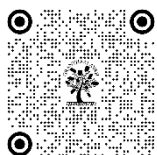


TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING OF HINDI CINEMA: A CASE STUDY OF YASH RAJ FILMS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the concept of transmedia storytelling in Hindi cinema, specifically in the film Ra.One (Anubhav Sinha) and the Dhoom series. Transmedia storytelling is the practice of telling a story across multiple media platforms, and it has become increasingly popular in today's culture due to technological advancement. These films were chosen for analysis because of their widespread popularity and extensive transmedia extensions, which make them prime examples of how Hindi cinema uses multi-platform storytelling. The research investigates how these films effectively employ transmedia techniques to tell stories suitable for multiple media channels. The study will employ textual and narrative analysis methodologies to delve into the transmedia elements employed in Ra.One and the Dhoom series. Additionally, the study will examine the economic logic of transmedia storytelling integrated into the studio business model of Hindi cinema, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between media convergence, narrative techniques, and industry practices. This analysis aims to shed light on the strategic deployment of transmedia storytelling in Hindi cinema and its implications for audience engagement and industry dynamics.

Keywords: Cinema, Transmedia, Narrative, Bollywood, Convergence

1. INTRODUCTION

With the digitization of cinema, the scale of the intersection between cinema and other media became monumental. This led to the proliferation of transmedia storytelling, an aesthetic resulting from media convergence [Jenkins \(2006\)](#). In transmedia storytelling, one has to traverse through several media (such as related games, merchandise, television shows, and live shows, among others) to get a complete film experience. Furthermore, the films comprise self-contained elements that best suit the participatory transmedia audience, with different access points to the larger storyline. The additional access point to the storyline of the films, in turn, provides the audience with a more immersive experience of the story world, the characters and the larger worldview of the film.

In the contemporary Indian scenario, large-scale vertical and horizontal integration transpire amongst a few conglomerates such as Yash Raj Films, Disney U.T.V., Fox, Reliance Entertainment, Eros, Dharma Productions, Red Chillies Entertainment, and others, which are referred to as 'studios', by the industry. Vertical integration refers to control of all aspects of production, such as production, distribution, and exhibition, by one primary company. This leads to reduced overhead costs, leading to profit maximization. Horizontal integration means merger, expansion, and acquisition across the same industry in allied sectors but at the same production stage. Horizontal integration leads to monopoly in the market and the reduction of competition. [Ray et al. \(2022\)](#). Vertical integration means that the production, distribution, and exhibition of the film are controlled by the same company [Ray et al. \(2022\)](#). Here, horizontal integration particularly leads to the emergence of alternate distribution and revenue channels, resulting in a new convergent business model for Hindi cinema. This model is based on monetising a film across multiple revenue sources such as overseas rights, satellite rights, digital rights, gaming rights, merchandising rights, music rights, and in-film placement. This model facilitates the transmedia narrative. *In addition, contemporary media practices such as licensing and selling media rights enable multiple media industries' co-creation process. By media rights, the study refers to the strategy where a film is monetized (often before release) across allied revenue sources, these being overseas rights, telecast rights, video rights, music rights and digital rights, rights for dubbing and subtitling in other languages, film placement, merchandising, gaming rights and comics among others.*

Research on Bollywood has primarily borrowed from social history models and has researched production-distribution-exhibition systems of contemporary Hindi cinema in Globalisation. However, the study of the media industry in the context of Bollywood cinema gained momentum in recent years. For example, using the ethnographic method, [Ganti \(2012\)](#) studied the industrial changes in the Bombay film industry during the 1990s. This study, by considering the theoretical studies on media convergence [Jenkins \(2006\)](#) and, after that, researching the new industrial networks of Hindi cinema [Mehta & Mukherjee \(2020\)](#) (which brings forth more recent information, knowledge, and understanding), the paper suggests new methods of studying the emergent aesthetics of contemporary Hindi cinema in the context of media convergence and finance convergence. Thus, it links the content and the industry's economic and technological changes.

