

The Future of Hollywood Films in India

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The economic success of Western industrially developed countries has been long and steady. The causes of this are diverse – technological innovation, their own hard labor, foreign countries' cheap labor, education, economic and colonial exploitations; the list seems endless. As a result of their long history of economic success, Western societies have enjoyed a previously unparalleled standard of living, with per capita income levels that other, less developed countries could only dream of. However, recently this Western economic expansion has slowed down significantly, and after having been riddled by the economic crisis of 2008, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, have seen their annual GDP growth rates drop to 2.7% and 1.6 %, respectively (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2011a). Incomes are stalling, and so is consumer spending on luxury goods – cars, home entertainment systems, computers, washing machines, cable subscriptions, and the like – as they have become part of the fundamental basics of any citizen's lifestyle (msnbc.com, 2010).

While these developments have affected industries across the board, one business struggling particularly is that of entertainment, and more specifically, motion picture trade and production. Gone are the days when movies were playing in theatres for months at a time, generating profit right from their first showings at the box office (Compaine & Gomery, 2000). The advent of television, VHS and DVD players, video-on-demand services, and pay-per-view brought with it a competition for audiences on a global scale, meaning that the production of outstanding movies that catch audiences' attention over other entertainment products becomes increasingly challenging (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011). Hollywood recognized quickly that 'Content is King' and began to invest large sums of money into individual movies, so-called blockbusters, so as to appeal to the largest audiences possible (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-238). Still, studio bosses failed to see that such constant budget build-ups would draw all of them into a fierce production value race, resulting in a situation where contemporary movie budgets average at tens of million-dollars,

from previously single-millions (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011; Compaine & Gomery, 2000). Moreover, there are no guarantees for success, and if a film fails to appeal to audiences, the losses from the initial multi-million dollar investment can be so great that a studio goes out of business. For example, *Heaven's Gate* (1980) ruined United Artists entirely when its gross revenue of \$3 million did not even draw near its budget of \$44 million (CNBC, 2010). The present oversupply in entertainment has consequently made it increasingly difficult for movie studios to obtain large returns on investment, and given the growing levels of piracy and streaming sites, it is unlikely that this situation will change in the near future (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011; De Vany & Walls, 2007).

Yet, as movie studios and distributors are confronted with over-saturated Western entertainment markets, other economies are only just beginning to develop. Although these are still far from reaching their full consumption potential, the forces of globalization often make their growth exponential. These NICs (newly industrialized countries) are not only eager to catch up with the West, but in some cases – such as India and China for example – they are also the most populous countries in the world, offering commercial opportunities that can be worth more than triple the size of the US market (CIA 2011b; CIA, 2011c; CIA, 2011d).

Looking at these two conditions, the action plans for entertainment companies in the West should be simple: Enter the NIC markets. Hollywood films, such as *Titanic* (1997) or *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007), and US television shows such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Baywatch* are already amongst the most successful in the world, having crossed into foreign Western markets so quickly and thoroughly that these societies sometimes worry of a possible 'American media imperialism', or an 'Americanization' of their culture (boldandbeautiful.com, 2011; Guinness World Records, 2008; Nash Information Services LLC, 2011; Willnat, He, Takeshita, & López-Escobar, 2002). US entertainment products are being sold throughout the entire Western world, generating billions of dollars of

revenue; just do some dubbing and subtitling, and send US movies over to India, China, Brazil, and Russia. Surely their developing motion picture industries could not possibly keep up with the production values of a good Hollywood movie (Marvasti, 2005).

Unfortunately, in many NICs, this traditional Hollywood export model has not proven very successful (James, 2007). While motion picture revenues from the most relevant NICs, the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), have risen in recent years, the US entertainment business also found that the BRIC markets vary from Western markets in fundamental ways, including grave cultural, legal, and political differences and distinctive market structures (Marvasti, 2005; Pendakur, 1985; Stewart, 2011). In the specific case of India, US filmmakers did manage to generate record earnings throughout the last few years already, with blockbusters such as *Spiderman 3* (2007; approx. \$4.7 million gross revenue in India) and *Casino Royale* (2006; approx. \$3.5 million gross revenue in India; Moviebuzz, 2009). Nevertheless, as James (2007) has argued, these successes come nowhere near the record admissions of the most successful Bollywood movies, which in themselves amount to more than \$1 billion in box office revenues every year. Thus, even as India's aggregate box office earnings of 2010 are expected to exceed \$2 billion for the first time, Hollywood continues to struggle heavily to maintain its share in the Indian film industry (Stewart, 2011).

One strategy Western studios are employing are joint ventures with and investments in Indian movie companies, including production deals and trade agreements. Adam Dawtrey (2004), for example, reported on Britain's efforts to establish an educational and training relationship with Indian moviemakers so as to facilitate future British-Indian co-productions. Similarly, Nicole LaPorte (2005) described Sony's efforts to break into the Indian film industry with a American and Indian joint production of the Hindi film *Saawariya*, whilst Anusha Subramanian (2009) evaluated Disney's strategy and goal to become India's number one provider of "family entertainment".

Needless to say, it is crucial for US movie studios and their distributors to assess any cultural and contextual differences and to identify any potential obstacles if they want to succeed in the global race for dominance in these developing film markets. The joint ventures and trade agreements mentioned above are only the beginning. Focusing solely on India as a 1.2 billion people society with a rapidly increasing middle-class hungry for entertainment, this paper will assess what adjustments US studios must make to appeal to audiences in a market that is not only culturally disparate, but also enjoys a well-functioning and highly successful film industry already. Leaving the political and legal intricacies of US-Indian motion picture trade mostly aside, this study will concentrate on the cultural framework within which US films operate in India, and consequently on the types of consumers Hollywood is confronted with in India.

So far, this paper has relatively little academic research to build upon. While the trade and industry press has chronicled Western efforts to capture the Indian market for a while (Dawtre, 2004; LaPorte, 2005; Subramanian, 2009), scholarly studies have focused mainly on the characteristics and features of both Hollywood and its Indian equivalent, “Bollywood,” as the next section will show.

### **Existing Research**

Manjunath Pendakur was one of the first scholars to realize the potential of the Indian film market for Hollywood. In his article “Dynamics of Cultural Policy Making: The US Film Industry in India” (Pendakur, 1985), he offered an analysis of the political and legal framework of motion picture trade between the two countries at the time, concluding that India’s policies regarding US motion picture imports were largely reclusive. In the following years, academic research in this field became a lot more variegated; assessments of its industrial framework and cinematography (Alexowitz, 2003; Pendakur, 2003; Saari, 2009) were joined by a large body of research concerning Bollywood audiences (Athique & Hill, 2010; Banaji, 2006; Dudrah, 2006; Srinivas, 2002) and continued to explore the role of Indian

cinema on a global scale (Bose, 2006; Radjon & Ahuja, 2010). At the same time, scholars also focused on the significance of cultural differences in the motion picture trade, particularly when it came to the reception of Hollywood films abroad (Budeva, 2010; Marvasti & Canterbury, 2005; Willnat, He, Takeshita, & López-Escobar, 2002). Finally, and most recently, India's growing economic prosperity initiated renewed efforts to assess Hollywood's trade opportunities in the Asian subcontinent, including projections of potential business threats (Acland, 2003; Da Cunha, 1996; James, 2007; Stewart, 2011).

### **Research on the Industrial and Cinematographic Frameworks of Bollywood**

After a century of mostly national film production, major technological developments renewed momentum in the Indian motion picture industry in the 1980s and 1990s (Alexowitz, 2003). New forms of media, such as VHS cassettes and satellite television, for example, offered means of spreading Indian movies to households around the world, where they were often very well received, particularly in Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan (Alexowitz, 2003).

The Indian motion picture industry quickly became a global player in entertainment, and it was not long before several studies began to explore its industrial contexts and cinematic characteristics. Pendakur (2003) himself, for example, continued his 1985 works on Indian film with an analysis of *Indian Popular Cinema*, concentrating not only on trade structures such as “exhibition, production, and distribution” (p. vii), but also on thematic elements such as visual styles and depictions of “sexuality and ideology” (p. viii). He was joined in his stylistic focus by Anil Saari (2009) who took a closer look at the individual story elements present in a majority of Indian films, such as poetry, formulas, violence, love, and social criticism. Both academics' efforts highlighted an important phenomenon of Indian filmmaking; rather than succumbing to the influence of liberal Hollywood cinema in a globalized world, Bollywood films astutely maintained their unique style characterized by

several hour-long plots, musical and dance sequences, and a strong emphasis on culture and religion (Pendakur, 2003; Saari, 2009).

