Indian Cinema as a Platform for Spreading Political Messages to Gen Z

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Abstract: Indian cinema has always been an influential player in framing public discourse as a strong vehicle for spreading political messages. Since the advent of Generation Z (Gen Z), a digitally native and politically engaged population, Indian cinema and political stakeholders have leveraged cinema as a means to spread ideologies, talk about social causes, and sway voters. This article delves into the way Indian cinema operates as a political instrument and how it is shaping Gen Z's political awareness and participation. It is done through case studies, theoretical insights, and empirical data to make evident how Bollywood and regional cinema frame political narratives, shape youth movements, and inform electoral turnout in India.

Keywords: Indian Cinema, Political messages, classifications, Theories and conclusion Introduction

Indian cinema has traditionally been a representation of social change and political ideology. From pre-independence to present times, movies have been utilized to promote nationalistic feelings, oppose the policies of governments, and establish political ideologies. With the changing technology of digital streaming and social media, Gen Z, the generation born from 1997 to 2012, diversely views cinema with enthusiasm. As a politically conscious generation, Gen Z shows a distinctive reaction towards movies laden with political content. This research is to examine how Indian cinema shapes the political attitudes of Gen Z and informs their activism and engagement in governance.

Indian Cinema as a Platform of Political Communication

Indian cinema, both Bollywood and regional film industries, has played a key role in shaping political discourses. The agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972) stipulates that mass media, such as films, determines what issues are seen as significant. In accordance with this theory, the media doesn't instruct the people what to think but what to think about. That is, movies can influence public discourse by emphasizing specific political issues and setting the terms of the debate in a certain manner. In prioritizing some subjects over others, film plays a significant part in setting the agenda for public concern and the political agenda of society.

Indian political cinema can be classified into the following categories:

Nationalistic Films – Films like Lagaan (2001) and Kesari (2019) affirm patriotic feelings and idealize national identity.

Social Justice and Reform Films – Article 15 (2019) deals with caste discrimination, which appeals to Gen Z's sense of social justice.

Biographical and Historical Films – The Accidental Prime Minister (2019) and Thackeray (2019) offer insights into political leaders and administration.

Satirical Movies – Peepli Live (2010) ridicules media exaggeration and bureaucratic apathy toward rural problems.

Revolutionary Movies – Rang De Basanti (2006) and Haider (2014) show youth movements and challenges to government policies.

Influence of Political Cinema among Gen Z in India

Indian political cinema involvement by Gen Z goes beyond amusement, shaping their attitudes, conducts, and activism. The influence of Indian political movies can be analyzed in three main areas:

1. Political Education and Awareness

The medium of films is educational, educating young audiences about political history, government, and social causes. According to a survey by Gupta (2020), 80% of Gen Z audience members who watched politically charged films claimed to have an enhanced knowledge of political events. For instance, Raajneeti (2010), set loosely against Indian political forces, offered information on election tactics and party politics.

2. Electoral Participation

Political movies tend to encourage young people to participate in democratic activities. Films such as Newton (2017), which delves into the Indian electoral system, have been attributed to raising awareness regarding voting rights among Gen Z. The Election Commission of India (2021) states that youth voter turnout increased significantly during the 2019 general elections, with media and cinema being a contributing factor. Furthermore, Madras Cafe (2013) raised awareness regarding the complexities of Indian foreign policy and conflict management.

3. Activism and Social Movements

Indian cinema has also impacted youth movements, propelling the debate on governance and social justice. Pink (2016), focusing on women's rights and consent, became a conversation starter for gender equality, with Gen Z viewing audiences utilizing social media to echo its message. Jai Bhim (2021), focusing on caste oppression, also created online outrage and activism among Indians of a younger generation.

In addition, Firaaq (2008) and Parzania (2007) discussed the effects of communal violence, prompting audiences to think about religious intolerance and coexistence in Indian society.

Theoretical Perspectives on Cinema's Political Influence

There are a number of media theories that explain how Indian cinema shapes Gen Z's political attitudes and actions:

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) – Implies that mass media prioritizes political issues by influencing the perception of the public. Film, being one of the means of mass communication, focuses on particular political themes, setting the agenda for how they are discussed and become important political issues that audiences think about. Article 15 (2019), discuss about the caste discrimination to the forefront of national discourse. Gen Z learns about real-world inequality through narrative immersion. Pad Man (2018) – A film based on the true story of Arunachalam Muruganantham, which spoke about menstrual hygiene, triggering social reform and policy debates.

Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) – Implies that constant exposure to political stories in movies inculcates in young audiences an understanding of what governance and justice mean. Rang De Basanti (2006) continuous exposure to revolutionary ideals fosters civic awareness and activism. Gen Z viewers often emulate activism shown in the film.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) explains how Gen Z audiences can learn attitudes and behaviors from politically charged movies. Jai Bhim (2021), Frames caste-based police brutality in a way that relates to modern-day human rights issues, inspiring digital activism and solidarity movements.

Encoding/Decoding Model (Hall, 1980) – Illustrates how various audience groups decode political messages from films according to their socio-cultural contexts. Tandav (2021), he series highlights political manipulation

and freedom of speech. Gen Z audiences interpret themes of censorship and resistance differently based on sociopolitical backgrounds. Section 375 (2019) – Tackled gender justice and the intricacies of legal procedures pertaining to sexual harassment laws, promoting legal literacy among youth audiences.

Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) – Illustrates how media influences perception by highlighting specific themes or perspectives, influencing the way Gen Z understands political issues in film. Haider (2014), The Kashmir conflict is framed through a personal lens; audiences decode themes of state violence and individual rebellion based on their cultural- political context. Uri: The Surgical Strike (2019) – A war movie that promoted nationalistic sentiment and was connected with enhanced sympathy for the Indian army among young people.

Challenges and Ethical Issues

Although Indian cinema is a strong political weapon, it also has ethical issues:

Bias and Political Propaganda – Certain films are blamed as government-sponsored propaganda, influencing public opinion in the interest of ruling parties.

Censorship and Freedom of Expression – Political movies usually undergo censorship from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) or political opposition, restraining artistic freedom.

Selective Representation – Some stories propagate stereotypes or showcase biased views regarding historical events.

Impact on Public Opinion and Misinformation – Movies can show historical inaccuracies or biased accounts, shaping Gen Z's views in a biased direction.

Sensationalism in Political Narratives – The dramatization of political happenings on occasion creates overly simplistic or sensationalized representations, influencing public opinion.

Conclusion

Indian cinema remains a powerful platform for disseminating political messages, particularly to Gen Z. With engaging storytelling, it informs, mobilizes, and shapes young voters and activists. The ethical dimensions of political cinema, such as bias, disinformation, and censorship, need to be examined in a critical manner. Since Gen Z is an important population in determining India's political destiny, cinema will remain a primary platform to generate political awareness and action.

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