

Film Distribution Process in Bangladesh: Loopholes And Suggestions For Establishing An Effective Distribution System

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Abstract: This study aims to portray the present film distribution system in Bangladesh as it seems distribution system is not well developed here. Moreover, this paper tries to find out the loopholes of the distribution process for which the problems are on. In addition, at last, this study comes up with some suggestions for establishing an effective film distribution system in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Film Distribution, Loopholes, Process, System, Suggestions.

Date of Submission: 11-12-2017

Date of acceptance: 26-12-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Film, of course, is an art form. But it needs money to make films. In the process of film production after making, it needs to show films that means in theatres where people watch films buying tickets. That is how the business runs. In this business it needs a process in which the film will reach to the viewers. This is called the film distribution process. It is a very important part in the film business. Foreign industries like Hollywood, Bollywood have well established distribution system. But in Bangladesh, it is not that mature process in this era. The research tries to find out what is the distribution process of films in the country, how it works, what are the loopholes in the process and suggestions for a better distribution system. This paper employs the topics problem statement, literature review, limitations, objective of the study, methodology, findings of the study and discussion and conclusion.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Film distribution is the process by which a film reaches to its audience. The more audience, it gathers, the more profit it makes. So, the business depends on the process. A producer invests in film so that he can get back the money with profit in return. That inspires him to produce another film which keeps the industry alive. As the making of money directly depends on distribution, so it has a great importance in the business. In Bangladesh, the film industry is not running that well. With the lack of good films, it is thought that the distribution process is also responsible here as it is claimed that distribution and exhibition system is the main obstacle to the development of Bangladeshi films (Hossain, 2017). To upgrade the film industry, it needs to know about all the parts of the industry. As distribution is a vital part, and nothing surely is known yet about the process, no research work is done yet, it needs to know the system, how it works and knowing that will help finding out the loopholes which will help to determine which steps can be taken to establish a better and strong distribution system.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Related to this study, no research work is found. Several journal articles and some book chapters only touch the section as a part of film production, but no highlight found relating the present distribution system in Bangladesh and the study areas. Film producing and distribution agencies are controlling the world film business. These two are different things. Producers are investors and they look after the whole thing of the production while distributors are like marketing agents of the producers (Kader, 1993, pp. 385-386). Before 1947, there was no distribution system of this Bengal area. Distributors from Kalkata controlled the exhibitions in this area. After 1947 there established two different organizations of exhibitors and the distributors with the directions of Labib Uddin Ahmed Siddiki, Mirza Abdul Kader, Pushpa Nath Dey (Hayat, 1987, p. 87).

In 1951 under the name of 'Purba Pakistan Chalaccitra Samiti' all the organizations unified because of business interest. But problem raised in the question of exhibiting either Pakistani films or both Pakistani and Indian films. That result in establishing another organization named 'Purba Banga Chalaccitra Samiti'. Before the independence of Bangladesh, producing and distribution systems were run separately, but after

independence 98 percent were both producer and distributor. Two separate thins merged here and till now they work together under Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association. The main reason behind this unification was the problem raised with the profit management among the distributors and producers (Kader, 1993, pp. 388-390).

At the present time, it is told that distribution and exhibition system is the main obstacle in the way of betterment of the film industry (Hossain, 2017, pp. 59-75). When we discuss about film distribution, it automatically come the discussion about the exhibitors that means the theatre owners. In Bangladesh, digital film making system started from 2005 A.D. (Hossain, 2017, p. 65). That is why it needed to change the exhibition system from analogue to digital. But from the very beginning it was not controlled in a systematic way which result in a great havoc in the whole film industry. Not every theatre could change into digital screening system. Again, Mismanagement and not having future plan in this sector resulted in a great loss which is visible with the number of theatres which was 1399 in 2000 A.D. and in 2016 A.D. it became only 325 (Hossain, 2017, p. 61).According to Hossain (2017) as in Bangladesh, producers and distributors are same or work as same, they say that exhibitors cheat with them because there is no e-ticketing system and no proper information about sold tickets. Again, the ticket fee is far more than the theatre entry fee, which goes to distributors as producers although there are percentages of booking agents. That makes the producers fall in loss.

