

# The Cinematic Depiction of Media's Social Responsibility: An Analysis of Journalism Films

Garima Shree



**Abstract:** Journalism has been portrayed on the silver screen many times. Over the years, filmmakers have been attracted by the role of the journalist, and the news industry has been represented in a variety of ways in Indian cinema. This study examines how the concept and theory of 'social responsibility of the media' has been depicted in journalism films. In this context, it is imperative to understand that the professional practice of journalism in the past shows that the press has the responsibility to act in the public interest. Whether it is the role of the press in India's freedom movement or the investigative function of the press in unearthing corruption and crime, the media has social duties and obligations towards society. Journalism and the media are often called the watchdogs of Indian democracy, and hence, it cannot be denied that society has some positive expectations from the media. These expectations go beyond journalism's obvious normative role(s). This paper will examine how the media's social responsibility has been depicted in cinema. The researcher will do a thematic analysis of journalism films that portray the social responsibility of journalism. Research on popular culture portrayals is important because such portrayals cultivate popular perceptions as well as myths about journalism. Film theory suggests that films are a reflection of real-life (to some extent), and therefore, films play an important role in documenting the contemporary trends in journalism. This study is based on the theory of 'film analysis' to understand the relevance of cinematic representations of social responsibility in journalism.

**Keywords:** Film Communication, Journalism In Film, Cinema Studies, Social Responsibility Of Media, Film Theory, Journalism In Cinema

Journalism is a significant part of popular culture in commercial Bollywood films. Movies and other forms of popular culture have a significant impact on our lives. It not only has an impact on our fashion sense and language, but it also leaves deep psychological imprints on our minds, which are eventually integrated into our society. "Research into depictions of journalists in popular culture is important because the depictions influence public opinion about Real-world journalists, as well as the credibility and public trust of the journalism field. Indeed, the influence might be greater even than the actual work performed by Real world journalists. Popular culture cultivates legend and myth, and this cultivation is especially true for a field such as journalism because the majority of the public will never see the inside of an actual news room." (Painter, 2019)

In fact, many of the characters in journalism films are inspired by real-life journalists, and most of the topics depicted in journalism films are a partial reflection of the news industry. Audiences are gratified when they get a sneak peek into the glamorous world of journalism through films. Movies are a powerful medium, maybe the most powerful medium. They have an ability to draw us in, touch us to the core, hit us with new, sometimes disturbing images, make us care about worlds far removed from the ones we inhabit, and bring characters to life. (Teays, 2012)

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's media-driven society, cinema analysis is becoming increasingly relevant. As a medium of mass communication, films are ingrained in the contexts in which society communicates and interacts. Films can be thought of as a potent medium for communicating knowledge about a culture's history, philosophy, politics, education, and religion. Films are also important medium for documenting and for suggesting new ideas about the contemporary realities of our society. For Indian filmmakers, societal and cultural portrayals have long been a primary source of creative expression in films. This paper explores the 'cinematic depiction of social responsibility of journalism, as portrayed in commercial films'. It dwells on the theory of Film Analysis to encapsulate the essence of cinematic representations of social responsibility of media. Journalism and popular culture traverse each other in many ways.

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## II. METHODOLOGY: FILM ANALYSIS

What is the portrayal of journalism and news media in Bollywood films like? Every film is a unique piece of work and dwells on a storyline. The researcher will make an attempt to do an analysis of journalism films that convey the idea of social responsibility of the press. The period chosen for study is between 2000-2010. Journalism films that fall in the scope of study are as follows:

S.no	Film	Director	Year of release
1.	Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani	Aziz Mirza	2000
2.	Page 3	Madhur Bhandarkar	2005
3.	Rann	Ram Gopal Varma	2010
4.	Peepli Live	Anusha Rizvi	2010

These films have a storyline about journalism. The central plot and theme of all films 'narrate a story about the profession and practice of journalism'. It is important to note that there are many journalistic portrayals as supporting characters in numerous films, but such films are excluded from the list of shortlisted films for the key reason that the central plot and story is not about journalism or journalistic practice.



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Films are well known for being more than only for entertainment. Since cinema is known as the 'mirror of society,' it cannot be denied that one of the most significant functions of films is to depict society's current discourse. Author Wanda Teays in the book *Seeing the Light: Exploring Ethics Through Movies* mentions that- "Films aren't just entertainment; they are powerful ways to see into the workings of our minds and hearts. With movies, we can get a better sense of what we are doing here, why we are doing it, and what in the world we need to do to bring about the changes we seek." (Teays, 2012)

This study utilizes the method of Film Analysis to study the portrayal of journalism in films. To understand the cognitive purpose of film analysis, we can assume that analysis generally concerns how the structural function of film texts is significant for reception, then the concrete cognitive purpose can be said to focus on the five following levels: • Content and representation

- Narration and dramaturgy
- Characters and actors
- Aesthetics and configuration
- Contexts. (Mikos, 2014)

On these levels, each film can be investigated. In doing so, analysis can limit itself to a single level, but it can also consider multiple layers. Each level is related to the others; for example, context influences the level of narration and dramaturgy, the level of aesthetics and configuration influences the level of content and representation, and the level of characters and actors is closely related to the level of narration and dramaturgy. This paper will analyse journalism films on the level of 'content and representation'.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The 'theory of social responsibility of the media' propagates that the media has obligations to society. F. S. Siebert, T. B. Paterson, and W. Schramm proposed the Social Responsibility Media Theory in 1956. The theory's main premise is that freedom comes with responsibilities, and that the press, which has a privileged status under the government, is responsible to the society for performing certain fundamental functions of mass communication. The media's social responsibility notion emerged in the mid-twentieth century and is mostly adopted by developing countries. Renowned media scholar Denis Mc Quail in his book *Mass Communication Theory* (2010) suggested the main propositions of social responsibility theory as follows:

- The media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust.
- News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant.
- The media should be free, but it should be self-regulated.
- The media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct.
- Under some circumstances, government needs to intervene to safeguard the public interest. (McQuail, Mc Quail's Mass Communication Theory, 2010)

### IV. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Since the early years of Indian film industry, journalists and journalism have played important roles in many movies. Many films feature the character of journalist as the main protagonist. There are many movies and on-screen journalist

characters that suggest that a journalist is often considered a social crusader who speaks for the rights of common people and acts in the interest of public.

