THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF HOLLYWOOD ROMANTICISM (THE TWILIGHT SAGA) ON THE YOUTH IN MUMBAI

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Abstract

Collins Dictionary describes romantic love as "an intensity and idealization of a love relationship, in which the other is imbued with extraordinary virtue, beauty, etc., so that the relationship overrides all other considerations, including material ones."[1] Over the years, films have succeeded in creating a loopy concept of this ‘romance’ which relies heavily on stereotypical situations and even on various occasions, purely sexualized content. Ranging from the quintessential Prince Charming to the Bad boy meets Good girl, most romance stories present rose-coloured imagery and conceal the harsh realities of relationships. This distortion tremendously impacts the mass notion of the concept of ‘love’. The purpose of this research paper is to study the impact of Hollywood's take on romanticism on the youth in the city of Mumbai, India. The case under study is the franchise of movie adaptations of one of the phenomenal best-selling novel series, 'The Twilight Saga'. The approach I have employed in the study is a theoretical analysis of the Twilight Saga's romance component, underpinned by a quantitative study. To carry out the theoretical analysis, the Cultivation Theory will be applied to the movie's content, followed by a quantitative summary through a survey of 113 participants.

Keywords: notion, impact, Cultivation

1. INTRODUCTION

The film industry today and for years before now, has owed its success to the United States’ Cinema, more popularly called, Hollywood. Hollywood as an industry found its booming eras in the early 20th Century. This was called the Golden Age of Hollywood. However, even today Hollywood remains the largest and most consistent contributor to the world of cinema. Hollywood produces the largest number of films of any single-language national cinema, with more than 700 English-language films released on an average every year.[2] Most Hollywood films adhere closely to selective storylines or genres, even today. Among these are the Wild, Wild West; slapstick Comedy, clichéd Romance stories, Classic musicals and Animated Cartoon movies. With close adherence to the film formula of having a beginning, middle and end, Hollywood only occasionally strays from this predictable pattern.

In this study, we are concentrating on one specific genre of Hollywood, Romance. The prime objective of this research paper is to determine the kind of impact that Hollywood Romanticism is having on the youth of Mumbai, India. A survey will be conducted to deduce the appropriate conclusion from the opinion of over 100 participants.

Theoretical Framework and Background

This study employs The Cultivation Theory as its theoretical framework to investigate the impact of the Twilight Saga Series on its viewers, confined mainly to the youth. In the paragraphs that succeed, I will introduce the Cultivation Theory and weave into the study the correlation of the film content with the theory itself.

Cultivation theory is a sociological and communications framework; it suggests that people who are regularly exposed to media for long periods of time are more likely to perceive the world’s social realities as they are presented by the media they consume, which in turn affects their attitudes and behaviours.[3] Anderson and Meyer's (1989) recently published text on mediated communication provides an extended detailed explication of how media content is accommodated into the ongoing daily social routines of individuals. Anderson and Meyer posit that human sensemaking or interpretation of the world in which we operate is a changing, emerging process. There is never a single understanding of meaning, but a continual re-creation of meaning as the various sources of influence are accommodated within everyday life, within a particular social context.[4]

The Cultivation Theory, originally introduced by George Gerbner and later expanded upon by Gerbner and Larry Gross, is an approach to explore and elucidate the impact media content, like the Twilight movies have on the youth today. A near demonstration of the process of developing a judgement on the world image through television viewing (see figure 1.).

Figure 1. The Cultivation Theory Framework (Bilandzic; Rössler, 2004) [5]
The key elements in the process of image development are message encoding and retrieval/decoding. (see figure 1.) The Cultivation Theory is gaining popularity in its application by media personnel to create certain images of ‘love’ and ‘romance’ in the minds of the perceiver. Heavy viewers or large time consumers of films are more susceptible to refine their beliefs of how relationships should be vs how they are. This, alongside interpersonal metafunctions (Martin & White, 2005) solidify the mass conception of the televised romance over reality. In the Twilight Saga movie franchise, a large number of tactics have been deployed to establish a short-spanned incubation period for the romance storyline, culminating in a happily ever after. Bella, the lead female character of the storyline is shown as weak, vulnerable and in constant need of protection. There is also the love triangle between the three leads, which makes the audience recant their faith in real, warm relations with real individuals. Instead, they are left, praying into the abyss, hoping for a love story that resonated with what they have viewed on screen. The turbulence in the relationship is more of supernatural nature and the movie does not sympathise with its audience’s mindset, which it impacts tremendously. With 5 movies in the franchise, the audiences are bound to get attached to the characters and resonate with their personalities. Thus, making it difficult for them to tell the difference between the content they have consumed and the reality. What we have come to know as interpersonal metafunctions. Perception and construction on part of the audience are another two important aspects. Audience perception varies depending on their background, consumption type and behaviour. Thus, each member may respond differently when exposed to the same content. External factors can affect the construction of a message upon decoding too, thus, the same message can be interpreted in more ways than one. However, one thing is clear, the longer the audiences watched the movies, the more they tended to believe the content and adhere to the depicted notions, holding them as true and traditional in their real lives. Expectations became more surreal and the movies reinforced them each time they were viewed.

