PROPAGANDA IN WAR FILMS AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF YOUTH'S AWARENESS OF PROPAGANDISTIC ASPECT IN WAR FILMS

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Abstract

Propaganda is a modern Latin word which means to spread or to propagate. Propaganda is intentionally misleading or deceptive information that is widely made known in order to uphold or endorse an idea, policy, or cause. Propaganda in films has been considered as an elite and supreme form of propaganda for the propagandists, as they know that a film reaches all. Be it the illiterate or the literate, rich or poor, everyone equally enjoys and understands the film. A propaganda delivered through entertainment is hardly mistaken as a propaganda theory as something done for the cinema's artistic content and the creative liberty. In recent times of cold War, it has been observed that propaganda is one of the best tools to fight a war apart from guns and bombs.

This study examines the perception of propaganda in audience's mind. The study inspects people's thought about propaganda without actually discussing about propaganda directly. The objective of the study is to understand the effect of propaganda with respect to films and particularly war films. Quantitative method has been used in this research. For quantitative method, a survey has been conducted. 100 sample size had been taken to collect the responses using purposive sampling method. The study was conducted among journalism students and their perceptions about propaganda in war films were collected through the questionnaire method to look into the effect of propaganda through cinema.

Key Words: Propaganda, Films, People's Perception, War Films.

Introduction

Propaganda is a way of manipulating any target audience by a group of people, organization or even by an individual. There have been many approaches to propagate propaganda in various ways. Out of which, films, especially war films have been taken as the parameter to propagate any type of propaganda in the form of entertainment. This research has been done to understand what audience's awareness about their exposure to propaganda is and the way they approach any media especially films, and in this case war films. This study can be of numerous benefits in especially understanding youth's awareness when it comes to the application of propaganda.

Review of literature

The research paper, "Film Propaganda: Triumph of the Will as a Case Study" by researcher Alan Sennett provides the definition of the word Propaganda. In the English-speaking world, there is a tendency to apportion a negative meaning to the term "propaganda." Here propaganda connotes the dissemination of particular messages of a dishonest and dangerous kind; ones usually associated with authoritarian and tyrannical regimes. Propaganda is associated with the manipulation of large numbers of people and is seen to involve deliberately misleading them either by obscuring reality with a partial or slanted view, or through downright lies. Yet it is evident that in some cultures the term has retained its Catholic usage alongside the modern negative sense. In Latinate languages, the term retains something of its original meaning of "propagation" and is used as a colloquial expression meaning advertising or "junk mail." Yet it is important to reflect upon the fact that propagandizing has not always been thought of as something to be ashamed of. It can be viewed as a positive activity, as in the original use of the term by the Catholic Church in its 1622 Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. Here the reference is to the active promotion of a worldview perceived to be the absolute and unquestionable truth. (Sennett 2014).

The paper "Filming, faking and propaganda: The origins of the war film, 1897-1902" by researcher S Bottomore gives the following definition of War Films- (Bottomore 2007).
1. Actuality War film: a film of real people and events, shot at an actual war related location, i.e. a non-fiction recording of reality (not with actors, nor filmed in substitute locations nor a studio). This term 'actuality' has the additional benefit that it suggests a film related to topical/current (i.e. newsworthy) events (Bottomore 2007).
2. Staged war film: a film about the conflict, shot with actors or scale-models away from the war zone. Another appropriate term might be 'imaginative representation', including only those films made at or near the time of the conflict (i.e. excluding much later dramatisations), so a longer but more accurate term would be 'staged film about a current war'. (Bottomore 2007).

The research paper "Soviet Montage Cinema as Propaganda and Political Rhetoric" by researcher Michael Russell says that the Soviet montage directors saw no contradiction between art and propaganda (Vertov, always the exception among the montage directors, denied that he was attempting to create art at all). To them, all art was fundamentally tendentious, political at its very root. To regard films like Potemkin or The Mother (1926) or The Man with a Movie Camera (1929) as propaganda is therefore not to denigrate them, or downgrade them from the status of great art to "mere" agitprop, but to acknowledge the motivations which lay behind their creation and to bring out those elements in these works which make them unique contributions to cinematic art. (Russell 2009).

The research paper "Entertainment or Propaganda?" by researcher Leo Braudy states that in the 1930s, with the gathering storms of war in Europe, Warner Bros. movies in particular begin to mediate between the actual life of their audiences and the more general public life of politics and world events. Instead of escapism, the films, both prestige and genre varieties, were more like special lenses through which to read otherwise exces - sively complex events. Like the lens of political science or economics for an academic observer, they offered an interpretive matrix. Different studios over time developed their own attitudes toward this outside world. For a variety of reasons, Warner Bros. was the most explicit in its attitudes and its effort to take on the cultural role of amalgamating "entertainment" and "propaganda" to present a point of view on current events, using fictional stories and characters as well as a recognizably factual "history." (Braudy n.d.).

