A comparative study of Indian viewers' approach to horror films of India and Hollywood

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Abstract: *We usually define "fear" as a negative emotion that is unpleasant. Generally, we desperately want to avoid this emotion because it causes distress and terror. However, the aesthetics and psychology behind horror films describe "fear" as a pleasurable experience. "Fear" is an essential element in the horror genre. Horror films have always been one of the most interesting and attractive film genres among Indian viewers. Affection for horror films by Indian film lovers has defeated the barrier of language. Some of the Indian horror films are categorized as B-grade films because of their sexual content, low-grade acting quality, and poor technical support (Ramsay movies). Instead of the flood of B-grade horror films, the Indian horror film market has experienced good production with reasonable budgets at regular intervals. Hollywood films have successfully established their presence in most parts of the world over the years, though they have yet to triumph over Indian dramas, romances, action, and rom-com genre films. Here, viewers prefer to watch Indian romantic family dramas and comedies over Hollywood films. But this statement is not applicable to Indian horror genre films. Indian film viewers love to watch and discuss Hollywood horror films. The paper is intended to understand the reasons for these inclined views.*

Key words: *Indian horror films, Horror film affinity, Horror components, Indian horror film audience. Hollywood horror films.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The components of horror films are pretty evident, and the affinity towards horror films is dependent on those components. There are quite a few physical and psychological reasons which contain the trigger elements of excitement in the case of horror films. All the physical elements have psychological connections as well. The word horror comes from the Greek mythological character Phrike, a spirit of horror. (Cairns, 2015).

In the Indian mainstream film market, the popular genres are drama, romance, action, and biopics, which leave a deep impact on the Indian audience. Hollywood films have failed to create a market in India. In other words, Hollywood mainstream films have failed to grab the attention of a larger Indian audience. American romantic, biopic, and family drama genre films have remained restricted to a handful of Indian audiences, but the scenario is different when it comes to horror films. Horror films have been preferred by all, irrespective of class, position in society, or age group of the audience. There are three main factors and eight major theories related to this affinity for horror films. "Why do we like horror films?" is a common question for most of the theories of the horror genre. There are three factors or components that are unique. The theories are universally applicable to the audience, but the unique factors are film-specific. Factors applied properly will attract an audience, which clearly indicates that the credibility of a particular film depends upon the film-specific unique factors. With the help of these theories, we can understand why people choose to watch horror films and love to spend time and money. In this paper, we are going to do a comparative analysis of the preference for Hollywood horror films by Indian audiences. Prior to writing the paper, we had done one pilot study where we asked a couple of questions to our respondents. We mentioned three genres—horror, romantic, and drama—and asked them to arrange the genres according to their choice of studio, i.e., Hollywood or Indian.. 75% of people said that they like Hollywood horror films over Indian horror films and 80% of people said that they like Indian romantic films more than Hollywood production. 70% liked Indian drama films.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

"Moving images inform us that 'something' is about to happen even before the why and wherefore can be specified. Each shot is a surprise effect, a pure emotional shock" (Mitry, 1997).

Some different schoolings are also considered horror as two types, horror which is genuine and is designed to make us afraid because it is important for our survival. (fear arising from attack and being motivated to fight or flee) and art-horror, which describes the imagined horror found in horror films. (Carroll, 1987).

Historically, horror has formed a significant part of "Western" literary tradition since the Babylonian Gilgamesh and the English Beowulf. The Gothic tradition, a period that covers 1,760–1,820 features fiction in which the omphalos are their archaic themes, haunted castles, stylized period settings, a supernatural element in the storytelling, suspense, and chaos (Punter, 1996) (Freud, 1919) describes horror as a "manifestation of the uncanny reoccurring thoughts that are lying in our consciousness by repressed by our ego, but is not familiar to us." But in essays from "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," Jung (1968) argues that horror films are popular because the movies "tap into primordial archetypes buried deep in our collective subconscious – images like shadow and mother play important roles in the horror genre". The audience is going through hypnosis in its "captivation" of our consciousness, compared to our state when we are. We are so absorbed into the plot and the quick images passing by, that even if we already know what is going to happen, the audience acts and reacts with the actor. Sound is one of the important parts of horror films, some authors argued that horror is a primarily sound-based medium (Kawin.B, 2012)

