

Analyzing A24's Successful Promotion of Moonlight Based on Precision Marketing Strategies

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Abstract:

This research examines the strategies utilized by A24 to effectively merge conventional advertising with social media to promote the independent film *Moonlight*, attaining both economic and artistic success. In the modern digital media landscape, marked by swift changes, independent films often face challenges in achieving prominence in the mainstream market. This is mostly attributable to constrained resources and specific target demographics. This study conducts a comprehensive analysis of A24's marketing strategy, emphasizing the company's innovative integration of traditional media, such as cinema trailers and television advertisements, alongside social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, aimed at expanding audience reach. This study, which combined current literature and a case study analysis, determined that A24 successfully combined the extensive influence of conventional media with the individualized, interactive characteristics of social media. This strategy markedly improved audience engagement, fostered cultural relevance, and optimized market visibility. The study indicates that the amalgamation of conventional and digital marketing tactics might effectively assist independent films in surmounting resource constraints, offering a significant framework for future independent film marketing strategies and industry practices.

Keywords: Moonlight; A24; Precision Marketing; Social Media Integration; Traditional Advertising

1. Introduction

This study will take A24 as a case to analyze how the company successfully promoted *Moonlight* through the integration of traditional advertising and social

media precision marketing, achieving both commercial and artistic success. The research will draw on existing literature and publicly available market data to conduct an in-depth analysis of A24's marketing strategy. In addition, this study will apply marketing

communication theories to explore how A24 effectively combined traditional advertising with social media to create a consistent brand image and expand its market reach. By examining the specific application of these marketing strategies, this research will demonstrate how A24, with limited resources, leveraged innovative integrated marketing techniques to help independent films break into the mainstream market.

Research on independent films has a long tradition. For decades, one of the most popular ideas in film marketing literature is the notion that independent films face significant challenges in breaking into mainstream markets due to limited resources and niche subject matter. However, recent theoretical developments have revealed that with the right marketing strategies, independent films can achieve both commercial and critical success, even in a market dominated by big-budget productions. *Moonlight* (2016) represents a pivotal moment for independent films in mainstream cinema. At a time when high-budget blockbusters largely controlled the Hollywood market, the independent studio A24 produced *Moonlight*, which not only won the Academy Award for Best Picture but also achieved significant global box office success. This was a major breakthrough for independent cinema, particularly because *Moonlight* was the first film with an all-Black cast and LGBTQ themes to win such a prestigious award. The film's success reflected broader social phenomena, particularly increased public interest in racial and sexual identity issues [1].

This research constitutes a relatively new area that has emerged from the intersection of independent filmmaking and modern marketing strategies. From 2015 to 2017, social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram became increasingly integral to film marketing, especially in North America. These platforms allowed independent films to engage with niche audiences in a cost-effective way, providing a direct line of communication with key demographic groups, including younger audiences and underrepresented communities. Analyzing the marketing tactics employed by successful independent films, such as A24's use of both social media and traditional advertising in *Moonlight*, is a common strategy to study these developments. These approaches have been influential in the field because they demonstrate how even films with limited financial resources can use targeted, multi-channel marketing strategies to generate substantial awareness and drive box office success. The integration of social media with traditional advertising allowed A24 to maximize its reach, ensuring that *Moonlight* gained visibility both within specific communities and among broader audiences. In the past several decades, independent film marketing strategies have played an important role in shaping how small-

er films can compete in the mainstream market. *Moonlight*'s marketing success underscores the growing appeal for combining digital platforms with traditional media to enhance audience engagement and extend market reach.

The focus of this study is A24 and its independent film *Moonlight*. *Moonlight*, directed by Barry Jenkins and released in 2016, tells the story of an African-American male navigating issues of identity, race, and sexual orientation. The film addresses profound social themes and adopts an innovative narrative structure, making it a milestone in the independent film industry. It went on to win the Academy Award for Best Picture, further cementing its impact [2]. A24 is an independent film production company, founded in 2012, known for producing and distributing artistic and creative films. The company successfully combined traditional advertising with social media marketing strategies to promote *Moonlight* globally, achieving both commercial and critical success.

