




# FOLLOWING THE HERD: A STUDY ON SALIENT TRENDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY HINDI FILM INDUSTRY IN INDIA

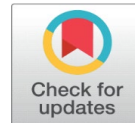


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## ABSTRACT

From the first feature film ever produced in Hindi cinema to this date, the industry has witnessed a massive evolution. With changes ushering in almost every few years, it has seen its share of highs and lows in its quality and filmmaking standards. Speaking of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while changes surely and gradually appeared in several aspects of the Hindi film industry, after 2010, many unprecedented conversions took place that shifted tectonic plates in Hindi cinema. However, there was one notion that the industry held on to, i.e. *Its tendency to follow trends blindly*. As soon as a method or a paradigm gains popularity, a noticeable majority quickly pick the "success formula" and start reproducing products in the exact similar fashion on and on until one day the trend loses its position amongst people, which is then taken over by yet another trend. This paper pursues a mixed methodology of exploratory study method with the assistance of library and secondary data, qualitative interviews with stake holders, cinegoers who extensively analyses the crucial trends followed by the Hindi film industry in the last decade, i.e., 2010-2020. The findings in the research paper provide deep insights into various trending formulas in Hindi cinema.

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**Keywords:** Hindi Film Industry, Trends, Success Formula, Film Production

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. CINEMATIC MILESTONES IN THE 2000S

With the advent of the new century, the Hindi film industry has witnessed notable growth in box-office collections. From embracing new technologies, digital cinema, to 24x7 available OTT (Over the top) platforms, Bollywood has undoubtedly ascended to become one of the most lucrative industries for the Indian economy [Pillania \(n.d.\)](#)

Filmed entertainment grew 9.5%

	2018	2019	2020E	2022E
Domestic theatricals	102.1	115.2	126.7	146.4
Overseas theatricals	30.0	27.0	25.0	30.0
Broadcast rights	21.2	22.1	23.2	25.5
Digital / OTT rights	13.5	19.0	23.8	32.8
In-cinema advertising	7.5	7.7	8.0	8.9
Home video	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>174.5</b>	<b>191.0</b>	<b>206.7</b>	<b>243.6</b>

INR billion (gross of taxes) | EY analysis

Figure 1 Source Ficci - EY -2020



Another aspect came to the notice of both film experts as well as cine-goers. With the evolution in the generation, the buying behaviour of the audience has also undergone several modifications. The hypodermic needle theory given by Harold Laswell did not appear to stand out as before [Nwabueze and Okonkwo \(2018\)](#) The cine-goers had matured as an audience. Their appetite for better films was also evident with each passing year. The audiences are no more passive [Jones \(n.d.\)](#) They now engage, interpret, and instantly respond to the movies over social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or their respective blogs [Salvador et al. \(2019\)](#).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

We observed that a film's shelf life has reduced to mere three days of its release and is heavily determined by the reviews on the print, electronic and new media platforms. A director has to come to terms relentlessly and regularly with this and accept the state-of-the-art filmmaking and audience behaviour trends to establish a dynamic approach towards the overall filmmaking process. [Killeen \(2020\)](#)

Gone are the days when cinema was no less than magic or miracle to the cine-goers. Today the audience is literate in cinema and understands the difference between a good cinema and an average cinema. The level of competition between filmmakers over a good script has expanded drastically. [Desai Associates \(2013\)](#) This scenario is a case in point for a concept known as "perfect competition". The slightest of inadequacy in the film attributes can amount to a significant difference in the box-office collection.

The origin of the word "trend" can be dated back to the 1590s, from Middle English "trended", which means "to run or bend in a certain direction". [Trend \(2021\)](#) To understand the latest drifts in Hindi Cinema and the trends observed during the last decade compared to the earlier filmmaking trends, one must study the factors affecting paradigm shifts in the multiple film attributes. Thus, this research article focuses on major pivotal transformations and the last ten years' reigning trends.

