Original Paper

Exploring Audience Engagement in War Films: How Chennai's Gen Z Connects with 1917

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Abstract

This study investigates the audience engagement in war films, focusing mainly on heroism or emotional narratives have a stronger influence on Gen z viewers in Chennai, with the film reference 1917 as a case study. A total of 100 participants, aged between 16-18, where taken and divided them into 2 teams (50 males and 50 females). Each of them was shown selected sequences emphasizing either heroism or emotional content of the same film. Engagement levels were measured using the structured questionnaire, and the independent sample t-tests were conducted to find the responses and compare between both the conditions with the selected audiences. The analysis clearly revealed that the male participants exposed more to emotional sequences with higher engagement (M = 4.329) than those exposed to heroic sequences (M = 3.326, p = 0.000 <0.05). Female participants showed higher engagement with heroic sequences (M = 3.880) than emotional sequences (M = 3.642, p = 0.000 <0.05). These findings indicate a gender-based preference in war cinema engagement, where males are more influenced by emotional narratives and females by heroism. The results also suggest further discussions can be made how these preferences impact choice of similar trends.

Keywords

war films, emotions, heroism, Gen Z, media, gender

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

For centuries, storytelling has been a fundamental part of the human experience; contemporary war films thus help in shaping public perception, drive narratives and become symbolic to the collective memory. Movies help people feel patriotic, evoke their emotional responses and make them more empathic. This

effect of the movies intertwines the individual experience with the broader narrative. War films help in showcasing the experience of the soldiers on the battlefields, they capture the resilience, fear, loss and bravery as for the soldiers, the wars were not distant memories, it was part of their daily routine and a fundamental part of their nation's security (Sheeba, 93). The movies also show the unsung bravery of the soldiers, which is often overlooked in historical records, the complex dilemmas and decisions which they have to make on the battlefield, making sure the efforts of these soldiers are understandable by the modern audience and not forgotten. War films in the early years were primarily used as propaganda, sanctioned by the government, as seen with "The Battle of the Somme" (1916) made by the British and "Bei unseren Helden an der Somme" (1917) by the Germans (Stojanova, 6). The propaganda films would often distort the truth to show ideological restraints among the soldiers and show the war efforts as a noble cause.

In the post-war era, war films changed from being objects of propaganda to an exploration of human emotion and survival. Movies such as "All Quiet on the Western Front" (2022), narrated from the perspective of Paul, show how fighting in the war is not as glorious as their teachers made it sound. He and his friends realised their mistake when the first bombardment hit, and that dying for one's country is a dirty and painful thing. Paul's observations reveal that even for soldiers to manage to survive the war, life after will never be the same, as other people cannot relate to or understand the struggles that they have faced (Masdar, 5). Therefore, modern interpretations of war movies show wars to be a traumatic phenomenon which causes large-scale property damage and civilians to lose their lives. The same disdain for war can also be seen with the character of Scofield in "1917" (2019), while medals gained from war are seen as symbols of valour, courage, bravery and heroism, Scofield associates the experience with a battle of survival and trauma, something he would rather forget (McCormack, 5). Media consumption and public perception of war have changed over the years; modern movie shows different approaches for engaging with the audience. Presenting the characters with their own struggles, trauma, and empathy, the movies are made more relatable.

Although India has never been involved in a total war, the limited wars it has faced with Pakistan and China, as well as the last few decades of terrorism, have influenced the great interest and positive perception of war movies among the Indians. War movies are thus incredibly popular among Indians, and Indian war movies also take significant influence from Hollywood, incorporating the gloss and indigenous narrative ethos. Past studies have shared that while the Indian audience turns to the West for material needs, they ultimately seek self-assurance and cultural identity, which the war movies from Bollywood provide. However, similar to Hollywood, the shifting demands and expectations from war movies have also changed in Bollywood, as movies no longer can depend on the standard movie formula and tropes (Nair, 14). Movies such as "Border" and "Rang De Basanti" became highly popular among the Indian audience for their patriotism and their appeal to different generations of audience. The historical narratives in war films, the showcase of cultural values such as coexistence, peace and harmony are key

elements which drive the Indian audience (Bharti & Sehrawat, 34). The core values of the war films are what make them popular among the masses. These movies show strong defensive capabilities and technological advancements in warfare, inspiring the audience to recognise the honour and contribution of the soldiers towards the nation.

