The Influential Portrayal of Crime in Films: Media Depictions and Youths' Understanding of Crime Trends and Techniques

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Abstract

This research paper explores the influential portrayal of crime in films and its impact on young viewers' understanding of crime trends and techniques. Over the years, crime films have evolved from depicting straightforward villains to presenting complex antiheroes, often glorifying criminal behaviour. This shift has significant implications for young audiences observing crime, viewing it as an exciting and adventurous pursuit rather than a serious moral failing. This glamorization can lead young viewers, especially college students, to see crime as a practicable means of achieving success and rebellion against social norms. The influence of peer discussions among young audiences further normalizes these perceptions, creating a collective understanding that may blur the lines between right and wrong. The paper emphasizes the need for media literacy programs to help young people critically analyze the media they consume, encouraging a more informed perspective on crime and its consequences. This study aims to provide filmmakers with insights into their portrayals' social responsibilities and advocate for educational initiatives that equip young audiences with the tools to navigate the problems of crime in media. By understanding the impact of crime films, the research contributes to a broader conversation about the role of film in shaping social values, particularly among youth.

INTRODUCTION

Films and media act as a powerful medium for visual storytelling, blending images, sound, and narratives to captivate viewers and express emotions and concepts. Its development since the late 1800s has profoundly impacted public perception and societal values. The shift from silent movies to "talkies," highlighted by the debut of The Jazz Singer in 1927, paved the way for Hollywood to become the preeminent center of cinema worldwide.Over the years, film genres have diversified, with crime films rising in popularity due to their capacity to weave suspense, intrigue, and ethical conflicts. Early crime films portrayed criminals as immoral characters facing repercussions for their actions, mirroring societal anxieties during the Great Depression. However, in the mid-20th century, the genre transformed, showcasing morally complex characters that blurred the distinctions between right and wrong.The 1970s and 1980s marked a transition toward narratives centered on organized crime, as seen in The Godfather series, which depicted criminals as intricate figures within a broader systemic context. In the 21st century, crime films have adjusted to modern issues, addressing themes like cybercrime and heists, with movies

such as Ocean's Eleven (2001) and The Dark Knight (2008) portraying criminals as clever antiheroes.The impact of crime films on young viewers, especially college students, is considerable. As young adults explore their identities and social expectations, they might imitate the appealing representations of crime, perceiving it as a form of rebellion or achievement. Conversations among peers about these films can further normalize criminal conduct, influencing shared views on crime.This cultural influence calls for a thorough analysis of media messages and a sense of social responsibility in filmmaking. Educators, parents, and policymakers should be aware of the effects of crime films on young audiences and advocate for media literacy initiatives that foster the critical evaluation of media content. By promoting a deeper comprehension of the ethical consequences portrayed in crime films, these efforts can help reduce potential negative impacts and develop a more discerning audience.In conclusion, this study seeks to investigate whether crime films act as educational resources or inadvertently encourage risky behaviors, contributing to a broader discussion about the influence of film in shaping societal values, especially among younger generations.

Objectives of the Study:
- To know how crime portrayals in films influence youth's perceptions in understanding criminal behaviour.
- To understand how the film media will encourage individuals to commit illegal actions.
- To gather suggestions from youth participants (aged 15-24) and establish potential solutions on how to reduce the negative impact of crime in films.

LITERATURE REVIEW:
- A study conducted by Hafiza Khadijia Azeem (2023) published in the Journal of Media and Communication Studies (1) reveals the detrimental psychological effects of crime-oriented films and web series on adolescents aged 15 to 25, particularly on streaming services like Netflix. The research, which involved a survey of 100 participants, discovered that the depiction of criminals as heroes romanticizes illegal behavior, resulting in heightened aggression and depression among young individuals. Furthermore, literature examining the impact of mass media on Indian society, as noted by author Manal Ali, points to a persistent link between exposure to violent media and an increase in violent behavior, particularly among younger viewers. Although crime movies frequently impart moral lessons regarding the repercussions of criminal activity, they can also unintentionally promote the imitation or glorification of criminal tactics, thereby influencing societal norms and attitudes toward justice.
- The studies conducted by Craig A. Anderson, Leonard Berkowitz, Edward Donnerstein, L. Rowell Huesmann, James D. Johnson, Daniel Linz, Neil M. Malamuth, and Ellen Wartella consistently (2) reveal a strong connection between exposure to violent media content—such as television, films, video games, and music—and an increase in aggression and violent behavior. Short-term effects encompass intensified aggressive thoughts, feelings, and actions due to factors like priming, arousal, and imitation. Longitudinal research indicates that regular exposure to media violence during childhood is linked to greater aggression in adulthood, which may manifest as physical assaults and domestic violence. Theoretical frameworks propose that media violence enhances aggressive scripts, leads to desensitization, and fosters beliefs that support aggression. Although individual traits and social circumstances can influence these outcomes, no one is completely unaffected. Despite ongoing

discussions, extensive studies affirm that media violence poses a serious public health issue, necessitating interventions such as parental guidance and efforts to promote media literacy.

