

# **Cultural Influences on Film Perception: Analysing the Multilingual Audience in Solapur City**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the film-watching behaviour of the multilingual audience in Solapur City, aiming to understand their preferences, attitudes, and viewing habits across various languages. The research analyses socio-demographic characteristics, language preferences, cultural impacts on film perception, viewing habits, and the role of cultural identity in shaping film choices. Data collection method include qualitative interviews to delve into cultural influences and identity-related preferences. The findings reveal a diverse linguistic landscape in Solapur, where Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, and other linguistic communities shape distinct film consumption patterns. Cultural authenticity and representation significantly impact audience engagement and satisfaction. This study offers valuable insights for filmmakers and content creators to develop culturally resonant films and enhance the cinematic experience for Solapur's diverse audience.

**Keywords:** Multilingual audience, Solapur City, Cultural influences, Film-watching behaviour, Language preferences

## Introduction

The Indian film industry is a vast and heterogeneous cultural domain, comprising numerous regional cinemas that reflect the country's linguistic plurality and socio-cultural diversity (Raj and Suresh, 2024). Indian cinema not only caters to specific linguistic communities but also serves as a cultural marker, reinforcing collective identities and narrating localised concerns (Srinivas, 2010). Cinema, therefore, functions as more than entertainment; it operates as a medium through which societal issues are articulated and regional identities are negotiated (Gupta and Gupta, 2013). This interplay between language, cultural identity, and audience reception becomes especially salient in multilingual contexts. Solapur City, situated at the confluence of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana, offers a unique case study for examining these dynamics. According to the Census of India (2011), the city's population is linguistically diverse, with Marathi speakers forming the largest group (42.29%) alongside substantial Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, and Vadari-speaking communities. Historically, this plurality has been mirrored in the city's cinema culture. Iconic venues such as the *Bhagwat Complex*, pioneering Asia's first multiplex concept—featured theatres like *Chitramandir* (1930–1935), *Chhaya Mandir* (1942), and *Kala Mandir* (1944), notable for their Art Deco architecture (Hindustan Times, 2023). *Uma Mandir* (1964), once the second-largest theatre in Maharashtra, hosted high-profile events such as the premiere of *Sangam* (dir. Raj Kapoor, IND, 1964), underscoring Solapur's significance in the cinematic landscape.

In recent decades, Solapur's exhibition ecology has evolved to blend nostalgia with modernity. While single-screen theatres like *Kalpana*, *Asha*, and *Shalimar* have closed, others, such as *Padma* and *Lakshminarayan*, continue to cater to Telugu and Kannada audiences. Multiplexes like *E-Square Oasis*, *R Miniplex* and *Bhagwat Cinemas* screen predominantly Hindi, Marathi, and English films, while niche linguistic groups, such as Savji speakers, remain underrepresented. This selective availability of films raises critical questions about linguistic inclusivity, cultural representation, and the market dynamics shaping exhibition choices in smaller urban centres.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines how Solapur's multilingual audiences engage with cinematic content across Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Marathi, and English. It interrogates how historical legacies of film exhibition intersect with contemporary viewing practices, both in theatres and on digital platforms, to sustain or reshape cultural identities. In doing so, the study addresses broader debates on linguistic diversity, regional representation, and the negotiation of cultural authenticity within India's fragmented yet interconnected media markets.

## Literature Review

The study of audience reception within multilingual, multicultural contexts has become increasingly pertinent in contemporary media studies, particularly in urban regions, where linguistic diversity shapes cultural consumption patterns. In cities such as Solapur, where Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, and Urdu-speaking communities coexist, understanding film

perception through the lens of linguistic and cultural multiplicity becomes essential. Existing scholarship highlights several interconnected dimensions: the role of cultural proximity in media preferences, the intersection of language and identity, the mechanisms of screen translation, the agency of audiences in meaning-making, and the broader implications of policy and media literacy. This review synthesises key findings across these themes to establish theoretical and empirical foundations for analysing multilingual film audiences in Solapur City.

The concept of cultural proximity offers a foundational framework for understanding how linguistic communities gravitate toward media, reflecting their own cultural and linguistic realities. Straubhaar (2007) argued that audiences often prefer content that is culturally and linguistically proximate, even in a globalised media environment, as it resonates more deeply with their identities and lived experiences. This theory challenges assumptions about passive cultural homogenisation and affirms the enduring influence of local cultural codes in shaping media consumption. In multilingual settings such as Solapur, this proximity is often mediated by language, with different linguistic groups aligning their preferences accordingly. Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) emphasise how globalisation is greeted by diverse patterns of localisation rather than uniform adoption through their investigation of transnational media flows, especially in areas with notable linguistic heterogeneity. These arguments provide the groundwork for situating Solapur's audience behaviour within both global media circuits and local linguistic contexts.

