

Analyzing the Impact of Excessive Violence in Indian Cinema on the Mental Health of Audiences in India

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Abstract

The study examines the evolution of violence in Indian cinema, highlighting the shift from romanticized portrayals to graphic depictions, particularly since the rise of the action genre in the 1970s. It discusses the impact of CGI and VFX technologies and the role of OTT platforms on youth viewing habits, raising concerns about desensitization to violence. Recent films, such as *Animal* (2023) and *Marco* (2024), illustrate society's growing tolerance for explicit content. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes data from Indian youth aged 15 and older to assess the psychological effects of media violence on behaviors and attitudes. Findings reveal a complex interplay between media consumption, demographics, and mental health, highlighting the need for increased awareness and regulatory measures. The study identifies essential gaps for future research, such as longitudinal studies and cultural analyses, and underscores the significance of responsible storytelling in shaping youth perspectives on violence in Indian cinema.

1. Introduction

The landscape of Indian cinema has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from early narratives centered on romance and moralistic lessons to the graphic, visceral depictions of violence common in contemporary productions. In the early decades, film culture prioritized emotional intensity over physical gore, serving as a medium for imparting societal values. However, the emergence of the action genre in the 1970s, led by iconic figures such as Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra, marked a pivotal shift toward overt conflict and physical aggression. Since 2010, rapid technological advancements in CGI and VFX have further enabled filmmakers to push the boundaries of "raw" action, creating a cinematic experience that is increasingly raw and visceral. The arrival of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms has catalyzed this shift by providing individualized, often unregulated viewing experiences characterized by excessive violence. This transition from communal theater viewing to private digital consumption raises critical questions regarding the desensitization of younger audiences. Recent high-profile releases such as *Animal* (2023), *Marco* (2024), and *Jaat* (2025) exemplify this trend, reflecting a societal shift toward a higher tolerance for explicit, graphic presentations of violence. This study investigates the psychological impact of this cinematic evolution on Indian youth, examining how these media messages shape conflict-related attitudes and behaviors. While existing literature has explored the sociological influence of Bollywood on cultural worldviews, there remains a critical theoretical gap in understanding the communication mechanisms, such as Cultivation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, that

facilitate the normalization of aggression in the Indian context. By analyzing current trends and audience responses, this research seeks to bridge the gap between creative freedom and social responsibility, offering insights into the complex relationship between media consumption and mental health.

2. Review of Literature

The book, "The Scene of Violence: Cinema, Crime, Affect," delves into the spectator's encounter with violent scenes in cinema. The book explores various forms of violence depicted in films, such as rape, revenge, homicide, serial killing and torture (Young 2019). Young's work emphasizes the affective processes involved in the cinematic representation of violence, highlighting the impact it has on the audience. Young's work has been cited in various contexts, such as cultural criminology and the study of propaganda. The affective nature of violence in cinema is a recurring theme in discussions related to Young's book. The book has been praised for its insights into the intersection of crime, affect and cinematic representation. Overall, "The Scene of Violence: Cinema, Crime, Affect" offers a critical analysis of how violence is portrayed in films and the emotional responses it evokes in viewers. The book contributes to the understanding of the complex relationship between cinema, crime and affect, shedding light on the impact of violent imagery on society.

The impact of Indian cinema on culture and the creation of a world view among youth, particularly through Bollywood movies, has been a subject of interest in recent sociological analyses. Balabantaray (2022) delves into this topic in the Journal of Public Affairs, highlighting the significant influence that Indian cinema has on shaping the perspectives and behaviors of young individuals. This influence extends beyond mere entertainment, as Indian cinema plays a crucial role in reflecting societal norms and values, thereby impacting the cultural landscape. Moreover, the influence of Bollywood films on youth social awareness has been a topic of interest, with scholars recognizing the role of Indian cinema in shaping the social consciousness of young individuals. This influence extends to various aspects of societal representation, including the portrayal of LGBTQ+ communities in Hindi cinema, which further underscores the impact of Indian cinema on cultural perceptions and worldviews. Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood movies, plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural landscape and influencing the creation of worldviews among youth. Through its representation of societal norms, values and diverse perspectives, Indian cinema serves as a powerful medium for reflecting and shaping the cultural consciousness of young individuals, thereby contributing to a broader sociological understanding of the impact of popular culture on societal dynamics.