- Browne and Hamilton-Giachritsis's research takes a public health approach to exploring the impact of violent media on children and teenagers, highlighting its capacity to enhance aggressive behavior and desensitize individuals to violence. (3)The researchers examine empirical research, pointing out that extended exposure to violent media such as television, films, and video games can lead to heightened aggression, increased fear of becoming a victim, and diminished empathy. They delve into the psychological mechanisms that explain media influence, including social learning theory, which posits that children replicate aggressive behaviors they see in media. The study also takes into account the moderating influence of personal and environmental factors, such as parental oversight, peer pressure, and socio-economic status, which can affect the degree of media impact. While recognizing the challenges in proving a direct causal link, the authors emphasize the need for media regulation, parental involvement, and public awareness initiatives to lessen potential risks. Their conclusions add to ongoing discussions about media violence and provide insights for policy suggestions intended to decrease its adverse effects on young viewers.

Research Gap:

Some studies have addressed the role of crime films and their negative impact on society. However, there is a gap in understanding how the youth age group of 15-24 observes crime films and their portrayal of crime. This gap highlights the need to explore the negative effects these crime films may have on young people's understanding of crime and criminal behaviour.

Research Question:

- How do young audiences perceive crime and criminals after watching crime films?
- Are young audiences more likely to consider crime as a feasible option after watching crime films?
- When watching crime films, what kinds of emotions do viewers feel (e.g., excitement, fear, admiration, etc.)?
- Should the portrayal of crime in films shift from glorification to highlighting the negative consequences of criminal behaviour to reduce its impact on viewers?
- How do discussions about crime films within peer groups influence viewers' attitudes toward criminal behaviour?

Hypothesis:

H0: The glorification of crime in films does not influence the perception and encourages criminal behaviour in youths.

H1: The glorification of crime in films influences the perception and encourages criminal behaviour in youths.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is designed with both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis to examine the students' understanding of the depiction of crime films in youth. The primary data collected from the respondents are constructed to questionnaire method to collect data, based on the objective by using google forms.

Sampling Method:

The study uses convenience sampling, as the respondents are selected from the institution who are readily available and easily accessible for this particular study.
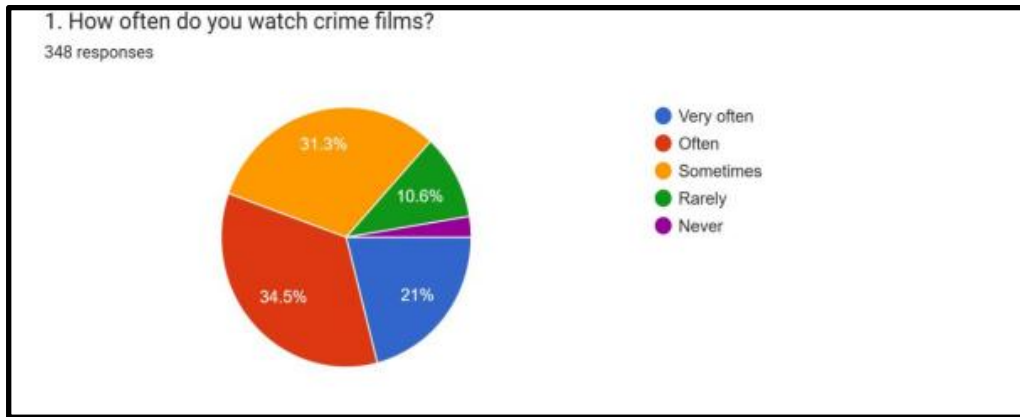
RESULTS:

Fig 1

This pie chart represents responses from participants regarding how often they watch crime films. Very Often (Blue - 21%) A significant portion of respondents frequently watch crime films. Often (Red - 34.5%) This is the largest category, indicating that crime films have a broad appeal. Sometimes (Orange - 31.3%) A large number of participants watch crime films occasionally. Rarely (Green- 10.6%) A smaller portion watches crime films infrequently. Never (Purple - 2.6%): A very small group does not watch crime films at all.
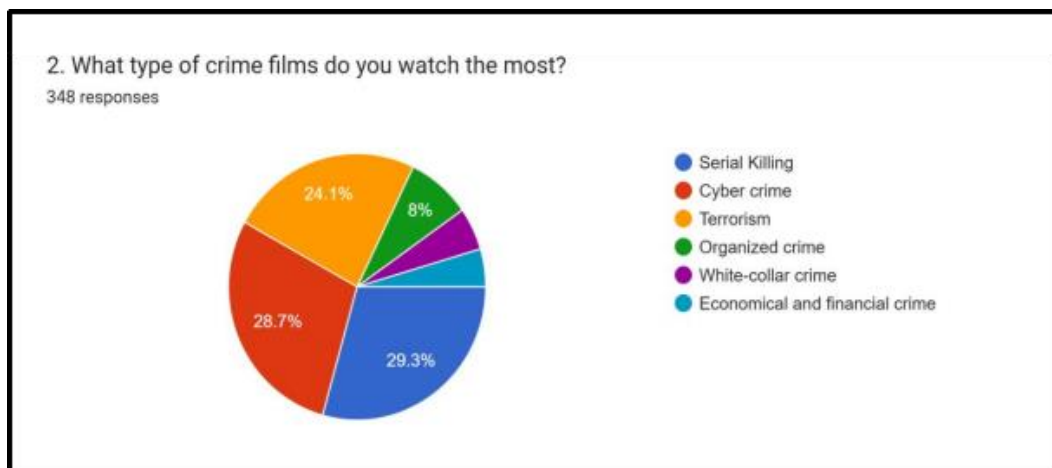

