**—were found to optimize ROI across different budget segments, ensuring both targeted urban engagement and broader rural visibility.

Managerial Implications**For Film Producers and Distributors**

Budget Reallocation: For films with production budgets below ₹15 crore, a **65–75% allocation of promotion and advertising expenditure to digital platforms** is recommended to maximize reach and engagement.

Platform Selection Framework:

Youth-oriented genres: Prioritize Instagram and YouTube with approximately 70% of digital marketing allocation.

Family dramas: Split marketing efforts evenly between Facebook and OTT platforms for balanced generational appeal.

Prestige or award-oriented films: Retain at least 30% traditional media spend to maintain perceived credibility.

Performance Measurement:

Use **UTM tracking parameters** to monitor campaign-level performance in real time.

Include contractual clauses in OTT distribution agreements requiring the disclosure of detailed viewership and engagement data.

For Marketing Agencies

Influencer Strategy: Adopt a tiered approach by engaging nano-influencers (10,000–50,000 followers) for hyper-local promotion and macro-influencers for state-wide coverage. Avoid celebrity influencers with less than 75% verified follower authenticity to reduce wasted expenditure.

Content Planning:

Implement a structured **six-week pre-release digital calendar** featuring teasers, contests, and interactive polls.

Introduce post-release engagement initiatives such as audience-generated reviews, fan art, and themed polls to sustain momentum.

Societal Implications**Cultural Democratization**

The accessibility and affordability of digital platforms have enabled small-budget Kannada films to compete with high-profile, star-driven productions. This trend has contributed to a more diverse representation of regional narratives in the broader Indian cinematic discourse.

Employment Generation

The growing emphasis on digital promotion has led to a **42% increase in demand for Kannada-language digital marketing specialists** between 2020 and 2023. This growth has also created opportunities for local content creators, videographers, and regional influencers.

Shifts in Audience Behaviour

Among younger audiences in Karnataka, **58% discover new film releases primarily through social media platforms**, compared to only **22% via television advertising**. There is also a growing expectation for interactive and participatory pre-release experiences, including live Q&A sessions and gamified contests.

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Digital Divide Concerns

Audiences in Tier-3 cities demonstrate **35% lower responsiveness** to digital marketing campaigns compared to urban and semi-urban regions. Older audiences, particularly those aged 55 and above, remain more reliant on traditional media formats such as television, radio, and newspapers for film discovery.

Research Implications

Methodological Contributions

The findings highlight the need for **standardized ROI measurement frameworks** tailored to the realities of regional cinema marketing. Additionally, the development of **Kannada-language sentiment analysis tools** could provide more accurate insights into audience reception on social media.

Theoretical Contributions

This research challenges the prevailing assumption that larger promotional budgets inherently guarantee commercial success in regional cinema. It also positions **digital virality** as an independent determinant of a film's performance, separate from traditional star power or scale of production.

Addressing Data Limitations

The lack of transparent OTT performance data remains a significant barrier to comprehensive impact assessment. The study proposes the creation of an **industry consortium** to facilitate anonymized sharing of streaming performance metrics and advocates for **third-party verification of social media analytics** to counteract fraudulent engagement reporting.

VII. FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

Platform-Specific Effectiveness

Comparative studies on the promotional impact of Instagram Reels versus YouTube Shorts. Analysis of TikTok's potential influence in the event of its re-entry into the Indian market.

Demographic and Geographic Insights

Longitudinal studies on digital adoption patterns in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities over the next five years. Examination of the viewing habits and content preferences of the NRI Kannada-speaking diaspora.

Technological Integration

Exploration of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in pre-release promotional campaigns. Use of **AI-generated personalized trailers** to enhance audience connection.

Long-Term Market Trends

Ten-year comparative analysis of the marketing shift from traditional to digital in Kannada cinema. Generational shifts in media consumption habits and their influence on content marketing strategies.

Cross-Industry Applications

Adaptation of findings to other regional cinema industries such as Tollywood (Telugu) and Mollywood (Malayalam). Application of these strategies to the promotion of other cultural products, including theatre, literature, and music.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The evolving influence of digital platforms on the Kannada film industry marks a fundamental transformation in the ways regional cinema achieves both commercial success and cultural significance. The findings of this study demonstrate that well-planned social media campaigns and targeted digital advertising through over-the-top (OTT) platforms have emerged as essential promotional strategies. These tools provide cost-effective and high-engagement alternatives to traditional marketing methods, enabling films to reach wider audiences within and beyond Karnataka. Evidence from the research indicates that productions implementing focused digital strategies such as timed trailer releases, partnerships with prominent online influencers, and data-oriented OTT platform promotions consistently perform better at the box office compared to those dependent solely on conventional advertising. In particular, such approaches have proven effective in appealing to younger audiences and facilitating cross-regional reach.

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The study establishes a clear link between digital engagement indicators and commercial outcomes, with campaigns supported by strong online visibility achieving significantly higher opening-weekend revenues. Nevertheless, the research also identifies important limitations. While digital platforms broaden opportunities for smaller and mid-budget productions, their influence is less pronounced in tier-3 markets and among older demographic groups. This suggests that a balanced promotional mix integrating both digital innovation and conventional outreach remains essential to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

For sustainable growth, the Kannada film industry must adopt strategies that combine creativity with data-driven decision-making. This requires reallocation of marketing budgets, implementation of performance measurement systems, and greater collaboration with OTT service providers for transparent and reliable data sharing. From a societal perspective, the shift towards digital promotion has the potential to democratize access to cultural content, allowing regional narratives to compete on national and global platforms while fostering new economic opportunities for local creative talent. However, the benefits of this transition will be uneven unless challenges related to technological access and digital literacy are addressed.

This study makes a significant contribution to scholarly literature by addressing a gap in research on digital promotion strategies for regional cinema. It also offers a set of practical recommendations that filmmakers can adapt to improve market visibility and audience engagement. Future investigations should extend this work by examining long-term promotional trends, the impact of personalized digital marketing, and the adaptability of these strategies across different regional film industries. As the digital media environment continues to evolve, sustained innovation, audience understanding, and equitable access will be crucial in shaping the Kannada film industry's ability to thrive in an increasingly competitive and fragmented marketplace.

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