"Balaji Telefilms Limited Q2 FY-21 Earnings Conference Call"

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MANAGEMENT:	**MR. NACHIKET PANTVAIDYA – GROUP COO & CEO, ALT DIGITAL MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT LIMITED** **MR. SANJAY DWIVEDI – GROUP CFO, BALAJI TELEFILMS**
MODERATOR:	**MR. DEPESH KASHYAP – EQUIRUS SECURITIES**

Moderator: Ladies and gentlemen good day and welcome to the Balaji Telefilms Q2 Earnings Conference Call hosted by Equirus Securities. As a reminder all participant lines will be in the listen-only mode and there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions after the presentation concludes. Should you need assistance during the conference, please signal an operator by pressing '*' then '0' on your touchtone telephone. Please note that this conference is being recorded. I now hand the conference over to Mr. Depesh Kashyap from Equirus Securities. Thank you and over to you sir.

Depesh Kashyap: Hi everyone on behalf Equirus Securities I welcome you all to the Balaji Telefilms 2Q FY21 earnings call. From the management, we have Mr. Nachiket Pantvaidya – Group COO and CEO of Alt Digital Media Entertainment Limited group and Mr. Sanjay Dwivedi – Group CFO. I would now like to hand the call to the management for their opening remarks and post that we can open the floor for Q&A. Over to you sir.

Nachiket Pantvaidya: Thank you. Good evening and welcome to the conference call of Balaji Telefilms Limited. We will be covering this evening the results for the quarter and half year ended 30th September 2020. We hope that you are staying safe and keeping healthy in these uncertain times.

As the unlock India commenced earlier in the quarter, we put our focus on restarting our production operations with the full swing while taking all necessary health and safety precautions for our teams on ground. Our TV production started getting ready towards the end of June but telecast only started from July 13th, resulting in over 12 days of loss of revenues this quarter. our TV business resumed with fixed shows with the necessary precautions as per government guidelines.

On the TV front, we've produced 176.5 hour this quarter and expect to return to more normalized level in the second half as our content line up appears to be steady. We have two new shows launching shortly, Brahmarakshas 2 on Zee and Molki on Colors replacing two shows that have come to an end recently. One of the important changes we're seeing that broadcasters have been impacted severely by the pandemic and are now not commissioning high budget shows, this has resulted in around 15% to 20% drop in realizations for us. The silver lining in this for us is that broadcasters will now more heavily on proven content expertise to deliver their ratings which we have. COVID has also forced us to relook at our costs and we are hopeful that some of the cost savings implemented in Quarter 1 will continue allowing us to maintain our margins in the business.

Coming to the movies business; there was limited activity for the first half as theaters remained closed with theaters now slowly opening getting expected rush for pending movies to be released quickly, we completed the sale of two movies from our portfolio for the direct to digital release instead of competing for theatrical windows.

Pagglait will premiere on Netflix and we'll be accounting for the same in the Quarter 3 revenues. Similarly in Quarter 1 you would recall we sold Dolly Kitty to Netflix, both of these movies have been profitable for us and reiterate our ability to back and monetize non-typical Bollywood films. Looking ahead of the movie business, we remain conservative in the movie business and currently are working on a few projects. Confirmed projects are Ek Villian 2 starring John Abraham, K Tina starring Disha Patani. We continue to work on the pipeline, for FY22 which are some exciting projects. We will be in a better position to announce the FY22 line up later in the year. Suffice to say that there are a number of exciting concepts or more importantly, we have also gotten good pre-sales to back all these projects.

Turning to Alt Balaji; our focus this quarter was to improve library utilization and improve depth of viewing as we could add only two shows in the quarter given the closure of all production activities. Our deep library of 65 shows allowed to generate revenues in line with the previous quarter and we should see subscriber addition growth in the coming weeks as our pace of adding new content improves. We have an exciting lineup for the upcoming festive season and hope to see the momentum carry through the Quarter 4 also.

As we are now heading into the season which usually is a time of blockbuster movies releasing. But however this time the situation is different theaters have opened with staggered openings and restricted capacities with safety being everyone's primary concern. People are expected to take the crisis seriously at the moment and prefer to rely on video streaming platforms to deliver first content to watch at home.