The portrayal of violence in Indian movies, particularly Bollywood films, has been a subject of interest in recent studies. Hafeez (2024) conducted a study on the effects of violence in Bollywood movies on real-life violence and crimes against women in Pakistani society. The study aimed to examine the possible connection between the increasing violence against women in Pakistani society and the portrayal of violence in Bollywood movies. The findings of the study shed light on the impact of cinematic violence on society. This study adds to the existing literature on the influence of media, particularly films and dramas, on societal behavior and attitudes. The findings of these studies highlight the need for further research on the subject to better understand the relationship between media portrayals of violence and real-life crimes in society. Social media's role in shaping the behavior of university students towards achieving sustainable education is a relevant area of study in today's digital age. Understanding the influence of social media on learning behavior can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Overall, the literature on the portrayal of violence in Indian movies and its impact on real-life crimes in Pakistani society is a growing field of study. Further research in

this area can help policymakers and stakeholders address the challenges posed by media portrayals of violence on society.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, utilizing a concurrent triangulation approach to validate quantitative trends with qualitative depth. This methodology was selected to capture both the frequency of media consumption and the nuanced psychological processing of violent content among Indian audiences.

1. Quantitative Phase:

- Survey Instrument

A structured questionnaire was distributed via digital social platforms and educational institutions using purposive and snowball sampling.

Sample Size (N): The study recruited a total of N=35 participants from Indian youth and adults aged 15 years and above.

- Data Collection: The survey gathered data on media consumption habits (weekly/monthly frequency), exposure levels to specific violent films, and psychological health indicators.

2. **Statistical Analysis:** Descriptive statistics summarized demographic skewness (notably the male predominance), while inferential statistics explored the correlation between exposure to films like *Animal* and *Jaat* and reported levels of anxiety.

3. Qualitative Phase: In-Depth Interviews

- Participants: A sub-sample of 35 individuals participated in audio-recorded interviews.
- Analysis: Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on themes such as "blurring of reality," "emotional numbing," and "ethical limits of entertainment".

4. Ethical Considerations

- The research adhered to strict ethical protocols.
- Informed Consent: All participants were briefed on the study's focus on graphic violence and mental health before providing consent.
- Anonymity: Data handling ensured the confidentiality of respondents, particularly regarding sensitive mental health disclosures.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the survey or interview process.

4. Research Gap

I **Longitudinal Studies:** Most contemporary research is primarily concerned with the immediate effects of violent media. A lack of longitudinal studies is needed that explores the long-term psychological effects of protracted exposure to violent content spanning a lengthy timeline.

II **Comparative Analysis:** There is little research available comparing the impact of violence in mainstream cinema to OTT platforms. It will be interesting to see how various media impact teenagers.

III **Cultural Context:** While there exists a significant literature on media violence, there is little research examining the role of India-specific cultural factors in the interpretation and impact of violent material on youth.

IV **Demographic Diversity:** Much of what has been studied may not be fully addressing how different demographic factors (e.g., socio-economic status, urban vs. rural communities, level of education) affect the impact of media violence on different youth populations.

V **Intervention Studies:** There is comparatively very little intervention research on increasing media literacy or more healthy uses of media among youth. There is a need for research on effective ways of countering the ill effects of violent media.

VI **Gender Differences:** Research on the effects of exposure to violent media on psychological health may not fully reflect gender differences in reaction and coping. This is an area that must be explored.

VII **Parental Mediation Effect:** Parental guidance and mediation effect on adolescents' and children's use of violent media is not researched. We need to understand how parental influence impacts young people's attitudes.

VIII **Psychological Mechanisms:** More research is required to investigate the particular psychological processes (e.g., empathic reduction, normalization of aggression) through which viewing on-screen violence affects mental health outcomes.

IX **Reaction to Alternative Media:** The popularity of the Internet and the proliferation of content produced by audiences rather than manufacturers necessitate consideration of how adolescents react to violent media in these environments compared to mainstream movies.

X **Regional Variations:** An investigation of regional variations across India and how they affect consumption and interpretation of violent media will be useful to understand the psychological impact on children.

5. Sample Case Studies

As discussed in the previous section of the paper, below are chosen films of recent time which can be taken into consideration for sample studies. These films had certain portions which were not suitable for viewing by any given age groups. The films namely are *Animal* (2023), *Marco* (Malayalam, 2024), *Jaat* (2025) and *Fateh* (2025).

