

A Movie is a Movie: Reddit Responses to Toxic Masculinity in *Kabir Singh*

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Abstract

Although highly successful commercially, Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Kabir Singh* has come under strong criticism for its depiction of toxic masculinity and for promoting problematic gender dynamics. Toxic masculinity refers to the compulsion to aggressively dominate others, and is marked by the inability to accept rejection. Within the dataset it referred to comments acknowledging the violent tendencies exhibited by the main character. Research on gender representation in films often overlooks the online discourse surrounding depicted themes. The data collection was done over the course of December 2024. To explore the connection between the film's box office success and its public perception, this paper seeks to examine public audience comments on *Kabir Singh* and establish the answers to two research questions: How do audiences view the Bollywood film *Kabir Singh*? How do viewers respond to its depiction of so-called toxic masculinity? To do this, the paper employs corpus linguistic methods and draws on a corpus of more than 3,000 comments from the internet forum Reddit. The findings indicate that Reddit users showcased extremely polarised opinions about the morality of the film. Although the character of Kabir Singh was overwhelmingly described using negative adjectives, the film was praised for its visual aesthetics. The analysis supports and expands on some of the previously reported literature around *Kabir Singh* and similar Bollywood films, as well as uncovering some unexpected findings related to audiences and more general social commentary. The results of the analysis communicate a sense of maturity from the commentators, wherein praise for the aesthetics of the movie coexists with the moral disapproval of the main character.

Keywords: Film, Kabir Singh, Box office success, Toxic masculinity, Reddit

1. Introduction

Bollywood films continue to be as popular as ever, with around 800 being produced per year (Brown, 2021). However, it is unclear how far Bollywood has developed in its portrayal of toxic male behaviour. One particularly interesting case is that of *Kabir Singh*, which was the third highest-grossing Indian film in 2019, earning a total revenue of Indian Rupees 2,76,34,00,000 (approx. \$32m), declared by Box Office India (2020) as a 'Super Blockbuster'.

Although highly successful commercially, *Kabir Singh* has come under criticism for its depiction of toxic masculinity and problematic gender dynamics. To explore the connection between the film's box office success and its public perception, this paper seeks to answer two research questions:

1. How do audiences view the Bollywood film *Kabir Singh*?
2. How do viewers respond to its depiction of so-called toxic masculinity?

To do this, the paper employs corpus linguistics and draws on data from the forum Reddit. Corpus linguistics (Gries, 2009) is chosen as a method of analysis as has proven successful on previous internet forum analyses, and because it reduces the interference of human bias on the data (Baker, 2009). As *Kabir Singh* is known for its controversial themes of toxic masculinity, domestic violence, and alcohol and substance abuse, the choice of a more objective and empirical analysis method is key.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender tropes and hypermasculinity

Bollywood films have traditionally been critiqued for their gendered tropes, placing women in subordinate, supporting roles: According to Yadav and Jha (2023) “Female characters are usually stunning, beloved, obedient wives and/or compassionate mothers whose only objectives are to either be the catalyst for the hero's character change and branching storyline or to be a lovely visual distraction from the action” (p.1). Male characters, on the other hand, are typically portrayed as the hero or the protagonist of Bollywood cinema, with women occupying peripheral character roles.

The treatment of women by the ‘Angry Young Man’ Bollywood protagonist (Kishore, 2011) is traditionally deeply unequal. On-screen romantic relationships frequently depict violence, stalking and coercion (Deshpande, 2021), and this phenomenon has been termed “angromance” (Viswamohan and Chaudhuri, 2020). Striking similarities can be noted between *Kabir Singh* and another film, *Tere Naam*: the problematic male protagonists of are transformed into “tragic heroes”, undergoing a change in appearance and becoming more misogynistic over time, while still earning the audience’s sympathy (Viswamohan and Chaudhuri, 2020).

