



Escapist versus eudaimonic viewers: Classifying and clustering audiences based on genres and movie theatres in southern India

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ABSTRACT

The Indian theatrical market is divided into two categories: single screens and multiplexes. This unique fragmentation has led to the movie maker's indecisiveness regarding the release strategy as some movies perform better in single screens whereas, some perform better in multiplexes. On top of that, although movie genre is deemed to be one of the most crucial factors impacting the audience's preference, the existing literature has scantily explored the impact of genre preference across the two different movie-watching venues in India. Furthermore, despite the growing importance of escapism and eudaimonism in the leisure literature, researchers have overlooked its relevance in the study of movie genres. This study seeks to bridge this gap in literature by exploring the diversity of escapist and eudaimonic genre preferences in single screens and multiplexes in India. To achieve the objective, a cross-sectional study was conducted, and data was hand collected from 324 moviegoers across five cities. Cluster and discriminant analyses were employed to explore the movie genre preferences. The findings indicate that the single-screen and multiplex audiences can be segmented based on four genres (Mythology, Romance, *Masala* & Crime). The study internalises the escape theory to conceptualise a novel relationship between escapist and eudaimonic behaviour with various movie genre preferences in single screens and multiplexes. It also links the audience demographics with the genre preference. From a managerial perspective, this study would consequently help the stakeholders of the movie industry in segmenting the market by designing an effective release and distribution strategy.

Keywords: *Movie genres, single-screen and multiplexes, cluster and discriminant analyses, escape theory and eudaimonism, southern India*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and marketers have always been intrigued by the unpredictable consumption phenomena of movies. The preference of a movie is completely subjective and thus, it is very difficult to predict its consumption pattern (Jacobs et al., 2015). Although there are many factors like movie stars, awards, reviews, budget etc. impacting theatrical success, genre¹ is attributed to be one of the most crucial factors that powers the success of a movie (Gazley et al., 2011). Through pre-release buzz, genre becomes the first point of contact with the audience as it hints about the probable theme of a movie and also generates numerous assumptions and expectations within a prospective viewer (Zufryden, 1996). While watching the movie, these assumptions and expectations play a significant role in developing meaning for the viewers (Stam & Miller, 2000). Researchers have also pointed out that movie genres have evolved over the years to stay commercially relevant (Hassim et al., 2019) and thus, it is critical to gauge the genre perception to keep the audiences hooked.

As such, movie genres have always raised curiosity among researchers. Igartua and Barrios (2013), for instance, found that some genres tend to evoke the feeling of eudaimonism, whereas some generate escapism. Eudaimonic genres in entertainment tend to evoke “truth-seeking” behaviour among individuals which may give rise to a feeling of melancholy, self-introspection and even personal growth (Bartsch & Schneider 2014, p. 370). Tearjerkers/thought-provoking movies like *The Notebook* or *Hotel Rwanda* falls under this category as it generates a feeling of sadness and melancholy among the viewers. On the other hand, the escapist theory of entertainment refers to the use of mass media by individuals seeking pleasure and a temporary escape from their mundane life (Vorderer, 2001; Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Vorderer et al. (2004) added that an individual may seek entertainment to escape from the social world into a dream-like universe as portrayed in the movies. For example, the audience loves watching superhero/comedy movies like *The Avengers* or *Ted*, as it entices a feeling of enjoyment/cheerfulness in them.

Although a movie has the potential to entertain both the privileged as much as the underprivileged, sometimes the preference may vary for the alternative worlds (Vorderer et al., 2004). Research indicates that the demographic profile (Addis & Holbrook, 2010) and the socioeconomic backgrounds (Fearing, 1947) could impact the preference of a movie genre. Besides the socioeconomic background, the movie-watching venue also impacts genre preference, for example, whether the movie is experienced in a posh theatre or in an old-fashioned theatre (Tesser & Shaffer, 1990). This is evident in India where the theatrical market is divided into two categories: multiplexes and single screens. Multiplexes and single screens are mostly located in the developed and underdeveloped cities, respectively, which has a diverse set of audiences belonging to the polarising sections of the society (Srinivas, 2002; Viswanath, 2007). Multiplexes are typically situated in the urban cities of India, whereas single screens are more prevalent in smaller towns and villages (Ernst & Young, 2019).

Interestingly, over the last few decades, numerous movies that have done wonders in multiplexes have failed in single screens and vice versa (Pradhan, 2022). Despite the diverse set of audiences that the two venues attract, there is scanty research which focuses on investigating the rationale behind it (Athique, 2011; Viswanath, 2007). The presence of

¹Genre: The term genre refers to a category of motion pictures that are similar with regard to particular features, including topic (e.g., adventure, war), geographical or historical background (e.g., Western, science fiction), stylistic issues (e.g., animation) and the targeted audience (e.g., children versus adults) (Wühr et al., 2017).