An essential point to be addressed here is the background of the Twilight movie series. The Twilight movie franchise was an adaptation of the novel series that go by the same names. This broadens the scope of audiences and makes the franchise more susceptible to criticism. However, it is worth mentioning that the films were a careful and intimate remake of the novels, and managed to bag many readers’ votes. Literary discourse and especially novels are unique in the emotional effect that it leaves on the reader. They have the potential to provoke strong feelings such as empathy, sympathy, happiness, anger, sadness, and love, among others. The ability of literary discourse to awaken human feelings makes it a discourse type read by a wide range of audiences. Therefore, the employment of human emotions is an important characteristic of a novel that renders it the power to win a wide audience. [6]

Keeping in mind the Construct of encoded messages and the perception factor of the decoding process, the study aims to address the following survey questions: 1) The romance quotient of the films is a close representation of what happens in real life. Do you agree? Based on the hypothesis: the maximum number of participants disagree with the notion that the twilight film franchise showcased a romance quotient with a close representation of reality, and 2) Does the romance in the film rely on surrealism (bizarre distortion) and dramatism? Based on the hypothesis: If people have watched the Twilight Film franchise, then they are more likely to agree that the films rely on surrealism and dramatism.

The questions are based on the premise that watching the movies might have had an impact on the mind of the audiences, irrespective of the impacts being positive, negative or neutral. The sole purpose is to establish the research statement as a conclusive one and this has been done through surveying 113 participants. Each question had provisions for 3 to 4 individual options to be chosen as responses. Therefore, exploring the impact on people in the light of these choices would give us a better insight into Hollywood Romanticism and understanding how it affects the youth, here, in Mumbai. This insight can serve as a guide for filmmakers and audiences alike, to carefully consider certain aspects while filming and consuming media content respectively.

Hypothesis
Following are the two hypotheses formulated to establish a definite inference for the research problem. This will be done via the questionnaire that will contain questions about the two statements and the resulting data will be analysed thoroughly.

1) The Maximum number of participants disagree with the notion that the twilight film franchise showcased a romance quotient with a close representation of reality.
2) If people have watched the Twilight Film franchise, then they are more likely to agree that the films rely on surrealism and dramatism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There seems to be an established formulaic take on Hollywood Romanticism, dating back to the 1930s. Years of metamorphism ranging from the neo-traditional romantic comedies to radical romantic content and the present concoction of both has resulted in constant reinforcement of certain ideas and notions about romantic love. This has impacted frequent film watchers in negative ways, creating an absurd sense of reality through the film’s content. The impact may be showcased through their recurring habits and/or by the manner
of thought and speech. (The Effects of Romantic Comedies on Relationships, in Reality, Geoffrey Kennedy Peel, 2011)](7)

The Romance Genre is abundant with films that can be categorically distributed. This research analysed the Perfect Partner/ The One in a Million category; the Love Conquers All strategy, and lastly, the Virgin sex. The paper emphasizes the impact that these clichés have on the minds of the viewers and how they give rise to cultures. Once these messages are consumed so much, they eventually become part of a society’s ideals. These images produced by the media have an astounding influence on the culture. [8]

(Romantic Movies and their Influence on the Audience’s Ideals of Real-Life Relationships, Carmella App, 2014)

Parasocial interaction is a psychological condition in which an audience member relates themselves to a celebrity or television/film personality in the course of everyday consumption of their content. As a result, they tend to accept and believe the claims of said celebrities more easily than other audiences. Thus, repeated television viewing may create a parasocial interaction and this can reinstate certain beliefs and ideologies through the media. A case under study: High School Musical (another Hollywood Romance movie), tended to create a false image of romance and love among adolescent girls. (Driesmans, K., Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2016). True love lasts forever: The influence of a popular teenage movie on Belgian girls’ romantic beliefs. Journal of Children and Media, 10(3).)[9]

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey Questions
Two survey questions were addressed in this study:
1) The romance quotient of the films is a close representation of what happens in real life. Do you agree?
A maximum number of participants disagree with the notion that the twilight film franchise showcased a romance quotient with a close representation of reality.

2) Does the romance in the film rely on surrealism (bizarre distortion) and dramatism?
If people have watched the Twilight Film franchise, then they are more likely to agree that the films rely on surrealism and dramatism.

2.2 Design
This study is focused on establishing whether or not the Twilight Saga movies have had an impact on the youth of Mumbai, India. A survey has been conducted to draw a calculated and popular inference. Through the 2 elements of the Cultivation Theory, the encoding of a message, its perception and construct, the type of impact, negative, positive or neutral will also be established.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure
Due to the Quantitative Analysis approach, a survey was conducted with 113 participants belonging to the age groups of 15 to 24 and all gender categories. Given the pandemic situation, the survey was conducted via online Google forms. A total of 14 questions pertaining to the impact of the films, direct and indirect were included in the questionnaire. Questions in the survey were framed in a manner such that 4 to 5 response options were available to the participants. Complete autonomy was provided to the participants to make their own choices. Two of the questions were determined to be imperative to include in the research as they directly responded to the research problem. Both of these have been included in this research. Apart from this, the survey forms also gathered personal opinions regarding the impact of the films through more elaborative response-based questions.

