

Emerging Trends of Aggressive Movie Marketing: Lessons Learned From Ghajini

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INTRODUCTION

Films continue to remain a popular way to reach the people and a form of mass entertainment in India. The Indian film industry has been identified as one of the most promising industries providing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities to millions of people directly or indirectly related with this sector. This industry is considered as the largest in the world in terms of the number of films produced and released every month (Mutsuddi., I, Mutsuddi, R., 2006).

But, with the global economic recession rocking the business environment in India and the recent terror strikes in Mumbai shocking the entire nation, the Indian film industry was in utter gloom with high budget movies like *Drona*, *Yuvraj* bombing at the box office. Yet inspite of this, the two year end box-office winners 'Ghajini' and 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi' seemed to have altered the perspective. Hard times generally mean the audience is looking for a good laugh, which means films offering the perfect escape from harsh reality have a better chance (Ghosh, A, 2009). These two 2008 year end mega hits have perhaps made their mark not only by encashing on the gloomy mood of the common Indian viewers but more on a well planned promotional and marketing strategy that had leveraged their success. In this perspective, the fabulous opening and success of the mega movie, Ghajini in India and world wide is worth a study in terms of marketing perspectives, where corporate and FMCG giants are struggling to make their mark even in the festive season. This paper makes an attempt to explore the success story of Ghajini and the efforts put in by the people behind its making and marketing.

GHAJINI-THE PRODUCT

Ghajini is an action-packed suspense thriller starring Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan and debutant Asin, produced by Indian Film Co. and directed by A.R. Murugadoss. The film is a remake of the superhit Tamil flick, Ghajini starring Surya and Asin, produced by Sri Saravanaa Creations and directed by A.R. Murugadoss. As a product, the story of the film had already made its mark as a mega hit movie in South India and abroad. The film is said to be inspired by the critically acclaimed film "Memento" by Christopher Nolan on the theme of the protagonist suffering from anterograde amnesia (short term memory loss) and seeking revenge for his wife's murder. And ever since Allu Arvind, the producer, A.R. Murugadoss and Bollywood heartthrob Aamir Khan teamed up for the Hindi flick, there was tremendous expectation from the movie goers and film experts for bringing this superhit movie to the viewers in a new package and delivery. The makers of the film not only decided to deliver the new product with superior technical attributes than its original version, further attention were given to ensure that the new "Ghajini" was presented as an augmented product so as to meet viewer desires beyond expectations. As a result, a detailed marketing plan was chalked to promote the film and the maestro A.R. Rahman was roped in to make the scores of the movie more enchanting. Aamir Khan, a producer-director himself, with the fame of the hit "Taare Zameen Par", even did not withdraw himself to give in the best inputs for ensuring that the film emerged as one of the best compared to those of the contemporary commercial Bollywood flicks.

GHAJINI-THE PERFORMANCE

Ghajini has earned an estimated Rs 90 crore (Meenakshi Verma Ambwani, 2008), by selling its distribution rights in the country to Indian Film Company (IFC) which itself speaks about its success as a product. The audio and home video rights have been sold to T-Series for Rs. 8.5 crore. The movie became the only Indian film to earn "One Billion Rupees" at the box office (thaindian.com, 2008) across the country in less than a week of its release on Christmas day. By 30th December, when the first six day's box office figures of the movie were added up, it no longer looked like 2008 would be remembered as the year of the small films (livemint.com, 2008). As the film crossed the Rs. 1 Billion mark in less than one week, trade analysts were already predicting that the film industry was recession-proof and the success of Ghajini would pave the way for more aggressive marketing strategies for the big budget releases scheduled in the year 2009 (livemint.com, 2008). It was party time for the makers of the film and during the cake cutting ceremony, the actors and crew members expressed their satisfaction and

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happiness roped in by the success of the movie. The producer in this function also expressed their satisfaction that the movie was not only raking in huge profits in domestic markets, but its performance had been equally appreciated in the overseas markets as well. The film was reported to have grossed four million US dollars within a week of its release, which is infact a new record in Bollywood history. According to market reports (Bhandari, R., 2008), brands that have associated with the movie have together spent more than Rs 140 million (Rs 14 Crores) worth of media in promoting the movie.