Research has found correlations between the glorification of toxic masculinity in films and the normalisation of aggressive male behaviour in real life (Allen, 2024; Mughal, 2024; Raj and Goswami, 2020; Zulfiqar et al., 2023; Rutledge, 2022). Such films may not only reflect the attitudes of Indian society but also influence them, perpetuating a cycle of normalisation, especially among the youth (Balabantaray, 2022).

2.2 The success and influence of Kabir Singh

Kabir Singh (2019) is a remake of the 2017 Telugu film, *Arjun Reddy*, both directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga. It depicts a romance between the protagonist, Kabir, and his college girlfriend, Preeti, which is derailed by Kabir’s self-destructive and toxic behaviours. During the film, Kabir is shown to behave in a violent, misogynistic way. In the end, despite his damaging actions, Kabir finds a happy ending in the form of marriage with Preeti.

The traditional and unequal representation of gender is upheld in *Kabir Singh*, with the protagonist achieving a positive outcome despite his flaws. Kabir is presented as “a hero who is the poster boy of hegemonic masculine ideology”, while the female lead, Preeti, “has a paper-thin role” and “exists without any autonomous identity” (Ganguly and Singh, 2021). However, the film was still highly successful at the box office, earning more than Rs 630 crore in revenue. Similar examples are films like *Animal* (2023) and *Raanjhanaa* (2023), both of which have been commercially successful despite their controversial themes.

Critics from the Hindustan Times, BBC, and The Hindu emphasised how the film’s narrative glorified a toxic relationship dynamic (Joshi, 2019; Arya, 2019; Sen, 2020). Public opinion, as seen in various YouTube videos and social media discussions, have echoed these sentiments, questioning the societal implications of normalising such behaviour in mainstream cinema (Lehren TV, 2019; Bollywood Spy, 2019). Surveying 107 people, Kalra and Pandey (2024) found that 37% of respondents considered *Kabir Singh* to contain too much violence and that 66% of respondents agreed that it depicted toxic masculinity. Around half of the respondents agreed with the statement that “films like *Animal* and *Kabir Singh* have an impact on society’s view of masculinity and violence” (Kalra and Pandey, 2024).

2.3 Studies on the reception of controversial films

Studies have analysed the critical and audience reception of controversial films, such as *Crash* (Barker et al., 2001), *Shivers* (Mathjis, 2003), and *Lolita* (Laily, 2019). Studies have also focused on Bollywood films, such as *My Name is Khan* (Fadhil and Pebrianto, 2021) and *Dunki* (Rakshit and Ghosh, 2024). Corpus linguistics has been used to analyse films and film reviews, such as Linh (2024) and Madeley (2024). Most film-related corpus-linguistic papers, however, analyse film scripts and song lyrics (Behl and Choudhury, 2011; Madaan et al., 2017).

There have been a few cases of corpus linguistics being used to analyse opinions on Indian films. Ravishankar

and Raghunathan (2017) carried out a corpus-based sentiment classification of Tamil movie-related tweets, but the focus was more on developing a sentiment analysis methodology. Kumar and Lahiri (2024) analysed a corpus of comments from YouTube videos in Hindi and Bangla to explore aggression and misogyny, and the phrase “Kabir Singh” does feature as a topic in that corpus. At the time of writing, however, no study has specifically used corpus methods to analyse the themes of the film *Kabir Singh*, nor are there any in-depth studies or analyses seeking to understand audience reception of *Kabir Singh*. Kalra and Pandey (2024) collected basic survey responses, but they do not go as far as to empirically examine written public comments and opinions on the film and what these might say about public perception of toxic masculinity in *Kabir Singh*.