Hossain (2017) argues that ‘exhibitors with the help of booking agents takes the film to exhibit with three processes which are called Share money, Minimum Guarantee (MG) and Fixed Rental’ (p. 68).There is no explanation how these three processes work. (Khan, 2017) shows how these process works and the problems in the system also with some suggestions but it needs more deep insight to understand the process properly. Similarly, after going through the article and books it seems that there needs more insight within the whole distribution system which will help to reach the study goals and understand the research objectives.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to learn about the present film distribution process in Bangladesh and finding out ways for better and effective system. Main themes are to learn

1. Present film distribution process of Bangladesh.
2. Loopholes in the process.
3. Way to establish an effective film distribution system.

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Overview

This chapter focuses on the structure of the whole study and initiate the design of the study. The chapter has discussed on research design, sampling, sample, design of the interview, processing of data and data analysis procedure.

5.2. Research Design

The study employs the qualitative research design on the basis of primary data where in-depth interviews of different respondents were taken in different time about the study focus.

5.3. Area and Population of the Study

As the study is on the distribution system of films in Bangladesh and in Bangladesh, the main film industry is named Dhallywood under the name of the capital city Dhaka from where all the works of distribution are regulated, the area of the study is selected the city Dhaka. To know about distribution process, it needs to discuss with film related persons and the population was selected remembering this, producers and distributors, directors and booking agents were the population of the study.

5.4. Sampling

In qualitative research, the samples are likely to be chosen in a deliberate manner known as purposive sampling (Yin, 1984). Interviewees were selected purposively who are related to the distribution process. There are 219 enlisted members of Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association (Members, 2017) and 139 active members who participated as voters of 2016-2018 executive committee (Executive Committee 2016-2018, 2016) from which randomly four members are selected. Bangladesh Film Directors Association has 300 enlisted directors (Members, 2017) and around 50 directors are active now; among them two directors were selected randomly. Bangladesh Film Booking Agents Association have 109 enlisted members and around 25 members are active now; among them 2 members are selected randomly.

Table 1: Sample Frame

Serial	Category	Number
1	Producers and Distributors	4
2	Booking Agents	2
3	Directors	2
4	Total	8

5.5. Design of the Interview

Face to face in-depth interview was taken from the sample which helped to understand the distribution system, loopholes of the system. The discussions have taken out the ways the participants think can be implemented to establish a better distribution system. Interviews were taken of around 20-25 minutes and then transcribed verbatim. The interview sessions were recorded with the concerns of the participants and notes where needed were taken by the researcher. Demographic data from all the participants were taken with filling up a form.

All the questions of the questionnaire were open ended.

5.6. Processing of Data

After transcribing all the recorded audio version of the interviews, those were coded and divided into three themes. After that the ideas were generated thematically.

5.7. Data Analysis Procedure

The study analyzed mainly with qualitative approach. For analysis of the qualitative data, obtained from the in-depth interviews, thematic analysis was adopted. The data were organized according to the emerged themes and concepts. At first descriptive notes have been coded and emerging themes had been identified for further analysis.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The data, emerged from in-depth interviews of four producers and distributors, two booking agents and two directors are divided into three themes analyzed for the findings.

6.1. Present Film Distribution Process in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh there are two types of filmmakers. Most are main stream film makers and some are independent filmmakers. In mainstream arena, as stated before producers and distributors are either same or works together and in case of independent makers they hire distributors. When working together or hiring distributors it is the deal that 15% of the net profit will get the distributor and 85%, the producer. The distributor then distributes the films to the exhibitors that means the theatres. Between the distributors and the exhibitors there are another group who are called booking agents works as mediator. They work for the exhibitors and hires films from the distributors for exhibition in the theatres. Depending on the quality of the film and the theatre, there are three systems of distributing films among the exhibitors; **a. Fixed Rental, b. Minimum Guarantee, c. Percentage.**

a. Fixed rental refers to the system where the exhibitor hires the film from the distributor for a definite time with a fixed amount of money. The rate depends on the film's demand, casts, releasing time that means in which time of the year it is screened, festivals or others and for how many days the film is hired. In this system the responsibility is upon the exhibitor. If he loses or makes more profit it is up to him. But the distributor gets the fixed money off the deal.