Renowned Media scholar Denis Mc Quail in his book *Journalism and Society* mentions that a significant component of journalism is that, according to the broad idea of 'freedom of the press,' journalism in a democratic society has no special responsibilities to the government or others. Journalists are obligated to do no damage and to respect the law, but they cannot be bound by any government to do anything specific good. They have the freedom to pick or ignore a number of goals and assignments that occur in the course of their job. The news media, in general, resents and resists attempts to assign them any position in society other than that which they have chosen for themselves. But having said this, there are certain expectations of society from journalism and media. Past history of journalism suggests that the constitution and practise of the press acknowledge some unwritten social duties and obligations to society. There are several external influences and potential motivations to social duty that cannot be overlooked. (McQuail, *Journalism and Society*, 2013)

One of the early portrayals of journalism in Bollywood films was seen in the film *New Delhi Times*, which was produced in the year 1986. The film depicts the professional and personal life of an honest and fearless editor of a newspaper. The role of Vikas Pande as executive editor of 'The New Delhi Times' newspaper is played by Shashi Kapoor. The film portrays the freedom of the press, the responsibilities of the editor, news ethics, and the nexus between politics and the media. Shashi Kapoor has won the national award for Best Actor for his

performance in the film *New Delhi Times*. The film's iconic dialogue ("Logon ko sachai jaan ne ka haq hai, aur unko sachai tak pahunchana mera farz") conveys the essence of the film. "Shashi Kapoor picked a part that was unusual for stars of his stature and, as he often did, lent a lot of dignity and credibility to Pande. *New Delhi Times* remains a milestone in not just his career, but also in the history of Hindi films — it had the spirit of truth in it, and that's what all journalism ought to be." (UPADHYAYA, 2019)

Another film, 'Main Azaad Hoon', is a political drama released in the year 1989. The film's protagonist is a common man who engages in active social leadership through the print media. The film portrays Amitabh Bachchan as Azaad (as the voice of the common people) and Shabana Azmi as Suhasini (the journalist who writes about social issues like corruption, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, etc.) in the newspaper. The character of Subhashni Saigal, the journalist, is an apt portrayal of the social responsibility of the media. Through her journalistic writings, she questions the government and raises public awareness about issues of public interest. The film's narrative connects the dots between fake news, state propaganda, and the media business. While making a critical comment on unethical practices in print media, the film highlights the role of journalism in spreading awareness about social issues and building a people's movement.



Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani was released in the year 2000. The film stars Shahrukh Khan and Juhi Chawla in the lead roles. Both actors have been portrayed as television journalists or news anchors who work for rival news channels. While the first half of the film presents an array of unethical concerns in the media like fake news, sensationalism, and state propaganda, the second half of the film portrays the "flip side of the coin". The film portrays the power of the media when the media acts in the public interest. The media is portrayed as speaking the truth to power. The film conveys that the news media has immense potential to influence the masses as well as the government. The media also play a significant role in the formation of public opinion.

Another film examined is 'Page3,' which was released in 2006. The critically acclaimed film revolves around the professional life of Madhavi Sharma (Konkona Sen Sharma), a young female journalist who plays the role of a well-known Page 3 reporter. Many sequences in the film portray Madhavi as a socially conscious reporter. She is outspoken and opinionated about her views on different social topics. She is portrayed as a bold and outspoken journalist who expresses concern about the social responsibility of the media. Peepli Live is directed by Anusha and Mahmood Farooqui but it bears the Hallmark of the cinema of concern heralded by Aamir Khan within mainstream Bollywood. (Raghavendra, 2010). The idea of social responsibility is well documented in Peepli Live (2010). The depiction of a team television journalists, and a stringer reporter named Rakesh (Nawazuddin Siddiqui), who questions the ethical concerns in media in the context of generating more TRP. In the midst of the media frenzy around Nathas' live suicide, stringer Rakesh draws attention to the story of a poor guy who died of poverty but received little media attention. Rakesh's character is similar to that of Madhvi in Page 3 (2006), Ajay Bakshi and Ria Banerjee in Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (2000), and Purab Shastri in Rann (2010). The act of 'media advocacy' by journalists Ajay Bakshi and Ria Banerjee in Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (2000) highlights the importance of journalism in shaping public opinion.

In the Hindi movie Rann (2010), Amitabh Bachchan plays the role of an uncompromising editor and owner of a television news channel. His character is the ideal depiction of a television news channel owner who believes that people have the right to know the truth. When he learns that his own people and trusted media personnel are engaging in unethical media tactics, he accepts full responsibility and decides to resign as the news channel's editor.

## V. CONCLUSION

The majority of journalism films communicate the idea that the news media should be socially responsible. As a result, the intersections between journalism and social responsibility are critical. Given such depictions, it is not an exaggeration to say that society has high expectations from journalism and that the public frequently considers the media as a 'last resort' for dealing with social crises or matters of overriding public interest. Films like Peepli Live (2010), Rann (2010), Page 3 (2006), and Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (2000) are important and compelling because they depict a

transformation in society and how citizens interact with journalists and other powerful institutions.

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