As far as the previous studies are concerned, an in-depth literature review helped us learn the importance of reading cinema trends. Understanding these trends can be a game-changer in the dynamics of filmmaking.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Indian film industry, since its inception, is infamous for "following trends". It has been observed repeatedly in several studies done by researchers and cinema critics that the filmmakers mostly prefer to recreate and reformulate what is "hit" and what works rather than going for experimentation or offering something new to the audiences. The occurrence can be described in this manner – take, for example, a director makes a film on a new concept which receives massive audience reception at the box office. Other filmmakers pick up the formula and keep presenting it till the audience does not stop indulging it.

This paper tries to track these trends in the last decade, i.e., 2010-2020, apart from finding out whether blindly following the different trends yield any success at the box office for several players in the Hindi film industry.

### 3.2. RESEARCH QUESTION

The vital question of the study was to ascertain the trends of the Hindi film industry in the last decade, i.e., 2010-2020 and determine which trends generated success to the films and the artists following them.

### 3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper uses mixed method approach including interviews from film critiques, Hindi film industry artist, cinegoers, cinephile and content analysis of film magazines, journals, media reports. Box office revenue reports were analysed to ascertain commercial success of films.

This article aims to understand the trends established by the recent films released and the audience's perspectives. The theoretical implications obtained would help the new directors, producers, and cinephiles discern the determining factors that created new filmmaking standards in the last decade.

## 4. ANALYZING THE MAJOR DRIFTS IN THE TRENDS

### 4.1. CONTENT IS THE KING

"Content is the King" is a catchphrase, taken from an essay penned by Microsoft founder Bill Gates in 1996 concerning a social media website's success [Gates and Teloni \(n.d.\)](#). Several much-awaited big-budget movies bit the dust or even kicked the bucket in the last ten years when it came to quality scripts. Films like Bombay Velvet (2015), Thugs of Hindostan (2018), Zero (2018), Sadak 2 (2020) craved for audience appreciation, whereas movies like Andhadhun (2017), Stree (2017), Badhai Ho (2017) and Bala (2018), despite the presence of lesser-known artists, not only made their mark at the box office but were also showered with praises from audience and critics alike [Fetscherin \(2010\)](#). This phenomenon conveyed a powerful message, i.e., an impressive budget cannot alone save the day as earlier if the film lacks the most vital department, i.e., its storyline. There was an unmissable shift in the minds, behaviour, and reception at the audience's end. The audience now wished to be fed better and more meaningful content that made sense and was relatable and palatable. It marked the end of the actor's dominion when people flocked the theatres merely to see their favourite actors. Instead, the times heralded the beginning of the rise of content. [Killeen \(2020\)](#)

### 4.2. THE ERA OF NICHE FILMMAKING

*The cinema for everyone is indeed a cinema for no one, while niches will get you riches.* A niche cinema is a movie intended for a smaller group of audience from a larger population. Usually, filmmakers tend to completely ignore niche filmmaking strategy and attempt to make a cinema aiming to win the majority's appeal. 2010-2020 taught us that filmmaker should make movies for a dedicated target audience rather than opting for the "one size fits all" formula [Ray \(2014\)](#). From the beginning of the decade, films made for the general audience like Desi Boys (2011), Ladies Vs Ricky Behl (2011), Players (2016), Joker (2012), Gori Tere Pyar Mein (2013), Befikre (2018) and Jab Harry Met Sejal (2019) failed to make a substantial impact

over the box-office as these movies were catering to the age-old formula of masala Hindi film. Niche cinema, on the other hand, like *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), *Andhadhun* (2017), *Tumhaad* (2018), *English Vinglish* (2012), *Udaan* (2010), *Lunchbox* (2013), *NH-10* (2015) and *Masaan* (2015) were examples that catered to classes rather than the masses. These movies are more of an acquired taste. People get attracted to them once they start consuming them. These films are often critic-friendly and commercialized due to limited audience appeal and are usually not supported by big production houses. Compared to mainstream films, their motto is to make low-budget good content cinema, catering to a smaller demographic audience. Little to no competition under this segment with high commercial risk is characteristic of niche cinema. This market is need-based.

