Towards an understanding of celebrity worship among Indian consumers - an ethnoconsumerist approach

By

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Abstract

Celebrity worship is a significant phenomenon in India. The stars of the Bollywood film industry are highly prominent celebrities. Their deification is not unusual in India, to the extent that some stars have temples dedicated to them. Although the need and importance of studies of consumption in non-Western societies has been recognised, little research has been undertaken in the marketing literature to better understand worship of Bollywood celebrities. This research interprets religious influences in the consumption and worship of Bollywood stars. Specifically, it examines the religious concept of darshan (a mode of seeing) and how it manifests itself in various forms to influence Indian consumer behaviour. An ethnoconsumerist interpretive approach was adopted to address this research. Participants of different age groups, sex and religiosity were recruited in the North Indian region of Delhi for the study using in-depth interviews. The thesis consists of three research papers. The first research paper follows the guidelines of the ethnoconsumerist approach by presenting a text view. This is obtained from a collection of secondary sources and provides cultural insights. It also traces the historical development of Bollywood films and summarises religious and theatrical influences. The second research paper examines the impact of darshan on movie consuming experiences in India. Some important thematic findings reveal that Bollywood stars are viewed as mythical beings and act as role models for Indian consumers. The third research paper examines consumer devotional behaviour towards Bollywood stars in the context of masala films. Findings suggest three distinct levels with varying degrees of devotional consumer behaviour: bounded consumers, devoted followers and worshippers. Based on the findings, an interpretive framework of consumer devotion is proposed. This research contributes to the marketing literature in three ways: firstly, it integrates literature from both anthropology and marketing to suggest a new way of looking at Indian consumption. Second, it introduces the cultural concept of darshan to better understand Indian consumer behaviour in relation to Bollywood celebrity worship. Third, it suggests a new interpretive framework of consumer devotion which can stimulate future research.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_____   _____

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Chapter 1

1.1. Prologue

This chapter provides a broad overview of the research. It acknowledges the role of culture and the symbolic modes, practices, and behaviours as the basis of understanding consumer behaviour. We describe briefly the theoretical paradigm ethnoconsumerism adopted in this research. Furthermore, a key unique cultural concept – darshan (a mode of seeing) is introduced. Darshan is a ubiquitous feature in the Indian culture and practised in daily lives. The concept of darshan manifests itself in various forms. As an important mode of seeing among the Hindu Indians, it influences consumption behaviour in India in many ways. The research examines the role and impact of the religious concept of darshan on consumer behaviour in the context of Bollywood in India. Religion is considered as a cultural process here that emphasises and understands darshan as a habituated socialised norm of the Indian culture. We develop in fuller detail the concept of darshan in the context of Bollywood and the theoretical framework in the three chapters of the thesis.

The thesis consists of three research papers. The first research paper is guided by an ethnoconsumerist approach and presents a text view. It provides an understanding of Indian culture and outlines the historical development of Indian cinema and its influences. This broad perspective sets the context for the rest of the thesis, in terms of religious influences on movie consuming experiences and consumer devotion. The second research paper specifically reports findings of an empirical study that examines the impact of the religious concept of darshan (a mode of seeing) on movie consuming experiences in India. The third research paper interprets the worship of Bollywood celebrities in terms of religious devotional behaviour. Finally, the thesis draws together the findings, contributions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Although the Bollywood industry has major significance for both economic and cultural reasons, very little has been written about consumption experiences of Bollywood films and stars in the marketing literature. The need and importance of studies of consumption in non-Western societies has been recognised (Jafari et al 2012). This research starts to address that need by examining the role and impact of the religious practice of darshan (a mode of seeing) on consumer behaviour in the context of Bollywood in India. Indian consumers represent highly symbolic modes of behaviour which need to be understood within the cultural framework (Venkatesh, 1995). Following the guidelines of ethnoconsumerist research, we bring to surface a deeply embedded cultural factor steeped in the Indian culture - darshan to show how it influences the behaviour of Indian consumers.

Geertz's (1973) *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* is an iconic work that describes the Balinese sport of cockfighting observed during his fieldwork in Indonesia. The cockfights are illegal in Bali, but widespread. Geertz (1973) calls it "a powerful drama tapping the fount of human experience" and describes it as "a glimpse of the hidden and opaque inner nature". Rabinow & Sullivan (1987) say that the sport may appear to be a superficial social practice but in fact is related to deep elements of the Balinese culture, self-conception, and world-view. "The intelligibility of any action requires reference to its larger context, a cultural world" (ibid). Geertz (1973) asserts that "culture is context", that "we must attempt to grasp it from the native point of view". The complexity of Geertz's (1973) example offers the view that cultural patterns cannot be generalized; rather they are specific "systems of significant symbols". As such, the example supports the view of culture that seeks the interpretation of local patterns. This definition of culture and the present research joins the ongoing debate in consumer behaviour regarding generalizations about consumer culture (Ilmonen, 1985; Costa & Bamossy, 1995; Sherry, 1995; Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000; Jafari, 2012).

Consumption is an inherently cultural activity (Jafari, 2012). Ilmonen (1985) argued that 'consumption does not take place in an economic and social vacuum' and consequently should be 'viewed in its cultural context'. In his seminal work on ethnoconsumerism, Venkatesh (1995)

highlights that there is an Indian approach to consumption and the answers come from a cultural analysis of everyday practices and behaviours arising from them; Western conceptual distinctions cannot be easily applied to an Indian context. For instance, the dichotomy of *the sacred* and *the profane* (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989) "have little relevance in the Hindu context since these are not antithetical in thought" (Das, 1987). Nicholas and Inden (1972) explain that the sacred impinges on the profane so deeply in Hindu social life that there is little meaning in insisting on its distinction from the profane. Venkatesh (1995) provides more examples such as Marx's *material base and superstructure*, Levi-Strauss's *nature and culture,* Weber's *class and status*. "Indians have their own conceptions of the connections between matter, actions, thoughts, and words, and these are imbued with certain relational properties that are not commonplace in Western thought" (Venkatesh, 1995). A number of scholars (Belk et al., 2003; Steenkamp and Burgess, 2002; Laros and Steenkamp, 2004, Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Jafari et al., 2010) have deemed further advancement of consumer research, specifically calling for more exploratory research in non-Western societies and contexts. This study is designed to address such concerns.

This research is contextualised in Bollywood, an important cultural phenomenon in India (Dwyer, 2010). According to Lorenzen and Taube (2008) Bollywood is not just one of India's most eye-catching phenomenon, it is also the world's biggest and fastest growing commercial film cluster. It is indeed one of the largest creative industries in the world, both by turnover and by viewership (BBC 2013; Ganti, 2013; Lal, 2013); with 14 million Indian moviegoers per day (Rosenberg, 2011). In 2017, India's film ticket revenue totalled $1.47 billion up from $1.30 billion in 2016 (Ernst & Young, India, 2017). The size of this market has seen an inflow of foreign funds and international players. For instance, Warner Bros. and Columbia have forayed, with Indian companies Zee and Sony, into Bollywood. Ironically, although Bollywood is such a conspicuous experiential industry in an emergent economy, research efforts to explore cultural influences have been sparse.

One pervasive influence of Indian life is religion (Venkatesh, 1995). Cohen (2009) suggests that religion can be seen as a form of culture. Uniquely Indian, darshan, a wider religious cultural mode of 'seeing' is a ubiquitous feature of Indian culture, and darshan is practised in daily lives. Babb (1981) defines darshan as 'a current of sight', a fluid-like 'seeing' that flows, mingling with that of the deity; that the deity's sight somehow "takes" the devotee's sight upward and inward, "on a pilgrimage of insight". "The devotee sees as he could not see before, and a wholly new universe comes into view. Most important of all, however, he sees his God as he truly is; that is, as the Supreme Being", allowing the devotee to acquire something of the deity's highest nature (Babb, 1981). Seeing in this way is a form of knowledge (Eck, 1985). This takes the devotee on a pilgrimage of insight (Babb, 1981). In this sense, to see is to know. Hence, darshan has a number of overlapping meanings. One can define the religious concept of darshan as connecting with the divine and experiencing grace through an act of devotional seeing.

In order to provide a broader and deeper insight into the unique and complex dynamics of Bollywood, an ethnoconsumerist interpretive approach is used. According to Venkatesh (1995), ethnoconsumerism is the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of study. Ethnoconsumerist research looks at the consumer not just as an individual but as a cultural being. It considers the value systems, symbolic belief systems, rituals, and everyday practices of the consumer all interwoven into a holistic view. One can define ethnoconsumerism both as a theoretical and methodological approach which studies consumption as a culturally constituted behaviour.

This research aims to identify and interpret religious influences in the consumption and worship of Bollywood stars. While there is a focus on India's growing economic might, much needs to be recognised about the implications of the "softer" power of India, Bollywood, in the commercial world. This industry generates consumers not only in India, but also, globally. So, there is a need for a better understanding of this conspicuous industry in an emerging powerful economy.

There are profound religious influences on Bollywood films (Prasad, 1998) yet little empirical research has been conducted in the marketing literature to better understand the worship of Bollywood stars. As this study aims to conceptualise darshan as a cultural phenomenon, ethnoconsumerism provides an appropriate approach through its assumption of the consumer as a cultural being. The key emphasis in this research is on uncovering the meaning and significance of darshan to understand the consumer culture in India in the context of Bollywood. This research will bring to surface deeply embedded factors steeped in the Indian culture, reflected in the behaviour of Indian consumers, even though they themselves may not be fully aware of the influence.

The next chapter introduces the first research paper focusing on the cultural context of India and the emergence of the Bollywood phenomenon.

Chapter 2

Towards an understanding of the Indian cultural kaleidoscope and Bollywood films - A text view

2.1. Introduction

This paper follows the guidelines of ethnoconsumerist research to set the course and direction of our research. One can define ethnoconsumerism both as a theoretical and methodological approach which studies consumption as a culturally constituted behaviour. Ethnoconsumerism argues for deeper development of knowledge constructed from the culture's point of view to all aspects of consumption. This framework is distinguished by its use of theoretical categories generated from within the culture under study (Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000). It provides a research approach that brings together a set of assumptions and tools that aids researchers aiming to learn about consumption in a given context. It accomplishes this by deriving cultural categories and using them in theory building with an emphasis on bridging the individual, social, and cultural (Meamber & Venkatesh, 2000).

The ethno-consumerist framework relies on the following tenets: (a) behaviour is grounded in culture; (b) cultural categories are dependent upon both historical and socio-cultural forces as well as current practices. Venkatesh (1995) emphasises that only field work, as ethnographers do, is insufficient as cultures have origins and histories. The analysis of any given culture must combine what Venkatesh (1995) refers to as "the text view". A text view refers to historical-sociocultural themes of the culture embedded in texts, local histories value systems, and archival sources.

A recent theoretical paradigm known as consumer culture theory has a similar focus which is to get an in-depth understanding of why consumers behave the way they behave. It examines the interaction between consumers and the cultures they are in. As a theoretical perspective, it has been criticized by scholars (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011) who have suggested that some of the CCT studies lack the socio-historic context that is seen to have a major effect to the prevailing culture. Both consumer culture theory and ethnoconsumerism study consumer behaviour and consumption from a social and cultural point of view. However, the difference is

the starting point between the two approaches. The ethnoconsumerist approach is to start broad, taking an expansive field of the phenomenon using both the literature as well as field notes as guidance to construct a cultural framework which then guides analyses. Consumer culture theory on the other hand does not consider the social-historic literature.

There are a number of reasons why using ethnoconsumerism as a theoretical framework is appropriate for this study. It fits with this study because firstly, it is part of the interpretive tradition that emphasises the research as a product of the researcher acting as interpreter. Secondly, the focus of our research is on a deeply embedded cultural concept - darshan. In order to understand the impact of darshan on consumer behaviour in the context of Bollywood, it is imperative to obtain cultural knowledge of the socio-historic; especially at the conceptualisation stage of the study. As previously mentioned, the principles of the ethnoconsumerist framework constitute a text view of the cultural categories. The text view provides us with a rich framework for a deeper examination of the culture in question, the practices, value systems, and behavioural norms as they relate to consumption. Henceforth, this theoretical framework is appropriate for our research.

This paper provides a "text view" to provide a framework for our research on religious influences on Indian consumers in the context of Bollywood. Historical-sociocultural aspects in this text view have been obtained and cited from scholarly studies in Indian culture. We organise the paper into two broad sections. The first section focuses on key aspects of the Indian culture, while the second traces the history of Indian cinema providing the beginnings, development and the different periods of Bollywood films. In addition, the cultural and religious influences on Bollywood films are summarised.

2.2. Cultural context of India

Literature (Hofstede, 1980, 1984) on culture is well developed. McCort and Malhotra (1993), describe culture as an amalgamation of beliefs, values, customs and habits that are acquired by an individual as a part of the society in which he is brought up. Although an understanding of

Indian culture is central to this research, several studies have highlighted the complexity of understanding Indian culture (Das, 2010; Kakar and Kakar, 2009; Malhotra, 2011). The complex nature of Indian culture makes it difficult to study culture as one unified concept and there is no single theoretical framework that can be applied to understand it. Venkatesh (1995) suggests focusing on the important aspects to understand the complexities of the Indian culture. The three key aspects of Indian culture selected here are discussed below.

2.2.1. Religious-spiritualistic orientation

Indian culture values spirituality (Verma, 1997). Spirituality has been emphasised for almost 2000 years and is a cultural phenomenon in India (Bhawuk, 2003). Many names of spiritual gurus (teachers) such as Buddha, Chaitanya, Tulsidas, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Chinmayananda are prominent in the spiritual history of India. Bhawuk (2003) notes that even today, spirituality permeates the masses in India, and social life revolves around rituals that act as symbolic reminders of the value of spirituality. Further, Das (2002) observes that religion and spirituality have a great effect on the Indian psyche. Indian culture which has evolved over many centuries, has strong religious roots forming the basis of everyday life (Venkatesh, 1995). This way of life encompasses a complex system of daily practices, rituals, beliefs, and symbolic patterns that overlap various aspects of social life. Everyday life can include small rituals and prayers to deities at home and during big festivals like the *kumbh mela* which occurs once in 12 years, drawing millions of people (Bhawuk, 2003). Chhokar et al. (2007) explain that daily religious practices are difficult to define but can be interpreted in a number of ways.

Scholars (Dissanayake and Sahai, 1992) have focused on the two Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Indian culture is strongly influenced by these epics, along with a multitude of ancient scriptures (Sinha, 2000; Chatterjee, 2006; Bhattacharjee, 2011). It is essential to understand the underlying principles of these ancient Indian teachings if one is to comprehend the modern Indian psychological makeup, society and culture (Roland, 1988).

Ramayana's impact is reflected in Rajagopal's (2001) statement that the immortal epic is not only of Himalayan dimensions, it is also a repository of social and moral values.

Ramayana is a simple tale of good triumphing over evil. It follows the life story of the prime character, Rama, the prince of Ayodhya (an ancient kingdom) and the rescue of his wife Sita from the demon Ravana. The main characters within the epic are Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman and the evil villain, Ravana. Rama is commanded by his father, the King Dashratha to relinquish his right to the throne and to go into exile. Rama's wife, Sita follows him into exile where she is abducted by Ravana and imprisoned on the island of Sri Lanka. Ravana is a powerful king who has the advantage that he cannot be killed by Gods or demons. Hanuman is an incarnation of the God Shiva and plays an important role in the battle that ensues to save Sita. Ramayana is a powerful story of Gods and demons and the contrast of vice and virtue; all typifying and symbolising the cultural and spiritual beliefs of India. Mankekar (1999) indicates that Indians tend to see Rama and Ravana as diametrically opposed, good versus evil. The Rama story is a "pool of signifiers," and a "common code" espousing social and religious ideals for much of India (Ramanujan, 1991). Not only does it form the basis of the cultural traditions of the Hindus but it also promotes moral ideals, love, obedience, and other virtues. The second epic Mahabharatha is primarily the legendary tale of a dynastic struggle resulting in a civil war. Krishna, the Indian God is a prime character in the epic. Mahabharata relates the story of how Vishnu appears on earth in human form as God Krishna to guide and protect Arjuna (mythological character from Mahabharatha). In their conversation, Arjuna is told that as a warrior, he must follow his duty, where nothing is of higher importance than the war against evil and to restore good.

In addition to the two epics, the most important religious book for Hindus is *The Bhagavad Gita*. At the core of understanding *The Bhagavad Gita*, Vivekanand (1972) said are the key messages of dharma and karma. Gupta et al (2002) explain that dharma means "to uphold what is correct" and is a guide in social and moral issues. Further, each person had a moral responsibility to learn from elders, which included the occupational knowledge and

expertise, and to pass on wisdom to the progeny. The concept of dharma implies duty or obligations that encompasses his/her whole life; following dharma ensures that all human action must conform to the eternal order that is all pervading (Gupta, 2002). The emphasis is thus not just on doctrine of thought (vichara) but on practice (aachaara) and actual conduct ensuring welfare for all (Nadkarni, 2007). Dharma is closely connected to the concept of karma (action). The belief in the concept of karma orients the Indian thinking towards right action as actions impact future life, which is the basis of reincarnation. One could break the chain of rebirths through appropriate performance of one's dharma, the duties and responsibilities, and performing them earnestly (Gupta et al, 2002). In addition, karma is also associated with acceptance of fate (Nimmagadda and Cowger, 1999). Mahadevan (2014) notes that these philosophies are still followed in modern India and that the spiritual nutrient of Hindu philosophy has not dried up or decayed.