Nandini Bhattacharya (2010) conducted similar analyses of the themes prevalent in Indian movies, focusing on the global appeal of Bollywood productions through a transnational angle. Still, her assessments of motifs constructing national, religious, and gender identities in Bollywood films were mostly superficial. Whilst she did include a description of the one-sided portrayal of Pakistanis and Muslims as bloodthirsty and ruthless extremists in the 2001 film *Gadar: A Love Story*, for example, she failed to go into greater depths on these images and their audiences. As a result, her observations may be useful in tracking major political and religious events that affected many Indian's understanding of their identities on and off the screen, but they do not offer new insights on the meaning of such themes to audiences and the film industry (Bhattacharya, 2010).

The special stylistic characteristics of Bollywood films were also the subject of Myriam Alexowitz's (2003) studies. However, rather than merely pointing at common artistic and narrative features found in Indian motion pictures, Alexowitz (2003) paid closer attention to the structure and ideological frameworks of the Indian society in general, including societal concepts of caste and class, family and marriage, religious life, and the traditional Indian Natyaveda teachings of dramatic composition. This approach also allowed her to correlate historic and societal developments with the evolution of Indian cinematography until today (Alexowitz, 2003).

Thus, while these evaluations of style in Bollywood cinema do form an important aspect of research on this subject so far, they remain limited in that they are purely theoretical. As other scholars became aware of this condition, they chose to add more practical knowledge to the field, resulting in a variety of studies directly involving audiences of Indian motion pictures.

### **Bollywood Audience Studies**

Particularly within the last ten years one of the greatest areas of Bollywood studies has been the research of Indian audiences and their tastes, preferences, and viewing habits. For example, Rajinder Kumar Dudrah (2006) offered a socio-cultural approach to Bollywood movies in order to assess their actual meaning to audiences. Drawing on different themes found in Indian cinema, such as diaspora, homosexuality, and identity, Dudrah analyzed the significance of these elements for Indian viewers, particularly when it came to critical but entertaining reflections on such socially controversial issues (Dudrah, 2006).

Yet, it is not only the general movie-going audience in India that has been studied. Shakuntala Banaji (2006) decided to pay particular attention to *The Young Audience and Hindi Films*, and to consider how these youths especially relate to classic Bollywood film themes such as dress, sex, love, religion, and violence. On the one hand, Banaji concluded, young Indian audiences continue to find multiple forms of gratification in Hindi films, mainly due to these movies' dramatic styles. These include striking *mise-en-scènes*, accompanied by a wide spectrum of emotions ranging from happiness, to anxiety, to sadness, and to contentment. Nevertheless, Banaji also observed a growing level of skepticism amongst young Indians, as they seemed to be torn between traditional values and progressive worldviews. This inner conflict makes them a lot more critical of the happenings on-screen, and motivates them to take up several different subject positions when being part of a movie audience. For example, some male viewers use Hindi movies as sources of cultural learning, in hopes that the films will help them negotiate their personal balance between tradition and modernity. Other audience members, however, refuse to acknowledge that a movie could have any influence on their lives at all, as they see filmic drama and everyday reality as two entirely different things (Banaji, 2006).

Prior to these types of studies Lakshmi Srinivas (2002) took a very different direction. Rather than analyzing the narratives of Bollywood, she chose to investigate the act of

watching movies itself in both Indian and European cinema theatres. As someone familiar with Bollywood movies might have expected, Srinivas's study showed how film-viewing habits in the West and in India vary fundamentally: Whereas Western cinema audiences remain extremely controlled and quiet in movie theatres, Indian audiences like to engage with a movie on multiple levels, particularly through comments and conversations with other audience members (Srinivas, 2002). So far, Srinivas (2002) has not been cited very often by other scholars in the field; it is likely that her comparative study will prove immensely useful in the near future nonetheless, when studios and scholars the like assess the cultural differences between moviegoers in societies around the world.

Srinivas (2002) was not alone on in observing cinema-going habits and their importance for the Indian movie business and its style. Already in 1993 Sara Dickey (1993) evaluated the significance of movie watching for penurious societal groups in Indian cities. She concluded that movies do not only provide a form of escapism to these viewers, but they also contain dramatized, yet highly relatable experiences for these disadvantaged audiences, and as such almost function as a coping mechanism for them. Likewise and more recently, Adrian Athique and Douglas Hill (2010) assessed the rapid evolution of the *Multiplex in India* as opposed to the traditional Indian cinema halls, and aimed to gauge its effects on movie audiences and the Indian movie industry as a whole. They found that the multiplex expansion led directly to a growing social segregation and changing distribution mechanisms in India (Athique & Hill, 2010), a discovery that will also play an important role in this study.

A last principal aspect of Indian audience research can be demonstrated by the work of Patrick Colm Hogan (2006), who investigated the "universality" of Hindi cinema (p. 100). Hogan found that Indian motion pictures derive their international audience appeal from their frequently timeless thematic structures, which include stories of individual morale and principle, love, societal cohesion, and of overcoming conflicts with a harmonious ending. This, Hogan went on to argue, allows Bollywood movies to appeal to our most basic human

emotions and concerns, and removes the need to be closely acquainted with the Indian culture and its society when it comes to relating to Indian motion pictures as a spectator (Hogan, 2006).

As a result, it becomes clear that the study of Bollywood audiences has been a relatively well-researched field so far. Nevertheless, researchers have generally neglected Indian audiences' reception of foreign films, even when it comes to Indian audiences' impressions and opinions of Hollywood movies. Instead, many studies focused on Bollywood's situation in times of globalization.

### **A Focus on Bollywood and Globalization**

Derek Bose (2006), for example, looked at the *Brand Bollywood*, claiming that it has the potential to revolutionize the way in which movies will be produced and distributed worldwide. He particularly saw Bollywood's structural and cinematographic framework as its key advantage in the international entertainment market, stressing that the Indian film industry is one of the very few next to China and Nigeria that is still able to draw increasing audience numbers at a global level.

Moreover, according to Bose, India also benefits from its ability to rely on a growing, well-trained and highly skilled workforce, in combination with an expanding middle class hungry for entertainment. While he did criticize the artistic and organizational carelessness with which some Indian movies are produced and distributed nowadays, such as their formulaic storylines (dramatic romance) and never-changing styles (lavish settings, song and dance, always the same actors) for example, Bose ultimately concluded that in the long-term, Bollywood's advantages will outweigh its disadvantages. At that point, he believes, India will have a unique opportunity to become a key force in international entertainment flows and their production (Bose, 2006).

Bose is not alone with his theories of Bollywood's influence on the global entertainment market. According to Radjon and Ahuja (2010), industry experts such as Amit

Khanna (CEO of Reliance Big Entertainment) believe that Indian motion picture producers have the ability to significantly change the global entertainment industry. In their view, communication advancements and technology will lead to a greater collaboration between Hollywood and Bollywood, as each of them possesses something the other lacks: Bollywood can offer cheap labor and highly-skilled young workers, whereas Hollywood enjoys a large amount of practiced and seasoned management personnel (Radjon & Ahuja, 2010).

### **Recent Issues in Global Motion Picture Trade**

Thus, with both Hollywood's and Bollywood's significance and popularity stretching beyond national borders in times of globalization, it comes at no surprise that the process of global motion picture trade itself has been subject to academic scrutiny as well. Traditionally, such investigation was of a purely legal and political nature, just like Pendakur's original study (1985) on the protectionist policies surrounding Hollywood's trade in India. Akbar Marvasti and Ray Canterbury (2005) correspondingly included such political and legal aspects in their study of "Cultural and Other Barriers of Motion Picture Trade", assessing how protectionist policies particularly within the US itself were aimed at preserving the hegemony of Hollywood in its own market. Still, as the authors go on to remark, these measures were in fact irrelevant, given the scope and global appeal of Hollywood productions (Marvasti & Canterbury, 2005).

While Marvasti and Canterbury (2005) also included other factors in their analysis of international motion picture commerce, such as "the magical American combination of movie stars, economies of scale, and popularity of English speech" (p. 39), it was not until 2010 that Desislava Budeva purposely examined the cultural disparities of movies' appeal around the world. Drawing on Geert Hofstede's "Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)" and paying particular attention to characteristics such as "budget, stars, being a sequel, and genre" (Budeva, 2010, p. 423), Budeva analyzed movies and audiences from 48 different countries. She found that there are some features that have universal appeal for audiences around the

world, including genres such as romance, comedy, and action thrillers, for example. At the same time, however, other characteristics such as a film's actors and its status as a "sequel" only matter to audiences in extremely risk-averse societies with an elevated UAI (Budeva, 2010, p. 432). Unfortunately, Budeva (2010) fails to mention exactly which countries classify as having an elevated UAI.