### 4.3. THE COPY-PASTE CONUNDRUM

The word conundrum means a situation or an anagram that creates a dilemma of choices between various options available with seemingly equivalent approaches to all the alternatives. The irony is, while on one hand, there is a section that strives to provide quality cinema with fresh and original content, on the other hand, another faction in the industry itself prefers resorting to "remaking" or "getting inspired" from the cinema of other countries or other regions in our country itself [Kumar \(2011\)](#). Since the dawn of filmmaking in the Hindi film industry, we have always faced this conundrum of choices between an original script or "remaking/getting inspired" from previously made movies in other languages or regions. In the last decade, this conundrum has increased multi-fold, where the films or even songs are either remakes/ inspired or sometimes even stolen without due credit to the original versions. The Hindi film industry searching for a good script turns towards the South Indian film industry or Hollywood instead of drafting an entirely new story from scratch. They merely buy the copyright of a successful film made in some other language and then reshoot it after applying Bollywood sensibilities. Resorting this possibility reduces the risk factor and breaks the string of stereotype stories [Umamaheswaran \(2020\)](#). On several occasions, certain movies receive a galore of praises and voluminous footfall for their content, performances, techniques, songs and even background scores. What follows is unfortunate. The creators then fall back on the same film and plagiarise it in Hindi and win over the market of the Hindi speaking or Hindi film watching states. One of the prominent adaptors of this trend is Priyadarshan, and the pattern seems to attract several Indian filmmakers even today.

When creators remake their films, they retain the original storyline but use other artists to play the roles. *Kabir Singh* (2019), starring Shahid Kapoor and Kiara Advani, was almost an exact rework of creator Sandeep Reddy Vanga's original film *Arjun Reddy*. (The per cent of plagiarism may vary from copying frame-by-frame to storyline, character, make-up, or as low as using a fair dealing exception of copyright. Few movies would result in copyright infringement suits due to their similarities without any credit to the original work. *Raabta* (2017), having too many similarities to S. S. Rajamouli's *Magadheera* (2009), is a case in point. Producers also increasingly opt for official remakes. In the least, it ensures that the rights and credits of the artists are protected [Bakshi and Kiran \(2014\)](#).

#### 4.4. HORROR COMEDY: A NEW GENRE IN TOWN

Film genres are categories based on similarities in narrative details, artistic approach, or emotional/psychological response. In the Indian film scenario, these film genres often decide the target audience and, eventually, the film's future box-office report. Often few directors choose their genre and get stereotyped along with it. It helps them to carve out a unique identity for themselves and to focus on a targeted audience. The Indian film industry's significant genres are action, comedy, crime, drama, historical, horror, musical, war, and cult. However, the changing times brought about new genres and mixtures of existing genres, which were also appreciated by the Indian audience. One such genre is horror-comedy: a combination of humour alongside elements of horror [Dhusiya \(2013\)](#).

The history of horror-comedy began roughly from 1948 cinema, Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein [Mayberry \(2017\)](#). The movie was a combination of the iconic monster and the highly beloved comedy duo Abbott and Costello. This trend was further followed by other films like A Bucket of Blood (1959), The Car that Ate Paris (1974), Army of Darkness (1974), American Psycho (2000) and Scary Movie Series. This movement was initially adapted in the Indian scenario by the South Indian Films, which gradually found its way into Bollywood. A glimpse of horror-comedy was seen in the movie Bhoot Bangla (1965), starring Mehmood and Tanuja. In the last decade, this uncommon genre of horror-comedy grew in leaps and bounds. Films like Manichitrathazhu (1993), 1993 Marathi film Zapatlela/Khilona Bana Khalnayak, Geetanjali (2004), Kanchana (2011), Prem Katha Chitram (2013), Aranmanai (2014), Raju Gadhi Gadi (2015), Ekkadik (2016), Dhiluku Dhuddu (2016), Anando Brahma (Telugu, 2017) inspired Hindi film industry to create works like Bhool Bhulaiyaa (2007), Bhoothnath (2008), Go Goa Gone (2013), Stree (2017) and Lakshmi (2020). The cocktail of dreadful horror alongside delightful comedy presented a new trend to the Hindi film industry [Christopher \(2011\)](#).