2.2.2. Hierarchical order

According to Kumar (2007), hierarchical order is deeply ingrained across generations in the Indian psyche. The hierarchical order in India can be traced back to the ancient Indian scriptures, where everyone was ranked. Sinha and Kumar (2004) explain that hierarchical order was in terms of caste. The caste system has been widely researched (Gupta, 2005; Rao, 1981; Chandra and Mittra, 2003; Chhokar et al., 2007). Indian society is stratified hierarchically on the basis of caste; the caste is a social category that is unique to India (Beteille, l991). Chhokar et al. (2007) note that the caste system was first enunciated by ancient law-giver Manu in the Vedic period (1500-1000 B.C.). Pick and Dayaram (2006) explain the caste hierarchical system divided society into four levels, according to their occupations. These categories (in descending order) are: the Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors and royalty), Vaishyas (traders), and the Sudras (people who performed menial jobs). The hierarchy was clear, with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the lowest place in the social order (Rangarajan, 1992). These castes are further divided into jatis (sub-groups). Entry into each caste is determined by birth and changing one's caste is not

possible. Raina (2004) states that it is an ancient historical legacy and still dominant. Chhokar et al. (2007) contend that the existence of the caste system is one of the major factors responsible for discrimination in Indian society today, where power is distributed unequally. While the higher ranked groups usually have access to wealth, power, and privilege, the opposite is true for the lower ranked groups; this system keeps the lower castes in poverty, while upper castes are upwardly mobile and successful (Gokulsing and Disanayake, 1998).

Recent studies (Kapur et al, 2010) suggest that the role of caste, in shaping economic well-being of among lower caste people, is lessening. In modern India the link between caste and occupation has also weakened considerably. This is because affirmative action has strengthened the upward mobility of lower castes with quota-driven government jobs and places for higher education (Beteille, 1992). In addition, migration to cities, entry into non-traditional occupations and changes in agriculture have all combined to bring further changes in Indian society in lessening the impact of the caste system.

Even though there is a widespread belief that caste disparities are characteristics of a bygone era and have no place in modern India, Kurian and Srivastava (1983) argue that this traditional system continues to play an important role. For example, inter-caste marriages are still looked down upon. Desai and Dubey (2011) observe that caste affiliations remain ubiquitous in modern India and are prevalent in everyday practices. Examples of such practices include emphasis on surnames, marriage arrangements, dress and food habits that often reflect caste distinctions. Caste remains a salient feature of Indian social morphology and "is still correlated with every form of social stratification whether based on wealth, occupation, income, education, or some other criterion" (Beteille, 1993). Despite contemporary trends in modern India, inequality remains a primary feature of the social and economic system (Pick and Dayaram, 2006).

2.2.3. Family oriented structure

According to Beteille (1993), family must be given a central place in the culture of India. For most Indians, family ties are most important (Stern, 2003). The social institution that is key in India is the joint family, which means that two generations live under one roof. While nuclear families are becoming more common, the typical family is still like an extended family. In spite of changes in Indian society, traditional norms such as the family system and values are still very cherished (Venkatesh, 1994). Banerjee (2008) suggests that relationship is of prime concern and people search for security within the confines of their near and dear ones in India.

Craig and Douglas (2005) suggest that culture matters for products with significant cultural content. This applies to Bollywood films in India as with their unique mixture of themes are an important cultural phenomenon in India (Dwyer, 2010). The films' narration and ideology have been influenced by the two epics, Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Dissanayake and Sahai, 1992). Bollywood films have "served to reinforce mythical stereotypes in modern clothing" (Chakravarty, 1993), with a recipe that appeals to Indian consumers. For example, references to Krishna's mythology and the romance between Lord Krishna and his consort Radha in an idyllic pastoral location surrounded by peahens and cows, has been adapted to modern day romance of young lovers and routines of the fantasy romantic duets in scenic locations. The historical origins of the Bollywood film industry and its influences are outlined below.

2.3. History and Evolution of Bollywood Films

The beginnings of Indian cinema can be traced to 1896, when the Lumiere brothers exhibited their six soundless short films in Bombay (Bose, 2006). By 1910, cinema halls had sprung up around the major cities. During the early days, Indians were increasingly exposed to popular foreign silent films, such as *The Great Train Robbery, Don Juan, The Sign of the Cross,* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Gokulsing and Disanayake, 1998). Dada Saheb Phalke produced the

country's first silent feature film, *Raja Harishchandra in* 1913. He was inspired to make a mythological film after he watched a British feature film entitled *Life of Christ*. Phalke wanted to make an Indian film with an Indian narrative style including storyline, actors and costumes as Indian audiences wanted storylines based on traditions familiar to them. The film was based on a well-known story of a Hindu king who was tested for his fidelity to God by being stripped of his worldly possessions. Phalke tied together the two important pillars of Indian cinema, religion and stage drama (Rangoonwalla, 2000). Inspired by traditions in Indian folk drama the film was a tremendous success. This set the tone and paved the way for future films combining mythology, religion, dance and melodrama and signified the birth of the Indian film industry.

With the advent of sound came a new era of Indian films. Key components have been songs and classical dance in Indian drama. With sound, film makers could intensify the viewer's emotions and with all of the important elements of classical Indian stage art would become more complete. In 1931, Irani's film *Alam Ara,* India's first sound feature film was released by the Imperial film company and brought revolutionary changes to India's film industry (Bose, 2006). As a case in point, Bombay's Majestic cinema was packed to the point of suffocation on its opening night (Shah, 1950). From then on, Indian films began to focus on scripts and dialogues that pertained to Indian society and culture. The early talkies were a mix of song, dance, and spectacle; the use of songs was overwhelming in these early talkies. There were 17 songs in *Shirin Farhad*, 22 in *Laila Majnu*, 41 in *Shakuntala*, and it peaked at 71 in *Indrasabha* (Rangoonwalla, 2000). The 1930s witnessed the arrival of many new production companies and filmmakers, which led to an increase in number of films being made. As India gained independence in 1947, cinema emerged as an undisputed vehicle for national unity (Kalkar, 1980). By the 1950s, Indian cinema had come into its own with films reflecting social messages highlighting inequities in Indian society (Jaikumar, 2003). Chopra (2007) notes that one of the films *Mother India* was nominated for an Oscar. Many films on social concerns, which appealed to the underprivileged sections of society (Iordanova, 2006) were made in the seventies and eighties.

Popular Hindi commercial cinema is known as Bollywood. Vasudevan (2011) notes that the term Bollywood at first was used casually by film critics and columnists. By the late 1990s, it became the common way to refer to films in India. Bollywood films are often referred to as masala films. In Hindi, masala is a pre-mixed blend of ground spices that is used in India to flavour food; so, 'masala-mix', describes a product that is a mix of ingredients such as song-and-dance sequences, fight and chase scenes, comedy interludes and lavish spectacle, all of which provides entertainment that lasts three to three and a half hours on average.

The history and evolution of Bollywood is inextricably linked with the historical, cultural, theatrical and musical traditions of India. Scholars (Radhyaksha and Willemen, 1999; Ganti, 2004) see the tradition of theatre as the immediate aesthetic and cultural precursor of the aesthetic of popular films. At the core of an understanding of the Bollywood genre is familiarity with an ancient theory of aesthetic reception which is called Rasa Theory (Mishra, 2009). The grand spectacle and the melodrama, music and dance is based on Rasa. The theory of Rasa is derived from the famous Indian ancient text 'Natyasastra', a book on the science of theatre, written by the Indian philosopher and theorist Bharath Muni. Bharath Muni considered dance, mime and drama as inseparable in the creation of drama. He consolidated and codified these three aspects of drama and addressed this book to the playwright, the director, and the actor. According to the Natyasastra, there is an array of rasas (emotions), for instance, love or desire, humour, grief, anger, valour, fear and wonder. Each rasa represents a particular emotion. Schechner (2001) in explaining the rasa theory says that when various condiments, sauces, herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is experienced. It is similar when different emotions are experienced. In traditional Hindu movies, expression of rasa was achieved through music, dancing and acting; just like a play that combines opera, ballet and drama.

Nandy (2003) says that Bollywood films make instrumental use of cultural traditions, and depicts them in a very theatrical and spectacular fashion. This form of theatre has provided Indian cinema with a template, which has been incorporated into the film structure; resulting in a trend in

Indian cinema to borrow iconic images from traditional Indian mythology, like the commonly used theme of the Radha- Krishna (Indian Gods) romance. Pisharoti (1987) suggested that the rasa experience is the essence of these vivid and complex dramatic events, in a performance perceived and experienced by the audience. The two most common primary rasas (emotions) in Indian cinema are the romantic and melodrama.

The earlier development of Indian cinema relied on the iconography of Hindu folklore with local cultural practices effectively embedded in the film aesthetics; easily recognizable by the Indian public. The aesthetics gave the film stars cultural meanings in their cinematic presence; this was the heralding of a psychological transformation in the relationship between the spectator and the filmic image (Dwyer and Patel, 2002). This transformation closed the psychological gap between the subject and the viewer and brought the two together in what might be considered a form of darshan, the Hindu religious practice whereby the devotee ritually gazes at deities to invoke good fortune (ibid). Scholars (Babb, 1981; Eck, 1998; Prasad, 1998; Rajadhyaksha, 2003) contend that the concept of darshan is central to popular Indian culture. It connotes the relationship between the visual object and the viewer/spectator and is used primarily in religious contexts. Fuller (2004) describes darshan as a two-way process, an "exchange of visions", in which the devotee looks upon the image of a deity and in return, the devotee experiences the deity's aura as a reciprocal gaze. Devotees believe that this reciprocation of "eye contact" effectively dissolves the pre-existing boundaries between divinity and humanity (Fuller, 2004). According to Dasgupta (1960), the prevalence of images of deities, which appear "mostly like human figures", are yet divine. They give expression to a spiritual message that the forms of Gods were intended to impart (ibid). Prasad (1998) relates darshanic practise to imagery of stars in films, "the object of the darshanic gaze is a superior, a divine figure or a king who presents himself (on screen) as a dazzling splendour to his subjects, he, is not randomly chosen by the camera, but belongs to the class of the 'chosen' in the extra-filmic hierarchical community".

2.4. Summary

Aspects of Indian culture that are considered directly relevant to the development of Bollywood films are discussed; these include: religious–spiritualistic orientation, hierarchy and family orientation. In relation to religious-spiritualistic orientation, the central role of the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics is emphasised, together with the concepts of dharma and karma. The origins and problems of the hierarchical caste system are explained and the recent social changes occurring, to lessen the impact of caste, are briefly mentioned – although the on-going influences of traditional social systems, that may no longer be relevant, are acknowledged. The recent socio-economic trends impacting families are briefly outlined, but the continuing importance of family ties and values are emphasised.

The history of Indian cinema is briefly summarised and development of the Bollywood film formula, based on religious and folklore themes, as well as traditional theatrical techniques and skills, is explained. Drawing on this historical background and the cultural features of India, and the characteristics of the Bollywood product, the next chapter examines the impact of the religious concept of darshan (a mode of seeing) on movie consuming experiences in India.

This paper provides us with a knowledge of Indian cultural dimensions. Specifically, we look at religious influences on Indian consumers in the context of Bollywood films. The focus on the three cultural dimensions in this research are: religious-spiritualistic orientation, hierarchical order, family-oriented structure. We outline Indian aspects within these cultural dimensions such as karma and dharma which are unique to the Indian culture.

The concepts of karma and dharma provide us with a background for deciphering right and wrong human behaviour in the Indian context. In simple terms, karma means action and dharma means righteousness. They are an integral part of the Indian religious philosophy with a tremendous significance attributed to practical life. An understanding of the religious-philosophical view underlying these concepts is imperative as they typify Indian culture. We

form linkages between the interpretation of the concepts and their application in various situations in everyday life by consumers, specifically, darshan in this research. Therefore, they help us explain Indian consumer behaviour better.

A text view of the evolution of the Bollywood industry provides us with knowledge of historical influences which are central to the aesthetics of current Bollywood films. For instance, the theory of rasa (aesthetics theory) is derived from a famous ancient text in Sanskrit known as the Natyasastra. Aspects of Rasa have an important influence on the Bollywood film as they provide a heightened darshanic experience to the consumer.

Such historical and cultural knowledge gives us important insights regarding the culture in question; its practices, value systems, and behavioural norms. With a knowledge of Indian cultural dimensions, we are able to deeply examine behavioural norms. This provides us a better understanding for our interpretive findings of how darshan influences consumer behaviour.

Chapter 3

Understanding Bollywood movie consuming experiences– a marketing perspective through the lens of Darshan

3.1. Introduction

Consumption has various dimensions, such as: experiential, hedonic, aesthetic, autotelic, and subjective (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The Hindi film industry, based in Mumbai and popularly referred to as Bollywood, is a unique experiential industry. Bollywood films are also frequently referred to as masala films, which means a spice mix. Masala films, are "signifiers that celebrate the uniqueness of Indian cinema in terms of a certain essential" Sarkar (2008). These essentials comprise "a potpourri of elements-music, romance, action, comedy and drama" (Ganti, 2004) including storylines derived from mythologies.

Dwyer (2002) observes that Indian cinema "is the place" that unites "the modern and the religious". Ganti (2004) says that, "we are dealing with a country which feeds on Hindi films, which breathes Hindi films, which does take its Hindi films very seriously". There are an estimated 14 million Indian moviegoers per day (Rosenberg, 2011). Industry estimates indicate that Bollywood will continue to grow at its current rate of 9% (Deloitte & Assocham, 2011). As previously emphasised, this industry has major significance for both economic and cultural reasons; however, scholarly research of the industry has been scarce. Very little has been written about consumption experiences of Bollywood films in the marketing literature, although the need and importance of studies of consumption in non-Western societies has been recognised (Jafari et al, 2012). This paper starts to address that need by examining the impact of the religious concept of darshan on movie consuming experiences in India.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a literature review. This is followed by a theoretical framework and methodology. Next, based on our discovery of behavioural patterns of consumers, we present our thematic findings and discussion on how these patterns unfold in different stages. To elucidate how the impact of darshan unfolds on movie consuming experiences, the findings are organised into three stages: before the movie, during the movie, and after the movie. Lastly, the conclusion discusses the limitations of the paper and offers suggestions for future research.

3.2. Literature review

Previous research (Neelamegham and Chintagunta, 1999; Elberse and Eliashberg, 2003) in the entertainment industry has been carried out mostly in the west. This only gives us a limited understanding of consumption of films outside the west. Scholarly studies through an anthropological lens (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998; Nandy, 1998; Prasad, 1998; Vasudevan, 2000; Dwyer and Patel, 2002; Kabir, 2001; Misra, 2002) inform us that there are profound religious influences on Bollywood films. Further, Prasad (1998) says that Indian film spectatorship should be viewed as being mimetic of the embodiment of local religious practices.

Religion can direct the life of an individual and affect that individual's preferences and what they consume (Fam, Waller and Erdoğan, 2004). Cohen (2009) argues that religion can be seen as a form of culture. An important feature of the entertainment industry, films are among the most common artifacts of modern popular culture (Beard, 1994) and the Indian film industry, most commonly known as Bollywood, is certainly a significant part of the Indian culture. It is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in India and "going to the movies" is a part of daily social life. Indeed, Mankekar (1999) suggests that the impact of films has been especially profound in India. While referring to Bollywood films, Kasbekar (2006) describes their cultural influence as all-pervasive and so powerful on the Indian consumer that even the mighty machine of Hollywood has been unable to make a dent in the Indian market.

Typically, Bollywood films contain elements from multiple genres and appeal to a wide spectrum of audiences and characterized by a "uniqueness" (Sarkar, 2008). The term 'uniqueness' refers to the fact that the films are a mix of song-and-dance sequences, fight and chase scenes, comedic interludes and lavish spectacle, all of which provides entertainment for over three hours (Ganti, 2004). Scholars such as Lutgendorf (2007) note that "Hindi films appear to be perhaps the most powerful cultural product based on non-western aesthetic principles". Rajadhyaksha (2003) states that, "there is a craze for Bollywood films that quite exceeds anything we have seen before".

Scholars like Dwyer (2002) have highlighted the similarity between how Indian consumers experience cinema and the religious practice of darshan. The concept of darshan has a number of overlapping meanings, from the 'sense of sight' or an act of seeing, to a philosophical system to the object of sight. Eck (1985) explains that seeing in this way is a form of knowledge, taking the devotee "on a pilgrimage of insight" (Babb, 1981). Lutgendorf (2006) says that darshan is relational and reciprocal. Davis (1997) explains that the reciprocal nature of darshan can only be understood when one accepts the proposition that divine images are themselves alive, imbued with the immanent presence of a transcendent divinity. This also explains how the religious images placed in temples or home shrines can be considered alive. These physical objects visually or symbolically representing particular deities, come to be infused with the presence or life or power of those deities. The concept of darshan is deeply embedded in Hindu religion and is a well-practiced and continuing tradition in present day India.

The concept of darshan manifests itself in various forms. As an important mode of seeing for millions, it influences the Indian consumer behaviour in many ways. It influences not only a mode of consumption of religious media, but also, stimulates a market for mass produced and consumed images, idols and posters as well as framed prints of Gods. Darshan is a ubiquitous feature in the Indian culture and practised in daily lives. Many people go to the temple daily and during festivals to get darshan. Many people travel far and wide to famous holy temples to get darshan of their preferred deity. The word darshan is often mentioned in the Indian culture during conversation. For example, friends who have not met in a while, will say, "I am lucky to get your darshan today".