Fig 2

This pie chart represents the responses from participants regarding the type of crime films they watch the most. Serial Killing (Blue - 29.3%) The most-watched type, indicating a strong public interest in psychological thrillers and serial killer narratives. Cyber Crime (Red - 28.7%): Almost as popular as serial killing, showing the growing fascination with internet-based crimes and digital threats. Terrorism (Orange - 24.1%) Many viewers prefer terrorism-related films, suggesting an interest in global security issues and action-packed narratives. Organized Crime (Green - 8%) A smaller but notable audience watches films related to the mafia, gangs, and syndicates. White-Collar Crime (Purple – 5.2% Less popular, reflecting limited interest in financial and corporate crime narratives. Economic and Financial Crime (Light Blue –

4.6%) Similar to white-collar crime, this category has the least viewers, indicating lower engagement with financial fraud-based stories.
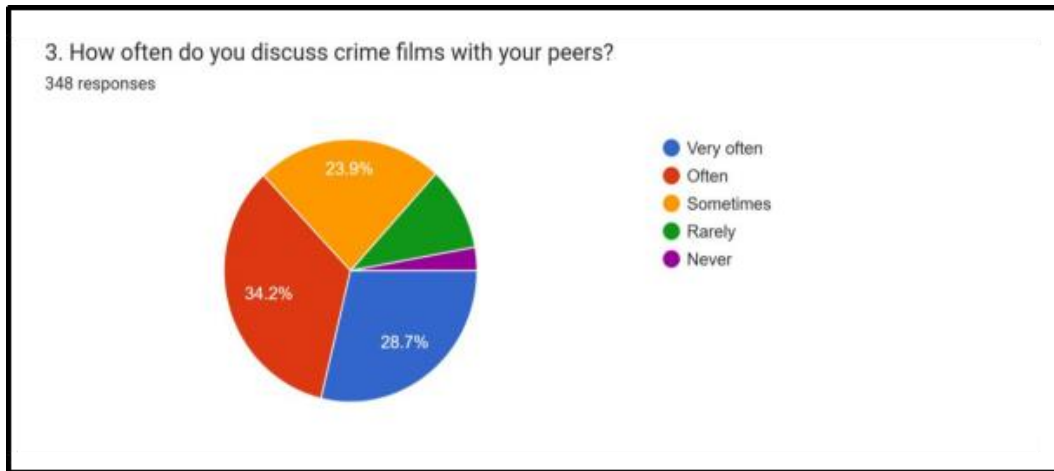

Fig 3

This pie chart represents how often respondents discuss crime films with their peers. Often (Red - 34.2%) The largest portion of respondents frequently discuss crime films, showing strong engagement with the genre. Very Often (Blue - 28.7%) A significant number discuss c rime films regularly, reinforcing the idea that crime movies are a common topic of conversation. Sometimes (Orange - 23.9%) A notable percentage discusses crime films occasionally, indicating moderate interest. Rarely (Green – 10.3%) A smaller group discusses crime films infrequently. Never (Purple – 2.9%) Very few people do not discuss crime films at all.
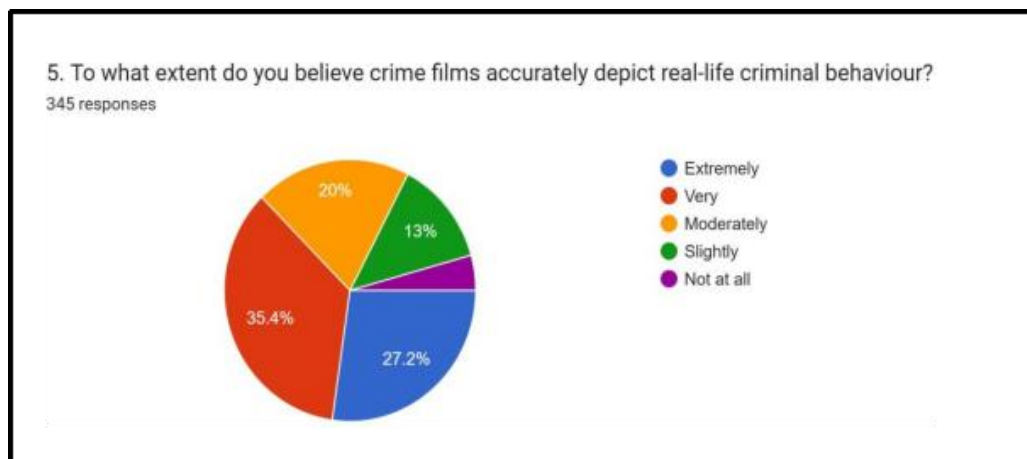