2,950 multiplexes and 6,650 single screens in India (Ernst & Young, 2019) has tantalised the stakeholders (producers, distributors and exhibitors) to devise an effective distribution strategy. Furthermore, the literature has hardly any evidence on how a movie of either escapist or eudaimonic genre is perceived by the single-screen versus multiplex audience. Thus, to bridge this gap in literature and to address the problems faced by the Indian movie makers, this study aims to investigate whether there lies any diversity in the preference of escapist and eudaimonic genres among the single-screen and multiplex audiences in India.

The study would lead to a three-pronged theoretical contribution. Firstly, this would be one of the pioneering studies to use the “escape theory and eudaimonia” as its theoretical underpinning to explain the genre preference in Bollywood. Although escapism and eudaimonism has been quite relevant in media gratification literature, the preference of movie genres is scantily researched from its theoretical lens. Secondly, although there have been several studies on genre preferences across the globe (Walls & McKenzie, 2012), most of them have viewed diverse movie genres as one holistic entity. However, this study will arguably be the first of its kind, as its primary uniqueness would be dissecting movie genres into the escapist and eudaimonic genres. And finally, this would also be one of the first studies to explore the genre preference among the multiplex and single-screen audiences in India based on their sociodemographic background. On the practical front, this study would help movie makers to comprehend the consumers’ perception and devise an optimal distribution and advertising strategy based on the genre’s specificity across different venues, which in turn will reduce the probability of a commercial failure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Escape theory and eudaimonia

Escapism is related to the impulsive pursuit of pleasure and minimising pain (Heatheron & Baumeister, 1991). In the domain of media literature, escapism is one of the major gratifications that keeps the audience hooked to their favourite mode of entertainment (Halfmann & Reinecke, 2021). The escape theory postulates that people often seek a mode to averse burdensome situations by narrowing down their focus on their present situation (Wicklund, 1975). This behaviour assists individuals to reduce the level of self-awareness which in turn helps them to escape into a different realm of reality temporarily (Heatheron & Baumeister, 1991). The self-awareness theory postulates that this behaviour is often exhibited by individuals who go through stress or a mundane lifestyle (Pennebaker, 1989). Thus, individuals under stress are often reluctant in engaging with deep ideas and prefer a light-hearted source of entertainment. Thus, the core of escapist entertainment experience is linked with fun and enjoyment (Vorderer et al., 2004). The concept of escapism indicates that an individual desires diversion from challenging circumstances and seeks distraction through entertainment. Thus, escapist behaviour is attributed to the pursuit of pleasure (Huta, 2016).

However, Aristotle’s Nichomachean school of thought digresses from the pursuit of pleasure and emphasises on the philosophical aspect of enjoyment, which is otherwise known as eudaimonia (Irwin, 1985). Eudaimonia is associated with the pursuit of “virtue and excellence” (Hursthouse, 1999). Individuals’ demonstrating eudaimonism have a higher level of self-awareness and opt for a thought-provoking mode of entertainment. Thus, several researchers have posited that eudaimonic entertainment can be derived from anxiety, suspense and even self-introspection (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). Huta (2016) added that eudaimonia is associated with individuals who seek truth and strive for high standards (in ethics, performance and behaviour) while gaining insights about their own

potential. Basically, eudaimonism deals with the profound and truth-seeking virtues of human existence (Wirth et al., 2012).

The motion picture literature however, has a limited number of studies linking genre preference with escapism and eudaimonism. Oliver and Raney (2011) conducted a study which depicts that escapist motivations had a higher preference for action adventures and romantic comedies, whereas eudaimonic motivations were more inclined towards serious genres such as non-fictional dramas. Igartua and Barrios (2013) conducted a study to highlight the preferences for movie genres. Their result also demonstrated that escapist motivation was associated with light-hearted movies while eudaimonic motivation was attributed to serious content. Bartsch and Hartmann (2017) studied the impact of cognitive and affective attributes with escapist and eudaimonic modes of entertainment. They found that the presence of cognitive and affective attributes resulted in the appreciation of eudaimonic movies, whereas their absence was associated with the desire for escapist movies. Similarly, Tkalčič and Ferwerda (2018) found that personality traits like neuroticism, agreeability and openness had a strong impact on the user's preference for escapist and eudaimonic movies. They also reported that escapist motivations are associated with non-serious movies, whereas eudaimonic motivations are more aligned with thought-provoking movie genres.