An example of how the role of darshan becomes a mode for consumption for a theatrical experience can be seen through 'Ramlila' (Hess, 1983). 'Ramlila', is an annual dramatic folk re-enactment of the life of Rama, as described in the Hindu religious epic Ramayana. The suffix 'lila' means play and also signifies amusement. It includes songs, narration, dance and dialogue. During this festive period, the staging of Ramlila gives people the opportunity for darshan every day. There are also dramatic stagings of the Rama story, and one interesting moment of Ramlila

is the 'jhanki' (Hess, 1983). Hess (1983) defines 'jhanki' as a moment when the play is paused and an iconographic glimpse of the God is displayed. These intermittent pauses give the audience the opportunity to look at the divine, gaze at the divine and get darshan. People go to watch 'Ramlila' to get God's darshan or 'vision'. According to Hess (1983), these glimpses offer a form of darshan where the deity is present in the form of an actual person. Hinduism through its epics teaches that the universe is 'lila', or play, which in English means both 'drama' and 'game'. "There is no clear line between the 'play' and the 'world'; there is none between actors and audience" (Hess, 1983). Hess (1983) explains how the Gods emerge from the field of the ordinary world, and the ordinary world emerges from the field of cosmic forces.

The concept of darshan is also exemplified in the television series Ramayana based on the mythological epic. The screening was viewed by an unprecedented 100 million people, nearly one eighth of the nation (Lutgendorf, 2006); the epic series proved so popular that life came to a standstill throughout the nation as people sat glued to their television sets or watching the show in public places. The screening of the Ramayana series attracted mass devotion throughout the entire country. Rituals of Hinduism like offerings, flowers, incense and fasting were observed; with make shift altars set up in front of many television sets (Lutgendorf, 2006). In many homes, the watching of Ramayana became a religious ritual, and the actor Arun Govil who played Ram in the television serial was garlanded on the television set. Lutgendorf (1990) observes that television sets were decorated with sandalwood paste and vermillion, and conch shells were blown. Further, ardent followers would wake up early on a Sunday morning, bathe and pray before they ate breakfast and others even chanted hymns looking at the television (Lutgendorf,1990). Sales of television sets soared, in order to be able to witness the divine spectacle. When the show ended its initial run, its impacts continued beyond those of a successful television series. Its leads, Arun Govil and Deepika Chikhalia, who portrayed Sita, were literally revered as the very incarnation of the divinity they enacted. The serial projected the mythical God Ram played by the actor Arun Govil as an 'Avatar' (divine incarnation). Reports published in newspapers showed that many villagers worshiped and offered prayer to

television sets while the programme was on the air. Arun Govil became a branded Ram, and Dipika who played the part of the mythical Goddess Sita became a branded Sita for many Hindus.

The worship of the visual image on the screen was a complete identification of the actor with the deity (Lutgendorf, 2006). Mass produced God posters were sold everywhere and are today a ubiquitous feature of Indian culture. These mass-produced images of Gods as well as human saints and places of pilgrimage are an omnipraxy (Smith, 1995) as exemplified by the shopkeepers and taxi drivers who daily offer flowers and incense to framed pictures of deities. These pictures are often sold near pilgrimage sites and on city street corners, displayed in private homes, places of business, and the dashboards of taxicabs. Lutgendorf (1990) observes that 125 kilos of sanctified sweets had been placed before the screen during the broadcast. Conch shells, incense and flowers saw soaring sales too. Audio cassettes of devotional songs became very popular and were sold everywhere. Similarly, when the classic epic Mahabharatha was televised, there was a steep rise in sales of replicas of toy arms and weapons depicted in the serial to imitate the great heroes of the epic. Monkey masks, crowns of kings, teeth of demons, posters, stickers, Mahabharata diaries and other specialty items were introduced into the market (Lutgendorf, 1990).

Even though darshan has religious connotations, it is also a habituated socialized norm of the Indian culture. We refer to Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) "religious field" that coheres for its members through its habitus – the deeply socialised norms that guide how people think and behave. Although darshan is deeply connected to the religious, this research considers religion as a cultural process that emphasises and understands darshan as a cultural phenomenon.

Jafari et al (2012) assert that current knowledge in consumer culture in non-Western societies has a long way to go before flourishing. Moreover, consumer research is dominated by positivistic researchers who analyse consumers as cognitive agents (Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000). The positivistic approach is limited in studying the "philosophical and

epistemological viewpoints" (Jafari et al, 2012) and does not lend itself in developing a deep understanding of a cultural phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

Dwyer (2010) argues that Bollywood is the single most important cultural phenomenon in India. This influence is spreading internationally too. For instance, there have been a number of Bollywood music and dance performances outside of India. Examples include the Commonwealth games where a number of such performances were witnessed in 2006. The city of Melbourne has hosted exhibitions of Indians' cinema-going activities at Melbourne's Immigration Museum besides showcasing documentaries on 'How to make a Bollywood movie'. These examples demonstrate the allure of Bollywood, not only in India, but also, globally. Dwyer (2010) emphasises the vital need to understand the Bollywood industry as it reflects and is a guide to the thoughts and aspirations of hundreds of millions of people in India. Using an interpretive approach, this paper examines the influence of cultural factors on movie consuming experiences of Bollywood consumers in India.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is based on ethnoconsumerism (Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000). Venkatesh (1995) defines ethnoconsumerism as "the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of study". Ethnoconsumerist research looks at the consumer not just as an individual but as a cultural being. It is the study of the consumer and their value systems, symbolic belief systems, rituals, and everyday practices all interwoven into a holistic view. The key emphasis is on uncovering the local meanings and cultural categories rather than imposing external frameworks to understand a particular consumer culture.

Ethnoconsumerism focuses on gaining an understanding of the subject's point of view while at the same time identifying the contextual/environmental factors contributing to their position – in what are described as the field view and the text view respectively. The text view is

the identification and understanding of the historical and sociocultural themes of the culture as derived from the collection and analysis of cultural texts and materials. The text view includes an understanding of the basic cultural code of the Indian cultural ethos obtained by a knowledge of secondary sources. The field view, on the other hand, is a descriptive account of the current practices in a culture as derived from data collection and analysis during ethnographic field work. For example, research questions which provide the basis for the empirical investigation comprise the field view. With the ethnoconsumerist research approach, the text view and the field view are combined to develop a cultural framework which guides the analyses. This study uses the ethnoconsumerist research approach to obtain both a text view and a field view of examining religious influences on movie consuming experiences.

There are a number of reasons why using ethnoconsumerism as a theoretical framework is appropriate for this study. First, a major assumption in ethnoconsumerism is that consumer behaviour is grounded in culture and that individual consumption behaviour is embedded in a sociocultural environment. This is relevant because this study aims to conceptualize consumption of darshan as a cultural phenomenon. Second, ethnoconsumerism is important to this study because its approach and suggested conceptual framework provide a good solution for integrating the individual, social, and cultural through its assumption of the consumer as a cultural being. In addition, ethnoconsumerism is based on the concept of the "modal personality" (Venkatesh, 1995), meaning that when we see a certain pattern of behaviour in the individual occur regularly, it may mirror general trends and patterns of social interactions in the shared culture. This is particularly appropriate for this study given that this research focuses on the perspectives of consumers and unfolds how darshan is part of those consumers' lives as a cultural phenomenon. Finally, the ethnoconsumerist approach advocates the need to balance emic (subject's point of view) and etic (researcher's point of view) approaches.

The strength of ethnoconsumerist approach is that it bridges the emic and the etic; where the "cultural native's" perspective remains important. Ethnoconsumerism is part of the

interpretive tradition wherein the researcher is ultimately only constructing a representation of a culture. In summary, this premise of ethnoconsumerism fits with this study because, firstly, it is part of the interpretive tradition that emphasizes the research as a product of the researcher acting as interpreter; and secondly, with regard to the nature of this research, the literature could easily fall into a trap, where it applies theoretical constructs indiscriminately without consulting the culture in question.

3.4. Methodology

We employ an interpretive approach to understand and to gain insights into movie consuming experiences of the Indian consumer. Interpretivism looks for 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998). This gives the research greater scope to address issues of influence and impact, and to ask questions such as 'why' and 'how' (Deetz, 1996). The methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual's perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts, which people inhabit (Creswell, 2009).

The research was undertaken in two concurrent stages. The first stage consisted of a review of the historical and cultural insights or the "text view". The second stage was the "field review" which consisted of primary data collection in the form of interviews. In order to strengthen the study, methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002) was applied. Interviews were triangulated with observational and archival data. Observations were made during community social events such as weddings, social dinners, during daily activities such as shopping and while commuting in taxis between Delhi and Chandigarh in the north of India. In addition, print and broadcast media were used as supplementary data. This triangulation of sources enriched the data.

3.4.1. Sampling

Overall, the researcher chose purposive sampling, primarily for the reason that it assured a maximum variation sampling rationale (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Given the nature of this study, we adopted the following selection criteria to select subjects for interviews i.e., representing different age groups, sex, and religiosity. Participants identified their age, education and religiosity in terms of pre-given questions in a form (Appendix B). Religiosity was based on two factors: 1) Patterns of associated behaviour including daily rituals, regular worship and attendance of religious institutions; 2) Attitude towards religion including interest in learning about religious topics, watching religious/spiritual shows and following spiritual gurus. A varied religiosity sampling provided us with richer data. Participants for this study can be characterised as ranging in age from 20 to 55, diverse in occupation and represent differing socio-economic backgrounds, including working professionals, housewives, and students (Appendix D). This sampling gave us a wider perspective for the study.

The study was conducted in the North Indian region of Delhi. All participants had been based in the Delhi-region for at least the past decade. Thirty-six people voluntarily agreed to be interviewed in-depth. A snowballing sampling method (Silverman, 1997) was used, by asking the participants they interviewed to recommend other possible participants. Cash incentives were offered as an incentive to participate in the in-depth interviews; however, all participants refused to accept the incentive remarking that they were only too happy to talk about such an interesting topic. The researcher gifted a small Australian souvenir to all participants at the end as a gesture of thanks.

3.4.2. Interview Process

The researcher created a comfortable, informal, and friendly interview atmosphere to help the participants feel at ease in articulating and discussing their feeling and perceptions. Interviews

were conducted beginning with general warm-up questions on topics such as participants' backgrounds and interests, followed by questions on movie watching habits and Bollywood films. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and their consent was taken. During the discussion, we probed participants to explain how they perceived Bollywood stars. Additional questions were asked to facilitate interviewee confidence and gain relevant insights into the research questions. Participants were also shown clips of Bollywood films to explore and probe their thoughts. All interviews were conducted in a convenient and quiet place such as an office or study room in mutually convenient locations, and ranged between 45 minutes to an hour.

To obtain an in depth understanding, this study employed semi-structured interviewing using open-ended questions (Fontana and Frey, 2008; Berg, 2007). This ensured that the participant had enough latitude to express him or herself while remaining on topic (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). This allowed the researcher to "rephrase the questions and add further inquiries such as 'Who?' 'Where?' 'When?' 'Why?' and 'How?' based on the interviewee's answers and conversation flow (DeMarrais, 2004). This approach allowed us to capture the participant's own viewpoints, understand the cultural nuances in their own words and gain insights from their particular experiences (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). In the course of the interviews, participants were asked for contact information for new participants from family or non-family who might be interviewed. At the conclusion, participants were asked to share any other thoughts or information that seemed relevant.

3.4.3. Interview Questions

In an effort to obtain an understanding of what constitutes the nature of the interviewee's experiences, the interview began with some broad questions (Appendix C). For example, what makes you want to watch a Hindi film? Who is your favourite movie star? Other questions asked included the following, can you talk about an instance when you were watching a Bollywood film with your favourite star, what did you feel/think? In the process of answering these

questions, respondents began discussing and shedding light into their experiences. In addition, we used projective techniques in our interviews to obtain deeply embedded insights from participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

3.4.4. Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, each interview was transcribed. Transcripts were read and re-read to establish preliminary codes. The process of coding, categorising, and iteration was followed as outlined by Spiggle (1994). Data was coded for four criteria. These four criteria include behavioural, perceptual, emotions and the experiential. This coding was used to yield themes. Once the interviews were transcribed, data derived from participant interviews were interpreted and analysed. This required repeated transcript reviews, with each interpretation evaluated by referring back to the entire data. Consulting the extant literature in this process further informed and intensified the emerging patterns. This helped in generating initial concepts, define starting points for the research, and centre the analysis on themes common to the pool of narratives. An interpretive stance (Bryman and Burgess, 1994) underpinned the analysis.

The first stage of this process involved the production of initial codes from the data. These initial codes identified a feature of the data that appeared as the most basic element of the raw data that could be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon. The participants' narratives were read to understand them fully and significant words that captured key concepts such as the types of activities talked about, the types of experiences reported, and expressed attitudes toward, or feelings about Bollywood stars.

In the second stage, codes were sorted into categories. Categories are themes that are directly expressed in the text or derived from them through analysis. This coding scheme guided the data analysis to be systematic, logical, and scientific (Weber, 1990). The categories were used to organize and group codes into "units of meaning". Throughout the coding process, ideas

for interpreting and analysing segments of data were developed.

Once all transcripts had been coded, all data within each particular code were examined in the third stage. Some codes were combined during this process, whereas others were split into subcategories. Codes were sorted into categories based on how the various codes related and linked. These categories were used to organize and group codes into meaningful themes (Patton, 2002). In this process, the relationship between concepts and categories was investigated further. The goal here was to discover convergent themes capturing commonalities and patterns within the data, across individuals.

3.5. Thematic findings and discussion

This section presents the analysis in the form of thematic findings. To elucidate how the impact of darshan unfolds on movie consuming experiences, the thematic findings are presented in three stages: 1) before the movie - star loyalty and idolization 2) during the movie - mythical beings, imaginary identity and role models; and lastly 3) after the movie - re-shaping self, new self, emerging new values and upholding cultural values.

1.5.1. Before the movies

Our thematic finding for the first stage is - star loyalty and idolisation. This theme suggests that Indian consumer behavior towards Bollywood stars is loyal and that they idolise them. We further elaborate upon this theme.

3.5.1.1. Star loyalty and idolisation

Indian consumers tend to be loyal to Bollywood stars, with a strong allegiance to them. A quintessential feature of Indian consumers who go to cinemas is that they want to be one of the first ones to watch their favorite star. Priya explains, "*yes, I watch each and every movie starring Salman Khan, I watch it the first day, first show*". Unconditional loyalty and love manifest in its most tangible form when consumers follow the "first day, first show" syndrome. Throngs of

devoted spectators wait for hours outside cinemas to get tickets to get darshan (darshan lena) of their favourite stars on screen. Such consumers show enduring loyalty and idolisation towards Bollywood icons. This is similar to scenes outside religious places where the devotee longs to stand in the presence of the image and to get darshan of the deity. In this situation, the devotee's prayers/meditation induces a unique spiritual emotion. This type of devotion to the Bollywood stars can be traced back to the socio-cultural history of the 'Bhakti movement' in India.

The word 'Bhakti' means devotion and the movement centred on a path of love and devotion and believed that God can be attained through a personal, loving relationship with the Divine. The relationship between the bhakta (the devotee) and the Divine can take many forms, for example, seeing God in one's father, one's mother, one's friend or child. Eck (1985) explains 'Bhakti' as a mode of worship founded on 'relational love', shared by both God and the devotee. We suggest that when the Indian consumer goes to the cinemas to watch his favourite star, darshan of the star evokes 'bhakti' in the faithful spectator consumer. Further, when the consumer gets darshan of the Bollywood stars on screen, he sees in them manifestations of the divine.

Another interesting aspect is that the drawing power, or attraction, of Bollywood stars is at least partly based on on-screen moral characters. Rahul explains his liking for such screen characters, *"he has something that he upholds through his character and can be looked up to"*. Consumers behavioural patterns are influenced by the morals of on-screen roles of Bollywood stars. These characters act as reminders for consumers to uphold eternal values handed down by tradition.

Bollywood stars try to create their screen identity through the films they star in and the characters they play. When consumers watch films, they develop their own perceptions of the star. In reality, star identity is constructed by the media, public and the star's real-life attributes as well. Once a particular star identity is established, consumers expect a similar character and role in subsequent films. Consumers follow stars intently in India, whether it is through social media, news or social conversations, and are well informed of their favorite star film releases.

We agree with Oliver (1999) that deep psychological commitment is a clearer affective root of loyalty; that the strongest form of this commitment is inherently emotional, involving affection, devotion, and adoration.

In summary, the Indian consumer recognises the Bollywood star as special and shows a deep commitment and loyalty towards him. Consumers' love for the star and his on-screen morality reinforces Bollywood the stars' drawing power.

Thematic finding of the first stage - star loyalty and idolisation advances our understanding of how darshan impacts Indian consumer behavior in movie consuming experiences, specifically before going to the movies. We draw parallels between pilgrims and consumers' experiences before they set on their respective paths. Just like pilgrims, who are prepared to travel to get darshan of a divine image because it is charged with divine presence and offers an emotional experience, so does the Indian consumer who goes to watch his favourite star on screen and benefit from this experience. This highlights the complex and interrelated processes of star creation and the impact on the consumer to get their darshan.

1.5.2. While watching movies analysis

Our thematic findings for this section are - mythical beings, imaginary identity and role models. We discover in our themes that darshan is intricately linked to Indian consumer behaviour while they are watching the movie. We further elaborate upon these themes.

1.5.2.1. Mythical Beings

Indian consumers tend to view Bollywood stars as mythical beings, i.e., creatures who originate from mythology and possess divine powers. When talking about Bollywood star Salman Khan, Sahil says, *"you know he can do everything like the supreme Gods Ram, Krishna, Arjun; they too are like Gods"*. Vinay says that *"Bollywood heroes end the evil, it is the same thing which Gods do in our mythology"*.