Building on the concept of cultural proximity, it is critical to understand that audience participation in multilingual settings entails intricate, multi-layered meaning-making processes. 'For audiences in multilingual contexts, reception is rarely monolithic; viewers navigate between linguistic layers, accessing meaning not only from the primary text but also from intertextual cues embedded in different languages', as Uribe-Jongbloed (2023: 57) observes. In the context of Solapur, where audiences frequently use a variety of linguistic codes, including Marathi, Hindi, and Kannada, to comprehend and relate to movie plots, this comprehension is especially pertinent. Moreover, the localised reception of cinema within diverse urban spaces significantly impacts both box office performance and the experiential aspects for audiences, illustrating that the 'placeless' perception of film is often a misnomer (Srinivas, 2010).

Language, as both a communicative and a cultural marker, plays a critical role in mediating cinematic engagement. Gillespie's (1995) ethnographic study of South Asian families in London demonstrates how language choices in media consumption are deeply entangled with issues of identity negotiation and generational cultural continuity. Her findings emphasise that, for multilingual families, media preferences are not only about entertainment but also about reproducing cultural belonging and intergenerational cohesion.

Simultaneously, research on Indian film audiences offers important insights into how multilingualism functions within the specific cultural and economic dynamics of South Asia. Chitrapu (2012) presents a nuanced picture of how linguistic identity and regional affiliation shape audience engagement with Indian cinema, particularly in urban centres where multiple linguistic communities coexist. Her study revealed how the coexistence of national, regional, and global cinema creates layered audience identities, making film preferences a reflection of broader social negotiations. Srinivas (2002), exploring the concept of the active audience, emphasises that Indian cinema-goers are not passive recipients but active interpreters of meaning, deeply embedded within local sociocultural realities. His analysis of Telugu cinema's

reception illustrates how audience interpretation varies depending on class, caste, and language, providing a valuable comparative lens for understanding audience reception in Solapur, where similar dynamics may be at play across Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada speakers. This localised perspective further challenges the notion of a monolithic 'Indian audience', advocating instead for a differentiated approach that acknowledges the specific cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts shaping individual and collective film consumption.

From an industrial standpoint, film producers and distributors have increasingly recognised the importance of targeted strategies for engaging multilingual markets. Iwabuchi (2002) introduced the notion of 'cultural odor' to describe how media products carry identifiable cultural markers that influence their reception abroad. In multilingual regions, these markers are often recalibrated through localisation, including language adaptation and cultural tailoring. Similarly, Hoskins and Mirus (1988) highlighted the economic rationale behind localisation, noting that films with familiar cultural codes tend to perform better in foreign or linguistically diverse markets. These insights are critical for understanding how distribution strategies in Solapur—such as screening Telugu films in certain theatres and Hindi/Marathi films in others, are shaped by audience segmentation and cultural resonance. This strategic approach enables distributors to cater to the diverse linguistic preferences within the city, optimising market penetration and audience engagement.

Finally, scholarly attention to cultural policy and inclusivity contextualises the need for systemic support of multilingual and culturally diverse media. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) advocates the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity in media production and distribution, reinforcing the relevance of public policy in ensuring equitable representation. Croteau et al. (2013), examining media industries, argue that structural reforms are necessary to democratise access to media and support culturally relevant content for diverse audiences. This policy-oriented perspective is especially pertinent in cities such as Solapur, where linguistic representation in cinema can reflect broader patterns of cultural inclusion or exclusion.

In synthesising this body of work, it becomes evident that multilingual film reception is shaped by an intricate web of factors, including cultural proximity, linguistic fluency, identity negotiation, translation strategies, audience agency, and institutional frameworks. This literature not only provides a theoretical foundation for the present study but also points to existing gaps, particularly in regional Indian urban contexts such as Solapur. By focusing on a multilingual audience in a historically significant yet underexplored setting, this study seeks to extend the discourse on multilingual media consumption by offering insights into how cultural identities are performed, contested, and reaffirmed through cinematic engagement. This research endeavours to fill this lacuna by providing empirical insights into the reception dynamics of diverse linguistic films among Solapur's multicultural populace.

### *Research Questions*

Present research paper seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the preferred languages for film watching among Solapur City's multilingual film audience, and what factors influence the selection of these films?
- How do cultural factors influence the perception and reception of films among Solapur City's multilingual audience?
- In what ways does cultural identity shape preferences for films that showcase cultural diversity among Solapur City's multilingual audience?

