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Research Article

Innovative Marketing in the Tamil Film Industry: Strategies, Audiences and Evolving Media Practices

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Abstract

Tamil films are more than mere entertainment, for the stage on which they play out matters a great deal to people in Tamil Nadu and beyond. With the volume of films India produces in a year of over 1,500, Tamil Nadu accounts for a significant part, making Tamil films an integral part of Indian films. For the last few years, conventional means of advertising like posters and trailers have taken a backseat to digital-first efforts. This paper considers a variety of innovative marketing strategies used by Tamil Nadu filmmakers, such as influencer partnerships, memes and interactive narratives to activate audiences in the age of digital media. Drawing both on survey results and secondary analysis of previous research, the study examines the effects of these strategies in terms of audience perceptions, excitement and decision-making. Results seek to illustrate how new promotional practices are (re)positioning Tamil films' relationship with their audiences in a shifting media milieu.

Keywords

Tamil Film, Digital Marketing, Social Media, Film Promotions, Influencer Marketing, Audience Behaviour.

1. Introduction

Film in India was never just about watching a film for entertainment, but something that would reflect social, cultural and at times even political aspects of life. Kollywood, as the Tamil film industry is known, is one of the largest regional film industries in India and serves both national and international audiences. Historically, film promotion was limited to posters, print media, and film trailers. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the rise of television advertisements and radio jingles reshaped promotional strategies in Bollywood and regional films alike. However, the digital revolution in the late 2000s introduced new platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which allowed producers to engage audiences instantly and at scale (Bharti & Redhu, 2022; Xue, 2024). Today, social media marketing is a cornerstone of film promotion, enabling interactivity through hashtags, memes, and influencer tie-ups. In Tamil film, this shift is particularly notable, with campaigns leveraging flash mobs, fan events, and viral meme culture to target younger audiences (Shruthi & Arun, 2023).

The origins of Tamil film can be traced back to a small group of pioneers who helped to create a flourishing industry and define its aesthetic. R. Nataraja Mudaliar was a trailblazing filmmaker in the early 20th century, creating "Keechaka Vadham," the first silent film in the area, in 1917. His project established crucial foundations by reshaping filmmaking techniques and inspiring others to try film as a novel medium. Together with his son R.S. Prakash, Raghupathy Venkaiah

Naidu made significant contributions by establishing several early studios and constructing Chennai's first film theatre, which helped establish film culture in South India. When H. M. Reddy directed "Kalidas" in 1931, he brought synchro nised sound to Tamil film, marking a significant turning point in the transition from silent to talkies. Production companies like AVM Productions, led by A. V. Meiyappan, and Modern Theatres, led by T. R. Sundaram, emerged during these decades, spurring rapid growth by encouraging not only technical advancement but also the investigation of socially relevant themes and creative storytelling techniques. With a rich history dating back to the 19th century, the Indian film industry has constantly altered its marketing approaches to captivate viewers in the face of varying box office results (V.J.& Rani, P., 2019). This growth demands a deeper understanding of the marketing techniques employed, especially within regional films like the Tamil film industry (V.J.& Rani, P., 2019).

Social media marketing's history demonstrates a noteworthy development that has changed the way films are advertised and seen. To draw viewers, film marketing initially mainly relied on conventional media like posters, print ads, and live events. Radio, television, and eventually digital platforms were among the new communication channels that the industry adopted over time. The emergence of social media in the early 21st century, which brought a more direct and interactive method of interaction between filmmakers and viewers, marked the culmination of this slow change. Studios were able to create anticipation and a worldwide fan base more successfully than before, thanks to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, which allowed them to share trailers, behind-the-scenes content, and real-time updates. This shift to digital has had a particularly significant impact on the Tamil film industry. Social media has become the main platform for audience engagement, even though traditional promotion techniques like radio and posters are still used. These platforms are actively used by producers, actors, and filmmakers to share content, engage in fan interactions, and launch viral campaigns. As a result, social media marketing now serves as a cultural bridge that connects viewers to the filmmaking process in addition to being a commercial tool. While retaining its regional roots, this dual role has assisted Tamil film in growing its appeal among younger, internet-savvy audiences.