In order to understand our theme 'mythical beings', we delve deeper into the cultural dimensions of India. At the core of this understanding, lies the Indian cultural heritage of the mythological epics, namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, with which Indian consumers are familiar. While the Ramayana is the story of the God Rama who fought like a human being to defeat the demon Ravana, Mahabharata narrates how the God Vishnu appears on earth in human form, as God Krishna, to guide and protect Arjuna (mythological character). Krishna tells Arjuna that he must follow his duty, where nothing is more important than the war against evil and to restore good. In addition, Krishna is known to perform miracles. Hindu mythology abounds with stories that relate his heroic acts of lifting mountains, killing wicked kings who were tormenting and harassing the public, and saving lives. This study found parallels being drawn between mythological deities and Bollywood stars. Namita articulates, "*he is like Krishna*", referring to Salman Khan, who plays the character of a super cop. Much like a modern-day Robin hood, modelled on the clever God Krishna, he has certain tips and tricks and even cheats to survive in today's world, although his ultimate aim is to wipe out the evil.

Consistent with Dwyer's (2002) observation that, 'there is no problem worshipping people in Hinduism'. We contend that there is a tradition of 'people worship' in India. The worship of divinity, in the form of many Gods and Goddesses is a widely prevalent tradition of religious practice in India. Polytheism underlies Hindu religion, with the concept that there is one God and all other deities are forms and manifestation of the divine. Hinduism believes that God can and does incarnate in human form. In Indian culture, there is no absolute distinction between deities and human beings. In tracing the history of film stars in Bollywood, it is noted that the earliest films were primarily mythological based on religious texts and the on-screen star playing the character of an actual God. The visual mode of "seeing" the "actual divine" on the screen in the mythological genre has transformed to an "embodied" form with divine qualities of Gods in the modern era. The demons have been substituted for the corrupt system and the Gods have been substituted with on-screen heroic characters. Darshan of the star on screen is like an epiphanic moment for the Indian consumer who views the star on screen as a mythological God. It is in

these spaces that the intimate connections between taking in darshan (darshan lena) of the stars and the Indian consumer reveal the cosmological nature of Indian culture. The findings of this study indicate that these on-screen powerful characters receive similar adulation as the mythological Gods Rama and Krishna and that Bollywood stars are considered "mythical beings".

This research also shows that the Indian consumer has a deep connectedness to mythology. The mythological epics are very much relevant to daily lives in India and the culture is strongly influenced by these ancient epics. The Indian consumer believes in this mythology and connects it to the real world. Jyotika says that, "*these epics are very relevant actually. I am currently reading Bhagavad Gita (holy book taken from a section from the Mahabharata), it solves my queries on life; they are very old but they are very relevant"*. With their knowledge of cultural myths, legends and folktales, Indian consumers are familiar with the mythological roots; both epics serve as guidelines for an exemplary life. As Jyotika continues, *"their wisdom is timeless",* alluding to the meaningfulness and relevance of the teachings of ancient Indian texts to the contemporary modern lifestyle. Mythological heroes are often invoked on screen whether it be Ram, the 'maryada purshotam' (ideal man), the eternal lover Krishna, the vulnerable Karan (mythological character), the powerful mythological Arjuna or the strong Bhim. When the consumer gets darshan of the Bollywood heroes on screen, he sees in them manifestations of the divine.

Another aspect uncovered in this research is that the mythical elements in films are reinforced by Bollywood stars, indicating that the celebrity fondness by Indian consumers has contributed to their better knowledge of mythology. This is attributed to Bollywood stars on-screen providing a considerable element of commonality with Gods who are rooted in Indian mythological epics. Contemporary manifestations of mythology in Bollywood films reinforce mythical elements helping consumers understand it better. For example, our participants discussed how they became familiar with the mythical bird 'Jatayu' in Ramayana when they watched a film. Stars like Ajay Devgun who put an end to all the villains on screen fuel the

mythical imagination of the Indian consumer who feels powerful in that moment and imagines himself as a hero who can take on all the problems of the world. Messages rooted in the ancient mythic structures of Indian civilisation are recalled and reinforced to the Indian consumer. Rajan says, "*I learnt more about the mythological hero Karan*", referring to the mythological story from Mahabharath of the two feuding brothers Arjuna and Karan separated at birth. Consumers pay more attention to such mythological concepts when their favourite celebrities are starring in films. The religious connotations invoked for Bollywood stars connect consumers with mythology providing consumers a better awareness, understanding and appreciation of it.

The third aspect revealed in the data is religious escapism*,* i.e., the avoidance of reality by escaping into a fantasy world influenced by religious notions. Consumers disconnect from the realities of the real world while watching the movie. Discussing Bollywood stars, some participants articulated that people who are oppressed in some way, whether financially or otherwise, are looking for somebody to take their woes away. Suraj says, "*A common man is so helpless and so constrained all the time. The Bollywood hero takes away all the evils"*. Findings indicate that consumers engage in religious escapism, seeking comfort and peace, because the need for tales of Gods is strong due to insurmountable obstacles in consumers' lives. Bollywood stars who are unbeatable, indestructible and inhumanely strong in their various on-screen avatars provide escapism. For example, when they see Amitabh Bachchan or Salman Khan taking the law into his own hands, "*smashing fifty heads and getting things done*", consumers disconnect from reality. This is religious because consumers place the on-screen heroic characters within a context of cultural familiarity.

This familiarity is inherent in Indian culture as stories of the epics are kept alive through performances, media, oral storytelling and folk theatre. Children learn episodes from the epics through the celebration of various festivals commemorating mythological events, such as Dussehra which celebrates Rama's defeat of the demon Ravana. We note that religion is a central part of life values in India, often developed at an early age. In order to understand 'religious escapism' better, it is emphasised that the of concoction of extra ordinary heroes, evil

villains and insurmountable obstacles in Bollywood films, provides consumers an escape; this dulls their own pain and struggle through the trials and tribulations of the screen character. Further, consumers draw on heroic characters on-screen, imagining that which is impossible for them to live out in real life.

Consistent with Soroush's (2000) point that religious knowledge is situational and capable of diverse interpretations, we suggest that Indian consumers' diverse interpretations in cinemas take a religious form. This is because the use of mythological undertones is created in cinemas. It is in the cinemas where 'seeing-believing' builds upon the potential of consumers' knowledge and their diverse interpretations; this connects Bollywood stars to magical tales performed by Gods that have been perpetuated through the ancient Indian epics. The religious practice of darshan of stars on-screen is analogous to the darshan of Gods in temples. The findings support Nayar (2010) who stated that "the sacred can be electronically mediated". These stars on-screen in the cinema space provide a key message that there are Gods on earth who restore order. Consumers transcend their ceaseless struggles and create utopian fantasy worlds. Darshan of the star hero on screen who eventually defeats and conquers the broken system allows consumers to believe that God is on earth; order is restored and everything will fall into place. This study suggests that the consumer's engagement with the character on screen transports him to a perfect world. These messages are cathartic for consumers and offer an escape for them.

In summary, darshan of Bollywood stars sets off and establishes a relationship between consumers and the stars on-screen where consumers behold them as 'mythical beings'. Bollywood stars through their darshan as 'mythical beings' orchestrate a deep connection between the good versus evil; consumers and the mythological, showing a very clear link to religious traditions in the Indian culture. Findings indicate that consumers religious interpretations of Bollywood stars' contemporary onscreen characters fuse with mythological characters. This also contributes towards consumers' better awareness and understanding of mythology. Moreover, darshan of Bollywood stars on-screen offers a platform where consumers can indulge in religious escapism. In the light of this relationship between consumers and stars, it

becomes clear that Bollywood stars as 'mythical beings' is not about how they 'look' but about what they can 'do'. This darshanic experiential consumption of Bollywood stars on-screen holds a deep significance for consumers as it connotes a whole range of meanings.

1.5.2.2. Imaginary identity

Another interesting phenomenon we observed is that darshan of the star on-screen sets off a process where consumers take on an 'imaginary identity', i.e., as a fictional make-believe sense of self.

A quick glance at the history of aesthetics of Bollywood films and stars explains this legacy. The tradition of melodrama and emotion is deeply rooted in the theatrical performances of the traditional Indian theatre and folk dramas. The founder of Indian theatre Bharatmuni laid out different emotions like love and sorrow to show the protagonists' state of mind. Drawing on the stories of the epics, the tradition of melodrama and emotion was replicated in early films. A myriad of exaggerated emotions by characters have been part of Indian cinema since the beginning and the role of emotion is still central to contemporary Bollywood films. Emotion accentuates the behaviour of the characters and is deeply engraved in the basic storyline.

The interesting aspect of this theme is that the consumer gets emotionally immersed in the character on-screen. There are various kinds of emotions that the characters play in a film. Ankush revealed that, *"if the hero is crying then I am full of tears"*. Similarly, if the character is feeling love, most often the consumer feels something akin to love. The study data indicate that there is a pattern of identifying with movie characters. It should be pointed out here that Bollywood star characters play multi-dimensional roles of a romantic lover, an action hero and the prodigal son. Yet, Bollywood films with their overall trajectory of a melodramatic mode, construct an emotional base for star characters. These on-screen characters depict and channel exaggerated emotion to the consumer. Eck's (1996) explains that the practice of darshan of images in temples is, "precisely what facilitates and enhances the close relationship of the worshipper and God and makes possible the deepest outpourings of emotions in worship".

We contend that a similar experience of darshan of the image of the star on screen activates deep sentiments and feelings in consumers, strengthening the bond between the consumer and the star character.

We also observe that a significant bearing of darshanic engagement is that the consumer constructs a transitory imagined life. They construct an identity that emulates the character on screen. Consumers fuel their imagination by recreating in their minds a similar role for themselves. As participant Lokesh says, *"for some time I think that I am the hero".* When they see a romantic character in front of them, consumers identify themselves as a romantic person. They imagine themselves as the romantic hero, singing and dancing in an idyllic location. The data collected shows a pattern where consumers break free from the status quo of their lives. Consistent with Dickey's (1993) conclusion, it is contended here that consumers temporarily replace their real selves with the image they see. This is because consumers are driven by their desires and want to realize these desires. We concur with Derne (2000) that Bollywood films and star characters provide a liminal period of wish fulfillment through this transitory imagined life.

Finally, this research unfolds that the Darshnaic emotional immersion and transitory imagination results in consumers feeling an intimate deep connection with the star. The consumer transforms into the character of the star on-screen. This implies that consumers not only empathise with the character but also, live vicariously through the character. While watching the star character, a subjective imagined world transpires for consumers, which manifests into a complete identification with the star. The Indian consumer undergoes a transformative experience in the imaginative space of cinema; they share human emotions, desires, and needs. This is because the stars are *"like us"* says Vinay, *"in many ways".* He adds, *"I feel a sense of oneness with him".* We decode that the image of the star on screen with a definitive portrayal of the emotional state of the character results in a fusion of the star and the consumer. There is no clear line between the Bollywood star and the consumer. Consumers fantasise themselves as the character and slip into the identity of the character. Darshanic

identification is engendered with the character; this results in and reinforces a fictional similarity between the consumer and the star. What follows from the construction of a fictional identity is fusion with the star character, where consumers feel a darshanic union with the character. A pattern of consumers fusing with the star on-screen is akin to the union with God in a temple. The union can be explained in a popular mythological conversation between God Krishna and Arjuna, "they are in me and I too am in them". We suggest that this is possible because Hinduism lacks explicit distinctions between Gods and human beings.

To comprehend this theme of 'imaginary identity' better, consider the following scenario:

It is an ordinary day in London. The protagonist of the film is just about to enter a mall, shop with his wife. The very moment when he puts his foot down inside the entrance of the mall, the audience sees his mother sense his presence. There is evocative music in the background conveying pathos. The scene takes the viewer back to the childhood in the hometown of the protagonist in the film where the son after returning home after a few years reaches the threshold of the house and the mother senses his arrival that very second. Back to the current scene in the mall, the mother and son who drifted apart are going to see each other after many years. The protagonist is now married and has a son. The tap of the mother from behind on the shoulder, the speechless silence on seeing her, the one tear in her eye, the amplified facial expressions all contribute towards the emotional bond and reunion. The moment is special. The audience is in tears. Spectacularly staged, this is emotion in Bollywood.

The above scenario depicts the legacy of a highly evolved emotion aesthetics in Bollywood.

In conclusion, it is suggested that there is a complex tapestry of factors that are interconnected in shaping an 'imaginary identity' of consumers. Findings indicate that aspects such as emotional immersion, transitory imagined life and transformation into the character result in a darshanic union and create an imaginary identity.

1.5.2.3. Role models

Bollywood stars on-screen are role models (individuals who are looked up to and are emulated by others) for Indian consumers.

It is important to understand how role models emerge in the Indian context. Observations in this study suggest that there is a powerful influence of the epic stories on the guiding principles and wisdom of the Indian consumer's life. The Ramayana provides a role model of an exemplary God with values such as a sense of duty, keeping vows even if there are painful ramifications, respecting elders, teachers and parents. Moreover, Bollywood star characters are framed within a context of Indian values, that increasingly portray social values such as responsibility for family members. These familial ideologies depicted by Bollywood stars on-screen are deeply rooted in the ancient mythological epics. As one of the participants, Jyotika explains, *"despite changes in modern society, Indians are very much tied to their families and the so-called relations like brother, sister and daughter-in-law"*. Bollywood star characters amalgamate Indian traditions and values on screen. For instance, a popular star character in a film portrayed middle class Indian values of morality regarding the honour of an unmarried girl by not touching her while spending the night alone with her. Such examples lead to recognition of heritage of Indian values by consumers and influence consumers' thinking and interpretation of values, reinforcing the standards of moral and cultural norms. The origins of this heritage are connected to the Indian epics (Kabir, 2001). Such characters portrayed on-screen by Bollywood stars act as role models for Indian consumers.

Another interesting behavioural pattern is that consumers start feeling socially responsible when they watch star characters doing good deeds on screen. There is an abundance of on-screen Bollywood star characters as benevolent and selfless characters. This activates feelings of empathy for the downtrodden and needy in society. The on-screen behaviour of star characters combined with consumer knowledge of real-life Bollywood stars' kind behaviour evokes social introspection and a pro-socio inclination emerges. For example, when consumers see characters depicting a respectful and loving relationship with the underprivileged and low caste domestic helpers, it

mobilises notions of humanity and social responsibility. This observation that characters on-screen transcend inequalities of caste and wealth resonates with consumers, as most of India hires domestic helpers and has to interact with them on a daily basis. Karuna referring to a Bollywood star, says, *"he's the messiah who will protect, financially or physically"*. They watch Bollywood stars helping the oppressed and those from deprived backgrounds. Here, it is important to remember that Indian society is highly status conscious – being stratified hierarchically on the basis of caste (Beteille, l991; Trompenaars, 1993; Gupta et al., 2002; Gannon, 1994; 2004).

In summary, Bollywood stars act as role models and set examples for Indian consumers. When consumers see stars redressing deprivation and bridging social barriers, it ignites reflective thought processes of Indian consumers.

Thematic findings for the second stage are– mythical beings, imaginary identity and role models. Seeing the star performing heroic acts activates the consumers' cultural knowledge of the mythological Gods. Darshan of the star on screen is like an epiphanic moment for the Indian consumer who views the star on screen as a mythical being. In this sense, to see is to know.

As evident in our findings, Indian consumers experience darshanic unification while watching the star in a film. Darshanic unification with the star gives the consumer an imaginary identity. This is akin to devotees' darshanic experience in temples which activates a union with God, where the devotee acquires something of the deity's highest nature. Similarly, seeing the star allows the consumer to acquire something of his highest nature. Henceforth, the consumer forms a new perspective on him or herself, resulting in new conceptions of the self.

Bollywood star characters on-screen are deeply rooted in the ancient mythological epics. Darshan on screen evokes the Indian religious philosophical concepts of karma (right action) and dharma (duty). Even though the consumer knows that the star is a mere mortal, darshanic contact with on-screen characters who follow right action and duty become role models.

Therefore, seeing the star while watching the movie establishes a connection for the consumer. Such connections can be seen as enabling a transitional experience for Indian

consumers. This demonstrates a rich multiplicity of meanings of seeing and its influence on the Indian consumer. Thus, the everyday concept of darshan is not just a simple daily practice or belief, it plays a key role of deeper significance by providing different meanings to consumers while they are watching a Bollywood film.

1.5.3. After watching movies

Our thematic findings for the third stage are – re-shaping self, new self, emerging new values, upholding cultural values. Thematic findings indicate that the Indian consumer extends the darshanic union with Bollywood stars beyond the cinemas to an entire range of cultural lifestyle activities. We further elaborate upon these themes.