3. Methodology

The search term “*Kabir Singh*” movie Reddit was entered into Google and the first 40 webpage results were used as data sources. After the first 40 results, the threads returned by Google were of diminishing relevance to the original search term, so the corpus was capped at 40 threads. This prioritised content with the most relevance ensuring online discourse was analysed, rather than archived, inactive or obscure threads. This process was done over a week in December 2024. The thread sampling involved selecting those threads which had significant discourse about the film. The quotation marks ensure that the words ‘Kabir’ and ‘Singh’ occur together as a set phrase, thus making the results more specific to *Kabir Singh*, and not another discussion thread which mentions just the word ‘Kabir’ or the word ‘Singh’. The word ‘movie’ was used to disambiguate from non-movie-related mentions of the name ‘Kabir Singh’, and ‘Reddit’ was included to isolate Reddit discussion threads as the search results. No further parameters were added to this search term that could bias the results, e.g. ‘toxic’ or ‘masculinity’.

Reddit was chosen because it is a publicly viewable, general forum, used by a wide range of community groups and demographics. The threads were chosen from certain subreddits. Primarily from ‘r/BollyBlindsNGossip’ and ‘r/bollywood’. Additional data was drawn from ‘r/india’, ‘r/IndianCinema’, ‘r/ABCDesis’ and ‘r/Tollywood’. The threads included a mix of opinion-based discourse, industry perspectives, evaluative questions and reflections on the film’s societal impact. This diversity allowed for identification of recurring themes. Each thread was saved as in individual text file to facilitate systematic analysis. After scraping the comments from all threads, the final corpus was built and all usernames and identifying metadata was removed. The resulting corpus contained a total of 3,045 Reddit comments and 130,515 words.

Corpus linguistics was chosen as it has proven successful on internet forum analyses (Flesch, 2019; Mahler, 2020; Ferrer et al., 2021). It is also an effective way of analysing large amounts of data, and reduces the interference of human bias (Baker, 2009). ‘Corpus’, from the Latin, refers to a large ‘body’ of text which can be submitted to specialist software that reveals the patterns and frequencies of words within it. Frequencies of words are considered to be reliable indicators of how preoccupied a speaker or writer is with a particular topic (Gries, 2009).

AntConc (Anthony, 2024) was used to interrogate the data. The main features used were the Word tool (for generating a list of all words in the corpus), Concordance (for examining key words within their contexts), and Clusters (for generating the most frequently occurring phrases that contain a given word). First, a wordlist was generated of all words in the corpus, ordered by frequency. The top 30 were taken as a starting point for analysis, and content words amongst these were selected as key terms for closer examination. Function words, such as ‘a’, ‘the’, ‘to’ and so on were not selected for examination as these are not considered to be content words (Abrusán et al., 2018). The pronouns ‘I’ and ‘it’ were also not explored further due to being highly frequent in all forum discussions.

For each of the key words, their clusters (phrases) were uncovered using Clusters in AntConc. Cluster size was set to 2-5 (a minimum of two words and a maximum of five), and minimum range was 2 (occurring in at least two files). After investigating each key word and its most frequent clusters within AntConc, all of the results were considered together and the most prevalent themes were extracted from the corpus findings.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the analysis are presented. Table 1 gives the top 30 most frequent words in the corpus,

ordered by raw frequency. The top 30 words were chosen to ensure that the focus remains on word patterns which are dominant, to filter out low-frequency noise. In bold are the key terms chosen for closer investigation.

4.1 ‘He’

‘He’ is the 12th most frequent word in the corpus with a frequency of 1,516. ‘He’ was used as a reference to either the protagonist of the movie or male members of the movie industry. The most frequently occurring clusters for ‘he’ were ‘he’s’ (n=180) and ‘he is’ (n=147). Analysis of the concordance lines show the Redditors discussing the main character of *Kabir Singh*, describing him as ‘a criminal’, ‘a dickhead’, ‘a drug junkie’, ‘a flawed character’, and even ‘a hero’. On analysis of the concordance lines of ‘he’s’ it was found that there are also cases where ‘he’ and ‘he’s’ refer not to a fictional character but to the actors or the director. There are also instances where references were made to other real-life industry figures even those not directly involved in this movie. The slippage between fictional and real referents indicates how discussions of *Kabir Singh* transcend the narrative of the film itself, evolving into broader debates about the Hindi film industry.