In the Tamil Film Industry, social media marketing has replaced traditional advertising with more engaging and fan-focused campaigns. With teaser releases, interactive sessions, and viral hashtags, actors and filmmakers interact directly with fans on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, which have become essential for film promotion. This tactic creates a tight-knit community around film releases in addition to increasing anticipation. In the Tamil film industry today, using digital influencers and star power to increase a film's visibility is a common marketing strategy. For example, carefully planned social media campaigns, such as teaser trailers that receive millions of views on YouTube within hours of release, have fuelled the success of blockbuster openings for films like Mersal and Vikram.

Innovative marketing is the application of new concepts, tools, or techniques that challenge traditional marketing methods to produce more effective, individualised, or engaging consumer experiences. To draw attention in increasingly crowded markets, this strategy places a strong emphasis on innovation, flexibility, and the incorporation of new media. Innovative strategies that propel modern marketing success include influencer collaborations, viral content production, experiential marketing, and gamification. Social media has emerged as a potent instrument for innovation in the field of film marketing. In addition to promoting ticket sales, filmmakers and studios use social media to tell stories, spark discussions, and create film-related communities. Releases of teasers and trailers on YouTube, interactive content on Instagram, and hashtag challenges on Twitter are all common examples of creative film marketing campaigns. For instance, several films have gone viral thanks to carefully thought-out social media rollouts that feature exclusive behind-the-scenes videos, live cast and crew Q&A sessions, and promotion of user-generated content like fan art or reaction videos. This study focuses on the theory of participatory culture, defining a society or environment in which individuals actively participate in the creation, distribution, and collaborative exchange of content, rather than only absorbing it. Audiences are actively participating in promotions like meme creations, film reviews, and other innovative marketing strategies.

1.1. Objectives

1. To analyse how marketing strategies in Tamil film have evolved in the digital era.
2. To assess audience perceptions of traditional versus digital promotions.
3. To evaluate the influence of marketing strategies on audience decision-making and overall film success.

2. Literature Review

Tamil film marketing strategies have fundamentally transformed from traditional star-power and print media approaches to comprehensive digital-first campaigns emphasising social media engagement, influencer collaborations, and

interactive content. The evidence base is moderately strong but limited in scope. Four studies specifically examine Tamil films' digital evolution ("Film Promotional Strategies in Tamil Film Industry-the Contemporary Access") (Jayakumar Ramesh et al., 2020) (Rajesh R, 2021) (Surya Kumar et al., 2024), with one quantitative study of 300 Tamil Nadu film audiences demonstrating significant relationships between social media engagement, promotional campaigns, and consumer film-watching decisions (Surya Kumar et al., 2024).

Digital platforms have created "new business horizons" for revenue generation (Prabakaran V et al., 2018). However, the evidence is primarily descriptive rather than comparative, and most studies lack longitudinal data to fully quantify the transformation's magnitude. Audience perceptions reveal a complex preference landscape where digital promotions are favoured for engagement and targeting, while traditional promotions maintain advantages in trust and credibility.

The evidence comes from multiple studies totalling over 1,100 participants across diverse methodologies. Narendra Prabhu et al. (2025) found among 250 respondents that 50.8% prefer digital formats versus 28.4% favouring traditional media, with digital perceived as superior for targeting precision (70.8% agreement) and cost-effectiveness (75.2%). However, traditional media maintained trust advantages, with television (40.8%) and print (19.6%) viewed as more credible (Narendra Prabhu et al., 2025). Supporting this pattern, Tanushree Banerjee (2024) demonstrated with 204 respondents that digital advertising more effectively builds brand awareness and loyalty, while traditional advertising better influences brand associations and perceived quality (Tanushree Banerjee, 2024). Conversely, Abyshey Nhedzi et al. (2018) found that 558 consumers still spend significantly more time with traditional media (m=3.60) than digital (m=2.63) (Abyshey Nhedzi et al., 2018), suggesting behavioural patterns may lag stated preferences.