#### 4.5. OTT - CINEMA IN POCKET

Those days are long gone when TV was the only resort to enjoy matches, daily soaps, movies, or our favourite shows. Technological advancements and progress in the new media sector have been such that everything is just a touch away today. The absence of budget constraints and box-office performance pressure, presence of cinematic liberty, creative freedom and a platform duly accepting of quality content added fuel to the surge of digital content production [Ryan and Hearn \(2010\)](#).

Furthermore, with the recent closing down of cinema halls due to the Covid pandemic, the OTT platforms are stocking up with a fresh quota of films like Gulabo Sitabo, Shakuntala Devi, Gunjan Saxena, Sadak 2, Laxmi Bomb, Durgamati, et cetera [Killeen \(2020\)](#). Directors, producers, and distributors join hands with digital content platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney + Hotstar, Zee and the like to reach their audience [Patel \(2020\)](#). A new kind of audio-visual popularly known as the "web series" is also gaining momentum. Actors like Saif Ali Khan, Vicky Kaushal and Pankaj Tripathi were "rediscovered" by Bollywood after they put forward stellar performances in their respective web shows/movies like Sacred Games Mirzapur, Lust Stories, and Love per Square Foot. The OTT platform also gave us "breakout stars" who were otherwise finding it hard to find work in the Hindi film industry. Undoubtedly, this trend has somehow impacted filmmaking in the

industry, as the success and popularity of the web content create greater demand and expectations amongst the viewers/cine-goers with respect to better content from Bollywood. (However, exceptions remain. Courtesy: David Dhavan movies et cetera.)

Like everything in this world, OTT platforms are not free from flaws. Platforms such as AltBalaji and their creators mistake creative freedom for the licencing to showcase nudity and explicit, adult content, which has attracted widespread criticism. In the name of original, engaging content, creators focus on showcasing and glorifying extreme violence, darkness, sinister plotting, and foul language. Examples of these can be the Mirzapur franchise, Sacred Games, Pataal Lok, et cetera [Content et al. \(2019\)](#).

#### **4.6. MIX, REMIX AND REFURBISHED MUSIC**

While we are certainly at a golden period as far as technological advancements are concerned, unfortunately, the same cannot be said about our music industry. On the one hand, we are taking giant strides in the technical sector, developing, and adopting more contemporary techniques and pieces of equipment during shoots, recording music, and so on, such that the packaging looks appealing and attractive; the same efforts are nowhere to be seen as far as original music and lyrics are concerned.

India has always been a slave to trends, and the roots of this said "slavery" goes back a long way. As soon as a wild, new experiment starts to find popularity among the masses, one by one, almost everyone decides to use the same technique until that is all that can be seen and heard. For example, if we talk about the post-independence period, the '60s was an era that witnessed several Hindi film songs created by beautifully combining love ballads, sad tunes, qawwalis, ghazals, patriotic anthems with a smooth blend of western instruments. String, percussion was prominent, as were saxophones and trumpets. Guitars, mouthorgans, accordion, and the grand piano were united with dholak, tabla and ghungroo for percussion, further complemented with the harmonium. This trend of mixing instruments was followed by almost all the music directors of that era. [Arnold \(1991\)](#)

