



ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS IN CINEMATIC SMOKING PORTRAYALS IN INDIAN MOVIES

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ABSTRACT

Cinematic narratives play a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions and behaviors, particularly concerning health-related issues. This study examines the intersection of health communication and cinematic portrayals of smoking in Indian films from 2010 to 2020. Using a systematic content analysis, we analyze character attributes, narrative contexts, visual representations, and the construction of perceived coolness in smoking scenes to understand their public health implications. A sample of 20 films was selected based on the saturation principle, revealing that smoking appeared in all analyzed movies, with male characters depicted smoking more frequently than female characters. The findings indicate that smoking is often portrayed as a symbol of rebellion, introspection, or allure, and is typically framed using cinematographic techniques such as dynamic camera angles and dramatic lighting that amplify its visual and emotional impact. The concept of perceived coolness emerges as central, portraying smoking as both glamorous and injurious, complicating health communication efforts. The study underscores the necessity for collaboration between the entertainment industry and public health advocates to promote responsible cinematic narratives. By highlighting the cultural symbolism, emotional associations, and gendered dynamics of smoking portrayals, this research advocates for strategic health communication interventions to counteract its glamorization in popular media.

Keywords: Cinematic narratives, Health communication, Smoking portrayals, Indian cinema, Perceived coolness, Public health communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Health communication plays a crucial role in disseminating information, shaping attitudes, and influencing behaviors related to public well-being. Its intersection with cinematic narratives is particularly significant in the context of smoking portrayals in films. Cinema, as a powerful visual medium, not only reflects societal behaviors but also actively reinforces or challenges public perceptions. This study explores how Indian films from 2010 to 2020 construct smoking as an element of character identity, social interaction, and perceived coolness, ultimately

impacting audience attitudes toward tobacco use.

Despite the well-documented health risks of smoking, it remains a culturally embedded behavior, often positioned at the crossroads of conflicting imagery. While public health campaigns emphasize smoking's dangers – through graphic health warnings and anti-smoking advertisements (Joo et al., 2022), cinema frequently romanticizes and glamorizes the act. Existing research establishes a strong link between smoking portrayals in movies and increased smoking susceptibility among adolescents (Farrelly et

al., 2011; Nian et al., 2022). The depiction of smoking in films, particularly as a symbol of rebellion, sophistication, or allure, creates an aspirational appeal that influences viewer behavior (Hassanein et al., 2022). A study by Shukla (2025) found that Indian cinema often constructs smoking as a marker of masculinity, power, or charisma, influencing audience perceptions at a subconscious level. Further studies indicate that repeated exposure to smoking scenes normalizes the behavior, increasing the likelihood of smoking initiation among young audiences (Morgenstern et al., 2013).

Several empirical findings further illustrate this trend. Exposure to smoking depictions in films has been directly linked to adolescent smoking initiation (Charlesworth & Glantz, 2005; Dal Cin et al., 2013). Sohn and Jung (2018) examined how socio-contextual variables heightened cigarette cravings after adolescents watched smoking scenes in films. This normalization of smoking in media can influence not only adolescents but also young adults in various cultural contexts (Hassanein et al., 2022; Singh et al. 2019). A study by Arora et al. (2012), which assessed 59 Bollywood films, revealed that adolescents encountered an average of 162 tobacco use instances, despite the enactment of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) in 2004, which prohibits all forms of tobacco advertising. Their findings suggest that students highly exposed to tobacco portrayals in Bollywood films were twice as likely to engage in tobacco use compared to those with limited exposure (Bollywood Films, 2011). Similarly, a study by Nandru et al. (2023) on anti-tobacco advertisements within Indian cinema highlighted that emotionally charged anti-smoking health spots (ATHS) were perceived as more effective, particularly among tobacco users with a greater readiness to quit. Kamath et al. (2024) demonstrated through a prospective cohort study that repeated exposure to smoking imagery in films significantly increased adolescents' susceptibility to smoking, regardless of the presence of statutory health warnings. This aligns with findings by Jena et al. (2024), who reported widespread non-compliance with anti-tobacco regulations in Indian over-the-top (OTT) streaming content, highlighting persistent visual promotion of tobacco use. Tripathy and Lakshmi (2023) further

established that exposure to tobacco advertising via multiple media formats including films was strongly associated with current smoking behaviors among adolescents.