Table 1. The top 30 most frequent words in the corpus; key words in bold.

RANK	RAW FREQUENCY	WORD
1	4,653	<i>the</i>
2	3,089	<i>and</i>
3	3,026	<i>a</i>
4	2,619	<i>to</i>
5	2,324	<i>it</i>
6	2,215	<i>is</i>
7	2,064	<i>i</i>
8	2,007	<i>of</i>
9	1,803	<i>that</i>
10	1,796	<i>in</i>
11	1,595	<i>s</i>
12	1,516	<i>he</i>
13	1,447	<i>t</i>
14	1,394	<i>was</i>
15	1,141	<i>movie</i>
16	1,100	<i>you</i>
17	1,084	<i>but</i>
18	1,014	<i>not</i>
19	993	<i>this</i>
20	982	<i>with</i>
21	978	<i>for</i>
22	944	<i>Kabir</i>
23	908	<i>his</i>
24	828	<i>are</i>
25	794	<i>as</i>
26	789	<i>like</i>
27	751	<i>have</i>
28	681	<i>they</i>
29	666	<i>people</i>
30.	635	<i>be</i>

4.2 ‘His’

The pronoun ‘his’ (n=908) was also examined. The most frequent clusters were ‘his actions’ (n=39) and ‘his own’ (n=31). When the concordance lines of the phrase ‘his actions’ were analysed. The forum members a predominantly discussed the nature of the main character, Kabir. Most comments view *his actions* in a negative light. It demonstrated a preoccupation with both actions and consequences, and there seems to be a general dissatisfaction with the way that the main character’s behaviour does not lead to a downfall. Words used to describe his actions are overwhelmingly negative, e.g. ‘questionable’, ‘stupid’, etc. Moving onto the concordance lines of ‘his own’ once again it was found that the discussion revolved around the nature and the actions of the character, Kabir. Commenters do not appear to hold much sympathy for the character of Kabir and they hold him responsible for his actions. *His* is a key word signalling discussion around both characters in the film and the actions of those characters, around which viewers hold strong (and typically negative) opinions.

4.3 ‘Movie’

Unsurprisingly, ‘movie’ ranks 15th in the list (n=1,141). A total of 346 clusters were found, the most frequent being ‘movie is’ (n=91) and ‘movie and’ (n=73). The main theme of the phrase ‘movie is’ appears to be a discussion about what the film *is* and whether it represents a real situation, i.e. whether it is a neutral portrayal of a real, abusive relationship, or whether it celebrates or glorifies problematic themes such as toxic masculinity and domestic violence. There is also the sentiment that the movie should not be censored or banned. The opinions on the film varied a lot, with some arguing that the film is out-and-out misogynistic, and others claiming the opposite. We also see the argument that films are trivial (*a movie is a movie*) and should not be taken too seriously. Looking at ‘movie and’, there is some reference to the movie itself, but commenters also discuss the Bollywood industry.

4.4 ‘You’

A total of 284 clusters were found for ‘you’ in AntConc, most notably ‘you are’ (n=94) and ‘you can’ (n=90). In

the cases of ‘you are’, the main topic of discussion is not the movie or the characters themselves, but rather members of the audience and other commenters in the forum. There is a high level of disagreement between forum members, and ‘you are’ is often used for insulting another commenter or discounting their opinion in some way. The phrase has been used to characterise other users as overthinking or misinformed. Especially in comments concerning the social impact of cinema. This construction allows speakers to shift from critiquing an argument to critiquing the person making it, transforming discourse into personal judgment.