Motion pictures and genres

In their US study, Brewer et al. (2009) found that horror, action-adventure and comedies were more popular because of their wide reach among the audience whereas, sci-fi and animated movies were considered risky business because of their limited reach. Meanwhile in New Zealand, Gazley et al. (2011) found that their respondents preferred comedies and dramas more whereas thrillers and horrors were the least preferred ones. Walls and McKenzie (2012) found that in all the countries where Hollywood flicks are released, action films earned more compared to other genres. Lauren et al. (2015) argued that undergraduates in America were very much inclined towards romantic comedies as they had a fanciful expectation about their romantic relationships and believed that love will resolve all their problems. On the other hand, Ye et al. (2018) found that Asian nations displayed affinity for action and adventure-laden movies whereas countries from Central Eastern Europe demonstrated a preference for the comedy and romance genres. Soto-Sanfiel et al. (2021) surveyed eight different countries and confirmed that the most popular genres were comedy and adventure-action. In Malaysia, Nagaraj and Mohd Mustafa (2019) concluded that the Malaysian audience prefer Hollywood movies as they cater more to action, horror and romantic flicks compared to the local movie makers.

Theatre venues and movie preference

A movie theatre is known to give an experience of a place, where people from diverse backgrounds come together and share the same emotions (Casetti, 2009). Nonetheless, this ideal scenario does not hold true in India because of the presence of single screens and multiplexes. Athique and Hill (2007) pointed out that formulaic *masala* movies are produced for the “masses” (single-screen audiences), whereas the offbeat storylines are meant for the “creamy layer” (multiplex audiences). In the same way, Viswanath (2007) observed that single screens in India served the public with slapsticks and over-the-top action, whereas the multiplexes offered serious and offbeat content.

Athique (2011) found that the single-screen audiences associate themselves with the typical melodramatic Bollywood movies, whereas the multiplexes attract diverse sets of audiences as they release a greater range of movies. Further, Srinivas (2002) reflected

on the fact that the single-screen audiences have a very “active and raucous” nature of watching a movie, whereas the multiplex audiences tend to disassociate themselves from traditional movie theatres. Akiner and Bykov (2018) found that in Russia and Turkey, audiences preferred large single screens. They found out that the dominant popcorn and coke culture of the multiplexes was not emotionally fulfilling to these patrons as compared to the single screen cinema halls.

Research gaps

The first portion of the literature review focuses on “escape theory and eudaimonia” which acts as the base of the theoretical explanation for the study. Several nuances of escapist and eudaimonic movie-watching behaviour are elaborated in this section. Although escapism has been widely used to explain distinct contexts like binge eating (Heatherton, 1991), gaming (Clarke et al., 2017), cyberbullying (Fitriana et al., 2020) etc., very few researchers have focused on elucidating the preference of movie genre through the lens of escapist and eudaimonic behaviour despite its relevance in the media gratification literature. Secondly, the researchers demonstrate that there lies no consensus when it comes to the preference for movie genres across the globe. This motivates the researchers to focus on the movie genre preferences in Bollywood as it is deemed to be unaffected by Hollywood (Eliashberg et al., 2006). And the final section on theatre venues suggests that audiences have had contrasting genre preferences across single screens and multiplexes and there is no clarity on the rationale behind it.

Thus, the objective of the study is to investigate whether there lies any diversity in the preference of escapist and eudaimonic genres among the single-screen and multiplex audiences in India. From a theoretical perspective, this would be one of the first studies to have implemented the use of “escape theory and eudaimonia” to explain the genre preference phenomena in Bollywood. Secondly, as far as the literature review is concerned, this would also be one of the pioneering studies to gauge the genre preference between single-screen and multiplex audiences in India.

METHODOLOGY

The respondents of this study came from five different cities of southern India which has one of the largest movie-viewing audiences in the entire country (Ernst & Young, 2019). Purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents (Ilker et al., 2016). The responses were collected through a self-administered questionnaire (Vivek & Delonia, 2010) at single screens and multiplexes. The researchers approached only those theatres which screened various genres of movies released over the last few years. This helped in minimising the selection bias as movies belonging to various genres were released in the nearby theatres. Other than the researchers, six postgraduate students also assisted in the data collection process as part of their marketing project. The questionnaire clearly stated that the participation of the respondents was purely voluntary in nature. Following strict ethical guidelines, no information was collected that would compromise the identity of the respondents.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to capture information on the favoured movie-watching venue (single screen versus multiplex) followed by preference for movie genres. A dichotomous question was framed to capture the preference for single-screen versus multiplex respondents. The second question was drafted to capture the responses for the independent variable, i.e., the preference for movie genres. IMDB and Box Office

India websites were used to identify the most frequently released movie genres in India. The researchers included nine most popular movie genres (action, comedy, mythology, crime, horror, romance, science fiction, *masala*, and family) released in Bollywood (Refer Appendix 2 for genre definitions). The last section captured the demographic details of the respondents.