Table 1: Comparative Figures of Earnings of Recent Bollywood Mega Movies on The Basis of 1st week Collections

Film Name	Earnings in the 1st Week	Source
Ghajini	Rs 110 Crore (all over)	www.samaylive.com/news/ghajini-scripts-history-with-first-week-collection/602942.htm http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghajini_(2008_film)
Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi	Rs 90 Crore (all over)	www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1215369
	Rs 60 crore worldwide	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rab_Ne_Bana_Di_Jodi
Singh is Kinng	Rs. 43.77 Crores in India alone	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singh_Is_Kinng
Om Shanti Om	Rs 41 Crores	www.indicine.com , http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singh_Is_Kinng

Commenting on the movie's success, reputed trade analyst Taran Adarsh commented, "As numbers come in from various territories, it looks like Ghajini's going to be the biggest hit for the industry this year. It's doing much better than Singh is Kinng, Golmaal Returns and one can't even compare Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi with Ghajini's numbers" (www.in.ibtimes.com).

GHAJINI: THE PLACE OR DISTRIBUTION

The makers of Ghajini wanted the movie to break all records in terms of distribution set by Bollywood. Infact, according to a report published by livemint.com (2008), Bollywood's 2009 big releases has been said to have no match the distribution strategy of Ghajini. Indian Film Co., the producers of Ghajini, released 1550 prints over India, the highest ever in Bollywood history. In August 2008, the same producers released 1400 prints of the movie Singh is Kinng which ran for eight weeks and raked in Rs. 147 crores. According to other Bollywood producers like Sajid Nadiadwala, "There's no alternative but to cross the 1400 benchmark. We will have to study how Ghajini was distributed and devise our strategy". Komal Nahta, trade analyst and editor of "The Film Street Journal" had commented, "Since 2005, the shelf life of films has gone down. No film, be it small or big, survives beyond four weeks. So it would definitely be the distribution and promotional strategies that would evolve to become more aggressive and intense. You can expect the same trend in 2009 and the coming years."

The Economic Times (Meenakshi Verma Ambwani, 2008) reported that Ghajini has earned an estimated Rs 90 crore by selling its distribution rights in the country to Indian Film Company (IFC). The movie has also been reported to have beaten Shahrukh Khan's Om Shanti Om's distribution rights. It was reported that Om Shanti Om's distribution rights were sold to Eros Entertainment for Rs 73 crores.

The Indian Film Company (IFC), promoted by the TV 18 Group, has bagged the domestic distribution rights for the Aamir Khan-starrer for an estimated Rs 53 crore. IFC is managed by B. K Enterprises, a joint venture of Viacom and Raghav Bahl. Producers, Madhu Varma and Allu Arvind have sold the home video rights, overseas rights and satellite rights for another Rs 40 crore. It is to be noted that IFC has commissioned the exploitation of its films to Studio 18, India's first vertically integrated motion picture studio with a business bouquet that entails, produces, and syndicates the marketing and distribution of Indian feature films.

(<http://www.studio18india.com/miptv.html>, 2008).

Studio 18, in a recent press release had been heard to express their plans to play safe and rely on pre-release hype to recover their investments on Ghajini. Regarding this, the comments made by Studio 18 team is noteworthy (Exhibit 1).

"Ghajini will be the biggest and widest release ever, breaking the record set by 'Singh Is Kinng', which was also distributed by us,"

Aman Gill, Director, Domestic Theatrical Distribution, Studio 18

"With 'Singh Is Kinng', we set a precedent in the way the films are marketed and with 'Ghajini', we tend to go beyond that"

Ms. Priti Shahani, Sr. V.P., Marketing & Distribution, Studio 18

Exhibit 1: Comment made by Studio 18 team on Ghajini

(Courtesy: <http://news.sawf.org/bollywood/54520.aspx>, 2008)

The makers of the movie had a different distribution strategy for its overseas market. The producers had decided to release the film worldwide across 22 countries along with its huge Indian release on Christmas 2008 (Economic Times, 22nd December, 2008). The overseas release and distribution was managed by BIG Pictures, the motion pictures brand of Reliance BIG Entertainment Ltd. (RBEL), the flagship media and entertainment arm of Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (R-ADAG). The key overseas markets covered were UAE with 36 prints, the US and Canada with 112 prints and the UK with 65 prints. The film had also been simultaneously released in Norway, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore. Infact, the top management of BIG Pictures had been quite happy with the outcomes of their efforts as revealed by the comment made by their COO, International Distribution in a reputed Business daily (Exhibit 2).

