

## Storyline Predictability in Bangladeshi Films: Exploring Viewers' Preferences

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### Abstract

Film storyline is a powerful way to connect with the audience. Filmmakers need to be aware of viewers' preferred storylines for successful films. This research explores the viewers' preferences, satisfaction, and fulfillment regarding Bangladeshi film storylines among two generations: those born in the 1990s and 2000s. Using a quantitative research approach, an online survey was conducted with 100 participants through stratified random sampling. The study reveals that only 12% of the survey participants are fully satisfied with the storylines of Bangladeshi films, while 76% reported that their preferences are not being fulfilled. Viewers prefer unpredictable storylines over predictable ones, stating that most Bangladeshi films follow predictable patterns. Participants strongly recommended that filmmakers adopt unpredictable storytelling. This research provides valuable insight into viewers' storyline preferences. The findings of this study serve as a guideline for Bangladeshi filmmakers to enhance viewer satisfaction and potentially increase regular viewership of Bangladeshi films.

**Keywords:** storyline, film, Bangladeshi film, predictable, unpredictable

### Introduction

Bangladeshi film history traces back to *Mukh O Mukhosh* (The Face and the Mask, 1956), directed by Abdul Jabbar Khan, widely acknowledged as the nation's inaugural motion picture (Haq, 2020, p. 16). Offbeat films,

characterized by their unconventional storylines and cinematic styles, have garnered attention for their distinctiveness (Haq, 2020, p. 58). Kabir (1979) reveals that, out of 163 films released from independence until January 31, 1977, only eight were classified as offbeat, while 125 were considered plagiarized. Interestingly, Bangladeshi audiences rejected both offbeat and plagiarized films.

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of offbeat cinema in Bangladesh, with some productions achieving moderate commercial success. However, productions like Akhtaruzzaman's *Pokamakorer Ghorbasoti* (Living like Insects, 1996) and Chashi Nazrul Islam's *Hangor Nadi Grenade* (The Mother, 1997), both based on Selina Hossain's novels, failed to resonate with viewers (Haq, 2020, p. 80).

Industry experts emphasize the significance of a compelling storyline as the cornerstone of successful film production (Eliashberg et al., 2007). Despite this, there remains a gap in research focused solely on viewer preferences for predictable versus unpredictable storylines. This study aims to address this gap by examining the preferences of 1990s and 2000s Bangladeshi viewers, exploring whether they lean towards predictable or unpredictable narratives, and evaluating the satisfaction levels derived from Bengali cinema.

Several studies have addressed film storylines, but there is a notable gap in research specifically focused on predictable and unpredictable storylines. Yet, delving into this topic is essential for understanding viewer preferences and whether film storylines meet their expectations. The research aims to shed light on this subject by examining two decades of Bangladeshi film viewership, providing valuable insights into audience preferences and satisfaction with film storylines.

## Literature Review

A number of studies have examined viewer preferences in relation to film genres, personality traits, and narrative techniques. However, few have directly explored whether audiences prefer predictable or unpredictable storylines, especially in the context of Bangladeshi film.

Stevens (2020) argues that narrative predictability can enhance viewer satisfaction by offering comfort and familiarity. This is particularly relevant in romantic comedies, where audiences often prefer the certainty of expected outcomes over suspense or surprise. However, the study is

limited by its focus on a single genre and relies on theoretical assumptions without empirical evidence, which may introduce bias.

Chausson (2010) investigated how gender and the Big Five personality traits, including Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, affect genre preferences in visual media, including comedy, horror, action, romance, and fantasy. While the study briefly mentioned storyline predictability, it did not focus on this aspect in detail and used data solely from British residents, limiting its generalizability.

Khan et al. (2020) examined film genre preferences and rating behavior by analyzing psycholinguistic data from social media platforms such as Twitter and IMDb. Their work emphasized the role of personality and value dimensions in shaping preferences. However, the study did not include any discussion of predictable versus unpredictable storylines and did not directly collect user feedback, which limits the accuracy of its conclusions regarding viewer satisfaction.