Watching a horror film makes us feel safer and reassured more than a bloody documentary because we know that these things are unreal. Documentaries are real and truth is scarier than fiction. Therefore, watching a documentary or even a horror film based on a real story gives us constant reminder that it happened to someone and can happen to us too. In Indian post-independent horror films (1950s and 60s) were different in nature. They were authentic and original, (Sharma, 2022) and that is what the researcher is going to discuss in the paper.

Horror film director James Wan shares explains some elements in article of a good horror film such as, "horror doesn't have to be expensive, turn classic horror in its head, develop great set pieces, undermine your audience and appeal to primal human fears". (Winfrey, 2016)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
Ethics statement:

The participants were comprised of individuals who were invited to complete the survey. Participants were informed about the study objectives and of the confidentiality and anonymity of the responses prior to the commencement of the study. Digital consent was obtained from each of the participants. The content of the questionnaire had no sensitive information. The names of the participants were not collected; the responses were anonymized to prevent bias. No ethical concerns aside from preserving the participants' anonymity were involved—following the standards of socioeconomic studies.

Sample selection and data collection:

The participants of the present study are people who have watched horror films. Before the final questionnaire was distributed, a pre-tested questionnaire was distributed, and changes were made based on the results of the first set of surveys. A convenient sampling was done for the selection of participants.

A total of one hundred and twenty responses were taken by the researcher from college students and faculty members of Kolkata and adjacent area colleges. Among them, sixty were college and university students and sixty were working professionals. Data has been collected by a non-probability sampling method (convenient sampling).

This was a phenomenological study using a qualitative method. A phenomenological study identifies the description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). An interview has been taken by the researcher with open and closed-ended questions. Thematic analysis has been done with the open-ended answers and data triangulation has been done with the close-ended answers.

The research questions for this work are as follows:

RQ1. How do Indian audiences distinguish between Hollywood and Indian horror films?

RQ2. Why Indian horror films are not as popular among Indian audiences as Indian romantic or drama genre films?

We took the following steps to investigate the research questions.-Researcher

1.   We prepared some open-ended and close ended questions regarding horror films to understand the mind-set of the audience.

2.   Conjuring and "Tumbbad" have been taken to validate the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:
In this paper, we have collected both qualitative and quantitative data. All the data has been presented graphically or in tabular form. Firstly, we have arranged an interview with open-ended questions. Then, for validation, we take rating on a Likert scale and the same questions are validated by subject experts. In this way, data triangulation has been done.

Rate Indian horror cinema:
In the first segment of data collection, researchers asked interviewees about their thoughts regarding Indian horror films and also asked them to rate Indian films on a given scale.