## **Methodology**

This study explores how Solapur City's multilingual audience perceives and engages with films across various languages and how their preferences are shaped by linguistic, cultural, and social contexts. To investigate these dynamics, a qualitative research approach was employed using in-depth interviews as the principal method of data collection. This approach was selected for its ability to capture the complexity of cultural identity, language use, and subjective cinematic experiences, factors that cannot be fully explored through quantitative tools alone. This methodological choice aligns with the interpretive paradigm, seeking to understand the nuanced meanings individuals ascribe to their media consumption (Castaldi, 2020). The study adopted a semi-structured interview format to allow for flexibility and the exploration of emergent themes while ensuring coverage of key research questions.

The decision to employ in-depth interviews stems from the nature of the research questions, which focus on how language and culture influence individual preferences, perceptions, and emotional engagement with the films. Unlike surveys or structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews allow participants to narrate their personal stories, elaborate on emotive and interpretative dimensions, and express subtle cultural nuances that shape their media choice. This qualitative approach, therefore, facilitated a deeper understanding of the 'life-worlds' of the participants, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of how their linguistic and cultural backgrounds intersect with their cinematic preferences.

Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language (Marathi, Hindi, Kannada, or English) and, where necessary, translated for analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis. This method allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes and patterns related to cultural identity, language accessibility, and cinematic experiences. Themes such as 'cultural proximity', 'linguistic negotiation', 'authenticity in dubbing', and 'digital access' were derived inductively, guided by the theoretical constructs presented in the literature review (e.g., Atay, 2019).

### *Respondent Profiles*

To capture the diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives of Solapur's multilingual film audience, six participants were selected using convenience sampling. These individuals reflect a cross-section of language groups, occupations, and age brackets, providing a varied yet thematically coherent dataset for qualitative analysis. All names used below are pseudonyms, and minor identifying details have been modified to protect respondent anonymity.

1. **Respondent A (28, Female, Marketing Executive)**  
A multilingual professional from a Telugu-speaking background, fluent in Marathi, Telugu, Hindi, and English. Based in Solapur, she engages with films across languages. Her insights emphasise how cultural familiarity and fluency shape emotional resonance, genre preference, and access to diverse cinematic content.
2. **Respondent B (22, Female, MBA Student)**  
A native Kannada speaker studying in Solapur, she brings a youthful regionalist lens. Passionate about Kannada films, she highlights their marginalisation in Solapur theatres and explains how linguistic affinity sustains cultural pride and media loyalty.
3. **Respondent C (35, Male, Business Owner)**  
A Solapur resident from the Kshatriya Savji community, fluent in Savaji, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu. He stresses the lack of Savji-language representation in mainstream distribution and calls for greater visibility of regional films. His narrative reflects the struggles of minority language speakers in accessing relevant media.
4. **Respondent D (24, Female, Journalism Student)**  
From a multicultural family, fluent in Marathi, Hindi, and English. She offers critical reflections on media trends, audience behaviour, and multilingual cinema's role in shaping Solapur's cultural identity. Her perspective highlights linguistic inclusion in contemporary viewing habits.
5. **Respondent E (52, Male, Theatre Owner)**  
A veteran of Solapur's cinema industry, fluent in Marathi, Hindi, and Kannada. With decades of experience in theatre operations, he provides historical insight into multilingual film exhibition and the evolving linguistic needs of audiences, underscoring regional cinema's cultural influence.
6. **Respondent F (20, Male, Mass Communication Student)**  
A native Kannada speaker studying in Solapur. Living in a primarily Marathi-speaking environment, he discusses barriers to accessing Kannada films and stresses the role of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms in overcoming linguistic restrictions, reflecting generational shifts in consumption.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Multilingualism and Cultural Narratives Through Cinema*

In Solapur, the presence of diverse linguistic communities, such as Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada speakers, had fostered a rich environment for multilingual film consumption. This aligns with Straubhaar's (2007) concept of cultural proximity, which posits that audiences prefer media reflecting their own culture and language. A twenty-four-year-old female (Respondent D) had emphasised that this multilingualism enabled residents to engage with various cultural narratives through cinema, stating,

Solapur is a city full of multilingual people... people from that community live in Solapur. Therefore, most people have more than these three languages and can speak them easily; at the same time, I am a Marathi speaker. But I also watch Hindi, Telugu, and Kannada movies without fail. (Respondent D)

This multilingual interaction was further facilitated by technological advancements that allowed films to be dubbed or subtitled, making them accessible across linguistic barriers, supporting Atay's (2019) discussion on the role of subtitles and dubbing in making films accessible to multilingual audiences. This observation underscores how the interplay of local linguistic diversity and evolving media accessibility transforms the cinematic experience into a dynamic site for cultural negotiation and identity affirmation. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the choices audiences make, where the linguistic authenticity and cultural resonance of a film significantly influence viewing preferences.