Aim: To understand youth's perception about the concept of propaganda in reference to war films

Objectives of the Study are-
1. To understand the concept of Propaganda with respect to war films
2. To evaluate the journalism graduate students' awareness of the concept of propaganda
3. To study journalism graduate students' awareness of the concept of propaganda with respect to war films

Methodology
The survey method of research was deployed for the present study. Structured questionnaire was used to collect required data for the study. The questionnaire basically assessed the respondents' awareness of the concept of propaganda in war films. Purposive sampling technique was used for the collection of the data. The target population of the study was the journalism graduate students of colleges in Bangalore. The survey was conducted during May, 2016 in Bangalore. 100 questionnaires were distributed to respondents for collection of the data.

Findings and Analysis
The researcher has taken 100 respondents to fill the questionnaire. The answers are based on what they do and their set of perceptions which may be relevant to the particular study. The respondents are journalism graduates from colleges of Bangalore.

Table 1: Medium of Communication Used By Respondents

Medium	No. Of Respondents	Percentage Of Respondents
Newspaper	21	21%
Television	27	27%
Radio	3	3%
Internet	32	32%
Films	17	17%
Total	100	100%

Table 1 show that respondents mostly use the internet at 32%. Second is the television which is at 27%, also being a new medium has a bit of influence. Newspapers and radio comes at 21% and 3% respectively. 17% are exposed to the medium of films.

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Table 2: Respondents' Interest In Watching News During-

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
War time	21	21%
Political Emergency	26	26%
All the time	37	37%
Do not watch at all	16	16%
Total	100	100%

Table 2 shows that 37% of the respondents watch news at all times. During political emergency, respondents watch more news at 26% than war times at 21%.

Table 3: Respondents Who Agree or Do Not Agree That Propaganda/ Political Agenda Are A Healthy Tool For A Society To Move Steadily

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	16	16%
No	32	32%
I don't know	52	52%
Total	100	100%

From the above Table 3, it can be seen that about 52% do not know if propaganda/political agenda are a healthy tool or not. 32% disagree to with propaganda as a healthy tool and 16% agree to it.

Table 4: Respondents Believe That A Government Who Lies Can Only Be Negative

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	38	38%
No	31	31%
I don't know	31	31%
Total	100	100%

Table 4 shows that majority of respondents (38%) believe that a lying government always has a negative connotation. 31% do not think that lying by government can always prove to be negative. 31 % also are unsure of the answer.

Table 5: Respondents Influenced By A Political Party And Their Propaganda

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	12	12%
No	48	48%
I don't know	40	40%
Total	100	100%

From Table 5, it is found that 48% believe that they are not under the influence of political parties and their propaganda. 12% think they are under the influence of propagandas by political parties. 40% of respondents do not know if they are under the influence of political parties and their propaganda.

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Table 6: Respondents Who Have Studied a War Film They Have Watched

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	34	34%
No	66	66%
Total	100	100%

Table 6 shows that only 34% of the respondents have critically studied at least one war film they have watched. 66% have never studied any war films they have watched.

Table 7: Respondents Who Believe That There Are Hidden Messages In the War Films They Watch

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	63	63%
No	13	13%
I don't know	24	24%
Total	100	100%

Table 7 shows that majority at 63% of respondents believe that there are hidden agendas in the war films they watch. 24% do know if there are any hidden messages in the war films that they watch. 13% disagrees to the statement.

Table 8: Respondents Citing the Reason Why They Watched a War Film

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
For entertainment	65	65%
Educational Purpose	8	8%
For the cast	27	27%
Total	100	100%

Table 8 shows that majority of the respondents at 65% watch war films for entertainment. 27% watch war films for the star cast and only 8% for educational purpose.

Table 9: Respondents Who Have Been Influenced By a War Film

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	52	52%
No	13	13%
I don't know	35	35%
Total	100	100%

Table 9 shows that majority at 52% believe that have been influenced by a war film. 35% do know if they have been influenced. 13% do not believe they have been influenced by an war film has influenced them so much

Table 10: Respondents Who Have Disagreed With a War Film They Watched

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	28	28%
No	21	21%
Neutral	51	51%
Total	100	100%

Table 10 shows that majority of the respondents at 51% have a neutral stance towards the war film they have watched. 28 % had disagreed to the concept of a war film they have watched whereas 21% believed in the concept of the war films they have watched.