Production has resumed across multiple projects and we have a very strong pipeline which is based on the learnings of the last 3 years. And also, this has helped us go deeper into mass India a market which we are very familiar with. In addition, there will be a number of returning seasons coming up. So we should have a busy launch calendar in the coming 6 months.

Overall, I think the first half was impacted by the pandemic and we are now slowly emerging from the same and we are also restoring our content production in both TVs and in the movie's division. The long-term potential for digital video has only got stronger with newer audiences now exposed to varied and differentiated content on OTT. With 65 shows and growing we are very placed to ride the growth of the OTT sector. I will now hand over to Mr. Sanjay Dwivedi, our Group CFO to give you a quick update on the financials. Over to you Sanjay.

Sanjay Dwivedi: Thank you Nachiket. Good evening, everyone. Actually this quarter we focused our efforts on getting ready after a prolonged gap due to the closure of all production activity in the pandemic. We lost 12 days of broadcast revenue on the TV business as programs were only telecast from 13th on July. Since then, we have managed to avoid major set closures and have resumed with six shows on air. Movie has very limited activity and we will be recognizing the revenues from sale of Pagglait in Quarter 3. Overall given the backdrop, this was more of a recovery quarter for us and getting ready for H2.

The key figures which I would like to highlight are as follows;

On consolidated basis revenue for the quarter was Rs. 78.3 crores up 123% quarter-on-quarter compared to Rs. 35.1 crores in previous quarter. TV business saw lower production hours for the quarter along with a near 15% to 20% reduction in rates from the broadcasters impacting overall revenue. There were no movies released in the quarter.

Moving to Alt; it saw some slowdown in direct revenues but compensated marginally from revenue from our sale of content to ZEE5. Overall Alt Balaji revenue for the quarter was at Rs. 14.7 crores and H1 was at Rs.29.6 crores. Direct subscription growth was muted as unlock made people slowly getting back to work and social commitment and this coupled with fewer releases meant a marginal slowdown in direct revenues. We believe direct subs growth will pick up as we got a good line up going into Diwali and content production for Alt has picked up pace. We also expect revenue from ZEE5 deal to return to the usual run rate of 6 to 8 shows per quarter adding to the revenue growth for Alt Balaji. In line with the lower slow launch we also had lower marketing expenses for Alt Balaji. An interesting observation I would like to share is that over the last few quarters we have managed to successfully reduce our consumer acquisition costs and now operate well below the Rs. 100 mark. We believe as a pace of launching new shows goes up we should be able to leverage this lower acquisition cost to drive faster subscriber growth and drive profitability.

On the margin front in the production business due to prudent and tighter cost control measures which we're putting since early Quarter 1, were able to deliver improvement on margin front and hope to maintain this as volumes is done to more normal run rate of 200 hours a quarter. On half yearly basis revenue was at 113.3 crores, down 59% compared to 278 crores during the same period last year. Degrowth in revenue on half yearly basis was purely because of the impact of the pandemic on our Quarter 1 and lack of any big movie releases. EBITDA loss for the H1 was at Rs. 38.7 crores versus EBITDA loss of Rs. 28 crores H1 of last year. H1 last year had that hugely successful movie Dream Girl otherwise we are in line in despite the huge impact of no TV production in Quarter 1.

Coming onto our balance sheet; we are a zero-debt company with investment of over Rs. 219 crores in hand and we have calibrated plan to invest these in making more content, our strong focus on balance sheets strength has allowed us to sail through such tough times and come back to operation at a much faster rate.

Overall we are coming back to track and coming quarters will be a better business growth. I thank you all for joining us today. I would request the moderator to open the Q&A session. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, we will now begin the question and answer session. We have a first question from the line of Varun Patni from Prospero Tree.

Varun Patni: My question is, Alt has been a cash burning business as we have seen in the past and till now we have not achieved breakeven. So can you just give some color on the strategy that is being adopted and the timeline within which we can achieve a breakeven?