Marketing strategies significantly influence audience decision-making and film success, with particularly strong evidence for social media and word-of-mouth effects. The evidence base spans multiple studies with substantial sample sizes. (J. L. Stimpert et al., 2011) tested 439 films and found positive associations between marketing expenditures, distribution patterns, and box office success. (Hyunwoo Hwangbo et al., 2019) analysed 338 films and demonstrated that user comments impact film sales more than ratings alone. (Lee Yoong Hon et al., 2014) found significant effects for both critics' and users' reviews on opening weekend and total box office performance, with user reviews showing stronger effects across all success measures.

(Surya Kumar et al., 2024) surveyed 300 individuals, confirming that promotional campaigns, social media engagement, and reviews significantly influence film choices. (Yehao Zhang, 2025) provided case study evidence showing integrated marketing communication strategies led to higher box office revenue and positive reviews. (Yeujun Yoon et al., 2017) empirically demonstrated word-of-mouth effects on filmgoer decisions using prospect theory.

The convergent findings across different methodologies and markets provide robust evidence for marketing strategy effectiveness. According to Xue (2024), short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels have revolutionised film promotions globally, offering cost-effective strategies. Bharti and Redhu (2022) emphasised that social media enables two-way interaction with audiences, which shapes perception and word-of-mouth marketing. Sharma (2012) found that Bollywood film promotions sometimes allocate more than 40% of budgets to marketing, showcasing its importance. Mahesh and Uma Rani (2019) identified that in Tamil films, trailers, word-of-mouth, and social media remain the most effective promotional tools. Shruthi and Arun (2023) concluded that digital campaigns strongly influence younger viewers, especially through OTT tie-ins and influencer promotions.

3. Methodology

This study uses an online survey method, which is a quantitative research method with simple random sampling. 100 respondents have participated in this study. Including young professionals, students, and film-goers. The major participants were college students and commoners who connected online over the districts, including Virudhunagar, Coimbatore and Pondicherry, and other areas of Tamil Nadu. Some of the questions used in the survey were

- Demographic details.
- What kind of innovative marketing techniques would the respondents like to see more of in Tamil films?
- Compared to traditional marketing (posters, print, TV), do the respondents believe digital promotions (social media, influencer marketing, memes) influence them more in deciding to watch films?
- Which type of promotional activity attracts the most?

- Have they ever decided to watch a film mainly because its marketing campaign impressed, even if the storyline was unclear?
- How much do they trust influencers/celebrities when they endorse or promote films?
- How important is marketing in taking the final decision to watch Tamil films?
- What kind of innovative marketing techniques would the participants like to see more of in Tamil films?

The overall analysis was conducted using through SPSS 29 tool to obtain the results.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Henry Jenkins, a media expert, officially defined and popularised the theory of participatory culture in 2006.It describes how individuals transform from passive consumers of content to active collaborators and creators, altering culture by innovation and community engagement. Technological innovations like social media and the internet have been very important in making participatory cultures larger, breaking down the old barriers between media producers and consumers, and letting a lot of people be artistic.

4. Results and Discussion

The empirical data gathered from the survey N=100 was subjected to descriptive analysis to quantify audience perception across three critical dimensions of film marketing: digital influence, content attractiveness, and the dominance of marketing over narrative clarity.

Table 1: Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age Group	Count (N)	Percentage (%)
18–25 years	72	72
26–35 years	20	20
36 years and above	8	8
Total	100	100

Table 1. interprets the age of the participants for the study including youngsters, middle-aged and above, where 70% of the participants were youngsters and 20% were middle-aged.