Fig 4

This pie chart represents responses from participants regarding the extent to which crime films accurately depict real-life criminal behavior. Very (Red - 35.4%) The largest group believes crime films portray real-life crime fairly accurately. Extremely (Blue - 27.2%) A significant port ion strongly agrees that crime films closely reflect reality. Moderately (Orange - 20%) A notable percentage thinks crime films offer a partial or balanced portrayal. Slightly (Green - 13%) A smaller group feels crime films only capture certain aspects of real-life crime. Not at all (Purple - 4.3%) A minimal number believe crime films do not depict reality accurately at all.
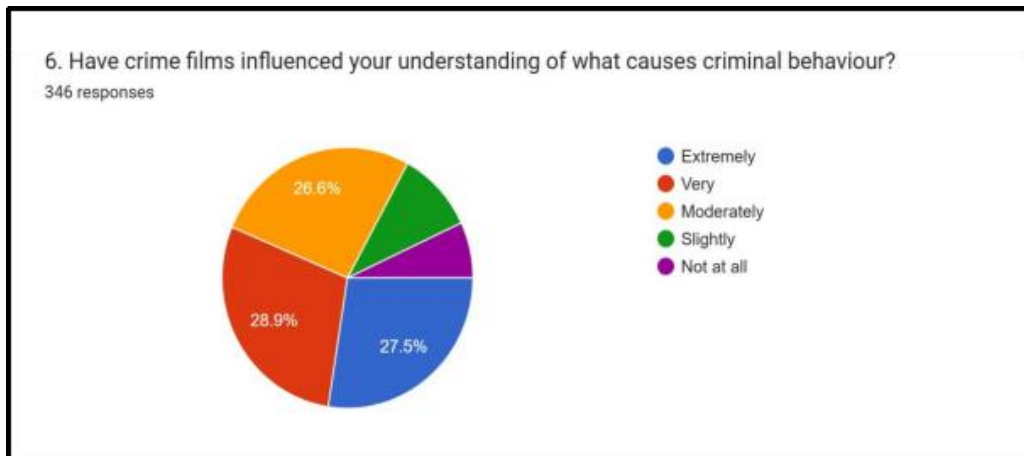
Fig 5

This pie chart presents responses from participants on whether crime films have influenced their understanding of what causes criminal behavior. Very (Red - 28.9%) The largest portion of respondents believe crime films significantly influence their understanding of crime causes. Extremely (Blue - 27.5%) A similarly high percentage strongly agrees that crime films shape their perception of criminal behavior. Moderately (Orange - 26.6%) A substantial portion acknowledges that crime films moderately impact their understanding. Slightly (Green -10.1%) A smaller group believes crime films only slightly contribute to their knowledge. Not at all (Purple- 6.9%) A minimal percentage thinks crime films do not influence their understanding at all.
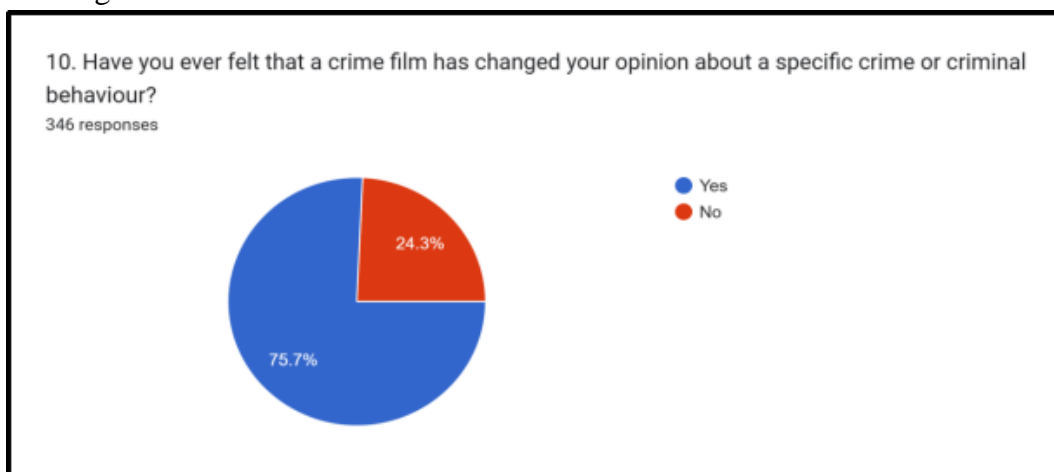

Fig 6

This pie chart presents responses regarding whether a crime film has ever changed their opinion about a specific crime or criminal behavior. Yes (Blue - 75.7%) A large majority of respondents reported that a crime film has influenced their perception of a particular crime or criminal behavior. No (Red - 24.3%) A smaller group of respondents stated that their opinions remained unchanged despite watching crime films.
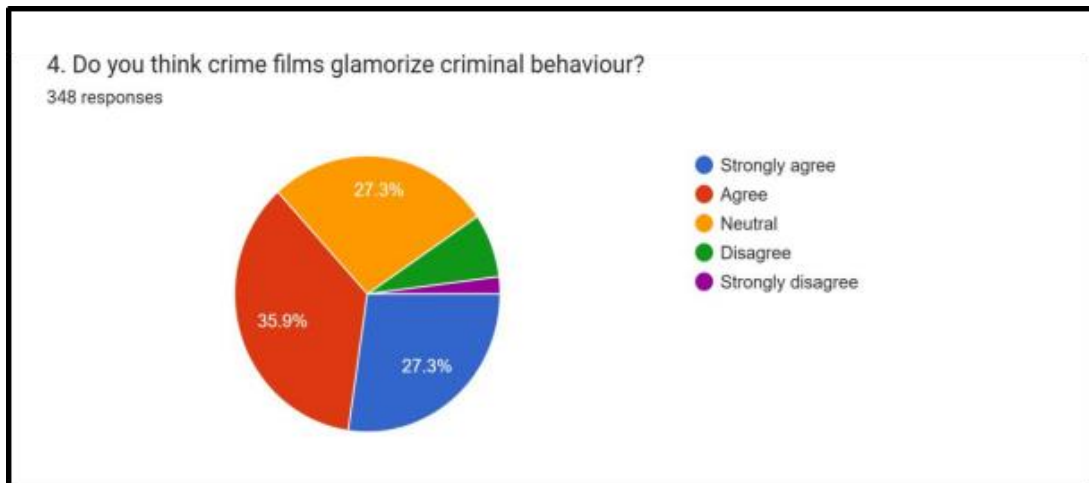
Fig 7

