

# Television and Cinema as an Agent of Development and Social Change

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## Abstract

Television and cinema have had an immense influence on society and culture universally. They have not only provided a global platform for the exchange of information but have also provided space for interaction between cultures.

In a world of globalization, beyond their primary aim of entertainment, television and cinema have become an important means of communication among different communities while also gaining a commercial value along the way. Where on one hand they have been used for communal and/or political propaganda, terrorism, religious preaching, coercion, cultural assimilation and a means of making a profit, they have also represented social activism, promotion of various cultures and traditional practices and art.

Television and cinema, as a visual medium, provide diverse possibilities to the society. From its conception as a black and white medium, it has evolved in the popular form of applications such as Netflix and Amazon Prime videos that has resulted in a much wider reach. For instance, the giant franchise of the Bond films promote a particular political agenda with the backdrop of the Cold War and September 11 and the most popular cartoon show Tom and Jerry that describes the relationship of predator-prey or oppressor-oppressed transcends the primary purpose of entertainment. The Charlie Chaplin films that offer a critique of the new progressing society and the various fairy tales that outline the gender and societal roles of individuals further expand the purpose and approach of the visual medium. Television and cinema take on a didactic role that not only aims at education but also contributes to the creation and/or destruction of conventions. This paper focuses on the evolution of television and cinema on the global platform while discussing its role in development and social change.

**Keywords:** Television-cinema-society-culture-visual medium-global platform

Visual medium in today's world has become almost an inseparable part of one's life which is one of the major reasons why it has become so influential on the lives of its consumer. The visual medium covers all bases, from social and political issues, to economic and developmental issues. It becomes a platform for expression because of the wide reach it offers. The consumption of content happens not only in the form of Cinema, Television shows, news, sports, teleshopping but also through the various new forms of teaching and coaching in schools and at home through the medium of various applications like YouTube. Visual medium has emerged as one of the most accepted and popular mediums of information exchange. Almost 82% of Indians watch television with an average of three hours and forty-four minutes per day. This statistic goes up to 99% for the television consumption in the United States with a viewership of almost 9 hours per day. And this is limited to television. One is fed this information in various politically correct and incorrect ways and has therefore had a very strong impact on individuals and society. This

exchange of information over the global platform has had a vital role in the interaction between various cultures and people. In the world of globalization, where one is producing and consuming products for the global market, use of the visual medium becomes the most important way of promotion. It allows different cultures and communities to learn about each other with much ease.

The availability of this medium enables individuals across the globe to access information and news from all parts of the world. The broadcast of sports, for instance, becomes a major attraction to many viewers who are able to sit back and enjoy a match or tournament happening hundreds of kilometers away. The FIFA World cup alone attracted viewership of 3.572 billion people.

The flow of information through news and media is another major space for its exchange on the global platform. Hundreds of media houses and news channels work day and night to provide information to the viewer's sitting in homes. News, in the age of smart-phones, has also been made available through various applications using internet. The manipulation, corruption and appropriation of news at the hands of a few powerful institutions, however, remains one of the most major setbacks of media.

Cinema and television have emerged as the most popular and accessible form of visual mediums. From the evolution of the medium from the black and white silent version to the current forms of applications like Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube and Hotstar, the visual medium has gained a very strong footing in the world. The content produced is therefore used for various political and social agendas that leaves an impact on the society. And since cinema and television are the most popular form of this medium, they become the most powerful tools for this propagation.

The production of major cinematic franchise serve this purpose. The Charlie Chaplin movies, for instance, offer a critique of the contemporary society as one undergoing a transition to the modern era. The famous film Modern Times depicts the life of a factory worker who, under poverty, is minimized to his production value. The dehumanizing of people happening in the society is reflected in the silent black and white film. This theme of the human condition in the new industrialized world is common in most of Chaplin's work. With the similar message of the changing society, the Bond films reflect the impact of the Cold War on the minds of people. Adaptations of Ian Fleming's novels, the Bond franchise paints a picture of the grandness of the allied powers as compared to the demonized Soviet Union. The recent film adaptations depict a world post the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America which becomes a benchmark in global history and politics. The films also display the figure of Bond as the hyper masculine and true patriot, a model, who keeps his county above all else, instructing the audience to be a preferred version of citizens.