Both of these studies – Marvasti and Canterbury's from 2005 and Budeva's from 2010 – are once again likely to increase in importance in the near future. With globalization driving both transnational entertainment commerce and the emergence of new entertainment markets on a global scale, it does not take much to realize that detailed knowledge of consumer tastes can lead to a crucial competitive advantage for any motion picture producer involved.

### **Hollywood Abroad**

In addition to studies of Bollywood's international appeal, the reception of Hollywood movies in other countries has also been a significant aspect of motion picture research. Whilst fears of a potential American "media imperialism" have existed for a long time, Lars Willnat, Zhou He, Toshio Takeshita, and Esteban López-Escobar (2002, p. 175) found that students in both Europe and Asia are consciously aware of the American values portrayed in US media. Yet, while Asian audiences felt that US entertainment affected each of their own morals and standards by improving them, European audiences perceived an adverse effect, and worried about a decline of their native societal ideals in the face of US media (Willnat, He, Takeshita, & López-Escobar, 2002).

In a similar vein but with almost contradictory results was the investigative approach by Samuel Craig, William Greene, and Susan Douglas. In their article "Culture Matters: Consumer Acceptance of US Films in Foreign Markets" (Craig, Greene, & Douglas, 2005), the authors evaluated the financial results of Hollywood films abroad, and concluded that a movie's earnings were higher in nations that have a larger cultural proximity to the US or, equally, have a history of American influence on their cultural values and frameworks.

Consequently, although Hollywood movies seem to perform better in Western countries, the perception of these films' cultural worth seems greater in countries that consume them less frequently.

The appeal of US motion pictures abroad and the way in which they can influence entire social practices has also been the focus of research by Charles Acland (2003). His findings show that the American culture of movie watching with its gigantic multi-screen theatres and amusement parks (amongst other characteristics) has found its way into societal practices around the world (Acland, 2003). As a result, he argues, this form of movie watching has become a form of "felt internationalism", connecting audiences in different countries and cultures through the shared experience of entertainment (Acland, 2003, p. 229). The effect of such American influence on movie consumption practices all over the world will also play an important part in this coming study, as it could present Hollywood movies with certain competitive advantages in India.

### **Consumption Patterns in India**

It therefore becomes obvious that the research regarding the US and India's respective situations within the worldwide motion picture industry has been multifaceted. While these are of course highly informative for this study, attention must also be paid to Indians' consumption patterns, which seem to be changing rather rapidly.

**Recent economic developments.** Despite the economic crisis of 2008, projections for India's growth and levels of consumption remain extremely positive. As a matter of fact, India has been one of the few countries relatively unaffected by the recent global economic downturn; its annual economic growth continued to surge, leading to a 8.5% increase in India's GDP in 2010 (India's economy, 2011; Mishra, 2009). Hence, even though research showed that consumer confidence in India lessened from late 2008 onwards, this phenomenon was not significant enough to severely affect the prosperity of its markets and industries (Mishra, 2009; Anonymous, 2008). It therefore comes at no surprise that the Indian

government remains optimistic for 2012 also, believing in another year of at least 8.5% growth in their GDP (Petersmann, 2011).

Yet, although this decrease in Indian consumer confidence did not affect their economic prosperity as such, several studies have shown that the 2008 economic crisis did affect Indian consumption behavior. The period until 2007 saw a continuous increase in consumer spending on luxury goods such as leisure activities (including cinema admissions), household appliances, and personal care products (including cosmetics and fashion). Still, more recent years offered a different picture, in which Indian consumers became aware of the potential dangers accompanying economic growth (Beinhocker, Farrell, & Zainulbhai, 2007; Mishra, 2009). As a result, many consumers now place an added importance on factors such as price and quality rather than design and fashionableness when it comes to buying decisions (Biswas, 2006; Mishra, 2009; Research: India, 2005).

According to Sourabh Mishra (2009) this development also holds true for entertainment products such as cinema admissions and the purchase of television sets, both of which respondents claimed to reduce and to re-evaluate. However, as Mishra elaborates, this does not mean that Indians reduce their entertainment consumption; instead, they tend to come together within the privacy of their households and communities to watch movies and television together (rather than going out to do so; Mishra, 2009). This observation was paralleled by the findings of Sarita Seshagiri and Jan Blom (2010), who investigated the consumption of entertainment products amongst the urban poor in India, concluding that these classes' lack of financial means did not lessen their movie- and television-watching. Instead, they came together in large groups at one family's house that did possess a television and/or VCR/DVD-set so as to be entertained in an economic and social manner.

**Key determinants of consumer spending in India.** Moreover, despite the growing prosperity of Indian consumers, Ranjan Biswas (2006) found that food and education continue to make up a significant proportion of their spending, often up to 50% of their

disposable income. Nevertheless, according to Biswas (2006), a strong demand for luxury goods such as home entertainment systems, household appliances, and cars does persist, and Indian consumers are often more than happy to spend the remainder of their disposable incomes on such “lifestyle products.”

In addition, Western or “global” products continue to uphold their position as status symbols demonstrating the affluence of their owners, despite the fact that they are increasingly accessible in today’s globalized world (Fernandes, 2000). Western and international consumer goods also have another important value for Indian consumers, particularly among the younger generations. Different from local products, foreign brands allow their buyers to benefit from a feeling of belonging to a globalized world, one in which they can see eye to eye with inhabitants of other (Western) countries in terms of fashion, looks, and media use (Biswas, 2006; Fernandes, 2000; Mishra, 2009). This observation parallels Acland’s (2003) findings on the “felt internationalism” (p. 229) Indian moviegoers derive from visiting American-style multiplexes, and will be an important factor to consider throughout the course of this study.

Another important factor influencing consumer behavior and decision-making are (Indian) movie stars. Seshagiri and Blom’s (2010) study on entertainment consumption practices of the urban poor in India highlights, for example, how young viewers’ clothing styles are heavily influenced by the types of dress movie stars wear, and how these viewers perceive such idols as “real life heroes” rather than mere actors (p. 9). Similarly, Coonoor Kripalani’s (2006) work on “Trendsetting and Product Placement in Bollywood Film” found that Indian audiences are very quick to adapt the consumption practices and examples they see on screen. Using the particular example of weddings, Kripalani reported that communities all over India adopted the extravagant Punjab-style weddings portrayed frequently in Indian movies, regardless of their own communities’ customs or religions (Kripalani, 2006).

Despite of all of these trends, important native factors determining consumption remain. As John Spillan, Manmohan Chaubey, Christopher Ziemnowicz, Nitish Singh, and Bindu Vyas (2007) have shown in their study of Indian consumption patterns in a globalized world, Indian consumers continue to combine their ethnic heritage with the new consumption possibilities offered from international brands. As a result, the consumption of all kinds of goods, including food, apparel, and also entertainment, is a collective activity, in which opinions about different products and sellers are exchanged frequently (Spillan, Chaubey, Ziemnowicz, Singh, & Vyas, 2007). Lastly, rather than sticking to a few established brands, Indian buyers are also eager to test new shops and products (Spillan, Chaubey, Ziemnowicz, Singh, & Vyas, 2007; Research: India, 2005). But as a report by the *Brand Strategy* journal shows, many Indian consumers assume product quality to be the same across different companies, which often leads them to chose one brand over another solely based on its price, regardless of its image (Research India, 2005).

### **Situating This Study**

Reviewing this existing body of knowledge regarding Bollywood cinema and audiences, global motion picture trade, the perception of Hollywood movies abroad, and recent entrepreneurial efforts by US movie companies in India demonstrates how significant the Indian motion picture industry has become in the last three decades. At first merely a successful producer of films with a certain tone and style, Bollywood has grown into a global entertainment force. At the same time, the Indian consumer market with its unique consumption patterns has become one of the most promising in the world. Within this context, the following study will examine how certain factors such as content and audience tastes, cultural values, consumer decision-making, and ideological frameworks come into play in the reception of US films in India, so as to identify possible factors to increase American movie makers' share of the Indian motion picture market.