Management: We are hoping to breakeven this business in Jan-Feb-March quarter which we have already indicated to in the previous calls even before COVID has stuck. I think because of COVID, we were uncertain whether we will do it in Q4 or Q1 of next year but I think the way the numbers are looking, we are looking on whole to breakeven in Q4 of this financial year. Having said that as a group, what you are saying is that it's taking up cash but we are not having to take cash from outside. From the last I think September onwards we are in a position where we are much more secure on our cash front and maybe Sanjay would like to elaborate a little more on that.

Management: So if you see the difference between P&L breakeven and cash breakeven, we are already cash positive in terms of our spend and in terms of our revenue. However, P&L will also show a drag because there is earlier year's amortization which has come in only in this fiscal because our ZEE5 deal has happened only in September of last year. So we are already cash positive in terms of overall number. However, P&L EBITDA positive we think we are targeting for Quarter 4.

Varun Patni: So, as per the ZEE5 deal what we are supposed to get is 60% of our production costs, am I correct?

Management: We cannot verify any of that because our deal keeps changing with time, so we are not in a position to kind of verify that at all now.

Varun Patni: Okay and what about the Pagglait release date and what is the revenue that you're forecasting for that?

Management: Netflix has not announced the date of release for Pagglait

Management: But the revenues also kind of confidential. Suffice to say that we are positive on our movie business across Dolly Kitty and Pagglait.

Management: But irrespective of the release date once we deliver the movies to them, we can realize the revenue. So hopefully Quarter 3 should show you that number.

Varun Patni: What would be the subscriber count for Alt?

Management: Right now, if you take total cumulative subscribers' subscriber, it would be upwards of 4 million, of course that includes the churn also.

Varun Patni: Churn would be around 65%, I think.

Management: It's kind of becoming a little lesser. It's going into the high 50s right now but yes.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Nikita Sharma from NJ advisors.

Nikita Sharma: I had a couple of questions, first in the line TV business; you mentioned that the rates have come down. Is it going to stay the same at these levels going or its going to come back? Also when you see that happening in case it does and what was the way going forward for Balaji like will you increase the number of hours or how is it going to work?

Management: There are two aspects to the business. First is, rates for our shows that also depends on how the advertising market buoys up. As you know that we sell to broadcasters who are largely advertising supported and if that comes up in a good way then I think we'll look to a situation where we can slowly take the rates up. It won't happen. Certainly, it will take at least 6 months to 9 months for that to track back to normal. That is point one, point two is let me mention we have managed efficient cost management though it's not in the same proportion as the top line drop but we are managing to save our cost and we hope that we continue these savings going ahead and try and at least deliver the similar percentage margins as we were doing earlier. Last as far as volume is concerned, we are looking at volume growth however we have to pick and choose what new shows we take on especially given the fact that shows are going at a price which is 15% to 20% lesser than what they were earlier going on.

Nikita Sharma: Also, in the movie strategy the current strategy seems to be working very good for us. Given the current situation and the movies taking the digital growth, how do we plan to go forward from here?

Management: There are two cornerstones to the movie strategy, rely on pre-sales to cover some of your cost, that is one and what we have also done is that we have partnerships with some of the other players in the market to ensure that our capital outflow per movie is not very high which is point 2.

Nikita Sharma: Can we say the productions have come back and they have resumed, will we see the same number of shows being launched during from the pre-COVID levels, how many shows you used to launch per quarter, is the same number of shows can you see that going ahead?

Management: We will not see the same number; we will see a 20% increase from the number of shows that we launched last year same time. So I think what is going to happen is if you see in the month of November-December-Jan-Feb we will launch at least three shows per month. So that is a upward tick from the two shows per month run rate, the run rate will actually go up simply for the reason that we have got a lot of inventory of development during COVID that we have done, we have written a lot of shows, those will be put into production on a very fast and fast track speedy kind of method to ensure that these come out at the rate of at least 3 to 4 shows every month going ahead starting this month, November.

Nikita Sharma: Given that like now a lot of traction is seen towards IPL and the movies are being released to the digital platform. So does the content strategy remain the same or we…?

