Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Film Industry in Pakistan

Aftab Alam a,*, Dr. Siti Aida Samikon b

a PhD Student, Post Graduate Center, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology Cyberjaya Malaysia
b Limkokwing University of Creative Technology Cyberjaya Malaysia

ABSTRACT
This publication report has focused on the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Pakistan's film industry. In this report, unified theories have been determined in the form of stakeholder and effective communication theory. The Governmental support has been identified as these impacts have been cannot be overruled without it. The overall occupancy rate has been affected, and the production of local and regional movies. Some suitable recommendations have been considered to avoid such adverse impacts for future improvements. A conclusion has been drawn that this film industry needs to improve its overall aspects by aligning such a better framework.
1. Introduction

The Pakistani Film Industry has always influenced both the regional and niche characters of nature. This industry is known as Lollywood, and it was established in 1929. Lahore is considered the central place for this industry as films get produced in several languages like Urdu, Punjabi. Due to the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this film industry has been affected adversely. The Pakistani cinema and its problems have been affected due to the threat of this pandemic. The primary purpose of this publication report is to determine the impact of the COVID-19 on this film industry along with the existing health crisis aspects. The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a significant impact on the Pakistani Film Industry in 2020. It has been observed that cinemas and movie theatres in this country were closed. Film festivals and award functions were cancelled or postponed. Many Pakistani films were scheduled to get released between March and April 2020. But this COVID-19 has delayed the releases indefinitely. The global box office or film industry had lost approx. US$5 billion by the end of March 2020. According to some Pakistani filmmakers, the existing film industry of this country is already getting affected as people only show interest in cinemas during the festive times of Eid, Muharram. But the COVID-19 outbreak has prevented any release during that time in 2020. It has created a 38% loss within this industry’s revenue. In 2020, this industry was expecting to have a growth of 20-25% in revenue. But this pandemic forced cinema makers in filming further. After-effects of this pandemic situation need to be recovered in three months’ time to gain the lost momentum within this existing Pakistani film industry. Adverse impacts of this situation need to be determined for the further betterment of this Pakistani Film industry.

2. Literature and Theories

The Pakistani Film industry has been facing several issues even before the commencement of the COVID-19 outbreak. The people of this country have lost their interest in this industry’s movies as the festival times are the main phase for major releases. Due to the adverse impacts of this pandemic outburst, major film releases got delayed or postponed during the festival time of 2020. It affected massively to the overall revenue of this industry. The existing Pakistani Government announced a full lockdown as people were scared to visit crowded places like cinema halls (Priyadarshini et al. 2020). All the available cinema halls were closed, and the production of local or regional films was prevented or prohibited. The
existing Government developed some strict SOPs that need to be maintained within and outside of these cinema halls for ensuring people’s safety. Over the years, this film industry is losing its grip on the existing market share of Pakistan. Since 2016-2017, the overall occupancy rate of cinema halls has been reducing gradually. But this pandemic situation has accelerated that reduction rate and that affected the overall growth of this industry (Shen et al. 2020). Available cinema owners have identified that cinema halls need to re-open with the help of the Government. Electricity bills need to be granted as an industrial aspect rather than a commercial aspect. The Pakistani Government has determined this entertainment sector as an industry. But this industry has been deprived of all the financial packages and required services during this pandemic situation, unlike other industries. Pakistani cinema owners were looking to convert the buildings to commercial plazas. Only one IMAX cinema was established in Lahore for $4 million (Nhamo et al. 2020). But, due to this situation, it was also got closed after one or two months. Strict SOPs have been considered to avoid any issues regarding this pandemic outburst. Several stakeholders have played a significant role in this Pakistani film industry as they have engaged themselves for further betterment of this industry. Effective stakeholder theory has been considered to determine their impact regarding the effective business operations of this film industry (Jones et al. 2018). It has been observed that this theory has helped in managing the existing business ethics along with the management activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic situation, this industry was getting affected adversely. Hence, different stakeholders, like cinema owners, producers, directors, have looked to work together for future improvements. This theory has engaged these associated people according to their requirements or needs in this industry. Effective communication theory needs to be also considered as effective communication can help in developing a better direction for the betterment of this film industry in Pakistan (Buzzanell, 2017). These theories have developed a better framework within the existing industrial structure of Pakistan for better enhancement. The existing Pakistani Government planned to re-open this country’s cinema halls during September 2020. Strict SOPs were implemented, and approx. 40-45% of occupancy was allowed for avoiding any further COVID cases. This industry has always developed a positive and direct impact on the global economic aspect. The global entertainment industry is expecting to have a growth of 10.1% by the end of 2025 despite these pandemic impacts (Ayanbadejo, 2020). Hence, Pakistan needs to improve its existing film industry also for making this industry more relevant than other industries. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed or postponed the production of both local and regional movies. Hence, many
associated people have lost their jobs in this industry. The overall occupancy rate has been reduced, and people have become scared of getting gathered in a crowded palace like a cinema hall. Hence, these significant impacts of COVID-19 have been preventing this Pakistani Film industry from becoming more significant than others.