In recent years, there has been a shift in media consumption. The Generation Z of Chennai has been more invested in digital media because it provides broader access to news and unites the world. This suggests that the youth are familiar with and consumers of global media on a daily basis and are digitally literate. Digital media is also easy to access, while in the past, there was a negative association with time spent on digital platforms; the useful information and accessibility have been one of the main reasons for Generation Z using digital devices (Preethy Rose, 5). Past studies conducted on Indian youth have also revealed Generation Z to be more aware, as they are more issue-focused, prioritising social issues. The study also shows a gender divide, as female users have a greater willingness to align themselves with global trends; they are more empathic and engage with social media through visual modes of storytelling. While the youth of Bangalore are more tech savvy, the study has shown that Chennai also has developed a culture of digital awareness among its Generation Z (Sharma, 10). Digitalisation and modern technology have attracted Generation Z because it is more appealing to the younger generation (Lekshmi, 5).

1.2 Justification for Selecting "1917"

Sam Mendes's "1917" (2019) is a highly acclaimed film that makes use of the one shot technique and differentiates the plot of the movie in a four act narrative structure. This layout of the movie has allowed the audience to develop a closer connection to the protagonist. The use of the one shot technique also creates an illusion which makes the passage of time chronological (Ghosh, 5). The real time action and place create a close realism which intrigues the audience and encourages the follow-along. The overarching plot point within the movie is the joint journey of Blake and Schofield across the front lines to deliver a message. Blake has emotional stakes in fulfilling the quest as his brother is serving on the front lines; the two soldiers journey through rough terrain where their lives are constantly in danger. The relationship between Schofield and Blake, though presented as comrades initially, turns to heteronormative masculinity as Blake is killed by an enemy pilot they save (McCormack, 13). Blake's death is symbolic and emotional, as even in death, Schofield tries to honour his heroism. At the end of the movie, he informs Blake's brother of how he died a hero. Blake's death engages the audience emotionally as they relate to the repressed emotions experienced by Schofield, as he is unable to show his emotions or mourn for his friend.

1.3 Research Problem

Past studies carried out on war movies tend to focus on the experience of the Western audience or on the historical accuracy of the movies. The movie sets, casting and lightning effects are made compelling to preserve the authenticity but also to show the historical scenes in a way that matches the audience

understanding of the events (Jindal et al., 3). The audience which are primarily western in most studies, analyse the movies based on the characters, roles, stories, the time period and setting (Spicer, 13). Audience surveys are necessary as they help in understanding which genres are more compelling and the themes within the movie which the general audience connects with. However, there has been a lack of research carried out on how the younger generations associate with war movies, as media consumption continues to change. The main focus of the research has therefore been on understanding how the Generation Z of India, particularly from the city of Chennai, engages with Western war movies. Sam Mendes's 2019 film "1917" has been chosen for a survey to gather a gendered perspective on the movie and whether the young audience connects more with the heroism or emotional aspects of the film.

The research aims to address the gap which exists in war cinema literature by incorporating a cross-cultural perspective through the Indian audience. The reception of war movies also differs between individuals belonging to different generations; the study thus also shares insight into their interpretations of the historical film. The past studies have shown how influential war movies are in India; these movies are an extension of entertainment to the people, with the military being a significant part of the narrative (Nair, 13). Using Generation Z from Chennai as the targeted participants for the present research thus provides a unique perspective to learn how the ethnically and culturally diverse youth from this part of the world view Western war films. The youth of Chennai represent the growth of transnational consumers, as these are individuals who indulge in global media on a daily basis. The easy access to media has familiarised the Generation Z of Chennai with digital media and raised their digital literacy (Preethy Rose, 5). The study has observed how this engagement has shaped their perception of Western war films from the unique socio-cultural context of India. As young female users are more likely to align themselves with global trends (Sharma, 10), the present research aims to understand how the Indian viewers connect to the trauma of the soldiers and whether they interpret it through a traditional heroic lens or through a more emotional context.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To study how Chennai's Gen Z are engaging with war films through Sam Mendes's 1917.
- To explore emotional engagement and gender differences in audience responses to 1917.
- To examine heroism engagement and gender perceptions for 1917.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Audience Engagement with War Films

