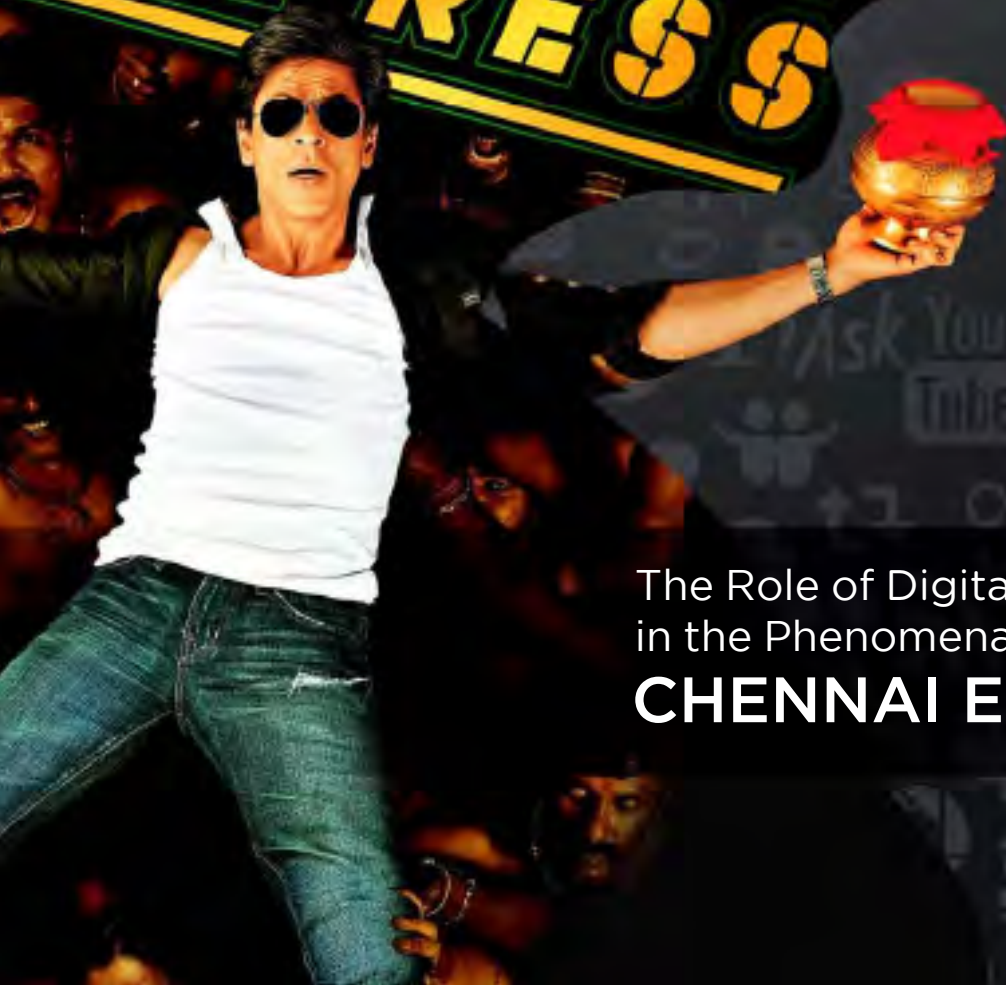


THE DIGITAL & SOCIAL BUSINESS OF

Bollywood

CHENNAI EXPRESS



The Role of Digital Marketing & Social Media
in the Phenomenal Success of
CHENNAI EXPRESS

FOREWORD

Siddhesh Bhobe (@siddheshb)
CEO, eMee & Business Head,
Persistent Systems

I would like to thank Shailja Gupta for the opportunity to be a part of Chennai Express's record breaking spree, and agreeing to co-author this case study. For a technology-centric company, it is always exciting to work on projects that directly impact millions of end users in a very visible and direct way.

Shah Rukh Khan is a truly global Indian brand, and his intellect and charm has earned him the love and respect of millions of loyal fans worldwide. For a movie that is as much about a resurgent, multi-cultural, modern India as it is about the universal language of love, social media presented the perfect medium for engaging fans across geographies and cultural boundaries, while presenting an unbeatable ROI on the marketing dollars.

While technology played a big role in the digital campaigns for Chennai Express, we quickly realized that having the pulse of the audience was critical to its success. No one understands this better than Shailja, who, while shuttling between New York and Mumbai in her various avatars as digital strategist, entrepreneur, filmmaker and artist, provided her critical perspectives on digital marketing for the restless global youth.

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Shailja Gupta (@shailja)
Creative & Digital Strategy Consultant
Chief Digital Strategist for Chennai Express
and Mr. Shah Rukh Khan

In the last couple of years, digital marketing for films has become a focal point in the overall marketing effort of a film. Persistent choosing to do a case study on the digital campaign for Chennai Express further emphasises how critical the digital aspect is.

