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THE LIMITS OF SOFT-POWER PUBLIC DIPLOMACY
Consumption and representation of Bollywood movies among Croatian students of media, communications and political science

Abstract. *In international relations the role of public diplomacy, inter alia, is to brand the country and the nation through its culture and art. In Indian foreign policy, as a tool of 'soft power' diplomacy, Bollywood has always been one of the most influential tools of promotion of national culture, heritage and tradition. In this paper authors present the results of the survey on consumption and reception of Bollywood movies among students of media and communications studies and of political science of the University of Zagreb. The conclusion is that Croatian students of media, communication and political science "read" Bollywood films through lenses of stereotypes.*
Key words: *"soft power" diplomacy, Bollywood, film reception, film consumption, film narratives, survey, Croatian students of media, communication and political science*

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Introduction: Film Narratives – The Political Role of Film in Communicating Social and Cultural Values

Film has always been one of the most influential political tools for promotion of national culture, heritage and tradition. In a film's narratives and in its text and subtext the audience can read and learn about social values and political ideas. As an entertainment media, film is an important agent of political socialization (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014: 250) and also a purveyor of ideology, it is the place "where behaviors are normalized and boundaries are created" (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014: 156–157), thus reading of a film narrative always depends on who reads it (Hall, 1980; Gillespie and Toynbee, 2006). Jostein Gripsrud defines a narrative as a culturally fundamental form and states that a narrative is "a representation of a human (or human-like) subject with a project (will, wish, desire) who lives through a series of causally linked events" (2002: 192). Film narratives are parts of

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a particular textual regime, and the structure of this regime, the order of its context, defines both the narratives and the audiences' reception. The meaning of a text is conditioned by the context. The context is the situation (physical, psychological, social, and political) in which a text is constructed or to which it refers. According to Nick Lacey: "(...) narrative is not only something that we experience when listening, reading or watching stories, it is also (...) a way of seeing that is fundamental to the understanding of human existence." (2000: 77)

However, ideologies often do not appear in film narratives because authors and producers "consciously want to impose their value systems on audiences", rather, they are "the result of the intersection of a variety of structural forces" (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014: 157). Producers (and sponsors) have ideas of who the target audience is and they try to predict how the target audience will read a film text, and its subtext. Therefore, when a state owns the film industry, film becomes possibly a powerful tool to promote particular ideology, ideas, and values.

In this paper we focus on Bollywood. Bollywood is the name for India's Hindi film industry. Indian cinema is the world's largest film producer (see more in Schaefer and Karan, 2015; Maheshwari, 2013) while in 2015 it was in fourth place, after China, the UK and Japan, according to data from Box Office Markets (TMA, 2015: 5). Although in the past two decades academic interest focusing on textual analysis of Bollywood film has exploded, as David J. Schaefer and Kavita Karan emphasised (2015: 129) the study of Bollywood audiences has been highly neglected in the world. That is why in this research we decided to focus on reading the messages contained in Bollywood films. But first, we have to explain how Bollywood, a government-supported film industry, fits as a tool into Indian soft power public diplomacy.

Indian "Soft Power" Public Diplomacy

According to Weber (2014: 6–11) International Relations (IR) theory is "a collection of stories about the world of international politics" which "relies upon IR myths in order to appear to be true". IR myths are "the stories IR theory tells about the world of international politics... so familiar to us that we take it for granted". Weber calls them myths because they have a "mythologizing function". They make "a fact out of interpretation", and may or may not be true. "IR theory relies upon IR myths to transform its culturally produced stories about the world, into common sense about the world that we take for granted". Weber believes that IR theory should be considered in relation to "other worlds", "other cultures, other times, other locations" because it is significantly easier to recognize other people's myths than their

(our) own. "Other worlds" are easiest to find in popular films. They "provide us with ready-made, somewhat delimited other worlds […] they are one of the narrative spaces of visual culture […] a way in which stories get told in visual culture." Researching visual culture through popular films provides us with a link between IR theory and our everyday life, and makes it easier to "get a sense" of everyday connections between "the popular" and "the political" (Weber, 2014: 6–11).

Current IR theory is using analytical potential of the culture and identity to understand world politics. Along the lines of cultural and postcolonial studies, it highlights the importance of popular culture (poetry, film, sculpture, music, television, leisure activities and fashion) to identify the political discourse. At the beginning of the 21st century a new IR sub-discipline emerged: Popular Culture and World Politics which claims that Popular Culture and World Politics are a continuum (Caso and Hamilton, 2015). "Popular culture cannot be divorced from world politics nor world politics from popular culture." (Greyson, Davies and Philpott, 2009: 155–156) This thesis leads to a new research agenda. PC helps us to separate 'us' from 'them' and it has "political power, precisely it is so closely intertwined with consumerism" (Duncombe and Bleiker, 2015: 36–37). We find certain 'them' and their culture attractive, unlike some others.

According to Joseph Nye (1990, 2008), "soft power" is an ability to shape the preference of others, to move people by argument, to entice and attract. Soft power resources are the assets that produce attraction. In international politics they are the values a country expresses through its culture, through its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. The sources of the soft power of particular country are its culture (high culture for the elite and popular culture for mass entertainment), political values and foreign policies. The importance of soft power of India was intuitively emphasised by Gandhi and Nehru, leaders who in the absence of hard power (strong military and economy power), turned to the global anti-colonial movement and then to the Non-Aligned Movement. Later, India started to play the role of the regional hegemon, but unsuccessful one.[1] Additionally, the end of the Cold War forced India to change its approach to the region and the world.