An interview with a fifty-two-year-old male (Respondent E) had provided a detailed exploration of how multilingualism shaped Solapur's film audience. Respondent E, a theatre personality, had emphasised the deep connection between language and cultural identity in film consumption, noting, 'when the audience watches the film in their own language, they understand it fully. Because language is such that its tone is also very important'. This had highlighted the intrinsic link between linguistic familiarity and audience engagement, as films resonated more profoundly when reflecting a viewer's cultural and linguistic background, resonating with Gillespie's (1995) findings on how media serves to maintain cultural ties. This phenomenon emphasises the importance of linguistic nuance in cinematic appreciation, where the subtle inflections of a language contribute significantly to the film's emotional and narrative impact. Also, Respondent E had pointed out the unique dynamics in Solapur, where films in multiple languages such as Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, and Marathi were screened regularly, reflecting the city's diverse demographics. He had observed, 'Solapur being a multilingual film city, films in four languages... are generally screened in Solapur, and according to that culture, they are language people who go there and watch that movie'. This cultural diversity not only enriched cinematic experiences but also fostered cross-cultural appreciation among the city's inhabitants, echoing Kolar-Panov's (1997) insights into media's role in maintaining linguistic diversity. Despite the challenges in maintaining cultural authenticity in remakes and dubbed films, Respondent E had remained optimistic about the growth of multilingual cinema in Solapur, highlighting its potential as a hub for diverse cinematic narratives. This nuanced understanding of local viewing habits is crucial for understanding the broader trends in film distribution and consumption across India's varied linguistic landscapes.

### *Navigating Multilingual Cinema: Challenges and Cultural Representation in Solapur*

In an interview, a twenty-year-old male (Respondent F) had shed light on the challenges faced by Kannada-speaking residents in Solapur regarding their access to movies in their native language. Despite being from a Kannada cultural background, Respondent F had expressed the difficulty of finding Kannada films in local theatres, with only one theatre, *Lakshminarayan*, occasionally screening Kannada movies. He had emphasised the importance of cultural representation in films

and suggested that filmmakers and distributors should consider cultural factors when making movies. This perspective aligns with Straubhaar's (2007) theory of cultural proximity and the importance of media reflecting one's own cultural identity. This situation highlights the persistent challenges in achieving equitable linguistic representation within diverse urban cinematic landscapes, highlighting how infrastructure limitations and market dynamics often impede access to culturally resonant content.

Further, Respondent F, a twenty-year-old male, had discussed the impact of language on movie preferences and viewing experiences. He had acknowledged the influence of language on his decision to watch a movie and shared his experience of watching movies in other languages with subtitles or dubbing, supporting Atay's (2019) research on the accessibility of multilingual films. Respondent F had also highlighted the significance of cultural events and festivals in shaping movie preferences and understanding cultural traditions, which ties into Gillespie's (1995) findings on media's role in fostering cultural ties. This perspective underlines how individual preferences for cinematic content are deeply intertwined with linguistic familiarity and cultural relevance, thereby shaping audience engagement and contributing to the sustained demand for culturally resonant narratives.

Overall, the interview had highlighted the challenges faced by multilingual audiences in Solapur regarding access to movies in their native language and the importance of cultural representation in films. This necessitates the importance of better movie availability in Solapur and the influence of cultural identity on film tastes. The experiences shared by the Solapur residents not only provided a detailed look at the city's unique multilingual film consumption landscape but also reinforced key concepts from the literature on the intersection of cultural and linguistic identity with media consumption.

### *Kannada Films: We Speak Kannada, It Comes Well—A Multilingual Portrait of Solapur*

Respondent B, a twenty-two-year-old female and a Kannada native in Solapur, had offered a glimpse into the dynamic multilingual landscape of the city. Hailing from a family where both Marathi and Kannada cultures intertwined, she had reflected the seamless coexistence of languages and traditions. As she had eloquently put it, 'our father is originally from Maharashtra, and our mother is from Kannada. For that, we speak Kannada, it comes well, and we mostly follow Karnataka rules. Culture follows more'. The interview had highlighted how Kannada films served as cultural anchors, bringing together families and friends to enjoy cinematic experiences that resonated with their shared heritage. Despite technological advancements, twenty-two-year-old female Respondent B's preference for watching movies in theatres highlighted the enduring appeal of the communal viewing experience. From her perspective, the interview accentuated Solapur's rich cultural diversity, where linguistic differences were embraced and celebrated, fostering a sense of unity amid the diversity. This narrative shows how local linguistic practices, such as the seamless integration of Kannada and Marathi, contribute to the unique identity of the region, influencing media consumption patterns. This cultural amalgamation extends to cinematic preferences, where the demand for Kannada films reflects a desire for narratives that

authentically portray their cultural milieu and linguistic nuances, stressing the importance of regional cinema in preserving and promoting distinct cultural identities (Dechamma, 2011).

