



War of words between Producers Guild and multiplexes over release of movies on OTT platforms

Multiplexes have warned of retribution over the scheduled premiere of a number of movies on OTT platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Producers Guild of India also issued a statement, saying the reaction was uncalled for



As major labels have decided to release their movies on OTT platforms first, rather than opting for the traditional theatrical release due to the pandemic-induced lockdown, a war of words has broken out between leading multiplexes and producers.

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In a public statement, Inox has expressed its disappointment with the decision, terming it as alarming and disconcerting. It said it will be forced to take retributive measures.

"Inox would like to express extreme displeasure and disappointment on an announcement made by a production house today to release their movie directly on an OTT platform by skipping the theatrical window run. The decision of the production house to deviate from the globally prevalent content windowing practice is alarming and disconcerting," it said.

"Such acts, though isolated, vitiate the atmosphere of mutual partnership and paint these content producers as fair-weather friends rather than all-weather life-long partners. Needless to say, Inox will be constrained to examine its options and reserves all rights, including taking retributive measures, in dealing with such fair-weather friends."

Reacting to the criticism, the Producers Guild of India expressed its disappointment at the reaction. In a statement, the guild said it had always supported theatrical releases and that it would work extensively to get audiences back to theatres once the cinemas reopen.

"We are in unprecedented times, facing one of the greatest public health and economic emergencies of our lifetimes. This is a time for the entire film industry to come together with empathy and support for the difficult predicament that each of our constituents find themselves in — from producers, distributors,

exhibitors, daily-wage earners and technicians, to the thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods are in some way dependent on our industry.”

“Hence at a time like this, it is disappointing to see abrasive and unconstructive messaging from some of our colleagues in the exhibition sector. Statements that call for ‘retributive measures’ against producers who decide to take their movies direct to OTT platforms —especially at a time when cinemas are unfortunately closed for the foreseeable future — do not lend themselves to a constructive or collaborative dialogue on the way forward for the industry,” it said.

“Given this combination of factors, it is only natural that producers who have already invested heavily in their films with theatrical revenue assumptions that are no longer feasible will seek out all avenues available to recover their investment and to stay in business. At a time like this, it is important that each stakeholder understands and empathises with the predicament of the other, rather than adopting an adversarial stance which is counter-productive for the entire value chain,” it added.

PVR Cinemas also put out its official statement on the matter. The multiplex said it is disappointed with the producers who decided to go directly to OTT platforms. “Needless to say, we are disappointed with some of our producers deciding to go straight to streaming platform/s. We are hoping the producers would accede to our request to hold back their film’s release till cinemas reopened. That said, it is not the first time films are being premiered on streaming platform/s. Cinema exhibition has regularly faced competition from new emerging distribution platforms over last many years, and it has continued to enjoy cine-goers patronage and affinity,” it said.

BestMediaInfo.com reached out to Kapil Agarwal, JMD, UFO Moviez, for his views on the issue. Agarwal said steps had been taken in the wake of the extreme conditions. He said ‘content’ and ‘finance’ are the two points to be looked at during this time and said this will be a short-term arrangement.

“Movies are made for theatre. The narrative of the content that is created for the large screen is very different from the narrative that is created for the content on OTT,” he said.

“These are compelling circumstances because the theatres are shut and there is no visibility about when they will reopen. Therefore, there are a few movies in different languages that were ready for release, where they had borrowed money, had financial commitments; so it is a short-term arrangement under which they have been compelled to sell the movies to the platform because financially it must be very difficult for them to hold it for this long,” he added.

Asked if this could be a long-term trend, he said small budget movies might be sold but large budget ones might not. “OTT cannot give them the kind of revenue to recover the cost of those movies. Small budget movies that have financial obligations might opt for OTT.”

It must be noted that Amazon Prime Video recently announced it is premiering seven highly anticipated Indian movies, including Gulabo Sitabo starring Amitabh Bachchan and Ayushmann Khurrana. Shakuntala Devi starring Vidya Balan will also be premiered on the platform. Amazon Prime Video will also have major premieres between May and August, it said in a media release.