“There has been a very high response from exhibitors to Ghajini, with keen anticipation from the media and public alike.”

*Mr. Jawahar Sharma,
COO, BIG Pictures, International Distribution*

Exhibit 2: Comment Made by BIG Pictures COO on Ghajini
(Courtesy: *marketwatch.com*, 2008)

GHAJINI - THE PROMOTIONS

The promotion and marketing of Ghajini was well- planned and executed by its makers well back since the project was taken up by the production team. Aamir Khan even though not a producer of the movie, took personal interest and took up a leadership role in promoting the film. It is said that 30% or 15 crore of the 50 crore cost of the movie has been spent on promotion and the buzz is clearly visible (Abhishek, 2008). The marketing of the movie has tapped numerous fresh ideas including life-size statues, ushers at multiplexes sporting Ghajini hairstyles, introducing 3-D PC games, interactive websites, Ghajini mobile handsets from Samsung, TV and FM promotions and co-promotions planned along with popular brands like Van Heusen, Tata Indicom and Tata Sky.

GHAJINI PROMOTIONS: AN EVENT IN ITSELF

The promotion of Ghajini has been described to be an event in itself. And all the partners and organizations involved in Ghajini's promotion were equally enthusiastic about the movie's marketing, an effort perhaps which was well- planned and executed for the first time for any Bollywood film. This eventful marketing strategy was planned and executed by targeting maximum number of people to spread awareness about the movie in an engaging manner, where each touch point of film was designed to occupy the mind-space of the viewers (Bhandari, R., 2008).

WEB PROMOTIONS

The makers of Ghajini had partnered with “Hungama” to bring in its online campaigns. “Hungama” has created three websites for the film namely, www.rememberghajini.com, www.findghajini.com and www.wallofsuspects.com. These websites contain videos (teasers/promos) and images (wallpapers) of the movie in order to enhance the enthusiasm of surfers interested in the movie and downloading its contents. These online promotions have been designed with all the elements in order to attract the inquisitive surfers to the theatres. Most interestingly, Hungama has created a viral application in the website www.findghajini.com where surfers can play the role of the character played by Aamir Khan in the movie and make attempts to find the “killer” through the clues provided.

PROMOTION THROUGH CO-BRANDING STRATEGIES

Brand experts and Bollywood have of late evolved a new co-branding strategy where a movie and a popular brand are being jointly promoted to make the venture immensely profitable for both the parties. These synergistic promotions have helped various brands to enhance their sales and the Bollywood flicks on the other hand gained immense popularity even well before the release of the films. Ghajini was not an exception of this well planned move.

Van Heusen's Ghajini Line: According to a press release made by Aditya Birla Nuvo (2008), Van Heusen the flagship brand of the company had launched the exclusive Ghajini line (priced at Rs 1,299 onwards), which is for today's uber-confident young Indian male who has it all. The Ghajini line translates the style statement of the character played by the iconic actor who is disciplined, self-made, educated, well- travelled and fashion conscious. The Van Heusen Ghajini line has the unmistakable stamp of an achiever, a fashionable tycoon, personified through slim plackets, narrow ties and mid-waist straight fit pants. Add to that the waistcoat, and the line aptly articulates the contemporary formal look. The company had launched a comprehensive promotional

campaign for the Ghajini line in all its stores across India with in-store campaigns and giant posters of the protagonist of the film dressed in formals (Exhibit 3). The company had recently also organized a fashion show with Aamir Khan, where models had sported the Van Heusen's Ghajini Line clothes along with his new hairstyle that had recently become a craze for the entire nation.

“We are proud to partner with Ghajini and style none other than the lead actor, Aamir Khan. The character he plays in the film embodies the values of Van Heusen as a brand, and makes a statement of power so unique, that we didn't think twice before associating our brand with this movie.”

“Aamir is playing the CEO of a telecom company and the collection, we have designed, is exclusive. We are proud to partner with Ghajini and dress none other than Aamir Khan, the man himself, who embodies the sentiments of Van Heusen as a brand. Thus, it was a strategic opportunity for us”.

