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## The subconscious influence of toxic cinema content on young adult's behaviour and the significance of static toxicity warnings during exposure to toxic media content

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### Abstract

**Background:** It has been known for a long time in psychological study that media like films can persuade people to change their minds and views. But a lot of the study that has been done so far has only looked at the effects on the awareness level. A person's inner mind is strongly affected by what they see in movies.

**Objective:** This study investigates the subconscious influence of toxic cinema elements on young adult's behaviour.

**Method:** The study employs a mixed-method triangulation approach using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I aimed to uncover the nuanced ways in which cinema portrayals influence individuals' subconscious behaviours. In the Quantitative phase, a survey was conducted to a cohort group of young adults, which yielded insights into the prevalence of the influence of toxic elements in cinema on their behaviour over time. This phase was followed by a qualitative phase in which semi-constructed interviews to delve deeper into the personal experiences and understanding of participants regarding the effect of the particular cinematic content on their behaviour.

**Results:** The findings reveal a complex interplay between exposure to toxic cinematic elements and subsequent behavioural manifestations, highlighting the need for more understanding of media influence, especially at a subconscious level. By integrating qualitative and quantitative information, this study provides an exploration of the subconscious effects of toxic cinematic content on young adults offering insights into both theory and practice in the field of psychology, cinema and law-making bodies of a nation.

**Conclusion:** These findings also have implications for the cinema sensor board committees and are aimed at mitigating the negative impact of toxic cinema content by spreading awareness and implementing measures like mandating the display of static warnings during the toxic scenes of the cinema.

**Key Words:** Subconscious Influence, Toxic Cinema Content, Young Adults, Behaviour, Static Warnings.

## 1. Introduction

Media such as cinema has a persuasive influence on individual attitudes and beliefs and this has been widely acknowledged in psychological research over time. However much of the existence of research is focused on the conscious impacts and not on the subconscious levels. The subconscious influence of cinema content is very powerful on an individual. This work aims to address the mentioned gap by exploring how certain toxic elements in cinema such as themes, characters and narratives that are characterized by aggression, violence, substance abuse and other negative behaviours influence and mould the thinking of the audience, mainly young audience and adolescent age groups.

Understanding the influence of toxic elements of cinema is crucial because they manifest the decision-making processes, and shape attitudes and interpersonal interactions of people without that individual's conscious awareness. Drawing on theories of social learning, we hypothesize that exploring toxic cinema content primes individuals to adopt similar behaviours in their own lives often without explicit awareness of the influence. By exploring this tragic phenomenon we intend to contribute to a keen understanding of the relation between media exposure, and behaviour and shedding light on subconscious influence and migration methods.

The qualitative and quantitative methods provide comprehensive data to explore the subject. Cinema sensor boards play a key role in this process, as their primary aim is to acknowledge and mitigate the harmful influence of content on the audience. Thus understanding the subconscious influence of toxic cinema elements is essential for fostering critical media management and promoting psychological welfare in today's media-saturated society.

## 2. Literature Review

The influence of media on its audience has been a topic of considerable interest in psychological research. Early studies in this field, namely Bandura's social learning theory (1977) explained how individuals can learn new behaviours through observation and imitation of characters from media. Such early studies were followed by substantial research that highlighted the role media plays in shaping social norms, perceptions and values.

The cultivation theory (Gerbner et al, 1986) sheds light on a prolonged exploration of media content and how it shapes individuals' perceptions of social reality. The cultivation theory explains that media containing elements like aggression, violence and substance abuse can lead to the cultivation of beliefs that are consistent with the toxic content portrayed in that media. This cultivation is a gradual and subconscious process resulting in the alignment of individual perceptions with the mediated reality present in the cinema. Additionally, research on priming effects suggests that exposure to media content can activate related thoughts, feelings and behaviours in individuals subconsciously (Bargh et al, 1996).

Priming occurs when exposure to certain stimuli like aggression or glorified domestic violence, activates associated mental representations, thus making them more accessible and influential in subsequent behaviour. The normalization of such behaviours can happen in this process which will lead the audience to exhibit these toxic behaviours in daily life even without conscious awareness. Studies especially examining the impact of media ferocity on aggression have provided empirical support for these theoretical frameworks. Meta-analytic research by Anderson et al, 2010 explored that experience of ferocious media content and aggressive

behaviour, particularly among children and adolescents showed a positive association between the toxic media content and the behaviours of the audience.