When respondents were asked to rate Indian horror films, only 10 to 15 percent said that they were good, and 5 to 10 percent said that they were very good, but the majority of the respondents said that they were poor. Among the respondents, the working professionals have shown a bit more affinity towards Indian films.
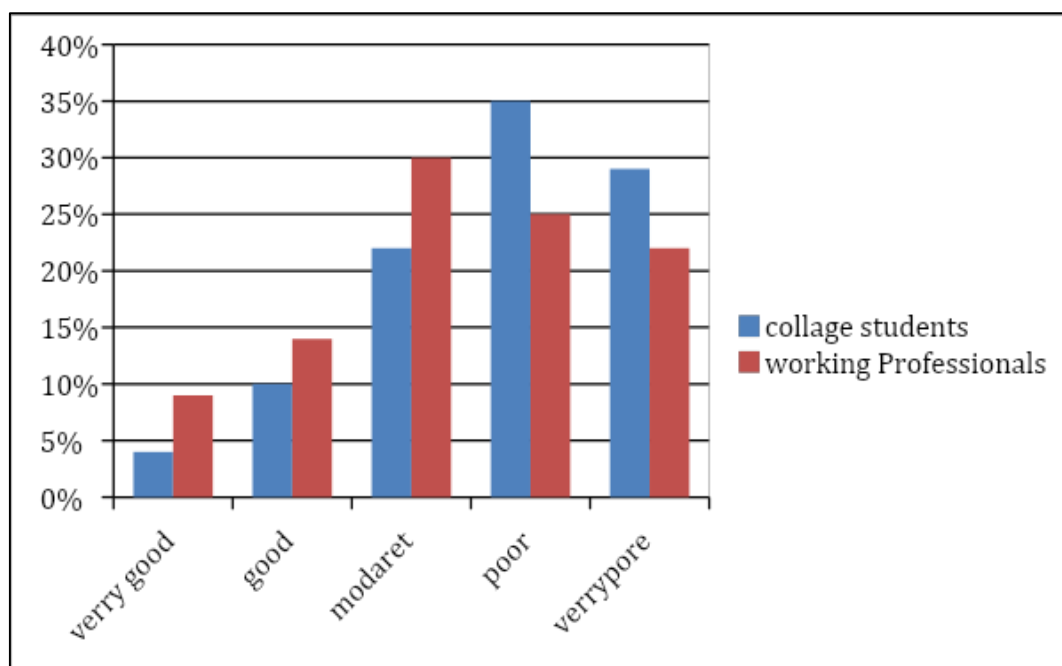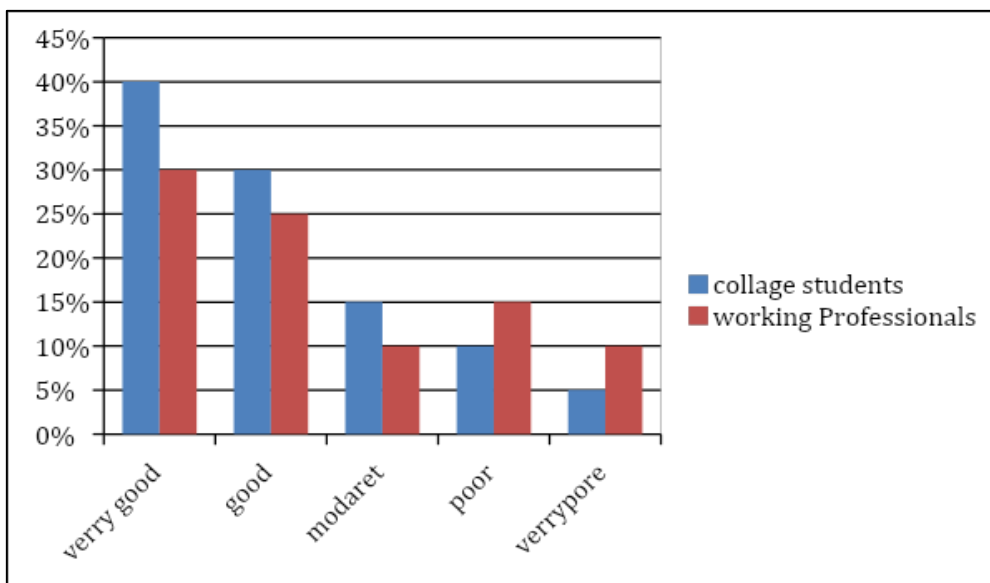

Figure 1 Ratting of Indian Horror Films.

Rate American cinema:

When asked to rate American horror films, 40 to 30 percent of respondents said they are good. It was rated very good by 30 to 25% of those polled. And only a small percentage of those polled said they are poor.

Figure 1.1 Ratting of American Horror Films.

When the researcher thematically analyzed the interviews after transcription, the result showed that most of the respondents were fond of English horror films rather than Indian horror films. In this very small number of respondents, they talked about the reason behind that.

Why do you like or dislike horror films?

In this segment, the first researcher arranges an open-ended question-based interview, why do you like or dislike horror films? After that, the researcher validated that with a 5-point likert scale, survey where he asked respondents to rate jump scare, gore, story, sound and sexuality on the basis of their liking and disliking of horror films.