The rise of social media and the different streaming platforms has affected how audiences engage with media content, and increased digitalisation has caused audience fragmentation. Audience engagement helps develop an emotional connection with viewers and satisfy their needs. Modern films tend to focus on viewer-oriented content, which drives engagement and social media engagement (Medina et al., 9). During wars, governments need to deliver a stable message to all the people to drive a hegemonic

narrative and glorify the efforts of the soldiers. Movies are therefore the perfect vessel which are able to reach out to a large audience and provide a strategic advantage to engage with the people (Bilgin, 8). Studies have shown that movies which have been acclaimed for historical realism strengthen the narrative of war movies. However, a gradual shift can be observed in the war films, while the older movies emphasised heroism and the act of sacrifice, newer war movies created in the post-World War period focus their attention on the civilians as well as the men and women who fight in these wars. The modern audience can relate better to the trauma, injuries, deaths, and reintegrating struggles of the soldiers, and this has thus been a striking feature of the war films (Good, 33).

War movies for over a century have been shaping public perception of heroism and trauma experienced by those serving on the front lines; fictional war movies create their own versions of the war. These movies draw from real-life historical figures and, experiences of veterans to draw in the audience, and the representation of trauma further helps people associate with the struggles that are faced by others. The war films are specially designed to show scenes of conflict that bring back imagery of war from other media (Good, 115). Through viscerally charged scenes, the audience witnesses the transformation of the characters, which ultimately helps in emotionally connecting with the story. A broader study on war films has shown that the representation of trauma and PTSD became central to war movie narratives, the dysfunction which soldiers experience after returning home, and the reintegration problems have helped in engaging the audience. Anti-war films also became highly popular in engaging the audience after the Vietnam War. Movies such as "Apocalypse Now", "Platoon", "Full Metal Jacket" and "The Deer Hunter" have laid a great emphasis on the experience of the soldiers (Good, 206). These forms of portrayal can also be found in the movies focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as they boost audience engagement.

National pride was used as a tool of audience engagement in the early days of cinema, as seen with the movie "Battle of the Somme". The movie engaged the British citizens in such a way that they were able to generate money through charities and get more volunteers to join the war. Despite not being a pivotal moment of WWI, the Battle of the Somme was elevated in popular consciousness. The story was successful in engaging the audience as the movie and the historical battle gained more popularity in the 1970s due to the shared memory of the war (McCartney, 3). Movies such as "Saving Private Ryan" also boosted the nationalistic attitude. The movie glorified soldiers such as Captain John Miller and promoted the idea of serving in the war as good citizens for national security (Good, 51). "All Quiet on the Western Front" was one of the first anti-war movies. This movie engaged with the audience by focusing on the experience of ordinary soldiers fighting in the battles instead of national leaders, like in the previous movies. The 1920s movie and its modern interpretations have continued to show the futility of war, the endless massacre and the death and suffering experienced by the people. The audience learn and relates to the trauma shared by the soldiers while the movie emphasises the meaninglessness and destructive powers of the war (Masdar, 17). These different movies and their unique focuses show how different

themes have been used over the years to engage the audience by the media.

2.2 Emotional Engagement and Gender in War Films

Emotional engagement is a critical tool that is used in war movies to influence the emotions of the audience, making them more empathetic towards the characters. Studies show that war films use a high degree of perceived realism through graphical violence, which boosts the emotional intensity of the films. These movies construct a stage sequence that is realistic to boost emotional engagement among the audience. The modern interpretations of WWI provide careful attention towards building the environment and landscape to introduce the familiar concept of trenches and no man's land for the audience to relate to (Yiassemides, 63). The film "1917" introduces the character of Schofield, who tries to mask his true emotions. Despite the movie getting considerable attention and awards for its depiction of intensity and immediacy on the battlefield, the movie shines through its standout scenes that show Schofield running through the French countryside as the Devons attack him (Wyatt, 6). Though the characters were shown not to be close at the beginning of the film, Blake's narration of his pre-war life fills the audience with a sense of nostalgia. Contrasts are also used within the films to show the difference in the landscape.