Having earlier spearheaded a very successful digital campaign for Ra.One, I was apprehensive as to whether that success could be repeated or bettered for Chennai Express. However, the digital marketing world is still in a tremendous growth phase, and advances in leaps and bounds in just a few months. Add to that my drive to perform better than Ra.One meant I was able to completely reinvent my outlook towards Chennai Express' digital strategy. And of course, the marketing engine of Mr Shah Rukh Khan and his visionary ideas just made the journey easy!

The main platforms and sites used in this campaign were the Website, Mobile apps & games, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Puzzles, Fanclubs...the list goes on and on. However, these are but tools; one of the biggest factors for Chennai Express' digital success was integrating social media with the different digital products and the daily collection and analysis of large amounts of data, to understand the pulse of the digital audience. Key to this analysis was eMee's invaluable contribution towards daily analytics and interpretation, which helped me tremendously to tweak the digital marketing strategy to suit the wave of buzz on social media.

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The Role of Digital Marketing & Social Media in the Phenomenal Success of Chennai Express

Mainstream film-makers and production houses use all available means in getting the word out about their films, before, during and after release. This kind of promotion activity is driven by a business need to ensure that tickets are sold and box office expectations met. Social media is becoming an increasingly crucial arm of this marketing juggernaut. Social media differs from traditional marketing techniques in its immediacy and directness; it enables a direct relationship with the target audience, a one-to-one feedback mechanism and sharing platform. Film marketing is no longer about releasing a trailer or a few posters and waiting for the audience reaction on opening day. The market survey approach of using focus groups is also passé. After all, social media is the 21st century's perfect crowd-sourced focus group! It enables real-time, two-way communication, allowing marketing campaigns to be changed based on trends and feedback.

The typical pre-release scenario of a medium to big budget mass market film involves launching official Facebook and Twitter accounts and pushing these through traditional media, online competitions and so on.

Major influencers – movie critics and the actors themselves, among others – are used to create a buzz. Social media managers work overtime to make their product stand out from all the noise on social networks. All this to build buzz and establish a connection with audiences before the film is released.

But what is the impact of this social media exercise? Is it merely about creating a buzz? Or does it translate into box office numbers? Can social media buzz around a movie create a mini economic boom and help brands and products ride the wave? Our experience as the digital partner for the recent Bollywood box office sensation, Chennai Express, gave us some interesting insights into these questions.

Chennai Express – Chugging in New Paradigms in Social Media Marketing

“Social media presented the perfect medium for engaging fans across geographies and cultural boundaries, while presenting an unbeatable ROI on the marketing dollars.”

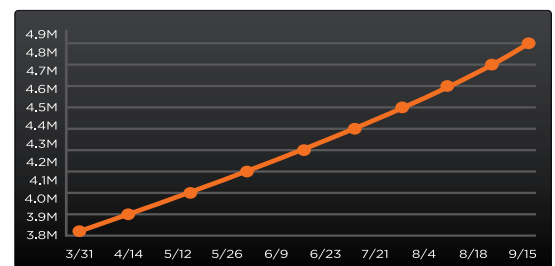


Chennai Express, directed by Rohit Shetty and produced by UTV Motion Pictures and Red Chillies Entertainment, features a stellar cast, including the elegant Deepika Padukone and India’s biggest superstar, Shah Rukh Khan. Given the big budget nature of the film, expectations ran high. Right from the outset, the Chennai Express digital team, headed by Shailja Gupta, was very clear about using social media as the focus of their marketing strategy. In addition to reaching out to as many people as possible, the objective of their social media strategy was to build campaigns that would capture people’s imagination and translate the increased social media traffic into getting more people to come to theatres.

The following key factors contributed to this decision:

- (a) The fact that both stars have loyal fan followings on social media
- (b) The lively cultural discussions about the differences in lifestyles in North and South India
- (c) As the film was to be released on a major holiday (Eid-ul-Fitr), social media traffic was expected to be high

The Chennai Express team decided to recruit a partner who could meet these objectives, help them analyze and interpret the social media presence and use technology interventions to multiply the social media efforts. Shailja worked closely with eMee as social media partners to evaluate the online presence and implement its system of Actionable Insights - a recommendation system that uses analytics, big data tools and calibrated metrics to gauge what people like and their engagement levels.



▲ Fig 1 - Shah Rukh Khan’s following on Twitter increased from 3.8M to 4.9M



Big Data analytics and our unique approach based on the 4A model of engagement provided Actionable Insights to the social media marketing team.

Analytics and Big Data

Technology played a big role in figuring out what fans liked, and what was going through the sieve. Big Data analytics, a variety of in-house and off-the shelf tools and our unique approach based on the 4A model of engagement provided Actionable Insights to the social media marketing team. However, these insights needed to be culturally and contextually relevant, and to achieve this, the team had to keep an ear on the ground and understand every nuance before providing recommendations! While the overall marketing strategy is important, the key lies in observing social media trends and creating campaigns on the fly in response to these trends. This is more art than science, and technology, at best, is an enabler.