Table 2: Location of the Respondents

Location	Count (N)	Percentage (%)
Rural	57	57
Urban	43	43
Total	100	100

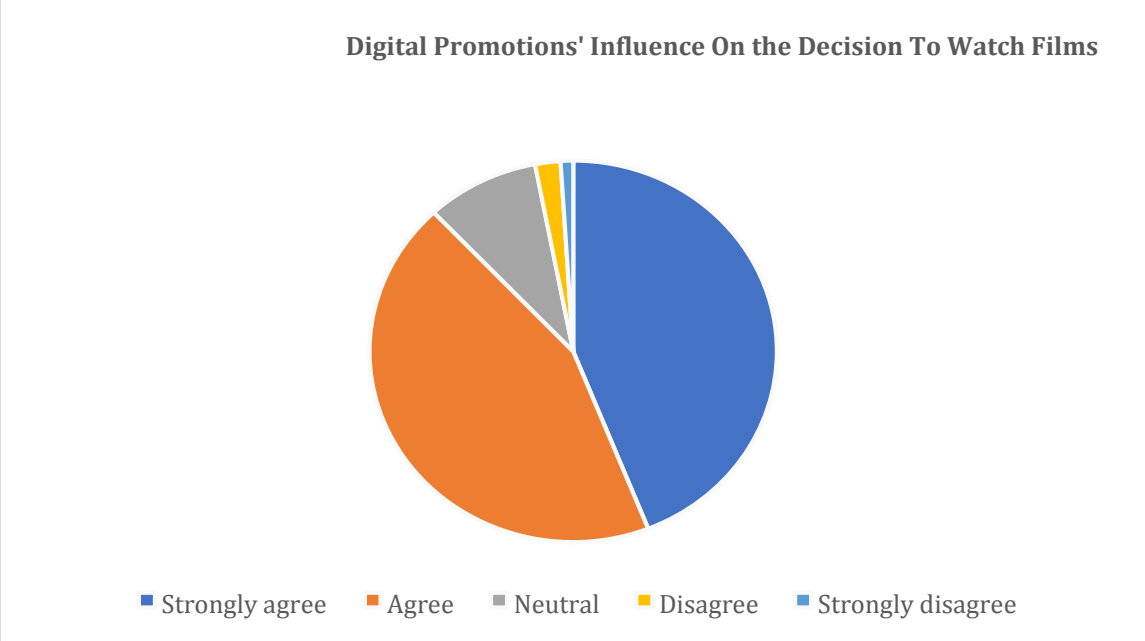
Table 2. determines the location of the participants, whether rural or urban, showcasing that even major rural-based people also depend on digital platforms when deciding to watch a film. In the age group of 18–25, there are 42 rural respondents and 30 urban respondents, which is almost equally distributed between urban and rural areas. Meanwhile, the age group of 26–35 includes 11 rural respondents and 9 urban respondents.

Table 3: Audience Perception of Digital Marketing Influence

Response	Count	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	44	44
Agree	44	44
Neutral	9	9
Disagree	2	2
Strongly disagree	1	1

Table 3. illustrates that the percentage of factors, including traditional or digital marketing, that influence to watch films. This table demonstrates that 88% percentage of the respondents agree that digital marketing is a major factor in influencing people to watch a film than traditional marketing strategies.