When the 1980 film *Kurbani* gave the song "Aap Jaisa Koi" to Indian listeners, little did it know that it lay the foundation for a long-lasting disco era of Bollywood. On the one hand, where the US witnessed a sudden increase in disco music popularity during the mid-'70s, with Bee Gees and John Travolta bearing the flag for disco dancing, Bollywood did what it does best – picking up the trend. Blinking lights, colourful dance floors, shiny attire, humungous bell-bottoms, and glittery hairbands knitted with synth-heavy voices. Mithun Chakravarty's "Disco Dancer", Reena Roy's "Disco Station", Parveen Babi's "Pyaar Karne Waale", Amitabh Bachchan's lightning performance in "Saara Zamaana" along with Rishi Kapoor's revolving stage in "Om Shanti Om" are prominent disco memories which worked as a trend for Bollywood throughout the decade. Moreover, how can we forget the flag bearer of Indian disco music Bappi Lahiri, who lent his music for Bollywood's iconic disco era?

In the recent decade, the trend has been set up for mix, remix, and refurbished songs. Punjabi lyrics blended with hip-hop and English rap give the taste of a mixed cocktail, whereas using old songs with a more recent version resurrected the 90s

mood and the songs that were limited to specific audience strata. [Ethnomusicology \(2009\)](#)

**Table 1 Source: Author**

Mixed Songs	Remixed Songs	Refurbished Songs
<i>Mai Tenu Samjhawaan Ki</i>	<i>Tamma Tammi</i>	<i>Engine ki Seeti</i>
<i>Mauja Hi Mauja</i>	<i>Ankh Maare</i>	<i>Mere Rashke Qamar</i>
<i>Such Na Sake</i>	<i>Dus Bahane</i>	<i>Chadariya Jeeni</i>
<i>Saadi Gali</i>	<i>Apni to Jaise Taise</i>	<i>Jugni</i>
<i>Angrezi Beat</i>	<i>Hawa Hawai</i>	<i>Kya Se Kya Ho Gaye</i>
<i>Dil Diyaan Gallan</i>	<i>Aaj Phir Tum Pe</i>	<i>Mai Dekhu Teri Photo</i>
<i>Athe Aa</i>	<i>Har Kisi Ko Nahi Milta</i>	<i>Zingaat</i>

Hence, the occurrence had always existed in the industry. It has only become too visible now that it has proliferated so vigorously.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Hindi film industry, fondly referred to as Bollywood, is the highest producer of films worldwide. Throughout a journey spanning practically 108 years, the industry has witnessed gradual changes in various filmmaking aspects. Moreover, the past few decades have ushered in significant advancements that have revolutionized even our film viewing perspectives. While some changes may be termed axiomatic, there are still plenty of things that are not so apparent at the surface level. It is imperative here to emphasize that this article does not aim to judge or criticize any of these trends in particular. The article chiefly intended to observe and report the said observations as clearly and as coherently as possible.

Hindi cinema has always been a witness to one trend or the other. Often, there were multiple trends at play simultaneously, as discussed in the section above. While certain times these trends were loved by both the critics and the cine-goers, there were also instances when the trends earned the love of one and dislike of another. The principal cause for these trends to materialize to their full bloom each time is the producers' box-office-oriented mindset. Film producers have always preferred the safest way of earning money. While this thought process brought down Hindi cinema every time because respect for good content, originality, and high filmmaking standards were pushed aside, it certainly earned them popularity and the earnings they had aimed for. It implies that people, in general, had no inhibitions towards the said trends, and despite the projected criticism for missing out on quality, in reality, they heartily indulged in whatever was being served to them.

A crucial point to remember about trends, however, is that they are not permanent. They have a concise life. It can be attributed to its nature of constant repetition up to the point of exhaustion and monotony. Eventually, the creator has nothing more to provide, and the receiver of the content also wearies of the reiteration. As such, it is safe to conclude that trends like other tangible and intangible goods have a life cycle. It consists of its advent, initial taste of success, the early bout of repetition, more success, a maturity stage where it appears as if the trend is here to stay, the period of fade-out, desperate attempts by beneficiaries of

the trend for the eleventh hour save, and its ultimate decline. Like its other tangible and intangible counterparts, trends in the Hindi film industry can find themselves happily resurrected after a brief or, in some cases, a long gap of absolute oblivion.

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