Research on independent films has explored various areas, particularly in terms of marketing strategies and audience targeting. In 2022, Sifaki and Papadopoulou examined independent films' marketing strategies in the digital age, focusing on how digital platforms improve film visibility [3]. Briggs applied the theory of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) to analyze how independent films can expand their market reach by integrating traditional and social media advertising [4]. Bartak studied the competition between independent and mainstream films, highlighting how precision marketing helps independent films overcome market barriers [5]. These studies provide the theoretical foundation and analytical framework for investigating A24's marketing strategy in *Moonlight*. The primary goal of this study is to analyze A24's marketing strategy and explore how the company successfully integrated traditional advertising with social media to achieve market penetration despite limited resources. This research aims to provide practical insights for future independent film marketing strategies.

To the best of my knowledge, no prior research has systematically examined how independent films, such as *Moonlight*, have effectively integrated traditional advertising with social media marketing. Although various research studies on independent cinema marketing exist, the majority have concentrated either on conventional tactics or the effects of social media in isolation. It is known to all; no research has provided a thorough examination of the amalgamation of these two methodologies in indie films with constrained budgets.

There has been less evidence regarding the effectiveness of cross-channel marketing strategies in helping independent films break into mainstream markets. In particular, no study has considered how independent studios like A24

strategically adapt to the digital age by integrating both traditional and digital platforms. This gap highlights the need for further exploration of integrated marketing strategies in the independent film sector, which this study aims to address.

This study will use A24 as a case study to examine how the company successfully promoted *Moonlight* through the integration of traditional advertising and social media precision marketing, achieving both commercial and artistic success. The research will draw on existing literature and publicly available market data to conduct an in-depth analysis of A24's marketing strategy. In addition, this study will apply marketing communication theories to explore how A24 effectively combined traditional advertising with social media to create a consistent brand image and expand its market reach. By examining the specific application of these marketing strategies, this research will demonstrate how A24, with limited resources, leveraged innovative integrated marketing techniques to help independent films break into the mainstream market by examining their specific application.

2. Case Description

A24 is an American independent entertainment business that specializes in the production and distribution of films and television shows. Daniel Katz, David Fenkel, and John Hodges founded A24 in 2012, and the company swiftly established itself as a prominent participant in the indie cinema business. Headquartered in New York, the company frequently takes on projects that conventional studios avoid, gaining widespread notoriety for the production of a succession of distinctive and artistically powerful films. Over the years, A24 has become synonymous with high-quality, thought-provoking entertainment, and *Moonlight*'s success has helped to strengthen this reputation.

Barry Jenkins directed *Moonlight*, which debuted at the Telluride Film Festival in 2016 before making its way to American theaters. The film follows the coming-of-age experience of a young African-American guy, delving into his issues with identity, racism, and sexual orientation. Its emotionally moving story gained global recognition, and it was the first film with an all-Black cast and LGBTQ-centered themes to win the Academy Award for Best Picture. The film also received the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture—Drama, as well as many Independent Spirit Awards. Despite a production budget of barely \$1.5 million, *Moonlight* made more than \$65 million worldwide, making it a critical and commercial triumph [6].

When competing with major studios, the independent

film business faces significant challenges due to its tight budgets and limited resources. However, the success of *Moonlight* shows that independent films can overcome these obstacles with the appropriate techniques. Independent films frequently rely on appealing to specific audiences, demonstrating innovation, and increasing engagement between the film and its audience. A24 completely understood these market dynamics and devised a precise marketing plan to capture these characteristics, allowing *Moonlight* to stand out from the crowd. The film's distribution plan followed the typical independent film format, with a limited release in four cinemas in New York and Los Angeles. This strategy allowed the film to gauge audience reception in a small number of cinemas before choosing whether to expand. As the picture received favorable early reactions, A24's analytics team advocated expanding its release to more theaters based on the data, resulting in a rapid scaling up of distribution. A24 used this method to capitalize on the film's momentum, gradually growing its market presence.