Figure 1: Digital promotions' Influence on the Decision to Watch Films



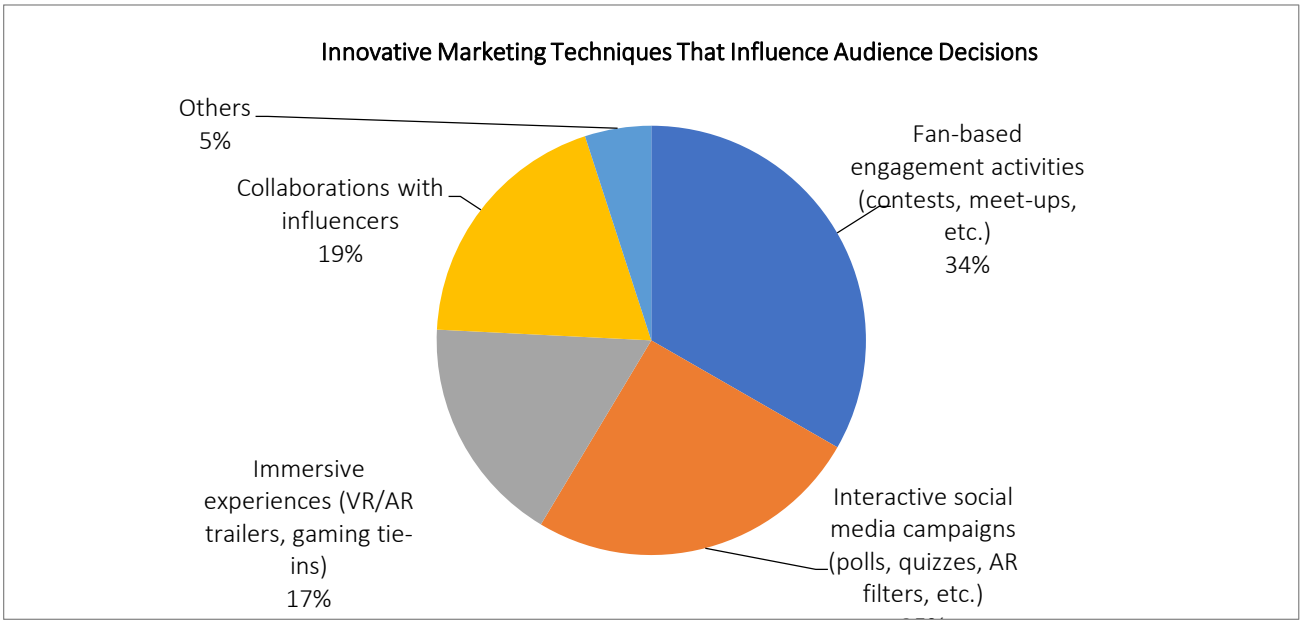
The findings prove a near-unanimous conviction among the audience regarding the superior persuasive power of digital promotions. A combination of respondents expressed that digital strategies (social media, influencer collaborations, and memes) exert a greater influence on their choice to watch a film compared to legacy advertising. This outcome provides strong empirical validation that the marketing ecosystem is currently defined by a digital ascendancy. The minimal dissent (Disagree or Strongly Disagree) suggests that the era of digital-first promotion is not merely a preference but a foundational reality of audience engagement. This interpretation connects with the study "Factors Influencing the Motion Picture Success (J. L. Stimpert et al., 2011), where the study showcases that social media and word of mouth strongly influence audiences.

Table 4: Efficacy of Promotional Activities: Attractiveness Analysis

Activity	Count	Percentage (%)
Social media challenges/memes	35	35
Teasers and trailers	33	33
Celebrity interviews and influencer promotions	21	21
Behind-the-scenes videos	7	7
Public events / audio launches	4	4

Table 4. expresses that the impact of marketing promotional strategies of the audience to watch a film. This table shows that social media memes, teasers and trailer cuts along with celebrity interviews and influencer promotions increases the audience interests towards watching a film on its release. This analysis isolated the specific promotional activities that the audience deems most engaging, providing a hierarchy of content effectiveness. Social media challenges and memes have improvised the promotion for 35% while teasers and trailers have got 33% of the respondents to get fascinated to watch a film. Celebrity interviews and influencers promotions has led the respondents to get influenced by 21% whereas Behind-the-scenes videos and public events/ audio launches created a minor impact in the minds of the respondents.

Figure 2: Innovative Marketing Techniques That Influence Audience Decisions



The data reveals a clear preference for high-velocity, short-form content. Social media challenges/memes and Teasers and trailers dominate the landscape, cumulatively accounting for of the most attractive activities. This validates the strategic effectiveness of content that is either designed for virility and interactive sharing (memes/challenges) or that offers a direct, high production-value cinematic preview (trailers). While Celebrity interviews and influencer promotions still hold significance, their secondary position suggests that the medium of promotion (short, engaging video clips) is currently a greater initial attractor than delivering the message. The marginal attractiveness of indicates that large, physical events have significantly diminished in relevance compared to digital content. This data proves that Participatory culture helps in the innovative marketing strategies of films.