Other than the clearly defined movie genres, data regarding the preference for *masala* genre was also captured, specifically for the Indian audience. Hollywood generally does not switch between genres in a movie (Neale, 2000). Whereas Bollywood is famous for its formulaic mixing of genres to create a *masala* flick (commercial potboiler) (Rashna, 2011). Although there is no denying the fact that commercial potboilers are still very much prominent in Bollywood, Viswanath (2007) pointed out that over the last two decades, the compulsion to make a *masala* movie has drastically reduced. However, to avoid confusion in genre recognition, two movies were cited (as examples) for each genre in the questionnaire. For each of the genres, a 5-point Likert scale was used, and the respondents had to mark their preferences on a scale of 1 to 5; from 1 being “really dislike” to 5 being “really like”.

In total, 514 questionnaires were circulated and out of that, 324 responses (63%) were deemed fit for analysis after data cleaning. The sample demographics (see Appendix 1) showed that the single-screen audiences were low on both educational qualification and income level compared to the multiplex audiences. The majority of the single-screen respondents had basic educational qualification till class X whereas, multiplex respondents were mostly graduates with an additional 5 years of educational experience compared to the single-screen audiences. Cluster and discriminant analyses were further used to differentiate among the single-screen and multiplex audiences.

RESULTS

Cluster analysis

As there is no consensus in the study of escapist and eudaimonic genre preference in Bollywood, the researchers intended to address the gap by exploring the Indian audience. In order to identify not only the preference of movie genres, but also to gain insight on the customer segmentation based on their movie-watching venues, the hierarchical cluster analysis was used (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2016). This was followed by the non-hierarchical K-mean clustering (Hair et al., 2014). The clustering procedures are expected to increase the effectiveness of the solution (Milligan, 1980). The dendrogram and the agglomeration schedule helped to identify two different clusters. Using non-hierarchical K-mean clustering, the two-cluster solution was confirmed. “K-mean algorithms work by portioning the data into a user-specified number of clusters and then by iteratively reassigning observations to clusters until some numerical criterion is met” (Hair et al., 2014, p. 449). The cluster centres for genre preferences presented in Table 1 show that the first cluster demonstrated a higher preference for crime, whereas the second cluster preferred romance, *masala* and mythology more. The cluster centres for the remaining five genres (comedy, family, action, horror and science fiction) were similar for both two clusters (see Table 1). As per the genre preference, respondents in the first cluster were named as eudaimonic moviegoers and respondents in the second cluster were named as escapist moviegoers. Eudaimonic audiences are those who prefer serious and meaningful content. They are more inclined towards storylines which depict the dark and truthful scenarios of the society. They do not shy away from movies portraying moral dilemmas. In contrast, escapist audiences tend to seek pleasurable and light-hearted content. Owing to their burdensome life, they intend to escape into a happier version of reality.

Table 1. Cluster centres

Genres	Eudaimonic Moviegoers	Escapist Moviegoers
Action	3.84	3.64
Comedy	4.41	4.38
Crime	4.00	2.86
Romance	3.05	4.22
Horror	3.19	2.89
Family	3.60	3.53
Masala	2.36	4.50
Mythology	2.05	4.33
Science Fiction	3.24	3.51

On profiling the clusters, it was found that the majority (68.7%) of the eudaimonic moviegoers preferred multiplexes whereas, the majority (83.4%) of the escapist moviegoers preferred single screens. Most of the escapist moviegoers were in the age group of 41 years and above. The analysis also points out that 86.54% of the escapist moviegoers belonged to less educated group (SSLC, X Std.), whereas most of the eudaimonic moviegoers were graduates (60.13%) and postgraduates (61.19%). The majority of the escapist moviegoers had an income under Rs.15000 (180 USD) and a few of them earned more than Rs. 1,00,000 (1,200 USD) per month. However, most of the eudaimonic moviegoers were in the group earning between Rs. 15,000 – 1,00,000 per month. To validate the differences among the clusters and to further check the relationship between genre preference and the preferred movie-watching venue, discriminant analysis was conducted.

