Unveiling The Silver Screen: Exploring the Impact of Movies on Criminal Cases from A Social Learning Perspective

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Abstract:

Over the past hundred years, Bollywood has emerged as one of the most dominant and distinctive features of Indian culture. Indian cinema wields significant influence and power in addressing various social issues through its medium of screenplay. It stands as the world's largest film industry in terms of the number of films produced. Movies serve as a potent medium for addressing societal concerns, as they play a crucial role in motivating individuals and communities. While movies have a positive impact on society, it is essential to acknowledge their potential negative effects. This present study is a review of how psycho-thriller movies leave a negative impact on individuals and play a significant role in influencing crime. It is well-known that people are highly engrossed in movies, web series, and social media. This study compiles insights from various research studies and relevant articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers, shedding light on the detrimental consequences of psycho-thriller movies on individuals and their potential correlation with crime.

Keywords: Crimes, Social Learning Theory, Cinema

Introduction:

Cinema, considered one of the greatest influences in modern life, is also regarded as a form of art, the seventh art alongside photography, architecture, literature, theater, painting, and music. It represents the amalgamation of technology, business, entertainment, and aesthetics, each of which plays a pivotal role in today's world. Drawing inspiration from its surroundings, cinema encompasses a wide range of genres, from emotional dramas to light-hearted romances and thrilling action films.

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, stands as one of the largest film industries globally. Cinemas are often referred to as 'the temples of modern India' (Mishra, 2002), with Bollywood churning out over 1,000 films annually, nearly double the production of Hollywood (Diwanji, 2020).

Cinema exerts a significant influence on people's daily lives, impacting their decision-making processes, overall happiness, lifestyles, and even problem-solving capabilities.

Cinema is a very powerful way to address the problems in society and shed light on societal issues. It also contributes significantly to instigating changes in society by portraying real-life situations and serves as a source of motivation for both individuals and communities. From women's empowerment to discussions about LGBTQ rights, cinema has played a crucial role in shaping society.

Social learning theories explore the social and interactional factors that influence prosocial development. These theories place substantial emphasis on individuals other than the child, including parents, peers, and teachers, as well as broader social systems like schools and communities (Spivak and Howes, 2011). Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that we acquire social behaviors by observing and imitating the actions of others. Bandura recognized that direct reinforcement alone could not account for all forms of learning, so he introduced a social element to his theory, proposing that people learn through observing others (Nabavi, 2012). His theory is seen as a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories, encompassing attention, memory, and motivational processes (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008). The social learning theory asserts that learning can occur even without altering behavior in response to observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1965).

Cinema is one of the most common sources of learning, and the behaviours and activities learned from it can be viewed as outcomes. People learn both positive and negative lessons from cinema, finding motivation through movies. Cinema plays a critical role in individuals' lives and influences them in both positive and negative ways.

Cinema has a positive influence in several ways:

1. Violence Reduction:
 Nowadays, the most popular film genre is drama. Youth are drawn to movies featuring themes like rumors, intrigues, violence, relationships, and bullying. Many characters in these films become role models for children, leading them to imitate their actions and behaviors. Movies serve as a tool to help youngsters distinguish between good and evil. They also assist in making informed decisions and fostering independent thinking.

2. Educational Importance:
 Modern educational films often depict the consequences of skipping school or dropping classes. In many of these films, the characters who are miserable or unemployed typically lack a strong educational background. Youth tend to be more attentive to what they see on TV than to the advice of their parents, family, or friends. Filmmakers possess the power to influence the minds of the younger generation, and by showcasing the significance of education in movies, teenagers start to recognize the true value of learning.

3.Critical Thinking:
Numerous movies convey important life lessons. For instance, science-fiction films can serve as educational tools for young audiences. It becomes easier to comprehend complex concepts when they are visualized, and through this visualization, students improve their memorization of the subject matter. If someone struggles with understanding a particular science topic, they can opt for a movie that implicitly or explicitly explains the issue, making it more accessible and engaging for learning.

Movies also have negative impacts on society: In the span of just 2 to 3 hours, people are exposed to a wide range of emotions in cinema. Love, hatred, vengeance, savage violence, and even rape are depicted within this short time frame. Without cinema, many individuals might not have had the opportunity in their real lives to encounter such scenes of murder, rape, and vengeance. However, these scenes are presented to everyone without hesitation or restriction under the guise of entertainment by the film

industry. This unrestricted exposure can significantly influence people's attitudes and lives. Children and young adults, in particular, may become desensitized and develop insensitivity to crimes as they grow older.

According to the latest survey of criminologists, the social learning theory is the most frequently endorsed explanation for both minor delinquent and serious criminal behavior (Ellis, Johnathon, & Walsh et al., 2008).

