



# THE EMERGING TREND OF ORGANIC PR IN BOLLYWOOD

## (A Case Study on Promotional Tools Used by *Pathaan*)

Khushi Rathore<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Public relations (PR) is the best tool for reputation management. Like other businesses, PR practitioners in film industry too make use of various promotional tools to create a buzz about upcoming movies. This study solely focuses on the paid and organic PR tools used by the marketing and PR team of *Pathaan* for its promotion. Amidst huge controversies and boycott calls, the movie successfully transformed negative PR into positive PR and became a box-office hit. This purely qualitative and descriptive study has used case study as research method to get a detailed insight into the research problem and the data has been collected from secondary sources to get rich information. The researcher found that instead of relying on paid PR tools such as press conferences, interviews, radio and TV channels and promotional events; the filmmakers used songs, trailers, posters, social media, SRK's fanbase and influencer marketing for promoting the movie *Pathaan*. They preferred organic PR not only to save money but also to create curiosity and dial-up demand.

**Keywords:** Promotional tools, Paid PR, Organic PR, *Pathaan*, PR strategy

### Introduction

Image and reputation are important aspects of brand awareness. They influence the knowledge, likelihood and trust of potential customers regarding the brand. Public relations (PR) is the best tool for reputation management and building effective marketing strategies. Organizations invest tremendous time and money in public relations to get huge returns and hence it has become an essential part of every business. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its public." However, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) stressed that reputation is the biggest asset of companies in today's era and hence, effective PR can help in managing reputation by communicating and building good relationships with all organization stakeholders. Paid PR and organic PR are two different approaches to building good relations with the public. Although the two terms are originally associated with digital marketing, the concepts apply almost everywhere. Among various fields, this research work solely focuses on the paid and organic PR tools used by the professionals of film industry.

Paid PR is the process of creating a good image of a brand or organization among the target audience using paid tools of media like advertisements and press releases (Morell, 2018). In case of film industry, examples of paid PR tools include news coverages, print advertisements, press conferences, interviews, Television appearances in reality shows, promotion through radio channels, organizing promotional events, online advertisements, etc. All these activities require a huge amount of money and the filmmakers have to prepare a separate budget for them. Paid PR is a conventional approach to public relations and it is contradictory to the concept of organic PR which is a new and emerging phenomenon.

Organic PR uses content marketing and social media to place the brand in front of consumers in an entirely organic or natural way (Morell, 2018). Instead of using a third party, the brand or organization

---

<sup>1</sup> Media Research Scholar, Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, **Address:** 1178, Sudama Nagar, Indore, Madhya Pradesh (PIN: 452009) **Email ID:** khushirathore669@gmail.com, **Contact No.:** +91 7772897984

promotes itself. In the context of the film industry, organic PR tools include film websites and blogs, influencer marketing through memes, launching teasers, trailers, promos and posters; boosting social media presence, viral marketing, followers and fanbase etc. The popular faces of the film (generally actors and directors) themselves promote the movie through these platforms and they don't need a huge sum of money in doing so.

**Figure 1:** PR Tools in Film Industry



*Note: The image is designed by the author using Canva (version 1.28.0).*

According to Fulgoni (2015), paid PR and organic PR are two types of branded media communications and each approach is used to achieve different goals. Paid PR is focused on converting people into potential customers and increasing business revenue. On the contrary, organic PR helps a company in developing a relatable brand voice and increasing customer engagement. Paid PR helps to reach a broader audience while organic PR helps to reach a targeted group of audience (niche). Paid PR is more sales-focused because it aims to convert people into buyers. On the other hand, organic PR is more like word-of-mouth marketing because it aims to attract the audience and increase brand awareness (Morell, 2018). In a nutshell, paid PR is an integral part of direct marketing while organic PR comes under indirect aspects of marketing.