3. Governmental Role for the Pakistan Film Industry

During the mid of 2020, the number of COVID cases was increasing rapidly in this country. Therefore, the existing Governmental authorities of this country have played a pivotal role in managing this pandemic situation efficiently. Cinema owners of this country have closed their halls due to loss of revenues. They demanded to the Government that special electricity tariffs need to be announced. But it has been paying as the commercial tariff because the federal and provincial governments did not take cinema owners’ demands seriously (tribune, 2020). The Government deprived of any financial packages and concessions to this industry, unlike other industries. After the commencement of the lockdown in this country, the Government allowed showing different movies by following strict standard operating procedures (SOPs) for Covid-19. Only 20 to 25 screens were allowed to get opened. But the Pakistani cinema owners decided not to reopen their cinemas fearing losses to the business.

According to some cinema owners of this country, the existing Pakistani cinema is in danger of shutting down in the coming years due to the lack of the Pakistani Government's seriousness and non-cooperativeness (nation, 2020). Production of domestic and local films was affected. The Government implemented some strict SOPs as these need to be maintained for future improvements. People were scared to visit such crowded places, and hence, this Pakistani Film industry has been facing the worst financial crisis since the outbreak of Covid-19. The existing Pakistani Government has been looking to revive the film industry of this country by protecting and promoting their cultural values. Several stakeholders like cinema owners, producers, directors of this country have been engaged to develop a proper understanding of how this industry can work for better revenue after these pandemic circumstances (link. springer, 2020). Governmental support was essential during the reopening of the Pakistani cinema halls as cinema owners can operate fully due to the alignment of standard operating procedures (SOPs).

The existing Governmental SOPs have affected the overall screening process, along with the sound system. All SOPs need to be maintained within and outside of the Pakistani cinema halls. This Government has looked to initiate E-Governance activities to combat the COVID-
19 adverse impacts. Sustainable development programs have been promoted for significant improvements within this available Pakistani film industry. This country has been economically contributed through this industry as social and cultural diversities have emerged in this existing industry. The Pakistani Government has always looked to revive this industry as it has been given the status of an industry. New tax rates were launched as the overall occupancy rates were reduced due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This industry has identified that without getting any help from this Government, a staggering loss of 70% can occur within the available business operations (OutlookIndia, 2020).

The Pakistani Government is focused on promoting its film industry to mitigate the adverse impacts of this pandemic outburst. This Government should look to provide the necessary background support along with a proper framework within this existing and affected industrial structure. Governmental authorities always play a vital role in different countries to manage their existing film or entertainment sectors of industries. Hence, these industries need to be backed by some support from the Government for abiding any adverse impacts for future betterments. Relevant SOPs need to be implemented as both the security of people and the reopening of the Pakistani cinema halls are required (Bilal, 2020). It can be beneficial for the overall economic growth for this country and other global aspects. Therefore, the Pakistani Government should be clearer in helping its existing Film industry through the proper provision of financial packages.

4. COVID-19 Impacts on the Pakistan Film Industry

COVID-19 pandemic has affected different global sectors economically as people were urged not to get socialized to prevent this infection’s spread. The Pakistani Film industry has been affected adversely due to this pandemic situation as the industry has been transformed into a sinking ship. Pakistani cinemas have been facing several issues regarding their infrastructure, occupancy, and quality of services (Agarwal and Sunitha, 2020). People of this country have lost their interest also in this industry’s cinemas. Only during the festival times like Eid, Muharram people have been found to visit cinema halls in this country. Therefore, major film releases were scheduled for those festive times in 2020, like every year. It has been observed that the Pakistani cinemas have been suffering from the worst economic crisis due to the COVID-19 lockdown (Moon, 2020). Strict lockdown rules have prevented people from visiting cinema halls. Hence, it affected the overall revenue of this industry.
Many cinema owners have decided to shut down their cinema houses permanently. Different countries like India have looked to open their cinema halls with the help of their existing Government and by the proper maintenance of the required rules. The existing Federal and Provincial Governments of Pakistan did not take the Pakistani cinema owner’s demand seriously. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the availability of newly released domestic and foreign movies. Before the commencement of this pandemic situation, Pakistani cinema owners were contacting architects to convert the buildings to commercial plazas. Only one IMAX cinema was established in Lahore for $4 million (Ozili and Arun, 2020). But, due to this situation, it was also got closed after one or two months. The Pakistani Government has considered Pakistani cinemas as an industry. But, according to the existing cinema owners, they were deprived of any financial packages and concessions like other industries from the Government.