While much of the research has focused on the explicit effects of media ferocity, less observance was paid to the subconscious pathways through which toxic cinematic elements influence behaviour. Research on the effects of substance abuse in media has highlighted their impact on individuals as exposure to glamorized depictions of substance use in cinema can contribute to positive perceptions of such behaviours and increase in the likelihood of experimentation among adults (Tanski et al, 2010). This influence is happening at a subconscious level.

In summary, the literature suggests that exposure to toxic elements in cinema can shape individuals' attitudes and behaviours through cultivation, social learning and priming processes. While earlier work has primarily concentrated on explicit effects, there is still an expanding identification of the importance of understanding the subconscious mechanisms through which cinema content influences behaviour. The current study contributed to this field of research by exploring the subconscious effects of cinematic elements on young adults through mixed-method triangulation.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a mixed methods approach to investigate the influence of toxic cinema elements on young adult's behaviour. The methods consist of two main phases, namely a quantitative Survey and a qualitative Interview.

#### **3.1. Quantitative Survey**

- Participants: A convenient sample of young adults (aged 17 - 24) was recruited from university campuses, peers and online platforms.
- Survey Instruments: The survey included questions assessing participants' exposure to toxic cinematic elements and their perceptions of influence of such content on their behavior.
- Process: Informed consent was acquired from participants before beginning the online survey. Data was collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality.
- Data Analysis: A descriptive mode of statistics was used to test the prevalence and nature of the influence of toxic cinema elements on participant behaviour. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis, were conducted to explore relationships between exposure to toxic elements and behavioural outcomes.

#### **3.2. Qualitative Interviews**

- Participants: A subset of people from survey respondents were requested to take part in semi-organized interviews to provide deeper insights into their experiences regarding the influence of toxic content in cinema on their behaviour.
- Interview Protocol: The interview protocol included a set of open-ended questions exploring the attitudes of the participants towards cinema content and their interpretations of toxic behaviours with emphasis on any observed changes in behaviour attributed to media exposure.

- Procedure: The interview was conducted in person or on a video call with the participant's consent and transcription was taken for analytic purposes.
- Data Testing: Thematic method of analysis was used to measure recurring patterns and themes in the narrative of participants. An analysis of interviews was done later with discrepancies resolved through research and discussions.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Quantitative Survey Findings**

- Primary analysis of the survey data revealed that over 80% of the participants reported being influenced by toxic cinema content in their behaviour.
- Correlation analysis indicated significant associations between exposure to specific types of toxic content like violence, aggression, substance use and corresponding behavioural outcomes supporting the hypothesis link between media exposure and behavior.

### **4.2. Qualitative Interview Findings**

- Thematic analysis of the interview data yield several key themes and they are as follows :
  - Normalization of toxic behaviors
  - Identification with cinematic characters
  - Subconscious adoption of behaviors portrayed in the media.
- Participants described instances where exposure to toxic content led to changes in their attitudes, beliefs and interpersonal interactions, while emphasizing on how these behaviors were influenced without their awareness.
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## **5. Discussion**

The findings of the current study threw light on ways in which toxic cinema content influences young adults' behaviour both consciously and subconsciously. Through a mixed method triangulation approach, I was able to explore the complex interplay between media exposure and behaviour, uncovering essential insights that contribute to better media management by responsible institutions and further psychological study.

Our quantitative survey revealed a high influence of toxic cinema content on behavior with over 80% of participants acknowledging some degree of impact in their life. The findings align with an earlier study on the cultivation and priming effects of media exposure, Suggesting that prolonged toxic media exposure can shape an individual's attitudes and behaviour. The correlation analysis provided more support for the link between specific types of toxic content and corresponding behavioural outcomes. For example, a participant who reported higher levels of experience with ferocity was much more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour throughout their own life.

The qualitative analysis provided further insight into participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the influence of toxic cinema content. Themes such as the normalization of toxic behaviours, and self-identification with cinema characters emerged from this phase of analysis, highlighting the role of media in shaping individuals' social norms and self-identification. Participants have described instances where they were subconsciously adopting toxic behaviour portrayed in media, illustrating the pervasive nature of media influence on behaviour.

