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## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **Significance of Cinema in Shaping Cultural Values of Young Consumers**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

With technological advancement in the digital realm and ever-increasing accessibility to variety of media, innumerable forces are shaping the cultural mind set of present day consumer. Cinema is one such powerful media vehicle widely considered as a microcosm of social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. India's Hindi language movie industry called 'Bollywood' is the world's most prolific factory of cinema. The ever-increasing popularity of Bollywood suggests the need to explore the messages that are being conveyed through this medium of entertainment. This empirical research paper attempts to study the influence of Bollywood movies on selected contemporary Indian cultural values. Primary data is collected through a survey of 202 post-graduate students in the city of Ahmedabad in India. Response towards the cultural values is measured using structured questionnaire and relevant statistical testes are performed for data analysis. The findings of the study suggest a definite impact of Bollywood movies on urban Indian youth's orientation towards contemporary cultural values. The practical implications suggest adopting Indian cultural cues in designing brand communication as well as combining a unique mix of Indian cultural values to a particular product. Since consumption decisions made in the market are closely related to cultural orientation and allegiance of the consumers, Bollywood has a huge potential of being a brand shaper for marketers.

**KEY WORDS:** Bollywood, Indian cultural values, consumers, cinema, brand communication.

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## **THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT:**

In this section, attempt is made to establish relationship between cinema, culture and consumption by reviewing past research studies. Literature is reviewed on cinema as a powerful vehicle of mass media and the significance of Bollywood movies in the Indian context. This is followed by reviewing studies on culture, its impact on consumption and various theories that operationalize culture.

## **CINEMA: A FORM OF MASS MEDIA:**

Mass media is a powerful social system, playing an important role in creating a person's sense of reality.<sup>3</sup> For example, mass media images provide prototypic expectations about the consumption patterns like dress, food preferences, leisure activities, appearance which are characteristic of variety of persons who are rich/poor, young/old, male/female and blue collar/professional.<sup>4,5</sup> Consumers' interpretation of media is an intrinsically social and interactive process in which audiences act not as passive consumers of media persuasion, but rather as active producers of perceived meaning.<sup>6</sup> Consumers use internally based percepts in constructing the meaning of media, including cinema.<sup>7</sup>

Cinema has occupied a significant position as a form of mass media since its inception in the early 1900's. Over the years, the film industry has grown and evolved rapidly with the power to reach massive audience. Movies are truly modern-day storytelling instruments due to the visual and audio stimulation they provide. Film is perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national mythology of heroism, consumerism, leisure, and sociality.<sup>8</sup> Cinema is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions

Hindi films articulate the fears and desires of audiences around the conflicting demands of age-old traditions and modernity.<sup>11</sup>

Different scholars have examined Bollywood movies from various perspectives: Bollywood movies of pre and post-independent India;<sup>12</sup> ideology of genres in Bollywood;<sup>13</sup> action genres in Bollywood;<sup>14</sup> technology and aesthetics of Bollywood movies;<sup>15</sup> changes in post-liberalization cinema and overseas reception of Bollywood films.<sup>15</sup>

Role and representations of cultural icons in Bollywood movies have been examined by pinpointing key trends in Bollywood film industry as it develops in the age of globalization, subjecting Bollywood to systematic sociological, cultural and media analysis.<sup>16</sup> Sets, locations and costumes in Bollywood movies are studied in order to understand Indian fashion, lifestyle and consumption.<sup>17</sup> Scholars have discuss the issues of capitalism, nationalism, orientalism and modernity through understandings of race, class, gender and sexuality, religion, politics and diasporas as depicted in Bollywood films.<sup>18</sup> It has been noted in recent past that contemporary filmmaking is marked by efforts to erase, rather than highlight, the signs of cultural difference in order to circulate and accrue distinction globally.<sup>19</sup>

## **CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION:**

One of the earliest definitions of culture given by Tylor in 1871 states that cultures the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society.<sup>20</sup> This definition set the tone for subsequent contributions that share the all-inclusive

international marketing, it is contended that culture impacts virtually every construct of concern to marketers.<sup>20</sup> Consumption choices cannot be understood without considering the cultural context in which they are made; culture is the prism through which people view products and try to make sense of their own and other people's consumer behavior.<sup>27</sup> It is suggested that consumption as it occurs in all societies is beyond commerce, that is, it is not restricted to commerce, but is always a cultural as well as an economic phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> The utility of goods is always framed by a cultural context, that even the use of the most mundane objects in daily life has cultural meaning.<sup>28</sup>