This pie chart represents responses from participants on whether crime films glamorize criminal behavior. Agree (Red - 35.9%) The largest group believes crime films do glorify criminal behavior. Strongly Agree (Blue - 27.3%) A significant portion strongly supports this claim. Neutral (Orange - 27.3%) A notable percentage remains undecided, possibly suggesting mixed portrayals in crime films. Disagree (Green – 7.5%) A minor group does not think crime films promote criminal behavior. Strongly Disagree (Purple - 2%) Very few believe crime films do not glamorize crime at all.
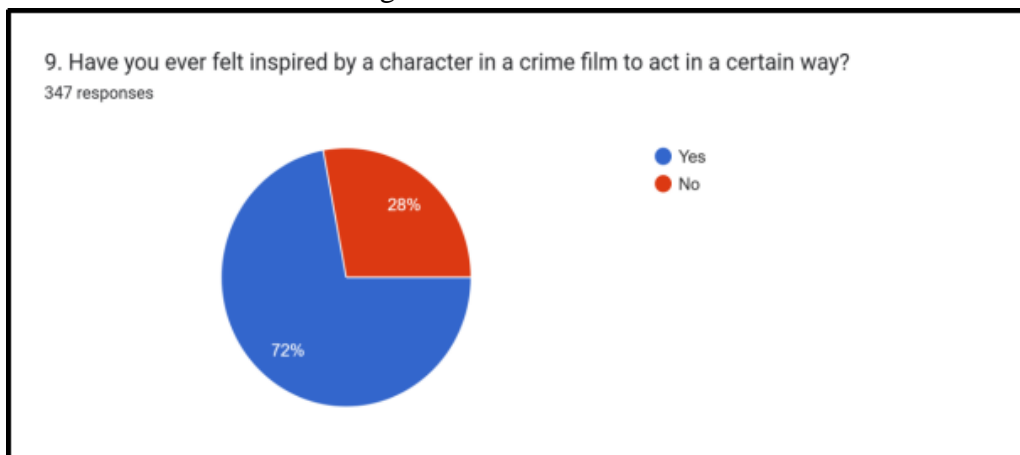

Fig 8

This pie chart presents responses regarding whether they have ever felt inspired by a character in a crime film to act in a certain way. Yes (Blue - 72%) A significant majority reported that they have been influenced or inspired by a character in a crime film to act in a certain way. No (Red - 28%) A smaller portion stated that they have never felt inspired by such characters.
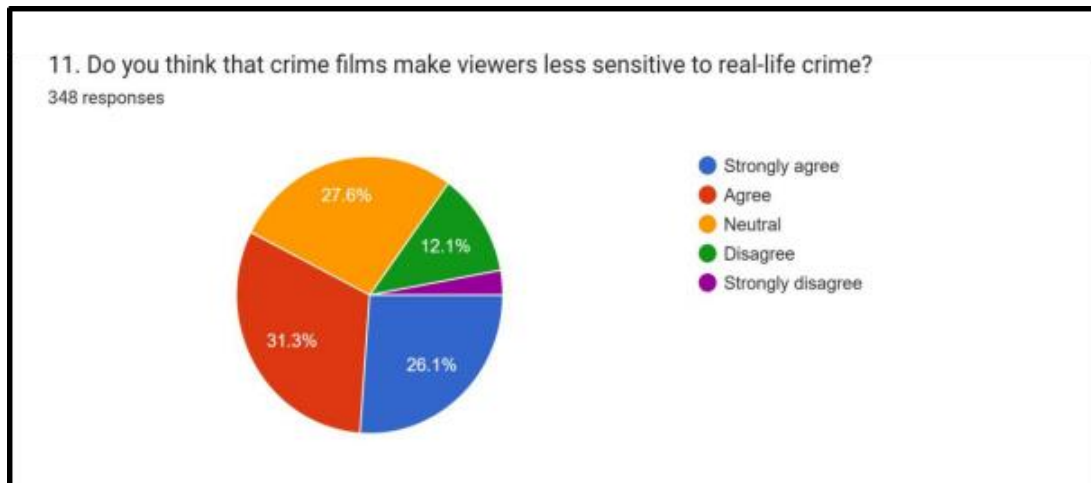
Fig 9

This pie chart represents responses regarding whether crime films make viewers less sensitive to real-life crime. Strongly agree (Blue - 26.1%), Agree (Red - 31.3%), the largest group, believes crime films do glorify criminal behavior. Neutral (Orange - 27.6%) A notable percentage remains undecided, possibly suggesting mixed portrayals in crime films. Disagree (Green - 12.1%) The minority group does not think crime films promote criminal behavior. Strongly disagree (Purple – 4.9%) very few believe crime films do not glamorize crime at all.