Beyond tobacco promotion, the media's role in cultural representation of smoking has also been explored. Pechmann and Shih (1999) found that cinematic portrayals of smoking as cool contribute to its appeal, reinforcing its association with desirability and social acceptance. Health communication strategies attempt to counteract this glamorization through emotionally resonant anti-smoking messages (Biener et al., 2004). However, cultural contexts shape smoking portrayals differently- with gender norms, socio-political climates, and industry regulations influencing cinematic depictions (Barbeau et al., 2004). Content analysis methodologies have provided systematic insight into smoking portrayals across different national cinemas (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002), underscoring how media representation contributes to public health discourse.

Despite this extensive research, a crucial gap remains: No comprehensive study has examined how Indian cinema constructs smoking's perceived coolness—a significant aspect of tobacco representation in popular media. While Western scholarship has investigated this theme in Hollywood films (Charlesworth & Glantz, 2005; Pechmann & Shih, 1999), Bollywood's distinct cultural, aesthetic, and narrative choices warrant an independent inquiry. This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing how Indian cinema frames smoking as aspirational, emotionally charged, rebellious, or reflective of personal turmoil, thus contributing to the broader discourse on media influence, health communication, and public policy.

By focusing on 20 Indian films from 2010 to 2020, this research investigates the mechanisms through which smoking is depicted as both glamorous and injurious. Through a comprehensive content analysis, the study examines character attributes, narrative contexts, visual representations, and the construction of perceived coolness to provide deeper insight into Bollywood's messaging strategies. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform public health interventions and

media literacy programs that can challenge the glamorization of smoking while respecting artistic expression.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The portrayal of smoking in cinema operates at the intersection of health communication and media studies (Yadav & Glantz, 2021). This study is grounded in three key theoretical frameworks that help unpack how cinematic representations shape audience perceptions and behaviors: Cultivation Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Media Framing Theory.

2.1 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976), posits that prolonged exposure to media content influences audience perceptions, reinforcing specific worldviews. Within the context of this study, Cultivation Theory suggests that repeated exposure to smoking portrayals in Bollywood films normalizes tobacco use, making it appear as a socially acceptable or aspirational behavior. Prior research has shown that media exposure cultivates distorted health perceptions, particularly in adolescents, leading to increased smoking initiation (Escamilla et al., 2000). Studies indicate that cinematic smoking scenes contribute to perceived social norms around tobacco consumption, shaping youth attitudes and which impact to repeat behavior (Paul et al 2023; Gendall et al., 2016). This effect is particularly significant in India, where cinema has a far-reaching cultural influence and often serves as a primary source of social learning (Arora et al., 2012). Applying Cultivation Theory to Bollywood films allows this study to examine how prolonged exposure to cinematic smoking normalizes the behavior, despite public health campaigns emphasizing its risks (Sood et al 2019; Morgenstern et al., 2013). The study investigates whether the frequency and context of smoking scenes reinforce tobacco use as a symbol of rebellion, masculinity, or allure, ultimately shaping audience attitudes.

2.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) highlights observational learning as a key mechanism through which individuals acquire behaviors. In the context of smoking portrayals, Social Cognitive Theory suggests that audiences—particularly adolescents and young adults—learn smoking behaviors by

observing characters in films, associating them with power, charisma, or social acceptance. Empirical research supports this assertion. Dal Cin et al. (2013) found that adolescents exposed to smoking in movies demonstrated a higher likelihood of experimenting with tobacco. Similarly, Sohn and Jung (2018) observed that adolescents who identified with on-screen smokers experienced heightened cigarette cravings, reinforcing the impact of observational learning. Hassanein et al. (2022) further argue that on-screen depictions of smoking serve as behavioral modeling cues, making the act appear desirable and socially rewarding. In Bollywood, charismatic protagonists, anti-heroes, and femme fatales frequently engage in smoking, reinforcing its symbolic association with power, defiance, or emotional depth (Pechmann & Shih, 1999). This study applies Social Cognitive Theory to analyze whether the portrayal of smoking in Indian films provides observational learning cues that influence audience attitudes and behaviors.