Thematic analysis has been given below, which has been done after the transcription of the interviews.

Code	Theme
Don't like jump scares it scares. Don't like Because it creates tension fear. don't like horror stories, Don't like the atmosphere of the move hall, Don't like gloom	Don't like horror films because jump scare. Don't like horror films because don't want the scary feeling.
Like because of the suspense and horror. Exposure to terrifying acts It's only entertainment, I expect more Sometimes it feels great of being scared. Sexual scenes entertained in Indian films.	Like horror films because jump scare. Like horror films because of story narrative.

Table 1 Code and Theme of horror film's affinity and animosity by Indian viewrs

The 5-point likert scale results reveal the same kind of results, the greatest number of respondents said that they like horror films because of the following elements chronologically:

1. story
2. Jump scare
3. Gore
4. sound
5. sexuality

They disliked horror films because of the following elements -

1.   jump scares
2.   story
3.   gore
4.   Sound.

The films have seen by respondents in last 10 years.

Frequently repeated film names have been mentioned

English	Evil dead, Annabelle, The Conjuring 1&2, Shining, The Nun
Indian	Tumbbad, Darna manahai, Bastusastra, 1920, Laxmi, Darna Jaruri hain

Table 1.1 Frequently repeated film names

Favorite horror films:

Frequently repeated film names have been mentioned

English	Evil dead, Annabelle, The Conjuring1 &2, Shining, The Nun, Exorcist
Indian	Tumbbad, 1920, Puranamandir

Table 1.2 Frequently repeated film names

When we asked people about their favourite horror films, most of the people selected Hollywood films, and the number of Hollywood films was greater than Indian films. Except for Purana Mandir, they never use a name from a Ramsay film.

After that, we did another survey among the same group with two simple questions.

1.   What are the positive things that encourage you to watch Hollywood horror films?

2.   What are the negative things that you don't like in Indian horror films?

After thematic analysis of these two answers, we have generated the chart below.

| Type of horror films	Code	Theme
Hollywood (English)	Good production, big budget, good story telling, jump scare. Sound.	Good production altogether.
Indian (Hindi)	Poor production, Unnecessary sexual scenes. Bad acting,	Poor production altogether.

Table 1.3 Code and Theme of the reasons why people like and dislike Hollywood and Indian Horror films .

From that analysis, we can say that the Indian audience discriminates between Indian and Hollywood horror films on the basis of production design and production quality (location, characters, story narrative).

We took two films for survey analysis after receiving that result. The first one is a Hollywood production – Conjuring 1, and the second one is Tumbbad, an Indian film. The analysis of the results has been represented graphically.