*Mr. Shital Mehta,
COO, Van Heusen*

Exhibit 3: Comments made by Van Heusen COO on Ghajini
(Courtesy: www.adityabirlanuvo.com, 2008, www.indiaretailing.com, 2008)

Tata Indicom and Ghajini: Tata Indicom had decided to promote Ghajini as a part of its recent promotional strategy “Suno Dil Ki Awaaz”, (Exhibit 4) the objective of which is to reach out the promotions to the mainstream mass market of India. The company had taken the promotions of the movie to a new level by introducing its “outbound dialer service with Aamir Khan's pre-recorded voice”. Any Tata Indicom service user would get a call in Aamir's voice, asking the caller whether he is Ghajini and inform that the film would release on 25th December. Through this initiative, the company had planned to target 10 million customers with these outbound calls.

“We want to manifest our campaign 'Suno Dil Ki Awaaz' in every possible form and film Ghajini represents this very well.”

*Mr. Abdul Khan,
Brand Manager, Tata Indicom*

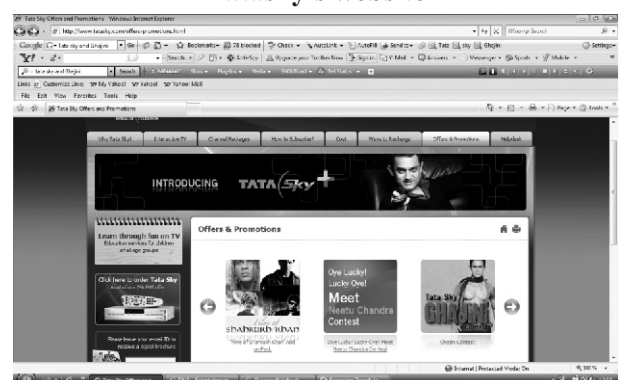
Exhibit 4: Comments made by Tata Indicom Brand Manager on Ghajini
(Courtesy: www.businessofcinema.com/news.php?newsid=11247, 2008)

Tata Indicom had also emphasized on TV commercials for downloads of Ghajini's mobile contents like video clips, songs, wallpapers, games etc. Web surfers have also been extensively informed about the movie in the company's website <http://www.tataindicom.com/print-ghajini.aspx> for information related to content downloading (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5: Ghajini's promotion through Tata Indicom's website



Exhibit 6: Ghajini's promotion through Tata Sky's website

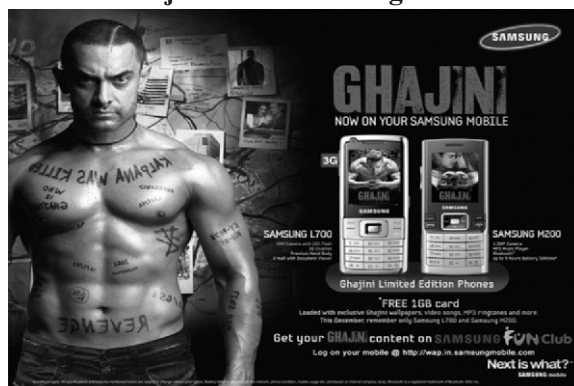


Tata Sky and Ghajini: TataSky, a joint venture between Tata and media major Star has already signed Aamir Khan earlier in July, 2008 for promoting the brand. Recently counting on Ghajini, the company had also roped in the movie's heroine, Asin as one of its brand ambassadors. According to Mr. Vikram Mehra, Chief marketing officer, Tata Sky, “Tata Sky and Asin have a lot in common. Both are young, energetic, achievers, and both enjoy a high degree of credibility with consumers. As our new face, she will be influential in reinforcing the attributes of

the Tata Sky brand and reiterate our positioning” (PTI, 2008). Apart from this, the company had also launched an interactive quiz contest on its website (<http://www.tatasky.com/ghajini-contest.html>) and aired an exclusive program for its viewers on the making of the film.