Organic PR is indeed an emerging phenomenon. If a brand is relevant to the consumer, they would naturally interact with it, want to learn more about it and definitely purchase it (Morell, 2018). Similarly, if the audience is interested in a particular film, they eventually want to know more about it and they visit cinema halls to watch it. Organic PR increases brand awareness and positive brand sentiment along with lowering the cost of conversion. It means that people can get emotionally attached to the movie through organic PR (Thiefels, 2021). Organic PR is cost-effective and generates a long-term impact creating authentic and honest brand personalities. In the context of the film industry, the above statement can be understood as when the director or actors themselves communicate with the audience using social media without any intervention of third parties, they become credible and get more attention. Using organic PR, organizations have the opportunity to tell the brand story and encourage user-generated content (Tran, 2023). When followers comment on the social media posts of the actors and get engaged in different fan activities, the film gets publicity free of cost. It is important to highlight that organic PR has some disadvantages too. Despite the benefits and trust build-up for a brand, organic PR takes a long time to have the desired impact. A research study done by Kenshoo Social (2013) concluded that even though organic PR is the most popular social media tactic, paid advertising is more successful.

### **Review of Literature**

The applicability of PR can be traced in almost all businesses but this research work solely focuses on the PR tools used in the Bollywood film industry. In an eminent research work entitled “Public Relations

and Promotion in Film: How It's Done and Why It's Important," Cheng (2014) highlighted that there is a great role of PR in cinema as it helps in bringing the spotlight to the movies. They help in creating the anticipation and excitement which draws the audience to the movie theatres. Public relations is very advantageous to the film industry because of its cost-effectiveness, image management skills, crisis management expertise, etc. and hence, the marketing and PR team of films include at least one PR campaign essentially in their promotional strategies in today's era (Cheng, 2014).

Qiang (2022) in "How Does Public Relation Work in the Film Industry" mentioned several tools of public relations that help in engaging the audience and some of them are press conferences to announce the new cast, releasing a teaser/trailer to organize a photo-op, appearance on TV to create a buzz about the film, boosting the presence on social media to spread a message through its viral effect and word-of-mouth referrals, and much more. He clarified that the strategy followed by PR practitioners of the film industry is quite simple - the more the film is talked about, the more interest it garners.

Undoubtedly, PR plays a vital role in the entire film industry including Bollywood. The previous section of the study thoroughly explained the concept of paid and organic PR and surprisingly, the researcher didn't find any research work in which paid and organic PR tools are studied in the context of film promotion and marketing. According to Kishore (2018), the PR strategies of Bollywood hits like *3 Idiots*, *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, *Padman*, *Happy New Year*, etc. are worth studying but Khan (2023) highlighted that the marketing strategy of the latest release *Pathaan* is also important to understand because it is quite different from the usual. *Pathaan* is a spy action thriller directed by Siddharth Anand and produced by Yash Raj Films (YRF). The actioner features Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone in lead roles while John Abraham played the role of antagonist. The film was released on 25th January 2023 and became the first Bollywood movie to collect ₹100 crores worldwide on day one (Medda, 2023). According to Bollywood Hungama (2023), the film collected ₹1050.3 Crore worldwide - ₹654.28 Crore in India and ₹396.02 Crore overseas.

Despite the huge collection, the film remained very controversial. Even the lead actor Shahrukh Khan faced various social and political controversies including Aryan Khan's drug case and Suhana Khan's debut 'The Archies' (Khan, 2023). However, the most popular controversy about the film was about the song 'Besharam Rang.' The song was trolled for its choreography and a saffron-coloured bikini worn by Deepika in the song because they hurt the religious sentiments of some people. The title of the song which can be translated as 'shameless colour,' has also become a sore point for these people as they are equating it to the saffron colour that Deepika wears in the video (Upadhyaya, 2022). Some other chaos created before the release of the film includes calls for violence against theatres, protests by some right-wing mobs and Hindu extremist groups, the claim of leaving an adverse effect on kids, plagiarism charges against 'Jhoom Jo Pathaan' song, death threats against Shahrukh Khan, objection on the title by All India Muslim Tehwar Committee and the demand of ten cuts by the Central Board of Film Certification (Upadhyaya, 2020; The Economic Times, 2023). Therefore, there were calls to get the song 'Besharam Rang' banned from the movie and boycott the film.

It is quite known that controversy is a common phenomenon in Bollywood for a long time and multiple boycott calls could be witnessed on social media even before the film's release. If the actors or director give any wrong statement during promotional events, then it works as fuel for the fire (Cyril, 2023). Amidst this chaos, it is important to highlight that the success of *Pathaan* mattered a lot to Yash Raj Films because its last four movies turned out box-office duds (Cyril, 2023). Popular Trade Analyst Taran Adarsh said that "Pathaan is an extremely important film for YRF. It's a big film. You are known by your last dry day in the industry and YRF hasn't had pleasant experiences in the past" (Cyril, 2023). In such circumstances, all the controversies on *Pathaan* have created a negative image in the mind of people which has ultimately resulted in 'Negative PR.' Hence, the job of Marketing and PR team of the movie was to transform this 'Negative PR' into 'Positive PR' through an effective promotional strategy and ensure its smooth release as well as success.