### Methods

As the perceptions of Indian consumers regarding Hollywood films have been less researched, the purpose of this study was exploratory. It aimed to highlight the most important features of Hollywood movies in the minds of Indian audiences, such as content, effects, and genres, for example, and to consequently provide directions for future research and marketing strategies. The researcher employed focus groups to acquire in-depth qualitative results, and to use their dialogical nature to help evaluate their own views and preferences, and to consider some aspects they might not have thought of before. In total, four focus groups were conducted; one consisting solely of female participants, two with solely male participants, and one mixed group. Ideally, the distribution would have been only one all male, one all female, and two mixed groups; however, due to limited participant availability, two groups turned out to be all male. All 18 participants were international students at the University of Southern California (USC) between the ages of 18 and 30, and were recruited through their cultural club *Association of Indian Students* (AIS) and through Facebook. Moreover, all of them were born and raised in metropolitan or rural areas in India, and had at least watched three Hollywood movies before.

Each session was video- and audio-recorded to facilitate data evaluation. All sittings were conducted in English, due to the fact that the researcher did not speak any of India's main languages (such as Hindi, Punjabi, or Tamil) and did not want to rely on possibly inaccurate translations from third parties. Using only English brought with it an important disadvantage for participants, however, as some might have difficulties expressing themselves and their views in a language other than their native tongue. While all participants were international students at an American university and could therefore be expected to have an above-average proficiency in English, additional measures to ease their focus group participation were taken also. All four groups were kept relatively small, consisting only of four to six members, so as to give individual participants more time to formulate their views

and to make them feel less rushed or pressured. Moreover, special care was taken to ensure that all groups would not run longer than 100 minutes so as to not exhaust the group members too much.

In order to account for both cultural and linguistic differences between the researcher (Caucasian female with a thoroughly Western background) and the participants, and to set the participants at ease, two Indian moderators were used to conduct the focus group discussions, with the actual researcher taking on the role of their assistant. One moderator was male, the other female, and each of them moderated one group at a time. Both moderators were fluent in Hindi and English, and just like the participants, both moderators were USC international students. They were trained thoroughly with regards to the overall objectives of the study, the specific goals of the focus groups, and their individual roles and tasks. Moreover, in order to further facilitate moderation, the researcher and moderators also composed a Hindi-English vocabulary list of terms that were likely to come up during the group discussions.

Both moderators were supplied with a detailed discussion guide (see Appendix B) outlining the general structure of the focus group, the approximate time allocations for all exercises and questions, and cases where probing might be especially necessary. Appendix B contains a copy of this discussion guide, while a more thorough description of this study's design, procedures, and measurements can be found in Appendix A.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Cultural Definitions of Entertainment**

A key point in all focus group discussions was the very question how entertainment should be defined. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'entertainment' refers to "the action of occupying (a person's) attention agreeably; interesting employment; amusement," or also, "a public performance or exhibition intended to interest or amuse" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2011, numbers 8 and 10). Entertainment by Western standards can hence be anything as long as it stimulates its audience and evokes a response in them

(Oxford English Dictionary, 2011). However, according to many of the Indian focus group participants, entertainment is first of all about the “popcorn” feeling (Participant 12) - that is (film) content with an upbeat tone that will make audiences “happy” (Participant 17) and “sit back and relax” (Participant 11). This distinction between Western and Indian understandings of entertainment emerged most clearly when the participants directly compared Hollywood and Bollywood movies. As Participant 11 noted, in the case of Bollywood movies, viewers “don’t have to put [their] brain to work,” whilst in the case of Hollywood, “I know I would have to give some work to my brain:”

Even if I miss some part of [the Bollywood movie] I don’t need to think about it. I can *enjoy* it. There is some fun into it, and there is some predictable ending, there is some song with really great music, so fun is guaranteed without any effort from brain.

(Participant 11)

This account correlates closely with the participants’ responses to the statement ‘I watch Hollywood films because they are very entertaining.’ When they were asked to rate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with this statement on a scale from one to five (one meaning ‘strongly disagree’, five meaning ‘strongly agree’), the average rating was 3.5, i.e. half-way between ‘neutral’ and ‘agree’. Participant 15, for example, agreed to the extent of 4, but stated that it was really “depending on the definition of entertainment ... I might not enjoy watching a really difficult-to-watch movie ... but I’m entertained in that at least, you know, the movie did what it was meant to do to me.” Hence, although Participant 15 acknowledged that entertainment can be defined differently to include complex movie plots and darker tones, for example, she did not seem to be fond of this definition; unlike Participant 11 earlier, she talked more about what that type of movie does *to* her rather than what it does *for* her.

Other participants frequently mentioned the varying definitions of entertainment as well. Participant 3, for example, mentioned “anything can be entertaining,” whilst Participant 18 pointed out that a film could be either “food for thought” or “an odd comedy” but could

entertain both ways. Nevertheless, there was an overall tendency within the participants to attribute the happy, undemanding type of entertainment to Bollywood, and the “stimulating” (Participant 14) type of entertainment requiring active viewer engagement, to Hollywood:

Hollywood movies, they can be quite serious, and if you watch some horror movies they can be quite (*sic*) sleepless nights for you, so ‘entertaining’ is a very different term. I think other movies are better, maybe, Bollywood are even better entertaining than Hollywood movies sometimes. (Participant 13)

Most of the Hollywood movies that I really liked weren’t exactly ‘entertaining’ kind of movies. I’m actually more into drama-related when it comes to Hollywood. I’m not so much into, you know, ‘popcorn’ movies in Hollywood. . . . I would mostly see a Hollywood [film] because of its originality and its uniqueness, basically. (Participant 12)

It comes at no surprise, then, that the different types of entertainment offered in Bollywood and in Hollywood movies is a key factor in the participants’ consumption decision-making. When asked how they would choose between a Hollywood and a Bollywood movie at the cinema or at home, the kind of entertainment participants expect from each kind of movie plays an important role:

The thing about Bollywood movies is – it’s for the mass (*sic*) just to make them happy. . . . 90% of the [Bollywood] movies don’t have a, you know, reason for why they are being made. [Participant 10 inserts: “Yeah, we leave our brains outside.”] We probably are like ‘OK, exams are done, let’s go laugh.’ (Participant 6)

In the case of watching a Hollywood movie, however, the expectation is different: “The first thing that comes to mind is a short sweet movie. I don’t have to spend four hours in the theatre . . . and there is no unnecessary opulence” (Participant 6). Participant 10 furthermore points out how the complex stories in Hollywood movies require full attention from the viewer:

Even, like, *The Dark Knight* – I had to watch it thrice to understand why the Batman didn't kill the Joker when he was on the ground. You have to, like, try to keeping (*sic*) your mind at play, full capacity when watching these movies. ... They make you think a lot. ... But in Bollywood movies, it's just like, 'OK, I'm not using my brain, I'm just trying to laugh.' (Participant 10)

As a result, the "mood" (Participant 16) the participants are in when they make their consumption decision often dictates the kind of movie they chose to watch. "Sometimes [I] don't want to think," Participant 16 stated, for example, and went on to say that in these cases, she would chose Bollywood over Hollywood. Similarly, Participant 11 pointed out that "if it was a free, enjoying, and relaxed day, I would prefer to see a Hollywood movie, because I know I would have to give some work to my brain in this movie."

Still, the participants' states of mind are not the most important factors in choosing one type of movie over another. As the next section shows, who the participants go to the movies with is a much more significant aspect of their decision-making.

### **Collective Consumption of Entertainment as a Core Cultural Practice**

**Picnic at the movies.** As Srinivias (2002) already found in her study of Indian movie watching habits, Indian spectators like to attend movies in large groups. The participants in this study confirmed this condition, both in their preliminary questionnaires and in their discussions. Out of the 18 participants, 17 indicated that they usually go to the movies with their friends and/or families. More specifically, ten participants stated that the most crucial factor in their choice between Hollywood and Bollywood is their company, and they were usually met with a collective nod or murmurs of agreement from the other participants. As Participant 3 summarized amongst amused giggles from his other group members: "In India, it is more like, you have big, big friend circles, ok? So always when you go theatres, or anywhere for that matter, it is in numbers. We are Indians and we are in numbers."

