Role of Music Scores in the Success of Movies

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ABSTRACT

Music scores play an essential role of contribution to the narrative meaning of a film, where songs stimulate the conscious mind using lyrics and melodies to establish a mood in its duration, and background scores stimulate the subconscious mind to interpret the mood and cause the audience to perceive the film a certain way, through close manipulation. This research investigates the relation between the popularity of songs of a film and its success, to prove the above ideas in terms of established trends. However, the dataset does not present any such relation, resulting in the conclusion that music scores do still hold an essential narrative role, however they may not directly contribute to the success of a movie through their popularity as individual songs, instead the connect formed by different background scores which are not included in the dataset may play a greater role in allowing the subconscious mind to interpret a film a certain way.

Keywords: *Narrative Role, Background Scores, Indian Cinema, Popularity, Subconscious, Mood, Manipulation, Success of Films, Bollywood Movies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Films are often perceived to be constructed mainly of scene settings, dialogues, the actors, action, and the plot. While music scores remain a major part of movies, our traditional mindsets allow for us to discount the same, especially background music. While dialogue, action, and expression bear the burden of describing the plot and setting different scenes, it is often left unrecognised how in-built music scores set the mood, tone, and atmosphere for the particular scene, complimenting the expressions and ambience of what is displayed on screen. This role that songs play heavily guides the viewers' feelings towards a certain film, therefore determining their choice to watch and further rate it. This literature review focuses on success results of movies keeping the kinds and numbers of music scores involved in each variable, extracting this data and conclusions from existing research. This work will comprise of analysis using the following:

Effect of hit songs on the popularity of movies: This will be analysed through a close comparison of the success of movies with and without hit songs, also comparing conclusions of how these movies reached their success. This will allow for the conclusion as to whether a song is a major draw for an audience to watch the movie or if a movie's popularity is directly proportional to the popularity of its songs. These analyses will be conducted using the example of a working theory Bollywood cinema follows, to be composing songs before the movie and releasing them earlier, making them act as pull factors for the audience expecting to watch their new favourite song in a movie, having proven success with the same.

However, this success is not necessarily known to follow a pattern, hence this literature review will allow a verification towards this method and towards the consideration given to the role music scores play in Bollywood movies. The characteristics of the same, like being emotionally drawn to the songs or willing to find the background behind the musical scores can be applied to other movie industries as well, such as sections of the Hollywood industry, where this work can be a reference to the success of this technique.

II. METHODOLOGY FOR CATEGORISATION

This analysis will be conducted by categorising movies into "Very Popular", "Popular", "Unpopular", and "Very Unpopular" with two movies assigned to each based on the number of votes by IMDB users and ratings based off those votes. Movies with a higher number of votes and high ratings are ones with great reach and good quality as rated by a majority of users. Those with high number votes but low ratings are ones likely to have reached a greater population but not with quality to be able to be classified as 'good'. Movies with a low number of votes and a high rating are likely to have reached lesser people but those who rated it find it good, and movies with low ratings and votes are simply what we can call 'flop productions'.

The number of songs and the number of YouTube views on them have been found for each of the eight movies, to determine the popularity of the songs in each, understanding if there is a directly proportional relationship between popularity of songs and their respective movies, or simply no relation at all and songs are a generally contributing factor. Also, to add a financial metric of comparison, the worldwide gross collections made by each movie have been noted to establish another scale of success.

III. NARRATIVE ROLE OF MUSIC IN FILMS

This research is brought forward by how multiple other researchers have conducted surveys, social experiments, or analysed film data to draw conclusions on how music is an essential tool in marketing Indian movies, playing an extensive narrative role. A research conducted at the University of California, Berkely analysed the strength of links between film topics and musical attributes, to conclude that musical attributes of soundtracks are predictive of user ratings. The narrative role of music in films was analysed, to draw the links between the evolution from the very first silent films in the 1890's displayed with live performances which were largely improvised to fit the narrative of the film, evolving to reach the Golden Age in 1935, shortly after the rise of synchronised sound, where works during this period set standards for cinematic scoring practices, leading to the rise of rock and roll and further incorporation of popular music in movies, using them to capture the audience's attention as directors began to see potential for songs to contribute to the narrative meaning of films. Upon the understanding of potential seen in songs to enhance narrative meaning, this study explored five different musical attributes of soundtracks to be Average 'acousticness', danceability, 'instrumentalness', mode, and tempo, for different eras of music in films. This research concluded in instrumental soundtracks or ones with acoustic instruments leading for an increase in rating of films and 'danceable' songs led to a decrease in the ratings, all of which were taken from IMDB, to help conclude that indeed, strong relationships do exist between films and their soundtracks making the same predictive of user ratings (Gillick & Bamman 2018).