Fig 10

This pie chart represents responses regarding whether crime films can encourage individuals to commit illegal actions. Strongly agree (Blue – 23.3%), Agree (Red – 36%): the largest group believes crime films do glorify criminal behavior. Neutral (Orange – 27.7%) A notable percentage remains undecided, possibly suggesting mixed portrayals in crime films. Disagree (Green – 8.6%) The minority group does not think crime films promote criminal behavior. Strongly disagree (Purple – 4.3%) very few believe crime films do not glamorize crime at all.
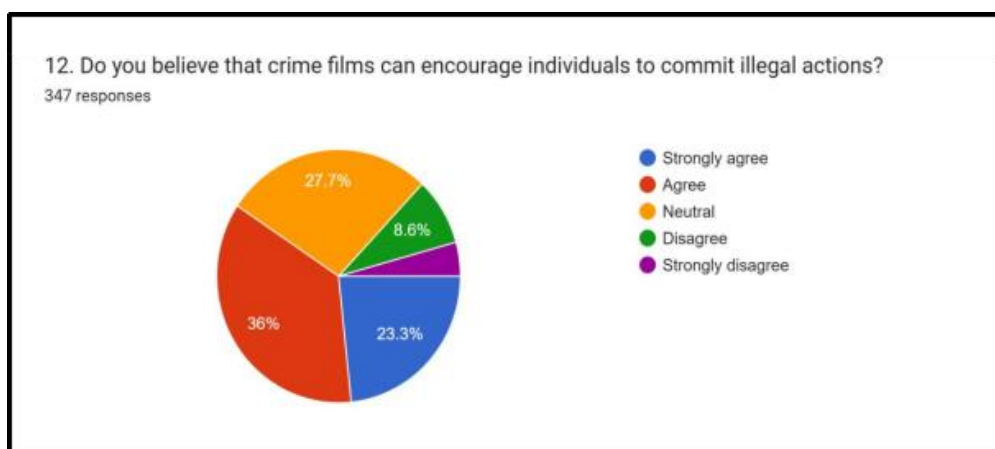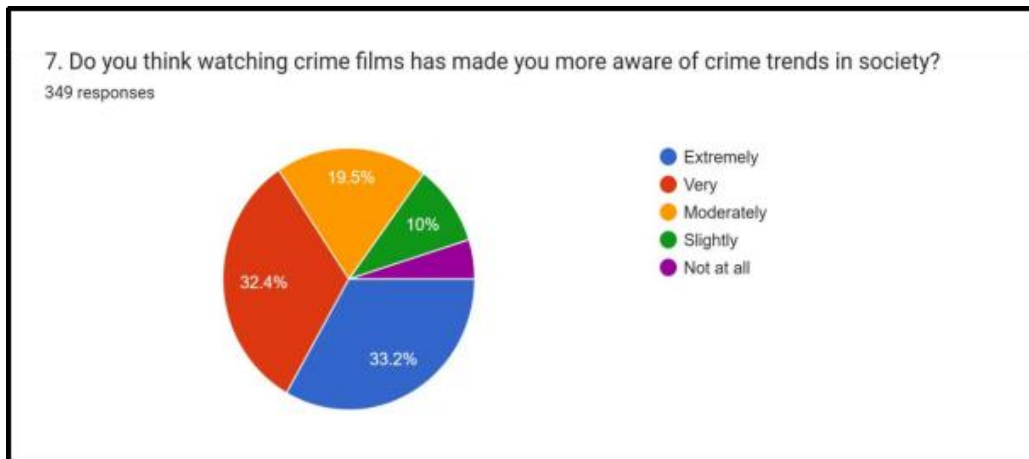
Fig 11

This pie chart presents responses from participants regarding whether watching crime films has increased their awareness of crime trends in society. Extremely (Blue – 33.2%) respondents strongly believe crime films have significantly increased their awareness of crime trends. Very (Red – 32.4%) almost the same proportion finds crime films very impactful in shaping their awareness. Moderately (Orange – 19.5%), a smaller yet notable percentage acknowledges a moderate influence. Slightly (Green – 10.1%) Some respondents feel crime films have only slightly impacted their understanding of crime trends. Not at all (Purple – 4.9%). A minimal portion believes crime films do not contribute to their awareness of crime trends.
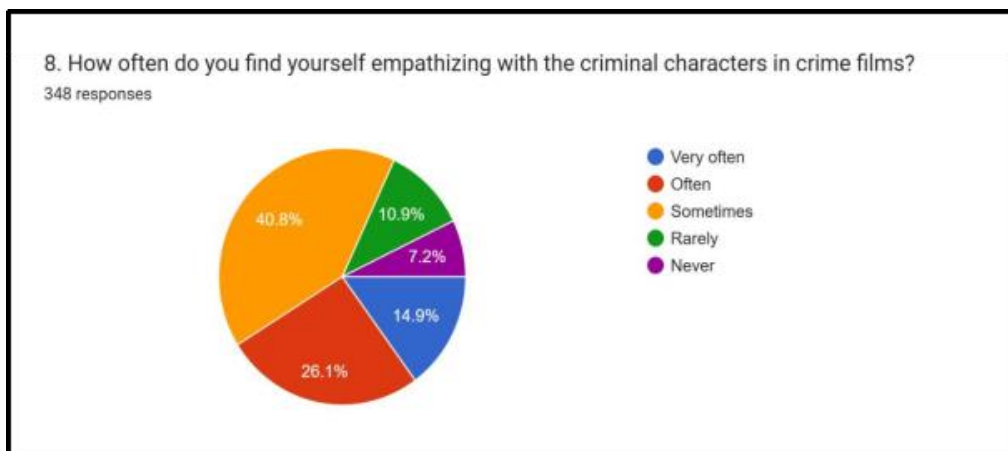
Fig 12