## **Research Objectives**

The situation analysis of the movie *Pathaan* reveals that it had faced huge controversies and boycott calls before its release yet it achieved great success and became a box-office hit breaking several records. It is important to study the promotional strategy of *Pathaan* to identify how different PR tools contributed in its success. Hence, this research work aims to achieve following objectives:

1. To study the use of paid and organic PR tools for the promotion of *Pathaan*
2. To identify the role of paid and organic PR in the success of *Pathaan*

The research objectives will also pave the way to understand the marketing and promotion strategies used by contemporary PR practitioners of the Hindi film industry and acknowledge the latest trends in the area of film promotion.

## Methodology

To achieve the research objectives accurately, this section elaborates systematic methodology for data collection and analysis. The current research work is a purely qualitative study. Rather than focusing on numbers, this flexible research approach is useful for getting detailed insights from a relatively small sample size (Wimmer and Dominick, 2015). Descriptive research design is used by the researcher as it emphasizes carrying out an in-depth study of the topic in hand along with focusing on ‘how’ and ‘why,’ rather than ‘what.’ Case study is used as a research method because it is the best way to generate an extensively detailed, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in a real-life context (Wimmer and Dominick, 2015). The data for this research work has been collected from secondary sources like newspaper and magazine articles, online articles, webpages, blog posts, etc. and hence, the collected data is secondary in nature. Speaking of data analysis and interpretation, this study will consider each promotional tool of paid as well as organic PR to draw reliable and valid results.

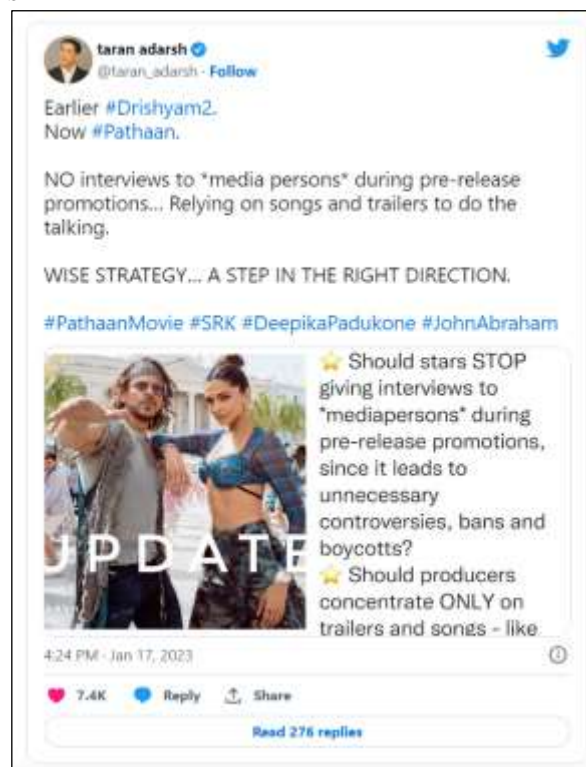
## Data Analysis and Interpretation

### Use paid PR tools

The filmmakers of *Pathaan* said no to paid news coverage, press conferences, interviews, promotional events, online advertisements, radio channels and reality shows on television. The only tool of Paid PR used by the filmmakers to promote the film were billboards and hoardings (Banerjee, 2023). Market Analyst Taran Adarsh tweeted on 17 January 2023 (Refer Figure 2) and declared that the actors of *Pathaan* would not participate in interviews before the movie’s release (Kesarwani, 2023). The same Strategy was used by *Drishyam 2* which featured Ajay Devgan and Tabbu. Commenting on this strategy, Tarun Adarsh called it a “wise strategy, a step in the right direction.” He further added that

*“It’s not new since we followed this in the 70s and 80s too. Films in those days used to have trailers, newspaper clippings, hoardings, etc. These days, the moment a star opens his mouth, it becomes viral and gets into a controversy. Why do you need that?” – Banerjee (2023)*