Cross-pollination of Social Networks

While Twitter is the engine for viral content, Facebook is the more personal platform, where word of mouth recommendations work better. Chennai Express' campaigns were designed in such a way that users of one social network were often asked to go to another one for the next stimulus. For example, the innovative video-based game "Rahul meets Meena" used movie clips hosted on YouTube, was deployed on Facebook, and took user inputs from Twitter.

Mobile Strategy

In today's world, a mobile strategy is very critical and impossible to overlook. A good strategy should encompass native apps, games and SMSes. In a bid to capture the imagination of casual gamers and increase the film's pre-release buzz, 'Chennai Express: Escape from Rameshwaram', the movie's official game, was launched on multiple platforms well before release day.

In a country like India with high mobile but low internet penetration, Shailja aims to reach out to the common man through a

unique "permission-based SMS marketing" initiative – a targeted 100 million fan base will get regular updates and tweets from Shah Rukh Khan on SMS, once they register for the service through a simple "missed call". "The 20 additional characters between a tweet and an SMS provide ample marketing opportunities!" quips Shailja.

Commenting on the integration, Shah Rukh Khan says, "I have always believed in the power of technology and use it in various ways to further my connection with my audience. In recent years, Twitter has been a magical place for me to engage with my fans. I hope all my fans in India will avail of this new service to connect with me. I thank ZipDial and Twitter India for helping me bring together my entire national audience on one single, mobile platform. Very soon I hope to also expand this to multiple countries, languages and platforms"

Shailja adds, "Twitter is the world's leading real-time information network where hundreds of millions of users follow the people and organizations that interest them via mobile. In India, Twitter has for years been bringing users closer to the stars of Indian cinema."



Unprecedented Buzz

An unprecedented response - 1 billion cumulative impressions and over 750 thousand tweets over a 90-day period during the campaign!

Chennai Express related tweets generated over 1 billion cumulative impressions and the total number of tweets across all hashtags was over 750 thousand over the 90-day campaign period. As a point of reference: Kaun Banega Crorepati, another very popular Indian TV show, has generated about 21 thousand tweets over the last 2 years. Interestingly, the international impressions exceeded the Indian ones. The top countries (in order of total tweets sent) included India, USA, Pakistan, Indonesia, Germany, Malaysia, UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Canada. The traffic generated from the most popular hashtags has been shown in the graph (Figure 2) below:

Compared to recent popular Bollywood box office successes, the peak buzz generated by Chennai Express was higher by over 600%.

Its buzz on opening day eclipsed even that of Hollywood movies released during the same weekend by over 500% (Refer: Figure 3).

“Trending in India has become a branding and prestige issue. And more importantly, customers and audiences feel the same way too!”

-Shailja Gupta

Chennai express has made Twitter history in India as the first film to be listed in the top trends for more than 10 consecutive days. It has also become the first Indian film in twitter history to trend at **worldwide no 1** with two separate hashtags **#ChennaiExpress** and **#ChennaiExpressWeekend**.

Fig 2 - Chennai Express Hashtag analysis

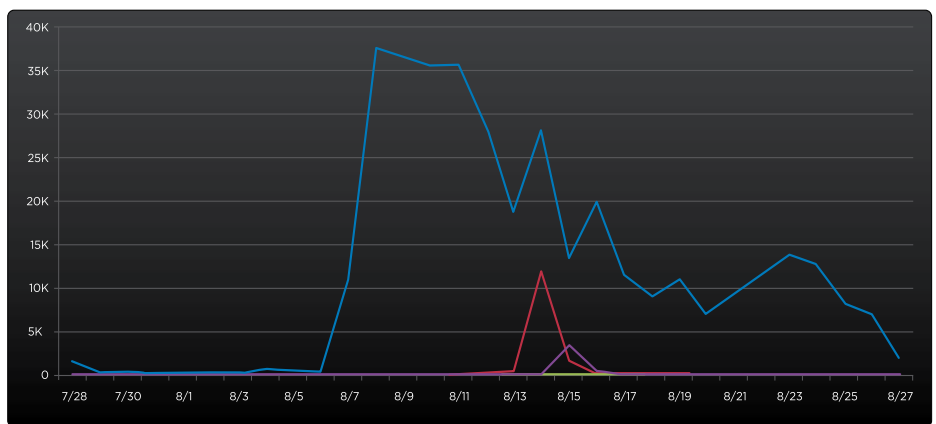
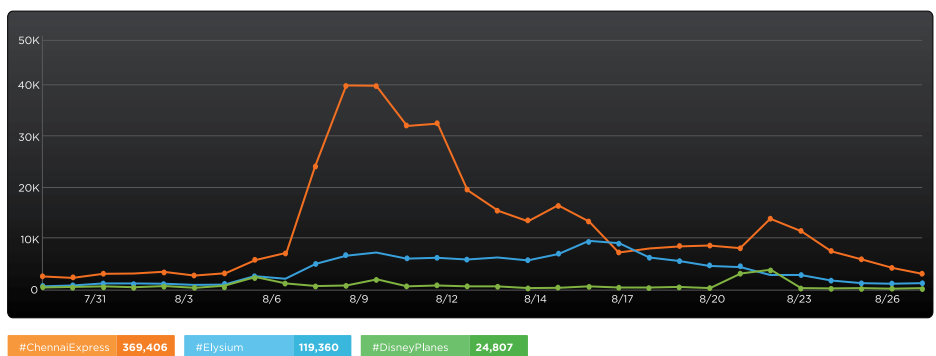