Shrier (2020) explored the balance between realism and predictability in horror films, highlighting how repetitive tropes and monsters function as tools to explore deep-seated human fears. While this contributes to understanding genre conventions, the study focused exclusively on horror and did not address broader audience preferences for storyline structure across genres.

Papalampidi et al. (2021) analyzed narrative patterns in various genres, observing that comedies and action films often follow predictable arcs, whereas thrillers are more likely to include narrative surprises. Though informative about storytelling styles, the study did not assess whether audiences actually prefer one type of storyline over the other.

Kraaykamp and Van Eijck (2005) found that personality influences preferences for straightforward versus complex recreational activities, suggesting that individuals with different traits may gravitate toward more predictable or unconventional content. However, their study focused on books, television, and cultural participation, excluding films from their media analysis. As a result, viewer preferences for film storylines specifically remain unclear.

Although a number of studies have explored film genre preferences, personality traits, and broader media consumption patterns, there remains a significant lack of research specifically addressing whether viewers prefer predictable or unpredictable storylines in films. Most existing literature either focuses on specific genres (e.g., horror or romantic comedy), relies

on indirect data sources such as social media interactions, or omits film as a distinct medium altogether (Chausson, 2010; Khan et al., 2020; Shrier, 2020; Stevens, 2020). Furthermore, none of the reviewed studies examine the connection between viewer satisfaction and narrative predictability within the context of Bangladeshi cinema.

In particular, no research has comparatively explored how viewers from two different decades perceive and prefer storyline structures, nor has any study assessed whether Bangladeshi films align with these preferences. Additionally, the level of audience satisfaction with the storyline content of Bangladeshi films remains an underexplored area.

### **Research Questions**

The present study poses the following Research Questions (RQ) to address the mentioned research gap.

- RQ1)** Which storylines do the viewers prefer – predictable or unpredictable?
- RQ2)** Do Bangladeshi films meet viewers' storyline preferences?
- RQ3)** How satisfied are the viewers with the storylines of Bangladeshi films?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The authors consulted uses and gratifications theory, cognitive film theory, and narrative transportation theory to build the discussion and analyze the research findings.

Uses and Gratifications Theory: Introduced in the early 1940s by Katz and Blumler, the uses and gratifications theory focuses on exploring the reasons individuals engage with specific forms of media, the needs they aim to fulfill through media use, and the satisfaction or benefits they derive from that engagement (Kasirye, 2021). The rapid growth of telecommunications technology has sparked renewed interest in the theory. The deregulation of the communications industry and the merging of traditional media with digital technologies have significantly transformed audience consumption patterns. As technological advancements offer audiences an expanding range of media options, understanding their motivations and gratifications has become increasingly important in analyzing audience behavior (Liu, 2015). The Uses and

Gratifications Theory posits that audiences are active participants in the media consumption process, deliberately selecting media content to fulfill particular psychological or social needs and to obtain specific gratifications (Zhao, 2008). Understanding viewers' preferences for film storylines is essential to ensure that their needs for gratification are met, as audiences actively select media content based on the expectation of fulfilling specific gratifications.

**Cognitive Film Theory:** In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, cognitive film theory gained prominence as an analytical approach, largely due to the influential work of Noel Carroll and David Bordwell. Carroll's criticism of psychosemiotic film theory played a key role in redirecting focus toward the cognitive mechanisms involved in how audiences perceive and interpret film (Plantinga, 2006). Comprehending the cognitive processes involved in film viewing and how they connect to the filmmaker's aims and actions is one of the main objectives of cognitive film theory (Smith, 2013). Humans are driven not only by physiological demands but also by cognitive demands. They have a strong desire to learn and are naturally curious (Plantinga, 2009). Cognitive film theory suggests that human cognition and emotion are naturally inclined toward storyline structures and emotional patterns, which are activated through exposure to stories, visual imagery, and interpersonal interactions (Bondebjerg, 2014). This theory offers a suitable foundation for exploring viewers' engagement with different storylines in films that can help filmmakers in developing more audience-responsive storylines.