2.3 Media Framing Theory

Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) explores how media structures narratives, shaping audience interpretation through selective emphasis on specific aspects of a message. Within this framework, Bollywood films act as powerful framers of social behaviors, presenting smoking either as an act of rebellion, an emotional coping mechanism, or a marker of sophistication. Research has shown that framing impacts how audiences process health-related messages (Chiong et al., 2021). A study by Pavlikova et al. (2023) found that when smoking is framed as a sign of independence or attractiveness, audiences are more likely to associate tobacco use with positive traits. Conversely, films that frame smoking as a consequence of stress, addiction, or self-destruction may counteract its glamorization (Moran & Sussman, 2014). This study applies Media Framing Theory to analyze how Bollywood films construct smoking narratives—examining whether smoking is framed as glamorous, rebellious, or tragic. By dissecting visual techniques, character arcs, and contextual cues, the study evaluates how framing influences audience perception of smoking as either an aspirational or destructive behavior.

By integrating Cultivation Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Media Framing Theory, this study adopts a layered theoretical lens to examine how cinematic portrayals of smoking influence public perception. Cultivation Theory captures the long-term normalization of smoking through repeated exposure; Social Cognitive Theory explains the immediate, observational learning effects on viewer behavior; and Media Framing Theory reveals how narrative emphasis and visual cues shape audience interpretation. These frameworks are not isolated; they operate in tandem—framing influences what is observed, observation leads to learning, and repeated exposure through such frames cultivates normative beliefs. Together, they offer a comprehensive perspective on the representational, behavioral, and cognitive pathways through which smoking gains cultural salience in Indian cinema. This integrated approach is especially relevant given Indian cinema's outsized influence on societal norms and youth behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs content analysis to systematically examine smoking portrayals in Indian cinema from 2010 to 2020. Content analysis is an effective methodological approach for identifying patterns, themes, and symbolic representations within media content (Himes & Thompson, 2007). By analyzing character attributes, narrative contexts, visual representations, and the construction of perceived coolness, this study provides insights into how smoking is framed in Bollywood films and its potential influence on audience perception.

3.1 Sample Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select 20 Bollywood films released between 2010 and 2020. This timeframe was chosen to capture a decade of cinematic output within the post-COTPA regulatory environment. IMDb was used to identify films with IMDb ratings between 6 and 8, ensuring the inclusion of widely viewed and culturally significant mainstream films without selecting extremes of popularity or obscurity. IMDb was chosen as a reference source due to its comprehensive film database and audience-driven rating system. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to focus on films

where smoking was thematically relevant or visibly integrated into character development. Films lacking any smoking depiction by major characters were excluded. Movies excluded from the sample include *My Name is Khan* (2010), *Dangal* (2016), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013), *OMG: Oh My God* (2012), *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), *Pad Man* (2018), and *Super 30* (2019), as they contained no significant smoking portrayals. The final number (20) was determined using the saturation principle—no new themes emerged beyond this point, indicating analytical sufficiency (Lowe et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2020)

3.2 Content Analysis: Constructs and Coding Framework

To analyze cinematic smoking portrayals systematically, key constructs were first operationally defined. Perceived coolness was understood as the portrayal of smoking as attractive or desirable; narrative context captured emotional or social circumstances around smoking scenes (e.g., rebellion, introspection); visual representation included cinematic elements such as camera angles and lighting and whether smoking was glamorized or problematized within the storyline; character attributes referred to gender, social status, and personality traits. These constructs informed the development of the coding framework used in the study. Two trained coders independently applied a standardized coding sheet to each of the 20 films, analyzing the following categories:

1. Character Attributes: Gender, age, occupation, personality
2. Narrative Context: Emotional states, motivations, social interactions
3. Visual Representation: Camera techniques, lighting, composition
4. Perceived Coolness: Attractiveness, alignment with cultural norms

The coding framework was inspired by netnography (Kozinets, 2010), an approach that examines digital self-presentation and narrative construction, making it relevant for analyzing cinematic depictions of smoking. The framework (Table 1) allowed for the categorization of repeated patterns, visual cues, and underlying messages regarding smoking portrayals in Bollywood films.