According to Ritambhara (2013) the fading power of the West at the beginning of the 21st century allowed the strengthening of the powers of the East. India's economic growth and de-facto recognition of the status of nuclear power influenced the attitudes of the international public about India as "an emerging power with expanding global clout." (Ritambhara,

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[1] *India became involved in a regional conflict between Pakistan and Bangladesh during the 1970's, and conducted an unsuccessful humanitarian military intervention in Sri Lanka during the 1980's.*

2013: 1) Therefore, it was crucial for India to focus on its public diplomacy,[2] an instrument that governments use to mobilise its culture, political values and foreign policies to communicate with and attract the public and government of foreign countries (Nye, 2008: 95). If public diplomacy can change minds, it is successful.

For a while India has been trying to use public diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy goals. Its audience comprises younger generations both home and abroad (especially in the West) and in developing countries (particularly resource-rich neighbours or countries of the global South). Kishan Thussu (2013: 10) noted that in history India's soft power was focused on the rest of the world, not upon the West.

One of the greatest advocates of India's soft power was the former Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor. He emphasized how important it was for the state to be able to "sell a better story," not to have a strong army and economy, and that India's popular culture is well-equipped to tell that story. According to Tharoor, India's soft power elements are: film and Bollywood, yoga, ayurveda, political pluralism, religious diversity, and openness to global influence (cf. Barrel, 2012: 29).[3]

According to Joseph S. Nye (2008: 107) (1) When sources of soft power are foreign policies, referees for credibility or legitimacy are governments, media, NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) and IGOs (intergovernmental organizations), while receivers of soft power are foreign governments and publics; (2) When sources of soft power are domestic values and policies, referees for credibility or legitimacy are media, NGOs and IGOs, while receivers of soft power are foreign governments and publics; (3) When source of soft power is high culture, referees for credibility or legitimacy are governments, NGOs and IGOs, while receivers of soft power are foreign governments and publics; and finally (4) when source of soft power is pop culture, referees for credibility or legitimacy are media and markets, while the only receivers of soft power are the foreign publics. It means that from all the sources of soft power, pop culture is the only one where foreign governments are excluded as receivers of soft power (Nye, 2008: 107).

Blarel believes that India today offers one of the most dynamic alternatives to the cultural heritage of the West, and that the Bollywood film industry is probably "the largest and farthest-reaching medium for Indian culture."

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[2] *According to Jan Melisse, one of the best definitions of public diplomacy was proposed by Paul Sharp "the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented" (Melisse, 2005: 106).*

[3] *Mukherjee's (2014: 48) list of India's soft power resources is longer: sports, music, art, film, literature, beauty pageantry, anti-colonial history, democratic institutions, free press, independent judiciary, vibrant civil society, multi-ethnic polity, secularism, pluralism, skilled English-speaking workers, food, handcrafts, yoga, status of responsible nuclear power, Bangalore (IT sector), large diaspora.*

He concludes that it is the fact that today more than ever before in history the world is better acquainted with the ways people live in India. But he cannot find evidence that, despite the creation of Public Diplomacy Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs[4] in 2006, these elements of India's soft power, helped the country to achieve foreign policy goals (Blarel, 2012: 30).

The partnership of Bollywood and the Government of India[5] started in 1998 when Bollywood was declared the Indian film industry and when that cultural industry began to be considered an important means of propaganda to promote foreign policy goals. Just a few years later, Raja Mohan (2003) concluded "Bollywood has done more for Indian influence abroad then the bureaucratic efforts of the Government." The former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the first Indian leader who understood the importance of cultural industries and their impact on domestic and foreign policy. In 2008 Singh declared Bollywood one of the diplomatic tools of the 21st century. Bollywood soft-power potential was used with the aim of uniting Indians and exporting Indian values to the world.

The Indian government's "Bollywood-friendly policies" have many advantages, but they also reduce the freedom to choose films that will be filmed in Bollywood, because the goal of the industry is not only to please financiers and audiences, but the government as well (Rasul, 2015). Mukherjee thinks that scientists and publicists often have an overly optimistic view of India as a potentially large and important civilization power. Today the concept of soft power and the rise of India is an artefact, but in the case of India it did not meet expectations.[6] The reasons for India's under-performance are: 1. Its soft power resources are not as rich as proponents of the idea thought; 2. Its hard power is not so preeminent (powerful) to back up its soft power to create political environment conductive to India's international goals; 3. India's confusion over its own identity, because its multiple social and political identities continue to conflict with each other inside and outside of India (Mukherjee, 2014: 52–55). Mukherjee concludes: "Although India's cultural resources are great, its internal dynamics and foreign policy are not attractive enough for states to want what India wants." (2014: 56) Today, still a

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[4] *At the beginning of the 21st century activities of Indian Ministry of External Affairs's activities were oriented towards: the Indian Diaspora; foreign entrepreneurs; delivering foreign aid and development program; the creation of "nation-brand" and the use of new media (Hall, 2012: 1102).*