### **OPERATIONALIZING CULTURE:**

A number of approaches have been used to identify and operationalize culture, allowing its inclusion in empirical research. Based on a twenty-year review of cross-cultural consumer research, it was concluded that researchers have followed three approaches in order to operationalize culture: through language, through material goods/artifacts and through beliefs/value systems.<sup>29</sup> Language offers an interpretative code or schema for organizing and presenting the world, but is not a good indicator of ethnicity and cannot be used alone to explain different behaviors across subcultures and cultures. Possessions/artifacts allow a more concrete operationalization of culture, as goods embody visible evidence of cultural meaning. Many cultural artifacts (e.g., durable goods, toys, and clothing) have been studied in cross-cultural contexts. Finally, values/belief systems (e.g., fatalism, materialism, and relations with others) as operational definitions of culture were deemed instrumental in understanding cross-cultural consumer behavior.

Other researchers have noted that culture influences human behavior through its manifestations: values, heroes, rituals, and symbols, wherein values are considered to have a central role, affecting other manifestations of culture.<sup>30</sup> It is suggested that culture has two fundamental components: Abstract and Material.<sup>31</sup> In terms of abstract components, one may consider values, attitudes, ideas, type of personalities, symbols, rituals and summary constructs like politics and religion. Material component represents visible cultural objects which represent the society as a whole.

Based on the previous studies discussed above, it is found appropriate to operationalize culture through values for this empirical study. India being a heterogeneous country in nature, it is complex for a marketer to identify common threads of Indian culture and core values. Many different sub-cultures coexist in Indian society having own distinctive values, norms, beliefs and behaviors. Researchers have identified cultural values in the Indian context after an in-depth and rigorous study based on two types of literature study and authors' judgement.<sup>32</sup>

The first type of literature study was related to value systems in general. For example, the meanings for the set of values like power distance and uncertainty avoidance,<sup>33,34,23</sup> study on values tied to artifacts,<sup>35</sup> values pertaining to different cultures and subcultures.<sup>36</sup> This helped in identifying a large consideration set of values, not all of which were necessarily applicable to Indian culture directly. The other type of literature examined was more specifically written with Indian culture in mind,<sup>37,38</sup> online references for listings of Indian values, trends in the Marketing White book about the Indian

author's judgment with respect to the suitability and scope of the study. The selected cultural values are as follows:

- a) Seeking Prosperity: desire to acquire materialistic possessions as a way of living
- b) Innovation: one's desire to experiment with brands and products.
- c) Celebrity Orientation: desire to get influenced by celebrities with regard to purchase decision
- d) Achievement Seeking: a strong desire to be successful.
- e) Neo-mindset Orientation: a desire to break conventions and be rebellious.

The study aims to examine whether consumers perceive a change in their orientation towards these cultural values due to exposure to Bollywood movies. Drawing upon review of literature on Bollywood in the previous section, it is assumed that consumers will perceive change in their cultural orientation due to Bollywood exposure. Based on this premise, following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Consumers will perceive change in their cultural orientation towards at least one cultural value due to Bollywood exposure.

Further, following hypothesis is proposed in order to examine the effect of movie watching frequency on consumer response:

Hypothesis 2: Consumers' response will differ with movie watching frequency.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

movies. All statements use 5-point Likert scale with the anchors "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

During data analysis, responses to statements in the questionnaire are coded such that rating of 3 indicates neutral/undecided response, rating of less than 3 indicates no change in cultural orientation towards the cultural value, and a rating of more than 3 indicates change in terms of reinforcement of the value. IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 is used to analyze data for this research. Statistical tests like one sample t-test and independent samples t-test are used for analysis using the conventional significance level criterion of probability  $p < .05$ .