b. Minimum guarantee refers to the system where the exhibitor hires the film providing the distributor a minimum amount of money as a guarantee. This also depends on the film type, casts, time etc. If the exhibitor gets more money after showing the film, the whole amount will be divided equally between the distributor and the exhibitor and if the exhibitor gets less the exhibitor is privileged here with the minimum guarantee; exhibitor is looser here. As an example, if the minimum guarantee is one lakh taka and the film earn three lakh taka then the half of the amount is one and half lakh taka. Both of the distributor and the exhibitor will get one and half lakh. That means the exhibitor will give the distributor more 50 thousand taka. If the film earns one and half lakh taka only, then the half amount 75 thousand taka. But the exhibitor would not get back his pre-given 25 thousand taka as it was given as minimum guarantee.

c. The Percentage is another system which works with the deal between the exhibitor and the distributor deciding how many percent of the net amount each will get. Normally in Bangladesh the distributor gets 60% and the exhibitor takes 40%.

6.2. Loopholes

Discussing with the participants, there were found different loopholes in the whole distribution system. Most of the theatres in Bangladesh do not have any electronic or digital system of counting how many tickets have been sold. Though distributor sends a representative to each theatre for monitoring things, most of the time the exhibitor bribes him for sending wrong information to the distributor referring less sells than actual. As a result, the distributor does not get deserved money, which causes a loss to the producer.

As stated before that there are booking agents of the theatres who hire or book films for the exhibitors. During the rise of Bengali films in the 1960s and 1970s, this group emerged who worked for the exhibitors by booking films for the theatres of distant areas which's exhibitors did not come to towns for the films. At first, they were paid by the exhibitors. But somehow these employees became a strong unified group. As a result, they became mediators between the distributors and the exhibitors. In present time there are around 25 booking agents in the country who have their control over 10 to 25 theatres each. They decide which film to exhibit in how many theatres. Both the exhibitors and the distributors are under their wills and both of the groups have to pay them. Normally the distributor has to pay the booking agent 10% of the net money. Now, distributors are accused of this type of evolution of the booking agents, because distributors, from the very beginning, bribed the agents for hiring their films to exhibit. Now the whole film industry is under the syndicate of the booking agents.

Imbalance is found in the price of the ticket. It seems easy to discuss with the price of a real ticket of a prominent theatre.

Table 2: Ticket price with details

Divisions	Taka
Entry Fee (Net)	82
Air Condition Management	80.43
VAT	24.37
Market Tax	08.20
Total	195

It is found that in the ticket of 195-taka, air condition management fee is about 80 taka, VAT and market tax add more 33 taka where the entry fee is only 82 taka and this entry fee is the money is to be divided into the exhibitor and the distributor. If it is in percentage system and the deal is of 40:60, then the distributor gets only 49 taka from a ticket of 195 taka. After the distributor gives the booking agent 10% of 49 taka, it becomes 44 taka. When the distributor keeps 15% of 44 taka, then the producer gets only 37 taka.

This is the scenery of prominent theatres of Bangladesh. In the case of theatres of distant rural areas, it becomes more pitiable.

Film making in Bangladesh with digital system has been started, but exhibition system is not developed in digital system that much because of lack of planning and exhibitors not being economically sufficient enough to change the system. As a result, exhibitors are compelled to take rent, low quality multimedia projectors which's fees are to be paid by the distributors or producers. Different organizations started business on renting projectors. Some of the organizations provide projectors to a big number of theatres that gave them keep control over those theatres and now, the organizations have a great power over controlling the distribution system because they now decide which film is to be released in which theatres or not.

All the problems discussed here are faced by the mainstream film's distributors, but as stated before, there are independent film makers in Bangladesh and they face crucial problems when want to distribute their films because of not having a proper system for them and not having liaison with the exhibitors. From the discussion, as an example, the film *Surja Dighal Bari* (Ali & Shaker, 1979) first film ever recognized internationally was first released in a small town Nator and it took one more year to release the film in Dhaka. *MegherOnek Rong* (Rashid & Salahuddin, 1976) was only screened for three days. Prominent film maker Tareque Masud with his films like *Muktir Gaan* (Masud, 1995), *The Clay Bird* (Masud, 2002), *Runway* (Masud, 2010) have faced the same problems (Saimon, 2017). It is known that campaigning before releasing a film is very important part of the distribution. But in Bangladesh, comparing to outer world the campaigning strategy has not developed much. Most of the distributors think the distribution is done by circulating some posters of the films. Now at the age of social media, they are not efficient to campaign digitally except a few. This shows the distributors here are not well educated and that is why they are not efficient to cope up with new technologies and systems. As a result, audiences are not attracted or informed well about the film to watch in a cinema theatre.