At the beginning of the film, Schofield is shown sitting under a tree in the countryside with his eyes closed. The final scene of the movie also shows him sitting under a tree, but this time his eyes are open due to exhaustion after completing the mission. The movie also emotionally connects with the audience through the cherry blossom symbolism, as the regrowth of the dead trees suggests the renewal of nature. The death of Blake is another aspect of the movie that deeply connects the audience with the characters. Schofield is shown not to be able to mourn the death of his friend as he needs to fulfil their shared mission. He jumps into the river and is shown to climb up rotting corpses in the river to reach his destination (Wyatt, 16). The audience feels his pain as he is shown to be falling on his knees and crying with his hands pressed against the earth. Although cherry blossoms have been used as a symbol of death and rebirth in other war films, "1917" has also skillfully integrated them into the movie, creating poignant scenes that the audience can relate to and understand. The cinematic depictions in "1917" thus provide powerful scenes in the movie for the viewer, which help them to emotionally engage.

Past studies have shown the impact of gender on movie preferences; women tend to prefer movies that are romantic or melodramatic. While the men connect better with action and horror movies, this causes action or war films to cater more towards their male audience (Wühr et al., 2). Findings from other studies also showcase how female soldiers are limited in war films, allowing the films to have a male-centred perspective (De Waal, 3). Males also show a keen interest in movies that are more violent or sexual, as interviews carried out on male movie goers reveal that they gain more pleasure in seeing action sequences than females. However, the study also states that the gender gaps in movies are often overestimated, as women like stereotypical female genres to a lesser degree. The gender difference in movie preference is much smaller than what is presumed. Studies have shown that men are typically

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more empathetic towards male characters in war films, connecting with them on an emotional level. The torture scenes in the movies allow them to contemplate the male bodies, while they appreciate the courageous and ruthless nature of the characters, they are also drawn to their caring, tender and sentimental family man trope (Straw, 76). Therefore, the past studies show a gendered dimension to the war films, and male viewers are more emotionally engaged with these movies than the female audience. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses have been developed,

H_{01}: *There is no significant difference in emotional engagement scores between male and female participants.*

H_{11}: *There is significant difference in emotional engagement scores between male and female participants.*

2.3 Heroism Engagement and Gender in War Films

War films are essentially known for their heroic portrayals of soldiers, and therefore, heroism has been a recurring theme in these movies. Heroic actions in war movies can be defined as the characters who have demonstrated valour on the battlefield, have gone above and beyond to fulfil their duties as soldiers to save the lives of their comrades. In "The Battle of the Bulge", the risk-taking behaviour of Kiley is seen to be heroic; he is seen taking shots at Hessler to prevent a tank battle, and he jumps into the fight without orders to protect his men and his country. In "A Bridge Too Far", the acts of heroism are seen by Col. Stout as he is seen constantly trying to protect his soldiers by leading first and assessing the situation to find safe passage. Taylor and Elias are presented as heroes in "Platoon"; the characters are initially introduced to the story with not much understanding of the plot, but as the story progresses, the characters are seen to indulge in risk-taking, loyalty and leadership (Davie, 33). They protect the weak, saving poor village girls from getting raped and opposing the evils of Barnes. War movies also showcase the soldiers having their own different culture, which is different from other members of society (Rehm, 35). These movies are known for depicting acts of valour through the actions, the heroes travel through dangerous and challenging terrain, accepting their nation to be greater than their own lives.

The traditional war movies were known for showing wars as glamorous and self-sacrifices as patriotic, but in modern films, characters such as Schofield in "1917" are shown to question the heroism in fighting wars. Schofield's rejection of heroism is revealed early in the film when he refers to medals gained from war as bits of bloody tin, when these same medals are used as symbols of valour, courage and bravery (McCormack, 5). His disdain for war and heroism is again revealed when he claims to have swapped his medals for a bottle of wine. The character of Blake is presented as a contrast to Schofield, as he believes in heroism and therefore, even in death, Schofield tries to honour him by telling Blake's brother how he died. Schofield hides the truth of his getting knifed to death; the chivalrous lie makes Schofield heroic. He knows the insignificance of the medals but is also aware of how heroism is attached to military, families and civilian expectations and thus protects Blake's legacy through a lie. Schofield's heroic acts can be considered accidental because the character has been used by Mendes to honour his grandfather,

who also completed missions that had put his life at risk (Logsdon, 14). The movie "1917" thus depicts heroism to be endurance and moral courage, which are showcased by Schofield; it does not glorify violence like previous war films.