3.3 Methodological Framework

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Table 1: Comprehensive coding framework followed in the present study. Table by authors

Sr.	Category	Subcategories	Description
a	Character Attributes	Gender, Age, Social Status, Occupation, Personality	Examination of the attributes of characters who smoke, including their demographic characteristics, societal roles, and personality traits.
b	Narrative Context	Emotional State, Social Interactions, Motivations	Analysis of the contextual factors surrounding smoking instances, such as the character's emotional state, interactions with other characters, and reasons for smoking.
c	Visual Representation	Camera Angles, Lighting, Composition	Evaluation of visual elements associated with smoking scenes, including camera angles, lighting effects, and composition techniques used to enhance the portrayal of smoking.
d	Perceived Coolness	Desirability, Attractiveness, Cultural Norms	Exploration of how smoking is presented within the cinematic narrative, considering its desirability, attractiveness, and alignment with or deviation from prevailing cultural norms.

3.4 Inter-coder Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, Cohen's Kappa was employed to assess inter-coder agreement across four coding categories. This measure was chosen because it adjusts for chance agreement, offering a more robust indicator than simple percentage agreement (Gupta et al 2024; De Swert, 2012).

Table 2: Inter-Coder Reliability for coding categories. Table by authors.

Category	Cohen's Kappa Value
Character Attributes	0.85
Narrative Context	0.82
Visual Representation	0.83
Perceived Coolness	0.84

The Kappa values ranged from 0.82 to 0.85 (Table 2), indicating strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977), thereby ensuring consistency in the interpretation of visual and narrative elements. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. To ensure validity, the coding framework was pilot-tested on three films before full-scale analysis. This process allowed refinement of categories for conceptual clarity and relevance. Additionally, definitions were drawn from established theoretical frameworks, supporting construct validity, while the comprehensive coverage of visual, narrative, and character-related dimensions ensured content validity.

Each selected film was analyzed through multiple viewings to ensure comprehensive data collection, with coders documenting smoking instances, character traits, narrative contexts, and visual representations based on the established coding framework. Following data collection, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and trends in smoking portrayals, examine gender differences in smoking representations, and assess how cinematic techniques influence audience perception of smoking. The findings were synthesized to explore broader implications for health communication, public perception, and media influence. Content analysis was chosen as the primary research method due to its ability to systematically examine media representations and uncover embedded patterns (Guthrie & Abeysekera, 2006). Unlike audience reception studies, which focus on individual viewer interpretations, content analysis enables an objective assessment of cinematic messaging related to smoking (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002). Additionally, content analysis is particularly valuable in health communication research, as it helps identify potential risk factors associated with media exposure to smoking behaviors (Viswanath et al., 2010). By analyzing Bollywood films as cultural artifacts, this study provides key insights into how smoking is constructed, normalized, or challenged in mainstream cinema.

Table 3: List of movies with details of Smoking Portrayal. Table by authors.