Table 2. Cluster profile

Cluster Profile	Eudaimonic Fans (n= 147) 45.37%	Escapist Fans (n= 177) 54.63%
<i>Venue</i>		
Single screen	16.55%	83.45%
Multiplex	68.72%	31.28%
<i>Age</i>		
Between 18 and 25 years	50.68%	49.32%
Between 26 and 40 years	47.20%	52.80%
Between 41 and 60 years	27.66%	72.34%
Above 60 years	16.67%	83.33%
<i>Education</i>		
SSLC (X Std.)	13.46%	86.54%
Graduate	60.13%	39.87%
Postgraduate	61.19%	38.81%
<i>Income (per month)</i>		
Less than Rs.5,000	38.54%	61.46%
Between Rs.5000 and Rs.15,000	40.22%	59.78%
Between Rs.15,000 and Rs.40,000	57.83%	42.17%
Between Rs.40,000 and Rs.1,00,000	55.00%	45.00%
More than one lakh	23.08%	76.92%

Discriminant analysis

Another important gap identified by the researchers was the lack of evidence on the diverse movie-watching preference in multiplexes and single screens in India. Two-group discriminant analysis was employed to determine the diversity in genre preference among

the two segments. Cramer (2003) pointed out that discriminant analysis is an appropriate tool to determine which of the independent variable best discriminates between two groups. All the respondents in the analysis were classified into two groups: Single-screen viewers (Audience who prefer watching movies in single-screen theatres) and Multiplex viewers (Audience who prefer watching movies in multiplexes).

The predictor or discriminating variables for the discriminant analysis were nine genres: action, comedy, crime, romance, horror, family, *masala*, mythology and science fiction. The results of the discriminant analysis show that on the basis of means, the two groups are separated in terms of crime, romance, *masala* and mythology genre. The Wilks Lambda value for the model (.606) was also found to be acceptable (Also, Chi square – 158.769, Significance – 0.000) (Sherry, 2006). The canonical correlation associated with the discriminant function was .627, suggesting that 39.31% ($0.627^2 = 0.3931$) of the variance in the dependent variable (preference for movie genres) was accounted for by this model.

Table 3. Univariate F ratios (Test of equality of group means)

Genres	Wilks' Lambda	F	df1	df2	Significance
Action	1	0.122	1	322	0.727
Comedy	0.998	0.515	1	322	0.473
Crime	0.785	88.432	1	322	0
Romance	0.913	30.559	1	322	0
Horror	1	0.131	1	322	0.717
Family	0.996	1.281	1	322	0.259
<i>Masala</i>	0.802	79.581	1	322	0
Mythology	0.773	94.494	1	322	0
Science fiction	0.997	0.951	1	322	0.33

From Table 3, it can be interpreted that except for crime, romance, *masala* and mythology (at 5% level of significance), the remaining five genres were not significantly differentiating between the single-screen and multiplex audiences.

Table 4. Functions at group centroids

Movie Venues	Function
	1
Single screen	0.892
Multiplex	-0.723

Table 4 reveals that the group centroid for the single-screen group was 0.892, whereas the group centroid for the multiplex group was -0.723. In comparison, single-screen audiences were more inclined towards mythology, *masala* and romantic genres, whereas multiplex audiences displayed a higher preference for the crime genre.

Table 5. Standardised canonical discriminant function coefficients

Genres	Function
	1
Action	0.126
Comedy	-0.126
Crime	-0.601

Table 5. (con't)

Genres	Function
	1
Romance	0.096
Horror	0.097
Family	-0.061
<i>Masala</i>	0.361
Mythology	0.486
Science Fiction	-0.156

Table 6. Structure matrix

Genres	Function
	1
Mythology	0.673
Crime	-0.651
<i>Masala</i>	0.617
Romance	0.382
Family	-0.078
Science Fiction	-0.067
Comedy	-0.05
Horror	-0.025
Action	0.024

The standardised canonical discriminant function coefficients (Table 5) and the structure matrix (Table 6) also suggest that crime, romance, *masala* and mythology were the differentiating genres among the single-screen and multiplex audiences. As per the structure matrix table, it can be established that mythology (0.673) had the highest discriminating effect followed by crime (-0.651), *masala* (0.617) and romance (0.382) genre.

Table 7. Classification matrix

Preference for venue		Predicted Group Membership		Total	
		Single screen	Multiplex		
Original	Count	Single screen	113	32	145
		Multiplex	35	144	179
	%	Single screen	77.9	22.1	100
		Multiplex	19.6	80.4	100
Cross-validated	Count	Single screen	112	33	145
		Multiplex	39	140	179
	%	Single screen	77.2	22.8	100
		Multiplex	21.8	78.2	100

The correctly classified group cases² stand at 79.32% that is greater than the C-pro value³ (50.4%) and this suggests that the discriminant analysis falls under acceptable standards (Hair et al., 2014). This also means that 77.80% of the cross-validated grouped cases is correctly classified.

