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TITLE

Cinematic Reflections of Despair: Comparing Depictions of Depression in Select Hollywood and Bollywood Movies

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ABSTRACT

Cinema has consistently played and will continue to play a vital role in spreading awareness and shaping perspectives and attitudes regarding mental illness (Pathak & Biswal, 2021), potentially having significant social value and relevance (Middleton, 2013), in both Hollywood and Bollywood, wherein various disorders are portrayed in different ways. Although cinema often amplifies or diminishes the symptoms and behaviors associated with mental illness, numerous films have effectively depicted textbook representations of these disorders, proving to be valuable resources for learning (Kumar, et.al., 2012). Studies have shown that people have an easier time learning new, unique, and abstract concepts when they are presented in both verbal and visual formats (Salomon, 1979). Furthermore, (Cowen, 1984) found that movies and visual media not only make concepts more easily understandable for individuals compared to text-based media but also aid in better retention and recall of information. Movies provide a notable advantage by offering a combined affective and cognitive experience (Smithikrai, 2016). The study was aimed to analyze the depiction of depression in Hollywood and Bollywood films, assessing the appropriateness of representation and its impact on audience understanding of the mental illness. Additionally, the study aimed to compare the two industries regarding the more suitable portrayal of depression.



Based on a comprehensive literature review, it was established that movies can be used to educate audiences about the prevailing mental illnesses, their diagnosis, symptoms and treatment procedure. Portrayal of indicators of depression in both Hollywood and Bollywood movies were studied in order to reach an understanding of the concept. The theoretical framework used for the study is Coherence Theory. The study works on two objectives; the first one being, to study the portrayal of indicators of depression in the selected movies, both in Hollywood and Bollywood which was pursued by distribution of an open-ended question set consisting of five questions to psychologists, psychiatrists, and academicians of the field; the second one being, to compare the portrayal of indicators of depression in the selected movies of Hollywood and Bollywood for which content analysis and self-comparison techniques were employed on six selected movies representing depression, 3 each from Hollywood and Bollywood, namely ‘*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*’ (2012), ‘*The Starling*’ (2021), ‘*Philomena*’ (2013), ‘*Dear Zindagi*’ (2016), ‘*Gehraiyaan*’ (2022), ‘*A Death in the Gunj*’ (2016). Hollywood and Bollywood films are equally chosen to understand mental disorders, but they suffer from drawbacks like excessive dramatization and limited awareness. Involving mental health professionals in filmmaking was recommended for authenticity. Hollywood surpasses Bollywood in research quality. Both industries overlook certain indicators. Hollywood explores diverse themes and stressors, while Bollywood focuses on familial issues. Both need improvement in portraying mental illnesses, with Bollywood lagging behind in awareness and research, not due to technical or developmental factors.

Key Words: Mental Illness, Depression, Indicators, Movies, Hollywood, Bollywood, Comparative study



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Rochak Saxena is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Journalism and Communication, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. He is currently pursuing PhD in the area of screenplay writing in Hindi films. With a keen interest in cinema appreciation, he has also worked as a journalist in DNA, then English daily published from Ahmedabad. He has published a number of papers on various aspects of cinema in journals of international repute. He is also an independent film critic and a filmmaker.



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