Management: Our content strategy as I think over the last 3 years altered from being urban mass largely to now having a significant portion of our content targeted at Tier II and Tier III towns. When we started of this business about 3.5 years ago we also had kids section which we have omitted because we feel that in a pay subscriber environment (+18) is the age limit and therefore the kids we are not able to attract and strategically it's not the same TG for us so that's the second drop. Third is we are looking now to focus only on Hindi markets, but we will probably include one of the strong regional markets also in our strategy in the next 12 months or so.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Shaily Gathani from Reliance Industries.

Shaily Gathani: I just wanted to understand since Balaji operates on a presale model, are we planning to exploit the movies on our satellite as well after the digital platform like Dolly Kitty, are we planning to exploit on satellite as well?

Management: Yes, there will be exploitation of models for every movie…what are you asking about specifically? If you are asking for the specific movie I unfortunately can't give you details out because it's a contract with Netflix and it's largely. We will keep options open for both the platforms, whichever gives a better margin and revenue we will definitely go for it.

Shaily Gathani: So later on in case we get a better deal we will be planning to exploit on satellite also going forward for movies as well?

Management: We will study the market carefully to respond. As a generic statement and I don't want to go through each movie because it involves confidentiality of contract. We want to exploit across all three mediums that is satellite, digital and we are looking for a theatrical window right now.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Yogesh Kirwe from B&K Securities.

Yogesh Kirwe: Whenever the OTT buys movies from us like Netflix or Amazon, do they buy the entire rights, or is the only digital rights are deployed here for movies?

Management: It's a very generic question. You should ask Netflix or Amazon first of all but our deals are as per the deals. If somebody pays a certain amount for rights and if they pay double that amount then the rights deal will vary. So I don't know whether, I don't know what is the question you are asking. Everything comes at a price.

Yogesh Kirwe: Right but the deals that we have done so far?

Management: I cannot reveal individual contracts obviously for the reasons of confidentiality, but I don't know therefore what your question is.

Yogesh Kirwe: Earlier the movies were largely done for the theatrical release, now there is an additional window which is getting available. So is it possible that a film production business on the Balaji Telefilms side could there be bit of a scale up for in terms of number of movies, now that we have an additional window?

Management: I think we have a sufficient number of movies in our pipeline. We are going to produce about four to five movies in post-COVID era that is in the next calendar year and we are confident that we will be always delivering a positive bottom line on the movie business. We delivered it in the financial year that ended March '20 and we will continue doing that in years to come.

Management: And having said that internally also we have set a max CAPEX what we can invest into movies, so we don't intend to cross that.

Yogesh Kirwe: Now I understand is not like-to-like so how does the profitability compare in terms of TV shows being delivered to television channels and movies being delivered to OTTs so is movie a more profitable business based on experience so far?

Nachiket Pantvaidya: One of the businesses involves an entire IP transfer whereas the second business that you talk about doesn't involve an entire IP transfer. So I think there is a fundamental difference there.Therefore it's not comparable but we are bullish on both. We have been traditionally a very strong television producer, we are the #1 producer in India, we have been getting hits, we have getting the hours but we don't get the IP there. What we have done in the last 2-3 years is also build a good movie business trying to get both IP as well as bottom line and we are confident that both have their purpose, both help us also expand our vision towards mass India and the way we produce content for mass India and both are essential for us to develop that competency and translate it into a very-very successful digital mass platform. They also help us get the expertise in other than the bottom line and the financial strength that we have.

Yogesh Kirwe: But generally, how do we plan? So just that the first cycle monetization, does that cover the investments or?

Management: The movie cycle of production is typically more than a year and a half. Things are changing so fast in our world, in a post-COVID world one would be the crystal ball to gaze into to realize how this will work out. There was this direct to OTT market has suddenly flourished in the last 5-6 months itself and suddenly the theatrical market seems to be uncertain which was actually a different scenario just about 8 months ago. So these models are evolving, these models are something that will even probably change even more further 6 months down the line depending on how successful these movies are only OTT platforms. A year's experience will let us know what is the kind of viewership that they garner so I think the verdict is yet to be delivered on what exactly will be a good model going ahead. Suffice to say we are as a company we are viewing this creatively as well as financially. We are limiting the capital exposure to the movies that we do to whatever we want to about 100 to 150 crores and also relying on pre-sale so that we are sure of what we are doing in terms of finances.