DISCUSSION

The results depict that the single-screen audiences are more inclined towards escapist content, and multiplex audiences prefer more eudaimonic content. When it comes to motion pictures, non-serious and light-hearted genres like romance and mythology are associated with escapism (Igartua & Barrios, 2013). As *masala* movies are produced to entertain the audience by transferring them to a world of happiness and luck, they are also considered escapist in nature.

Ramanujan (1994) pointed out that mythological stories are more prevalent in smaller cities that have not been westernised. Most of these stories display the hero coming out victorious after an epic battle of good overpowering evil. Thus, it is probably the affinity towards a glorifying past, that movies made on mythological and historical stories attract a lot of viewers in the single screen located in the unurbanised part of the country. Secondly, romantic fiction has also been associated with escapism as they endorse fanciful expectations (Mann, 1985). In India, although romanticism is found in abundance in scriptures and movies, it is still not a prominent element, especially in the unurbanised parts of the country. Compared to the urban middle class, the unurbanised population do not have the liberty of self-choice in their romantic life (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016), and thus, it is theorised that they seek closure from the fanciful portrayal of romantic movies. And finally, the *masala* movies in India are well known for portraying larger-than-life characters. Athique and Hill (2007) highlighted that the *masala* genre is more preferred by the single-screen audiences in the unurbanised parts of the country. Because of the economic disparity among the single-screen and multiplex audiences, the former is associated with the lower income strata of the society. Thus, it is predicted that because of their burdensome life, the single-screen audiences exhibit an affinity towards the escapist content of *masala* movies, where the protagonist leads a trouble-free and happy life.

The researchers intend to explain this behavioural aspect of the audience through the lens of the escape theory. The escape theory states that due to unpleasant life experiences, individuals try to escape their own reality and seek for escapist entertainment that stimulates an automatic and effortless mode of cognitive processing (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). Research also indicates that formal education and the viewing amount of escapist content are intertwined and furthermore, individuals with low formal education tend to display a lower need for cognition (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). The cluster segregation (see Appendix 1) clearly points out that the single-screen audiences are far less qualified, education-wise compared to the multiplex audiences. Literature proposes that education is not only an important ingredient in the process of socialisation (Sharipudin et al., 2020), but is also essential in enhancing the living standard of an individual (Agrawal, 2014). It can also be noted that only 32% of the single-screen audiences had an average income above 180 USD, compared to 67% of the multiplex audience, which clearly suggests that most

²Correctly classified group cases: $(257 \times 100 / 324)$

³C-Pro Value Calculation: $(145/324)^2 + (179/324)^2 = .504$ (50.4%)

of the single-screen audiences belong to the underprivileged section of the society. Thus, drawing support from the escape theory, it is theorised that the low education and income level of the single-screen audiences results in their lower need for cognition, which in turn prompts them to gravitate towards escapist content (see Figure 1). The results are also aligned with existing literature on motion picture that contends single-screen audiences are more inclined towards non-serious content, whereas multiplex audiences prefer serious movies (Athique, 2011).

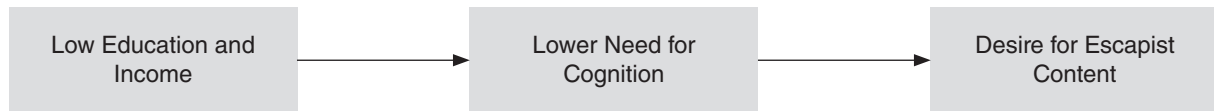


Figure 1. Single-screen viewers

Compared to escapist content, the other end of the audience spectrum prefers eudaimonic content that is linked to “social or perceptual realism” addressing the controversial problems of the society (Banks & Wasserman, 2019). Stam and Miller (2000) clearly pointed out that crime movies are eudaimonic in nature as they feature moral dilemmas. Most of the recent crime movies made in India have also taken up serious topics like murders, rapes, domestic violence, illegal drug trade etc. Interestingly, the respondents preferring crime movies are predominantly multiplex audiences belonging to the urbanised parts of the country that witness the highest rate of crimes committed in society (National Crime Records Bureau, 2018). As most of these movies depict crime in a fictional form, it would not be wrong to assume that the urban population appreciates the reality portrayed in a crime movie as it helps the audience to not only confront but also reflect on the heinousness of the society.