The firm communicated directly with viewers on Twitter, personalizing the marketing effort by retweeting user comments. *Moonlight* follows the lives of a young black guy from birth to maturity, exploring topics of homosexuality, poverty, and narcotics. A24 marketed the picture as a communal event, urging viewers to perceive themselves as part of *Moonlight*'s success. The LGBTQ and African-American populations, who strongly identified with the film's themes, especially warmly welcomed this tactic. This film is both a realistic representation of current African American life and a very emotional and poetic meditation on identity, family, friendship, and love.

A24's marketing campaign was quite effective. *Moonlight* had a production budget of only \$1.5 million yet earned \$65 million globally. It also got eight Oscar nominations in 2017, including Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Adapted Screenplay, further increasing the film's prominence and cultural effect. *Moonlight* not only had outstanding box office returns, but it also became a cultural sensation, raising crucial debates about race, identity, and media portrayal. As awards season neared, the film's effect grew even stronger, propelling this cheaply funded small picture to global fame.

3. Analysis

3.1 Reasons on Precise Social Media Targeting

A24 effectively utilized social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to implement a precise marketing campaign for *Moonlight*, particularly targeting younger audiences and minority groups. Through these platforms,

A24 was able to release highly personalized content, including behind-the-scenes footage, actor interviews, and trailers, resonating deeply with the film's core audience [1]. The success of social media campaigns lay in their ability to encourage organic sharing and user-generated content, significantly expanding the film's reach. Moonlight's themes of identity and race especially attracted active engagement from younger and minority viewers on social media.

A24 created a highly interactive community atmosphere on social media using tools such as hashtags, making the film's promotion feel more like a cultural discussion than a traditional ad campaign. This approach aligns with IMC theory, which emphasizes delivering consistent messages across multiple channels to create a seamless brand experience [3]. Real-time interaction and audience feedback allowed A24 to adjust its messaging promptly, ensuring the marketing content remained relevant and engaging throughout the campaign.

Additionally, A24 capitalized on short-video platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, which have high engagement among younger audiences. By posting short, shareable content, A24 successfully attracted a large mobile user base. Collaborating with social media influencers also played a crucial role in helping A24 tap into niche markets. Influencers' credibility and authentic presence brought wider attention to the film, and their involvement was instrumental in fostering emotional connections with the audience [4].

3.2 Reasons on Complementary Strategy with Traditional Advertising

Although social media was a crucial element of A24's marketing strategy, conventional advertising continued to be an essential supplement. A24 allocated substantial sums to conventional media, including television advertisements and theatrical previews, to engage viewers with lower social media activity. This paper meticulously developed the design of conventional advertisements to enhance the social media campaign and deliver a cohesive brand image across all channels. The visual aesthetics of television advertisements combined with internet material improved the overall promotional experience. This technique aligns with Media Integration Theory, which asserts that the amalgamation of several platforms amplifies brand visibility and fortifies message coherence [5]. A24 utilized both conventional and digital platforms to enhance the film's reach, attracting not just the younger, tech-savvy demographic but also older audiences familiar with television and theater. This multi-channel strategy-initiated dialogues among various audience segments,

enhancing the film's capacity to engage a wide range of viewers.

Moreover, traditional media such as theater trailers brought a level of legitimacy and authority that social media often lacks. Traditional advertising played a key role in establishing credibility for the film, especially among more skeptical viewers who may be less inclined to trust social media promotions. While digital ads excel at targeting specific audiences, traditional media, through its established credibility, helped the film attract a more cautious audience. A study by Media Science compared the effectiveness of advertising on one platform to advertising on two platforms. The results showed that using two media platforms to advertise, such as TVs and phones, increased purchase intent by 30% (from 28% for one platform to 39% for two platforms) [7].

3.3 Reasons on Amplifying Publicity through the Oscars

One of the highlights of A24's marketing strategy for Moonlight was its adept use of the film's Oscar nominations and eventual win. Following Moonlight's Academy Award nomination, A24 promptly modified its marketing strategy to accentuate the film's potential for an award. This included ramping up promotions across both social media and traditional advertising, specifically highlighting the film's connection to the Oscars. This approach helped A24 attract a broader audience, including those who might not have been initially interested in the film but were drawn to it due to its Oscar buzz [8].