Fig 3 - Chennai Express buzz against Hollywood movies released the same weekend

Tweets per day: #ChennaiExpress, #Elysium, and #DisneyPlanes July 29th - August 28th



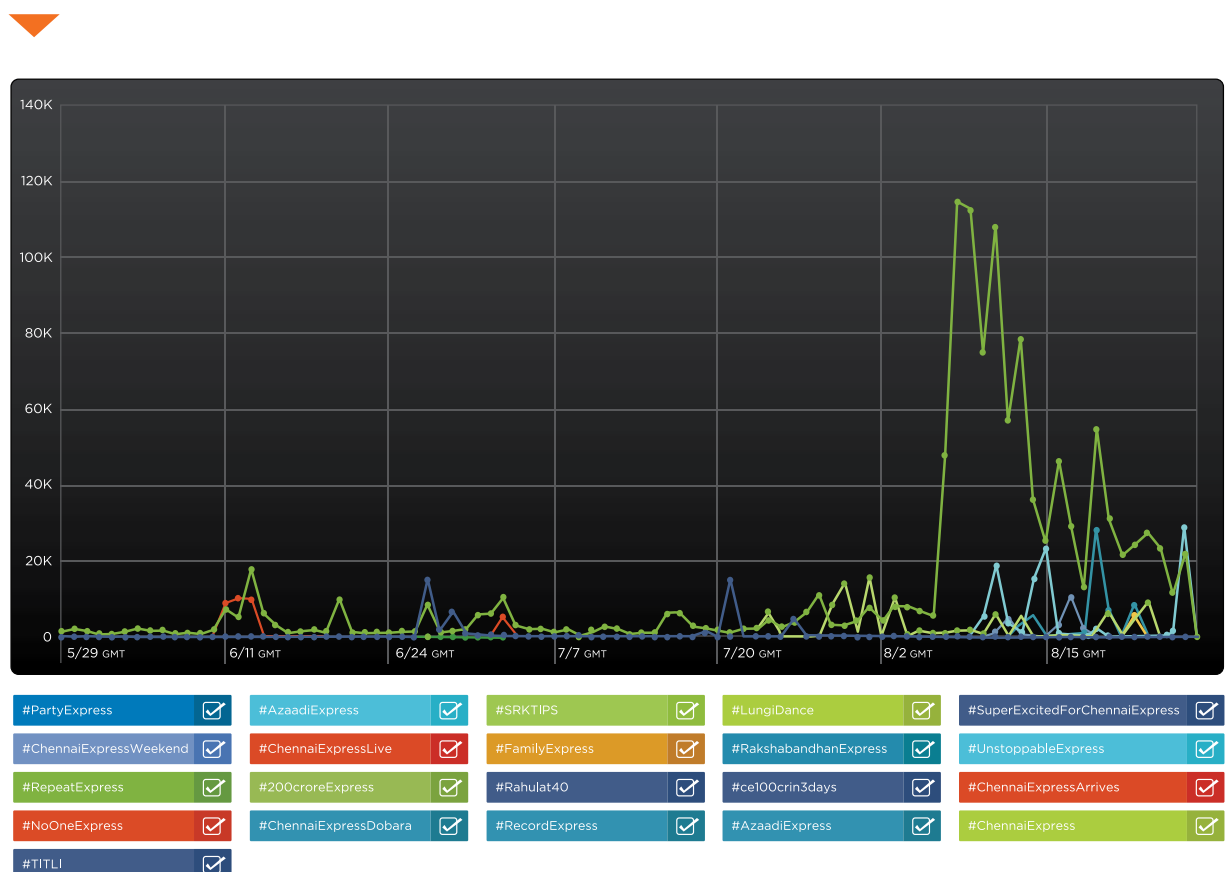
Trending On...

Innovative campaigns and hashtags were vital in keeping the buzz trending worldwide well beyond the opening weekend.

A crucial challenge for the campaign was sustaining the buzz for global and national audiences over such a long period. In social media, a week is a decade and timing is everything. If a movie's buzz peaks too early or too late in its marketing lifecycle, it could ring the death knell for successful box office collections. eMee's Actionable Insights were vital in keeping things fresh and adding new paradigms to the social media buzz.

For example, during the opening weekend, the team quickly realized that people like talking about box office numbers, so the hashtag #CE100crin3Days was designed to celebrate the box office numbers being reported. As evident from the graph below (Ref: Fig 4), the response to this hashtag rivaled that of the #ChennaiExpress hashtag itself that weekend.