Another vital problem shows the system is not well protected. It is seemed in the case of most of the films that the film is pirated after two or three days of the release. It causes a great havoc to the producer because people do not watch films going theatres as they can watch it in DVD players or with soft copy versions.

6.3. Suggestions for Effective Film Distribution System

The distribution system is run by uneducated personalities. There require educated persons in this sector who will be able to inspect the market and can go ahead by planned way. It will be easy for educated people to cope with new technologies and form of communication as how to work or campaign with social media, how to manage marketing and sales in a profound way and so on. In case of campaigning there need more than only some posters. Using of social media is vital here. Posting, boosting, advertising in internet these things can be implemented.

Participants suggested that it is needed to develop the whole distribution system centrally. It includes having all the theatres connected with a developed electronic and computerized medium where the center will have all the data about the theatres like it's projection system, capacity as the number of seats and so on and no doubt it will require to develop the digital projection system first. This will take the system under control and there will be transparency in all sectors. Again, if the central system includes a server which is connected to the theatres and the server is capable of controlling the screening of the films, it will also be a solution to the piracy problem. In short, it can be said, server based film releasing and e-ticketing system can be implemented.

This central coordination system can be helpful and a solution to the biggest problems in the distribution system. It will be easy to come out of the syndicate of the mediators like booking agents as there will be no need to contact with them as the films will be distributed from the central server digitally. Another suggestion is to make a law to limit the costs of the tickets where the subsections as the air condition management fee will be a tolerable amount of money, and this law should be implemented centrally based on the quality of the theatres. All these are possible only if the government takes steps about it because taking the whole system under one umbrella is not possible with the private initiatives.

Again, this is high time to develop an online distribution system which means releasing films online as now it is done by Netflix (NETFLIX, 2017), Amazon (amazon, 2017) and different websites. Films now are being released also on YouTube (YouTube, 2017). In Bangladesh, there are emerging different websites like Bioscope (bioscope, 2017) which are trying to release short films and dramas online which concept can be implemented in films also where the films will be released in the websites after its closing shows in theatres for extra business.

Independent film makers can think about alternative distribution. It is a concept which is different from the mainstream system. When it is difficult to release films in cinema theatres, it is better to release in different places understanding the film's audience. It can be released in different auditoriums of different towns, in different university areas contacting different film clubs where students are aware of films of different genre and ready to accept experimental films. As an example, when *MuktirGaan* (Masud, 1995) has been made, it was not released in cinema theatres, but the director screened it in the national public library auditorium and the audience response also was that inspiring (Saimon, 2017). And of course it is another suggestion from the participants that the producers and distributors need to be parted for better works in their arena.

VII. CONCLUSION

The film distribution system in Bangladesh is going through a weird situation where producers and distributors are same or works together under one association and both are bound by the wills of the mediators booking agents. There are several shortcomings found during the whole study. There are very less documents archived about the distribution process. Most of the persons related to the whole process are not well educated and do not have good knowledge about the whole process. That made the study hampered to find out the objectives. This study primarily tried to lighten the present situation of the film distribution system in Bangladesh, find the loopholes and at last, tried to provide some suggestion for establishing an effective distribution system. Further study can be done on the online distribution system to find how important for it is for future film industry of Bangladesh and how it can be implemented in this film industry. Film industry of Bangladesh is at stake for different reasons; problems in the film distribution system are some vital reasons. If the study recommendations can be implemented it can be hoped that these problems will be solved and investors when will get advantages they will come ahead more than now to invest in film sector which will help this industry to turn about from the present situation.

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Saiyed Shahjada Al Kareem. "Film Distribution Process in Bangladesh: Loopholes And Suggestions For Establishing An Effective Distribution System." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* , vol. 22, no. 12, 2017, pp. 57-62.