The methodology employed in this study involves a qualitative approach to understanding the emergent aesthetics of contemporary Hindi cinema in the context of media convergence and finance convergence. The study draws from the theoretical framework of media convergence and uses the method of content analysis to examine the transmedia elements present in contemporary Hindi cinema. The study also analyzes the industry's economic and technological changes, using the case study analysis method to study the business models a major studio in the industry –Yash Raj Films. The study aims to comprehensively understand the relationship between the industry's content, the economics and technological changes, and the resulting emergent aesthetics in contemporary Hindi cinema.

This study aims to analyze the use of transmedia storytelling in Hindi cinema, specifically focusing on Yash Raj Films as a case study. The study aims to assess how Yash Raj Films, a prominent studio in the Hindi film industry, effectively incorporates transmedia techniques in movies such as *Ra.One* and the Dhoom franchise. The Dhoom franchise consists of Dhoom (Sanjay Gadhvi, 2004), Dhoom 2 (Sanjay Gadhvi, 2006 and Dhoom 3) (Vijay Krishna Acharya, 2013). The study seeks to ascertain how these films utilize transmedia storytelling to develop narratives

catering to diverse media platforms by conducting a textual and narrative analysis. Additionally, the study intends to investigate the economic logic behind transmedia storytelling in the studio business model of Hindi cinema, emphasizing the strategic integration of transmedia elements and how it affects audience engagement and industry dynamics. Ultimately, the research aims to provide insights into the changing landscape of storytelling in Hindi cinema and how it impacts creators and consumers in an increasingly convergent media environment.

2. THE CONVERGENT BUSINESS MODEL OF HINDI CINEMA: THE ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE OF TRANSMEDIA INTERACTION

Jenkins (2006) states, "Transmedia storytelling is the art of world-making". Jenkins further states that "to fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of the hunter and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels" Jenkins (2006), p. 21. In this regard, films like *Ra.One* and *Dhoom* series (especially 2 and 3) can also be stated as an attempt to tell a story that befits the inclusion of other media industries in the film's narrative. Thus, the economic logic of transmedia storytelling is effectively the horizontal integration of the media industry.

In contemporary times, the Hindi film industry is defined by the term 'studio'. The term 'studio' is an industry-ideated term that suggests large-scale enterprises such as Yash Raj Films, which are corporate in their working attitude. The term is closely associated with the corporatization of the Hindi film Industry. For instance, an enterprise like Yash Raj Film, despite being a private limited company, is corporate in how it runs its business. 'Bollywood' instead, a term widely used to refer to 1990s Hindi cinema with NRI centralism and a defined mode of presentation Rajadhyaksha (2008), Prasad (2008), is pitted as an industry where kinship defined the working dynamics of the industry.

This research revealed that these studios have vertically and horizontally integrated business structures. For instance, Yash Raj Films has its production and distribution business (excluding exhibition) and has ventured into allied businesses such as home entertainment, music, television, merchandising, comics and digital.¹ Thus, the 'studio' operates with the emerging 'convergent' business model of Hindi cinema. Aashish Singh, Vice President of production at Yash Raj Films, stated that they keep in mind the 'salability' of the film, not only in terms of theatrical revenue but also allied revenues, these being overseas rights, satellite rights, home video rights, music rights and digital rights, rights for dubbing and subtitling in other languages, film placement, merchandising, gaming rights and comics among others. In this regard, Aashish Singh stated:

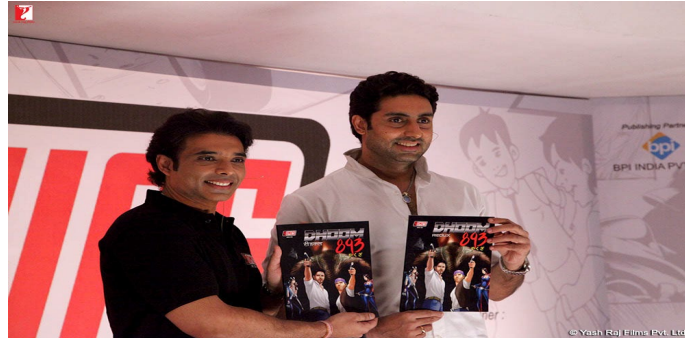
With time, we realised that things are moving in a different direction, technology will take over, and the traditional way of monetizing films will change... We try to monetize all the revenues across all verticals... studios monetize revenues as much as they can.... The domestic theatricals revenue of India was as much as satellite rights fetched for the film *Dhoom 3*