Fig 4 - Chennai Express Hashtag analysis (in number of impressions)





Translating Buzz to Box Office Success

Box office collections mirrored the social interaction trends of the previous day.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this case analysis is to draw a parallel between the buzz on social networks and the key business performance indicator of box office collections. As this report goes into print, Chennai Express has already become the highest grossing Bollywood movie of all time. Along the way, every box office record has been broken, including highest opening weekend collections in India, highest opening weekend collections for a Bollywood movie in USA & Canada, fastest Bollywood movie to make Rs. 100 crores and the fastest Bollywood movie to make Rs. 200 crores, among others. Clearly, the buzz generated did result in unprecedented collections, but let's analyze this phenomenon further.

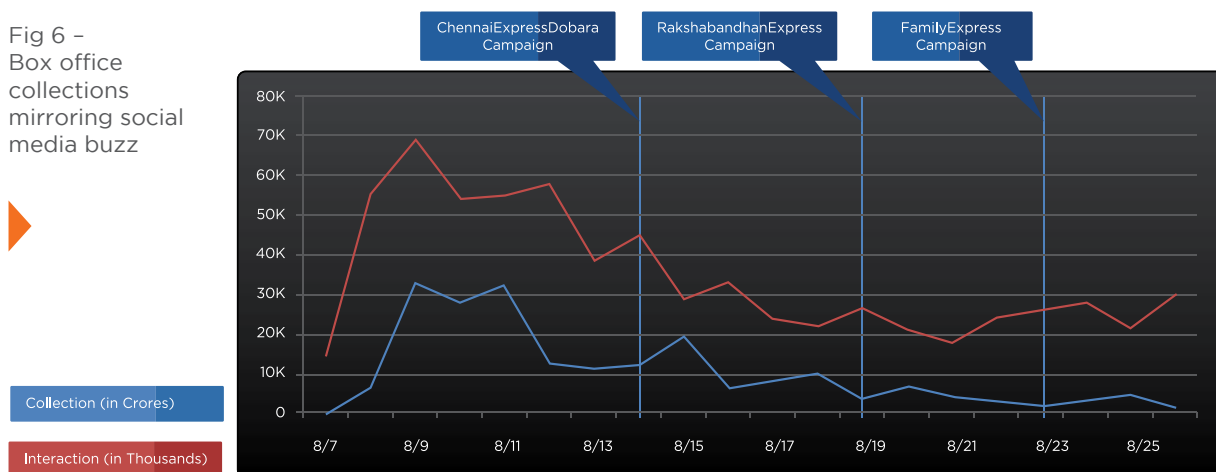
Typically, social media buzz and box office numbers mirror each other in that they peak around opening weekend and tend to taper off over a week in most cases and in about a fortnight for highly successful movies. This could be because of anything from unfavorable reviews or low attention spans to the release of newer movies. As mentioned earlier, one of the successes of the Chennai Express social campaign was its longevity. Although it received some mixed reviews (as can be expected for almost any movie), the initial buzz was built upon, based on the insights gained by the team and negative sentiment was dealt with through appropriate recalibration.

The first real test of the strategy arose during the second weekend of the movie's release, a long weekend which included the Indian Independence Day holiday. It came in the form of another high-profile Bollywood release competing for eye balls. Given the backdrop of the Independence Day celebrations, the hashtag #AzaadiExpress was created to piggy back on the mood of the nation and another hashtag, #ChennaiExpressDobara was started as a tongue-in-cheek response to the competing movie; to encourage audiences to watch Chennai Express, not just once, but a second time!

These two hashtags introduced a fresh perspective and began the social conversation around Chennai Express anew. These two hashtags alone saw over 12,000 related tweets, each with a potential reach of over 25 million people. This resulted in box office collections of Rs. 43.85 crores for Chennai Express, another unprecedented figure for second weekend figures.

Another interesting phenomenon we noticed was that after the first five days, that is, after the initial buzz had died down, the box office collections mirrored the social interaction trends of the previous day. If the interactions went up, the collections for the next day were very likely to go up as well. Figure 6 below shows this trend clearly.

Fig 6 - Box office collections mirroring social media buzz





Now Showing: Brands & Box Office Hits - A Symbiotic Relationship on Social Networks

The use of in-movie branding is not a new phenomenon. Especially in the case of movies starring Shah Rukh Khan, this has been a win-win for both parties: the brands use the 'Baadshah of Bollywood' to endorse their products in his movies and the films themselves use the huge marketing engines of these brands to further their own marketing objectives. What was interesting in the case of Chennai Express was the extension of this phenomenon onto social networks. This included both direct partners and, rather surprisingly, even brands with no connection to the movie or the cast. The interesting adaptations and metaphors used by the different brands added to the buzz around the core Chennai Express brand and allowed it to remain relevant for a longer period of time.