Gender plays a role in audience interpretations of heroism depicted in war movies. A study conducted on women has revealed that they are naturally less aggressive than men and that their attraction to heroism is directly linked to their own struggles and hopes to triumph (McClearen, 14). Women are generally more attracted to war heroes due to their heroic traits; however, this same trait is not observed among the male audience. While evidence shows that female participants consider war heroes to be more sexually attractive, men are not seen to be attracted to women war heroes (Rusch et al. 1). Interpreting the war films from a gendered perspective thus offers new insight into the character traits which engage the audience. The past studies carried out on the subject have shown females to have more fascination for heroic traits in the war heroes than their male counterparts. Based on these conditions, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H_{02}: *There is no significant difference in heroism engagement scores between male and female participants.*

H_{12}: *There is significant difference in heroism engagement scores between male and female participants.*

2.4 Theoretical underpinnings

Audience Reception Theory

The audience reception theory actively emphasises how the audience interprets media instead of passively accepting it. The theory can be traced back to Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model of communication from the 1980s. Hall has stated that the media can be used to encode a certain message by the "sender", and it is decoded by the "receiver" or the audience. The same message can also be decoded to mean something else, because the message is encoded based on the sender's own ideals and views, while the receiver decodes based on their own ideals and views (Martin, 1). Hall, through his research, has proven that the media does not have simplistic behavioural effects on an individual; rather, it should be perceived as meaningful discourse which needs to be decoded (Schrøder, 122). Hall's research on audience reception through his coding and decoding model has embedded the meaning in audio, visual and textual symbolic languages.

Hall identifies three different positions that the audience takes while interpreting cultural texts, the first of which is the dominant-hegemonic position, in which both the sender and receiver are working under the same set of rules. Thus, there is little to no room for misunderstanding, and the receiver accepts the intended meaning. The second is the negotiated position, in which the audience does not view the message from a hegemonic viewpoint, but as they are familiar with the intended meaning, they reject part of the intended meaning to fit their own experience (Martin, 1). The final one is oppositional reading, in which the audience completely rejects the intended meaning, basing it on their own societal beliefs and finding other unintended meanings within the message. This theory is significant in the present research

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as it can help in understanding how the Generation Z of Chennai might engage and interpret the movie "1917" differently. The general themes of trauma, duty, emotional endurance and heroism might be interpreted differently by Generation Z based on their own social, cultural and personal contexts.

Gender Schema Theory

The gender schema theory can be seen as a social-cognitive theory, the purpose of which is to define how individuals develop mental frameworks about gender from an early age. The cognitive and categorical processing continues to shape how they act and interact with others throughout their life. A schema is essentially a cognitive structure which guides an individual's perception (Bem, 2). This helps children to develop ideas and theories on what it is like to be masculine or feminine. The theory was developed by Sandra Bem in 1981, which suggests that children who grow up with strict gender restrictions often divide their world and regulate their behaviour based on gender (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2). Ben also sheds light on the gender-aschematic people, as these people put less emphasis on gender and do not organise their behaviour based on it.

The gender schema theory proposes the idea that individuals process information based on their sex-linked associations, and this constitutes the gender schema. As the self-concept gets assimilated with gender schemas, they learn that certain attributes, while growing up, are linked to their own sex (Bem, 2). The theory has thus been developed to put a detailed focus on how society creates and enforces these gender categories (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2). Since the study has been focusing on emotional and heroic engagement of the audience from a gendered perspective for the "1917" movie, this theory will be significant as it will help in understanding how male and female audiences relate to war films. War films often reinforce stereotypical traditional gender roles of valour and sacrifice to be masculine, while vulnerability and empathy to be feminine. Using this theory to interpret the findings will thus reveal the internalised schema of the individuals.