1.5.3.1. Re-shaping self

An after watching movies analysis shows that the Indian consumer re-shapes the self, i.e. reconstructs his identity. The influence of Bollywood stars on screen carries over to real life where *positive aspirations* are born. Rohan related how, "*Hrithik Roshan in Lakshaya showed how to get focussed in life*" adding that "*he was quite inspirational*". There is an observable pattern of consumers envisioning new goals by getting inspired by such positive roles by Bollywood stars. Participants articulated that Bollywood stars have a significant influence on their aspirations and behaviour. There are other consumers who are inspired to build bodies like the Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan. Ankush commented that, "*if you need to achieve something you need to get to that level*". Such aspirations lead to consumer behaviour patterns of a desirable self when Indian consumers are inspired by Bollywood stars and follow them for self-transformation. Stars like Shahrukh Khan, the 'king of romance', act as an inspiration for many in their romantic ventures. But there are many other examples where Bollywood stars influence choice of career or physical transformation such as building a new strong body. An interesting outcome following this transformation is that there is a change expectation by the consumers by

following Bollywood stars on screen. Sahil articulates, *"there is certain hope because of men like Salman Khan"*. For example, after Salman Khan's role as a wrestling hero in the movie Sultan, wrestling centres have emerged overnight and aspiring youth are members of such centres and have enrolled for training in the state of Haryana in north India. In this example, the Indian consumer has become aware of new aspirational groups, with which he may desire to have affiliation and, specifically, give the consumer a sense of hope to explore new possibilities in sport. We observe a pattern of emancipation from set pathways for such consumers. These examples illustrate how the Indian consumer re-shapes his identity and that the outcome of watching the star on-screen results in consumers aspiring to construct preferred personal and social identities.

Another aspect that emerges is that there is new learning for the Indian consumer after watching Bollywood stars on-screen. The consumer develops new skills after watching the film. For example, we found consumer behaviour patterns of new learning in the form of songs, dance movements and dialogues too. Nishtha stated that, *"I learn dance movements and sometimes I use them at parties and functions"*. It is very common to find Bollywood themed parties, wedding functions and events in India. This is a practical blend of the star's popularity and the real world, where consumers integrate Bollywood stars into their lives with new learning.

In summary, the results indicate that Indian consumers re-shape themselves after watching Bollywood stars on-screen. The Indian consumer comes out of the film with positive aspirations and new learning, ready for self-transformation and a change expectation. There are consumer behaviour patterns that lead to re-shaping themselves in their lives.

1.5.3.2. New self

It is clear that the darshanic union flows unmistakably from the screens to the streets to form a consumer who is a new self, i.e., the transformation that occurs by converting to a new self, after watching the film. Indian consumers copy on-screen styles and mannerisms of Bollywood stars. Dialogues spoken by stars on-screen are routinely used in their conversations with friends. What

is seen on the silver screen by movie viewers one day, often ends up being a popular commodity the next. Whenever a Bollywood star dons a particular style on-screen, it becomes revolutionary for the masses and is imitated with enthusiasm. This extended self of the Indian consumer shows a pattern of consumer behaviour where consumers generate purchase intentions for various goods such as clothes, holiday destinations on-screen, cars, and lifestyle habits such as food or drinks. For many consumers, the Bollywood star on reel not only inspires, but is also a reference point when it comes to lifestyle, fashion, romance and language. People emulate not only clothing styles but also products like cars and holiday destinations. Many participants mentioned how they have been inspired to travel to Ladakh, a place Aamir Khan visited in a film. In addition, Bollywood stars in India lead very public lives- this includes substantial media coverage about film inaugural functions, information about shooting locales, love lives and heart breaks in the industry, favourite foods of the stars, where they shop and where they holiday. The Indian consumer is influenced by these public images and the stars fuel the desire to live out their fantasies.

Central to the overlapping of the Indian consumer purchase behaviour with the star on-screen is the emergence of the new self as a form of identity reconstruction. Engaging in identity reconstruction serves the purpose of producing a personality for the consumer which is important for him to pursue to create a supernormal hero-like identity. Rohan while referring to the Indian consumer following Salman Khan explains, "*they try to follow his hairstyle, they try to follow the way he dresses up*". It is common knowledge how thousands of Salman Khan fans sport his hairstyle and a blue bracelet that the star wears. The hero-like new identity is manifested because fans of the star iconise him. The icon becomes crucial to fans because the icon creates powerful connections at a personal level. These personal connections can be interpreted in light of cultural values and referred to as "subjective meanings" (Barthes, 1968) where these connections encompass condensed symbolic meanings for consumers.

1.5.3.3. Emerging new values

Another interesting aspect about after watching movies that emerged is that consumers are influenced by stars on-screen to think differently. Swaran explains how she relates to stars on-screen roles after she has watched a film. She states that, *"Deepika and Ranbir (popular Bollywood stars) leave their relationship just to follow their dreams and travel"*. We find that there are emerging new values for Indian consumers. These emerging new values are due to patterns of changing mindsets and attitudinal shifts of consumers. For instance, Kalpana believes that her parents will also get influenced by such star roles in films and be more understanding of the younger generation who would like to follow their dreams before settling down into matrimony. This is a reactionary youth culture that is beginning to emerge, yet is a far cry from the common social attitudes of society. We suggest that the darshanic spell of the Bollywood star continues outside the cinema hall to influence new patterns of thinking and viewing the world.

1.5.3.4. Upholding cultural values

Bollywood stars also influence the desire to maintain consumers' Indian roots and uphold traditional cultural values. Stars on-screen strengthen cultural values. Priya says that she enjoyed watching *"Ranbir Kapoor (popular Bollywood star) playing Holi (festival of colours), that these festivals increase our bonding and closeness to our own people, relatives, family members, friends, peers, colleagues"*. A pattern of value reinforcement emerges from the data. There is a concern that prevailing traditions are dwindling, hence, stars who reinforce such festivities on-screen, influence consumers. Stars portraying family duties on-screen reinforce a sense of "doing the right thing" by following practices that are right "for our culture". Anita expressed that she feels "showing the importance of family" on-screen, Bollywood stars emphasise the importance of extended family, rituals and filial duty. Our interpretation is that upholding family values appeal to the Indian consumer. Such cultural values for the Indian consumer are a part of the identification with their culture in an environment where individuals are trying to grapple with the modern lifestyle.

In summary, the Indian consumer extends the darshanic union beyond the cinemas to an entire range of cultural lifestyle activities. Extending this darshanic union by the consumer reinforces one's desired identity, rendering feelings of connectedness and identification with Bollywood stars. This connectedness is kept alive by paralleling what stars do on screen and manifests in fashion, lifestyle, romance and language. So, the desired identity does not end at the cinemas, rather, it is an ongoing process for the Indian consumer. Darshan of the star offers the Indian consumer a wide range of heterogeneous ways of visualising and appropriating the star, consuming signs, symbolic meanings and messages. Each consumer will develop his/her own interpretation of signs and the significance of each hero can be different; this alludes to a meaningful connection between the consumer and the star they identify with. As recently as 2015, an Indian hand spun cloth from natural fibers called 'Khadi', has found renewed popularity with Indian consumers. This has occurred only after the revered Indian star Amitabh Bachchan became its brand ambassador (Indusage, 2015). This star is seen as a pivotal force in eradicating polio in India through his mass social appeals to get children vaccinated. This is because Amitabh Bachchan is worshipped as God in India. Mick (1986) suggests that symbolic meaning is "at the nucleus of consumer behaviour" and that symbolic meanings help consumers establish their identities, acculturate into a culture, express themselves and their extended selves (Mehta and Belk, 1991). In the case of Bollywood, it is suggested that this process is due to the unique darshanic connection between the star and its meanings in consumers' lives.

The four thematic findings for the third stage of after watching the movie - re-shaping self, new self, emerging new values, upholding cultural values, show that the cultural phenomenon of darshan is significant to how the Indian consumer experiences Bollywood films.

The powerful darshanic ability of the stars to influence consumers goes beyond the cinema and manifests in numerous ways. Such manifestations have an important bearing on the Indian consumer's evaluations, aspirations and behaviour. Indian consumers actively absorb star characterizations that shape desires, hopes, values and traditions. As evidenced in our thematic findings, consumers continue to consume the darshanic experience beyond the cinema. This is

similar to the consumption of darshan in a temple visit where the devotee is overwhelmed with an emotional experience and continues to feel the connection with God beyond the temple visit.

We draw parallels with the seeing the star in cinemas to the darshan of a deity in a temple who is capable of granting grace and stirring emotional experiences for consumers. Just as darshan of the divine evokes a sacred power of knowing within the devotee, so does the star for the Indian consumer. Darshan activates the fusion between the consumer and the star, evoking an immensity of a divine force within the consumer; offering a new understanding of the self. This is similar to the connection of the devotee to God after darshan in a temple; there is a sense of connectedness between the star and the consumer outside the cinema.

This is evidenced in the thematic findings where the Indian consumer extends the darshanic union and stays connected with the star beyond the cinema by re-shaping the self and forming a new self. The research also found that consumers are influenced by stars to think differently; this results in an emergence of new values. Stars also strengthen cultural values and there is a desire to uphold traditional cultural values by Indian consumers.

Table 3.1 summarizes the experience stages and thematic findings.

Three Stages of Experience	Thematic findings
Before the movie	1. Star loyalty and idolization
While watching the movie	2. Mythical beings 3. Imaginary identity 4. Role models
After the movie	1. Re-shaping self 2. New self 3. Emerging new values 4. Upholding cultural values

Table 3.1: Summary of stages of experience and themes

4.5. Conclusion

Given the role that darshan plays in the Indian culture, this research has shown how it impacts movie consuming experiences and acts as an undercurrent in consumer behaviour in the Indian context. The thematic findings are presented in three stages: before the movie - star loyalty and idolisation, during the movie - mythical beings, imaginary identity and role models; and lastly, after the movie - re-shaping self, new self, emerging new values and upholding cultural values.

This study makes a modest contribution to consumer research in marketing in the following ways. First, the research context in this paper is unique in that it has rarely been explored in previous research despite its significance in consumer culture; the findings add to current knowledge of consumer culture in a non-Western society. Second, this study applies a non-Western cultural concept, of darshan, to understand the influence on consumption behaviour

in Bollywood; whereas previous literature on consumption studies is rooted in Western tradition of thought, theoretical frameworks and explanations (Jafari et al, 2012). Third, this study takes an interpretive approach, utilising "local knowledge" Gertz (1983), to offer an insight to writers, producers and directors to develop and produce a successful film formula.

An array of theoretical, historical and religious approaches has been used in this study. Future researchers might benefit from this design and combination of methods to understand other film industries. For example, the Australian and the Chinese film industries have both produced epic hits. An Australian box office sensation in 1986, the film Crocodile Dundee, is a measure of Australian singularity in the film industry context. It was an extraordinary phenomenon that got an extraordinary response. Touching upon themes like mining and aboriginal rights, combining different forms of comedy and adventure simultaneously. It provided a hybrid form genre, and also, made a hero out of the main character. The film 'Pancake Man' produced in China generated $140 million. The film is a super hit with a focus on native superheroes. Despite a number of indigenous movies, such as these, being produced and released each year, we still know little about audience motivations, viewing practices and consumption patterns.

A limitation of this study is that participants are all from the north Indian region of Delhi in India. Future research could examine the impact of darshan on movie consuming experiences consumers in other regions of India. Further research could be undertaken, using similar methodology, to explore cultural influences on film consumption patterns in other countries.

Having considered the various aspects of the concept of darshan on film consumer experiences in India, the next chapter goes on to investigate consumer behaviours towards Bollywood stars in more detail.

Chapter 4

Bollywood star worship through the lens of Darshan

4.1.   Introduction

Bollywood stars enjoy a celestial status in India. While researchers (Holt, 2004; Eager and Lindridge, 2014; Hackley and Hackley, 2015) have focused on celebrity worship in the west, there is a gap in understanding celebrity worship in India in the marketing literature. We provide a cultural interpretation by taking into consideration the "Indian consumer point of view" (Bijapurkar, 2007; Varman and Belk, 2009) to understand consumer devotional behaviour towards Bollywood star celebrities. This study is set against the backdrop of masala films.

The worship of Bollywood stars is rooted in the religious concept of darshan (a mode of seeing). An example of how darshan makes the star a God can be understood through the example of the television series Ramayana based on the mythological epic Ramayana. The screening was viewed by an unprecedented 100 million people, nearly one eighth of the nation (Lutgendorf, 2006). There were instances of mass devotion where the watching of Ramayana became a religious ritual, and worship rituals were offered and performed to the main protagonist (actor who played the role of the God – Rama) in front of the television set. The television series Mahabharatha too received similar reception from Indian consumers. An example of a film which drew huge crowds particularly in small towns where consumers visited cinema halls as if they were visiting a temple is *Jai Santoshi Maa* (name of the film). Consumers carried offerings as they would do for a temple visit. The image of the star as Goddess on screen evoked religious devotional responses. According to Hansen (1983), a special relationship was established between audiences and actors playing the roles of Gods in the early cinematic mythologicals and in the replay of the epics on Indian television. The ritual gestures of obeisance that accompanied it reflected a conviction that the actors were in fact inhabited by the Gods.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section provides a literature review. This is followed by the research method. In the next section, we present our findings and discussion. There are two sets of findings; the first set explains factors that attract consumers to masala films, the second focuses on the levels of devotion to Bollywood stars. The paper suggests an interpretive framework that classifies devotion to Bollywood stars into three levels: bounded

consumers, devoted followers and worshippers. Lastly, the paper acknowledges the limitations of the study as well as explores opportunities for future research.

4.2. Literature review

Previous studies in the area of culture and consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Shaw and Clarke, 1998; Thompson and Tambyah, 1998) have identified cultural values as important factors in determining the consumption behaviour of individuals. Since culture can be complex to understand, it is important to decode the underlying dimensions of cultural influences on behaviour (McCort and Malhotra, 1993). Religion can be seen as a form of culture (Cohen, 2009) that affects people in many ways (Waller and Fam, 2000). Bourdieu (1991) stressed the plurality of meanings in religion and emphasised the importance of its contextual understanding. De Certeau (1984) adds that religious practices are similar to everyday practices. These practices need to be understood in terms of the "cultural resources they offer different people in everyday life" (Denzin, 1996). Cloud (2000) describes religion as the habitual expression of an interpretation of life, which deals with ultimate concerns and values. Religion is a central part of life value that is often developed at an early age and therefore it plays a significant role in establishing consumption (Sheikh and Thomas, 1994; Berkman, Lindquist and Sirgy, 1996).

The role of religion on consumption patterns in India is marked by high religious heterogeneity. Hinduism, the main religion is difficult to define and is interpreted in number of ways (Chhokar et al., 2007). It "represents a complex system of daily practices, rituals, beliefs, and symbolic patterns that overlap various aspects of social life" (ibid). It is crucial to use a "Hindu view of sacredness" (Fernandez et al, 2011) when examining Hindu rituals. Much of what goes by the name of Indian culture has strong religious roots (Das,1987; Marriott, 1990). Unlike the west where religion stands in opposition to science, Indians believe that the material world and the spiritual world belong to the same realm of experience (Venkatesh, 1995). According to Das (2002), religion and spirituality have great effect on the Indian psyche.

Venkatesh (1995) talks of how Indians accord objects a spiritual colouring and that this must be a given serious consideration in the study of Indian consumer behaviour. Indian consumer behaviour is replete with what might be misinterpreted by the modernist to be contradictions and the juxtaposition of opposites, but in reality, they represent highly symbolic modes of behaviour, much of which must be understood within the Indian cultural framework (Venkatesh, 1995). However, Venkatesh (1995) says that even though there is religious heterogeneity and cultural multiplicity in India, it is possible to imagine an Indian approach to consumption and that there may be something uniquely Indian about consumption that will not be found in non-Indian settings.

Despite the evidence of correlations between religion and consumption patterns (Delener, 1994), little attention has been given in the marketing literature to understand how religion affects the worship of Bollywood stars in India, that further impacts consumer behaviour. The worship of Bollywood stars is exemplified by the case of a housewife Sandi, who mentions that Shahrukh Khan (Bollywood actor) put "passion, magic and delight" in her life (Chopra, 2007). Her frenzied enthusiasm extended to buying land on the moon for the actor and running a number of online fan clubs. Sandi believed that the actor had "some kind of grace within him, like he has been touched by God" (Chopra, 2007). Dwyer (2006) suggests that "Indian cinema has specific traits that incline it more towards the religious than other cinemas". Uniquely different, Bollywood masala films (Ganti, 2012) is a genre that mixes action, comedy, drama, and romance. Chakravarty (1993) suggests that Bollywood masala films have "served to reinforce the mythical in modern clothing". For example, the ancient traditional theatrical dramas of love, built on the erotic play between the God Krishna and his consort Radha in an idyllic pastoral location has been adapted to modern day romance for young lovers with fantasy romantic routines in scenic locations. Similarly, themes from a popular festival of Holi are commonly used in Hindi films, often with explicit references to Krishna.

Bollywood stars are highly prominent celebrities in India. Celebrity is defined as "a person who is known for his well-knowness" (Boorstin, 1964). Further, celebrity worship is a form of para-social interaction in which individuals become obsessed with one or more celebrities (McCutcheon et al, 2002). In India, the deification of stars is not unusual. According to Tyrell (1999), Bollywood film consumers equate actors with God and are venerated by the Indian people. Consumers worship Bollywood stars as modern avatars (divine incarnation) of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Dwyer (2006) says that "there is no problem worshipping people in Hinduism". The polytheism underlying Hindu religion allows people to believe in and pray to their own conceptualisations of the divine in whatever form they choose. In addition, there is a belief in Hinduism that deities have appeared in human history in human form. For example, the Hindu God Krishna is considered to be the incarnation of the God Vishnu, a manifestation of the Supreme God, who incarnates during times of crises to guide and help humanity.