Management: I think what you wanted to know is whether we fully realize the investments which we do in each of the movies or are we creating any intangible through the balance sheet for the future years. So answer is we don't create intangibles. At the time of release, we fully accrue the cost and revenue.The cost is all 100% written-off.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Deepesh Kashyap from Equirus Securities.

Depesh Kashyap: Now that the theatres are opening, do you think the buying spree of this OTT platforms will reduce, the kind of money that they were paying in the lockdown period will they come out with the same kind of money or they should reduce going forward?

Management: I don't think it will reduce to answer your question for a simple reason that on digital platforms the aggregation of audiences is possible. So if you were to go to a theater with your family you have to get Rs. 1000-600 say if you are in a fancy multiplex, family of four and with food it's a Rs. 2500 evening outing whereas on digital platforms that is considerably lessened. Some of them are price as low as Rs. 400 a year; some people have priced slightly higher maybe a Rs. 600 a month or something. So I feel economically India has an alternative and also there is a choice of individual movies being watched in an unscheduled manner. Both these factors will lead to growth in digital viewing. How big the growth is, will it cannibalize entirely theatre audience one doesn't know but then definitely will be some cannibalization of theatre audience.

Depesh Kashyap: Do you think the aid with theatrical window that is being followed by everybody that can come under negotiation and also the producer and exhibitor kind of revenue-share model that is there, can that also be renegotiated? Are the talks have started on that line?

Management: As of now at least we are not party to any of these stocks but my intuitive instinct, I don't have data to back this up is that things will change for the way we are doing business in a way if you have an OTT release you don't have tension of Friday-Saturday-Sunday box office performance. In an OTT release you can actually wait for a month for all the audiences to come and therefore I think the equation of how the producer views moviemaking might alter significantly in the next 7-8 months. Like I said the verdict is still out. People are still waiting because once the movie is on the OTT platform for a year or so only then will we know whether it has been successful or not but one thing is there that there is an option to this one-shot thing that Friday-Saturday-Sunday it works, then it works otherwise it doesn't. That period of or that examination period will I think change to 6 months from that first weekend.

Depesh Kashyap: Now the theaters are and even in Maharashtra but like no big budget movies like Sooryavanshi etc. have released their, announced their release date so we have content producer. By when do you think the content producer will feel comfortable of releasing the movie from a theatrical? Will they wait for the 6 more months, how is it?

Management: It is of course a quite interesting question which doesn't have simple answers. I think there are two or three things that need to happen. One is that the theater environment has to be restored to full normalcy including F&B and I think once that happens then the profit and loss of large movies and get justified. The alternate sitting without F&B is still not the full environment so perhaps smaller budget films might make it to the theatres if it is viable and everybody knows their P&L who am I to comment but might for the big films I think we have to wait for the new year to dawn.

Depesh Kashyap: Will you be comfortable with only of the domestic cinemas to open to full capacities or you will wait for the international market also to resume because I think that there is lot of international collection also that is happening for the bigger budget movies.

Management: It depends on the film. Some actors and some film stories are internationally oriented. They have draws abroad; some of them have only domestic draws. So I think it varies from case to case, of course the best thing is that if you open up but then the films were made and costed, they were costed at a full open, everything is as normal basis. But now if you are saying that your earning capacity is that much diminished then the equation between digital and theatre will decide what happens.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Ridhima Chandak from Roha Asset Managers.

Ridhima Chandak: My question is on the Alt Balaji like from the last four quarters our revenue is declining, in the last year Quarter 3 revenue was approximately 23 crores odd and which is now 14.67 crores odd so what is a strategy behind as we said that we would be breakeven in the Quarter 4 of this fiscal or maybe in the next fiscal of Quarter 1. So what is the strategy behind this and as a direct consumer billing has also paused because of this unlock. Earlier daily subscriber was approximately 17,000 or 15,000 or so which is now come to the 9000. So what is the reason behind this and in this also we have seen some marginal uptick in the international subscription of Alt Balaji so that is gaining traction. So, how much is international contributing in the Alt Balaji.