There were 18 direct brand associations across categories like food and beverages, mobile handsets and fast moving consumer goods. These partners not only benefited from the exposure of the in-movie endorsements, but also launched social media campaigns with a connection to the movie. The immense popularity of the movie saw each brand campaign receive a good response on social media and helped each of them in furthering their brands.

Possibly, the best example of this was the buzz experienced by Palam Sarees, which was the brand of sarees that Deepika Padukone wore in the movie. The Palam Sarees Fashion Show, organized as part of the movie pre-launch, generated immense interest on social media. The support from the official handles and the fan clubs contributed the buzz lasting up to the movie opening and even beyond.

Conversations involving the Palam Sarees brand experienced over 550,000 impressions on Twitter alone over a 7-day period.

Over 30 brands directly or indirectly rode the Chennai Express generating millions of social media impressions in targeted market segments.

Interestingly, brands with no connection to the movie at all also tried to ride the buzz. These involved suggestive hashtags, social media contests and other campaigns designed to piggy back on the immense popularity of the movie. The brands were an eclectic mix, ranging from FMCG brands to political parties. A leading eCommerce portal's #BechDeLungi hashtag humorously used the Lungi Dance metaphor and generated a good buzz on Twitter, including participation from US, Turkey, Pakistan and Australia – countries that the portal has no presence in. Clearly, everyone was getting on the train! Another very popular hashtag which leveraged the movie's popularity was #FekuExpress, a politically motivated campaign to counter another hashtag by a rival political party. A microsite was created, with a competition to win tickets to Chennai Express. The hashtag proved to be immensely popular, reaching over 600,000 people with over 1 million impressions.

However, most brands' digital campaigns were done in isolation. Though they benefitted with the film association very few brands were able to capitalize on it digitally as they did not seem to align the tags and other elements on social media. In some cases there were two opposite campaigns of two brands running on the same day diverting the attention of the users and taking away dedicated user engagement.

Conversations involving the Palam Sarees brand experienced over half a million impressions on Twitter alone over a 7-day period.

A Comprehensive Digital Strategy

In addition to exploiting social media, Chennai Express used a variety of digital marketing tools, partners and strategies to reach out to audiences and generate a huge buzz before and during the movie release. This ties in perfectly with Shah Rukh Khan's firm belief in keeping up with the latest in digital and social media. His view is that effective marketing is really about connecting with your audience using all available media and talking to them on platforms that they are comfortable with.

Website

Shailja was very clear that for a film to be converted into a brand, it is vital for it to have a standalone identity. Although there was a school of thought that believed that the rise of social media made websites redundant, Shailja stuck to her conviction that a website was essential for brand building. This belief paid off, as the Chennai Express website, which was completely integrated with social media sites, was highly appreciated and proved invaluable in creating high recall value for Chennai Express.

Browser-based Games

Lots of people still feel more comfortable playing on a big screen than on a mobile especially in a work environment where users while taking a break surf the web on their desktops. The Chennai Express website had 7-8 different games, which were also adapted for use on mobiles and social media sites. This seamless cross platform integration helped the audience to engage more.



Trailer Launch Innovation

This was an exciting digital innovation and took the Twitter world by storm. For the first time ever a movie used Twitter to engage users and give them live redemption. Users were required to Tweet their comments to make a train move over a virtual rail line from Mumbai to Rameshwaram. The more the tweets, the faster the train moved and as soon as the train reached Rameshwaram, the trailer was released to the eager fans. This gave fans a real sense of involvement and achievement, while creating an amazing buzz around the trailer launch.



Mobile Game

'Chennai Express: Escape from Rameshwaram' was created as an endless running game where users take control of Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan's character in Chennai Express) while he runs and tries to escape from Rameshwaram. On the way, you have to fight goons and run past a variety of obstacles ranging from trucks, buses, autos, coconut carts, man-holes and much more. Users can also unlock a special lungi-clad Tamilian avatar Meena (played by Deepika Padukone in the movie) by collecting more than 10,000 coins in one game session. You also get special power ups and upgrades in future updates of the game. Shailja Gupta says, "The 'endless running' game is one of the highest rated style of games today and it suited the film's theme too where Rahul and Meena embark upon a journey. We wanted to take the movie's experience to all the audiences and give them a taste of the unique Indian style of eye catching graphics just as in the movie and the bet paid off. Even months after the film release, we are getting paid downloads every day!"

Karaoke App

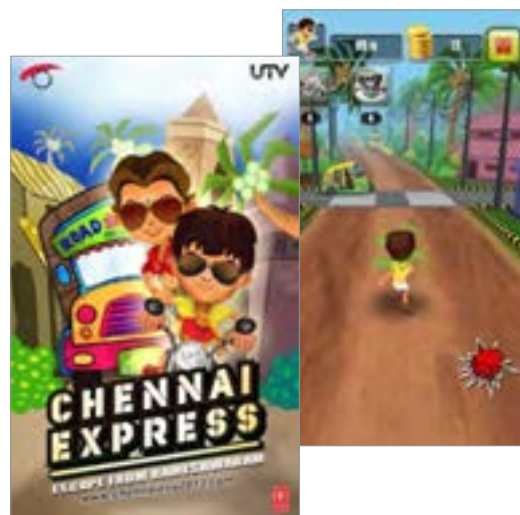
The Social Karaoke app was created for users to sing a song from the movie, share the score on Facebook and also dedicate the songs to your friends. Songs from the movie were already making waves. For weeks, there were constant conversations among the social media users about the use of this app and even today people world over are downloading the app and singing along!

