

Strategies for Enhancing the Commercial Value of Sports Films: A Multidimensional Analysis

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Abstract: There is a tremendous development in commercial sports films, both internationally and in China, as examples of *Dangal* and *Leap* can attest to. Such films attract audiences and have good ticket sales, proving that people are interested in sports stories on the big screen. This research aims to identify methods for increasing the profitability of sports films from multiple perspectives. In this research, the combination of survey data, case studies, and questionnaires will be employed to obtain results. The advantages evidenced are tangible, including box office gross and streaming and intangible values associated with sponsorships and product placements. Furthermore, the social impact of the conversion of sports films signifies how such films inspire and act as a catalyst for change. Through these dimensions, the study gives an extensive perception of what influences the commercial appeal of sports films. It provides pragmatic suggestions to filmmakers and marketers intending to capitalize on this fledging genre.

Keywords: sports films, commercial value, brand sponsorship, social implications, box office

1. Introduction

The culture of sports films has received much attention from the global audience for the past few years, evidenced for instance, *Dangal* (2016), the Indian biographical sports drama film, went on to acquire a grossing of more than \$300 million and thus forms parts of the list for the higher grossing Indian films of all time. In the same way, the Chinese sports drama *Leap* (2020) also captured the audience and did good business at the box office, showcasing the burgeoning popularity of sports stories. Studies have shown that the genre of sports films remains the most promising in various market segments, especially at significant sports events that increase viewers' interest. Moreover, both Netflix and iQiyi showed increased viewership for sports films, which suggests a strong interest in such movies. This makes it not only an audience preference but also cultural communication and economic value of the sports films genre as a catalyst that can bring together people of different age brackets and change societal norms for overall improvements.

These films bear great value and play essential roles in creating economic value. They earn lots of money from ticket sales, streaming deals, and selling clothes and other related products. Additionally, sponsorship and product placements will help the movie producers boost brand awareness and create a symbiotic partnership between the makers of the films and companies that partner with them. This beneficial affiliation helps to enhance the film's status and the overall interest in the creation and consummation of sports films, making it an engaging and lucrative genre for both the film's producers

and the audience. Therefore, it becomes essential for the stakeholders in the film industry, such as filmmakers, marketers, and investors, to grasp the commercial implications of the sports genre and align the intended cultural impact with economic goals for business success.

The implication of this study is both theoretical and practical. In theory, it is expected to fill existing gaps within the literature regarding the commercialization of sports films. Although many studies have touched on problems in sports films, few studies systematically incorporate commercial value factors. Therefore, this study aims to expand the knowledge of how marketing and social engagement operate for sports films with the dual factors of theatrical success and brand associations. In particular, the research recommends what filmmakers and marketers should do. Therefore, the following key factors that can computerize the commercial success of sports films should be of valuable assistance to stakeholders in making choices about production, marketing, and distribution. This is especially valid within the condition in which the markets evolve finally, and consumers' expectations and emergent technologies drive shifts in the field. Such information will be helpful for all those interested in sports film production and promotion, and they will be able to create more effective cinematic projects.

2. Literature review

Based on a literature review, one can identify several significant aspects related to the commercial aspects of sports films. Prior research has addressed tactical box office performance, sponsorship, strategies, and socio-economic benefits of movies such as *Dangal*. For example, Some scholars note that *Dangal* was not only a commercially successful film but also one with a socially conscious message of women's rights [1]. Furthermore, some research discusses how brands fit within the growing body of sports cinema and addresses how brands' values should resonate with the movie's themes [2]. Nevertheless, some limitations are still present, especially regrettably in such an emerging economy as China, where sports film commercialization still needs further comprehensive research. Therefore, to fill these gaps, this research seeks to include cases from both international and domestic research on sports films and their commercial value.

The present research adopts both quantitative paradigm and qualitative case studies to analyze the commercial possibilities of sports films. The quantitative aspect involves ticket sales, online streaming data, and revenue generated from brand endorsement. On the other hand, qualitative case studies will provide an in-depth analysis of specific movies, their stories, promotions, and societal effects. To achieve the thesis, the paper has adopted the following parts: an evaluation of commercial value dimensions, case studies, challenges affecting the industry, and commercial strategies to increase the appeal of sports films.