**Figure 2:** Tweet of Tarun Adarsh



**Source:** Adarsh, T. (2023, January 17). Earlier #Drishyam2. Now #Pathaan. Twitter. Retrieved June 23, 2023, from [https://twitter.com/taran\\_adarsh/status/](https://twitter.com/taran_adarsh/status/)

According to media experts, the filmmakers avoided interviews and promotional events to avoid controversies. According to Trade Analyst Amul V. Mohan, “It’s not a new norm to not do interviews or traditional marketing just before the release of a film. Drishyam is a good example of what happened in the past. Pathaan is an eventful film with Shah Rukh Khan coming after so many years and YRF introducing the spy universe. So, for an event film like this, it doesn’t make sense to go out and do traditional marketing” (Cyril, 2023). Akshay Rathi added, “In South, stars like Ajith and Vijay have never interviewed for the media and still their films were a success. There are equally big stars like Dhanush and Rajinikanth in the Tamil industry who do these big interviews. Every star has their trajectory around the marketing and PR.” (Cyril, 2023). After avoiding promotional events, the cast of this movie also turned down offers from TV reality shows like *Bigg Boss* and *The Kapil Sharma Show* because filmmakers wanted the audience to see SRK directly on the big screen almost after five years instead of TV shows (Purohit, 2023; Banerjee, 2023).

## **Use of Organic PR tools**

*Pathaan* didn’t use film websites, blogs and viral marketing but extensively made use of social media, trailers, teasers, posters, songs, influential marketing and fanbase to promote itself at a minimal cost. The strategy was simple – a teaser, a trailer, two music videos and posters, just like in the old days (Banerjee, 2023). A bold move was taken by the filmmakers to release songs before the trailer. It was very unusual but they knew that the songs will be a hit and the trailer will hype up the film even more (Kumar, 2023). Since Shahrukh Khan has a great fanbase in the Middle East, “Jhoom Jo Pathaan” song was released in Arabic (Kumar, 2023). In addition to that SRK promoted his film at FIFA Finals in Qatar to excite the fans overseas and Deepika Padukone unveiled the FIFA trophy (Kumar, 2023).

Shahrukh Khan did another unconventional activity to communicate with the fans directly – i.e., using his Twitter handle to conduct his famous 15-minute #AskSRK sessions for one month (Banerjee, 2023). He cleverly integrated the audience’s enthusiasm for the movie and turned it into a marketing opportunity for the flick (Medda, 2023). This strategy was appreciated by most of his fans as well as market experts. A major role was played by fans and followers of SRK whose brand value was worth \$46.3 million in 2021, according to research by Duff & Phelps Celebrity. The developers of *Pathaan* capitalized on SRK’s brand value with their marketing plan, which appears to be working in their favour (Kesarwani, 2023). A few people set up bleeding camps, while others paraded life-size cutouts of the figures through the streets – After all, *Pathaan* is SRK’s comeback after almost five years (Kesarwani, 2023). Fans were missing him and the social as well as the political controversies on him increased his demand.

Eman Batliwalla, Co-founder of By The Gram, a content marketing agency, pointed out that SRK being hyper-active on social platforms, donning the *Pathaan* look for over a year in the Thums Up’s commercial, playing cameos in other major releases like *Brahmastra* and YRF’s videos – all these increased his demand among the fans (Baliga, 2023). The audience was titillated, curious and craving for his comeback. Then, the songs 'Besharam Rang' and 'Jhoom Jo Pathaan' were dropped and fans made sure to make them viral. Batliwalla explained that

*“While there were no hook step challenges initiated by YRF, a lot of user-generated content took over social platforms and helped in creating tremendous last-minute buzz for the film. YRF banked on SRK’s brand value and waited for his magic to work on the audience. It did” - Baliga (2023).*

Another reason behind the great success of the movie was appreciation tweets by many celebrities after its release like Anil Kapoor, Ritesh Deshmukh, Ramcharan, Vijay and many more (Kesarwani, 2023).

## **Findings and Discussion**

The paid and organic PR tools used by the filmmakers of *Pathaan* to promote the film are summarized in Table I. Out of 8 Paid PR tools, the Marketing and PR Team of the film relied on only one – i.e., Billboard and Hoardings. They extensively used Organic PR tools (5 out of 8) including social media, teasers, trailers, posters, influencers and followers.