2.5 Research Gap

Extensive past research has been carried out on war films and their contribution to shaping public perception of war. This literature has established the important role of war films in emotionally connecting with the audience, but nearly all of the studies have been focused on the Western audience. Nearly all of the articles that have been observed within this section have focused on the narrative realism, trauma depiction and the use of propaganda in the films. This leaves a gap in understanding how the non-Western audience perceives these movies. Some of the studies have shared a gender-based analysis of the portrayals of masculinity, but there has been a lack of detailed studies conducted on the gender of the audience and factors which influence their engagement. No studies were found addressing generation-specific patterns of engagement for war films; the aim of the present research is thus to focus attention on Generation Z of India. Conducting the study on Gen Z in Chennai will help in showing how culturally diverse individuals interact with Western war films.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The design of the study is quantitative for testing the hypothesis developed in the previous section and understanding the gendered differences that exists with audience engagement with war films. Data was collected through a survey where participants were showed specific segments of the movie either relating to heroism or emotions. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the necessary data based on the experience that the participants had with the specific segment of 1917 movie. A 5-point engagement scale was used to record the responses of the participants with 1 indicating lower engagement while 5 indicating higher engagement. The data collected using survey was analysed through statistical analysis using Excel spreadsheet. The mean of the responses was calculated along with independent t-test to compare the differences between male and female respondents.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this research were 18-25 years individuals based in Chennai who have watched 1917 movie. However, including or recruiting the entire population who have watched the movie is not possible to include in the research and thus a sample of the population was selected to accurately represent the entire population. The sampling technique used to select a sample from the entire population was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants for a research based on specific characteristics or features that are relevant to the study. This research required selecting Gen Z who have watched the 1917 movie. The purposive sampling ensured that the correct individuals are selected where the findings could be generalised to the entire population. Incorporating the particular sampling technique, a total of 100 individuals were recruited for the participants comprising of 50 males and females. After getting the required consent from them, the structured questionnaire was provided to them to fill their responses and then the gathered were manually incorporated within the excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The results from the analysis have been provided in the next section followed by the discussion of the results.

4. Analysis and Results

The findings of the present research have been analysed with the help of a t-test. In experimental research, it is often important to differentiate between the conditions and factors which influence different outcomes. T-tests are important as they allow the comparison of two groups and finding the difference in the means of the two groups (Allam, 1). The results from the t-test carried out on emotional engagement ($t = 7.919$, $df = 88$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$) showed statistically significant differences between the male and female participants. The mean emotional engagement score for male respondents has been recorded to be 4.329, whereas for female participants it is 3.642. These findings support the idea that the male students are more emotionally engaged with the film "1917" than their female counterparts. Therefore, the null hypothesis or H_{01} proposed at the beginning of the research has been rejected, and H_{11} has been accepted.

The findings thus prove that gender plays a role in shaping emotional engagement among Chennai's Generation Z audience.

Table 1. T-test Results (Emotional Engagement)

	Male	Female
	Emotion_Score	*Emotion_Score*
Mean	4.329	3.642
Variance	0.176	0.200
Observations	50.000	50.000
Pooled Variance	0.188	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.000	
df	98.000	
t Stat	7.919	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000	
t Critical one-tail	1.661	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000 <0.05	
t Critical two-tail	1.984	

The t-test results for heroism engagement (t = -5.315, df = 98, p = 0.00 < 0.05) also prove that there exists a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants. In this t-test, however, the female participants have scored a mean of 3.880, while the male participants have acquired 3.326; these findings demonstrate that the female participants engage more with the heroic dimensions of war movies than their male counterparts. Therefore, again, the null hypothesis or $H_{0\ 2}$ has been rejected and $H_{1\ 2}$ has been accepted. The findings from the t-tests have revealed the female audience to be drawn more towards war films for the heroic feats achieved by the actors, acts of courage and endurance are more widely accepted by the female demographic. The results from both the t-tests show the significance of gender and the influence it has on the Generation Z of Chennai.