Of the 90 instances of ‘you can’, 37 were actually ‘you can’t’ but with the ‘t’ printed separately due to the way that AntConc parses contractions. Many of these ‘you can’t’ instances are quotes or paraphrases of the movie’s director, Vanga. The phrase ‘you can’ is more general in scope and seems to be used as a way of permitting, normalising or justifying certain views. ‘You can’ is also found in ‘you can see’ and ‘you can tell’ as a way of demonstrating a wider trend in society. Again, discussion strays beyond the film and into wider issues. ‘You’ and ‘you can’ are used to defend opinions or normalise certain views, and it appears that there is a strong theme of disagreement and imposing views on others.

when it's in their right to do so.Yes,	Kabir Singh	was a misogynist and he had elements of
ed their friend dynamic, the alpha beta dynamic" "For me,	Kabir Singh	was a film of friendship between Shiva and
story of an angry misogynistic guy" "How does it glorify?" "	Kabir Singh	was a creep, the movie was glorifying him
ed any social message thing or so called strong characters.	Kabir Singh	was a very weak, immensely flawed character and
ask something that was on my mind for a while.	Kabir Singh	was a blockbuster. If you see the news
a man and exploiting his mental illness is ok then."	Kabir Singh	was a character with lots of flaws, just
the set." "Thank God Ranveer didn't do it. Yes	Kabir Singh	was a hit but people still curse Shahid
o that role honestly. He looks comical" "Good for Ranveer.	Kabir Singh	was a stupid movie. \ud83e\udd26\ud200
utes-culture-sexual-violence-mysogyny-041050918.html" "	Kabir Singh	was a good movie with great direction and
itch, else he will meet the Jimmy Shergill fate." "Because	Kabir Singh	was a tukka hit and industry understands these
up with, but net net it was a great experience.	Kabir Singh	was an ok movie. Nothing we haven't
controls every aspect of your life!" "Bro it's \"character\",."	Kabir Singh	was an uncomfortable movie to sit through. I

Figure 1. Concordance lines of ‘Kabir Singh.’

describe the movie. The character of Kabir is also described as ‘weak’, ‘flawed’, ‘misogynist’, etc.

Looking at examples of ‘Kabir Singh is’ (Figure 2), there are a range of views on both the character and the movie as a whole. Discussion goes beyond a simple opinion of the film and extends more generally to society. There is also the argument that films have real-life consequences in terms of gender-based violence and that *Kabir Singh* speaks to viewers’ desires to be ‘edgy’ and ‘destructive’.

Kabir is generally described in a negative way, as a ‘bad guy’, a ‘grey character’, and an ‘extremely unlikeable character’. However, there is still a mixture of opinions.

Despite the negative overtones, there is a lack of agreement on Kabir’s character. In some cases, he is viewed neutrally, while in others, he is seen as a very unlikeable character. There is also a degree of sarcasm in these discussions, with commenters mocking each other for their opinions. There are evidently strong views on both the character and the film, and there is no real consensus on whether this movie is responsible for real-life misogyny or whether the responsibility lies with the viewer.

4.6 ‘People’

The most frequent clusters for ‘people’ are ‘people who’ (n=66) and ‘people are’ (n=56). Concordance lines of

4.5 ‘Kabir’

‘Kabir’ ranks highly in terms of frequency, given that it is a seed word in the search term that created the corpus. The most frequent clusters are ‘kabir singh’ (n=591) and ‘kabir is’ (n=29).

The discussion here revolves around the movie itself, but there is also discussion about the career trajectory of the actor who plays Kabir. The sentiment is mostly negative, with words such as ‘stupid’, and ‘uncomfortable’ used to

- ◆ *Kabir Singh* is just a romance movie where for some reason the lead is an abusive pos.
- ◆ However, *Kabir Singh* is one of the many problematic movies that pushes this movement 100 steps backwards. Movie makers shouldn't only be praised for their successes, they should also be held accountable for the aftermath of the ideations that their creations hold.
- ◆ Like OP said, *Kabir Singh* is not even given a character arc (yet somehow he's still the hero) and Priti is not even a character, she's a caricature at best.
- ◆ So basically yeah, that's why *Kabir Singh* is popular. Young people being edgy and fantasizing about destructive behaviour imagining themselves with 'Bekhayali' playing in the background while they smoke their daily cigarette.