The desire for eudaimonic content is associated with a higher need for cognition and introspection when compared to escapist content. Henning and Vorderer (2001) have also indicated that individuals with a higher level of education tend to display a higher need for cognition. As explained earlier, the cluster segregation pointed out that the majority of the multiplex respondents are more educated compared to the single-screen audience (Appendix 1). Thus, it would not be improper to theorise, that owing to their education and income level, the multiplex audiences display a higher need for cognition and thus, exhibit a stronger inclination towards eudaimonic genres (Figure 2).

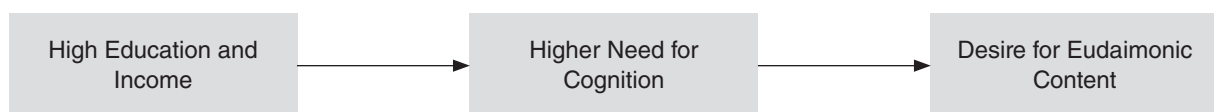


Figure 2. Multiplex viewers

CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical contributions

The theoretical underpinning of the study is derived from the escape theory and eudaimonism. The escape theory highlights the fact that individuals tend to have lower self-awareness and evade uncomfortable situations by seeking out pleasurable avenues of entertainment. On the other hand, eudaimonic individuals exhibit a higher level of self-awareness and prefer

a thought-provoking and meaningful mode of entertainment. The theoretical contribution of the research lies in the inclusion of escape theory and eudaimonism in explaining the genre preference of the Indian moviegoers. Although escapism and eudaimonism have been used in media and gratification research, very few researchers have looked into genre preference through its lens. On top of that, the researchers have conceptualised the escapist and eudaimonic behaviour with the demographic profile of the audience which have never been done before.

Thus, the originality of the contribution lies in the revelatory dimension (Corley & Gioia, 2011) of the genre preference behaviour in India. The revelatory dimension of theoretical contribution focuses on unearthing “hidden truths” which is related to a “specific phenomenon” (Zhou et al., 2019). Following the logic of the revelatory dimension, the researchers investigated the movie genre preference phenomenon in India and inferred specific rationales which were never explored in a priori literature. Firstly, the researchers theorised that lower education and income level nurtures a lower need for cognition which results in the preference of escapist content and secondly, higher education and income level nurtures a higher level of cognition resulting in the preference of eudaimonic content. As far as the existing literature is concerned, this is the first study on marketing psychology that theoretically attempts to conceptualise the link between the preference of movie-watching venues and need for watching escapist or eudaimonic content. Furthermore, although existing studies in the media literature have only dealt with reporting the genre preference of the audience, this study moves a step further and contributes to the media literature by associating the single-screen and multiplex audiences, and their genre preferences in India.

Although India is one of the largest movie-producing nation across the globe, very few researchers have studied the Indian movie industry from the marketing perspective. Thus, it is expected that this study would further encourage marketing researchers to delve into the vast untapped movie-viewing audiences in India. This opens a new dimension for research in the media literature by proposing the need to capture the escapist and eudaimonic needs. Moreover, this study was based only on one aspect of the entertainment industry (motion pictures). In combination with consumer behaviour, the concept of escapism and eudaimonism might help media researchers over other domains (like video games, entertainment parks, comic books etc.) to better understand the nuances of the leisure and entertainment industry not only in India, but across the world. Future researchers might opt for capturing the cognition level of the target audience and segment them as per their preferences. This would also help to determine whether the aspect of escapist and eudaimonic preferences hold true in other entertainment avenues or not.

Practical implications

The second dimension of a study’s contribution is its practical implications in the industry (Corley & Gioia, 2011). In this study, the researchers have highlighted certain specific practical contributions for the motion picture industry of India. The most important finding of this study was that the single-screen audiences prefer the mythology, romance and *masala* genres more whereas the multiplex audiences displayed a higher preference for the crime genre. From a managerial point of view, this study would be very helpful in gauging the target audience and devising an effective release strategy for the three most important stakeholders of the movie industry: the producers, the distributors and the theatre owners.

For example, the findings could guide a producer in rethinking his strategy before producing a high-budget crime thriller in India. In 2016, one of the biggest stars in the world, Shah Rukh Khan starred in a \$16.2 million movie named *FAN* (Box Office India,

2016). Despite releasing in over 3,450 screens and garnering healthy reviews, the movie was a box-office disaster and collected only \$11.3 million majorly from multiplexes. In comparison, another crime thriller, *Badla (The Revenge)* was released in 2019 with a modest budget of \$1.3 million. The movie was released in 1,250 screens only, predominantly in multiplexes. Despite having a lesser-known star, Taapsee Pannu, it became a major box office hit as it collected \$11.7 million (Box Office India, 2019). Trade reports (Goyal, 2019) and Bollywood analysts (Taran, 2019) clearly mentioned that the latter was doing splendid business in urban cities and multiplexes. For *Badla (The Revenge)*, the stakeholders netted good profit as they crafted a low-budget crime thriller and smartly targeted the multiplex audiences compared to *FAN* which was a widely released commercial failure.