Table 2. T-test Results (Heroism Engagement)

	Male	Female
	Heroism_Score	*Heroism_Score*
Mean	3.326	3.880
Variance	0.264	0.279
Observations	50.000	50.000
Pooled Variance	0.271	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.000	
df	98.000	
t Stat	-5.315	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000	
t Critical one-tail	1.661	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000 < 0.05	
t Critical two-tail	1.984	

5. Discussion

The purpose of the present research has been to explore how the Generation Z of Chennai actively engages with Western war movies from an emotional and heroic dimension. The use of Sam Mendes' "1917" as a case study has shed valuable light on the gender based engagement among the audience and has helped in meeting all of the objectives. War movies have moved on from being tools of propaganda to movies that are compelling and provide a voice to the ordinary soldiers who are often forgotten. The first objective of the research has thus been to understand how the Generation Z of Chennai are interpreting the movie "1917", which is consistent with Stuart Hall's audience reception theory. In his theory, Hall has argued that the audience is not passive consumers of media but rather active interpreters who decode the message encoded by the film. The audience uses their own thoughts and ideals to interpret the events within the movies, giving them meaning (Martin, 1).

The western audience engages with war films with a nationalistic attitude; however, one of the key elements of Mendes' movie is showcasing the futility of war. The protagonist, Schofield, rejects the heroism people associate with war as he considers the medals gained from it as bits of bloody tin (McCormack, 5). The movie has both an emotional aspect to it, as the audience experiences the trauma of losing a close friend when Blake dies, as well as heroism, with Schofield delivering the news and promoting the idea of Blake dying a hero. Accordingly, the Generation Z of Chennai also engages with the movie on an emotional level. The use of the one-shot technique and real-time actions has contributed to creating realism, establishing a bond with the audience (Ghosh, 5). The death of Blake has been used as a plot point within the movie to show the character growth of Schofield as he redefines heroism as not just mindless killing, but duty and honour. This aligns with past literature that has been studied in this section; the modern audience is able to understand the trauma and reintegration struggles faced by the

soldiers (Good, 33).

The second objective of the study aimed to explore the significance of gender in audience engagement with the movie "1917". The use of the independent sample t-tests has helped in comparing the emotional engagement scores of both the male and female Generation Z participants. The results have revealed a significant difference, with the t-stat being 7.919 and the P value being 0.000 <0.05; males have been reported to have a mean value of 4.329, while females have achieved a mean value of 3.642. Thus validating Hypothesis $H_{1\ 1}$ and rejecting the Null Hypothesis $H_{0\ 1}$, the study has proven gender to be a significant determining factor in how the modern audience interprets war movies. According to the gender schema theory of Sandra Bem, each individual possesses their own mental frameworks on gender, and this determines how they interact with the ideas of masculinity and femininity. The theory emphasises the struggle which men face in acknowledging trauma as being expressive of one's feelings goes against the ideals of masculinity (Starr & Zurbriggen, 9).

This makes Schofield's struggles in processing his traumas even more relatable; the young male audience has been able to understand the grief and sadness he experiences, connecting with them on an interpersonal level. The controlled emotions of Schofield and his staunch qualities of duty and perseverance align with the male schemas. Bem's gender schema theory has also argued that the interpretations also depend on the cultural context of the individuals. The Indian audience understands historical narratives presented in war movies, the ones showcasing cultural values and resilience (Bharti and Sehrawat, 34). This also aligns with past studies that have shown that male audiences connect better with war movies and war films to cater more towards the male audience (Wühr et al., 2; De Waal, 3). Therefore, the findings fulfil the objective and show emotional engagement as cultural and gendered constructions.

The third and final objective of the research has examined the heroism engagement of the audience with the "1917" movie. The second t-test, which has been used in this context, has also revealed a statistically significant difference between the variables; the t-stat is -5.315 while the p value is 0.000 <0.05. The female participants in this context have shown a higher heroism engagement with a mean value of 3.880, while their male counterparts have achieved a value of 3.326. The findings of the research, therefore, confirm Hypothesis $H_{1\ 2}$ and reject the Null hypothesis $H_{0\ 2}$, proving that women connect strongly with war movies that show heroism traits. The outcomes of this study can also be interpreted by the application of Bem's gender schema theory. Although Schofield was against the glorification of war and against heroism in the early parts of the movie, the death of Blake and his personal desire to fulfil Blake's dying wish make him courageous and heroic.