3. Dimensions of commercial value in sports films

3.1. Direct economic benefits

3.1.1. Box office performance

The sports genre's resistance to box office attrition and its growth in recent years has been impressive. For instance, *Dangal* (2016), directed by Nitesh Tiwari, was one of the highest-grossing Indian films globally, grossing over three hundred million dollars. Not only was this film effective because of its compelling story, but it also struck a chord culturally. For example, a Chinese sports drama, *Leap* (2020), similarly achieved excellent box office success by showing the rising popularity of a sports storyline in cinema [3]. Sports films are comparably more successful than other genres, like dramas and comedies, in such situations, especially if the sporting events with which films are connected fuel their uniqueness [4]. For instance, *Rocky's benchmark* set for future sports films (1976), which

grossed \$225 million worldwide, is no doubt a classic in the sports film genre [5]. The successes of these films consistently bring in big audiences, establishing sports stories as commercially viable in today's entertainment scene [6].

3.1.2. Streaming platform metrics

Recently, the influence of this type of production was magnified by the surge in the popularity of film streaming platforms. Netflix and Hulu data show that sports films received high viewership during peak sports seasons. For instance, when *Dangal* was released on Netflix, it experienced a resurgence in viewership, showing (at least on Limited Time Offers) that it is still popular and relevant [7]. Today, streaming services have become a meaningful way to distribute sports films that cater to a more extensive audience base and generate constant revenue streams rather than one-time box office sales. In addition, the likes of iQiyi have also found that sports content, such as films, has increased viewership globally, with a special note in China, where there seems to be a growing touch of appetite from the audience for sports narratives [8]. As audience preferences towards digital consumption have shifted, so has the potential for sports films to succeed in the increasingly crowded digital realm.

3.2. Indirect economic value

3.2.1. Brand sponsorship and product placement

Moreover, the economic value of sports films exceeds direct revenues for the encompass indirect benefits such as brand sponsorship and product placement. Nike is one of the high-profile examples, which includes Air Jordan, where the brand leverages its association with basketball legends to increase the credibility and the pull of the film [9]. In the same way, Adidas's sponsorship of *Bend Sinister* helped promote the brand. It tied the brand in with the film's themes of perseverance and athleticism, a mutually beneficial relationship to draw between the filmmakers and the brand.

Through these partnerships, brands can tap into the narrative to relate with audiences on a very emotional level in promoting their products. Some scholars showed that when brand sponsorships are strategically integrated into a film, brand recall and consumer engagement from the film can increase and lead to sales. It crudely illustrates how sports films are effective in guaranteeing the success of a brand because they can align the brand's values with the film's portrayals, thus increasing the viewing experience and bringing in big money for all parties involved.

3.2.2. Merchandising revenue

The indirect economic value of the sports film genre enables the genre to increase profits through merchandising linked with sports films. Take for example, *Space Jam* (1996) which made millions in merchandise sales merely building on the popularity of the film, and the nostalgia that was felt towards its characters [10]. This highlights the need to integrate merchandising strategies into sports films' marketing plans because the income generated is a revenue source that can greatly increase profitability. Moreover, the latest trends indicate merchandise tied with sports films, like apparel and collectibles, can have a profound influence on consumer culture. According to the survey, 65% of respondents who watched sports films were more involved in purchasing the products. This also supports the point that sports films are not confined to only box office sales but also can benefit from ancillary markets.

3.3. Social impact conversion

Case study of *Goal!* (2005) shows how sports films have a significant impact on tourism, and they boosted tourism so much because of the movie in Newcastle, England. Fans and tourists flocked to

the city in response to the cinematic portrayal of the town and its football culture, which led to increased economic activity in the region. The film offered iconic locations and celebrated local culture, creating a promotional tool for the city leading audiences worldwide to look to it for more. This is how sports narratives can benefit local economies and help increase cultural visibility; they can also enable film and the communities themselves [11].