The findings reveal the differences in genre preferences across the two movie-watching venues in India: Single screens and Multiplexes. A proper analysis of the movie genre and its target audience will increase the probability of a commercially viable movie. From the producer's point of view, a clear understanding about the audience's genre preference will guide him/her to allocate the budget for an upcoming project. Similarly, movie distributors and theatre owners also spend a huge amount of money to bag the theatrical rights of a movie. Neglecting the audience's genre preference puts them in a considerable amount of risk. Although there are a few handful movies like *Bahubali* that enjoyed brisk business at both single screens and multiplexes, most of movies (mythological, romance, *masala* and crime) only cater to either of the venues. Thus, as per the findings, it is strongly recommended that crime movies should be extensively released in multiplexes and urban cities whereas mythological, romance and *masala* movies should be primarily released in the single screen and tier II cities⁴.

LIMITATIONS

However, this research is not devoid of limitations. Firstly, although the respondents were from diverse demographic profiles, they belonged only to the southern part of India. Given the possibility that different states in India might have different genre preferences, future studies on different parts of the country may provide us with promising outcomes. Secondly, as this study was exploratory in nature, the conceptual explanation of the results is based only on the existing literature. Thus, to validate the given rationale of this study, it is planned and recommended to use scales for capturing the cognition and escapism level (Huta 2016) of individuals and associate them with the preference for genres among the single-screen and multiplex audiences in India. And finally, future researchers might use the theory of escapism and eudaimonism to analyse other entertainment services like video games, theme parks etc.

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⁴Tier II cities: Tier II cities are categorised as semi-urban and developing centres with a population ranging between 50,000 and 99,999. On the other hand, Tier I cities are urban and developed centres with a population of 100,000 and above (Reserve Bank of India [RBI], 2001).

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Demographics of the respondents

Demographic Variables	Characteristics	Single Screen	Multiplex
Gender	Male	94	102
	Female	51	77
Age	Between 16 and 25 years	62	84
	Between 26 and 40 years	52	73
	Between 41 and 60 years	28	19
	Above 60 years	3	3
Education	SSLC (X Std.)	82	22
	Graduate	46	107
	Postgraduate	17	50
Income (per month)	Less than Rs.5,000	50	46
	Between Rs.5000 to Rs.15,000	51	41
	Between Rs.15,000 to Rs.40,000	29	54
	Between Rs.40,000 to Rs.1,00,000	12	28
	More than one lakh	3	10

Appendix 2. Genre definitions

Genre definition	Source
Action: Films that have tremendous impact, continuous high energy, lots of physical stunts and activity, possibly extended chase scenes, races, rescues, battles, martial arts, mountains and mountaineering, destructive disasters (floods, explosions, natural disasters, fires etc.), fights, escapes, non-stop motion, spectacular rhythm and pacing, and adventurous heroes.	Filmsite (2020)
Comedies: Films that are designed to elicit laughter from the audience.	Filmsite (2020)
Mythological/Historical/Epic: Films that deal with an historical or imagined event, mythic, legendary, or heroic figure.	Filmsite (2020)
Crime: Films that are developed around the sinister actions of criminals or gangsters, particularly bank robbers, underworld figures, or ruthless hoodlums who operate outside the law.	Filmsite (2020)
Horrors: Films that are unsettling, designed to frighten and panic, cause dread and alarm, and to invoke our hidden worst fears.	Filmsite (2020)
Romantic: Films that centre on the obstacles and the hazards of hardship, finances, physical illness, racial or social class status, occupation, psychological restraints, or family that threaten to break (the main characters') union and attainment of love.	Filmsite (2020)
Science fiction: Films that are usually scientific, visionary, comic-strip-like, and imaginative, and usually visualized through fanciful, imaginative settings, expert film production design, advanced technology gadgets (i.e., robots and spaceships), [or other] scientific developments.	Filmsite (2020)
<i>Masala</i> : Traditionally, popular Hindi films have been called masala films, sometimes disparagingly, in order to address Bollywood's formulaic mixing of genres like romance, action, comedy, and melodrama.	Rashna (2011)
Family-Oriented: Films are non-offensive, wholesome, and entertaining that do not include topics or scenes with violence, foul language and other profanity, religious issues, gratuitous sexuality etc. These films are a clean, broadly suitable entertainment for all sections of the movie-going public.	Filmsite (2020) & Brown (2013)