In a similar vein, celebrity icons in the west have been referred to as "objects of worship" (Alexander, 2010). Barthes (1957) likened Greta Garbo's face to the "divine". Other scholarly studies (Holt, 2004; Eager and Lindridge, 2014) have also highlighted the iconic status of celebrities. Celebrity worshippers strive to be like their admired icons. For instance, Gwyneth Paltrow's messy blond, ear-length hair triggered a 'stampede to the hair salons' by women in 1998 (Maxted, 1998). More recent literature (Hackley & Hackley, 2015) suggests that the monotheistic origin of iconicity does not prevent consumers from consuming celebrities as God-like. Yet, it does not mean that consumers are worshipping celebrities as God, as in the case of India.

In order to understand the phenomenon of Bollywood star worship, one needs to discuss the religious concept of 'darshan'. This concept encompasses devotion, and is linked to star worship in the Indian culture. Uniquely Indian, darshan, a wider religious cultural mode of 'seeing' is a ubiquitous feature of Indian culture, and darshan is practised in daily lives. Many people go to the temple daily and during festivals to get darshan. Indians travel far and wide to famous holy

temples to get darshan of their preferred deities. The word darshan is often mentioned in the Indian culture during conversation to communicate with friends, who have not met in a while, "I am lucky to get your darshan today". Babb (1981) defines darshan as 'a current of sight', a fluid-like 'seeing' that flows, mingling with that of the deity; that the deity's sight somehow "takes" the devotee's sight upward and inward, "on a pilgrimage of insight". "The devotee sees as he could not see before, and a wholly new universe comes into view. Most important of all, however, he sees his God as he truly is; that is, as the Supreme Being", allowing the devotee to acquire something of the deity's highest nature (Babb, 1981). According to Vasudevan (2000), unlike the western concept of 'looking' where the image is reduced to an object, darshan of the image or icon is not passive, but exercises power; the devotee is permitted to behold the image of the deity, and is privileged and benefited by this permission.

We posit that everyday religious practices such as darshan are in fact "guiding the themes of life" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). This study draws on the concept of darshan to understand Bollywood star worship in India. Darshan is deeply connected to the religious, however, it is important to note that it goes far beyond religious settings. Therefore, it is understood here as a cultural category encompassing different social spheres.

While there is a focus on India's growing economic might, much needs to be recognised about the implications of the "softer" power of India, Bollywood, in the commercial world. Lorenzen and Taube (2008) state that Bollywood is one of India's most eye-catching phenomena, with an estimate of 14 million Indian moviegoers per day (Rosenberg, 2011). A variety of creative industries and products related to Bollywood, have emerged including musical spectacles, dance studios, music albums, tourism and fashions. This is generating more consumers not only in India, but also, globally. So, there is a need for a better understanding of this conspicuous industry in an emerging powerful economy. The existing western frames of reference limit the understanding of cultural realities. Using an interpretative approach, this paper seeks to understand this reality of God-like worship of celebrities in India. Since this

phenomenon is observed within the context of masala films, this study will also try to understand why this form of entertainment, so unique to the Indian culture remains so popular. On the face of it, the powerful presence of Bollywood stars in India reflects a frenzied consumer fan behaviour in India. Yet, there is a more complicated cultural rendering of the intense devotion to Bollywood stars. This paper will bring to surface deeply embedded factors steeped in the Indian culture, reflected in the behaviour of Indian consumers, even though they themselves may not be fully aware of the influence.

4.3. Research Method

We use ethnoconsumerism (Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000) to understand Bollywood star worship through the lens of darshan. Ethno-consumerist studies on India (Venkatesh et al, 2013) have examined how marketeers in India play on Indian mythological themes to influence consumer behaviour. For example, when the car NANO was marketed in India, it was likened to giving birth to a child. The message to the consumers was that they should receive it as the child God Krishna. Venkatesh's (1995) ethno-consumerism emphasises the importance of examining consumer behaviour in a specific environment by locating and understanding the local cultural categories that are significant to that culture. Cultural categories are theoretical concepts derived from an understanding of a culture's current practices and the socio-historical context in which it is situated (Venkatesh, 1995; Meamber and Venkatesh, 2000). The research was undertaken in two concurrent stages, to obtain both a "text view" (understanding of the historical and sociocultural concepts in the literature) and a "field view" (primary data collection in the form of interviews). In order to strengthen our study, methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002) was used. Data from interviews was triangulated with observational data and informal discussions.

An interpretive approach was adopted with the aim to understand Bollywood star worship. We chose purposive sampling, primarily for the reason that it assured a maximum variation

sampling rationale (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We adopted the following selection criteria to select subjects for interviews i.e., representing different age groups, sex and religiosity (Appendix D). Religiosity was based on two factors: 1) Patterns of associated behaviour including daily rituals, regular worship and attendance of religious institutions; 2) Attitude towards religion including interest in learning about religious topics, watching religious/spiritual shows and following spiritual gurus. Participants of different age groups, sex and religiosity were recruited to get a wider perspective for the study and to provide us with richer data. A snowball sampling method (Silverman, 2000) was used, by asking the participants interviewed to recommend other possible participants.

The study was conducted in the North Indian region of Delhi. Thirty-six participants representing differing socio-economic backgrounds, including working professionals, housewives, and students were interviewed. A semi structured interview method was used (Appendix C). In addition, we used projective techniques in our interviews to obtain deeply embedded insights from participants. For example: "Do Indian people feel that when something good happens with their favourite star, it has happened with them?" "Do you and your friends like to discuss what your favourite star has done?" "Do your friends frequently think about their favourite star?" Each interview lasted for an hour was transcribed verbatim. The narrative data were coded and analysed to identify cognitive and behavioural patterns among participants.

4.4.   Findings and discussion

Two sets of findings are discussed below, beginning with findings on factors that attract consumers to masala films. Four factors emerged as attracting consumers to masala movies. These factors are: entertainment, the star, empowerment and socialisation and bonding. Bollywood films are often referred to as masala films. The second set of findings relate to levels of devotion to Bollywood stars. Table 4.1 summarises our findings. We first discuss below factors that attract consumers to masala films.

1. Factors that attract Indian consumers to masala films	• Entertainment • The Star • Empowerment • Socialization and bonding

2. Levels of devotion to Bollywood stars	• Three levels of consumer devotion
	  ▪ Worshippers
	  ▪ Devoted followers
	  ▪ Bounded consumers

Table 4.1: Summary of findings

4.4.1 Factors attracting consumers to Masala films

4.4.1.1. Entertainment

Our findings reveal that masala film is consumed as Bollywood entertainment, an experience which is an enjoyable distraction, diverting the mind and body from any serious task. Indian consumers are seeking fun when they go to watch Bollywood masala films. Rohan tells us that, *"My general interest lies in masala movies, generally, movies which are entertaining"*. Lokesh expresses that, *"there is something about both these movies that make life lighter, makes me less serious and are fully entertaining".* The sheer richness of the masala film with its important features like melodramatic aesthetic of romance, family melodrama, beautiful spectacles, songs, dances and action stunts in Bollywood films are a means of wholesome entertainment.

Many participants confessed watching almost every Bollywood film released over the weekends as they love going to the movies. The ubiquitous Bollywood masala films in India capture the mainstream Indian imagination. According to Desai and Dudrah (2008), masala films at their best are enthralling entertainment, that have the audiences reeling with laughter and tears

from one minute to the next. Furthermore, we note that Bollywood films is a form of affordable entertainment which offers fun. Sarathi tells us, *"a Hindi movie for Rupees 200-300 is affordable and is paisa vasool (good return value for the money)"*. Consistent with Derne's (2000), we suggest that many Indians rely on movies to provide them with entertainment, investing their leisure time and money in it.

Historically, masala films have been formulaic movies typically including romance, comedy, family sagas and action rolled into one movie. Even though some contemporary masala movies break the mold, the storyline still almost focuses on formulaic components. The main attractions of Hindi cinema for its fans, according to Dwyer and Patel (2002) are the "sets and costumes, action scenes, presentation of stars, grandiloquent dialogues, and song and dance sequences". There are many in India who face harsh realities of everyday life. This formula of the masala film offers entertainment as it takes the Indian consumer away from their daily grind. Even though there are Bollywood movies that have brought realities to the big screen, an overwhelming majority of masala films with their fantasy quotient provide the Indian consumer a means of escapism from reality. Chandni says, *"the three-hour of entertainment is magical, puts the audience in a trance, where they don't have to think anything else"*. This research echoes the findings of Dwyer (2010) that Bollywood films are "labelled eclectic and hybrid, happy to mix elements of realism with fantasy anything in fact that will allow it to entertain".

4.4.1.2.   The star

We define a Bollywood star as someone who is a famous Indian actor. We find that Bollywood stars are the ultimate box office pull for the popular Bollywood masala film. Our findings show that the first thing that comes to the mind of Indian consumers in deciding whether to watch a movie is the star. In Bollywood consumers' language, the star is the "hero" in the film. Priya animatedly tells us how she has watched every movie of Salman Khan and waits excitedly for his films, *"the main factor for choosing to watch a Bollywood film is Salman Khan. I am very, very fond of him since my childhood"*.

Participants mentioned that a major draw of the celebrity was their physical attractiveness. This is because the Indian consumer finds the celebrity attractive- a celebrity who is good looking, is dressed in the latest fashion, has a cool hairdo, is very appealing to the Indian consumer. Payal animatedly discussing Salman Khan says that she is *a super, super fan of Salman Khan. He has got this lethal combination of a soft face and a macho body*". The new age Bollywood star show case their ripped bodies. Stars like Hrithik Roshan who have a tall muscular physique in addition to fair skin, chiselled chin and light eyes are highly successful. These stars are not only good looking, they have a compelling personality. Similarly, participants expressed their love for Shahrukh Khan who is popularly referred to as "the king of romance," saying how he casts a magical spell on them. Other participants mentioned how the personality of the star attracts them to watch the film. Charismatic, they have flamboyant personalities which is a major draw for the Indian consumers.

In addition to the physical looks and personality of Bollywood stars, the Indian consumer has respect for them too. The popular Bollywood stars' off-screen presence is ubiquitous; they are cyber friendly. Their private lives are out in the open, made possible by media and fan culture. The Indian consumer is very familiar with the off-screen values of Bollywood stars. Jyotika remarks about a popular Bollywood star, *"the way he loves his mother and father and supports them, that's like ordinary Indian families"*. Participants also alluded to how they respect stars who are caring and responsible human beings. Tanushree told us how much she is impressed by Salman Khan's "Being Human" organization, *"this shows how he feels responsibility towards society"*. Participants mentioned how they themselves felt inspired by stars in their goodwill behaviours. Indian consumer tends to respect stars who follow not only the quintessential Indian cultural values of love and respect for family but also are doing something for society, making them an admirable figure for the consumer. These factors draw the Indian consumer to watch films of such Bollywood stars.

Another aspect of Bollywood stars that impacts the Indian consumer is the romantic personality of the star. Many of our participants expressed devotion to stars like Shahrukh Khan

(SRK) who is popularly known as the king of romance, as his romantic avatar clearly resonated with many participants like Isha. Isha says she *"too like all other SRK fans, waits for his films with bated breath"*. She has never missed a single Shah Rukh Khan film. Sunanda said she *"loved watching Akshay Kumar in Rustom in which he played a naval officer. My husband is in the navy, so I can relate to it. It is romantic"*. Sunanda is an example of how participants' discussions intersected between their personal life romance and on-screen stars. On screen romantic stars are a huge draw card for Indian consumers. Shahrukh Khan's very popular romantic pose of outstretched arms and a bewitching smile pulls heartstrings of many of his fans. Indian consumers love romantic characters who are endearing, charming and alluring.

We observe that participants drew parallels between the star and God, referring to the Bollywood star Salman Khan, Sahil says *"he is like lord Krishna"*. The statement also reflects the fluidity between the character of the God Krishna and that of the star as a hero. Many Bollywood stars are modeled on Lord Krishna. The popularity of Krishna is that besides the super powers which every God has, Krishna has certain kind of tricks, tips and tricks. Our interpretation is the belief that human beings can be Gods coupled with the belief that God Himself descends on earth to save humanity helps the Indian consumer to view the human avatar as God especially if the avatar displays extraordinary acts. Stars like Salman Khan display different avatars (divine incarnation) in different films, the hero of the poor or the saviour of the needy thus reinforcing mythical stereotypes. This "metaphorical drinking of the star's power" (Babb, 1981), lets the Bollywood consumer appropriate such powers of the star/super hero, making them feel powerful and transforming into a hero himself/herself. Star appeal tends to lie in the Bollywood stars' ability to act to redeem society, expressing the common man's desires. Most Bollywood stars are characters in films who are endearing, win hearts and are charismatic. Indian actors are so popular that "children to the elderly recognize them" and are besotted with them. Drawing on Gods in the mythological epics like Rama, Krishna and Arjuna, Bollywood films portray super heroes, which fuel the imagination of the people by creating mythical heroes and stars. The imaginative space of cinema lets the fans idolise and deifies their stars. The Hindu

philosophy allows and facilitates consumer worship of a favourite star as God and as an 'avatar' (incarnation) of Gods and Goddesses.

It is noteworthy that 'King Khan' or 'King of romance' as Shahrukh Khan is known in India has starred in over 70 films and has a huge appreciative fan base; the popularity currency is very high for such stars. For instance, the Indian Bollywood star Salman Khan is very popular with non-urban Hindi speaking audiences. Salman Khan's films like Tere Naam was a big hit, with nearly every boy in the Kashmir valley sporting a similar hairstyle. Stars like Salman Khan, Govinda, Akshay Kumar have been able to win over the hinterland consumer a lot more than the urban Indian consumer. Film characters are portrayed in such a way that the non-urban realities of India come out in some form or the other. We observe an interesting aspect that there are a number of consumers living in smaller urban cities that are not yet quite the urban middle class. We suggest that the star's huge popularity with the non-urban Hindi speaking audience is primarily due to the ability of the star to connect with the rural hinterland. For example, the film Sultan is set in the hinterland and it deals with a sport like say 'kabbadi' or wrestling. Such sports as wrestling are not popular in big cities like Delhi. It is an agrarian sport where the film star Salman Khan has been able to capture the imagination of a much younger set of Indians who come from small towns and are not fully urban Indians. Such masala films speak the language of the rural small-town Indian consumer and connect with their reality.

4.4.1.3. *Empowerment*

We define empowerment as the process which enables a consumer to overcome their sense of powerlessness. We find that Bollywood stars empower the Indian consumer through their darshan in masala films. Nitesh says that *"the average citizen in India is powerless and this gives them a sense of power"*. When the Indian consumer sees Amitabh Bachchan or Salman Khan taking the law into his own hands, which an average person could not do at all, the consumer feels empowered. The findings show that the Indian consumer is attracted to the heroic behaviours of on-screen characters. Sahil says, *"the common man in India is so harassed on an*

everyday basis, the common man is so helpless. The Bollywood hero beats the villain and takes away all the evils". This statement portrays how Bollywood heroes are unbeatable, indestructible and inhumanely strong in their various on-screen avatars. Discussing Bollywood heroes, participants articulated that people who are oppressed in some way or other, whether financially or otherwise, are looking for somebody to take their woes away. Stars like Salman Khan display different avatars in different films, the hero of the poor or the saviour of the needy, thus reinforcing heroism. Bollywood stars like Ajay Devgun who put an end to all the villains on screen, fuel the imagination of the Indian consumer who feels powerful in that moment and imagines himself as a hero who can take on all the problems of the world.

In addition, some popular Bollywood films have set a precedent and have provided inspiration. A recent Bollywood film *Sultan* was hailed as very inspirational story. Chiranjeev shares with us that, *"Sultan (Bollywood film) is a very inspiring story about a wrestler who rises high in life and then he comes down and then above all odds he again rises".* Participants felt empowered after watching such inspiring films. They articulated that they related to the film in profound new ways and believed they draw on the film, by emulating it in real life.

Another interesting observation made in this study was that even though masala films are formulaic, yet contemporary stories deviate to reflect modern times. Till a few years ago, the thought of traversing the long stretch of desert roads in India by a single female or becoming a cop or a detective had not crossed the minds of Indian women. Bollywood produced movies such as Dor and Kahaani which featured empowered and professional women, in turn empower the women in modern Indian society. It is suggested that the darshanic viewing allows consumers to seek out social spaces where they can establish their own societal norms (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

4.4.1.4.   Socialization and bonding

Our findings indicate that Bollywood stars serve an important functional role in the Indian society. What emerged as a major overarching theme was the strong sense of following for stars like Shahrukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan and Salman Khan as these stars are typically portrayed as family orientated. Lokesh says that he likes some stars as *"they are family entertainers and portray no obscenity. That's the deciding factor for me"*. Lokesh's statement reflects the importance of Bollywood stars in the social and interactional aspects of leisure and the need to carefully examine the social context within which leisure behaviour occurs. Hema told us that she *"must have watched Shahrukh Khan's film at least three times in a movie hall, first with a friend, then with another friend and then I took my sister and her daughter"*. These stars become a vehicle for sharing a nice family time together and henceforth, creating good memories. They help in forging and maintaining family communication; fostering connectivity with family.

Traditionally, in India, the basic unit of society was not the individual but the joint family (families where two generations or more live under one roof). Indian society is undergoing great change with migration to urban areas, new patterns of employment and economic survival impacting on families. These changes in the Indian society have led to changes in the structures, functions, roles, relationships and values of the family. Traditional joint families have given way to modern dual career families. However, despite the move towards nuclear families among the middle and upper classes, the extended family continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society. In contemporary India, the nuclear family is still strongly embedded in the extended kinship matrix. Families are intimately involved in the participation in life-cycle events such as births, marriages, deaths, and festival celebrations.