(Singh, A. Personal Interview, 2014, October 21).²

¹ See www.yashrajfilms.com

² He also mentioned films like *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (Yash Chopra, 2012) and *Ek Tha Tiger* (Kabir Khan, 2012) that monetized across verticals like satellite rights, gaming, music, merchandizing, and music among others.

The case study of Yash Raj Films business policy revealed that Bollywood is now leveraging many hitherto untapped revenue streams, such as mobile phones and other telecom devices on which users download movie clips, songs, videos, wallpapers, ringtones, and dialler tones.³ An example would be the tie-up between Yash Raj Films and the retail store chain *Diva'ni*, which sells clothing and merchandise inspired by the studio's productions. Yash Raj Films also collaborated with '99 Games' as a gaming partner for films like *Dhoom 3*, *Sultan* (Ali Abbas Zafar, 2016) and *Fan* (Maneesh Sharma, 2016).⁴ In addition, Yash Raj Films subsidiary Yomics published comic books for films like *Hum Tum* (Kunal Kohli, 2004), *Ek Tha Tiger* (Kabir Khan, 2012), *Dhoom 2* and *Dhoom 3*.⁵



This is a Page from the Yash Raj Films Website Showcasing the Launch of Dhoom 3 Comics by the Yomics Division of Yash Raj Films.⁶

Presently, the shorter release window⁷ and saturated release⁸, a mandate for any contemporary film, has also created the need for a pre-release 'marketing hype'. The term 'buzz', often used by industry personnel as a synonym for 'pre-release excitement', is considered a crucial factor for the success of a said film. Therefore, the Hindi film industry focuses on creating "marketing clout" Kerrigan (2010), p.114 with a high marketing budget. Thus, the marketing budget often surpasses the film's production budget, as in the case of the film *Vicky Donor* (Shoojit Sircar, 2012) FICCI KPMG (2013), p. 60. However, in the general preview, the film's marketing budget remains as high as 40 per cent of the entire film budget. In this scenario, the allied revenue streams often become a marketing tool for theatrical revenue and vice versa, blurring the lines between a revenue stream and a marketing tool. For example, in the case of a film like *Ra.One* or *Dhoom Series* gaming was a significant access point to the film. The games being pre-released before the film served as a revenue stream and simultaneously also played an essential role in the film's marketing. In order to save the film marketing budget, the games were added to the film's revenue pool. However, the other side to the coin is that the film's success in

³ Yash Raj Film has expanded both vertically and horizontally. Vertically the company has spread into distribution business including overseas distribution. Horizontally the company has subsidiaries across home entertainment (YRF Home Entertainment), music (YRF Music), television content (YRF Television), merchandizing (YRF Stores), comics (Yomics) and digital (not named).

⁴ www.99games.in

⁵ According to the website www.yomics.in the comics are available across retail bookstores like Crossword, Landmark, and Om Book Stores among others.

⁶ Source Yash Raj Films official website. See www.yashrajfilms.com

⁷ Shorter release window means that the film is released in theaters only for two to three weeks. This has become a mandate as it facilitates telecast of the film as well as more recently streaming of the film in over-the-top platforms.

⁸ The saturated release also referred as wide release is a distribution strategy referring to the practice of releasing a film in several theaters, concurrently, to maximize business potential in the first few days of the release Barat (2020).

the theatrical business also becomes essential in the profitability of non-theatrical revenue such as gaming, music, merchandising, etc.