Event marketing theory posits that prestigious accolades, such as the Oscars, may substantially enhance a film's visibility, particularly for indie filmmakers with constrained finances. The Oscar nominations not only propelled Moonlight's box office expansion in North America but also attracted global attention. A24 adeptly used the media attention after the Oscar victory to enhance the film's visibility. The Oscar victory of Moonlight reinforced A24's status as a dominant entity in the indie cinema industry. A24 bolstered its brand image as a purveyor of high-quality entertainment by aligning itself with a highly acclaimed, award-winning film. This achievement not only enhanced Moonlight's promotion but also enabled A24 to recruit additional premier talent, facilitating ongoing collaborations with filmmakers and performers who value artistic expression and inventive marketing.

A24's marketing campaign for Moonlight demonstrated the capacity of independent films to attain mainstream popularity through the amalgamation of conventional advertising and social media. A24 created a marketing environment that appealed to a diverse audience by utilizing

both digital and traditional methods. Social media enabled A24 to cultivate strong relationships with niche markets, facilitating word-of-mouth promotion, while traditional advertising broadened the film's audience and enhanced its legitimacy. A24 exploited *Moonlight's* Oscar victory to maximize event marketing, greatly increasing the film's prominence. Through these coordinated efforts, A24 surmounted the conventional obstacles encountered by independent filmmakers, transforming *Moonlight* into both a commercial triumph and a cultural landmark. This story highlights the significance of multi-channel marketing, particularly for independent films with constrained finances. As digital platforms advance, aspiring filmmakers and marketers can glean insights from A24's efforts to optimize audience reach and engagement in a progressively competitive media environment.

4. Suggestions

4.1 Suggestion on optimize Audience Segmentation on Social Media

As mentioned earlier, A24 effectively uses platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok for targeted advertising, especially towards younger audiences and minority groups. However, with an increasingly complex market environment, A24 should further refine its audience analysis by leveraging advanced data analytics and machine learning technologies to gain deeper insights into audience behavior. By continuously improving its algorithms, A24 will be able to predict more accurately which platforms and content resonate with different audiences, thereby optimizing its marketing budget and ensuring that ads precisely reach their target demographics.

The film industry is intensely competitive, with independent film companies encountering significant obstacles due to constrained resources. Social media serves as an economical instrument, allowing film studios to target particular audience segments. Nevertheless, as an increasing number of enterprises enter this sector, competition is escalating. Consequently, A24 must leverage cutting-edge data analytics tools to sustain its competitive advantage. Studies indicate that the integration of data analytics with precision targeting might markedly improve marketing efficacy [9]. Predictive analytics can ascertain the probability of viewers engaging with particular material, but machine learning algorithms can more precisely characterize audience profiles based on real-time activities. These data empower A24 to create more tailored and captivating marketing programs, therefore enhancing the return on investment (ROI) for social media marketing.

A24 ought to persist in investing in more sophisticated

social media monitoring and analytics tools to enhance its marketing strategy. By monitoring audience engagement metrics in real-time, A24 may more precisely anticipate audience preferences and modify promotional content to optimize engagement and conversion rates. This would not only augment the efficacy of its marketing activities but also guarantee sustained success in a fiercely competitive business.

4.2 Suggestion on Strengthen the Integration of Traditional and Digital Advertising

A24 has effectively integrated conventional advertising methods, like theatrical previews and television advertisements, with social media marketing to build a unified marketing plan. A24 should intensify the integration of these two advertising modalities to establish a cross-channel marketing strategy that improves overall advertising efficacy. By integrating advanced technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), A24 can significantly elevate audience engagement and reinforce brand consistency. Although the significance of digital media in marketing is growing, traditional advertising continues to be indispensable for reaching wider audiences. Nonetheless, conventional advertising must adapt to maintain its efficacy. A24 can provide contemporary audiences with more engaging interactive experiences by incorporating innovative digital technologies with traditional advertising. For independent films such as *Moonlight*, which depend on compelling narratives, this approach is especially crucial since it enables films to differentiate themselves in a fiercely competitive market.