Figure 2: Selected examples of ‘Kabir Singh is’

- ◆ *Kabir is* a cool character throughout the movie.
- ◆ LMAO that you think *Kabir is* a grey character who shows us that life is "Lord of the Rings" movie. Yeah, because in real life, doctors routinely operate while on drugs/alcohol successfully.
- ◆ Personally, I still stand by that *Kabir is* a complete immature asshole and abusive guy, and their relationship together is abusive and toxic.
- ◆ I have literally seen men coming and telling how they will also beat their SO and make them fall in love with them, and how *Kabir is* their hero. If it's all fiction, then why is it actually influencing people in real life?

Figure 3. Selected corpus examples of ‘Kabir is.’

‘people who’ revealed judgments being made towards those who dislike the movie, and there is an assumption that the audience is either not intellectual enough to understand the implications of it, or that taking issue with it borders on censorship. Others argue that those defending this film lack intelligence and media literacy skills.

On looking at ‘people are’, the discussions primarily revolve around opinions. Rather than discussing the movie itself, the commenters chose to discuss ‘people’ more generally or society as a whole. Forum members describe audiences as a certain type of person or criticise ‘people’ without including themselves in that group.

There is discussion revolves around what is and is not acceptable to portray in media, and that this is due to ‘people’ being ‘impressionable’, ‘influenced’, ‘aggressive’, and not ‘mature enough’. Rather than focusing on discussing the movie, the commenters discussed ‘people’ and society more generally.

5. Discussion

Across the results laid out in the preceding section, there are some consistent themes related to views on the movie *Kabir Singh* as well as views on cinema and society.

5.1 Divisiveness

Clearly, there are strong and opposing opinions on this film. Rarely is there an agreement or consensus on any aspect of the film, ranging from whether or not this is a ‘good’ film to whether it poses any moral issues. As found in the literature, the theme of hypermasculinity has been a consistent source of controversy in Bollywood, and we can see that the case of *Kabir Singh* is no exception. Perhaps this diversity of strong opinions explains why the film has been so widely viewed and is so ‘successful’ in commercial terms.

5.2 Kabir Singh as ‘hero’

The views on Kabir’s character in this corpus are negative, but there are also discussions on his character development and the fact that the ending of the movie was a positive one despite his poor behaviour. Kabir Singh is an example of the ‘tragic hero’ in an ‘angromance’, and this could explain why there are such mixed views on Kabir’s character. Although he is generally understood to be a ‘bad’ person who is responsible for his failings, he is nonetheless viewed as the hero of this story and is supported and rooted for by the audience in his happy ending. Meanwhile, female characters are backgrounded both in the film and in discussions of the film. In the film, Preeti rarely articulates her feelings and her emotions are depicted only in relation to Kabir’s character. The most frequent words in the corpus show that male pronouns feature much higher (*he, him, his*), while female pronouns are far less common in these discussions. Thus, female focused commentary is sparse and is more focused on Preeti’s responses to Kabir’s action. Therefore, the online discourse surrounding this film reproduces the gendered asymmetry showcased in the film. As found in the literature, female characters are generally not cast as the hero, and instead perform a ‘peripheral’ role. This was recognised in parts of the corpus, such as the comment that “*Priti is not even a character, she’s a caricature at best*”.

5.3 The role of cinema

There seem to be two polarised views amongst the commenters in the corpus regarding the role and responsibilities of cinema. The first is roughly that *a movie is a movie and should remain a movie*, and therefore is not morally responsible for affecting the minds of viewers. The other view is that because audiences are impressionable and because toxic masculinity can be promoted by films, the filmmakers have a moral responsibility to promote acceptable ideas. From the corpus, it is evident that several Redditors perceive the Indian audience as not “mature enough” to differentiate between a satirical social commentary and a film that glorifies toxic behaviour. However, these views show opinions expressed within this specific Reddit dataset and should not be generalised to all Indian viewers.