This new business model of Hindi cinema, where the revenue is derived from co-existing media industries by selling media rights and licences, remains the economic imperative of transmedia interactions in Hindi cinema. “World-making” Jenkins (2006) becomes mandatory for a film to realize its economic potential fully. Jenkins (2006) also points out that essential information about the film is given in separate versions in transmedia storytelling, accessible on different media platforms. The film *Ra.One* also had several other access points to the film. These include gaming, merchandising, graphic novels, music launches, telecasts, commercials, etc. Shah Rukh Khan (SRK), the film's producer, released two games, *Ra.One: The Game* and *Ra.One Genesis* in association with Sony PlayStation for PS2 and PS3 consoles. He manufactured toys in-house in China and made these merchandise available in 3500 stores and e-commerce websites Raghavendra (2011). In addition, he penned down a graphic novel related to the film, which was also sold as merchandise Raghavendra (2011).. SRK also received 52 crores (approx.) from brand tie-ups, including the barter deals he made with companies Pal (2011). The music launch of the film was streamed live on an Over-the-Top (OTT) platform, and the agreement was made for an undisclosed amount Raghavendra (2011).. The film's telecast rights were sold for ten crores to the television channel Star India Raghavendra (2011). In the case of the film *Dhoom 3* (2013), the latest in the *Dhoom* series, the merchandising and licensing division of Yash Raj Films (YRF, the producer of the film) partnered with 99 games and released *Dhoom 3 The Game* on Android, Windows, iOS and BlackBerry 10 platforms. According to a press release, it gathered ten million downloads across various platforms.⁹ The other access points to the film were comic released by Yomics (the merchandising division of YRF), the telecast of the film with satellite rights sold for 65 crores, the music of the film cumulatively garnering 9-10 crore earned through digital sales, television and radio airings and the brand association fetching the producer approximately 20 crores Malvania (2013). The paper's intention here is not to chart the revenue recovery model of the film *Ra.One* and *Dhoom 3*. The industry often remains secretive about its revenue figures, which limits this research. However, with the limited data, the study wishes to highlight that for a film like *Ra.One* and *Dhoom 3* monetization occurred across several delivery platforms.¹⁰ Therefore, transmedia world-making becomes a mandate for production houses such as Yash Raj Films, where the associated businesses are segments (divisions)/franchises, an extension of their business as a strategy to maximize profits across media sectors.

3. TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING: THE CASE OF *RA.ONE* (2011)

Ra.One is a film about a video game developer who makes a video game for his son featuring an undefeatable villain. In the film, video simulations become real wherein the game characters, G.One (hero, Shah Rukh Khan.) and Ra.One (villain, Arjun Rampal) transcend the screen and battle within cinematic reality. Shah Rukh Khan (henceforth S.R.K.) owned Red Chillies Entertainment produced the film. The

⁹Yash Raj Films. (2014, 12th February). *Dhoom: 3 The Game*' crosses 10 million downloads mark across mobile platforms [Press release]. Retrieved 2017, June25 <https://www.yashrajfilms.com/news/detail/2016/06/21/dhoom-3-the-game-crosses-10-million-downloads-mark-across-mobile-platforms>

¹⁰ Kamal Jain, C.F.O. Eros International, the distribution partner of the film *Ra.One*, states in this regard, “Some 40 to 80 per cent of the cost will be recovered from the pre-licensed content - distributed across platforms such as cable, digital, home theatre, etc. – before the film hits the theatre” Pal (2011).