Bollywood stars act as a common thread that bind the "rishtey" (relationships). Social interactions are greatly enhanced through Bollywood stars; they strengthen familial and kinship bonds, helping to maintain and sustain these bonds. These bonds tie the individual to his family, friends and extended society. In addition, we confirm Nayar's (1997) observation that

Bollywood films counter western influences by their emphasis on family ties. Consumers are attracted to such films, where despite western symbols, Bollywood stars actively sustain a set of Indian values. Families routinely watch Bollywood films together and more so if the stars are family orientated. They help in forging and maintaining family communication and cohesion. They are important to the parents and the children in creating what might be called a "sense of togetherness". This can be attributed to traditional norms for example the family system and values are still very cherished and worth preserving (Venkatesh, 1994) in spite of the changing Indian society. Bollywood films portray these traditional family structures and values through traditional and ideal family stories originating from Indian mythology. Bollywood depictions of combining the traditional with the modern, allays the fear of a possible loss of cultural identity (Venkatesh, 1994). Therefore, the consumption of Bollywood masala films reinforces the identity of being distinctively Indian and establishing an Indian identity.

To conclude, it is clear that the star plays a pivotal part in masala films and is a prominent factor that attracts consumers to masala films. These stars not only provide entertainment through songs and dances, they also play a functional role in empowering consumers and strengthening familial and community bonds in Indian society.

In the next section, the second set of findings is discussed with preliminary evidence suggesting that consumer behaviour is expressed at different levels of devotion to Bollywood stars.

4.4.2. Levels of devotion to Bollywood stars

As previously noted, Indian consumers are devoted to Bollywood stars. A large number of our participants were found to adore Bollywood stars, however, we classified them in a less obsessive category of fans. Despite their adoration for Bollywood stars, there are Indian consumers who stay realistic and rational. Yashika says, *"I am his fan but I have my limitations"*. Yashika's statement clearly shows that even though she is a fan and would love to

meet her favourite celebrity, yet, her fascination with Bollywood stars is limited. Such individuals within the Indian consumer fan base are socially motivated and keep up with all the knowledge of Bollywood stars without being obsessive about them.

At the next level, we observe behavioural patterns of consumers who go beyond the keeping up with information of Bollywood stars. One interesting aspect observed is that consumers like to stay connected to their stars and exhibit their extended connection by being members of different communities. These fan communities include following stars on social media and fan clubs. It was demonstrated that consumers' knowledge of Bollywood stars and their stories is rich. As Purnima says, *"I do follow Bollywood gossip"*. Arunesh is a member of the Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan fan club and connects with the group daily. The fan club page is continually updated by fan administrators about the star's latest fitness strategies. Other administrators collect photographs of the star's film shooting, videos and make it viral through this page. Arunesh shared with us how one of his friends knew of Hrithik Roshan's film shooting in Italy and managed to meet up with him in Italy. There are many such fans of Bollywood stars who are cyber friendly and active on social media. Fans like to comment and like posts on fan pages. These Indian consumers share a sense of familiarity with Bollywood stars. Many participants described themselves or were observed to be fans, fanatic about stars, loyal and devoted. A number of participants expressed sentiments similar to those of participant Priya; they had forgiven the Bollywood star Salman Khan for his criminal record; these consumers displayed fierce loyalty. They also try to be one with the star by following the star and being like him/her, *"Many copy his hairstyle and follow the way he dresses up"*. Other participants articulated their frenzied following for stars like Hrithik Roshan, as he was the pioneering Bollywood star to bring in new concepts of body building for males. They show affection towards the stars by giving them endearing titles, *"people call him Bhai (Hindi term for brother to refer to Salman Khan) and stuff"*. Many fans bond over these stars through social media like twitter, fan clubs and online fan groups. These consumers within the Indian consumer fan base watch every film starring their favourite Bollywood star. Consumer behaviour of such fans

includes social media, joining fan clubs and pursuing similar diets, gymming techniques and learning his dance moves.

Finally, we identify a third level of consumer devotion towards Bollywood stars. These consumers are the self-proclaimed star bhakts (devotees) who worship the Bollywood star as modern avatars of various Gods. Isha while talking about her friend says, *"She is mad about Shah Rukh, and she distributes sweets on his birthday every year"*. Other participants were devoted to stars like Shahrukh Khan who is popularly known as the king of romance, as his romantic avatar clearly resonates with many Indian consumers. Participants articulated their frenzied following of heroes like Hrithik Roshan, as he was the pioneering hero to bring in new concepts of body building for males. While some fans are elated to get an autograph or a picture with their favourite stars, others just go to great lengths to show their love, devotion and obsession. For example, it is common knowledge in India about how Kishore Kumar, a huge fan of Aamir Khan, cycled all the way from Ranchi to Mumbai to meet the actor. He also bought Aamir hand written letters from the people who he met on the way and helped him reach Mumbai. Similar stories of admirers, who have done unusual things for Bollywood stars, abound in India.

Many Bollywood stars are known to give darshan appearances on the balcony of their homes, greeting fans and just for people to look at them. This practise is termed 'darshan of the star'. It is common for fans to visit the stars' residences on festive occasions such as Ganesha Chaturthi (Ganesha, a Hindu God's birthday), Eid (a Muslim festival), Diwali (popular Indian festival) where crowds of fans throng outside and await darshan of their beloved star. This is similar to how devotees line up outside temples on holy occasions to get darshan of their Gods. Popular Bollywood stars like Amitabh Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan greet huge crowds of fans on their birthdays from the balconies of their houses. This is a special opportunity where darshan is even more auspicious as it is "sakshat" darshan (Hess, 1983), meaning "direct witness" darshan. Participants discussed how deified posters have been installed in Amitabh Bachchan temples by ABFA (Amitabh Bachchan Fan Association) in Kolkata, where they are

ritually venerated on a regular basis. In India, Bollywood stars have larger than life roles. There are self-proclaimed star devotees who dedicate a "puja room" (temple) in their fan clubs or homes who worship their "deity" as modern avatars of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Many auto rickshaw drivers who are ardent lovers of Salman Khan, have a poster of the actor on the back of their rickshaws and regularly queue outside his house. They are also known to give special discounts to their passengers who are Salman Khan fans. Everyone in India knows how in 2005, Amitabh Bachchan was hospitalized after an accident on the movie set of the film 'Coolie'. There were many prayer ceremonies organized in many cities of India for his recovery. Another example often mentioned is how once a 'samosa' (Indian savoury snack) vendor in Mumbai went to Amitabh Bachchan's residence with a truck fully loaded with samosas, asking him just to touch the samosas so that he could distribute it in his locality as a form of 'prasad' (holy food offered in temple). This is akin to how Indian consumers place 'prasad' before Gods in temples and once it is blessed, they distribute and consume it themselves. Darshan here is manifested in the form of the deity who is present in the form of an actual person, whose feet may be touched, who is offered 'prasad' and whose 'prasad' may be consumed after he has blessed it. Such consumer behaviour lends a cosmological status to Bollywood stars.

The relationship between the Indian consumers and Bollywood stars is similar to that seen between Indian people and their Gods. The concept of darshan manifests in the devotional behaviour of the Indian consumer to a Bollywood star. Consistent with Tyrell (1999), it is suggested here that Bollywood film audiences equate actors with God, these actors are venerated by the Indian people who are devoted to them. This study also supports earlier research in media studies (Dwyer, 2002) that there is an extreme degree of idolisation of Bollywood stars by Indian consumers, to the extent of equating them to Gods.

4.5.   An interpretive framework

India is often perceived as paradoxical (Mahadevan, 2014). Tharoor (2006) says, "how can one approach this land of snow peaks and tropical jungles, a country whose population is fifty-one percent illiterate but which has educated the world's largest pool of trained scientists and engineers, whose teeming cities overflow while four out of five Indians scratch a living from the soil?" In contrast to the western tradition where enlightenment, tradition and modernity are seen as mutually exclusive, many individuals experience their lives as being with tradition and modernity at the same time in India (Mahadevan, 2014).

Although previous studies have focused on darshan and Bollywood stars (Dwyer, 2002), what happens between a consumer and the darshanic impact of the Bollywood star is rarely made explicit. Here the findings are interpreted by drawing on concepts from the Indian culture and how they manifest in worship of Bollywood stars and devotional consumer behaviour. Based on these findings, we develop an interpretive framework (figure 4.1) of consumer devotion. The framework incorporates three levels of increasing devotion to the star, the lowest being that of 'bounded consumers', followed by the 'devoted followers' and lastly, the 'worshippers'. Figure 4.1 summarises these devotional levels to Bollywood stars.

Consumers at the first level of devotion called, 'bounded consumers' are well informed about the star through the media. By bounded, we mean they are not obsessive; for instance, they are not members of any fan club. Although they still like Bollywood stars, their admiration is derived from watching films and their consumer behaviour towards Bollywood stars is rational. One possible reason for this rationality may be because these consumers tend to live in urban areas, and are well educated. They are more capable of critical thought and hence less susceptible to the star mania that can grip Indian cinema goers. We classify such consumers as 'bounded consumers'.

Consumers at the next level of devotion are classified as 'devoted followers.' This term means that there is a high level of frenzied obsession with Bollywood stars. They watch the first show of the film starring their favourite star on the first day; follow and copy the star style in clothing, hairstyle, dialogues, mannerisms and dance style. 'Devoted followers' are active members of fan clubs and closely follow social media relating to Bollywood stars.

One of the reasons why 'devoted followers' have a higher degree of devotion than the 'bounded consumers' lies in the hierarchical structure of Indian society. Indian society is stratified hierarchically on the basis of caste. Caste is a social category unique to India (Beteille, 1991). The caste system divides people into groups, from the priestly class (Brahmins) to the untouchables (Harijan). Further, besides caste, Béteille (1991) notes that society in Indian accords each other status by taking into consideration distinctions of class. India is a highly status conscious society, attaching saliency to hierarchy orientation (Trompenaars, 1993; Gupta et al., 2002; Gannon, 1994; 2004). While the higher ranked groups usually have access to wealth, power, and privilege, the opposite is true for the lower ranked groups. Despite the fact that modern India has made efforts to abolish discrimination based on caste, the centuries old system permeates every level and aspect of Indian life. This system keeps the lower castes in poverty and upper castes in upwardly mobile success (Gokulsing and Disanayake, 1998). Prasad (1999) contends that in hierarchical regimes, social status is derived from the degree of access which individuals have to an important person; therefore, it is not easy to meet a very important person. The Indian system rests on a very hierarchically coded criteria of social rank (Prasad, 1999). Bollywood stars are high in the symbolic hierarchy order and enjoy a high social status in India. The system perpetuates a hierarchy of status within which the Bollywood stars are accorded a high rank on the echelon pole.

'Devoted followers' are predominantly from the lower middle class or working-class groups and are low in the hierarchical order. Such consumers are not very educated. Even though literacy and poverty rates are improving in India (74.04%, 2011 Census report), a quarter of the

Indian population is unable to read and write. Despite it being illegal, it is common to find young children not going to school and working to aid in their family's financial situation. "Psychologically, they are a browbeaten group forced to acquiesce to their lower caste origins and impoverished upbringing" (Srampickal, 1994). Indian consumers who go for darshan of Bollywood stars appearing on balconies on special occasions are awestruck by Bollywood stars as it is not easy to access, see or meet a person who is so high in the hierarchical order for the Indian consumer. Offering the only type of escape form to the downtrodden, the Bollywood star represents the eternal hero who brings hope and triumph over evil to 'devoted followers.'

Furthermore, Indians are considered vertical collectivists (Sivadas, Bruvold and Nelson, 2008). The ramifications for verticality include the propensity to look up to successful people in the hierarchy, such as Bollywood stars. Despite the growth of the middle class, it continues to be an elastic term in India, where it includes a vast range of incomes and standards of living (Scrase, 2002). In India, it is very difficult to talk about socio-economic class in the traditional way class is understood in the west. For many consumers, Bollywood stars like Shahrukh Khan, who have the ability to straddle different worlds, reconcile the great divides of Indian imagination, village and city, poverty and wealth, modernity and tradition (Chakravarty, 1993). It is a privilege to see the star, where the stars in the hierarchical culture of India themselves play to it by giving darshanic blessings.

Another possible reason why some Indian consumers are 'devoted followers' is because they emulate Bollywood stars within their everyday life and create imaginary meanings to "construct different selfhoods" (Vasudevan, 2000). 'Different selfhoods' herald a psychological transformation (Dwyer and Patel, 2002). Stars like Shahrukh Khan stand as a symbol, representing the idea of India in the minds of the audiences, standing up for the desires and aspirations of the whole nation. This symbolism can be explained by a psychological process through which an individual "consciously or unconsciously recognizes himself in, or wishes to be, and vicariously participates in his activities, feelings, and thoughts" (Feilitzen & Linné,

1975). Mick (1986) suggests that symbolic meaning is "at the nucleus of consumer behaviour" and that symbolic meanings help consumers establish their identities, acculturate into a culture, express themselves and their extended selves (Mehta and Belk, 1991). We confirm Pimentel and Reynolds's (2004) observation that consumer devotion is accompanied by proactive sustainable behaviours, and the devoted consumers reach a level of loyalty so intense that the loyalty overcomes poor product performance, scandal, bad publicity, and absence of promotional efforts. At the deepest level, darshan of the Bollywood star formulates a relationship between the Indian consumer and Bollywood stars offering different meanings to the consumer. Such a relationship fosters enduring loyalty by the Indian consumer towards the Bollywood star. We classify such Indian consumers as 'devoted followers.'

Consumers at the third level in our framework who exhibit intense devotion are the 'worshippers.' The term 'worshippers' means that these consumers consider Bollywood stars as sacred and bestow upon them a 'divine' status. The 'worshipper' worships the Bollywood star in temples dedicated to the star, puts up star posters and follows rituals such as anointing star posters with sacred objects and performing holy ceremonies on star birthdays.

There are two reasons to explain the behaviour of 'worshippers'. First, the 'worshippers' consider Bollywood stars as avatars. Avatars are higher souls, divine incarnations or messiahs who have taken birth on earth to work as messengers of Gods, healing and guiding and showing the true path of Gods. There are many examples of gurus in modern India who have been hailed as 'avatars'. The 'worshipper' adores the star as a modern human 'avatar' of Gods and Goddesses (Prasad, 1999). 'Worshippers' draw many parallels between Indian deities and Bollywood stars who "reinforce mythical stereotypes in modern clothing in films (Chakravarty, 1993)". Hinduism has always allowed the presence of Gods on earth and is particularly suited to generate intense attachment and devotion to stars because "there is no problem worshipping people in Hinduism" (Dwyer, 2002).

The second reason that 'worshippers' exhibit an intense level of devotion to Bollywood stars is rooted in the tradition of 'bhakti' in the Indian culture. The term 'bhakti' has many meanings. It means devotional love and can be found in human relationships such as beloved-lover, friend-friend, parent-child. 'Bhakti' can also refer to devotion towards a spiritual teacher as 'guru-bhakti' or to a personal God. In contrast to the second level of devotion of 'devoted followers' where the Bollywood star is unreachable, for 'worshippers', Bollywood stars are a reachable entity. They are like loving personal Gods who they can relate to in an intimate personal way. 'Worshippers' fuse their fandom with modes of intense 'bhakti,' which offers a spiritual experience of union between the two, revealing an intimate connection between the 'worshippers,' and Bollywood stars. 'Bhakti' of the Bollywood star by 'worshippers' is "an intensely private space in the believer's consciousness" (Bharucha, 1998). In addition, the stars themselves foster 'bhakti' by giving back love to the Indian consumers in varied ways such as: extraordinary attention to audience, being socially conscious and doing good deeds for the needy. Such love by Bollywood stars towards consumers is an important component of 'bhakti' which constitutes mutual love between the deity and the devoted. Religious knowledge is capable of diverse interpretations (Soroush, 2000), hence, the deification and worship of stars is not unusual (Lutgendorf, 2006).

We propose an interpretive framework (Figure 4.1) identifying the levels of devotion of the Indian consumer towards Bollywood stars.
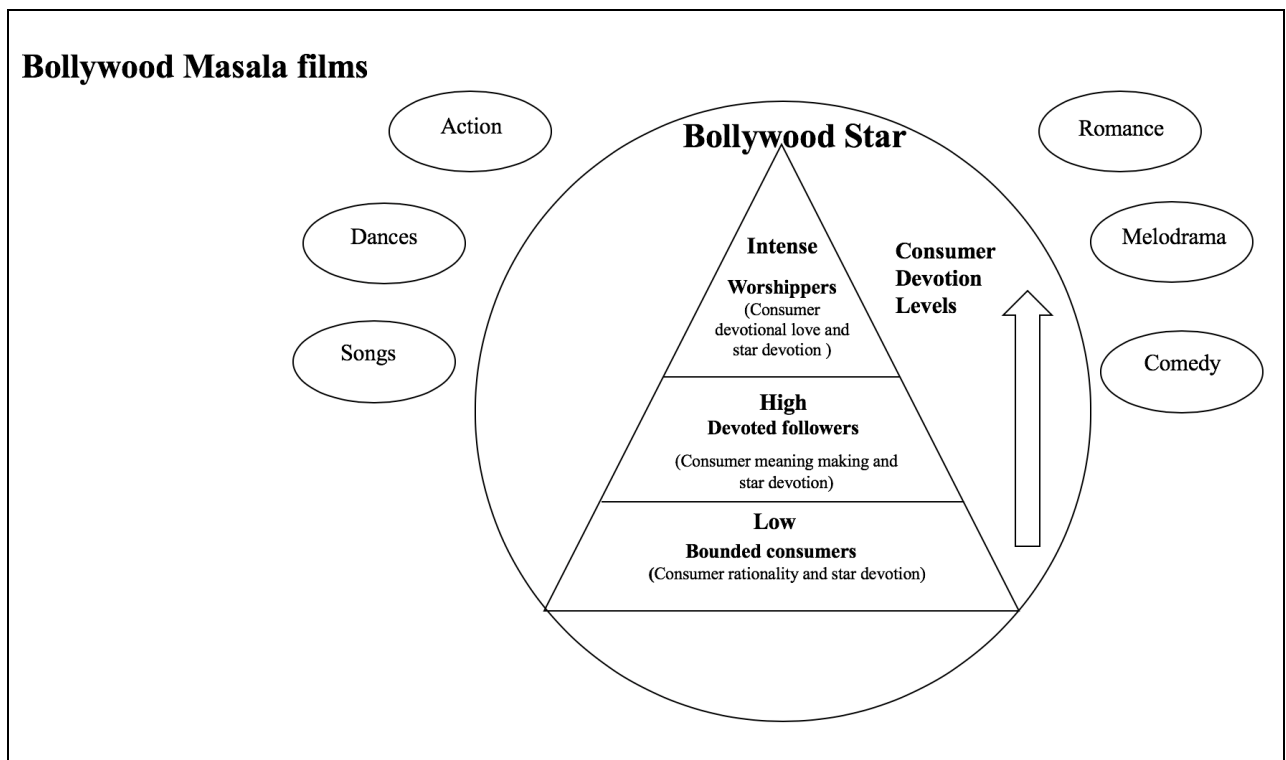
Figure 4.1: A summary of a three-level interpretive framework of consumer devotion to Bollywood stars, with characteristics that attract consumers to masala films.