Review of Literature:

Karande and Sharma (2022) examined the impact of movies on society and found that films can have both positive and negative effects. On one hand, movies can contribute to economic growth, inspire individuals, and enhance our understanding of the world. On the other hand, they can potentially promote violence, encourage bad habits, foster greed, and convey negative messages to the public. The influence of films on society is multifaceted, and the smallest elements within them can significantly affect viewers. This underscores the need for vigilance and responsibility on the part of major movie studios when crafting their productions.

Dr. Sonia Sharma (2019) conducted a study titled "Cinema and Inclusive Movies: Its Impact on Personal and Social Life." Her research emphasized how movies featuring the stories of real-life heroes can motivate individuals, particularly those with disabilities. Such films provide a platform for disabled individuals to overcome challenges and achieve their goals, increasing their acceptance in society. These cinematic portrayals of heroes with disabilities serve to showcase their potential, effectively altering societal perceptions. Movies play a pivotal role in positively influencing the mindset of people with special needs and shaping society's attitude towards them.

In his study, Hafiz Muhammad Ahmed investigated the correlation between viewing crimes in films and committing crimes in real life. Through tests on a sample population, he reported high alpha values in various categories such as "Love for Movies," "Crime Fascination," "Crime Inspiration," "Inspiration by Hollywood and Bollywood films," "Crime Learning," "Influence of character (hero)," "Influence of violence," and "Criminality." These values supported the principal hypothesis, suggesting that the public perceives a positive association between watching crimes in films and engaging in criminal activities in real life. Respondents perceived that films could effectively teach methods of committing crimes and encourage the emulation of criminal actions portrayed by on-screen heroes. This study highlights the public's belief in the influence of crime thrillers in making criminal behavior appear inspiring and fascinating.

In 2019, Kumari Juhi conducted a study involving a sample of 100 individuals from various academic disciplines across India. Her research revealed a noteworthy correlation: individuals who watched violent movies tended to exhibit a mindset, reactions, and actions infused with violence. This conclusion emerged from a survey that engaged respondents from diverse age groups. The survey indicated that a significant number of people favored genres such as thriller, horror, and action movies, and exposure to these films appeared to influence violent tendencies in their thought processes.

The researchers conducted this survey diligently, minimizing any potential biases or subjectivity in their analysis. Regardless of whether the movies were from Bollywood, Hollywood, or Tollywood, a common theme emerged - the promotion of a culture of violence within society. In contemporary cinema, violence has become pervasive, extending beyond the boundaries of traditional action and thriller genres to even

infiltrate romantic and comedy films. The youth, in particular, eagerly anticipate the release of new movies across various genres, indicating the far-reaching influence of this cinematic trend.

Cinematic Portrayals of Crime and Their Impact:

It is widely acknowledged that visual media has a more profound impact on us than written content. The environment we immerse ourselves in significantly shapes our learning and behavior. In the context of crime, thriller movies exert a greater influence on viewers compared to novels or written narratives. Renowned directors like Anurag Kashyap, Sriram Raghavan, and Ram Gopal Verma have made significant contributions to the crime genre in Bollywood. Iconic films and dramas such as "Gangs of Wasseypur," "Raman Raghav 2.0," "Black Friday," "Johnny Gaddar," and "Satya" stand as classics in this genre.

Regrettably, there have been instances where audiences have been influenced to commit crimes after being exposed to dark comedies. For example, in movies like "Joker," the audience finds delight in the character's violent actions, cheering during gruesome murders. Films based on real-life incidents or inspired by serial killers have, at times, inadvertently led viewers down a path towards criminal behavior. This phenomenon aligns with the principles of social learning theory, which asserts that we acquire social behavior by observing and imitating the actions of others. Several real-life cases illustrate the impact of this theory:

Shraddha Walker's Murder: In a shocking incident in Delhi, a 26-year-old woman named Shraddha Walker was brutally murdered by her live-in partner, Aftab Ameen Poonawala. He strangled her and dismembered her body into 35 pieces, storing them in polythene bags within a refrigerator, all of which was inspired by the American TV series "Dexter." The show's influence on him was evident, and it had garnered a significant following in India.

Murder in Panoor, Kannur: In another case from Panoor, Kannur, a man named Shyamjith M was arrested for the murder of Vishnupriya, who had rejected his romantic advances. Shyamjith had meticulously planned the murder and even crafted his own knife for the act. He claimed that he had drawn inspiration from the Malayalam film "Anjaam Pathira," which revolves around a serial killer.