"The Karaoke app was a completely new and unique way for me to communicate and interact with my fans, through the power of music and technology. I was very happy to meet the winners of the contest and was amazed at the number of people who made the effort to sing and send their songs." says Shah Rukh Khan.

Interactive Video Innovation

An interactive video innovation was created where users could choose what Rahul would do next to woo Meena, and accordingly change the sequence of events and influence the end of the video. This video was originally shot and implemented as an installation at cinema lobbies and airports throughout the country. The digital team decided to use the existing video and create an interactive story around it.

"To capture a movie in a game format is one of the most difficult and creatively challenging things to do and I think this running game blended very beautifully with the film," says Shah Rukh Khan



The Technology Drivers

eMee and its Social Radar platform was used to build, analyze and interpret the audience behavior online. We followed Chennai Express' online presence closely and implemented our system of Actionable Insights - a recommendation system that uses analytics, big data tools and calibrated metrics to gauge what people like and their engagement levels. With social media ever evolving, such expert insights are necessary for a coordinated social media strategy. These Actionable Insights were used to produce real time and contextually relevant recommendations to drive the social media campaign.

eMee worked closely with Shailja throughout the marketing lifecycle, including reaching out to the core fan base, influencer targeting, design of effective campaigns, marketing recalibration, the effective use of twitter hashtags and competitor analysis.

The eMee Social Radar collected data at scheduled intervals from a variety of Social Media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and a wide range of blogs.

The unstructured JSON files received from these varied sources were then pushed into data ingestors for critical first level filtering, metadata enhancement and noise clean-up. eMee's location and clout derivation tools also ran on top of this data to get a better understanding of each user's profile. Individual tweets or posts were mapped in relation to Chennai Express and important tags and keywords used in the posts were identified. The data was then transported to our Big Data Cluster on MongoDB for sentiment and mood analysis in an automated fashion. At the same time, a dedicated team of data analysts added critical insights and recommendations to the final report that was provided to the Chennai Express team at the end of each day for review and follow up action.