[5] *Even before "official partnership" between the state and Bollywood, according to Priya Joshi (2015) Bollywood had participated during three periods (1950's; 1966–1984; 1990's) in making, unmaking and remaking of "the soul" of modern India. It was the point of contact between the state and the nation. Bollywood has influenced the creation of public culture and political culture. It depicted the social problems as well as public fantasies in which the popular and mass, politics and pleasure intertwined.*

[6] *KMS Kodithuwakku (2015) argues that India has successfully applied its foreign policy soft power tools within South Asian region for the purpose to enhance regional integrity and stability. But it has not been so successful regarding the rest of the world.*

significant percentage of Western and Asian public opinion does not have a positive attitude towards India. A piece of evidence to support this judgement is provided by the Portland's soft power 30 (index) that showed India was in the 27th place in 2011 (McClory, 2011). We compared it with 2015 and found out that India was not on the list of top 30.[7] It could be interpreted that India soft power is decreasing, but the report singles out India with special profile and gives a credit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for promoting soft power of Bollywood, Sanskrit, yoga and democracy. Jonathan McClory (2015: 35) suggests: "Modi's India is a definitely a soft power player to watch in the years ahead." And it can use it for "nation branding" as well.

Methodological Framework

In this research we were interested in analysing the reception of Bollywood film in Croatia – to find out if students of media, communications and political science recognize and react on implemented soft-power diplomacy messages in the movies from the sample. The main purpose of the research is to account for the following questions: How Croatian students of media, communications and political science interpret what could be considered politicized content of contemporary Bollywood film? How do they interpret Bollywood representations of the Indian social world? How do they read Bollywood narratives?

The first part of this research is descriptive. We give an overview of the representation of Bollywood in Croatia through cinema distribution, film festivals, public service television and national commercial televisions programming of Bollywood films and TV serials, as well through individual screenings and cultural events organised by different civil society organisations and associations which promote Indian art and culture in Croatia and are supported by the Indian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Embassy in Croatia.

The second part of this research is a survey. Following the theoretical approach on (1) physical and (2) cultural and social film reception (Turner, 2002) we developed a questionnaire for audience research. We were interested in students' reception of Bollywood narratives (Gillespie and Toynbee, 2006) on Indian cultural, religious and family traditional values, social taboos, but also in how Croatian students of media, communication and political science recognise Bollywood contemporary production considering film as a medium (music, film *mise-en-scène*, production standards, etc.).

The type of sample that was used in this survey is a non-probabilistic

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sample: convenience sample. The research was conducted on a sample of 228 students (N = 228) of BA and MA studies of media, communications and political science, at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zagreb. Students were invited to Bollywood film screenings organized at the Faculty. Screenings were organized on December 7th, 2015 (film *I am*), on December 17th, 2015 (film *Peepli Live*), on December 22nd, 2015 (film *Dirty Picture*), on January 15th, 2016 (film *Pinjar*) and on January 19th, 2016 (film *Swades: We, the People*). After each screening they were asked to fill the survey. After filling the survey, each screening followed with a discussion with contextualisation of the main topic presented in the film.

With the help of the Indian Embassy in Croatia and the Indian Cultural Centre Zagreb (Indija.hr)[8], five films were selected for screenings. Colleagues from these two institutions have a very good insight into contemporary Bollywood production. As they have contacts with the Indian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, they have good insight on Bollywood production which is in line with the soft power Indian diplomacy. Therefore, they were asked to select five Bollywood movies produced between years 2000 and 2015 with different topics – from Indian history, political relations with neighbouring countries, to family relations, Indian tradition, and position of women in Indian society.

Selected films are:

(N = 29) *Pinjar* (2003, Chandra Prakash), based on the novel by Amrita Pritam, is an Indian drama which speaks up about Hindu-Muslim problems including degradation of women during the partition of India. The narrative follows the life of Puro, a young woman kidnapped and forced to marry a stranger who tried to revenge his family, as her own father, due to a fear of shame and losing family honour, renounces his daughter. Staying with her husband and facing different problems, she helps other women to get back to their families.

(N = 73) *Swades: We, the People* (2004, Ashutosh Gowariker). NASA scientist Mohan Bhargava is coming back to India, his homeland, to take his childhood nanny to the United States to take care of her. This film presents different problems Indian citizens are facing in the rural parts of this country. The narrative of the movie follows the efforts of Mohan to help villagers to improve the quality of their life. By the time he is falling in love with Gita, a local teacher, he rediscovers the importance of India in his life and his obligation to help the country.

(N = 38) *I am* (2010, Onir) presents four traumatic stories and the

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common theme of fear. For the screening we selected only the second part of the movie, Megha, which talks about a personal experience of a Pandit woman whose family had to leave Kashmir when religious riots occurred in the 1980s. She meets her childhood friend and her family, but is unable to forgive as she holds their community responsible for her displacement.

(N = 35) *Peepli Live* (2010, Anusha Rizvi), a satiric comedy, follows a life of a poor farmer Natha as he made a decision to commit a suicide in order to obtain money for his family and not lose their farm. As a journalist over-heard Natha's conversation with his brother, their home was soon packed with television cameras covering this extraordinary story which finds its way to careless government which decides to help Natha just with a view to keeping their power.