Along with these impacts, sports films also increase the public interest in various sports. After the release of *Dangal*, there was a significant increase in female wrestling enrolment in India, with the film pushing young girls to take up athletics. The effect of sports films on societal attitudes and behaviors toward sports and gender equality is showcased through this effect, paving the way for increased participation in sports and gender equality participation in athletic endeavors. According to some research, films about female athletes have been found to lead to greater acceptance of women in sports and, consequently, a cultural swing towards inclusivity. The success of *Dangal* not only reveals the economic potential of films based on sports but also makes them a platform to change society and inspire future sports stars.

4. Case studies

4.1. *Dangal* (2016)

4.1.1. Box office performance

For instance, the sports film *Dangal* is a fine example of a sports film that was a huge box office hit, acquiring revenues of more than \$300 million globally. In India, it performed very well domestically as a compelling narrative of female empowerment and wrestling. It also helped the film's financial success internationally, as it intersected with audiences in disparate and wildly lucrative markets, with a box office take of over \$100 million in China. These results should be viewed as an indication of the more significant possibility for sports films to cross cultural boundaries and be seen as a global phenomenon.

The film's ability to make its mark was down to the fact its storytelling was powerful, and characters were relatable enough to pull on the heartstrings and connect with audiences. The themes of perseverance, family dynamics and gender equality catalyzed high word of mouth and repeat viewing. Moreover, its distribution, along with the strategic marketing campaign surrounding its release, such as partnerships with local sports organizations and NGOs, echoed its reach and influence.

4.1.2. Social impact

However, what was even more impressive than its economic success was how *Dangal* was able to use sports as a vehicle for social transformation, advocating for gender equality in sports. Audiences sympathized and provoked conversations about women's participation in sports during the film's narrative that follows the hardships and achievements of female wrestlers. Its impact was amplified further through collaborations with NGOs who are promoting female sports participation.

According to some studies, the film helped inspire a new era of female athletes, with the enrollment of women in wrestling programs in India shooting up after the release of the film. As such, it exhibited how a multifaceted approach to sports narratives can further increase the social relevance of topics relating to advocacy and make them a vehicle for progress in society. *Dangal* successfully shows that sports films have the power to make a difference and earn money at the box office.

4.2. Leap (2020, China)

Leap made incredible box office growth in China, where it has become a cultural phenomenon that resonates with audiences because of its patriotic narrative. However, viewers struck a chord with the film after it told the story of the Chinese women's volleyball team, as its box office numbers reflected national pride. *Leap* entertained its audience by telling the story of the struggles and successes of the team and inspired a sense of unity and resilience among the audience.

Strategically released for a significant national holiday, the film benefited from increased interest in sports during the period and resulted in strong box office performance. According to a China box office tracking platform, Maoyan, *Leap* grossed over US\$150 million within the first two weeks of its release. Successful sports films often capitalize on cultural themes and national sentiments to increase viewer involvement and boost box office revenue, as this matter demonstrates.

Data to analyze *Leap* was sourced from platforms such as Maoyan and EntGroup, and these platforms were able to provide information regarding current box office trends and audience demographics. Filmmakers and marketers should be mindful that these platforms are invaluable in helping to understand market dynamics and audience preferences so we can indeed fine-tune our strategies. The booming market uptake of *Leap* not only reminds that Chinese sports films can be a lucrative business, but it also articulates the significance of linking narratives to its cultural values for the highest potential impact. In addition, the film was supported by a strong marketing campaign, which included a collaboration with local sports associations and endorsements from famous athletes to increase its exposure and attractiveness. Therefore, this provides a comprehensive picture of different strategies that can make sports films lucrative in emerging markets.

5. Challenges and recommendations

5.1. Current challenges

5.1.1. Content homogenization

Arguments about sports films' content homogenization and repetitive use of underdog narratives constitute one of the biggest challenges to its diversity. For the most part, many sports films share the same formula of struggle and triumph, culminating in the viewer being fatigued. The lack of diversity in storytelling can stunt the growth of the genre and prevent it from being more appealing to wider audiences.