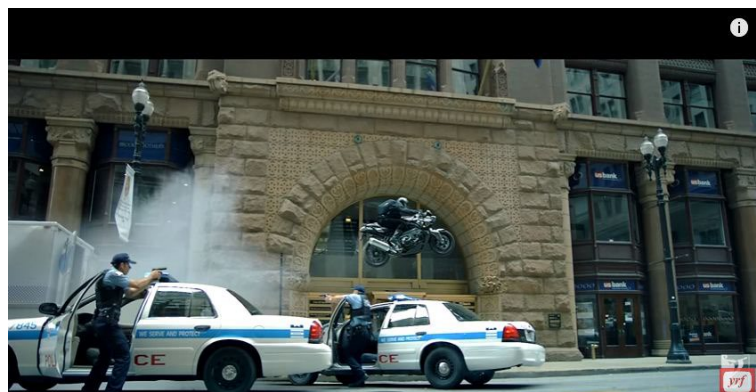
film had approximately three thousand visual effect shots produced by the subsidiary of the Red Chillies Entertainment, VFX division – Red Chillies VFX [Banerjee \(2012\)](#). As already stated, Red Chillies Entertainment released the games, *Ra.One: The Game* and *Ra.One Genesis* in association with Sony PlayStation for PS2 and PS3 consoles. Previously, several Hollywood films such as *Tron* (Steven Lisberger, 1982), *War Games* (John Badham, 1983), *The Last Starfighter* (Nick Castle, 1984) had extensively employed video games as a central narrative device. In these films, the cinematic experience has come to gaming experience with video games like *Final Fantasy X* (2001), *The Secret of Monkey Island* (2010) and *Shenmue II* (2001), providing extensive fictional background as a part of the worldview of the game. Hollywood has a long association with the video game industry with games being released based on films such as *James Bond* (1973-2006), *Star Wars* (1977), *Spiderman* (2002-04-07) and *Harry Potter* (2001- 2011), to name a few. In addition, films such as *Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Resident Evil* (W.S Anderson 2002) came into limelight as video games and were then adapted into films in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Hindi film industry, instead, is currently employing the gaming industry primarily as promotional tactics and secondarily as a monetization forum. However, in the instance of *Ra.One*, the scale of intersection between video games and cinema is monumental. The experience of the film remains in the realms of cinema as well as video games. In a review of the film *Ra.One* by trade analyst Komal Nahta states that if you don't understand video games, it will be difficult to grasp the film [ETC Bollywood \(2011\)](#). The climax of the film *Ra.One* is approximately thirty minutes long and takes place in the form of game levels. The characters Ra.One and G.One, each with a distinctive set of superhuman abilities and power, battle each other through several game levels, each taking place in different virtual settings. Thus, experience of the film is like gaming experience, and for complete entertainment, one must play the video games based on the film.



Screen capture of the game Ra.One: The Game

4. TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING: THE CASE OF *DHOOM*

In 2004, Yash Raj Films produced an action thriller *Dhoom* (Sanjay Gadhvi, 2004), followed by sequels *Dhoom 2* (Sanjay Gadhvi, 2006) and *Dhoom 3* (2013). *Dhoom* is a series of chase films between police officer Jai Dixit (Abhishek Bachchan), his henchman Ali (Uday Chopra), and a certain skilled burglar (role played by John Abraham, Hrithik Roshan, and Amir Khan in the sequels, respectively). Each film in the series has extensive chase sequences, showcasing several adventure sports such as skydiving, sand surfing, scuba diving, rollerblading and bungee jumping. In each film, the burglar has to perform a series of stunts to complete the robbery successfully. *Dhoom 2*, for example, begins with Mr A (Hrithik Roshan) skydiving and landing on a moving train to steal a diamond crown. This is followed by a shoot-out sequence on top of the train. He finally succeeds in robbing and escapes with the help of his sand surfing techniques. Visual Computing Labs, subsidiary of Tata Elxsi, handled visual effects for *Dhoom 2* with over forty minutes of VFX screen time [Tata Elxsi \(2006\)](#). According to the media release by the lab, the process included "pre-visualization of all the action sequences, high-level compositing, 3D Virtual 'Set' creation, 3D character animation, CG model building and some of the most complex wire and rig removal ever" [Tata Elxsi \(2006\)](#). The film had multiple robbery episodes: the crown, the museum diamond, the antique sword and finally, the coin. The scale of difficulty concerning stunts increases with each robbery. Alongside, many gadgets such as remote-controlled robotic devices, mechanical insects, and wrist gadgets were used to undertake the tasks required for each robbery episode. *Dhoom 3*, the latest film in the *Dhoom* series, features several bank robberies sequences by a burglar named Sahir (Amir Khan). Visual Computing Labs (VCL) of Tata Elxsi handled the visual effects used in numerous stunt sequences throughout the film. *Dhoom 3* has VFX shots which is a sum total of thousand and five hundred. "The film *Dhoom 3*, just as *Dhoom 2*, had performances around moving trains and several fight sequences (parachuting and motorbike stunts)" [Barat \(2020\)](#). The narrative of the *Dhoom* series is thus once again very akin to a game narrative where one has to successively finish levels to go to the next level and undertake a new and more difficult task. Each film in the series was supplemented with a game accessible both on Android and iOS platforms.