(N = 53) *Dirty Picture* (2011, Milan Luthria) is a drama on women's efforts of trying to succeed in Indian movie industry. Silk is a young woman who, using her body and sensuality through dance, finds her way to fame and money in male dominated industry. As her carrier started to fade, after a disappointment in love, she is rejected by her mother and insulted by journalists, and she turns to alcohol and decides to take her own life.

Reception of Bollywood Movies among Croatian Students of Media, Communications and Political Science

Bollywood films are very rare in Croatia. They are not present in mainstream cinema distribution, only in film festivals, and special cinema screenings like *Dani indijske kulture* (Days of Indian Culture, 2009–2013) organised by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) Zagreb, or *Indija u kinu* (India in a Cinema) selected Indian films at the cinema "Europa" in the Croatian capital – Zagreb (2015–2016). At another cinema in Zagreb, Cinema "Tuškanac", ICC organised Indian Night on New Year's Eve, with Bollywood film screenings. Only during such special events Croatian citizens, almost exclusively in big cities such as Zagreb, Rijeka and Split, have an opportunity to watch Bollywood films. Such cultural events are often supported by the Indian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Embassy in Croatia.

On television, Bollywood film is also sporadic, but Indian soap operas have become very popular. On the commercial television channel with national distribution – NovaTV, 1,200 episodes of *Balika Vadhu* (Child bride, in Croatian *Mala nevjesta*) were broadcast. From the beginning of 2016 Udaan (Fly, in Croatian *Slomljena krila*) (directed by Mahesh Bhatta) has been broadcast on DomaTV.

This research confirmed that watching Bollywood films is a very rare experience for students as well. 43 percent of students had never seen any Bollywood movie (before the screening which was organised at the Faculty

of Political Science), 41 percent of students had seen one or two Bollywood films, 12 percent had seen less than 5 Bollywood films, while only 4 percent had seen between five and 10 Bollywood films. In comparison, numbers for Hollywood films amount to hundreds.

At this point it is worth mentioning that only 4, out of 228 students had been to India, while 150 of them (66 percent) would like to visit India sometime in the future.

Graph 1: HOW MANY BOOLYWOOD FILMS HAVE YOU SEEN SO FAR? (N = 228)
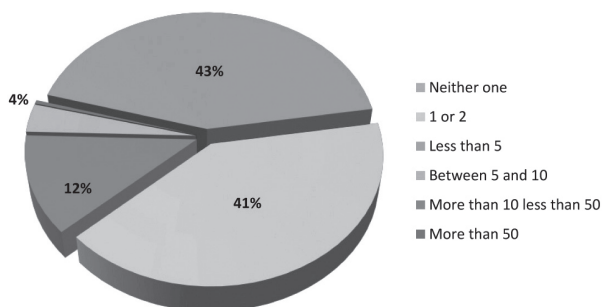
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

As the first and the second reflection/idea on Bollywood film, students offered music and dance, the third most common answer was "I do not have any reflections," and it is followed by long lasting, colourfulness, colourful clothes, dramatics, law quality, cheap production, and love story.

Graph 2: THE FIRST REFLECTION/IDEA ON BOLLYWOOD FILM (N = 228,
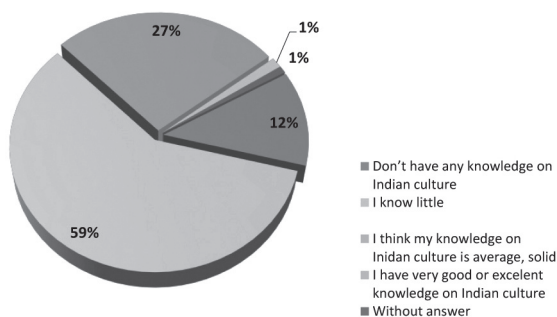*multiple answers)*
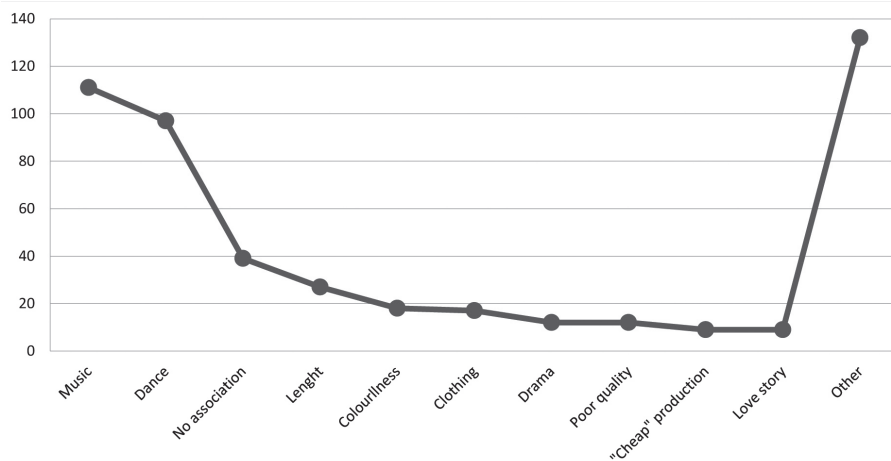
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

India is: Hinduism, Caste System, Bollywood, Colourful Clothes and the Holy Cow

We asked students to rate their knowledge of Indian culture and 59 percent of them answered "I know little about India", 27 percent answered "I think my knowledge of Indian culture is decent", 12 percent answered that they do not have any knowledge on Indian culture, while only 1 percent of students answered that they have a very good or excellent knowledge of Indian culture. That Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, correctly answered 89 percent of students.