This pie chart presents responses regarding how often they empathize with criminal characters in crime films. Sometimes (Orange – 40.8%) The largest proportion finds themselves occasionally empathizing with criminals in crime films. Often (Red – 26.1%) A significant number frequently feel empathetic toward these characters. Very Often (Blue – 14.9%) A smaller but notable portion experiences frequent strong empathy. Rarely (Green – 10.9%) Some respondents rarely feel empathy for criminal characters. Never (Purple – 7.2%) A small fraction reports no empathy at all.

Fig 13

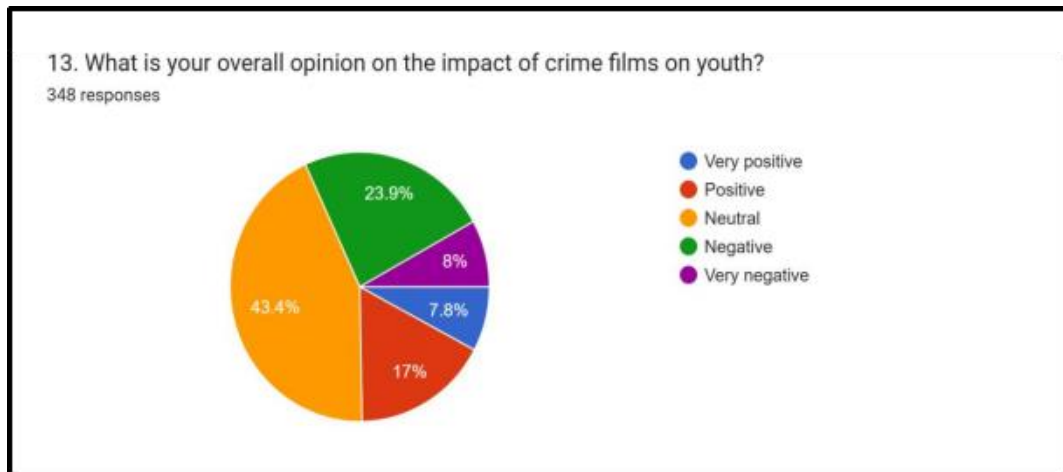The pie chart presents survey responses regarding the impact of crime films on youth. Negative (23.9%) A considerable percentage perceives crime films as having a harmful impact. Very Negative (8%) A small fraction believes crime films have a strongly detrimental effect. Neutral (43.4%) The largest group remains undecided, indicating that they neither see significant positive nor negative effects. Very Positive (7.8%) A small portion believes crime films have a highly beneficial impact. Positive (17%) Some respondents view crime films as somewhat beneficial.
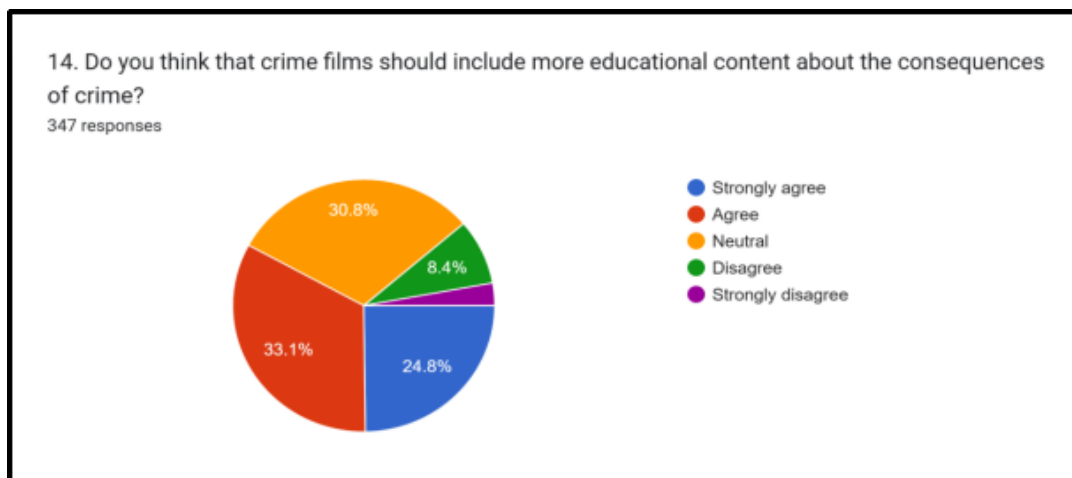

Fig 14

The pie chart illustrates survey responses regarding whether crime films should include more educational content about the consequences of crime. Strongly Agree (24.8%) A significant portion believes that crime films should strongly emphasize educational content. Agree (33.1%) The largest group supports the idea but with less intensity. Neutral (30.8%) A considerable percentage remains undecided on this issue. Disagree (8.4%) A small group opposes the inclusion of more educational content. Strongly Disagree (2.9%) Very few are strongly against the idea.