Screen capture of the film *Dhoom 3*

5. CONCLUSION

In [Sontag \(1996\)](#), Susan Sontag lamented the *Decay of Cinema* and the death of movie audiences who submitted to the screen in dark theatres. Sontag refers to watching a film in a theatre as being kidnapped in the dark. Furthermore, she refers

to watching a film in a smaller format, such as television, as being disrespectful to the film, which results in the demise of traditional cinephilia. Yet, contemporary film viewing is not limited to the purview of the theatrical domain. Films are now being watched in smaller formats, such as on television, laptops, and mobile screens. Simultaneously, films are also distributed in smaller formats along with theatres and multiplexes. This has led to the demise of a particular kind of cinephilia, for whom the definition only constituted the ritual of watching films in theatres. Despite having access to film theatres, the new cinephile watches many films on television or other home video options and the internet. Thus, new cinephilia can be referred to as technology-mediated cinephilia. The contemporary multiplex-going Hindi film audience also comprises this new cinephile. As a result of engaging themselves in transnational cinema across the globe through new media devices, this heterogeneous multiplex audience is much more equipped to understand tropes that often belong to alternative cults. This new cinephile comprises a migratory audience who constantly shift from one media to another and from one device to another, giving rise to a certain kind of cinema that [Jenkins \(2006\)](#) refers to as transmedia storytelling. Films like *Ra.One* and *Dhoom 3* are examples of such intermedia transactions. Concerning the game, both *Ra.One* and *Dhoom 3* attempted to present the game and the film as two distinct entities to be understood without experiencing the other.¹¹ Nevertheless, the lines between gaming and the cinematic experience seem blurred, especially with narrative and *mise-en-scene*.

Upon examining Yash Raj Films' efforts in transmedia storytelling within the Hindi cinema realm, it becomes clear that their narrative techniques are intertwined with economic and technological shifts within the industry. Through works such as *Ra.One* and the *Dhoom* franchise, Yash Raj Films, has capitalized on these changes to involve viewers and expand its business model across multiple media channels. The success of these films highlights the strategic approach of Yash Raj Films towards media convergence. They believe in creating a larger ecosystem that includes not only cinematic content but also digital media, gaming, and merchandise. This approach helps the studio to tap into multiple revenue streams while making the narrative experience richer for the viewers. In today's media-saturated market, this method has become increasingly important. Furthermore, observing these movies through the perspective of transmedia storytelling uncovers a convoluted interplay between creating content and the economic requirements of modern media production. Yash Raj Films has successfully capitalized on this model, establishing patterns that affect industry principles and practices. However, exploring further films and media extensions in future research could reveal the full extent of their contributions to the aesthetics and narrative structures of Hindi cinema. By aligning the studio's transmedia strategies with the changing dynamics of the global entertainment industry, this study not only demonstrates Yash Raj Films' part in transforming Hindi cinema but also offers a framework for comprehending how major film studios can utilize technological advancements to reshape storytelling in the digital era.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

¹¹ The transmedia presence of the film has been widely discussed in the realms of marketing the film. However, the same can be seen as an example of convergent narrative whose 'fictional world' is created in multiple media platforms.

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