Graph 3: HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF INDIAN CULTURE? (N = 228)
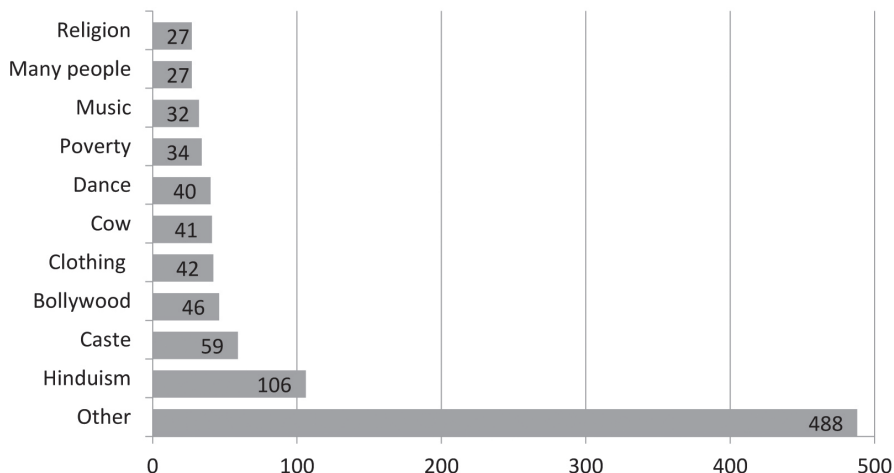
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

Graph 4: WHICH IS THE DOMINANT RELIGION IN INDIA? (N = 228)
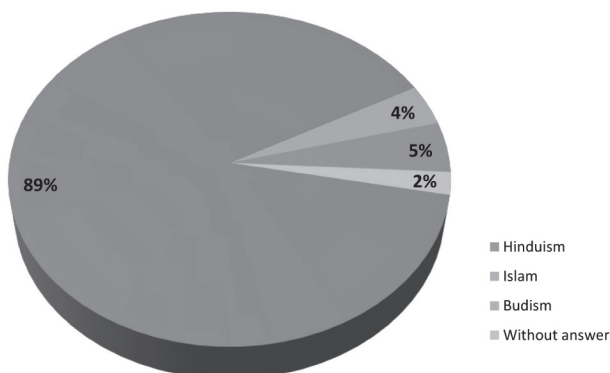
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

The top five most common terms students associate with Indian culture are Hinduism, the caste system, Bollywood, colourful clothes and the holy cow. The other associations are dance, poverty, music, extremely large population, etc.

*Graph 5: FIVE KEY TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE INDIAN CULTURE. (N = 228, multiple answers)*

Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

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Students were asked to list up to five Indian cultural values. The top five are: music, religion, dance, clothes and tradition. They also had to list up to five traditional social values, and the most often listed are: religion, family, discrimination of women, the caste system and arranged marriage.

As Guduzev, Konukhova and Podyapolskiy (2015) argue "Bollywood films integrate distinctive cultural elements with a popular way of their presentation", but they note that the foreign audience doesn't understand the conceptual meaning of dance and music. Croatian students of media, communication and political science also did not understand it, so they usually laughed during the songs, commenting on them as funny and childish.

Graph 6: INDIAN CULTURAL VALUES (N = 228, multiple answers)

Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

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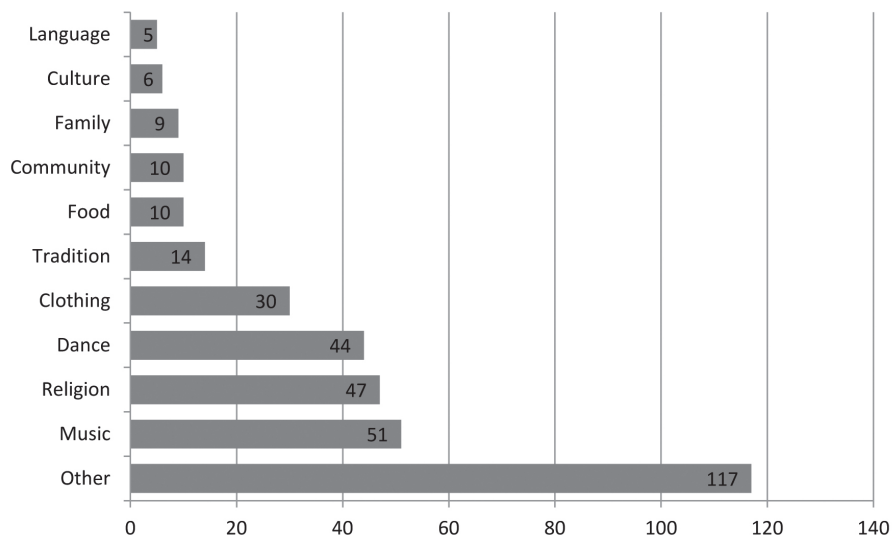
Graph 7: TRADITIONAL SOCIAL VALUES (N = 228, multiple answers)
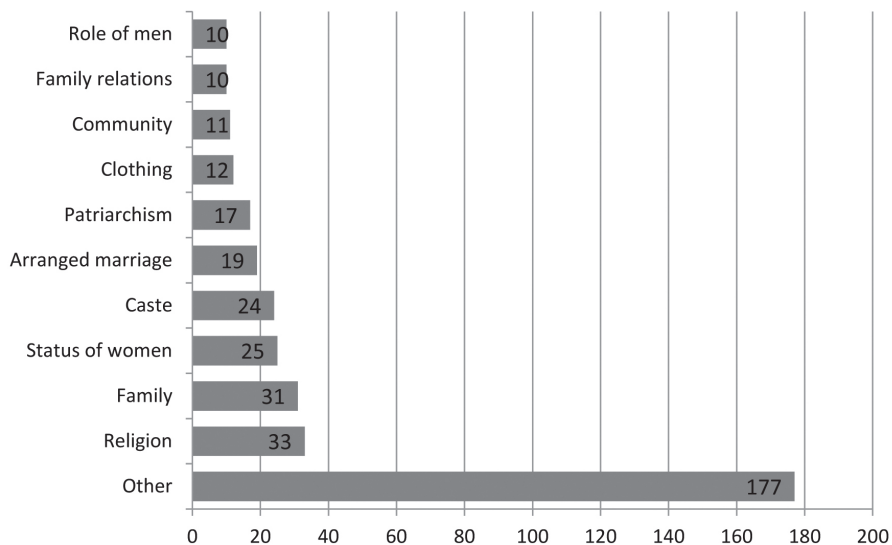
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