S.No.	Film Title	Release Year	Smoking Portrayal Summary	Gender of Smokers
1	Guzaarish	2010	Elegant defiance; used to enhance sensual persona	Female
2	Don 2	2011	Stylized masculinity and authority	Male
3	No One Killed Jessica	2011	Assertive female journalist; smoking signals boldness	Female
4	The Dirty Picture	2011	Sensual rebellion and self-expression	Female
5	Once Upon a Time in Mumbai	2010	Frequent use to portray authority, ambition, control, and vintage charisma.	Male
6	Ugly	2013	Chaotic stress response and tension release	Male
7	NH10	2015	Strategic moment reflecting psychological shift	Female
8	Lipstick Under My Burkha	2016	Covert rebellion and gendered autonomy	Female
9	Gangs of Wasseyapur	2012	Normalized in gangster lifestyle, tied to power and threat	Male
10	Rockstar	2011	Rebellion and alienation; visually glorified	Male
11	Shaitan	2011	Peer-driven hedonism and risk-taking behavior	Both
12	Kabir Singh	2019	Emotional disintegration and masculine vulnerability	Male
13	Tamasha	2015	Symbol of identity conflict and emotional fatigue	Male
14	Aashiqui 2	2013	Melancholic addiction linked to romantic decline	Male
15	Udta Punjab	2016	Depictions tied to trauma and social decay	Both
16	Delhi Belly	2011	Youthful irreverence, humor, and chaos	Male
17	Talaash	2012	Used to enhance the mystery and sensual ambiguity of a female character.	Female
18	Haider	2014	Claustrophobic rebellion under military stress	Male
19	LSD: Love, Sex Aur Dhokha	2010	Techno-social alienation and voyeurism	Male
20	Go Goa Gone	2013	Comedic escapism in counterculture party setting	Male

Table 3 presents the sample characteristics of the 20 analyzed Hindi-language films. Smoking was present in all selected movies, with portrayals ranging from occasional and isolated instances to frequent, visually stylized depictions. The qualitative summary includes a brief narrative of each film's use of smoking—whether symbolic, rebellious, stress-induced, or gendered—to contextualize how cinematic portrayals shape public

perception. The analysis focuses on character attributes, narrative integration, and the emotional or social function of smoking within each film.

Table 4 provides a detailed breakdown of the coding categories and subcategories used to analyze the smoking scenes. Character attributes include gender, age, social status, occupation, and personality traits. The

narrative context encompasses emotional states, social interactions, and motivations for smoking. Visual representation focuses on camera angles, lighting, and composition, while perceived coolness evaluates the desirability, attractiveness, and alignment with cultural norms. This comprehensive framework facilitates a nuanced understanding of the various dimensions through which smoking is portrayed in cinema.

Table 4: Smoking scene analysis

Category	Subcategory	Description
Character Attributes	Gender	Male, Female
	Age	Young Adult, Middle-aged
	Social Status	High, Middle, Low
	Occupation	Various (e.g., executive, worker)
Narrative Context	Personality Traits	Rebellious, Confident, Vulnerable
	Emotional State	Stress, Celebration, Introspection
	Social Interactions	Peer Pressure, Group Dynamics
	Motivations for Smoking	Identity Assertion, Rebellion, Cultural Symbolism
Visual Representation	Camera Angles	Low-angle, Close-up
	Lighting	Dramatic, Natural
	Composition	Strategic Framing, Focus on Sensory Elements
Perceived Coolness	Desirability	Attractiveness, Charisma
	Cultural Norms	Reinforcement, Challenge

Source: Authors

Table 5: Thematic Patterns in smoking scenes

Thematic Category	Observed Patterns
Smoking Frequency	Ranges from isolated instances to frequent portrayals; some films depict smoking as a recurring trait, others as symbolic moments.
Visual Framing	Smoking scenes often stylized through close-ups, dim lighting, or handheld shots to emphasize mood, rebellion, or chaos.
Narrative Role	Used to reflect rebellion, stress relief, identity assertion, trauma response, and social non-conformity.
Gender Patterns	Male characters dominate smoking portrayals; female smoking often marks autonomy, emotional resistance, or transgression.