Respondent A (twenty-eight-year-old female), hailing from a Telugu background while residing in Maharashtra, had eloquently articulated her multilingual fluency, stating, 'I can fluently speak in Marathi, Telugu, English, and Hindi'. Her insights had unveiled Solapur's cinematic landscape, where she had highlighted the accessibility and enthusiasm for films across diverse cultural backgrounds, noting, 'so I think it's very, it's available here in Solapur, so that's a very good thing for us'. Respondent A's (twenty-eight-year-old female) perspective had resonated throughout the conversation, advocating for authentic cultural representations in filmmaking and expressing a desire for a deeper exploration of cultural narratives. Her remarks had shaped a narrative of inclusivity and exploration in cinematic experiences, highlighting Solapur's cultural diversity and the city's growing embrace of multicultural film.

### *Cultural Diversity in Solapur's Cinematic Realm*

Respondent C, a thirty-five-year-old male, had shed light on the multilingual landscape of Solapur's cinema culture, revealing the city's rich tapestry of linguistic diversity. Hailing from the Kshatriya community, Respondent C had expressed a desire for more films in his native language, Savaji, emphasising, 'I think that such movies should come out in our language'. Despite the scarcity of films in his language, Respondent C's openness to watching movies in various languages had reflected Solapur's multicultural ethos. He had advocated for greater consultation with community members and experts to ensure authentic portrayals of cultural identities in films, stating, 'movies are created, and we can show it to the audience or the director'. According to Respondent C's observations, there is a need for more cinematic options that appeal to Solapur's multilingual audience and encourage diversity and cross-cultural interaction on screen.

The above analysis had explored the theme of multilingualism in Solapur's cinematic landscape through interviews with various residents from different linguistic backgrounds. This had highlighted the city's rich cultural diversity, where languages such as Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, and Hindi coexisted, shaping the film consumption habits of its inhabitants. Interviews with individuals like twenty-four-year-old female respondent D, fifty-two-year-old male respondent E, twenty-year-old male respondent F, twenty-two-year-old female respondent B, twenty-eight-year-old female respondent A, and thirty-five-year-old male respondent C had provided insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by Solapur's multilingual environment. Despite facing hurdles such as limited access to movies in native languages, residents had expressed a desire for more authentic cultural representations in films and advocated for increased availability of multilingual content. Overall, the analysis had emphasised Solapur's vibrant multicultural cinema scene and the importance of embracing linguistic diversity in cinematic narratives to promote inclusivity and unity amidst cultural differences. This commitment to cultural inclusivity in cinematic narratives echoes a broader movement within the Indian film industry, particularly the rise of pan-Indian cinema from the South, which actively seeks to deconstruct traditional compositional elements and narrative paradigms to appeal to a wider, linguistically diverse audience (Putta, 2024).

## *Cultural Influence on Film Preferences*

Individuals' cultural and linguistic backgrounds had played crucial roles in shaping their film preferences. This relationship had been evident from the responses of twenty-eight-year-old female respondent A, thirty-five-year-old male respondent C, twenty-two-year-old female respondent B, twenty-four-year-old female respondent D, fifty-two-year-old male respondent E, and twenty-year-old male respondent F, who had all highlighted how their cultural heritage influenced the types of movies they enjoyed. For instance, Respondent D's emphasis on films reflecting local customs and traditions underscores the pervasive influence of cultural proximity, aligning with research indicating that audiences often gravitate towards narratives that mirror their own lived experiences and societal norms (Pegrum et al., 2005). Respondent A, a twenty-eight-year-old female, had emphasised the preference for Telugu movies, stating, 'we prefer Telugu movies because they resonate with our cultural background'. This had indicated a strong connection between cultural identity and the choice of film, where movies in one's native language had been preferred for their ability to reflect and uphold cultural traditions and values, aligning with Straubhaar's (2007) findings on cultural proximity and media content. Similarly, a thirty-five-year-old male respondent C's enjoyment of films like 'Savaji', which depicted Marathi culture, underscored the importance of authentic cultural representation in fostering audience engagement and preserving linguistic heritage (Yang and Zhang, 2023). Respondent C had expressed a desire for more films in his native language, saying, 'I am known as Savji... our language is Kshatriya. I think that such movies should come out in our language'. This had highlighted the importance of representation and the desire to see one's language and culture reflected in popular media, suggesting that linguistic identity had played a significant role in film preference, driving the demand for movies that reflect cultural narratives. This perspective resonates with Gillespie (1995) and Kolar-Panov (1997), who discussed how diasporic communities use media to maintain cultural ties and negotiate their identities. This desire for authentic linguistic portrayal in cinema is a critical aspect of cultural preservation, as it allows for the intergenerational transmission of heritage and the affirmation of regional identities within a broader national discourse.