Comparing these values with cultural and traditional values of Western cultures, students emphasised that values such as the role of religion, family relations, honour as the most important value, the status of marriage, virginity, the role of community, the importance of tradition and culture have by far greater significance in Indian culture than in Western cultures, while in Western culture countries the caste system and arranged marriages do not exist.

[In Western countries] *there is also a kind of a "ritual" when a person is coming to other person's home (nocking at the door, cleaning shoes at the doormat, bringing presents). We do not wear traditional clothes.* (Swades, 2)

*Western cultures do not respect older people that much and generally the relationship between generations is not that strong. (*Swades, 3)

[Indian society] *is not consumeristic, but spiritual and it respects tradition and culture.* (Swades, 32)

Eastern cultures respect more community, and togetherness, while Western cultures respect individualism more. (Swades, 38)

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In western cultures patriarchism is present as well, but it does not promote gender exclusiveness. In contrast to India, women have more freedom and rights in western cultures. (Dirty picture, 34)

From the students' point of view, what lacks in Indian culture are freedom of speech, democracy, multiculturalism, secularism, gender equality, respect of human rights, openness in communication, education for everyone, technological development, individualism:

Western society is much more open and treats everyone equally, and it takes care of children's school education. (Swades, 44)

Western cultures are much more liberal in terms of sexy scenes. (Dirty picture, 36)

In Indian culture women are treated differently from the way they are treated in Western European culture. [In Indian culture] *a woman is categorised and limited.* [...] *For example, men enjoy watching that type of movies, but together with other men they think that these actresses are disgustful.* (Dirty picture, 31)

Western culture is lacking modesty:

[In western cultures] *the more we have the more we need; a man is never satisfied and strives for material wealth. Endeavour in conserving the tradition is vanishing; everything becomes universal and equal....* (Peepli (Live), 14)

Students find family, home, religion, tradition, culture and art, community, modesty, as positive values:

... tradition and religion are the base of existence of the nation, and so is the civilization. (I am, 16)

Religion is a positive value for preserving cultural and national distinctions. (I am, 19)

Patriarchy – because a man has to be the head of the family. (I am, 33)

Respect for older family members. (Swades, 3)

Hinduism – a peaceful religion which promotes no violence. (Swades, 7)

Cherishing and knowing one's own culture and identity; I believe that "we" have been "eaten" by the globalisation. (Swades, 20)

Respect for the family, because parents deserve it. (Pinjar, 15); *Respect for parents.* (Pinjar, 18)

Hard work (Peepli (Live), 35)

Negative values for Croatian students who filled the survey are: the caste system, discrimination of women, men dominance, patriarchy, arranged marriages, child marriages, backwardness (towards education, economy), labour exploitation.

Religion – because it is the cause of wars. (I am, 10)

... eating with hands – it is not hygienic. (I am, 33)

Excessive religion (Swades, 6)

Religion often promotes intolerance and interreligious hate. (Swades, 43)

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The most negative is patriarchal society which results with gender discrimination. (Swades, 65)

Traditionalism turns out not to be open to new things. (Swades, 65)

…women are treated as objects (Dirty picture, 12)

…women are extremely subordinated and exploited… (Dirty picture, 15)

Authoritative family (Pinjar, 4)

The question of honour – they would rather banish a daughter than help her. (Pinjar, 13)