Consumer devotion to Bollywood stars in the proposed framework (Figure 4.1) refers to the levels of devotion of the Indian consumer towards Bollywood stars: low, high and intense. The background in which consumer devotion to Bollywood stars must be viewed is the history of masala films in India. Masala films grew from the following roots: offering the perfect blend of the star and a 'spice mix' including features such as a romantic tale, a villain, triumph of good over evil. These characteristics are commonly found in all masala films in varying forms. Stars in Bollywood masala films play a pivotal role. We examine the role and impact of these stars in consumers' lives and their levels of devotion to the star. Levels of consumer devotion are classified as low, high and intense.

In summary, this model provides an integrative framework to better understand the different degrees of devotional consumer behaviour. It is suggested that western modes of thinking or viewing a film star are very different from how Bollywood stars are viewed in India. While the western notion of the objective world extends to its aesthetic and functional

dimensions, Indians believe that objects have symbolic meanings at three levels, aesthetic, functional and spiritual (Venkatesh, 1995). In India, the philosophy of life and the mental approach of people comes not from a study of books, but from tradition and the spiritual nutrient of Hindu philosophy that has not dried up or decayed (Gannon and Pillai, 2012).

4.6. Conclusion

The research reported here seeks to understand Bollywood star celebrity worship by the Indian consumer. The devotional consumer behaviour is exemplified by one of India's popular stars, Salman Khan. Convicted in a hit-and-run accident case and sentenced to five years in 2002, the star was let go free on bail. While Hollywood is ruthless to stars who fall from grace, such as Mel Gibson and O.J. Simpson; much of India, on the other hand, rallied around Khan. Bollywood star Salman Khan's Bollywood film release 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' (2015) had a strong opening, proving that he has box-office drawing power of devoted consumers despite his conviction.

Findings derived from the data demonstrated the pivotal role of stars in masala films, which manifests in devotional consumer behaviour. The first set of findings reveal four factors (entertainment, the star, empowerment and socialisation and bonding) that attract Indian consumers to masala films. The second set of findings relates to levels of devotion towards Bollywood stars. An interpretive framework classifies devotion of consumers into three distinct levels: bounded consumers, devoted followers and worshippers.

There are four major contributions of this work. First, this paper introduces the cultural concept of darshan to the marketing literature and examines the instrumental role and use of deeply rooted religious cultural traditions in devotional consumer behaviour. Second, this study offers a framework highlighting three different levels of consumer devotion to Bollywood stars. Third, it integrates literature in both anthropology and marketing to provide an in-depth understanding of the Indian consumer psyche in relation to Bollywood star worship. Fourth, this

study will help managers make genre and casting decisions in the Bollywood industry. Cinema director Shyam Benegal (2006) says that, "he cannot see Hollywood films achieving a real grip on the Bollywood market unless the Americans learn about the Indian culture and what appeals to the Indian culture". If Hollywood wishes to capture the stubbornly elusive film Indian market, one of the critical success factors for these movies is to identify ideas from within the Indian themes, which appeal to the audience. In summary, this research is relevant to both academics and practitioners who wish to understand the role of religious influences on consumer behaviour.

This research can serve as a guide for subsequent research. Since it has used an array of theoretical, historical and religious approaches, other researchers interested in integrating such variety, might benefit from this approach to understand other film industries. The film 'Pancake Man' produced in China generated $140 million. The film was a super hit with a focus on native superheroes. With a number of indigenous movies being produced and released each year, we know little about audience motivations, viewing practices and consumption patterns.

A limitation of this study is that participants are all from the north Indian region of Delhi in India. Future research could potentially examine devotion of consumers towards Bollywood stars of participants from diverse regional backgrounds of India. Preliminary evidence through our study of different devotion levels suggests that a large cross section of Indian consumers fall in the category of bounded consumers followed by devoted followers and lastly, the intense worshippers in urban India. Further studies could investigate rural versus urban consumer behaviour in context to devotion of Bollywood stars. A similar pattern of this study can be undertaken in other countries to explore religious influences on consumption patterns.

Chapter 5

5.1. Epilogue

From my field notes:

As I commute through the north of India for my field work, I observe posters of the film Sultan everywhere. The taxi driver is excited about the film. He is going to watch it with his family. Incredibly, the taxi has a Salman Khan picture in the front corner. A conversation with him reveals how much he loves Salman Khan's films and can't wait to watch them, "he is a messihaa" (messiah). Interestingly, I also see many autorickshaw drivers sporting a blue bracelet just like the one Salman khan wears. A roadside eatery is adorned with large posters of Bollywood stars. One eatery is called 'Bollywood dhaba' (roadside place to eat). The ubiquity of Bollywood stars is evident. Another thing that strikes me are the big billboards announcing the visit of a particular guru. On asking the taxi driver, I get a reply that the particular guru has a big following and is God for many people. People have to line up for his darshan. These observations illustrate to me how popular Bollywood stars are in India. Most importantly, the centrality of darshan in daily life strikes me immediately.

In this research, we have directed scholarly attention to the cultural concept of darshan as a basis for understanding consumer behaviour in India. An ethnoconsumerist interpretive approach was adopted in order to gain a deeper appreciation of how Indian consumers view Bollywood stars. We learnt that Bollywood has a major influence in India. The thesis consists of three research papers. The first research paper follows the guidelines of ethnoconsumerist research and provides a text view to set the course and direction of our research. It presents an understanding of Indian culture and outlines the historical development of Indian cinema and its influences. The second research paper specifically reports findings of an empirical study that examines the impact of the religious concept of darshan on movie consuming experiences in

India. Thematic findings are presented in three stages: before the movie, during the movie and; after watching the movie. Findings show that consumers are loyal to Bollywood stars and idolise them. Bollywood stars are viewed as mythical beings and are role models for Indian consumers. An imaginary identity is constructed while watching the movie. Indian consumers extend the darshanic union beyond the cinema by re-shaping the self and forming a new self. The research also found that consumers are influenced by stars to think differently; this results in an emergence of new values. Stars also strengthen cultural values and there is a desire to uphold traditional cultural values by Indian consumers. The third research paper understands consumer devotional behaviour towards Bollywood celebrities. An interpretive framework within the context of Bollywood films is proposed; this classifies devotion of consumers into three levels: bounded consumers, devoted followers and worshippers. This research contributes to the marketing literature in three ways- firstly, it introduces the cultural concept of darshan to understand Indian consumer behaviour in relation to Bollywood star worship, secondly, it offers an interpretive framework identifying three different levels of consumer devotion to Bollywood stars, and third, it integrates literature in anthropology and marketing to suggest an Indian approach to consumption.

Even as the country continues to modernise, the worship of Bollywood stars cannot be underestimated; something a western person may not necessarily understand. For instance, some Bollywood stars have temples constructed for their deification; this is unheard of in the West. The uniqueness of the concept of darshan has provided us intrinsic insights that reflect the cultural mindset of Bollywood consumers. It has allowed us to decode patterns of behaviour specific to Indian consumers even though they themselves may not be aware of them. Given the special role that darshan plays in the Indian culture, consumption of the Bollywood star impacts movie consuming experiences in different ways and devotional behaviour of Indian consumers. The work interprets and explains not only what consumers do, but also, why they do it.

Jafari et al (2012) assert that for effective theory building, researchers need to broaden their perspectives to include different kinds of consumers. Academically, we have added the unique theory of darshan in the marketing discipline to make sense of consumption in a non-western culture. Our research has revealed the cultural underpinnings of a lucrative entertainment industry. Its significance can be leveraged by a heterogeneous body of entrepreneurs and artists for actionable business ventures in India. For example, global firms seeking entry into the Indian market can use Bollywood stars to endorse their products to connect with consumers. Research (Spry, Pappu and Cornwell, 2011) shows that local celebrities are effective in shifting perceptions of global brands and improving brand credibility.

This work can inspire scholars to study local embedded religious cultural practices and dispositions to gain insights in other indigenous cultures. Aboriginal music and dance in its contemporary form is popular in Australia, for example, the Sydney based Bangarra dance theatre. Many traditional performances find themselves on tourists' must do lists. Yet the origins and symbolic meanings of the music and dance in the Aboriginal society and consumers remain to be interpreted in the marketing literature. Similarly, Nollywood, the Nigerian cinema is uniquely African. There is little knowledge of Nollywood consumers in the marketing literature. We hope to inspire other researchers to think along the lines of the research presented here and uncover cultural nuances to understand consumers better and in turn, build effective theory.

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Appendix A

Participant Information and Consent Form

Department of Marketing and Management
Faculty of Business and Economics
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY   NSW   2109

Phone: +61 (2) 9850 1811
Email: anna.sahgal@ mq.edu.au

Chief Investigator: Dr. Lawrence Ang
Researcher: Anna Sahgal

You are invited to participate in a study that investigates the core elements of the Indian culture to understand and decode the success of 'masala' films in Bollywood and to identify the underlying mechanisms of religion that affect Indian consumers' consumption of masala films. The research question that this study aims to address is - How are Indian consumers influenced by religion when consuming 'masala' films?

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You are invited as you may be between 18-50 age, and are a resident of Delhi. I may know you or you may have been referred by a friend.

The study is being conducted by Anna Sahgal to meet the requirements of a doctoral degree under the supervision of Dr. Lawrence Ang, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Management, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

What will happen in this research?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to talk about Bollywood 'masala' films. You will be shown pictures of Bollywood stars. Also, you will be shown short 1-2 minute clips from Bollywood films. The meeting will last a maximum of 2 hours.

The interview will be tape recorded for purposes of my study. If you do not wish to have your talk recorded, you need to let me know. If you may have any apprehensions or fears regarding the recording process, you are welcome to talk to me at any stage. I will ensure the safety of the tape-recorded material.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Although it is unlikely that you will experience any discomfort or embarrassment, however, if there is any such possibility at any stage of the research process, you would have the full right not to answer it or pass the question, or even discontinue with the interview.

What are the benefits?

We offer AUD $20.00 as an incentive to participate in this research.

Besides, the monetary incentive, this interview offers a great opportunity to discuss the Bollywood films you watch and experience. In addition, you would receive participation in a real research exercise, and will receive a letter of appreciation for doing so.

How will my privacy be protected?

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. The researcher will have access to the data.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is a cost involved in terms of your time. The interview meeting will be a maximum of two hours.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you are interested, you have a week to get back to me on the email address provided on this form (anna.sahgal@mq.edu.au).

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you wish to receive a copy of the research, it could be provided to you once the project is completed. You can contact the researcher at the contact details provided in this letter.

Researcher Contact Details

Anna Sahgal, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Marketing and Management, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Email: anna.sahgal@mq.edu.au

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:____

(Block letters)
Participant's Signature: Date:_____

Investigator's Name: ANNA SAHGAL_____
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: Date:__

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B

Participant Details

Name:

Age:

Gender: Male/Female

Educational Qualifications:

Contact Details:

Mobile:

Email:

Please highlight the appropriate category in the following table:

Age	Religiosity (Please answer the following three questions)
Young (18-30)	1: How often do you take part in religious services? A) Once a day B) More than once a week C) Once a week D) One or three times a month E) A few times a year F) Less often H) Never
Middle Aged (30-50)	2: How interested are you in learning more about religious topics? (On a scale of 1-5, 5 is very interested, 1 is minimal interest)
Old (50-75)	3: How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books? A) Once a day B) More than once a week C) Once a week D) One or three times a month E) A few times a year F) Less often H) Never

Appendix C

Semi Structured Interview Guideline

Pre-Session – Welcome; explain and ensure participants understand the interview process; answer any questions.

To be followed by the interview for an hour and a half (maximum two hours) – The interview process is primarily guided by participant responses, with the interviewer only adding questions to improve interview process and to probe and clarify responses.

Post-Session - Thank participants and answer any questions.

Interview Guide for an interpretive research on consumption of Bollywood films

- How many times do you go to cinemas every month?
- What qualities in a film encourage you to watch it – songs, dances, costumes?
- What gets you deeply involved in a film?
- What is your favourite part of any Hindi film?
- What sorts of movies do you enjoy?
- Which of the following aspects do you feel is most important to a good movie – dialogues, emotions, songs, dances, beautiful locations?
- What makes you want to watch a Hindi film?
- Who is your favourite movie star?
- Why do you like them better than others?
- What is your favourite movie and why?
- What is your favourite Bollywood film? What appealed to you?
- Why do you think you liked it?
- Do you like the dance and song sequences?
- Can you share any unforgettable experiences while watching a Bollywood film?
- In what ways have modernity and consumerism affected people's values, morality and traditions?
- What do these terms, 'traditional' and 'modern', mean to you?

- Would you consider yourself more traditional or more modern?
- What is your favourite film genre?
- Which of the following aspects do you feel is most important to a good movie – dialogues, emotions, songs, dances, beautiful locations?
- Have you attended the staging of Ramlila (theatrical play of the life of Indian God Rama) anytime?
- Do you play the festival Holi?
- Do you participate in religious rituals and festivals?
- If yes, how does participation in religious rituals and festivals influence your personal, public and social life?
- How important is the mythology to you?
- Do you enjoy watching, reading about or listening to your favourite celebrity?
- If someone gave you a lot of money to do with as you please, would you consider spending it on a personal possession (like a napkin or paper plate) once used by your favourite celebrity?
- Do your friends feel that when something good happens with their favourite celebrity, it has happened with them?
- Do you and your friends like to discuss what your favourite celebrity has done?
- Do you like watching and hearing about your favourite celebrity when you are in a large group of people?
- Do you love to talk with others who admire your favourite celebrity?
- Is learning the life story of your favourite celebrity a lot of fun?
- Is keeping up with news about your favourite celebrity an entertaining pastime?
- Is your favourite celebrity practically perfect in every way?

Appendix D

Participant Information Table

Interview Participants	Age	Gender	Education	Location	Religiosity	Profession
1. Chandni	42	F	Masters	Delhi	Low	Home Maker
2. Sahil	52	M	Doctorate	Delhi	Low	Professor
3. Priya	28	F	Masters	Delhi	Low	IT professional
4. Swaran	28	F	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Administrator
5. Lokesh	40	M	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Administrator
6. Mayur	28	M	Bachelors	Delhi	High	HR professional
7. Karuna	36	F	Masters	Delhi	High	Administrator
8. Tanushree	33	F	Student	Delhi	High	Student
9. Namita	47	F	Masters	Delhi	High	Professional
10. Suraj	33	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Assistant professor
11. Chiranjeev	27	M	Student	Delhi	Low	Student
12. Arunesh	29	M	Doctorate	Delhi	High	Student
13. Jyotika	32	F	Student	Delhi	High	Student
14. Rohan	38	M	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Bank professional
15. Purnima	35	F	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Homemaker
16. Sunanda	30	F	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Homemaker
17. Nitesh	35	M	Bachelors	Delhi	High	Bank Officer
18. Ankush	18	M	Student	Delhi	High	Student
19. Surya	18	M	Student	Delhi	High	Student
20. Nishtha	32	F	Doctorate	Delhi	Low	Professor
21. Umesh	24	M	Student	Delhi	Low	Student
22. Sarathi	21	M	Student	Delhi	Low	Student
23. Fouzana	35	F	Bachelors	Delhi	Low	HR professional
24. Vinay	39	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Administrator
25. Isha	22	F	Student	Delhi	High	Student
26. Anuradha	23	F	Student	Delhi	High	Student
27. Rajan	36	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Assistant professor
28. Hema	43	F	Masters	Delhi	Low	Administrator

29. Varun	45	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Entrepreneur
30. Ruchi	26	F	Masters	Delhi	High	Assistant professor
31. Moneesh	39	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Assistant professor
32. Yashika	26	F	Masters	Delhi	Low	Assistant professor
33. Ishima	48	F	Masters	Delhi	Low	Home maker
34. Anup	49	M	Masters	Delhi	Low	Home maker
35. Anita	30	F	Masters	Delhi	High	Marketing Manager
36. Deven	26	M	Bachelors	Delhi	High	HR professional