Respondent B, a twenty-two-year-old female, had noted the impact of her mixed cultural heritage on her film choices: 'our father is originally from Maharashtra and our mother is from Kannada... we follow Karnataka culture more, and hence, watch more Kannada movies'. This had illustrated how familial and regional cultural practices had influenced individual preferences, leading to a stronger inclination towards films that represent the culture one had been more exposed to. This highlights the complex interplay between cultural heritage, family background, and media consumption habits, suggesting that film preferences are not merely aesthetic choices but are deeply embedded in an individual's socio-cultural environment.

Respondent D, a twenty-four-year-old female, had noted that cultural identity could significantly influence one's engagement and interest in films. The portrayal of cultural identities in films had often piqued curiosity and led to a deeper exploration of those cultures: '... one of the cultural identities is the growing interest towards that culture and when we try to study the culture more closely we also study the local people who are there'. She had explained that this deeper engagement could also manifest in physical exploration, such as visiting places depicted

in films. This observation aligns with Atay's (2019) study on the intricate relationship between multilingualism and cinema, highlighting how cultural context shapes viewing experiences.

Respondent E, a fifty-two-year-old male, had highlighted how cultural elements such as language, traditions, and clothing deeply influenced his engagement with films. He had stated:

I have always been watching movies from different cultural backgrounds. Our country, India, is multilingual in nature. Since there are different states here, and after the independence period, multilingual states were formed on the basis of language, so the language of each state is different, and the language is different. Therefore, the dressing is different. Because clothing is generally like the climate.  
(Respondent E)

He had elaborated on how the diversity of languages and cultures in India made each film unique and enriching, emphasising the authenticity of incorporating local customs and languages into movies. This perspective is consistent with the findings of Lukinbeal and Zimmermann (2008) on how subtitles and dubbing influence the comprehension and enjoyment of films among multilingual audiences.

Respondent F, a twenty-year-old male, had highlighted the challenge of accessing Kannada films in Solapur, where theatres predominantly screened movies in Marathi and Hindi. He had stated, 'staying in Solapur and watching movies in theatres, that too in the mother tongue Kannada, is not easily possible'. This demonstrated the important influence that linguistic diversity has on the accessibility of films that cater to particular cultural backgrounds and encourage harmony and inclusivity in spite of cultural differences. Respondent F had acknowledged the influence of cultural elements on movie choices, emphasising how films often reflected and preserved cultural experiences. He had noted, 'the culture, language, or what is cultural is displayed in the way of the film approach or the cultural experience'. Despite this recognition, he had struggled to pinpoint a film that resonated with his Kannada cultural identity, indicating a potential gap in representation. This highlights the broader issue of minority language cinema's visibility within dominant linguistic entertainment landscapes, where commercial viability often dictates distribution, potentially marginalising culturally significant but less widely spoken productions (Trisnawati, 2017).

### *Cultural Impact on Film Perception*

The theme of Cultural Impact on Film Perception had been prominently reflected in the interview with twenty-two-year-old female respondent B, showing how her cultural background had shaped her preferences and perceptions of movies. Respondent B had emphasised the significance of the Kannada language and culture in her film choices, stating, 'for that, we speak Kannada, it comes well and we mostly follow Karnataka rules'. She had further expressed her fondness for movies depicting Karnataka's cultural and mythological elements, such as '*Kantara*' (dir. Rishab Shetty, IND, 2022), highlighting, 'when a picture like *Kantara* comes, it feels good to see'. Her taste for films that resonated with her culture had highlighted the close relationship between cultural identity and cinematic experiences, which affected how she saw and enjoyed

films. This had elucidated the profound impact of cultural background on individuals' film perceptions and preferences, shaping their cinematic experiences meaningfully. This theme aligns with Atay's (2019) study on how language diversity impacts audience reception and interpretation of films, emphasising the role of linguistic fluency and cultural context in shaping viewing experiences. This preference for culturally aligned narratives extends beyond language, influencing the appreciation of local customs, traditions, and even subtle nuances of social interaction portrayed on screen, thereby deepening the viewer's identification with the cinematic world (Euphemia et al., 2015).

Respondent F, a twenty-year-old male, had illustrated how cultural background shaped individuals' movie preferences and experiences. Respondent F's Kannada cultural identity had influenced his movie viewing habits and choices, despite residing predominantly in a Marathi-speaking area like Solapur. He had expressed difficulty in accessing Kannada films in theatres and had resorted to online platforms such as OTT services for viewing. However, he had highlighted the significance of cultural elements in films, particularly appreciating movies like '*Kantara*' for their portrayal of cultural heritage. Respondent F's preference for love stories in Kannada cinema had reflected his cultural identity and personal tastes. He had also emphasised the importance of filmmakers considering cultural aspects when producing movies, suggesting that films serve as a medium for cultural preservation and outreach. Despite his limited access to Kannada films in Solapur, Respondent F's cultural identity had remained influential in his movie preferences and viewing habits. Similar to the findings of Gillespie (1995) and Kolar-Panov (1997) on the negotiation of cultural identities through media, this thematic analysis highlighted the long-lasting influence of cultural background on people's cinematic experiences as well as the need for greater cultural inclusivity in film production and distribution. These insights collectively affirm that cultural and linguistic heritage are not merely incidental factors in media consumption but are foundational to audience engagement, shaping preferences, influencing interpretations, and ultimately determining the success and impact of cinematic works.