Rate Conjuring 1 and Tumbbad if you have seen both the films
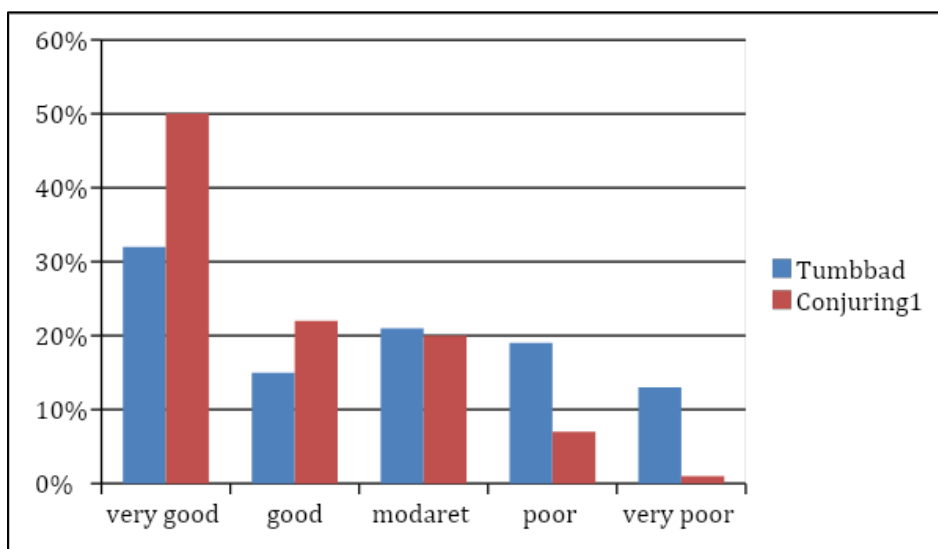
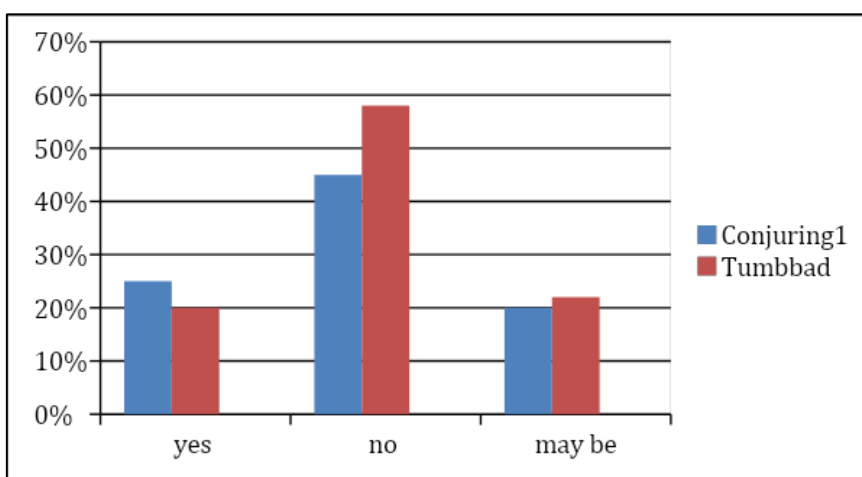**Figure 1.2 Ratting of Conjuring 1 and Tumbbad by respondents.**

Most of the people rate conjuring1 as a good film than Tumbbad and Tumbbad is worse than conjuring1.

Write down the fear factors of conjuring & Tumbbad according to you.

Film	Code	Theme
Conjuring	Suddenly the ghost came in front of the camera, the unexpected jump scares, surprise elements.	Jump scare
Tumbbad	Thriller and storytelling,Story, The mythological character. Plot, Psychological fear, Twist in plot, Unpredictable events	Narrative

Table 1.4 the fear factors of conjuring & Tumbbad according to respondents.

Would you like to watch the film conjuring1 and Tumbbad alone in a dark room?

Figure 1.3 Percentage of respondents about watching the film conjuring1 and Tumbbad alone in a dark room.

After getting the ratings of these two films, we asked people, which film would they choose to watch if they had to watch it alone in a dark room? 60% of people have denied watching Tumbbad and less than 50% have denied

watching Conjuring 1. More than 20% of people said they could watch Conjuring, while less than 20% said they could watch Tumbbad.
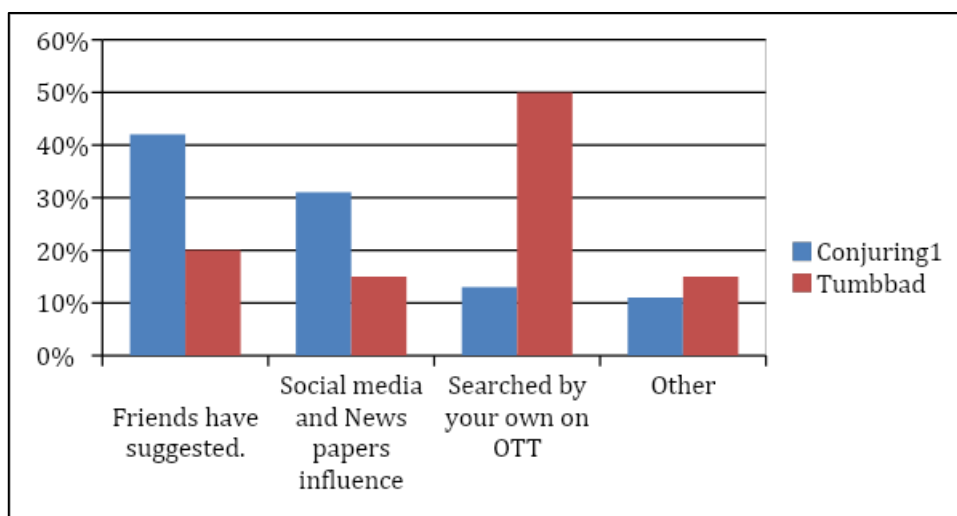
Figure 1.4 the Influencing factor for watching the film conjuring1 or Tumbbad.