Movies are designed to evoke a series of emotional responses from the viewers with careful manipulation of visual and auditory aspects, where music by itself carries an inherent sense of mood and is deliberately designed to target specific moods to enhance the director's intent, often playing in the background such that conscious attention remains with visuals while music stimulates the subconscious mind into elucidating certain emotion (Austin et al 2010). Music holds radical importance in stimulating emotion within the cinema and to form a mood, appealing to the audience's selective attention to sounds. Traditionally, film music can be defined as any soundtrack accompanying the narrative of a film often referred to as merely for that of fanfare, but research today refers to it as that of advancement to the narrative, where it has developed to supporting it, to be playing an increasingly important role in expressing emotion, feeding a psychological connection to the spectator with the on-screen actor. There are three kinds of sound that exist in films today being music, speech, and sound effects where music is considered the least essential in deepening the narrative, however having existed alongside films for the longest amongst the three. When setting the mood, film music, especially underscores play the great role of establishing setting in context to the mood and ambience in the cinema, or that of the 'feel' the spectators take. In fact, Mickey-mousing is a widely known and helpful technique in the incorporation of music to enhance narratives as the traditional operating technique of undercutting dialogue and action with music to emphasise dramatic movements, something which took root in this idea, which has found great success in action-heavy films such as those of animated Disney films. A study by Western Kentucky university has even concluded its research with the ideas that film music can communicate narrative meaning to spectators through setting the film's mood, portraying the narrative structure, echoing the character's inner thoughts and feelings due to the emotions elucidated, and clarifying morally ambiguous moments. Another evidence of music playing a vital role in guiding spectators' narrative understanding of each film is how composers ensure the entry at exit of underscores at dramatically appropriate times in scenes to support rather than impose on the narrative, which is done closely by the director who picks out melody, instrumentation, harmony, and rhythm to achieve artistic vision, where the point of achievement is reflected in selective attention to sounds and if successful, the spectator will not consciously recognise underscore music, influencing the subconscious mind, and ultimately audience perception (Schulte 2019).

This research is derived from another research done by Sharaf N. Rehman on the role of music in Indian cinema, where movies made in Mumbai were referred to as "Hindi Cinema" and those made in all of India as "Indian Cinema". The Indian cinema has closely followed with the developments of that of Hollywood, however having two major contrasts, where Indian cinema always consists of a love story and has dance scores, though we do see the trend of dance scores fading into songs used as backing tracks for switching through a series of scenes and moments, to back the narrative. Still, we can say that dance scores have been a staple in Indian cinema and there are only the rarest of cases where Indian films exempt these scores. The tradition of song and dance in Indian cinema came from its roots in Indian mythology and fantasy, where these movies are often expressed as fairy tales with beautiful people and locations,

where they act as a literal escape from reality for the audience, explaining the lengths of exaggeration that Indian films perceive. This research even quotes that "If the stars are the backbone of the industry, music is its heartbeat." India follows what we may call an 'unpredictable' or 'unique' process of film making, where the first step lies in recording a song, where "Songwriters weave the lyrics of a song into stories". These initial few songs are recorded and played on radios and streamed on multiple platforms to gain popularity and become hits before the film is actually recorded, where the next step instead of filming scenes is to picturise the songs, often through dance numbers, to stream these dances online to allow them to gain popularity and based on the same, producers attract monies from distributors to complete films. The research also quotes that "Songs determine the fate of a movie", where it claims that few films succeed without successful songs, and fewer with no songs at all, and that the industry for film songs is parallel with the film industry in India (Rehman 2016).

This research endeavour highlights four essential elements of Hindi film music which are songwriter, music director, playback singer, and choreographer. Most film songs are written to intensify the mood and advance the plot in dramatic scenes, where directors have taken drastic turns in film script just to take maximum advantage of song lyrics, where poets are presented with specific situations to write to, not just supporting but advancing the plot, which conveys how integral they are as part of a film, almost as comparable to Disney musicals to understand the vital role film songs play. Here, hit songs tend to become self-complete units which are emotionally satisfying without the support of images with their lyrics and melody. Indian films are known for often having title songs as well, which often may not match the plot itself, but help in knowing the movie, or simple spreading its name. Just as lyrics are important with accurate images to support, background music essentially sets the mood for scenes and is often used in place of sound effects. In the first ten years of sound films, Indian actors sang their own songs, however as the demand for movies increased, the industry grew with actors that could not sing, bringing in the concept of film songs, referred to as playback singing which revolutionised the nature of Indian films by enhancing commercial and aesthetic of films rather than just being add-ons, where lyric writing evolved to a poetic art form upon the joining of professional singers. Often, stars are repeatedly paired with the same playback singer which creates demand for the pair, where the acting traits with the playback voice builds the actor's star persona. The golden era for Indian film music is referred as the period from 1950 to 1970 by historians, where soundtracks from hit movies during this era are still in demand, and the fact that popular singers from this era have recorded over 5,000 songs each. This research also claims that the popularity of songs from films has a directly positive correlation with the success of a film's initial run at theatres. Hindi movie conventions have been such over the years that audiences have been taught that everyone sings and dances, regardless the plot (Rehman 2016).