Respondent E, a fifty-two-year-old male, had highlighted the significance of cultural authenticity in films, stating, 'when the audience watches the film in their own language, they understand it fully'. He had emphasised the importance of accurately representing cultural elements in movies to resonate with the audience, noting, 'according to that culture, that film is perfect'. Respondent E had also discussed how cultural identity influenced film choices, stating, 'an audience can have different reasons for watching a movie... depending on the audience, there may be different reasons'. The interview emphasised the complex interplay between cultural background and film perception, highlighting the critical role that cultural authenticity plays in influencing how audiences interact with films. This insight connects with Straubhaar's (2007) work on cultural proximity and the importance of culturally resonant media content. This perspective highlights the persistent demand for media that reflects specific local or regional identities, demonstrating that films often serve as crucial vehicles for cultural expression and preservation (Tai and Chuang, 2014).

Respondent D, a twenty-four-year-old female, had illuminated the profound impact of cultural factors on film perception, particularly within the multilingual context of Solapur City. She had emphasised the linguistic diversity of Solapur and its influence on film consumption, stating, 'Solapur is a city full of multilingual people... If any new movies come out, I always go and watch them with interest'. She had highlighted the role of films in bridging cultural gaps, noting

how watching movies in different languages fostered an understanding of diverse cultures, such as with the film *'Kantara'*, which had introduced her to a previously unknown culture. She had also acknowledged the significance of cultural identity portrayed in films, stating, 'definitely one of the cultural identities is the growing interest towards that culture, and when we try to study the culture more closely, we also study the local people who are there'. Additionally, she had discussed the impact of festivals and events on film preferences, suggesting that modern portrayals in films might influence traditional celebrations. She had further addressed the challenges posed by language barriers in film viewing, highlighting the importance of subtitles or dubbing for comprehension. As Uribe-Jongbloed (2023: 72) explains, 'language functions as both a gateway and a barrier: it can facilitate the appreciation of a product across cultures, but it can also limit its reach when the linguistic distance is perceived as too great'. This theoretical perspective reinforces the observation that for some viewers in Solapur, unfamiliar languages created a sense of distance, leading them to avoid films that felt culturally or linguistically inaccessible. All things considered, the interview had emphasised the complex connection between cultural background and how films are perceived, as well as how films can promote cultural awareness. This aligns with Lukinbeal and Zimmermann (2008), who found that subtitles often preserve the original linguistic and cultural nuances of the film, enhancing the viewing experience for multilingual viewers.

### *Lost in Translation: Navigating Cultural Identity in Cinema*

Respondent C, a thirty-five-year-old male, highlighted the lack of Savaji films and called for more cultural authenticity in regional cinema, aligning with Straubhaar (2007) on cultural proximity and Gillespie (1995) on language's role in media preferences. Despite limited Savaji films, he chose diverse genres, stressing universal themes. Respondent A, a twenty-eight-year-old female, appreciated Solapur's access to diverse films and authentic cultural representation. She noted evolving viewing habits and supported Lukinbeal and Zimmermann (2008) on subtitles preserving cultural nuances and O'Sullivan (2021) on multilingual content engaging audiences. She also emphasised the importance of storytelling as a reflection of lived experiences, highlighting how narratives can resonate deeply when they authentically portray the cultural milieu of their intended audience. She also articulated how films, through their cultural narratives, contribute to national integration by fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse communities within a country (Imhanobe, 2022). This perspective aligns with the idea that cinema functions as a powerful cultural artifact, capable of both reflecting and shaping societal values, thereby reinforcing collective identities and promoting cross-cultural dialogue (Bhandari and Singh, 2016). This aligns with the broader understanding that cinema can serve as a potent tool for social awareness and national cohesion, fostering a shared sense of identity among disparate groups (Khattri and Singh, 2021).