Thus, individual movie or entertainment preferences do not matter as much as finding a lowest common denominator that will be an adequate compromise for the entire group accompanying the individual viewer. As it turns out, Bollywood has a definite advantage in this regard: Its formulaic plots mix many different genres such as comedy, drama, and romance, with song and dance sequences. At first sight, this lack of originality might look like a major flaw to an outsider such as Bose (2006), who criticized Bollywood's reliance on a set formula by which seemingly all movies are made. Yet, as several participants pointed out, this formula is necessary for the movie to appeal to the largest audience possible (Participants 5, 6) and to serve its purpose, which is not the provision of attention-grabbing entertainment but the creation of a comfortable setting in which families and friends can socialize:

[Bollywood movies are] more of a family thing. ... You will have a bunch of people going out; 'let's plan a movie' [they'll say], and there would be like 15, 20 people of the same family going and watching a movie with a lot of noise, and it's more of a picnic. ... It's more about sharing food, and everybody cracking jokes aloud. ... It's not a pristine, uh, you know, it's not like a very religiously followed thing where everybody is silent and watching the movie. It's more a having-fun, noises, noise, food, and fun. (Participant 17)

From this perspective, then, going to the movies is not so much about the actual film itself but about the social gathering related to it – just like Srinivas (2002) observed. The viewers are fully aware that Bollywood movies are “always the same” (Participant 6) – and they are counting on it, as it means that the movie possesses genre elements that will please everyone (Participants 7, 18), and that audiences do not have to “use [their] brain” (Participant 11) but can jump in and out of the storyline as they please and even “make fun” of the clichés it uses (Participants 11).

**Safe for everyone.** Besides being a picnic-like outing of families or friends, Bollywood movies possess another advantage in comparison to Hollywood productions: They are safe,

accessible, and relatable (Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18). One topic mentioned at least once in every focus group was the use of sex, violence, and foul language in Hollywood movies. Although Hollywood productions are already censored to a large extent when released in India (Participant 8), they are still considered so “frank” (Participant 18) and “graphic” (Participant 14) that many participants avoid watching a Hollywood movie with more conservative friends or their family: “[When watching a Hollywood movie with family or friends] we can statistically (*sic*) assume that there will be some sort of a sex or violence in the Hollywood movies” (Participant 7). Bollywood movies, on the other hand, rarely prompt such concern, due to the fact that they seldom show excessive violence or sexual situations – not even kisses (Participant 4). Such taboos remain taboos in Indian cinema, and in cases where directors attempted to break these social conventions they were met with extreme public outcries, including the “burning down of cinemas, [and the] burning down of posters of [the film]” (Participant 4). In many cases, the public outrage was so great that the production of controversial movies was stopped immediately (Participant 4).

As a result, Indian audiences can expect Bollywood movies to be extremely safe for everyone’s eyes and ears – be it the little toddler or the traditional grandmother. In addition, Bollywood movies are also considered extremely accessible and relatable, due to the fact that they are a) set in the audience’s own culture, and b) shot or dubbed in the main local languages (Participants 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16) – and are as such truly “universal” in their appeal, just as Patrick Colm Hogan (2006, p. 100) already observed in his study.

**Not actors but heroes.** The inherently social aspect of Indian movie-going practices is not just confined to film theatres. Throughout all focus groups, participants brought up an important point of re-entry into a Bollywood movie: its stars. As Seshagiri and Blom (2010) as well as Kripalani (2006) already found in their observations of the Indian culture, Bollywood actors are not just film professionals but are seen by the movie-going public as

“real life heroes” (Seshagiri & Blom, p. 9) who possess a tremendous influence on Indian consumption habits and fashion trends (Kripalani, 2006; Seshagiri & Blom, 2010).

This assessment was confirmed throughout all focus groups. For example, the terms ‘actors/stars’ appeared 8 times in the Bollywood mind maps the participants created, and were only surpassed in their frequency by the terms ‘songs/music’ (mentioned 11 times).

Participant 17 tried to explain the importance of the continuous glamour and hype surrounding Bollywood stars, saying “we [Indians] like to get associated with things. We love the gossip behind everything. We love the ... star power coming across in our movies. That’s what we are accustomed to.” And as Participant 16 points out: “[Bollywood producers] don’t see (*sic*) if that person fits the role. If he is the highest grosser in terms of audience, they will keep him.” Thus, just as Indian audiences are aware of the predictability of Bollywood movies, they are also aware of the fact that the casting in Bollywood movies is not dependent on sole skill and talent (Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17). According to them, the majority of Bollywood stars come from the “same rich families,” as if the “caste system” were still in place today: “you are born an actor, you are not trained as one” (Participant 2, ironic).

However, despite all the criticism and ridicule the participants offer when talking about mega-stars such as Sharukh Khan, the actors and the hype surrounding a film’s release remain crucial for the participants when making movie buying decisions (Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15, 17). Whether they like Sharukh Khan or not, for example, “people will at least watch [his new] movie once,” thereby making actors like him a guarantee for success (Participant 2). According to Participant 3, “you go to see a movie of the star, not the other way around. ... Irrespective of how crappy the movie [may be]” (Participant 3). Just like going to the movies in India is not about the movie itself but about an opportunity to socialize, it can be argued that the purpose of Bollywood stardom is not the admiration of the actors’ skill and talent either. Instead, it is about finding another form of common ground for

everyone within society, regardless of one's social, economic, and religious background (Participant 6). As a result, Bollywood stars can be said to act as a form of 'glue' that improves and streamlines societal cohesion: It provides audiences from all walks of life with a collective (consumption) experience that all of them can directly engage in by means of gossip or lifestyle imitation (Participants 15, 17; Kripalani, 2006; Seshagiri & Blom, 2010).

**Belonging to the global community.** Just like Bollywood offers various ways of creating a feeling of national and societal belonging, Hollywood has its own community to offer – the globalized world. Yet, unlike in Indian cinema, Hollywood's actors and production styles are not the points of entry to this community. Whilst the participants frequently complimented Hollywood actors on their professionalism, training, and devotion (Participants 1, 2, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17), their stardom or celebrity was rarely mentioned. Instead, the global hype surrounding the release of a Hollywood blockbuster seemed to be a lot more important (Participants 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17). The participants were quite passionate when they talked about outsiders' assumptions of the Indian people; for example, they seemed to be unsure whether to laugh or cry at the many foreigners asking if people in India could speak English – given the fact that all Indian schools continue to teach only in the language of their former colonial rulers (Participants 4, 11, 16). "Actually, there is (*sic*) more than 100 languages in India, and if I meet a person, irrespective of what language or what region he is from, I would actually introduce myself to him in English," Participant 3 explains. As a result, the language barrier that often prevents older Indian generations from watching Hollywood movies is almost non-existent amongst the young and educated (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17), and they quickly become impatient if a globally hyped Hollywood movie does not open the same day in India as it does in the rest of the world:

Most of the Hollywood movies actually [are released] three or to four months (*sic*) later in India. Sometimes it's like India's left behind. Something like 'OK, you'll get it later. Just wait.' [Laughter amongst other participants] And we're already watching it

after one week or something in, like, DVD rips etcetera. Yeah, that's pretty common.

(Participant 3)

Participant 3 then went on to explain that such late releases are not just limited to movies but also includes other internationally popular consumer products such as Apple iPads; whilst the "rest of the world" is already on iPad 2, the Indian market is only just introducing the iPad 1: "Which is unfair, right? We have all the potential to buy everything, yeah, I mean, we're equal, that's something like asking 'do you speak English in India?'"

(Participant 3).

Indians have been working hard to catch up with other, more affluent countries (Biswas, 2006), and as the gap gradually closes, young Indians in particular do not want to be left out of the globalized lifestyle that is rapidly including one country after another. As Acland (2003) already found in his study of multiplexes around the world, the "felt internationalism" (p. 229) of American-style theatres is crucial in their appeal for most audiences. It seems that this feeling of belonging to a globalized world does not stop at the mere buildings, but also includes American movies themselves. Just as the release of the latest Bollywood movie allows Indian audiences to engage in a nationally shared experience that establishes a feeling of cultural belonging, Hollywood movies allow Indian audiences to join in the global discourse and shared experience of watching the latest American blockbuster. This, in turn, enables them to become a part of a community of affluent, well-educated, and respected individuals that transcends their national borders (Biswas, 2006; Fernandes, 2000; Mishra, 2009).

Given this situation, the availability of Hollywood movies in Indian theatres is crucial, as Participant 3 already mentioned. As keen as young Indian audiences are to position themselves within the global community, each day Hollywood fails to show an internationally relevant movie in India losses from illegal streaming grow (Haniffa, 2008; Participant 3).

According to Biswas (2006), the amount Indian households spend on entertainment can easily

amount to 50% of their disposable income, and as this study highlights, 11 out of the 18 participants go to the movies 3 to 5 times a month, or even more. As a result, the Indian movie market offers an immense sales potential for both Hollywood and Bollywood productions, and with US piracy losses nearing \$1 billion in India alone (Haniffa, 2008), it is likely that making Hollywood movies available earlier will significantly increase US studios' revenues. Indian audiences are willing to pay for Hollywood entertainment – but only if they are offered it in a timely and accessible manner.