Table 11: Respondents Rating the Most Important Component in a War Film

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Rating
Plot	32	**1**
Patriotism	29	**2**
Protagonist/Antagonist	21	**3**
Bloodshed	18	**4**
Total	100	

From the above table 10, Plot was considered to be the most important component in war films followed by concept of patriotism, characters played in the film, scene of bloodshed respectively.

Table 12: Respondents' War Film Watching Habits

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Foreign Films	10	10%
Indian Films	14	14%
Both	76	76%
Total	100	100%

Table 12 shows that majority of respondents at 74% watch both watch foreign and Indian war films.

Table 13: Showing the Rating of the People Who Think Censorship Is a Barrier

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	58	58%
No	23	23%
I don't know	19	19%
Total	100	100%

Table 13 shows that 58% think that censorship is a barrier for communicating the true essence of a film. 23% do not consider censorship to be a barrier and 19% have responded that they do not know.

Table 14: Respondents Who Believe That Muslims Are At Times Being Targeted As Terrorists In Indian/American War Films

Answer Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	61	61%
No	26	26%
I don't know	13	13%
Total	100	100%

Table 14 shows that majority of respondents at 61% believe that Muslims are at times being targeted in Indian/American war films. 26% think they are not and 13% do not know.

Major Findings from the Survey
1. The study shows that respondents mostly use the internet at 32%. Second is the television which is at 27%, also being a new medium has a bit of influence. Newspapers and radio comes at 21% and 3% respectively. 17% are exposed to the medium of films.
2. The study found that 37% of the respondents watch news at all times. During political emergency, respondents watch more news at 26% than war times at 21%.

3. From the study, it has been found that 52% do not know if propaganda/political agenda are a healthy tool or not. 32% disagree with propaganda as a healthy tool and 16% agree to it.
4. Majority of respondents, 38% believe that a lying government always has a negative connotation. 31% do not think that lying by government can always prove to be negative. 31 % again are unsure of the answer.
5. It is found that 48% believe that they are not under the influence of political parties and their propaganda. 12% think they are under the influence of propagandas by political parties. 40% of respondents do not know if they are under the influence of political parties and their propaganda.
6. Majority of respondents at 74% watch both watch foreign and Indian war films.
7. Plot was considered to be the most important component in war films followed by concept of patriotism, characters played in the film, scene of bloodshed, respectively.
8. Majority of the respondents at 51% have a neutral stance towards the war films they have watched. 28 % had disagreed to the concept of a war film they have watched whereas 21% believed in the concept of the war films they have watched.
9. The study shows that only 34% of the respondents have critically studied at least one war film they have watched. 66% have never studied any war films they have watched.
10. Majority of respondents at 63% believe that there are hidden agendas in the war films they watch. 24% are not aware of any hidden messages in the war films that they watch. 13% disagrees to the statement.
11. Majority of the respondents at 65% watch war films for entertainment. 27% watch war films for the star cast and only 8% for educational purpose.
12. The study found that majority of respondents at 52% believes they have been influenced by a war film. 35% do know if they have been influenced. 13% do not believe they have been influenced by an war film has influenced them so much.
13. 58% believe that censorship is a barrier for communicating the true essence of a film. 23% do not consider censorship to be a barrier and 19% have responded that they do not know.
14. Lastly, majority of respondents at 61% believe that Muslims are at times being targeted in Indian/American war films. 26% think they are not and 13% do not know.

Conclusion
The youth in the present times are more exposed to the internet and television. According to the study conducted, respondents lack awareness of the holistic concept of propaganda in terms of any political agenda of the government, hidden messages in films, good and bad propaganda, etc, thus making them play or involve themselves in the periphery only. The audience is not passive, they are active. They think for themselves, but what to think are provided by the mass media with the help of mass communication. Similarly in war films as well, people engage with the story line and the aesthetics of characterization and settings and stop looking beyond the obvious.

The study shows that the youth watch war films mostly for entertainment. The respondents also got influenced by war films and since most of the respondents watch both foreign and English films, making them exposed to all kinds of propagandistic functions. Respondents do believe that there can be good propaganda but also support that bad propaganda is more prevalent than good.

The basic conclusion the researcher has come up to is that people watch wars films irrespective of any hidden meanings or ulterior motives. Though majority of respondents at 61% believe that certain sections of society are at times being targeted, they watch such films to get entertained. Even though they know that there might be some kind of hidden agenda involved in the films that they watch, they prefer to watch war films and are unsuspectingly under the claws of propaganda and remain willingly unaware about the adverse effects of propaganda.

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