***Animal* (2023):** *Animal* (2023), a compelling action-drama directed by Sandeep Vanga Reddy, explores the intricacies of loyalty, power and the innate instincts that shape human behavior. The movie chronicles the tumultuous life of Bala, played actor by Ranbir Kapoor, as he negotiates the perilous criminal underworld and familial relationships. Bala's journey is characterized by his struggle to strike a balance between his intense ambition and his love for his family; all set against a backdrop of extreme violence and emotional turmoil. He struggles with the repercussions of his decisions as he advances through the ranks of a criminal empire, which finally forces him to face his own inner demons.

In an attempt to showcase some action sequences as real actions the films portray the majority of the scenes in extreme violence. Although such a realistic portrayal of violence heightens tension and draws viewers in, it also raises questions about its effects, especially on younger viewers. By normalizing harmful behaviors and creating a distorted perception of conflict resolution, the constant depiction of violent acts can desensitize young people to aggression in the real world. Additionally, the depictions made it difficult to distinguish between entertainment and reality, which could have glorified violence as a way to gain respect or power. This unsettling influence emphasizes the necessity of telling stories responsibly, striking a balance between dramatic effect and the moral ramifications of showing violence.

***Marco* (Malayalam, 2024):**

Written and directed by Haneef Adeni, it is a gripping film that delves into the dark underbelly of society, exploring themes of power, vulnerability and the harsh realities of life. The story follows Marco, a young man who finds himself embroiled in a world rife with crime and violence. As he navigates the treacherous landscape, he witnesses unspeakable acts of brutality, particularly against the elderly and children, which force him to confront his own beliefs about justice and morality. The film aims to deliver a raw and unfiltered portrayal of action, with extreme violence being a central element. Notably, the it includes unsettling

depictions of brutality directed at vulnerable groups, such as elderly people and young children. While these graphic scenes are intended to create a strong impact on viewers, they also raise important ethical questions about whether such portrayals could contribute to normalizing violence in cinema. The risk of desensitizing younger audiences and reinforcing negative stereotypes related to aggression and power is significant. Targeting the most defenseless members of society in this way is especially concerning, as it may diminish empathy for their suffering. Considering these issues, there is a clear need for more careful censorship and oversight to ensure that films like *Marco* handle violent content responsibly, balancing artistic expression with moral accountability.

Jaat (2025):

Jaat 2025, the Hindi directorial debut of Telugu cinema's action maestro Gopichand Malineni, promises a return to the visceral, larger-than-life action associated with lead star Sunny Deol. The film aims to marry the exaggerated swagger of South Indian masala entertainers with the raw intensity of North Indian machismo. Starring Deol in the titular role and Randeep Hooda as the antagonist, "Jaat" has received significant buzz, particularly among fans eager for Deol's return on the big screen.

The ongoing and intense violence in *Jaat* especially the casual portrayal of beheadings and the troubling use of sexual assault as a plot device, is hard to overlook. When audiences are repeatedly exposed to such harsh scenes without meaningful emotional context or consequences, it can negatively affect their mental well-being. This kind of content risks dulling viewers' sensitivity to real violence, making it harder to distinguish between fictional action and real-life suffering. For some, it might cause feelings of anxiety, discomfort or even trauma, leaving them unsettled rather than feeling the sense of justice or relief the story aims to deliver. Filmmakers have a responsibility to think about how their work impacts viewers psychologically and in *Jaat* that responsibility seems to have been overshadowed by the push for intense, unfiltered action. While *Jaat* certainly provides the high-octane action sequences that Sunny Deol's fans expect and enjoy, the heavy focus on graphic beheadings and the problematic treatment of sexual assault ultimately weaken the film's message. It sacrifices subtlety and social awareness in favor of shock value, resulting in a disturbing impression that detracts from the overall experience and raises important questions about the ethical limits of entertainment.