These findings have important implications for media literacy and intervention strategies aimed at mitigating the negative impact of cinema exposure on audience behavior. By raising awareness of the subconscious effects of toxic cinematic elements individuals can be empowered to critically evaluate and navigate media content reducing the likelihood of uncritical acceptance and imitation of harmful behaviors. One such prevention measure is Static warning mandated by the Cinema Censor Board during toxic and wrongly influencing cinema content such as domestic violence, glorified violence etc.

Implementations of static warnings for scenes depicting glorified domestic violence or other glorified unwarranted behavior serve as a proactive alert to the viewers and making them self-aware of the nature of the content they are about to watch. These warnings provide an opportunity for individuals to make informed choices about their media consumption and mentally prepare themselves for potentially triggering material as well. Static warning mandates serve as a form of public awareness and education highlighting the seriousness of the toxic content such as domestic violence which is commonly misinterpreted by young adults. By acknowledging the serious effects of glorified domestic violence in cinema, the cinema censor boards can play a vital role in promoting social norms that reject violence and abuse in intimate relationships/households. In this process, the audience also gets a chance for critical self-reflection and dialogue. However, while static warnings have the potential to mitigate negative influence on the audience, cinema censor boards need to consider the broader context in which such content is presented including its narrative, framing, portrayal and overall message.

It is vital to recognize the limitations of the study including the use of convenience sampling and self-reported measures, which may introduce bias & limit the generalizability of the results reported. Further work could employ more rigorous sampling procedures to enhance the validity and reliability of results.

In conclusion, the research aimed to attribute to the deeper concepts of the subconscious influence of toxic cinema content on young adults' behavior. By recognizing and addressing the subconscious effects of media, we can work towards promoting healthier media consumption habits and promote psychological well-being in today's media-saturated society.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current study emphasizes empirical support for the influence of toxic cinematic content on young adults both at conscious and subconscious levels. These quantitative and qualitative interviews were conducted to support the hypothesis that exposure to toxic cinematic content shapes individual attitudes and behaviours subconsciously.

These results shed light on the importance of media literacy and critical engagement with cinema content. By raising awareness of the subconscious effect of toxic cinema content, interventions can be developed to empower individuals to build healthy media consumption habits in this digital age.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Instruments

1. Demographic Information:
  - Age:
  - Gender:
  - Education Level:
  - Occupation:
2. Exposure to toxic cinema content:
  - How often do you watch movies or TV shows containing violent scenes?
    - Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always
  - How often do you watch movies or TV shows containing substance abuse?
    - Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always
  - How often do you watch movies or TV shows containing aggressive or antisocial behaviors?

- Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always
- 3. Influence on Behavior:
  - To what extent do you believe that exposure to violent scenes in movies or TV shows has influenced your own behavior?
    - Not at all / Slightly / Moderately / Extremely
  - Have you ever found yourself imitating behaviors or actions you saw in movies or TV shows?
    - Not at all / Slightly / Moderately / Extremely
- 4. Media Consumption Habits:
  - On average, how many hours per week do you spend watching movies or TV shows?
  - What types of movies or TV shows do you prefer? (eg. action, drama, comedy)

### **Appendix B: Interview Plan**

1. Introduction:
  - Acknowledge the participation.
  - Background Information
  - Ask about the participant's media consumption habits like frequency of movie watching, preferable genres etc.
2. Exposure to Toxic cinema content:
  - Inquire about the participant's exposure to movies or TV shows containing violent scenes, substance abuse or aggressive behaviour.
  - Probe for specific examples of movies or tv shows that have left a lasting impression on the participant.
3. Influence on Behavior:
  - Explore the participants' perception of the influence of cinema content on their behaviour.
  - Ask whether they have ever found themselves imitating behaviours they saw in the movies or TV shows.
4. Personal Experiences:
  - Encourage the participant to share any particular experience related to the influence of cinema content on their behaviour.
5. Concluding:
  - Thank the participant for their time and participation in the interview.
  - Offer the opportunity for any final insights or additional information upon their willingness.

The interview protocol is flexible and adapted based on participants' responses to prioritize the participant's comfort during the interview.