### **Unique Selling Points of Hollywood in India**

My conception of Hollywood is everything that is done well. Executed well, planned well, that's what I think of Hollywood. (Participant 15)

If you tell me a movie is coming out of Pixar Studios, I'm gonna watch it no matter what. If you tell me the [original soundtrack] is by Hans Zimmer, I'm gonna listen to it no matter what. So I guess what I'm trying to say is that the dollar pulls towards itself a collection of the best people in the world, and they all contribute towards a package deal which would be a Hollywood movie. (Participant 1)

Such statements were frequent throughout all focus groups conducted. Unlike Indian cinema, which was criticized and praised in equal parts by the participants, Hollywood movies were showered with unadulterated praise. From American movies' production values, to their originality and professional execution, the participants discussed a variety of unique selling points, whilst the only drawbacks of Hollywood seemed to be the availability of its films in Indian theatres and the sometimes controversial content, as already discussed above.

**High production values.** For the majority of participants, Hollywood movies are closely associated with quality. "Even if the story is not good, the action or the cinematography takes care of entertainment," Participant 4 explained. "It will be worth the money I'm spending," Participant 16 agreed, while Participant 15 stated that "a bad Hollywood movie [is] still many times better than a bad Bollywood movie." However, whilst

participants acknowledge the immense budgets American studios can rely on (Participant 8, 9, 10, 11, 15), they seem to see the actual value of Hollywood movies in less tangible terms. For example, the mere access to new technologies is not as important as the way in which Hollywood puts these technologies to use for effective storytelling (Participants 4, 5, 11, 15, 16):

*Avatar* was a nice movie. ... It was entertaining in the sense [that] ... it pushed animation to a new level and it also had a strong storyline to it. ... They made it almost real for everybody who watched the movie. Especially in 3D it made a difference. (Participant 4)

Thus, the participants derive their entertainment value in Hollywood movies not just from larger budgets and special effects, but also from the skill and professionalism with which these tools were used (Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18). “The way the scenes were executed out (*sic*), ... how the director achieves the goal of the narration. ... [And] the actors, also, they really got submerged in their roles,” Participant 12 praised the making of *The Sixth Sense* before highlighting the unimaginable effort required to make *Avatar*. Some participants even went so far to claim that unlike in Bollywood, money and a movie’s mass appeal are not the motives behind Hollywood filmmaking: “They don’t make a movie just to satisfy the audience,” Participant 12 said. “They make it because they want to do it.” Directors, producers, and actors are considered to possess a strong “dedication” (Participant 7) to their individual crafts, which according to several participants, is the secret to Hollywood’s global appeal (Participants 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 18).

**Professionalism and focus.** Unlike the “opulent” Bollywood movies with their standard plots “giv[ing] the masses what they want” (Participant 6), Hollywood professionals are considered by the participants to be exactly that – “professionals” (Participant 14). According to Participant 2, anyone can be anything within the Indian film industry if they only have the right connections to the right film-producing families, and in the case of actors,

if they have the looks. In Hollywood on the other hand, participants believe, an individual's talents come before anything else, including nationality and ethnicity (Participants 2, 6, 10, 11, 13, 17, 15). "It's a global cinema," Participant 10 explains. "They hire Indian actors, Chinese actors, [any] actors in all the movies, for example *Rush Hour*. ... And now, Anil Kapoor is working on [*Mission Impossible 4*]."

In addition, all Hollywood professionals are assumed to have gone through structured training in their field – again unlike Bollywood industry players – and in the participants' opinions, it shows: "Hollywood movies are more sophisticated. ... There is a greater amount of effort in all divisions of film development," Participant 11 explains. American scripts were particularly popular amongst the participants. Praised for their "originality" (Participants 9, 12, 13, 16) and "creativity" (Participant 7), many participants stressed how in Hollywood movies, plots are usually "well-researched" (Participants 9, 11, 12), highly "realistic" (Participants 3, 8, 10, 11, 14), and very "credible" (Participant 10) in the sense that they do not just "go with any wild fantasy" (Participant 10) but try to base stories on actual knowledge and situations. Frequently named examples of this included *Cast Away*, *Star Trek*, *The Sixth Sense*, and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Participants 3, 10, 8, 11). As a result, the participants considered American movies to possess highly "complex" (Participant 16) and "engaging" (Participant 11) plots that are easy to relate to by audiences (Participant 4, 11, 14).

Scriptwriters were not the only ones that were praised for their skills acquired through training. The trained "method acting" (Participant 12) of Hollywood actors has also registered positively with the participants. Participant 10, for example, picked up on *Cast Away*'s casting on Tom Hanks:

The best part is that they don't care if the actor is good-looking or not. If he's a good actor, he's a good actor. Like Tom Hanks. You won't say he's a good-looking actor. But the way he acted in *Cast Away* without saying a single [word], it was a really good movie. (Participant 10)

Other participants offered similar views. Participant 12, for example, noted how in Hollywood, actors “really [get] submerged in their roles,” whilst Participant 11 stated that unlike in Bollywood, a Hollywood star is not automatically a “typecast” but actively tries to play several different characters. Participants 15 and 17, on the other hand, liked that Hollywood tries to cast its actors according to the types of characters needed, and not based on their popularity. Particularly Participant 15 stated that she hates it when in Bollywood movies like *Love Aaj Kal* (2009), “there is zero chemistry between the leads, [and they are] cast purely based on stardom” as it often ruins the tone of the movie for her.

Hollywood directors’ efforts to produce high quality and innovative movies that offer audiences an “immersive” (Participant 11) experience have not gone unnoticed either (Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18). James Cameron’s *Avatar*, for example, was frequently praised by the participants for its ground-breaking use of effects, action sequences, and storytelling (Participants 5, 10, 11, 12). In particular, participants appreciated the attention to detail American directors demonstrate when it comes to moviemaking, and their ability to successfully integrate the different creative divisions involved in producing a hit movie (Participants 1, 9, 12, 13, 15). Instead of just throwing it all together, Participant 9 notes, careful planning from the directors ensures that “a scene may not be real; but you can’t make out of the scene that it’s not real unless you’ve seen the making of it.” Thus, from directors to actors and the scriptwriters, the participants see Hollywood as delivering great value throughout due to its professional yet creative focus.

**Straight to the point.** According to the participants, the professional focus found in Hollywood also has other positive effects. For example, Hollywood movies are on average only half as long as Bollywood movies, and “there is no beating around the bush” (Participant 6), i.e. plots are kept short and simple in their three parts (i.e. beginning, middle, end; Participants 5, 6, 8, 11, 12). Moreover, participants appreciated the individual genres Hollywood possesses, action, comedy, horror/suspense, and animation in particular

(Participants 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18). Unlike Bollywood's 'all-in-one' approach to appeal to the largest audience possible (Participant 6), the participants in this study liked that Hollywood caters only to one or two types of content at once.

### **Hollywood and Bollywood: The Appeal of Difference**

It is therefore obvious that just like apples and oranges that cannot be compared, the participants see Hollywood and Bollywood films in highly distinct manners – Bollywood films as predictable yet safe family entertainment, and Hollywood movies as spectacular pinnacles of filmmaking. Still, this does not mean that one generally trumps the other. On the contrary, it seems that the two complement each other by offering different entertainment experiences, and that the participants purposely seek out each of them for their particular content and style. “[Hollywood movies] are quite different from non-Hollywood films. So if I’m watching Hollywood films, [it is] because they offer me something different from what I’m usually watching,” Participant 17 explained, for example, and others, including Participants 11, 15, and 16 agreed. “It *is* different from what I’m getting otherwise and that’s why I make the choice [to watch Hollywood films],” Participant 15 stated.

As a result, in times where the influence of American “media imperialism” on foreign cultures is hotly debated (Willnat, He, Takeshita, & López-Escobar, 2002, p. 175), young Indian audiences seem to have found a way to appreciate the quality productions Hollywood offers without de-valuing the importance of their own film industry. For example, as mentioned earlier, the participants were keenly aware that Hollywood movies contain content and cultural depictions that are considerably different from those in Indian movies (Participants 4, 7, 8, 14, 18); however, instead of mindlessly imitating or welcoming such representations, the participants saw Hollywood movies as a form of ‘window’ to the world: “It’s entertaining. I like having different world viewpoints... . It’s something which doesn’t happen ... where I live, I mean, in India,” Participant 17 explains, for instance, but clarifies “I

can't relate to [Hollywood movies]. I know them as a different ... way of living, but not mine. It's understandable but not relatable.”