Taboos in Indian Society

The films included in our selection framed students' answers. However, the original framing was done in Bollywood – the only potential difference arising from the fact that the audience can react differently from what was planned. Students recognised as taboo themes the following: the conflict with Pakistan in the region of Kashmir, the conflict between Muslims and Hindus, religious conflicts in general, the position of women in Indian society, violent reforms, religious conversions, terrorism, reformists, caste, limited access to education, illiteracy, corruption, dense population, gap between the rich and the poor, poverty, the right to drinking water, lack of food, arranged marriages, children marriages, sexuality, sex and nudity, promiscuity, pornography:

Taboos are things which are shameful for a person, especially for a family. (I am, 13)

Malnutrition, and problems in society that people are resigned to, so they ignore these problems. (Swades, 12)

There is no open dialogue on men's and women's sexuality, it is thought to be something abnormal, "sick", something that needs to be cured. (Dirty picture, 45)

To be in love is taboo. As marriages are arranged, a woman does not have a chance to express her feelings towards another man, otherwise she would betray her family. (Pinjar, 19)

Poverty is taboo. The wide framework of this problem is not recognized. (Peepli (Live), 25)

Students recognised the problem of Indian society that does not open discussion about these taboos, it is very oppressive towards these issues. Therefore, students think that citizens are forced to accept these issues as "normality". Discussion and commenting are only set within a private conversation. Ignorance is the common reaction.

[Indian society] *put up quietly* [with taboos]. *There is passive resistance.* (I am, 33)

...to sweep them under the carpet (Swades, 34, 68; Pinjar, 11)

Slowly they accept taboo issues, but they have a long way to go. Conservatism is changing slowly. (Swades, 65)

Croteau and Hoynes argue that "the creators of media content have often reproduced the inequalities that exist in society based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This is not to say that media have acted as a mirror, passively reflecting the inequalities of society." (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014: 187) There is a certain gap between the "reality" and media representations of the social world (Fiske and Hartley, 1978; Bennett, 1982; Hall, 1980). But it is especially interesting to study how the audiences read media representations, and if they read them in a way producers planned them to be read.

Family and Women in Indian Society

Croatian students of media, communication and political science view a typical Indian family as conservative and patriarchal, where the man is the head of the family, while the woman is always subordinated. There are lots of children. There are traditional gender roles: a mother is taking care of children, doing housework, cooking and cleaning. Traditionally, a family is strongly related to the community. Within the family, members try to help each other, they are closely related. From students' point of view, a typical Indian family is poor, rural, uneducated and very religious.

A typical Indian family is

...hungry (I am, 3)

The father and mother are at the top, children have to listen to them, learn from them, and never oppose to them. (I am, 32)

Croatian students who took a part in this survey have divided opinions on women in Indian society. On one side, students see Indian women as *sad* (I am, 3) and as inferior to men. Women are not treated equally to men; their position within Indian culture is very bad – they are oppressed, they do not have democratic rights. It is socially expected that a woman has to be dedicated to her family.

But, some students have a different opinion:

It is better than I thought before watching this movie. Gita is not isolated nor socially rejected just because she decides not to get married at a very young age, she wants to work, etc. But, I am not sure if this is the case in Indian reality as well. (Swades, 2)

Women are important, especially mothers – they are respected. (Swades, 13)

Family and heterosexual relationships are central to the plots of not only Indian films. Fundamental inequality of appearance of women and men is present in all major world film productions (van Zoonen, 1994; Signorielli, 2009; Wood, 2004). The film images of women reflect and reproduce stereotypical gender roles. Women characters in film are often focused on family and romance, they are often young and beautiful. Over the years, the dominant roles for women in film have been as mother, wife or mistress, and sexual object (Tešija, Car and Šipić, 2014).

Conclusion

Every society deals with stereotypes about others, other cultures, nations, etc. Film narratives often help confirm these stereotypes, not only stereotypes about others, but also about us – about our culture, our society. Croatian students of media, communication and political science were asked to list typical characteristic features of Bollywood film, and the majority of them listed music, singing and dancing, colourful clothes, mass scenes (with lots of people). They recognised religion as omnipresent in film narratives. Through students' lenses a Bollywood plot is often related to conflicts within a family, unrealised love stories, conflicts between castes or because of religion. Students consider the pace in Bollywood films to be very slow; there is no "real action", no tension. They see Bollywood film as dramatic, extremely long-lasting with many long shots. Furthermore, students see Bollywood film as not realistic, far-fetched, low-quality acting and pathetic.

Croatian students who took a part in the survey find similarities with Hollywood or European mainstream film narratives in the use of the

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English language. Moreover, they recognized that the main female actor must be beautiful, while the main male character has to be successful and is often represented as a hero. Students argue that the plot is often a love story (sometimes tragic, sometimes with a narrative when a "prince" is saving a beautiful women), but still a happy ending is a common ending. In Bollywood films students read propaganda on national values, they read product placement, need for glory and power.