Despite the growth of Indian film music as melodious with a strong poetic element, these traits are falling due to the rise of hip-hop, salsa, and rap, where music marketing has undergone major change, where film music on radio and in records was a powerful film marketing tool during the golden era where Indian film songs became part of the Indian cultural heritage and developed their own identity and form. The identity of Indian film music was to offer hope to young lovers, soothe broken hearts, lift spirits with their beauty, wit, and wisdom, and to speak against social injustices as well, representing the strong sense of expression and meaning these film songs hold in Indian cinema, where it is even a fact that film songs have saved movies from becoming box office flops innumerable times. Often, songs have little appeal outside of the film context, catering to the idea that they are tailored to the plot, where using songs as inner monologues in the background has also become a rising trend, however during the golden era, songs found their appeal even outside the context of the movie. Many times, the not-so-popular movies are remembered in their name simply due to extremely popular title songs. In the current era of item songs and Indian rap, dance sequences are extremely popular with a new generation of film audiences, as the success of top ten money makers of the last 10 years can attribute the same to popularity of item songs and item girls, whereas during the best years of Hindi cinema, music and dances turned out to be more inspiring than the films themselves at many instances. Today, apart from the film music industry, the new generation of singers is keener on developing solo careers and touring the world, with income through concerts (Rehman 2016).

IV. METHODOLOGY

To testify the above research, eight movies were listed in four categories of "Very popular", "Popular", "Unpopular", and "Very unpopular", listing two for each. The metrics for the categories are defined by the following values for number of votes and rating on IMDB (2024):
Very Popular: over 30,000 votes and a rating of 8.0 or more
Popular: between 20,000 and 30,000 votes and a rating of 6.0 to 7.9
Unpopular: between 10,000 and 20,000 votes and a rating of 4.0 to 5.9
Very Unpopular: below 10,000 votes and a rating of below 4.0

These movies have been analysed in terms of the number of songs, and the number of views each song has, which is sourced from YouTube as a common and reliable platform for songs over time, acting as a platform which has been widely referred to before the rise of music streaming platforms like Spotify, which would only be reliable for later songs, whereas YouTube can document views from longer than most such platforms. This helps determine which songs were hit in each movie if at all, and how many of them were, and if these number of hits are proportional to the popularity of the movie based on the category it falls in (2024).

Further, to establish another metric of comparison, the Box Office collection for each movie was found using Box Office India in terms of the Worldwide Gross collections (2024).

Data

The collected data for each category is as below:

Very popular	Rating	Votes	Songs	YouTube views	Box Office Collection (Worldwide)
Dangal	8.3	2,08,510	Haanikaarak Bapu	284M	Rs. 7,02,47,50,000
			Dhaakad	179M	
			Gilehriyaan	23M	
			Dangal	100M	
			Naina	28M	
			Dhaakad- Aamir Khan Version	37M	
			Idiot Banna	12M	
			Naina- Neha Kakkar Version	100M	
3 Idiots	8.4	4,27,711	All Izz Well	29M	Rs. 3,49,10,35,000
			Zoobi Doobi	24M	
			Behti Hawa Sa Tha Who	71M	
			Give Me Some Sunshine	51M	
			Jaane Nahin Denge	19M	
			Zoobi Doobi (remix)	24M	
			Aal Izz Well (remix)	109K	

Popular	Rating	Votes	Songs	YouTube views	Box Office Collection (Worldwide)
Pad Man	7.9	28,610	Aaj Se Teri	44M	Rs. 1,28,09,32,500
			The Pad Man Song	6.4M	
			Hu Ba Hu	4M	
			Saale Sapne	3.5M	
			Sayaani	644K	
Secret Superstar	7.8	29,191	Main Kaun Hoon	27M	Rs. 1,22,53,50,000
			Meri Pyaari Ammi	28M	
			Sapne Re	13M	
			I'll Miss You	13M	
			Nachdi Phira	35M	
			Sexy Baliye	47M	
			Gudgudi	4.7M	
			O Re Manwa	270K	