Source: Authors

Table 5 summarizes the thematic patterns observed across the 20 analyzed films. The table classifies portrayals based on visual frequency descriptors (e.g., frequent, occasional, isolated), emotional framing (e.g., stress-induced, rebellious, habitual), and symbolic role (e.g., identity assertion, social defiance, trauma coping). The analysis also reveals gendered patterns—male characters are more often shown smoking, typically in alignment with dominant or emotionally volatile traits, while female smoking, though less frequent, is framed around autonomy, rebellion, or defiance of social norms.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The key findings of the study are presented within the framework of character attributes, narrative context, visual representation, and perceived coolness, supported by examples from a diverse array of movies. The analysis revealed that smoking was present in all the analyzed films, manifesting through diverse frequencies and contexts. While some characters engaged in isolated, symbolic acts of smoking, others demonstrated frequent or habitual usage. These portrayals ranged from quiet introspection and emotional distress to rebellious defiance and gendered resistance. Smoking appeared most commonly among male characters, yet female smoking- though less prevalent- carried strong narrative weight, often signifying autonomy or resistance

4.1 Character Attributes

4.1.1 Gender and Age:

The analysis revealed a consistent trend in the gender and age of characters depicted as smokers. Male characters dominated smoking portrayals, often portrayed as rugged, rebellious, or assertive figures. Female characters who smoked were portrayed in a more enigmatic or defiant light, often aligning with femme fatale archetypes. For instance, in *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), the male protagonist's frequent smoking underscores his violent defiance and macho dominance. *Shaitan* (2011) explores the rebellious behavior of an urban youth group, where both male and female characters are seen smoking as expressions of hedonism and resistance to authority. Similarly, *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016) uses female smoking as a subtle act of rebellion against societal norms.

4.1.2 Social Status and Occupation:

Smoking characters often belonged to diverse social strata, indicating that the habit transcends socioeconomic boundaries. Characters representing a range of professions, from corporate executives to street vendors, were depicted as smokers. This highlights the universality of the habit while also reinforcing the notion that smoking is not exclusive to any particular social group. For example, in *The Dirty Picture* (2011), the protagonist Silk, a B-grade film actress from a modest background, uses smoking as a visual expression of defiance and self-assertion. Her habit is not merely recreational; it becomes a symbol of her rebellion against the moral hypocrisy of the film industry and society at large. Through Silk's portrayal, the film underscores how smoking can function as a form of agency for marginalized women, cutting across both occupational and class boundaries in Indian cinema.

4.1.3 Personality Traits:

Smoking characters exhibited a spectrum of personality traits, including independence, nonconformity, and vulnerability. While some characters smoked to project confidence and assertiveness, others used it as a coping mechanism—signaling inner turmoil or a restless, spirited disposition. For instance, in *Tamasha* (2015), Ved's occasional smoking visualizes his fractured inner identity and emotional exhaustion. *Kabir Singh* (2019) illustrates how smoking marks the protagonist's descent into toxic obsession, while in *Ugly* (2013), characters smoke under stress, exposing personal instability.

4.2 Narrative Context

4.2.1 Emotional State and Social Interactions:

Smoking instances were often linked to specific emotional states, such as stress, contemplation, or celebration. The act of smoking frequently served as a visual cue to convey a character's emotional journey. For instance, in *Delhi Belly* (2011), smoking is depicted as an impulsive response to chaotic, high-stress situations. In *Haider* (2014), smoking accompanies the protagonist's internal unraveling in the face of family and political trauma. Similarly, in *NH10* (2015), the act of smoking punctuates the female protagonist's shift from fear to aggression, marking an emotional transformation.

4.2.2 Motivations for Smoking:

In *Rockstar* (2011), the protagonist's indulgence in smoking aligns with his transformation from an innocent student to a disillusioned celebrity, symbolizing his embrace of pain and identity. In *Shaitan* (2011), smoking is used by both male and female characters to assert independence and defy authority, especially in peer-driven settings that celebrate risk-taking. In *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), smoking becomes a private, almost clandestine act of rebellion, symbolizing suppressed agency in a repressive social environment. Similarly, in *The Dirty Picture* (2011), the protagonist smokes publicly as a bold declaration of self-ownership and nonconformity, using tobacco as both armor and provocation.