Respondent B, a twenty-two-year-old female, focused on Kannada films like *'Kantara'*, reflecting Atay's (2019) study on language diversity impacting film reception. Respondent F, a twenty-year-old male, emphasised the need for cultural inclusivity in film, aligning with UNESCO (2005) on supporting linguistic diversity. This perspective is further supported by scholars who argue that cultural products, such as films, play a crucial role in reinforcing national identity and

disseminating hegemonic forms of cultural narratives (Manavalli, 2010). Moreover, these cultural narratives frequently serve to legitimise specific societal structures and power dynamics, reflecting prevailing ideologies rather than always challenging them (Huq and Mukherjee, 2020).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study explores how a multilingual urban audience in Solapur City engages in cinema across languages and cultures. Through in-depth qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, we examined how linguistic preferences, cultural identities, and access shape the film-watching behaviour of a population embedded in a richly diverse linguistic and cinematic heritage. Our findings illuminate the intricate ways in which individuals negotiate their cultural affiliations and linguistic competencies within a globalised media landscape, emphasising cinema's role in reflecting and shaping these dynamics.

### *A Complex Urban Demographic and Linguistic Matrix*

Solapur is a non-metropolitan, culturally layered setting in which the film audience is predominantly young, employed, and digitally connected. The linguistic mosaic of Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, Savji, Hindi, and Urdu speakers not only informs everyday life, but also actively shapes film consumption. This diversity is not merely demographic; it reflects deeper cultural affiliations that impact how cinema is chosen, interpreted, and emotionally experienced. The varied linguistic competencies within the population enable a unique form of cultural proximity, where audiences can engage with narratives that resonate with their native tongues while also exploring films in other regional or national languages (Karande and Sharma, 2022).

Participants consistently revealed that language preference in films is not arbitrary but is tied to familial, regional, and emotional resonance. As Straubhaar (2007) suggested, cultural proximity remains a key factor in shaping media preferences, and in Solapur, this proximity is filtered through a multilingual lens. Films watched in a familiar language are consistently perceived as more authentic, accessible, and emotionally impactful. This phenomenon highlights how linguistic familiarity enhances narrative immersion and cultural identification, reinforcing the idea that language serves as a crucial conduit for cinematic engagement.

### *Cultural Identity and Film as Symbolic Practice*

The respondents demonstrated a deep sense of identification with films that represented their linguistic or cultural backgrounds. For instance, twenty-two-year-old female respondent B and twenty-year-old male respondent F expressed that Kannada films served as symbolic links to their heritage, while thirty-five-year-old male respondent C advocated for the greater visibility of Savji-language cinema. These insights support Gillespie's (1995) and Kolar-Panov's (1997) assertions that media serves as a crucial space for the negotiation of diasporic and minority identities. Such cinematic engagements go beyond mere entertainment, functioning as vital expressions of

cultural preservation and vehicles for asserting identity within a larger, often homogenising, media environment.

However, identity-oriented consumption does not exclude cross-cultural engagement. Participants such as twenty-eight-year-old female respondent A and twenty-four-year-old female respondent D articulated a fluidity in preferences, where exposure to multiple languages allowed for broader cinematic appreciation, enabled in part by the increasing availability of subtitled content on OTT platforms. This adaptability suggests that while linguistic and cultural proximity remain significant, audiences are increasingly willing to transcend these boundaries for compelling narratives, leveraging technological advancements to bridge linguistic gaps.

### *Access, Infrastructure, and the Role of Digital Media*

The structural inequities in cinema exhibitions, where Hindi and Marathi dominate multiplex screens, while regional languages are often confined to older single-screen venues, emerged as recurring challenges. Respondents noted that Kannada and Telugu films were not consistently available in mainstream theatres, with venues such as the *Lakshminarayan Talkies* catering only occasionally to non-Marathi content. This limited theatrical distribution for regional films highlights the need for more inclusive exhibition strategies to cater to Solapur's diverse linguistic demographic.

Digital platforms have emerged as critical spaces for linguistic inclusion. For younger viewers, OTT services provide access to culturally specific content, challenge traditional barriers of distribution, and open new avenues for multilingual engagement. This transition is a reshaping of viewing habits and is especially important for marginalised linguistic communities without institutional representation in the local cinema infrastructure.

### *Toward Inclusive and Authentic Cinema*

This paper emphasises that film creators and distributors must approach multilingual markets as opportunities rather than obstacles. The Solapur case demonstrates that audiences are eager for content that reflects their lived experiences and linguistic reality. Cultural authenticity, nuanced dubbing or subtitling, and equitable distribution practices are not only desirable; they are also necessary for fostering inclusive cinematic experiences in diverse urban regions. This necessitates a strategic shift towards recognising linguistic diversity as a valuable asset, leading to the development of tailored content and exhibition models that cater to the unique preferences of multilingual audiences, thereby fostering sustained engagement and market growth (Zheng, 2022). Moreover, cultural policy intervention is needed. Institutions should support programming mandates and funding schemes that allow underrepresented linguistic groups to be seen and heard in films. As UNESCO (2005) affirms, linguistic diversity in media is not just a cultural right; it is essential to democratic and pluralistic cultural expressions.

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