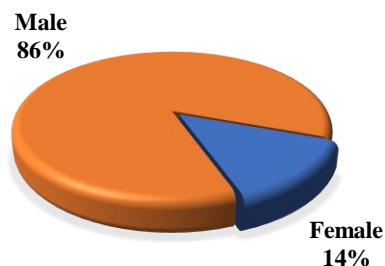
Fateh 2025:

Fateh, directed by Sonu Sood, is an action-thriller that dives into the world of cybercrime, a topic that's becoming increasingly relevant today. Sonu Sood not only directs but also stars in the film, alongside a talented and varied cast including Jacqueline Fernandez, Naseeruddin Shah and Vijay Raaz. The movie promises a mix of social commentary and high-octane action, but unfortunately, its story sometimes gets lost amid an excessive and often unnecessary amount of violence. The main character, *Fateh*, is a former special ops officer who takes on the digital underworld using his intelligence and tech skills, though he mostly relies on brute physical force. This approach quickly grows repetitive and numb, making it harder for the audience to stay emotionally engaged. For viewers who are sensitive to graphic violence, the film's intensity can feel overwhelming and unsettling, which detracts from the overall experience rather than adding to it. While the film's focus on cybercrime is timely, especially in India, where digital scams are a growing concern, the heavy emphasis on action over substance weakens its social impact. Instead of raising awareness or offering meaningful insights into the complexities of cybercrime, *Fateh* leans heavily into a fantasy of vigilante justice. This choice somewhat diminishes the film's potential to contribute constructively to conversations about cyber safety or the real challenges involved in combating organized digital crime. In short, *Fateh* shines when highlighting a timely issue and showcasing strong

performances, but its message is often overshadowed by a reliance on violent spectacle, leaving viewers wondering whether it truly fulfills its social responsibility.

6. Results and Findings

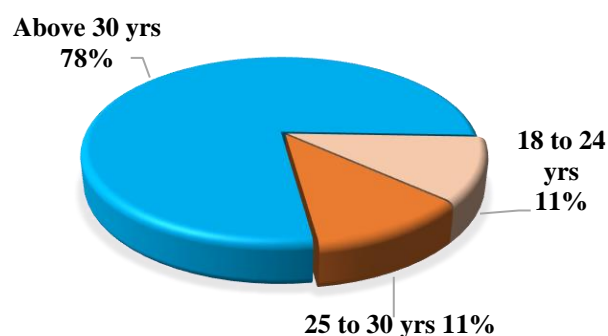
Gender of participants



Finding: The majority of respondents are male, particularly in the "Above 30 yrs" age group.

Insight: This gender imbalance suggests that marketing efforts may need to cater more to male audiences or explore why female engagement is lower.

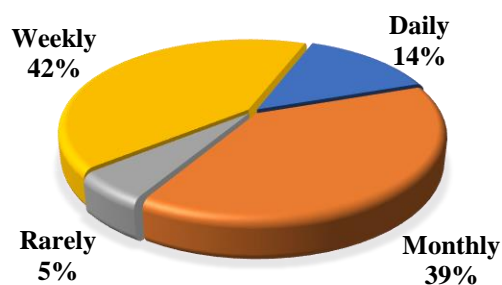
Age group



Finding: Most respondents are in the "Above 30 yrs" category, with fewer participants in the "18 to 24 yrs" and "25 to 30 yrs" groups.

Insight: The age distribution indicates a potential gap in understanding the perspectives of younger audiences, who are critical consumers of media.

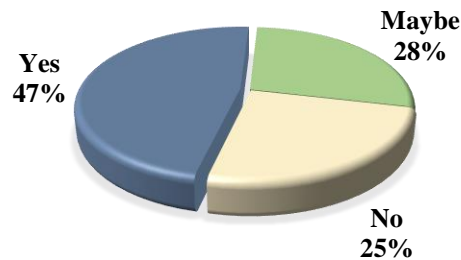
How often do you watch Indian films?



Finding: A significant number of 42% of participants watch Indian films monthly or weekly.

Insight: Regular viewership indicates a strong cultural engagement with Indian cinema.

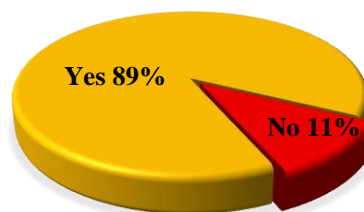
Do you believe that violence in films is excessive?



Finding: Responses are mixed, with many unsure about the excessiveness of violence.

Insight: There is a perceived ambiguity regarding the portrayal of violence.

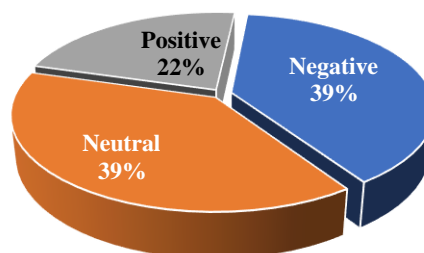
Are you aware of the mental health impacts of consuming violent media?