2.4 Data Analysis
On collecting all responses via the Google Forms software, the data was recorded in an excel sheet. After meticulously scrutinising the data entered, the two highly essential questions, alongside their responses were filtered out. The information was then filled into the Special Package for Social Sciences software to draw analysis with ease. The Chi-square tests were performed and p-value results were obtained. After which, using the convenient tabular form of data presentation, all the information was assembled. The rows and columns were allotted as per the variables considered for the tests and titled respectively (see table 3.1.1). These visual aids helped interpret the results and answer the research questions. The numbers and graphs were analysed and interpreted, keeping in mind the research objective.

RESULTS

Upon completion of data collection and analysis, inferences were drawn that concluded impact has been made on the minds of the viewers of the Twilight Saga movie franchise. Some light will be shed on the nature of the
impact made by the movies in section 5 of the research paper. It is imperative to announce that there are several caveats which concern the validity of the assessment results. Among these are, each person’s opinion is individual and the collection was not done in a social gathering, opinions are subjective and may be affected by external factors such as environmental setting, psychological state, previous experience and background. They need to be carefully considered in any upcoming research endeavours of similar composition.

Another point to be brought to notice is that the franchise has a total of 5 movies and each has its own impact, apart from the impact of the series as a whole. This too should be kept in mind, in any future research endeavours.

3.1 Answers to the Survey Questions
3.1.1 Survey Question 1
1) The romance quotient of the films is a close representation of what happens in real life. Do you Agree?

Table 3.1.1 Classification of opinion among different age groups of movie audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
<th>Strongly Disagreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 3.1.1 Classification of opinion among different age groups of movie audiences.

'p'-value= .046
In table 3.1.1 and chart 3.1.1, it may be seen that there is no significant difference between the age groups and the participants’ opinion on the romance quotient of the film and its close representation of reality, $X^2 (1, N=112) = 12.832$, 'p'-value is .046. The Twilight Saga film franchise does not showcase a romance quotient which is a close representation of what happens in reality.

It may be noted that maximum (39%) participants, in the age group category with the largest number of participants disagree with the notion that the twilight film franchise showcased a romance quotient with a close representation of reality.

3.1.2 Survey Question 2
2) Does the romance in the film rely on surrealism (bizarre distortion) and dramatism?

Table 3.1.2 Classification of observation of elements of surrealism and dramatism among participants who have/ have not watched at least 2 out of 5 films.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have/have not watched the films</th>
<th>Elements of surrealism and dramatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Totally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 out of 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not heard of them</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart 3.1.2 Classification of observation of elements of surrealism and dramatism among participants who have/ have not watched at least 2 out of 5 films.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have/have not watched the films</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 3.1.2 and chart 3.1.2, it may be seen that there is no significant difference between the audiences having watched at least 2 out of 5 films and their observation of elements of surrealism and dramatism in the films, $X^2 (1, N=97) = 15.115$, $'p'$-value is .235. The audiences of the Twilight Saga film franchise are keen that they have observed elements of surrealism and dramatism used in the films. It may be noted that maximum (40%) participants observed elements of surrealism and dramatism in the films that they watched.

**LIMITATIONS**

For every research analysis, limitations are inevitable. First, as the data collection procedure in this research comprised a manual data extraction method through surveying more than 100 human participants, subjectivity may exist in the opinion of all participants. The second limitation would be not all participants have watched all films from the 5 films franchise which may lead to a lop sided, partially informed opinion formation. This is something that can be overcome by sampling larger populations to make more sweeping generalisations. The third limitation would be the small sample size of roughly 115 participants, which would mean the research is heavily influenced by localised opinions and not those of a sizeable populace. For further research on this/ similar topic, it would be advisable to employ a sizeable sample size. Another recommendation would be considering other Media Consumption Theories for theoretical analysis of the film series that has won over so many hearts over the years.

**CONCLUSION**

The objective of this research was to establish whether or not the Twilight Saga series has impacted the youth in Mumbai. The Cultivation Theory angle of encoding and decoding messages in a particular way as mis/guided by the producer for the consumer reaffirms the fact that movies and other media content do impact the minds of the viewers. The data collected via the Google Form survey, after thorough analysis, presented the inference that the movies have in fact had an impact on the minds of the young audiences who viewed them. Through the detailed response, questions asked, it was established that the impact that the movies have had on the viewers are of negative effect. Viewers complained that the Hollywood romance movies, like most other movies employed certain tactics to lure the audiences: ‘the bad boy meets good girl complex’, ‘the love triangle’, and the ‘damsel in distress complex’ were among few named by them. This gave the audience a sense of artificiality in the romantic storyline. They voted that the romance was superficial, unreal and hardly a semblance to what happens in real life scenarios. Thus, it can be concluded that Hollywood Romanticism impacts the mind of the audiences and the kind of impact it has is often negative.

**REFERENCES**
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