The use of cinema and television has always involved the agenda of instruction and critique. Various cartoon and fairytale shows for children provide an example of the instruction that takes place from the very beginning in children. Through shows like Tom and Jerry, the children are taught about the hierarchy between the prey and predator. Through the various cartoon movies like The Lion King, Cars, Toy Story, Zootopia and many others, children are taught about the values, however flawed they may be, they need to live and prosper in the society. Similarly, the fairytale stories that talk about the damsel in distress in need of a knight in shining armor depict the gender roles that are assigned and attributed at a very young age.

The dystopian genre, as a part of speculative fiction, presents a social and political commentary using a setting of an alternate or/and future reality which may be very different from the creator's ethos. The movies and shows made in dystopian genre portray the world in the distorted and apocalyptic near future and what steps are necessary to prevent it from happening. Movies like The Matrix, The Hunger Games,

Planet of the Apes and shows like *The Handmaid's Tale* talk of a world that was created as a result of human actions and how can they be corrected. This form of cinema and television provides the audience with a sense of the future that may result as a consequence of their behavior in the present and/or past, instructing them not to behave in a certain way. Many of the social messages involved in this are related to the environmental and climate change, the advent and dependence on technology, immorality and appropriation of science.

Through cinema and television, another giant influence comes from the historical and period drama and movies that bend the popular understanding. This aspect of this medium has had a positive impact on many who have had a better understanding of history due to this genre of art. The most famous period series *Game of Thrones*, for example, that had a viewership of over 19 million, is based on the War of the Roses which were a series of civil war for the throne of England between the house of Lancaster (Lannister) and the house of York (Stark). Similarly, many Bollywood productions like *Jodha Akbar*, *Lagaan*, *Padmaavat* and *Bajirao Mastani* have depicted a historical narrative using fiction inciting controversies on their dramatic interpretations.

These historic films and television shows have, however, remained generally realistic in the representation of a past time that resonates some aspects to the present. This realistic representation does not go absent in the huge Harry Potter franchise where, even in a fantastical and magical world, the play of good and evil, moral and immoral and class division remains the same as the real world. Young Harry encounters many such moral questions that end up forming his personality. As a phenomenon that it is, this franchise becomes popular among the masses, offering teaching and guidance for not only children and young-adults but also many adults and elderly of the society.

The influence of cinema and television is immense in India where the common man is still away from Netflix and Amazon Prime and turn to cinema and T.V. as their medium of entertainment. The film industry in India has a huge market that produces over 1,600 films per year in various languages and it has been predicted to hit the gross realization of \$3.7 billion by 2020. With that big a popularity and reach, the Indian cinema becomes one of the most thriving industries of the country. On that note, let's draw our attention to the kind of cinema that is produced to reach the audience.

As discussed before, the approach of cinema and television has been similar across nations, cultures and communities. The aspect of economic and commercial gain from this medium leads to the creation of a profit generating industry on the global platform. With a budget as huge as \$375 million (*Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, 2011), \$82 million (*2.0*, 2018) \$31 million (*Padmaavat*, 2018) and \$15 million per episode (*Game of Thrones*, 2011-2019), cinema and television have become a major revenue generating industry in the world.

We have seen so far how the wide reach enables it to carry the social and moral messages as well as political and religious propaganda ahead in its approach. The contemporary cinema and television has emerged with a social consciousness, attacking the conventions and norms of a rigid and orthodox society. Where films like *PK* and *Oh My God* pose a question on the orthodox religious practices, films like *Article 15*, *Masaan* and *Newton* give an account of the ground zero reality of the society while attacking these social evils. Films like *Parched* and *Super 30* offer criticism as well as individual's empowerment, ending on a hopeful note while films like *Dear Zindagi* talk about mental health. The classic film *Dead Poets Society* and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* revolve around the theme of *Carpe Diem*, seize the day.

The impact of this visual medium is, thus, by far the most important source of information exchange which has a didactic role in the formation of a society that aims at becoming its best version. With occasional

setbacks of political propaganda and manipulation as well as appropriation of news and information for personal gains, cinema and television offer a much broader network that enables the world to connect and reconnect with each other in the support of humanity.

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