Finding: Awareness levels vary significantly among respondents.

Insight: There's a need for more education on the mental health impacts of media.

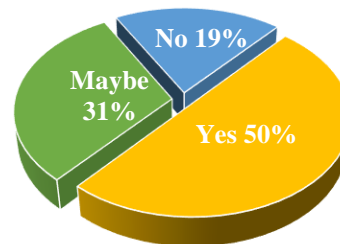
What role do you think cinema plays in shaping societal attitudes towards violence?



Finding: Opinions vary widely about cinema's influence on societal attitudes.

Insight: The perception of cinema's role suggests a complex relationship with societal norms.

Would you support initiatives to reduce violence
in cinema?



Finding: Majority of the participants expressed support for reducing violence.

Insight: There are a growing awareness and desire for change in cinematic portrayals.

7. Discussion

Cognitive and Affective Processing of Media Violence

1. Demographic Skew and Consumer Identity

The quantitative data revealed a significant gender and age imbalance, with a majority of respondents being male and over 30 years old. From a communication theory perspective, this suggests a target audience reinforcement loop; the "raw and visceral" action tropes of films like *Animal* and *Jaat* are coded to resonate with traditional masculine identities. This demographic is a critical consumer of "masala" entertainers, indicating that the violent content serves as a primary driver of cultural engagement for this specific group.

2. Cognitive Ambivalence and the Cultivation Effect

A significant finding of this study is the "perceived ambiguity" regarding the excessiveness of on-screen violence⁵. While 42% of participants are regular viewers, many remained "unsure" if the gore was excessive.

This provides empirical evidence of the Cultivation Effect, where frequent exposure to films like *Marco*, which depicts brutality against vulnerable groups, normalizes aggression as a standard narrative device. The lack of a clear threshold for "excessive" violence suggests that the audience's internal baseline for realism has been shifted by years of CGI-driven escalation.

3. Affective Dissonance: Anxiety without Imitation

The qualitative data highlights a state of Affective Dissonance. While participants infrequently reported direct imitation of violent behaviors, their internal emotional responses were predominantly negative, including anxiety, distress, and feeling "overwhelmed".

This suggests that while viewers may be cognitively "desensitized" (enabling them to keep watching), they are not emotionally "immunized" against the psychological toll of graphic content.

The repetitive reliance on brute force in films like *Fateh* was described as "numbing," leading to a loss of emotional engagement with the narrative.

4. The Media Literacy Gap and Regulatory Advocacy

The findings reveal a significant Educational Gap regarding the mental health impacts of media consumption.

Despite experiencing distress, very few individuals sought professional support, reflecting a low level of media literacy regarding psychological well-being. However, there is a clear "growing awareness and desire for change," with a majority of participants advocating for stricter regulatory frameworks and a reduction in cinematic violence. This collective stance

indicates an emerging critical dialogue among the audience regarding the ethical responsibility of filmmakers.

8. Conclusion

The evolution of violence in Indian cinema is a multifaceted process that reflects broader societal, technological, and cultural shifts. Historically, Indian films emphasized emotional intensity and moral values over explicit graphic content. However, the emergence of action-oriented narratives in the 1970s and the subsequent integration of advanced CGI and VFX since 2010 have transformed violence into a visceral and realistic spectacle. This shift is further exacerbated by the proliferation of OTT platforms, which provide unfiltered, personalized access to violent content, raising significant concerns regarding the desensitization of vulnerable demographics, particularly youth. Recent films such as *Animal* (2023), *Marco* (2024), and *Jaat* (2025) exemplify a heightened tolerance for graphic brutality. This study demonstrates that such portrayals risk blurring the lines between entertainment and reality, potentially fostering aggressive behavioral norms and diminishing empathy. Through the lens of Cultivation Theory, the research suggests that regular consumption of these narratives cultivates a worldview where aggression is normalized. Furthermore, the inconsistent awareness of mental health consequences among respondents highlights a significant educational gap in media literacy. Ultimately, the findings underscore the urgent need for a multidisciplinary approach involving filmmakers, policymakers, and mental health professionals to foster responsible media practices. By prioritizing ethical storytelling and implementing stricter regulatory frameworks, it is possible to balance creative expression with the protection of audience well-being. This study serves as a critical step toward an informed discourse on how cinematic violence shapes the psychological landscape of contemporary India.

Conflict of Interests

None

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None

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None

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