Table 5: Influence of Marketing Campaigns on Narrative Clarity

Response	Count	Percentage (%)
Yes	65	65
No	35	35

Table 5. denotes that the impact of impressive campaigns on the decision to watch a film is even when the storyline is unclear. And the responses show that 65% of the participants get to watch a film through impressive campaigns. The results unequivocally demonstrate that marketing holds the capacity to override the consumer's need for narrative certainty. A substantial portion of the sample affirmed having made a viewing decision based primarily on the campaign's execution. This high affirmative rate suggests that successful digital campaigns function as a proxy for film quality or excitement, generating sufficient pre-release enthusiasm and perceived value to compel a commitment from the audience. This validates the notion that innovative, high-impact marketing is not merely informing the audience but is actively constructing the initial consumption motivation, effectively decoupling the viewing decision from a clear understanding of the cinematic plot.

Table 6: Platforms to Watch a Film and Its Marketing Strategies

Where do you usually watch Tamil films?	Behind-the-scenes videos	Celebrity interviews and influencer promotions	Public events / audio launches	Social media challenges/ memes	Teasers and trailers

Film halls	0	3	3	5	13
OTT platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, etc.)	3	11	1	17	13
Other	1	1	0	1	0
Pirated/Downloaded sources	1	3	0	8	5
Television	2	3	0	4	2

Table 6. reveals that most viewers watch a film on its release in film theatres and OTT Platforms rather than on television and pirated sources.26 respondents watch films in film halls and OTT platforms considerably through the influence of teasers/trailers. OTT platforms are effectively used by 28 respondents over the impact of Celebrity interviews, influencer promotions and social media challenges/memes, as also recognised in the study of Xue (2024). Social media platform plays a major role in film promotions.

The data empirically demonstrates a paradigm shift in audience behaviour, revealing that the consumption of ancillary promotional material, specifically interviews, social media memes, and trailers, has become a predominantly digitally-driven activity, with a significant concentration of engagement observed on Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms.

This trend carries distinct strategic imperatives for film production companies and marketing practitioners:

1. Resource Reallocation: Marketing budgets should be realigned to prioritise the creation and rapid dissemination of content designed for virality and high shareability (e.g., short-form memes and challenges) across dedicated digital channels. This approach capitalises on the platforms where audience consumption is currently highest.

2. Dual-Channel Strategy: While digital proliferation dictates content strategy, the enduring utility of the traditional theatrical environment must be maintained. The high-impact, captive exposure achieved by showcasing Teasers and Trailers in film halls remains a critical component of the promotional lifecycle and should be strategically leveraged alongside the aggressive digital campaign.

In essence, successful film marketing now requires a sophisticated, data-informed strategy that prioritises digital channels for volume and reach while preserving the theatrical space for premium, high-impact promotional dissemination.

Table 7: Innovative Promotional Methods Make Tamil Films More Appealing to the Younger Audiences

Response	Count
Strongly agree	20
Agree	28
Neutral	32
Strongly disagree	12
Disagree	7

Table 7. signifies the agreement and disagreement of younger audiences in innovative promotional activities when watching a film.32 respondents have said that innovative promotional methods make Tamil films more appealing to the younger audience, whereas 28 respondents have agreed, and 20 have strongly agreed. The analysis of the response counts reveals a clear pattern of overwhelming consensus and acceptance. The data can be interpreted as strong evidence supporting the central tenet of the survey question, given that nearly two-thirds of respondents expressed a favourable opinion. This proves that innovative strategies help in the promotion of Tamil cinema, as said in the study of Mahesh and Uma Rani (2019).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the growing dominance of digital marketing strategies in Tamil film, with influencer credibility, viewer habits, and gender emerging as significant predictors of marketing effectiveness. Although age was not significant, findings suggest that interactive campaigns, trust building influencer promotions, and frequent film engagement can

strengthen audience-film relationships. These insights underline the shift from traditional promotion to innovative, audience centered digital campaigns.

Declarations

Author Contributions

K.S. Sakthi Priya was primarily responsible for conceptualising the study, designing the methodology, collecting and analysing data, generating maps, interpreting the results, and drafting the manuscript. Dr K. Karpaga Sundaram contributed to the literature review, supervised the research process, validated the analytical framework, and critically reviewed the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

This study involved 100 respondents who participated voluntarily and provided informed consent.

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