4.3 Visual Representation

4.3.1 Camera Angles and Lighting:

Visual cues played a pivotal role in shaping the perception of smoking as cool within cinematic narratives. Smoking scenes were often captured using dynamic camera angles and dramatic lighting to enhance the aura surrounding the act. Films like *Rockstar* (2011) and *Delhi Belly* (2011) have used stylized smoking sequences—marked by close-ups, dim lighting, and handheld camera movements—to amplify emotional depth and frame smoking as cool or chaotic, depending on context.

4.3.2 Composition and Framing:

Cinematic composition and framing further contributed to the allure of smoking. Characters were strategically positioned within the frame, sometimes in close-up shots, to emphasize the act of smoking. These compositions highlighted the sensory aspects of smoking, creating an immersive experience for the audience. A notable example is the use of close-ups during smoking scenes in *Kabir Singh* (2019), where the protagonist's rebellious demeanour is accentuated. In *Aashiqui 2* (2013), the character Rahul (played by Aditya Roy Kapur) is framed in close-ups while smoking, highlighting his complex emotions and brooding temperament in a number of poignant scenes. In *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), visual framing isolates female characters while smoking, specially in confined domestic spaces, creating a powerful contrast between surveillance and subversion, as smoking becomes both a private pleasure and a political gesture.

4.4 Perceived Coolness

4.4.1 Desirability and Attractiveness:

Cinematic smoking instances often imbued characters with an air of desirability and attractiveness. Smoking was utilized as a tool to enhance a character's charisma and magnetism, making them more compelling to the audience. In *Rockstar* (2011), the protagonist's frequent smoking is framed through dramatic lighting and stylized shots, contributing to his enigmatic and rebellious image. In *Kabir Singh* (2019), smoking is tightly linked to masculine assertiveness and emotional turmoil, reinforcing the character's dominant screen presence. *The Dirty Picture* (2011) similarly uses smoking to accentuate the protagonist's bold and transgressive femininity, adding charisma and allure to her public persona.

4.4.2 Cultural Norms and Challenges:

The cinematic portrayal of smoking both reinforced and challenged prevailing cultural norms. While smoking was frequently presented as stylish and aspirational, certain movies used smoking to confront societal taboos or to illustrate the pitfalls of addiction. In *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), smoking scenes involving the journalist Meera depict her as a nonconformist within a predominantly male-dominated profession, challenging gender stereotypes. Similarly, in *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), female characters smoke in defiance of patriarchal expectations, using tobacco use as an expression of autonomy and resistance. The results of the content analysis illuminate the intricate mechanisms through which cinematic narratives contribute to the paradoxical perception of smoking as both injurious and cool. The consistent portrayal of smoking as an emblem of masculinity or enigma underscores the power of cinematic storytelling to shape gender norms and societal ideals. Moreover, the strategic use of visual elements and narrative context fosters a sense of allure, reinforcing the perception of smoking as an attractive behavior (Viswanath et al., 2010).

The study's findings hold significant implications for health communication and public health efforts. The allure of smoking within cinematic narratives could potentially undermine the effectiveness of anti-smoking campaigns by perpetuating a glamorous image of the habit (Davis, 2008).

Consequently, there is a pressing need for collaborative efforts between the entertainment industry and public health advocates to counterbalance such portrayals with responsible messaging. The diversity of motivations for smoking depicted in the movies underscores the complexity of this behavior, emphasizing the importance of nuanced health communication strategies. Understanding the underlying drivers of smoking, as illustrated in cinematic narratives, can inform the design of tailored interventions (Campbell & Quintiliani, 2006) that address the multifaceted nature of tobacco use. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of movies in challenging or reinforcing cultural norms (Kristensen & From, 2015). Certain movies used smoking portrayals to question gender roles and societal expectations, showcasing the potential for cinema to be a catalyst for social change; this underscores the importance of promoting health-conscious narratives that challenge harmful behaviors and norms while resonating with audiences.