This also parallels Banaji's (2006) findings regarding Indian youths watching “Hindi” movies, who, as he observed, display a growing skepticism when it comes to films, and who struggle heavily to balance the influences of globalization and progress with traditional cultural values. Nevertheless, while this study highlighted the young participants' cravings to be part of the globalized world, the fact that they could clearly formulate the appropriateness of Bollywood and Hollywood movies in different situations suggests that they have found ways to reconcile tradition and progress – in the media at least. As a result, both Bollywood and Hollywood movies have their individual places within the participants' lives: Long, formulaic Bollywood films for typically Indian large-party outings where socializing is the main objective, and Hollywood movies for quality entertainment requiring the audience's full attention. It therefore becomes clear why the participants view Indian and American movies as disparate products even though both are film productions: Hollywood and Bollywood films fulfill different entertainment needs. “You can't compare both of them. ... They both offer the same things, but in different packages and to different audiences,” Participant 10 asserted, while Participant 17 declared: “[Hollywood and Bollywood are] actually starkly different. I couldn't find any similarities.”

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of this study's findings, the researcher would like to offer several recommendations to Hollywood studio executives aiming to increase their share of the Indian movie market.

#### **Know and Use Your Market Position**

As this study has shown, Indian audiences have a particular time and place for both Bollywood and Hollywood movies. At the moment Bollywood may possess a near-monopoly in the Indian film market (James, 2007; Stewart, 2011), but particularly young and well-

educated Indians have become keenly aware of the clichéd and plagiarized stories offered by many Bollywood filmmakers. While these youths are not willing to give up Bollywood just yet, they have begun to relegate Bollywood movies to social outings with their families, and have turned to Hollywood for unique and quality entertainment. In addition, the participants in this study also highlighted that the content in Hollywood movies is generally considered too offensive to appeal to older generations, namely the participants' parents and grandparents, as they do not like graphic depictions of violence or sex, and do not accept foul language either. Hollywood's objective should consequently not be to replace Bollywood movies with Hollywood movies in India, because as Participant 10 summarizes, "They both offer the same things, but in different packages and to different audiences." Instead, a long-term strategy aimed to improve and maintain the appeal of Hollywood movies to young Indians is likely to prove a lot more viable. If Hollywood tries to capture the older generations as well as the young, it will have to make deep-running adjustments in terms of content and style, even though the young audience already greatly values Hollywood movies as they are. Moreover, young Indians possess strong English language skills and therefore do not require Hollywood movies to be dubbed or subtitled as much as their parents and grandparents. And given the highly positive projections regarding the growth of India's affluent middle-class for the next 50 years (CIA, 2011b, para. 'Economy'), it is extremely probable that Hollywood will be able to improve its share of the Indian film market if it is able to capture its key audience – the young and more progressive – as early as possible.

### **Tap Into Collective Consumption**

Throughout all focus group discussions, the participants stressed the importance of shared experiences, both within their local communities and within the globalized world. Young Indians want to belong, and they particularly do not want to be seen as 'backwards' any longer. They are working hard to get ahead, and many of them have been raised as bilinguals in English and their local language. As Acland (2003) already demonstrated in his

study of audiences around the world, the majority of them are exceptionally responsive to the concept of “felt internationalism” (p. 229), and according to the participants in this study, this includes young Indian audiences as well.

As a result, Hollywood executives should strongly consider tapping into the Indian predisposition to consume collectively in order to establish a feeling of belonging. In combination with the young Indians’ desire to be a part of the globalized world, the promotion of such a “felt internationalism” (Acland, 2003, p. 229) through Hollywood movies could prove a valuable tool to attract Indian consumers in the long run. Possible ways of promoting feelings of global belonging include, for example, marketing hypes surrounding the release of an American movie (which, combined with word-of-mouth, play an important role in collective consumption practices, according to the participants in this study and according to previous research; Spillan, Chaubey, Ziemnowicz, Singh, & Vyas, 2007), targeting multiplexes as gathering grounds for the prosperous middle-class (Athique & Hill, 2010), and making use of Indian consumers’ continuing tendency to view Western products as status symbols reflecting an individual’s economic and social worth (Fernandes, 2000). As the evolution of product branding has shown, feelings and associations play a crucial role in longstanding consumer retainment (Keller, 2009), and given the already favorable opinion young Indian audiences have regarding Hollywood films, tapping into their collective consumption habits also offers American producers an immense opportunity to attract and preserve consumers in the Indian movie market.

### **Be Available**

As Biswas (2006) has shown, Indians are willing to spend up to 50% of their disposable income on entertainment. This finding was paralleled by information gathered in this study, which indicates that 61% of the participants go to the movies 3-5 times a week, if not more often. Yet, the participants also stressed that if a Hollywood movie is not released the same time in India as in the rest of the world, they will set out to find illegal copies right

away. With India playing a key role in the rapid expansion of global piracy (Haniffa, 2008), it is important that Hollywood act sooner rather than later by making its films available in Indian theatres at the same time the Western countries see movies premiered. Indian consumers are willing to spend money on cinema tickets, and the young value the entertainment Hollywood films have to offer, but they must be given the opportunity to legally watch American movies when they want to.

### **Branding is Key**

What all of this ultimately sums up to, then, is the right marketing and branding strategy for Hollywood movies in the Indian market. Informed by the findings in this study, these strategies should be based on the following elements:

**Brand mission.** *For audiences around the world, Hollywood movies provide complex and professional filmed entertainment.* This may sound quite simple and common to many film industries, and it is. At the end of the day, many countries have filmmakers that produce appraised movies. However, what ultimately distinguishes Hollywood from the rest is its distinctive position in the mind of its audience, particularly in India, as this study has shown, and which can be summed up as follows:

**Brand positioning.** *For audiences around the world, Hollywood movies are a unique form of entertainment that offers high production values, original storylines, and a feeling of belonging to a global culture.*

A positioning statement like this one clearly distances Hollywood movies from other film productions, including Indian ones (which the participants considered opulent, formulaic, and inherent to their own culture). It makes it clear that Hollywood movies provide particular entertainment with international appeal, and those who purchase a ticket for a Hollywood movie receive an unparalleled experience combined with access to the global community.

**Target audience.** While the brand mission and positioning statements may be transferable for Hollywood's marketing and branding strategies around the world, the target

audience must be tailored to the Indian market specifically. The findings of this study suggest aiming marketing measures at *males and females between the ages of 12 and 35, who are high school educated (or higher)*, as this particular group usually speaks English fluently, values American filmmaking, and possesses a strong desire to belong to the globalized world. Given that this target audience is one of the fastest-growing groups in India, it also offers an immense potential for Hollywood's future success in India.

**Brand attributes and audience needs.** Lastly, marketers for Hollywood in India must constantly be aware of Indian movie-going habits, what Indians look for in entertainment, and how Hollywood movies can or cannot meet these preferences. Hollywood productions are seen as realistic, mind-blowing, and original; Indian movies, particularly Bollywood films, are light entertainment, safe, and embedded within the local culture. The time spent watching Indian movies is for socializing; the time at a Hollywood movie requires focus, and "using your brain". This study has shown how clear the divisions between Indian and American productions are in the minds of Indian consumers, and as in any marketing strategy, disregarding these product positions could seriously hinder Hollywood's chances in the Indian market even if it possesses a very promising target audience.

The Indian movie market is one of the most hotly contested entertainment markets in the world. Even for globally successful Hollywood conquering the Indian film industry has been challenging. As this study has shown, Hollywood and Bollywood movies may be as different as apples and oranges in the minds of Indian consumers, but US filmmakers still have a lot offer. American producers can benefit from an immensely positive attitude amongst younger Indians towards their products, and in time and with the right strategies, Hollywood will be able to firmly establish itself within the Indian film market also.

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## Appendix A

### **Design, Procedures, and Measurements**

Each moderator was supplied with a copy of the moderator discussion guide outlining the aims of the focus groups and their structure (see Appendix B). As the guide shows, participants were first shown a six-minute clip made up of different types of Hollywood movies, including recent successes such as *Avatar*, but also classics from different genres, such as *Pretty Woman*, *E.T. – The Extra-Terrestrial*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Lion King*, and *The Sixth Sense*. Afterwards, the moderator asked all members about their general thoughts regarding these clips, which was then followed by two mind-mapping exercises: one for Bollywood films, and one for Hollywood films. The participants were asked to include anything that they could think of in their individual mind-maps, and the Bollywood-map was chosen to be the first one due to the fact that participants were likely to be a lot more familiar with Indian movies, and would thus be likely to think of more things right away.