Schofield running across no man's land through dangerous terrain, not caring about his own life, is seen as a sign of courage. Even in the end, when Schofield finally reaches the camp, he makes sure to inform Blake's brother of how he died a hero, which presents his own heroic qualities of hiding the truth to protect his friend's legacy. As Bem believes, females are naturally more tender, and they are guided by

this schema while engaging with situations (Bem, 3). Expressing one's emotions and traumas is inherently seen as a feminine trait, and therefore, females do not have a hard time acknowledging trauma (Starr & Zurbriggen, 9). The past studies also share that females tend to be more comfortable in connecting with heroism as it is directly linked to their own struggles and hope to triumph in certain aspects of life (McClearen, 14). They are also drawn more towards war heroes, a character trait which is not often observed among the male audience (Rusch et al., 1). Using the audience reception theory, the findings from this research also showcase how the decoding practices can be gendered. While the heroic acts of Schofield can be interpreted as endurance and perseverance by the male audience, the females connect more to the heroism trait.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

As concluding remarks for the present research, the study has successfully explored the audience engagement of Chennai's Generation Z with the movie "1917". The use of the Audience Reception Theory and Gender Schema Theory has significantly helped in guiding the study. The findings from independent sample t-tests have been combined with theoretical interpretations to show that user engagement with media is not merely shaped through gender but also sociocultural environments. One of the most significant findings of the study has been the impact of gender on emotional engagement. The male respondents have shown higher emotional engagement compared to the females, supporting the alternative hypothesis in the process. The results show how men are able to associate more with repressed emotions and acts of endurance presented by the protagonist within the movie. This also reflects how gender schemas associated with masculinity are followed by the male audience, as they are able to relate to the struggles of Schofield.

On the other hand, the findings also show how the female participants have a higher heroism engagement compared to the males. The study findings present that females are more drawn to the presentation of moral courage and heroic acts. Their engagement with these character traits of Schofield is shaped by gender schemas of tenderness and compassion. Using the audience reception theory, it can be confirmed that the Generation Z of Chennai does not passively consume the message presented through the film. Their gendered response to the movie shows that they have taken a negotiated position, where they interpret the events from the movie as endurance and heroism. The use of the Gender Schema Theory has shown how internalised gender frameworks help in guiding both the emotional and heroic engagement. Therefore, the use of both theories has helped in understanding the audience from a cultural and generational perspective.

6.2 Implications of the Study

The findings of the study have several implications. Analysing how the Generation Z of Chennai engages with "1917" expands on the understanding of gender, culture and their intersection. The findings have

revealed that male and female audiences respond differently to the same movie. This suggests the need for gender sensitive storytelling and incorporating more inclusive narratives in war films that can allow both genders to relate. Generation Z also connects with the movie through the depictions of trauma, resilience and duty instead of historical familiarity, which suggests the audience connects to feelings and emotions that are universal human experiences. The study also shows that non-Western audience interprets war movies differently from Westerners, which can encourage Hollywood movies to be more understanding of the global reception to the movies. Focusing on the perspective of Generation Z from Chennai also offers a generational lens to the research; the high digital literacy and willingness to discuss and share content on social media can help in developing future models that drive audience engagement.

6.3 Limitations of the Work

Despite the research being successful in fulfilling its objectives and shedding new insight on gendered audience engagement, significant limitations have been found while conducting the research. The study has exclusively focused on Generation Z from Chennai, and only 100 participants were selected, limiting the scope of the research. Despite Chennai having a rich urban setting, it is not reflective of all Generation Z from the region and therefore, the engagement can differ based on film literacy and cultural identity. A larger and more geographically varied sample, including participants from different parts of the country, would offer a more unbiased perspective to the research.

6.4 Future Directions

Future research conducted on the subject can include participants from different cities and regions of India, and the diverse cultures of the different states can influence their perception of the war movie. Simultaneously, the study has only made use of quantitative forms of data analysis within the research; this has prevented Generation Z from sharing their personal interpretations and moral reasoning, therefore, using a qualitative form of data analysis with open ended question will help in exploring the nuances and connecting with the participants on a deeper level.

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