**Table I:** PR Approached used for promotion of *Pathaan*

S. No.	Promotional tools	Type of promotional tool (Paid/Organic)	Whether used by the filmmakers of 'Pathaan' (Yes/No)
1.	Print advertisements	Paid	Yes (Billboards and Hoardings)
2.	Paid news coverages	Paid	No
3.	Press conferences	Paid	No
4.	Interviews	Paid	No
5.	Radio channels	Paid	No
6.	TV appearances (Reality shows)	Paid	No
7.	Online advertisements	Paid	No
8.	Promotional events	Paid	No
9.	Film websites	Organic	No
10.	Film blogs	Organic	No
11.	Social media	Organic	Yes (Twitter AMA Sessions)
12.	Teaser, trailer, promo	Organic	Yes
13.	Posters	Organic	Yes
14.	Influencer marketing	Organic	Yes (Celebrity's appreciation)
15.	Viral marketing	Organic	No
16.	Followers and fanbase	Organic	Yes

It is said that a brand doesn't need advertisement, it can sell itself. Luxury brands such as Lamborghini, Ferrero Rocher, BMW, etc. seldom go for heavy advertising. Similarly, for Shahrukh Khan's *Pathaan*, the makers avoided the traditional marketing route and relied on his brand value and fandom to promote the film. In this way, they choose organic PR to bring the audience to the movie theatres. A major step taken by the actors and director was to avoid interviews which is a conventional tool of film promotion. According to TradeExpert Ramesh Bala,

*"During interviews, they may say something and the quote will go viral. Some negativity will be generated. SRK will be asked about the controversy, and Deepika about her bikini song. For the masses of the audience who are going out to watch the film, the trailer has appealed to them. Even the bookings look good. Giving interviews to promote the movie is not needed at all."*- Cyril (2023)

Relying on organic PR tools for promotion, the movie saved a good amount of money. In the words of Taran Adarsh, "There is so much money involved in promotions and major publicity. It all depends from film to film and the budget. At least Rs 12 crore is spent on promotions with the mall visits, sundry interviews and all that can be saved"(Cyril, 2023). Instead of using any third party as mediator, SRK run Twitter AMA sessions for one month to interact directly with the followers. This act created empathy and positive sentiment among the masses and the strategy undoubtedly proved very beneficial. Making extensive use of Organic PR tools for promotion, *Pathaan* became a box-office hit and collected Rs. 700 Crore just in ten days. The marketing and PR strategy of *Pathaan* was an experiment with little chance of failure.

## Conclusion

Public relation is an integral part of all kinds of businesses including the film industry. The marketing and PR teams of movies brainstorm thoroughly while planning the PR strategy for the promotion of their films. Paid and Organic PR are two approaches for establishing good relations with the masses and there are separate tools for each approach that are used by the filmmakers to create a buzz about movies. This research work studied the PR strategy used by the makers of *Pathaan* to deal with controversies as well as boycott calls and found that organic PR tools were highly used to transform negative PR into positive PR.

There are separate big budgets for film promotion– it starts from Rs. 2-3 Crores and goes up to Rs. 20-30 Crores. But Taran Adarsh believed that "Media interactions and promotions have nothing to do with the box office collection of a film." So, instead of relying on traditional marketing tactics, *Pathaan* used organic PR tools and not only saved a lot of money but also set an example of how a 'no-show' can be used in a positive way to create curiosity and dial-up demand. According to experts, the movie followed the strategy of 'less is more' (Baliga, 2023). The makers of *Pathaan* aced the promotions for the film and hence, it is possible that organic PR could emerge as a new trend in Bollywood in future.