Fig 8 - eMee Social Radar Architecture

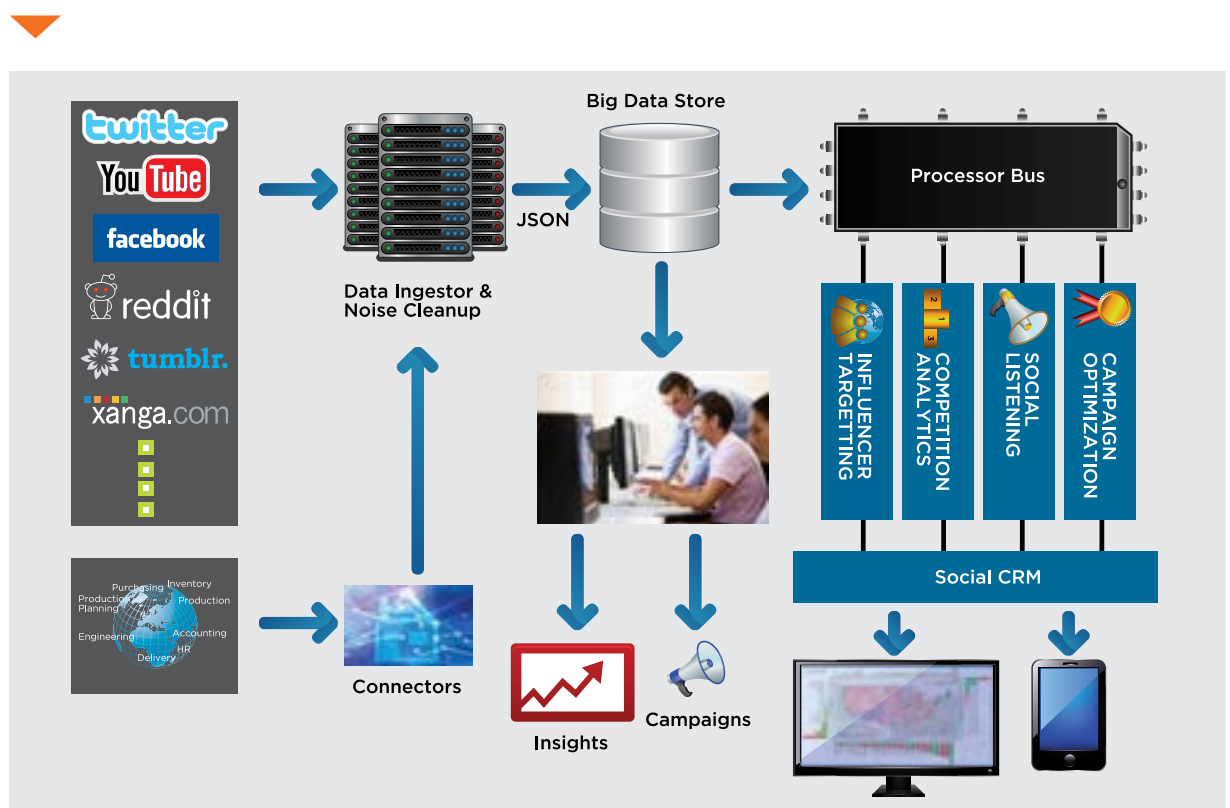
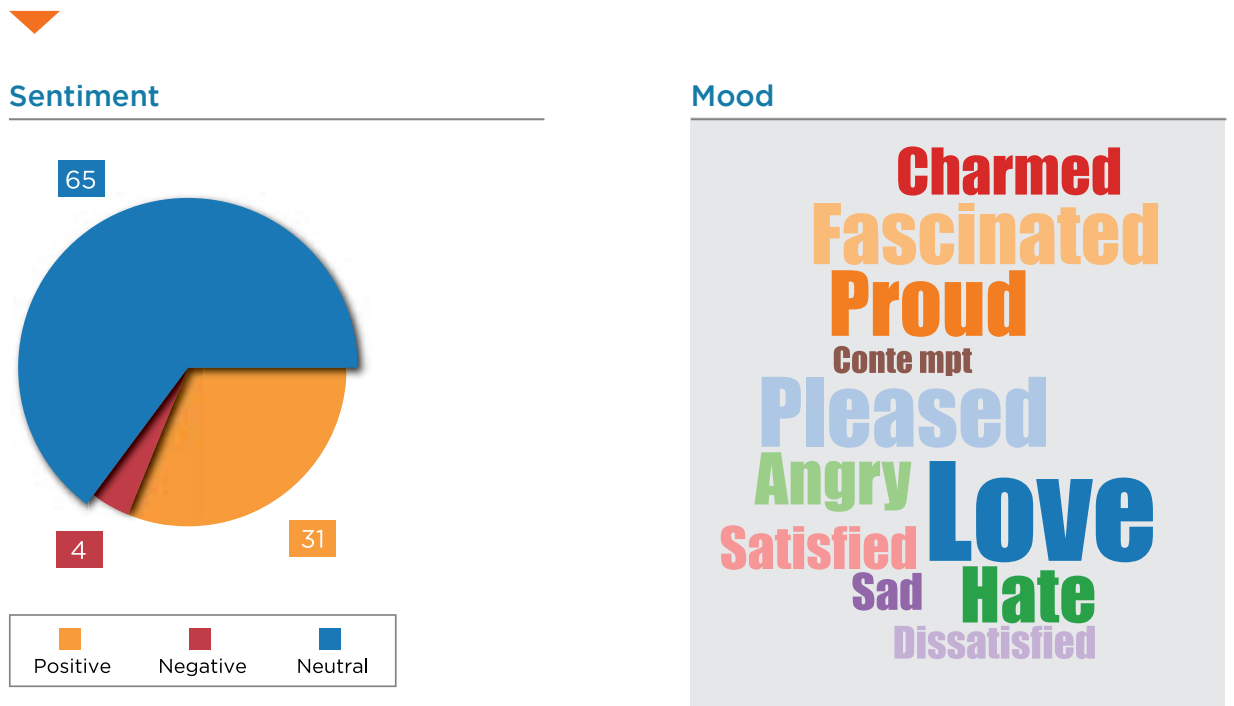


Fig 7 – Sentiment and Mood Analysis



Fig 9 – eMee captured moods and helped judge pulse of the audience





It's a Wrap!

The relevance of social media and digital marketing to Bollywood marketing and film marketing in general is evident. Clearly, conversations are now moving onto social networks. For movies and brands to participate in these conversations, innovations are crucial in the way the connection with audiences is made. At the same time, the social web is ever evolving - trends take minutes to appear and disappear equally rapidly. Expert insights, built on analytics and big data, are necessary in planning the many facets of a coordinated social media strategy. A strategy's success on social media - and ultimately its business success - lies in taking advantages of the opportunities that present themselves, being able to predict circumstances and planning for different eventualities. Shah Rukh Khan and the success of Chennai Express have proved that social media and digital marketing is the channel of the future and that it presents unique opportunities to marketers and brands, at an unbeatable ROI.

To quote Malcolm Gladwell from 'Outliers: The Story of Success', "Success is not a random act. It arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances and opportunities."

Credits

Adil Qureshi & Team

Software & Development Partners

Red Chillies Entertainment

Rohit Shetty & Team

UTV

T-Series

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