Samsung and Ghajini: Samsung had been tied up Aamir Khan as its brand ambassador for quite a few times. The company had launched special Ghajini edition mobile handsets namely, L-700 and M-200 containing (www.in.samsungmobile.com) pre-loaded Ghajini ringtones, wallpapers, video clips and songs (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7: Ghajini's and Samsung's Advertisement



Courtesy: <http://in.samsungmobile.com/promotion/promotionView.do?promotionNo=1462>

PROMOTION THROUGH MULTIPLEXES

The makers of Ghajini had decided to take their promotions directly to the cinema goers. As a result, an elaborate promotional campaign covering the major multiplexes in the country was targeted. The promotions began on the day when Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi was released. These included multiplex ushers sporting the Ghajini haircut of Aamir Khan and life size bare chested tattooed statue of the protagonist, displaying “Ghajini Wall of Suspects”, distributing Ghajini mementos like tattoo stickers, pamphlets. These point-of-purchase (POP) promotions/displays created tremendous enthusiasm and excitement amongst the viewers visiting movie theatres and multiplexes. Marketing literature (Hawkins, D.I, Best, R.J, Coney, K.A, Koch, E.C, 2003) suggests that are common in retailing of many products and the impact these displays have on brand sales is often tremendous. This had been effective for Ghajini's promotions. As a result of these, the “Ghajini” fever was already implanted well before the movie was actually released for the viewers. The outlet atmosphere or servicescape (Wakefield, K.L, Blodgett, J.G, 1994) created at most multiplex theatres were unique in terms of lighting, arrangement of Ghajini banners, layout of Ghajini mementos and particularly, by the behaviour of the multiplex ushers in their Ghajini looks created a real festive environment for the viewers. Adding to this, TV channels airing Aamir Khan personally visiting some of these promotional stalls and encouraging the multiplex staffs by sharing snaps with them added more fire to the promotions.

GHAJINI MERCHANDISES

The producers of the film have also decided to launch exclusive Ghajini mementos in retail outlets across the country. Recently, a multimedia and gaming company, FX labs have developed a 3D PC game on Ghajini that had already been reported to have acclaimed popularity amongst gamers in and around the country.

TV PROMOTIONS

Apart from promoting the movie through teasers and trailers and playing the superhit songs of the movie in various TV channels, the producers also aired short videos on Aamir Khan showing his rigorous thirteen month training and workouts in a gym to sport the “Eight-pack Abs” look for the movie. Video clippings showing Aamir Khan and director A.R. Murugadoss adopting the Ghajini haircut in a hair cutting parlour was another strategy that had attracted the youth. Recently, some TV channels also aired another promotional event where Aamir Khan himself rendered the Ghajini haircut to his ardent fans in various places across the country. The superstar was even seen singing few lines from the hit song “Guzarish” from the movie. Even, till date, the TV promotions post release and acclaimed reports on the movie's success has been continued with equal vigour where reputed news channels screened special shows and reviews on the movie's huge success and trade analyst Komal Nahta having exclusive interviews with actor Aamir Khan and director, A.R. Murugadoss. Another noteworthy promotion event aired by channels was that of the inauguration of paintings on the movie Ghajini by Bollywood star Salman Khan (www.filmnirvana.com/multiplex, 2008).

PROMOTIONS THROUGH FM

With TV promotions pumping up Ghajini's promotions, FM channels were equally enthusiastic with Ghajini. Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM, India's hottest radio station, has brought about some power packed action exclusively for its listeners. To promote the movie Ghajini, Radio Mirchi have introduced two interactive contests 'Kaan to Khan' and 'Baal Dhamaal'. The contest which began on December 15th, 2008, provided listeners a memorable experience of not only winning exciting goodies but also interacting with Aamir Khan in person (Exhibit 8). Announcing the initiatives (Radio Mirchi, 2008), Mr. Sriram Kilambi, Station Director, Radio Mirchi, said, "Radio Mirchi has always provided its listeners great music and Mirchidaar Bollywood updates. The two interesting contests will not only entertain our listeners, but will also provide a lifetime opportunity of meeting the superstar Aamir Khan."

Exhibit 8: Ghajini's promotion at Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM



Courtesy: <http://www.mastiask.com/indian-celeb-pics/aamir-at-ghajini-promotion-at-radio-mirchi.html>

LESSONS FROM GHAJINI

Ghajini's unique aggressive marketing strategy has been supported to be effective by most trade analysts because, trends in the Indian film industry since the year 2005 had shown that the shelf life of films had gone down drastically to an average of four to five weeks and as a result, film producers need to skim the chunk of cream in the first few weeks. So the only way to leverage success would be through promotions and marketing as result would emerge to be more intense and aggressive.