## **RESULTS:**

### **SAMPLE PROFILE:**

A total of 202 respondents are surveyed. Personal contact method ensures completeness of all questionnaires, leading to final sample size of 202. The sample consists of 114 (56%) men and 88 (44%) women. The movie watching frequency is measured in terms of average number of Bollywood movies watched per week on any medium i.e. theatre, TV, computer, tablet etc. Based on movie watching frequency, respondents are divided into 2 categories: low frequency and high frequency. Respondents watching more than 2 movies per week on an average fall in high frequency category and those watching 2 or less than 2 movies per week fall in low frequency category. The sample is observed to be divided almost equally between the two categories of frequency, i.e. 102 respondents fall under low frequency category and 100 respondents under high frequency.

## **HYPOTHESES TESTING:**

As the findings indicate, except for Celebrity Orientation ( $M=3.07$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ), mean score for all other cultural values is significantly different from 3. The mean scores for Achievement Seeking ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=0.81$ ), Seeking Prosperity ( $M=3.64$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ), Innovation ( $M=3.58$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ) and Neo-Mindset Orientation ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ) are significantly greater than 3, indicating reinforcement of these cultural values due to Bollywood exposure. The higher the mean score, the greater is the level of reinforcement. Celebrity Orientation exhibits an undecided response. Since 4 out of 5 cultural values

exhibits change in response due to Bollywood exposure, *Hypothesis 1* is accepted.

*Hypothesis 2*: Consumers' response will differ with movie watching frequency.

In order to test whether the response differs with movie watching frequency, independent samples t-test is carried out to compare mean scores of low frequencies group ( $n=102$ ) and high frequency group ( $n=100$ ). The results are shown in Table II.

**Table II. Independent samples t-test for comparing response of two movie watching frequency groups**

Name of Cultural Value	Low frequency ( $n=102$ )		High frequency ( $n=100$ )		t value	P
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation		
Seeking Prosperity	3.57	1.20	3.72	0.85	$t(182.7) = -1.04$	0.30
Innovation	3.55	0.75	3.62	0.75	$t(200) = -0.64$	0.52
Celebrity Orientation	3.06	1.10	3.08	0.98	$t(198.34) = -0.14$	0.88
Neo-mindset Orientation	3.25	0.99	3.60	0.98	$t(200) = -2.48$	0.01*
Achievement Seeking	3.94	0.90	4.06	0.71	$t(200) = -1.04$	0.30

\*  $p < 0.05$

The findings indicate that the response differs significantly between the two frequency groups for cultural value of Neo-Mindsets orientation at  $t(200) = -2.48$ ,  $p=0.01$ . Hence *Hypothesis 2* is accepted. The high frequency group ( $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ) exhibits higher desire to break conventions than the low frequency group ( $M=3.25$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ). Higher exposure to Bollywood movies suggests greater level of rebelliousness. No significant difference in response between the two groups was found for any other cultural value.

## DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The most noteworthy finding of this study is that

Milegi Dobara [2012], Dil Dhadakne Do [2015] have showcased lavish sets, exotic foreign and domestic locations, trendy fashion products and luxurious lifestyles. Moreover, superhit movies like Salaam Namaste [2005], 3 Idiots [2009], Yeh Jawani Hai Diwani [2013], Kapoor and Sons [2016] have promoted neo-traditionalism and deterrence from accepted societal norms.

Further, findings of this study indicate undecided response towards the cultural value of Celebrity Orientation, i.e. respondents are not sure whether their orientation towards this cultural value has changed or not due to Bollywood exposure. This suggests that urban Indian youth is not necessarily attracted towards brands

implications of such a study range from adopting Indian cultural cues to advertisements, to combining a unique mix of Indian cultural values to a particular product. Marketers can use the medium of Hindi movies for promoting brand communication. Consumer goods over and above their utilitarian character and commercial value also communicate cultural meaning.<sup>21</sup> Consumption decisions made in the market are closely related to cultural orientation and allegiance of the consumers. Thus, Bollywood has a huge potential of being a brand shaper for marketers.

### FURTHER RESEARCH:

The limitations of this research suggest a number of possibilities for future research. Since this study is limited only to Ahmedabad city with limited sample size, the results are only indicative, not conclusive. A bigger sample size with adequate representation of different strata of society can provide more accurate inferences. Moreover, additional cultural values can be included in future studies to get a holistic insight. Also, additional demographic variables like age, education, income or occupation could be considered to determine differences in cultural impact.

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