## References

1. Baliga, A. (2023, February 7). Pathaan's marketing strategy decoded: Building on fan curiosity and SRK's brands value. *Storyboard 18*.<https://www.storyboard18.com/how-it-works/pathaans-marketing-strategy-decoded-building-on-fan-curiosity-and-srks-brands-value-5356.htm>
2. Banerjee, D. (2023, January 27). No TV Appearances Or Interviews: People Think Pathaan's Marketing Strategy Should Be Studied.*Storypick*. <https://www.storypick.com/pathaan-marketing-strategy/>
3. Bollywood Hungama. (2023, January 25). *Pathaan*. <https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movie/pathaan/box-office/>
4. Cheng, T. (2014). Public Relations and Promotion in Film: How It's Done and Why It's Important.*Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*.[https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1777&context=honors\\_capstone](https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1777&context=honors_capstone)
5. Cyril, G. (2023, January 20). Pathaan saves Rs 15-20 crore with no publicity before release, is this the new way forward for films? | Exclusive. *India Today*.<https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/bollywood/story/pathaan-saves-rs-15-20-crore-with-no-publicity-before-release-is-this-the-new-way-forward-for-films-exclusive-2323940-2023-01-20>
6. Fulgoni, G. M. (2015). How Brands Using Social Media Ignite Marketing and Drive Growth. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 55(3), 232–236. <https://doi.org/10.2501/jar-2015-004>
7. Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
8. Kesarwani, P. (2023, January 28). Pathan's Marketing Strategy: SRK's Brand Value. *Marketing Mind*. <https://www.marketingmind.in/pathans-marketing-strategy-srks-brand-value/>
9. Khan, S. (2023, February 2). Pathaan Movie Marketing strategy, the new craze of the World. - Beinghe Fashion Publisher. *Beinghe Fashion Publisher - Fashion News & Brand Ananlysis*. <https://www.beinghe.com/social-marketingmind-in-pathans-marketing-strategy-srks-brand-value-pathaan-marketing-relies-solely-on-brand-srk/>
10. Kishore, S. (2018, October 9). *Bollywood Movies With The Best Marketing Strategies | Mango Bollywood*. Mango Bollywood. <https://www.mangobollywood.com/2018/10/09/bollywood-movies-with-the-best-marketing-strategies/>
11. Kumar, A. (2023, January 23). Releasing Song In Arabic To FIFA Finals, Here's How YRF Aced The Promotions For 'Pathaan.' *www.mensxp.com*. <https://www.mensxp.com/entertainment/bollywood/127509-how-yash-raj-films-aced-promotional-strategy-for-pathaan-with-shah-rukh-khan.html>
12. Medda, S. (2023, January 27). Pathaan marketing relies solely on Brand SRK | Social Samosa. *Indian Social Media Knowledge Storehouse*. <https://www.socialsamosa.com/2023/01/pathaan-marketing-relies-solely-on-brand-srk/>
13. Morell, D. (2018). What is Organic Marketing?*Cairntek*. <https://www.cairntek.com/articles/marketing/what-is-organic-marketing>
14. Purohit, R. (2023, January 19). Pathaan: Shah Rukh Khan refuses to promote film on The Kapil Sharma Show and Bigg Boss 16? *Bollywood Life*. <https://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/pathaan-shah-rukh-khan-refuses-to-promote-film-on-the-kapil-sharma-show-and-bigg-boss-16-news-and-gossip-2312922/>
15. Qiang, R. (2022, April 19). *How does public relations work in the film industry | PRLab: Student-Staffed Public Relations Agency*. © 2023 Boston University. <https://www.bu.edu/prlab/2022/04/19/how-does-public-relations-work-in-the-film-industry/>
16. The Economic Times. (2023, January 6). Boycott calls, plagiarism charges, death threats: A look at the controversies faced by 'Pathaan.' *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/boycott-calls-plagiarism-charges-death-threats-a-look-at-the-controversies-faced-by-pathaan/articleshow/96770496.cms?from=mdr>

17. Thiefels, J. (2021, November 22). Paid Marketing vs. Organic Marketing: What's the Difference? *Salesforce*. <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/paid-organic-marketing-strategy-blog/>
18. Tran, A. (2023, May 15). Paid Social vs. Organic Social: Creating a Hybrid Strategy. *AdRoll*. <https://www.adroll.com/blog/paid-social-vs-organic-social-creating-a-hybrid-strategy#:~:text=Organic%20social%20is%20any%20social,that's%20influenced%20by%20advertising%20dollars.>
19. Upadhyaya, A. (2022, December 25). Pathan: Behind the controversy around 'Besharam Rang' and Deepika Padukone. *Lifestyle Asia Kuala Lumpur*. <https://www.lifestyleasia.com/kl/culture/people/pathan-movie-controversy-and-deepika-padukone-explained/>
20. Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2015). *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning India Private Limited.