The ultimate gauge of a successful trade promotion (Wells, W., Moriarty, S., Burnett, 2007) as that seen in case of the movie Ghajini is whether sales increase. Ghajini's promotion as revealed in the above was primarily designed to get the cooperation of its domestic and overseas distribution partners and to encourage the overall promotions of the movie to the cinema goers. At this juncture, the success of the distribution and promotional strategy of Ghajini could be attributed to two factors, namely: the ability of the makers to successfully stimulate in-store campaigning through co-branding strategies and creating a high level of excitement about the movie among the viewers as well as those involved with its distribution, promotions and sales (exhibition). In addition, it is clearly visible that Ghajini's promotion was also used to accomplish other marketing objectives such as strategically dodging the impact of the rival movie "Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi" already in the market by expanding its distribution

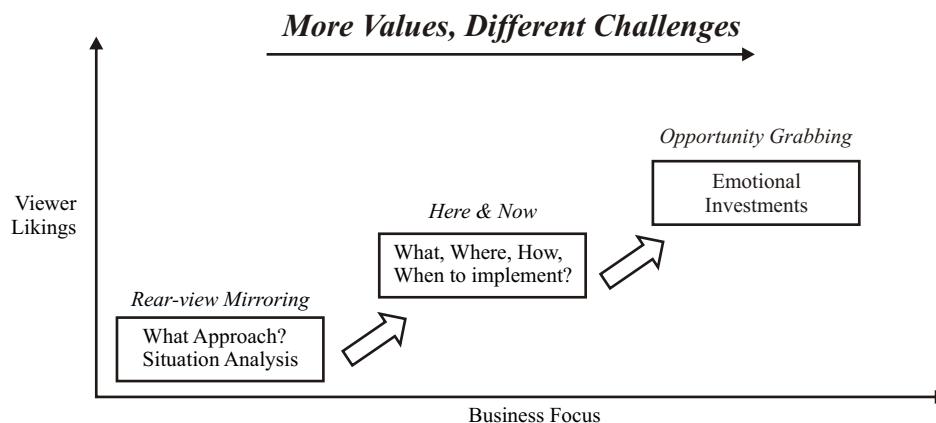


Fig 1: Ghajini's route towards success (Model adapted from Wyeth, S., 2005)

and promotions beyond what had been done by Yashraj films and Shahrukh Khan.

The Ghajini team had definitely scaled this titanic marketing plan on the basis of a detailed market survey that formed the cornerstone of its future success. In the year 2008, where other big and small production houses were struggling to score a hit in the box office and particularly when the entire business scenario had been going through a lean phase, Ghajini's approach to understand and scale the emotional needs of its viewers was crucial to build up its comprehensive marketing strategy that leveraged its success. Choosing the right distribution partners, co-branding initiatives, designing the right advertisements were all strategically analyzed and executed professionally by the makers of the movie.

One can easily say that Ghajini's success could perhaps be attributed more on its team's ability to scale the future opportunities and deliver highly on the "emotional investments" (Figure 1), where Aamir Khan himself played a vital role in leading the campaign right into the audience's hearts. Infact Tata Indicom's promotional punch line "Suno Dil Ki Awaz" had rightly matched with Aamir and his team's effort.

CONCLUSION

Marketers and manufacturing companies can take inspiration from the Ghajini case to gear their efforts through innovative promotional and service packages in the uncertain business environment. Although the business scenario might not be very encouraging in the present economic scenario, "winning the customers minds" would emerge to be the most valuable factor providing competitive edge to organizations plying in highly competitive markets. It is worth mentioning here that Ghajini was sold to the audience as a product which was emotionally owned by them, rather than its marketers selling a story that most of Bollywood's movies had repeated over the years. Perhaps this is where Ghajini has had left its mark as a key differentiator.

Organizations directly and indirectly related to the media and entertainment industry would perhaps be more encouraged to adopt strategies successfully implemented by Ghajini's sponsors and associates. With big corporations like the Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (R-ADAG), Tata, Aditya Birla Groups already been proudly associated with Ghajini's success, who knows movie making and marketing could emerge as one of the most profitable investments for the Indian and Global Corporate giants.

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