Management: I will just answer you the direct subscription revenue. You said it has been declining quarter-on-quarter basis, the number is wrong, you can just check your data. Only for Quarter 2 sequentially it has dropped by few crores for the Quarter 2 otherwise on a year-on-year basis if you see my direct revenue is almost doubling . How much international contributes? So for this quarter of direct revenue of around 11 crores international would have contributed around 1.75 crores. So to tell you first year our total revenue is of 15 crores, second year our total revenue was 40 crores, third year our total revenue was 77 crores and we are on track to improve by at least 30% to 40% on that in the coming year, in this year.

Ridhima Chandak: I am not talking about the direct subscription. That must be increased but, on a quarter-on-quarter basis that I said that, that has decreased from 23 crores to 14-15 crores in the Quarter 2 of this fiscal?

Management: If you see on a quarter-on-quarter basis Quarter 1 was 14 crores 90 lakhs, Quarter 2 is 14 crores 67 lakhs. Correct.

Ridhima Chandak: What is the total direct subscription count?

Management: Direct subscriptions right now are anywhere between 4 and 5 million.

Ridhima Chandak: In which how much is paying subscriber count if any number you may have?

Management: We are not a free platform, all our subscriptions are paid.

Ridhima Chandak: I just want to know that as we are focusing on the breakeven part for the Alt Balaji, so what is the strategy behind this to increase our count on the direct?

Management: The strategy is based on the following. The first half of the year has been a wipe-out for us with hardly 5-6 shows launched. We just launched two or three shows I think in the quarter that we are discussing right now. From that number you want to go through a number which is close to anywhere between 18 and 25 shows in the second half of the year. So we have been produced 3X the amount of content in the last half of the year and this is because of COVID, if COVID was not there we were evenly played out. So that is what will give us the burst in quarters to October-November-December and Jan-Feb-March quarters. Our customer acquisition cost has been steadily decreasing and that helps us as our content goes up that helps us to acquire customers at a much cheaper price. Because library also drives the subscribers.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Apurva Shah, an Investor.

Apurva Shah: I want to know by what time this deal with ZEE are you planning to carry on and isn't this deal regarding the content more lucrative for ZEE as far as Balaji Alt is concerned?

Management: The deal is going to carry on till March 2022, who it is more lucrative for you have to ask. We find the deal is very beneficial to us, we have become cash flow positive on Alt as Sanjay mentioned and we also find that we are addressing synergistic mass markets.

Apurva Shah: Won't it add more subscribers to Alt directly if the deal with these called off?

Management: There are two aspects to it, one is that we also get to earn income from this deal in the form of a cost subsidy which of course I can't reveal. So that helps us ensure that we are cash flow positive.

Moderator: We have the next question from the line of Varun Patni from Prospero Tree.

Varun Patni: Out of the 46 crores of cost of production for Alt in H1, how much part of it would be the past amortization and what would be the cost for the current shows?

Management: So even current shows cost are amortized so not full cost gets hit into the P&L, for the quarter, out of 46 crores, so for 2021 accounts for 3.12 crores, so balance is all coming from the earlier years' amortization.

Varun Patni: As you have mentioned in the investor presentation that 65% of the cost is recognized in the first year and 25% in the second and 10% in the third year.

Management: From the date of launch of the show.

Varun Patni: That is what I wanted to confirm.

Moderator: Thank you. As we have no further questions, I would like to hand the floor over to the management for closing comments.

Management: Thank you very much for attending the call. We are seeing ourselves come back to normalcy; we are also bullish on the growth of our digital platforms. So please keep watching Alt and our shows on the various television channels. Please stay safe and thank you for attending.

Moderator: Thank you gentlemen. Ladies and gentlemen on behalf of Equirus Securities that concludes this conference. Thank you for joining us and you may now disconnect your lines. Thank you.

Transcript has been edited for readability

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