Analysing character attributes, narrative context, visual representation, and perceived coolness, this study underscores the need for a collaborative and strategic approach to health communication that navigates the intricate nuances of cinematic storytelling. As the cinematic landscape continues to evolve, the findings of this study contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the influence of media on public perceptions and behaviors, shedding light on the potential avenues for harnessing cinema as a tool for positive health communication. This aligns with findings from Scheffels and Tökle (2017), who describe how even occasional smoking may be linked with identity signaling, particularly in Western cinematic contexts of tobacco denormalization.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how health communication intersects with smoking portrayals in Indian cinema (2010–2020), revealing complex dynamics that shape public perceptions, cultural norms, and behaviors. Through content analysis, it identifies how character attributes, narrative contexts, visual representations, and perceived coolness construct smoking as both alluring and hazardous. Smoking in Indian films often symbolizes rebellion, sophistication, or

defiance, reinforcing societal constructs of identity. Characters across diverse gender roles and social statuses such as in *Tamasha* (2015) and *Ugly* (2013) use smoking as a narrative device to portray internal conflict, rebellion, and emotional distress. These portrayals contribute to cinema's ability to reflect and challenge norms. Visual aesthetics play a central role in amplifying smoking's appeal. Techniques such as dramatic lighting and close-up framing in *Rockstar* (2011) and *Delhi Belly* (2011) romanticize smoking, linking it to confidence and charisma. The theme of perceived coolness captures this paradox where cinematic allure clashes with known health risks. Films like *Shaitan* (2011) and *Rockstar* (2011) exemplify this tension, portraying smoking as both aspirational and symptomatic of deeper conflict, thus complicating its role in public health messaging.

The findings highlight the need for strategic collaboration between public health advocates and the entertainment industry (India's Film Industry Backs Tobacco Control, 2017). While a cross-sectional study from southern India found that tobacco imagery in films does not always lead to smoking uptake, suggesting regulatory measures may reduce harm (Kulkarni et al., 2020), consistent monitoring remains essential. Media literacy initiatives that deconstruct the 'cool' image of smoking can foster critical viewer engagement and help counteract glamorization. Filmmaker partnerships could further support responsible portrayals by depicting smoking's consequences or avoiding its unnecessary stylization. Cinema also holds the power to subvert norms and provoke reflection. Several films use smoking portrayals to challenge gender roles or raise questions about identity, rebellion, and autonomy. This dual function – reinforcing and resisting social scripts – positions cinema as a powerful tool for shaping public discourse. By analyzing character traits, narrative framing, and visual aesthetics, this study advocates a nuanced, collaborative approach to health communication. As Indian cinema continues to evolve, such insights can inform how cinematic storytelling through character-driven, symbolic, and visual strategies might advance broader public health goals.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

This study offers valuable insights, yet some limitations remain. Despite the systematic nature of content analysis, interpretive subjectivity may influence the coding of visual or narrative cues. The focus on visual and narrative elements may underplay the role of auditory aspects such as dialogue and background score in shaping audience perception. Additionally, the exclusive analysis of smoking scenes may overlook other influential character behaviors or subtexts that also inform viewer attitudes. The study does not engage with filmmaker intent or production context, which might further elucidate the motivations behind smoking portrayals. While the sample is diverse and culturally significant, it remains limited to 20 Hindi-language films from 2010–2020, selected purposively. Consequently, findings may not be generalizable across other genres, languages, or temporal contexts. Moreover, several films in the sample are critically acclaimed or widely viewed, potentially biasing the data toward more prominent cinematic representations of smoking.

Future research can explore how smoking is depicted across different regional and national cinemas to better understand cultural variations in symbolic and narrative functions. Empirical studies such as audience reception surveys, focus groups, or eye-tracking analyses would help evaluate how viewers process and interpret cinematic smoking. Expanding the timeframe to include pre-2000 or post-2020 films may reveal shifts due to regulatory changes (e.g., post-COTPA disclaimer policies). Comparative analyses across genres (e.g., romance, action, social realism) could further uncover how genre conventions mediate the acceptability or appeal of smoking. Finally, integrating filmmaker interviews could contextualize the aesthetic, commercial, or ideological motives behind smoking portrayals.

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