Unpopular	Rating	Votes	Songs	YouTube views	Box Office Collection (Worldwide)
Student of the Year	5.2	19,738	Ratta Maar	21M	Rs. 96,66,90,000
			Radha	583M	
			Ishq Wala Love	96M	
			The Disco Song	236M	
			Kukkad	154M	
			Vele	89M	
			Mashup of the Year (DJ Kiran Kamath Remix)	13M	
Ready	4.9	19,448	Get Reeady	29K	Rs. 1,83,39,87,500
			Ayyo Ayyo	251K	
			Tu Tu Tu	2.3M	
			Ninne Pelladu	58K	
			Naa Pedavulu	506K	
			Om Namasthey	2.9M	

Very unpopular	Rating	Votes	Songs	YouTube views	Box Office Collection (Worldwide)
Himmatwala	1.7	9,193	Dhoka Dhoka	10M	Rs. 65,79,93,750
			Bum Pe Laat	1.9M	
			Thanks God Its Friday	2.2M	
			Naino Mein Sapna	18M	
			Taki Taki	30M	
Shaandaar	3.6	6,305	Shaam Shaandaar	28M	Rs. 75,70,00,000
			Gulaabo	83M	
			Nazdeekiyaan	4.8M	
			Senti Wali Mental	17M	
			Raitaa Phailgaya	3.6M	
			Gulaabo Remix	319K	

"Home - Box Office India." *Boxofficeindia.com*, 2019, boxofficeindia.com/.
YouTube. "YouTube." *YouTube*, 2005, www.youtube.com/.
IMDb. "IMDb - Movies, TV and Celebrities." *IMDb*, 1990, www.imdb.com/.

V. ANALYSIS

These results present a randomised distribution of the number of views of songs across the different sets of movies, where most lie in millions, but the numbers vary from ten millions to hundred millions following no pattern or proportion to the popularity metric for the movies, which leads us to conclude that songs are most likely not predictive of the success of movies, based on this small set of data. However, the metric for Box Office collections establishes a directly proportional relationship with the popularity metric of the movies, with one outlier being "Ready" from the unpopular category, having made a collection of over 183 crores, higher than both movies in the popular category. However, since all other movies follow a pattern of decreasing collections as number of votes on IMDB and ratings decrease, we can consider "Ready" to be an outlier. The question that now arises is that "even if the collections are directly proportional to the success of a movie based on its popularity metrics, can this be attributed to the songs in the movie?" According to this dataset, it cannot.

Since the number of views for the songs across different movies is randomised and does not follow a trend per category, any success in terms of popularity or Box Office collection cannot be justified by the success or popularity of the music scores, which for example lie in high values in hundred millions of views for "Student Of The Year" which according to the IMDB popularity metric lies in the unpopular category, whereas "3 Idiots" which lies in the very popular category has songs with lower values of ten millions of YouTube views.

VI. CONCLUSION

The conclusion to this research based on the dataset lies in the idea that yes, music can be influential in movies by causing shifts in mood and conveying important messages to the audience through a poetic sense while stimulating their subconscious mind to respond to any background music scores with an emotional response, to be able to interpret the movie and its plot with an emotional angle which is intricately manipulated using background scores which we may not even notice playing, whereas songs are evident parts of a movie which set aside and highlight the musical and melodious elements from rest of the scenes, especially when there are dance numbers.

This leads to the conclusion that music scores are not limited to just film songs and extend to background scores as well, which justify the above studies evidencing the effect of melodies on the subconscious mind and interpretation, along with enhancement of the plot, which is not quantified in the above dataset which only accounts for distinguished songs in each movie (Schulte 2019). This hence results in the interpretation that music does play a major role, just not through the sole use of film songs. Here, while accounting for Indian cinema as well, upbeat songs with dance numbers may have more views but belong to comparatively unpopular movies due to a possible lack of subconscious connect through background scores, as an example. Hence, if the views that songs get do not match the popularity of the movie, while that popularity metric or the Box Office collections cannot be attributed to the songs themselves, the absence of background music scores in the dataset still leaves a possibility to interpret that the other, more subtle side of music scores is what affects these metrics which is most likely to be true based on the above published researches with data evidence, also the idea of how these scores are not brought to main focus, but can stimulate the mind from the background, adding a natural incline to the plot over that of a conscious one, which film songs cause.

To conclude, this research can be carried forward with the next possibility of testing the success of background scores on the metric of impact on viewers with the same or a similar dataset to compare the both, and understand what area of music the success of movies must be attributed to, knowing that it does definitely play a role for the scientific connect melody establishes with the human mind.

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