The long tail of a blockbuster—collections beyond the box-office

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The box-office is no longer the only engine of value for a successful film. Feature filmmakers that once relied only on theatrical, satellite television and video streaming rights are fast expanding monetization avenues to extend the shelf-life of the project beyond the cinema and OTT window.

Last month, audio series platform Pocket FM announced a new collaboration with Arka Mediaworks to launch an original audio series based on the *Baahubali* franchise that would include over 250 episodes, and be available in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. Earlier, Yash Raj Films' had collaborated with District, the going-out platform for a fan engagement experience within the app for action-drama *War 2* while Hrithik Roshan-starrer *Fighter* had launched a merchandise collection.

Many of these efforts are limited to big-budget, larger-than-life films and in pure revenue terms, they don't match box-office or a big OTT deal, given their niche appeal. For a big-budget film, it may make over ₹200 crore from OTT deals, while a spin-off or merchandise sales would only bring in around ₹20-30 crore. However, industry experts say they extend the earning cycle, build fan engagement and mirror global operational standards at a time that the content space is getting increasingly cluttered.

"Spin-offs and digital-first collaborations allow films to evolve from one-time releases into living, expanding IP ([intellectual property](#)) universes. From a fan perspective, this creates deeper access to the worlds and characters they love not just for two hours in a theatre, but across multiple touchpoints, formats, and storylines," said Vineet Singh, senior vice-president and head – brand marketing and partnerships at Pocket FM. Audio, in particular, is a powerful medium because it enables creators to extend a film's universe at a fraction of the cost and time of another film or streaming season, while still delivering immersive storytelling, Singh added.

Fans can explore backstories, side characters, alternate timelines, and unseen moments, strengthening emotional attachment and keeping the fandom engaged between theatrical cycles. "Digital platform collaborations add another layer by turning passive audiences into active participants through in- app discovery and engagement-led experiences," he pointed out.

To be sure, the entertainment industry experts say conventional models such as satellite, TV, and music rights were largely transactional one-time deals with limited visibility into audience behaviour. New digital formats such as audio spin-offs, digital platform experiences, subscriptions, brand integrations, merchandise, gaming extensions, creator collaborations, and fan events enable recurring consumption, global scalability, and real-time engagement data.

In such arrangements, the IP stays with the [producer](#) while profits from sales or streams are split between the two parties, depending on the contract. The cost of production and distribution of the spin-off is usually borne by the new licensing partner.

Harikrishnan Pillai, chief executive officer and co-founder of digital marketing agency The Small Big Idea said creative ideas taking a format change isn't new, but that Indian filmmakers are thinking of it too is. "This can largely be attributed to the corporatization of cinema in India. They are realizing that the power of franchise is much bigger than the power of one. Instead of one-off investments, they're attempting to build elastic brands. Milk the success dry," Pillai said, adding that the key here is being selective. Spin-offs only work for content that has created a significant pop culture impact, or for films, characters, and music that audiences genuinely connect with. That assures lower promotional costs and a higher possibility for uptake.

The softer, but equally important, value is data, Keren Benjamin Dias, associate vice-president, brand planning, Lead Capital Z, at digital marketing agency White Rivers Media, said. These formats tell producers about who's listening, where, for how long, and what characters or storylines travel. That insight feeds smarter green lighting, localization, and franchise planning.

"So, it goes beyond incremental revenue to strategic insulation. The theatre has stopped being the only ignition point and instead serves as the most potent breeder of fandom. The big screen creates emotional imprinting. Everything that follows is designed to nurture, stretch, and monetise that bond over time," Dias said.

Studios are asking sharper questions: how do we let audiences enter the world earlier, stay inside it longer, and return through different formats without fatigue? That's where modular storytelling comes in. Short-form extensions, regional adaptations, global co-productions, and platform-native formats keep the IP culturally present across screens, geographies, and attention spans.

To be sure, theatrical, satellite, and music rights remain the primary revenue drivers for filmmakers. These new streams are parallel opportunities, not replacements. Industry experts say they're smaller individually but valuable as portfolio additions and long-term experiments. The core business funds these experiments, but over time, they build meaningful supplementary income.

According to Charu Malhotra, co-founder and managing director at Primus Partners, a management consultancy firm, the industry is seeing a clear shift from "one-time consumption" to "IP as an ecosystem".

New-age monetization is smaller per stream but more continuous. Audio spin- offs, in-app experiences and fan-centric formats don't bring in higher revenues in one go, but they extend the earning cycle. They also give producers more control over how their IP is used and how audiences engage with it, Malhotra said