Electricity bills have been collected as commercial tariffs instead of industrial tariffs. The Pakistani cinemas were facing several issues before this pandemic situation since 2017. It has been observed that during 2017-2018, 1093 shows were running with an occupancy rate of 55%. But, in 2018-19, the occupancy rate got reduced to 29.14% with 979 shows. Then, due to this COVID-19 impact, the occupancy rate got reduced to 12.8% with 842 shows between December 2019 and March 2020 (Abbasi et al. 2020). Different organizational sectors of this country have been affected, and the existing Government has looked to provide financial support. But the existing film industry of this country has been deprived of any Governmental and financial help. This Pakistani Film industry has always developed a positive impact on the global entertainment and film industry. Proper cleanliness, disinfection need to be considered for a better environment [Refer to Appendix 1]. As people need to consider social distancing norms, they cannot be gathered in cinema halls. Hence, this pandemic situation has affected the overall occupancy level.

Still, the global film industry is expecting a growth of 10.1% by the end of 2025 by mitigating the adverse impacts of the COVID-19. The Pakistani cinema halls were expecting to get reopened from 11th September 2020 by maintaining the existing Governmental SOPs (Wionews, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic had left many people jobless in this industry through more shambolic performances. This pandemic situation has prevented any production of local films in this country. Adverse impacts of this situation have affected this industry, and these issues have been identified. Suitable SOPs and preventing activities need to be aligned to avoid any other cases regarding the COVID-19. The Pakistan film industry is
an essential part of this country's economy. Hence, it has directly developed an impact on the existing economic aspect of Pakistan.

5. Recommendations for the Pakistan Film Industry

The existing Pakistani Film industry has identified the existing adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as the overall occupancy rates have been reduced yearly. Hence, some specific ways can be recommended in the form of Governmental SOPs to avoid any adverse circumstances in this film industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Awareness Activities</td>
<td>Effective COVID-19 awareness activities need to be conducted to make the people of this country aware of the adverse impacts of this pandemic situation. People need to learn the Governmental SOPs need to be followed for having a safe visit to the existing cinema halls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitable Policies</td>
<td>No mask-No entry policy needs to be followed in the Pakistani cinema halls for preventing this pandemic outburst. Proper cleanliness, disinfection, and ventilation need to be conducted for ensuring people’s safety in this country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental Support</td>
<td>The existing Pakistani Government needs to value the demands of the existing cinema owners by delivering the required financial support. Electricity bills need to be considered as an industrial tariff instead of a commercial tariff.</td>
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</table>

Table 1: Recommendations

Figure 1: No Mask-No Entry
(Source: Moon, 2020)
These recommendations need to be aligned within the existing Pakistani Film industry to combat the adverse impacts of COVID-19 with more proactiveness.

6. Conclusion

The film industry is an essential part of a country as it directly develops an impact on the public economic sector of the country. Here, the film industry of Pakistan has been considered as during 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has affected this industry adversely. All the associated stakeholders, like cinema owners, directors, producers, have been considered due to the implementation of a stakeholder theory. Effective communication theory has been considered as it will be beneficial in determining the associated issues of this pandemic situation. The existing Government has considered it as an industry. But this industry was deprived of all the beneficial facilities like financial support, unlike other industries. Strict SOPs have been considered as people’s safety needs to be ensured for further betterments. This pandemic situation has delayed or postponed the production of local and regional cinemas as many people have lost their jobs also. Suitable recommendations need to be aligned for further improvements within this country. Finally, this publication report can be concluded in such a way that the existing Pakistani Film industry has been affected massively due to the lack of Governmental support during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Reference List

Journals


Websites


Appendix 1: Cleanliness of Cinema Halls

(Source: Moon, 2020)