Following this exercise, all participants were asked to talk about their mind-maps, the types of branches they came up with, and any significant differences between their Bollywood and Hollywood maps. This exercise was the only one where participants were actively encouraged to think about any disparities and similarities between US and Indian movies. While one could argue that such comparisons may have been helpful to evaluate any competitive advantages of one or the other type of film, the primary goal of the study was to assess how Indian consumers perceive Hollywood movies in general, and which aspects of US films they consider positive or negative. As a result, the majority of the questions guiding focus group discussions focused directly on Hollywood movies.

The next set of questions then focused on two particular situations in which participants have to decide between watching a Hollywood or a Bollywood film: In one case, at the cinema, and in the other, at home on their PC. They were also asked whether their decision to watch one or the other would change when friends or family accompanied them.

The purpose of these questions was to discover any important factors influencing the participants' film buying decisions in general, and was followed by a much more specific set of questions. These were based on a set of "gratifications sought (GS)" and "gratifications obtained (GO)" scales by Sage Publications Inc., and investigated to what extent particular aspects of Hollywood films fulfilled any needs, desires, or demands within Indian consumers (Sage Publications, Inc. as cited in Perse, 2004). These scales were adjusted for this study by switching their focus from television news to movies. While they still asked participants to rank the degree to which they agreed with different statements on a gradation from one to five, the content of the statements was replaced by dimensions more specific to Hollywood movies, such as their uniqueness, entertainment value, types of plots, narrative styles, and cultural disparities (Perse, 2004). In order to make the exercise more 'tangible' and to limit the participants from influencing each other they were also asked to visually commit to their answers by indicating the number they chose with one of their hands.

Finally, the last question aimed to specifically explore the significance of language in Hollywood movies for Indian audiences. The participants were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale from one to seven how important it is to them that a US film is available in Hindi, i.e. that it is dubbed, and the moderators were instructed to probe for subtitling and original language in the participants' replies (Likert as cited in Cooper & Schindler, 2008). An inquiry about any last thoughts participants wanted to share then concluded the sessions and led to their debriefing.

## Appendix B

**The Future of US Film Distribution in India: Moderator Discussion Guide*****Introduction: 10 minutes***

Hi everyone, my name is \_\_\_ and this is my assistant, Christine. Thank you very much for coming tonight. As you probably know from the invitation, we will be talking about your views on Hollywood movies for the next two hours; what you think of them, what you like and dislike, and what they have to offer you.

Before we get started I'd like to highlight a few things to you that will make this discussion as smooth and easy as possible for us:

1. There are no right and wrong answers. It's a discussion, and we'd like to hear your honest and frank opinions. While we are videotaping this discussion, everything you say here will be kept confidential, and when any statements you make are used in the final report, we will use a pseudonym, that is a fake name, instead of your actual name.
2. The discussion will take place in English, and we are aware that it is not your native language. We are also talking about a matter where you might not be familiar with some of the vocabulary and terms. PLEASE let us know if you are unsure about the meaning of a word, question, or exercise. The same goes for anything another participant says. We want to make sure everyone is able to keep up, and that everybody can contribute their opinions to their fullest extent.
3. In case there is a word that you can only think of in Hindi or another language, please ask me or the other participants, and I'm sure we'll be able to help you translate the term you're looking for.
4. Please turn off your mobile phones so we won't be interrupted.

Does anyone have any questions so far?

First of all we should start by introducing ourselves. The reasons why all of you are here is because you were all born and raised in India, and have come to USC for your studies. All of you have also seen at least three Hollywood movies. Let's go around in a circle, and it'd be great if you could give us your name, where in India you are from, what you study, and what your favorite movie is. Let's start with you.

***Discussion Topics: 85 minutes***

**1. Hollywood clips and general opinions (15 minutes)**

As we are starting our discussion I'd like to show you a few clips from all kinds of Hollywood movies that you may or may not have seen. Just have a look at them and see what you think.

**Would you say you have seen the majority of these films?**

[Moderator will probe answers to see whether there are any specific types of Hollywood movies the participants have seen more than others, such as certain genres, production periods (when the films were made), and how successful they were globally]

**What comes to your mind when you see these clips?**

[This is about the participant's general perceptions of Hollywood movies, and to make them start thinking about US films more specifically]

**2. Mind-mapping exercise (25 minutes)**

I would like us to do a mind-mapping exercise. In case anyone has not done this before, here is an example: it is a simple drawing exercise where you brainstorm and write down anything you can think of when it comes to a certain topic – concepts, feelings, opinions, people, and so on, on different branches. Often, writing down one association leads to you to another, and in that case, you can expand on the one branch you have already started with.

Please feel free to use different colors to, as you see them fit, or to draw things. We have plenty of supplies for you here, and you will have five minutes to write down as much as you possibly can. Do you have any questions?

Ok, let's start then. **The first mind-map I would like you to do is one concerning 'Indian movies', so let's all take a sheet of paper and write that down in the middle. Now, it's all up to you – what do you think of, feel, see when you hear Indian movies?**

Please use the entire paper, and take each branch as far as you can. Of you can't think of a word in English, write it down in Hindi for now, and we can look at it later.

[Give them a warning at 4 minutes that they have one minute left].

Great, thank you. Was everyone ok with this exercise or do you have any questions? We're about to make another mind-map, so please let me know if there's anything you're not sure of.

**Now, please turn your first mind-maps face down and take another sheet. This time, we'll make a mind-map on US or 'Hollywood' movies. So let's write 'Hollywood' in the middle, and again, write down anything you can think of.**

[Give them a warning at 4 minutes that they have one minute left].

Great, thank you! So now have a look at your first mind map, the one on Indian films. **Is there one branch that stands out from the rest, or is there one that you would particularly like to share with us?**

[Call on someone, then ask if anyone has a similar branch and let them discuss it for 30 seconds or so. Then call on other members to offer their branches, and again ask if anyone has something similar, etc.]

**Now let's have a look at the second mind-map, the Hollywood one. Which branches do you have there that stand out particularly?**

[Call on someone, then ask if anyone has a similar branch and let them discuss it for 30 seconds or so. Then call on other members to offer their branches, and again ask if anyone has something similar, etc.]

**And so lastly, do you have any particular differences between the two maps that you would like to share with us? Or are they very similar?**

[Wait for a few seconds whether anyone replies, if not, move on].

### **3. Factors influencing buying/consumption decisions (15 minutes)**

Now I would like you to imagine that you're back home in India at a movie theatre. You'd like to watch a film, and you have the choice between a recent Indian production and a recent Hollywood production. **What are things that influence your decision to chose one of the movies over the other?** (10 minutes)

[Moderator will probe and call upon other respondents, including those that remain quieter. One probe will be whether being with friends or family is important when they make a decision between a Hollywood and an Indian movie]

**What about when you are at home and want to watch something on your PC? What are things that influence your decision to watch a certain movie then?** (5 minutes)

[Again the moderator will probe, for example asking about the difference the setting makes, and the people that may or may not watch the movie with the participants]

### **4. Gratifications Sought and Obtained from Hollywood Movies (25 minutes)**

Now I will be giving you certain statements, and you will be asked to tell me on a scale from one to five, how much you agree or disagree with the statements. The statements will be projected on to the wall to make it easier for you to understand them. It'd be great if you could also lift one of your hand and indicate the number you chose with your fingers. What is important is that **I would not just like to hear whether you agree or disagree, but also *why* you do so.**

- A. "I watch Hollywood films because they offer me a unique experience that is different from other, non-Hollywood films." (5 minutes)
- B. "I watch Hollywood films because they are very entertaining." (5 minutes)
- C. "I watch Hollywood movies because I can relate to their stories and plots very well." (5 minutes)
- D. "I watch Hollywood movies because I like their styles, i.e. the way in which they tell their stories – the dialogues, actors, special effects, music, etc." (5 minutes)
- E. "I watch Hollywood movies because I like to watch stories taking place in cultures that are different from mine." (5 minutes)

### **5. The Importance of Language (5 minutes)**

We are now at our last three questions. Just like the statements just now they will be projected on to the wall, and I would like to ask you to tell me how important or unimportant language is on a scale from 1 to 7. Just like earlier, I would also like to know *why* something is important or unimportant to you, and I'd like to ask you again to indicate the number you chose with your hands.

**How important is it for you that a Hollywood film is also available in Hindi, i.e. that it is dubbed?**

Alright! Lastly, are there any last thoughts, comments, suggestions, or remarks you would like to share with us regarding the topics we just discussed or this focus group session?

Thank you very much for coming, again, and for offering you opinions in such detail and so freely! Your inputs are very valuable to our research, and it was very interesting to hear your different viewpoints. Please do not hesitate to e-mail Christine if you have any questions that may come up. Other than that – have a good evening, and get home safely!

**Total time: 95 minutes.**