> *...when he* [the main male character] *is looking at her* [the main female character] *at the rear-view mirror.* (Swades, 56)

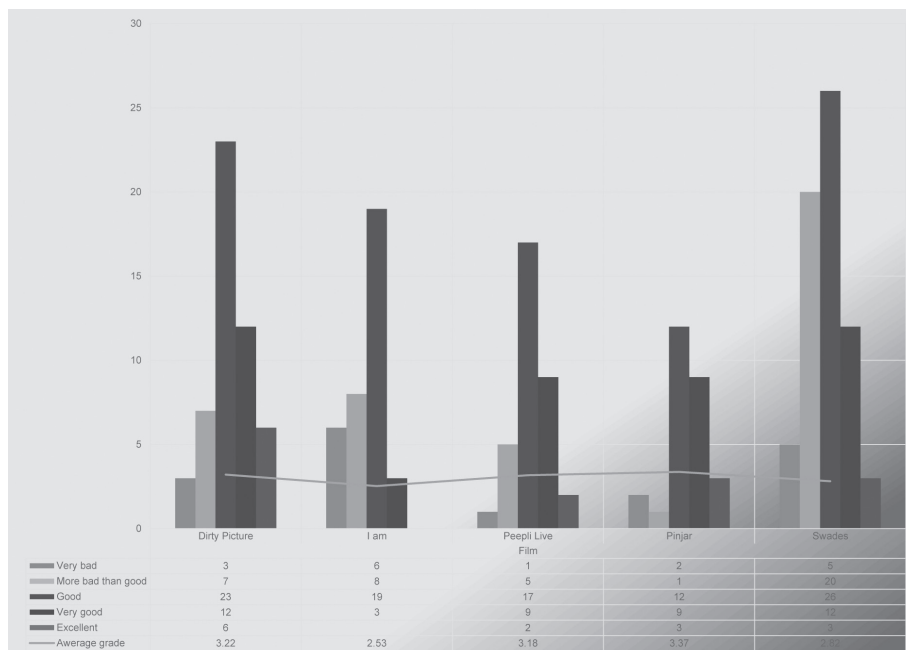> *Also, there is some disagreement with stereotypical interpretations:*

> *Every social value is seen as different because of a different perspective, not because it is a different value – family is important everywhere.* (Swades, 71)

> *Not really. Bollywood movies are one of the kind.* (Swades, 71)

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Students were also asked to grade a movie they watched at that particular screening. The average grade was good.

And finally, we were interested in finding out if watching a Bollywood film has exerted any influence on changing students' opinions and knowledge of Indian culture. Our expectations were that it would, but only the *Pinjar* influenced students on a large scale (42 percent), while other movies did not have any significant effect on students.

Graph 8: EVALUATION OF BOLLYWOOD MOVIES (N = 228)

	Dirty Picture	I am	Peepli Live	Pinjar	Swades
Very bad	3	6	1	2	5
More bad than good	7	8	5	1	20
Good	23	19	17	12	25
Very good	12	3	9	9	12
Excellent	6		2	3	3
Average grade	3.22	2.53	3.18	3.37	2.53

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Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

*Graph 9: DID THE FILM YOU HAVE SEEN TODAY EFFECT THE CHANGE OF
YOUR OPINION ABOUT INDIAN CULTURE? (N = 228)*
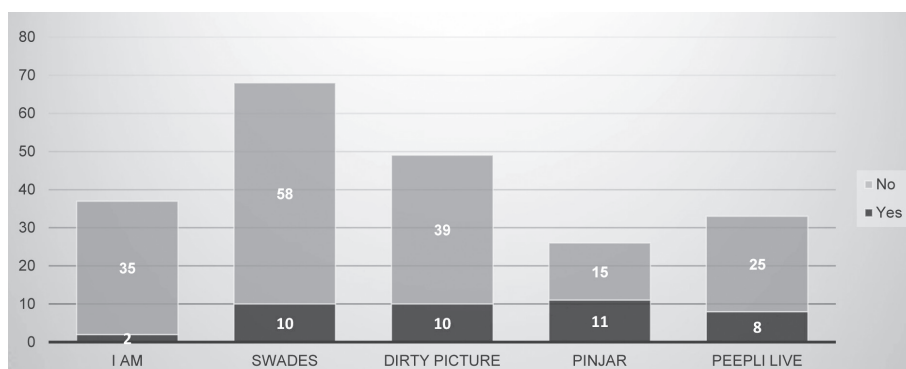
Source: Car, Kos-Stanišić and Viduka (2016).

Overall, Croatian students' of media, communication and political science perceptions of Bollywood film are both negative and positive. Their concept of Bollywood is perceived as demeaning, stereotyping of Hindu

culture. It is obvious that they read film narrative through the lenses of their social values and norms, which are further framed by their knowledge or ignorance of Indian culture. As researchers, we can only surmise that Croatian students who took a part in this survey as non-Indians lack the requisite cultural and social interest needed to appreciate Bollywood films, and that they prefer media products that are close to their culture and to their social class. As Janet Steiger (2000), but also Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt (2001) argue, social class is the fundamental cause for all responses to film, as audiences have multiple socially constructed identities.

Therefore, to conclude with an attempt to answer the question as to whether Bollywood is a successful or an unsuccessful tool of Indian soft power and a public diplomacy tool – looking from Croatian students' of media, communication and political science perspective. Bhasin (2008) claims that "public diplomacy is a target-oriented activity: both in terms of objectives and audience." It means that if India wants to influence and inform foreign public, positive attributes of India should be projected through the right strategy at the right time in the right place. From perspective of students who took part in this survey, it is not. India is still very invisible in Croatia, and through Bollywood film it is often misread. We see a big potential in Indian television production, especially soap operas, a possible platform to promote India's cultural heritage, beautiful nature, Hindi tradition lifestyles, and light-hearted humour.

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