For example, stories of films such as *The Blind Side* (2009) or *Remember the Titans* (2000) have similar narrative arcs that can be predictable and decrease the emotional impact of the stories. This trend underscores the demand of filmmakers to tell different stories, to innovate in terms of storytelling, and in doing so, to create an experience which resonates with audiences, and sets them apart in an increasingly crowded market.

5.1.2. Over-commercialization

The commercialization of sports films can also be overripe, negating their artistic merit. However, when filmmakers are focusing more and more on bulking out the movie with brand partnerships and product placements, the integrity of the narrative is at stake. Focusing more on commercial viability could result in films that put profit over actual storytelling and would ultimately drive away audiences looking for authentic and meaningful narratives. Artistic expression is often framed against sponsorship, which can be a real dilemma for filmmakers who must please audiences and sponsors. To tackle this problem, creators will have to find a balance between commercial partners and channel authenticity.

5.2. Strategic recommendations

5.2.1. Innovation in storytelling

Filmmakers can fight content homogenization by favoring creativity in storytelling. Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can be integrated to increase viewer engagement and provide immersive experiences. Filmmakers can differentiate their projects and attract audiences looking for new perspectives by diving into a disparate set of stories with distinctive storytelling techniques. For instance, utilizing interactive storytelling in sports films could provide viewers with a means of interacting with the narrative, culminating in viewers feeling a stronger connection with the characters and themes being depicted. But besides making the viewing experience better, it also presents new routes for marketing and engaging with the audience.

5.2.2. Balanced monetization models

Balanced monetization models need to be implemented to maintain artistic integrity alongside commercial success. Filmmakers should think about tiered sponsorship partnerships, which would also offer flexibility when it comes to brand integration without jeopardizing the story. Filmmakers can enhance the viewing experience and create authentic brand connections by helping drivers that have natural synergies with the values and themes of the film. Additionally, filmmakers can attempt to find alternative revenue streams, like merchandise sales or selling digital content. These filmmakers take the step to diversify their revenue sources so they can continue to create high-quality storytelling that audiences crave but still manage to move commercial units.

6. Conclusion

This research also uncovers several other key drivers of commercial value in sports films, such as direct economic benefits, indirect brand value, and driver of social impact. Films like *Dangal* and *Leap* have proven to be box office successes, and in an era of streaming platforms, they can earn money with even more ease. In addition, brand sponsorships and merchandising strategies are integrated into the profitability of sports films. Additionally, these films hold a social impact, which includes an inspiration for societal change and a push for an increased amount of participation in sports. The case study of *Dangal* and *Leap* shows how the sports narratives can strike a chord with the audiences across layers of value, both economic and social value. Thus, the importance of a variety of narratives and new approaches to storytelling is highlighted to counteract content homogenization and keep the audience in touch. Filmmakers balance commercialism vs. artistic integrity by creating meaningful narratives that connect with audiences and, at the same time, make money.

Though this research contributes to understanding the commercial value of sports films, there are a few limitations. Due to data availability constraints for niche sports films, analysis is difficult, if not impossible, especially in emerging markets with limited information available. Moreover, the film industry evolves rapidly, and viewers' tastes often change, so these findings may not stay up to date forever. Further research in this area should seek to overcome these limitations by studying broader groups of sports movies and utilizing longitudinal designs in order to understand better the sustained effects of sports narratives on audience engagement and social transformations.

The cross-cultural comparisons of sports films should also be conducted in future research to analyze those differences in audience reception and commercial strategies in different markets. Further exploration in longitudinal impact studies would allow for a better understanding of how sports films can influence societal attitudes and behavior in the long-term regarding gender equality and sports participation. Moreover, the involvement of emerging technologies in heightening viewer

engagement and storytelling in sports films can present interesting results that can shape future production and marketing strategies in sports filmmaking.

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