Media Integration Theory suggests that cross-channel marketing strategies can enhance brand consistency and maximize audience reach. Combining traditional and digital advertising not only increases brand exposure but also provides audiences with a seamless brand experience, thereby improving conversion rates. By incorporating emerging technologies like AR and VR, A24 can create more interactive experiences, narrowing the gap between traditional and digital marketing [10]. A24 might consider incorporating AR into theater trailers, allowing audiences to interact with the film's scenes and enhance their viewing experience. Additionally, integrating a VR experience based on *Moonlight's* themes into social media campaigns could enhance audience engagement with the story. By strengthening the synergy between digital and traditional marketing, A24 can further elevate its brand image and solidify its market position.

4.3 Suggestion on Leverage Awards and Indus-

try Events for Sustained Promotion

A24 cleverly used *Moonlight*'s Oscar nominations and eventual win to generate significant promotional effects. In the future, A24 should adopt a more proactive event marketing strategy, aligning with major industry events in advance and laying the groundwork for marketing even before award nominations or wins. By creating anticipation early, A24 can ensure that its films maintain visibility and audience attention throughout the awards season and beyond. Event-driven marketing has proven to be highly effective in the film industry, especially for independent films that rely on awards like the Oscars to raise their profile. With digital platforms allowing real-time interaction with audiences, marketing strategies need to expand from short-term event responses to long-term planning. Event marketing theory indicates that planning marketing campaigns that cover the entire awards season and its aftermath can significantly boost brand visibility and audience engagement. Moreover, research shows that early involvement by audiences in film promotion leads to more frequent interactions across multiple touchpoints, from social media to ticket purchases [8]. By leveraging major events as platforms for sustained marketing, A24 can effectively extend the life-cycle of its promotional activities.

A24 should develop a long-term event marketing strategy ahead of time, aligning with major industry events. For instance, previewing award nominations early in the awards season can create anticipation and maintain audience interest. Additionally, post-award behind-the-scenes footage or actor interviews can be continuously released on social media platforms to keep audiences engaged. This approach not only maximizes the impact of the event but also ensures that A24's films maintain momentum long after their release. A24 achieved success with *Moonlight* by combining precise social media targeting, traditional advertising, and event marketing. Moving forward, A24 should continue optimizing its audience segmentation, integrating emerging technologies with traditional marketing, and adopting a long-term event marketing strategy to maintain its leading position in the independent film market. Through ongoing adjustments and optimizations, A24 will continue to dominate the film industry with innovative and effective marketing strategies.

5. Conclusion

In the digital era, film marketing paradigms have experienced substantial changes, rendering it a critical area of study to investigate how independent films can overcome resource constraints and fierce market competition. This study employs A24 as a case study to analyze the com-

pany's effective promotion of *Moonlight* using a targeted marketing strategy that combines traditional advertising with social media. The primary concern is how A24, despite its low resources, employed this technique to attain a market breakthrough, achieving both commercial and creative success. This study examines A24's particular approaches in integrated marketing, utilizing current literature and market data. By employing this method, A24 preserved brand continuity and broadened market reach, allowing *Moonlight* to attain significant success on a constrained budget while enhancing its global cultural impact. The main contribution of this research lies in revealing how independent film companies can overcome resource and market constraints by integrating traditional advertising with social media and offering practical marketing strategies for the independent film industry, particularly on maximizing market impact with limited resources. A24's success demonstrates the effectiveness of cross-channel marketing in attracting diverse audiences and provides valuable insights for other niche market companies. Additionally, this research confirms the practical application of integrated marketing communications theory in independent film promotion.

This paper is unique in that it systematically explores how traditional advertising and social media can work together to drive the success of independent films. Compared to previous studies that focused on single channels, this research provides new marketing insights for the independent film industry through its analysis of cross-channel integration, especially in the context of rapid social media growth. However, this study has certain limitations: first, it focuses on A24 as a single case, and while representative, other independent film companies may face different market conditions or audience preferences, affecting the applicability of these strategies. Second, this study relies primarily on publicly available market data and literature, with no access to internal company data, which limits the depth of understanding of certain key decision-making processes. Future research could compare cases from other independent film companies to further verify the broader applicability of integrated marketing strategies and provide more detailed analysis on how social media impacts audience emotional resonance and encourages organic user promotion.

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