Open-ended Question:

- A disclaimer or awareness video for the films they are performing should be provided to the actors so they are not influenced by any criminal behaviour in the act.
- Laws that restrict content that promotes criminal behaviour should be in place.
- In economic crime, they give methods for committing crimes. For instance, in the case of Harshath

Mehta, they have presented him as a brave and crafty man who inspires and provides ideas for committing economic crime.

- It isn't appropriate to create crime-themed TV shows, movies, or web series that glorify crime and criminals.
- Teach them the distinctions between right and wrong so they can comprehend and refrain from engaging in that kind of unlawful behavior.

DATA INTERPRETATION:

Two chi-square tests were done to understand the influential portrayal of crime in films and its impact on youth's understanding of criminal behaviour. To prove whether the hypothesis is rejected or accepted, we need to find the p-value.

If the p-value is less than 0.05, i.e ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$), then we can reject the null hypothesis H0, but if the p-value is greater than 0.05, i.e ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$), then we reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. To find the p-value, we need to use the chi-square formula, which is,

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O_i - E_i)^2/E_i$$

- χ^2: The chi-square statistic
- O_i: The observed value
- E_i: The expected value

The first test addressed two questions: how often watch crime films and how usually crime films accurately depict real-life criminal behaviour. The second test is between the understanding that crime films cause criminal behaviour and does crime films change opinions of specific crime and criminal behaviour.

CHI-SQUARE TEST NO.1:

Observed values:

	Extremely	Not at all	Slightly	Grand total
Never	1	3	5	9
Often	153		36	189
Rarely	60	12	72	144
Total	215	15	114	344

Expected values:

	Extremely	Not at all	Slightly
Never	5.625	0.3924418605	2.98255814
Often	118.125	8.24127907	62.63372093
Rarely	90	6.279069767	47.72093023

Formula: [(O-E)^2/E]

	Extremely	Not at all	Slightly
Never	3.802777778	17.32577519	1.364624416
Often	10.29642857	8.24127907	11.32545025
Rarely	10	5.212403101	12.35250918

RESULT OF 1ST CHI-SQUARE TEST:

Chi^2	79.92124756
DF	4
P-value	0

CHI-SQUARE TEST NO.2:

Observed values:

	No	Yes	Grand total
Extremely	19	175	195
Not at all	19	5	24
Sligthly	46	79	127
Grand total	84	259	346

Expected values:

	No	Yes
Extremely	47.34104046	145.9682081
Not at all	5.826589595	17.96531792
Sligthly	30.83236994	95.06647399

Formula: [(O-E)^2/E]

	No	Yes
Extremely	16.96655939	5.774167898
Not at all	29.78393087	9.356888061

Sligthly	7.461541296	2.715274645

RESULT OF 2ST CHI-SQUARE TEST:

Chi^2	72.05836215
DF	2
P-value	0

Discussion:

By looking at the p-value, we can see that both of them are less than 0.05; therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This means we can see that, based on the analysis, the glorification of crime in films influences the perception and encourages criminal behaviour in youth.

SUGGESTIONS:

● Show how criminal activities disrupt communities, leading to fear, mistrust, and long-term societal issues. This broader perspective can underscore the extensive harm caused by crime.

● Illustrate the mental and emotional consequences faced by those who engage in criminal behavior, emphasizing that such actions often lead to internal conflict and suffering.

● Refrain from using graphic violence purely for shock value. Ensure that any depiction of violence serves a narrative purpose and is presented thoughtfully to avoid desensitizing viewers.

● Move beyond typical portrayals of criminals to present diverse and realistic characters, thereby avoiding the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes.

● Consult with individuals and communities affected by crime to gain authentic insights and portray their experiences accurately and respectfully.

CONCLUSION

The study provides strong evidence that crime film glorification influences young audiences' perceptions and may encourage criminal behaviour. By analyzing crime film trends, audience responses, and statistical findings, the research confirms that such films often portray criminals as intelligent and fascinating, making crime appear interesting. The shift from clear moral differences to sympathetic antiheroes, along with the normalization of crime in media, impacts young viewers, particularly college students. Frequent exposure to strategic heists and cybercrimes may lead some to view crime as a means of success or rebellion, with potential real-life imitation.

These findings highlight the need for media message programs to help youth critically assess crime-related content. Schools, universities, and media organizations should introduce educational initiatives to distinguish fiction from reality and discuss crime's ethical, legal, and social consequences. Filmmakers should balance artistic freedom with responsible storytelling, ensuring audiences see both crime's allure and its consequences. By promoting critical awareness and responsible media, society can reduce the risk of crime glorification influencing real-world behaviour.

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