"Drishyam" Influence: The 2013 blockbuster "Drishyam," starring Mohanlal, has seemingly influenced multiple real-life crimes. In 2018, a man killed his younger brother during a quarrel and concealed the body in his house's backyard with the assistance of his mother and wife. This crime was reportedly inspired by elements from the film.

In another incident reminiscent of the film "Drishyam," a murder occurred in Thiruvananthapuram in 2019. Vidya, a resident of Cherthala, was strangled to death by her husband, Prem Kumar, and his accomplice, Sunitha Baby. They disposed of her body in a forested area in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, while deliberately leaving her mobile phone in a dustbin on the Netravati Express bound for Mumbai to mislead investigators. To further complicate matters, Prem reported his wife as 'missing' at a local police station just two days after the murder.

Similarly, the movie **"Hindi Medium,"** featuring Irrfan Khan, shed light on the challenges parents face during school admissions. In 2018, a businessman in Delhi was apprehended for falsifying his economic

status to secure a seat in the Sanskriti School of Chanakyapuri under the economically weaker section category.

In another case from 2016, an individual abducted a 24-year-old Snapdeal employee and created problems that he subsequently 'resolved' to gain her trust. He later proposed marriage, stating, "Are you going to make a friend or an enemy?" The accused confessed that his actions were inspired by Shah Rukh Khan's movie **"Darr"** (1993).

Likewise, after watching Akshay Kumar's movie **"Special 26"** (2013), a group of armed robbers posed as CBI officers and conducted a raid at the Hyderabad branch of Muthoot Finance. They made off with 40kg of gold and removed all the CCTV cameras to eliminate evidence.

The Bollywood film **"Munna Bhai M.B.B.S."** from 2003, beloved by a wide audience, has also influenced a series of crimes. Several students attempted to impersonate themselves or send proxy candidates to exams. They even employed Bluetooth technology to cheat during examinations.

Instances related to "Munna Bhai M.B.B.S."-inspired crimes include:

- In 2017, two men were apprehended for appearing in an exam on behalf of aspiring candidates.
- In 2016, a dozen individuals were held for taking the Uttarakhand Ayurveda Pre-Medical Test for other aspirants.
- In 2012, a group of cheats sought to leak question papers for the AIIMS postgraduate course, providing answers via SMS to students during the examination. Notably, one of the individuals involved was a sub-inspector from the Delhi Police.

These instances underscore the complex interplay between cinematic representations of crime and their potential impact on individuals' behavior, a phenomenon that finds support in the social learning theory.

Influence of Cinema on Criminal Behavior:

There have been several instances where individuals have committed crimes inspired by cinematic portrayals. One harrowing case involved the abduction of a 15-year-old boy by one of his classmates, who demanded a ransom of approximately 50,000 rupees and tragically ended up taking the boy's life. The perpetrator confessed that he had been so deeply influenced by the character portrayed by Vivek Oberoi in the movie "Shootout at Lokhandwala" (2007) that he watched the video of the character committing the crime daily and mimicked the mannerisms of Vivek Oberoi's character in the film.

In a striking twist of irony, the movie "Dolly Ki Doli," inspired by a real-life incident, gave rise to another crime. The bride, who had just been married to a farmer from Roorkee, absconded with the gold and silver jewelry gifted to her by the family, merely a day after the wedding.

In another incident, an individual posed as a researcher and gained access to Delhi's National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum. Conducting a test run, the person identified the weak points, including CCTV camera locations, and proceeded to steal 16 shawls, each over 250 years old, with a total value of Rs. 2 crore.

It's important to note that this influence of cinema on criminal behavior is not exclusive to Indian films; it is a trend seen across various industries. Incidents involving child offenders often reveal that they were influenced by the 1991 American film "Child's Play 3." The case of James Holmes, who committed a mass shooting in an Aurora, Colorado, theater, raised debates about whether movies and comics, such as those from Batman, Marvel, and D.C., can influence people to commit crimes.

Conclusion:

The latest survey of criminologists suggests that the social learning theory is the most frequently endorsed explanation for both minor delinquent and serious criminal behavior. Advancements in technology have provided new avenues for learning through observation, whether it pertains to criminal activities or other aspects of life. Cases like the Shraddha Walker murder, the Vishnupriya murder, the Delhi businessman's fake economic status, the Vidya murder case, and cheating in MBBS exams using Bluetooth technology all highlight instances where cinema has played a role in shaping individuals' actions, as they observed movies and applied what they learned to real life.

Suggestion:

It's clear that highlighting several strategies can help in reduce the negative impact of cinema and mass media. Self-regulation, content examination, responsibility on the part of mass media, communication, and limited screen exposure are all valid approaches to address this issue. These methods can indeed contribute to a healthier and more responsible media environment.

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