Finally, in our survey, we asked what factors influenced people to watch Conjuring 1 or Tumbbad. Fifty percent of those who responded said they were influenced by the films. people answered that they had decided to watch the film Tumbbad while they were surfing the OTT, and 12% of the people said the same in the case of Conjuring, 14% of the people said that they had decided to watch Conjuring1 for friends' influence, and 30% of the people said that it was social media and newspaper that influenced them to watch the film, whereas less than 20% of the people said that social media and friends' influence had worked as an influencing factor in the case of Tumbbad.

5. CONCLUSION:

Based on the data presented above, we can conclude that the people of India (sample size) enjoy horror films. Hollywood horror films are more popular in India than Indian horror films. According to thematic analysis, people like Hollywood films because of their high production quality (art direction, sound, and overall budget all have their own psychological effect) and dislike Indian films because of their low production quality (poor acting, Ramse films have become synonymous as horror Indian films, bad story). The reasons for Indian audiences' preference for horror films are not uncommon. We can easily understand when we combine the survey results with horror theories.

The fundamental question then becomes how to justify this preference for Hollywood horror films. The survey responses are insufficient to explain the reason. Thematic analysis of the responses reveals that they dislike Indian films due to poor production quality and prefer Hollywood films due to high production quality. The question is, if production quality is the only deciding factor in selecting horror films, why are films of other genres not treated in the same way? Low-budget Indian romantic comedies, rom-coms, and family dramas. We conducted one case study to better understand this. We chose Conjuring1 and Tumbaad because the majority of respondents named these two films as their favourites. These two films adhere to horror theories such as mise en scene, jump scares, gloomy texture, sound, acting, and so on. When we asked respondents to choose between these two films, the majority chose Conjuring 1. However, a majority (55%) denied watching Tumàad alone in a dark room, and only 30% thought Tumbaad was a better film than Conjuring 1. Less than 50% of respondents selected Conjuring 1 to watch alone in a dark room, but the majority selected it as a better film than Tumbaad. This demonstrates that fear is present in Tumbbad. That is why respondents do not want to watch the film alone. In our survey, we wanted to know what factors influenced people to watch both films. 50 % of respondents said they discovered Tumbaad while browsing OTT platforms, while less than 15 percent said the same in the case of conjuring 1. Less than 15% of people said they watched Tumbbad because of media reviews. Conjuring 1 was shared by 30% of the population. As a result, we can say that the media was critical in spreading the film. The majority of people stated that in the case of Conjuring 1, friends and rumours had suggested it.Those fake news or rumors are effective crowd-pooled. Many Indian film directors have expressed disdain for film critics and film journalism in recent years. These directors believe that it is difficult for any journalist to evaluate the film on factors

such as content quality, protagonist-antagonist-narrative development and progression, set design, costume, and so on. (Deb, 2022) So, in the end, we can say that the reasons for Indian horror films' failure are myths that claim Hollywood horror films are superior to Indian horror films in terms of technicality, acting, makeup, sound concept, and so on. Another reason for the failure or lack of popularity of Indian horror films among Indians is their long history of Ramsay films. Some Ramsey films have come to be associated with Indian horror films for some people over the years, and the number is not insignificant. They dislike Indian horror films because of their poor production quality. Another reason could be a lack of interest in Indian horror films by the Indian mainstream media.

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