Aside from the gender politics, a recurring sentiment is that, despite its controversies, the movie has some

cinematic merits, such as its soundtrack, cinematography and colour grading. Another common view is that whether or not the film is ‘promoting’ or ‘glorifying’ toxic behaviour, it should not be censored.

5.4 Blurring the lines of fiction and non-fiction

The corpus analysis showed that the discussion amongst the forum members is often not about the movie itself, but extends to topics such as society as a whole and the intellectual capabilities of the Indian audience. There is no explicit differentiation between the character of Kabir Singh and the actor who portrayed him, Shahid Kapoor, as shown in the sections discussing the keywords ‘he’ and ‘him’. There is also explicit discussion of the industry and the people involved in the making of the film such as the director, Sandeep Reddy Vanga, as well as direct quotations of his which promote violence within romantic relationships.

The fact that there is a blurring of the line between the film itself and society could suggest that viewers find it difficult to separate fictional media from reality, or that this media too closely resembles real-life issues in Indian society. In their survey, Kalra and Pandey (2024) identified that the majority of their respondents found *Kabir Singh* to depict examples of toxic masculinity and around half of the respondents believed that films such as this have an impact on society’s views on masculinity and violence. The corpus analysis presented here also suggests that audiences might believe that Indian viewers are impressionable or naïve.

5.5 Summary of findings

This analysis has shown that *Kabir Singh* is indeed a controversial film, and audiences have responded to it with strong and divergent opinions. Despite much of the discussion revolving around the film, there are also many instances of the commenters extending discussion into the realms of society, moral responsibility, hypermasculinity, and the role of art. In some of the forum threads, there was a greater preoccupation with the audience than with the film itself, and much of the criticism was levelled at ‘naïve’ or ‘immature’ viewers, rather than at ‘toxic’ media or problematic storylines in Bollywood. Besides its production values, there were generally negative views held around the film and even its actors and director.

5.6 Limitations and future research

This paper was a limited investigation into audience perspectives on *Kabir Singh*, and does not make generalisations about Bollywood films or audiences generally. The corpus consisted purely of Reddit threads which is primarily accessed by young and urban individuals; and did not draw on any other data for these findings. The comments analysed were in English, potentially excluding regional language’s nuances especially around themes relating to gender and masculinity. Additionally, the corpus was capped at 40 threads. Thus, the perspectives analysed may not represent Bollywood cinema watchers in its entirety. The reliance on Google’s ranking algorithm introduces sensitivity to search personalisation, thus the results could vary based on location and browser history. Furthermore, AntConc does not process contractions, for instance ‘you can’t’ would be shown as ‘you can’ and ‘t’, therefore analysis about the degree of informality would not be possible.

Future work could expand on this paper by incorporating other datasets, looking at other Bollywood films, incorporating data from other social media platforms such as YouTube, X and Instagram and Indian platforms such as Moj and Mitron as well as include a multilingual analysis. This paper has also raised questions about how viewers relate to cinema and how filmmakers are held to account, morally. Further work could seek to shine a light on why commercially successful films are not always held in high regard by their audiences.

6. Conclusion

To return to the research questions posed at the start of this paper, we can say that audiences generally hold a negative view towards the character of *Kabir Singh*, but that the film has some merits. However, the picture is complicated by other, conflicting, opinions, such as that *a movie is a movie* and that the responsibility of filmmakers

is not always clear-cut. In response to our second research question, it appears that Reddit members discussing agreed that the actions of the characters (and even the director) represent toxic and problematic points of view, especially with relation to toxic masculinity. However, many disagreed that movies are responsible for gender imbalances in society, and argued that viewers should have more discernment. Unexpectedly, there were also a high number of comments that related to society more broadly, rather than discussing the film.

The disparity between the film's commercial performance and its critical reception raises questions around audience expectations and acceptance of controversial art. Commercial success is often mistaken for endorsement but may instead reflect effective marketing, controversy, or curiosity.

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