**Narrative Transportation Theory:** Richard Gerrig first coined the theory of narrative transportation in 1993 to describe experiences in which readers become fully involved in a narrative (Gerrig, 2018). Green and Brock developed this concept in 2000, distinguishing it from the elaboration process (Green & Brock, 2000). Narrative transportation theory delves into how narratives influence individuals psychologically. Generally, high-quality stories are more transporting than low-quality ones (Kreuter et al., 2007). This phenomenon of transportation and persuasion occurs in both factual and fictitious narratives. In fictional storytelling, psychological plausibility is paramount; audiences should find the characters and scenarios believable, even if they are imaginary (Green, 2021). Effective narratives often evoke strong emotions (Green, 2021). Reader preferences play a significant role in shaping responses, as individuals tend to enjoy and become

transported in their preferred genres (Green, 2021). Transportation extends beyond written materials, encompassing various modalities where the term “reader” can refer to listeners, viewers, or any recipient of narrative information (Green & Brock, 2000). It tends to evoke strong feelings for story characters, thereby increasing the potential impact of their experiences or beliefs on readers’ own beliefs (Green & Brock, 2000).

Understanding viewers’ storyline preferences is essential for enhancing participation and delivering an authentic transportation experience. By catering to individual tastes and crafting a storyline that resonates with them, creators can foster deeper emotional connections and maximize the storyline’s influence on audience beliefs and perceptions.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative research approach. This approach is appropriate for examining measurable patterns. Quantitative research aims to collect numerical data and generalize it across populations or to explain a specific occurrence. So, this methodology was considered suitable for understanding the generational storyline preference in Bangladeshi films.

To provide thorough insights, both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary data was collected via a structured online survey with closed-ended questions. A stratified sample technique was used to achieve equal representation across generational cohorts. Stratified random sampling is a statistical technique in which the population is divided into different subgroups, or strata, based on certain characteristics, and a random sample is selected from each group (Makwana et al., 2023). In this study, the sample was stratified by birth decade: Stratum 1 (individuals born between 1990 to 1999); Stratum 2 (individuals born between 2000 to 2009). Participants are selected through online channels such as Messenger and WhatsApp.

The authors reviewed academic papers, newspaper articles, and books as part of consulting secondary sources. The primary survey results were contextualized and supported by these secondary data.

The total sample size is 100 respondents, equally distributed across the two generational cohorts ( $n = 50$  from each). Additional demographic

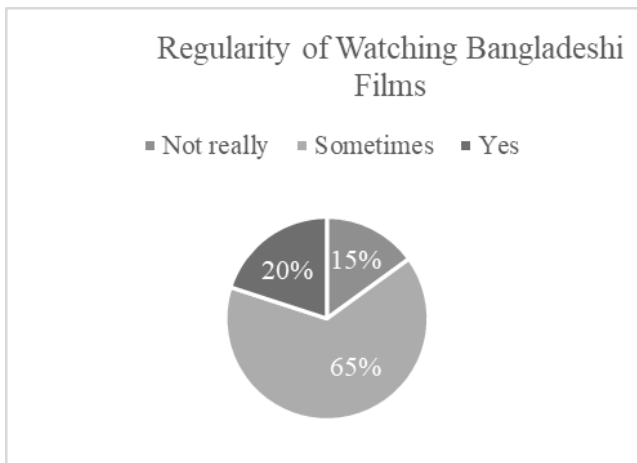
information, such as gender and educational background, was gathered to facilitate a more nuanced interpretation of the results.

Survey responses were organized systematically according to individual questions. Frequencies and percentages for each response type were calculated to determine distribution patterns. Visual representations were added to the following formats to enhance data interpretation and clarity.

Tables and charts were used to ensure a clear and systematic representation of the survey results. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Statistics, a popular statistical tool in the social sciences. The software was used for data coding and entry and to run basic descriptive analyses such as frequency distributions and graphical displays. The use of SPSS helped maintain methodological rigor while also improving the validity and reliability of research findings.

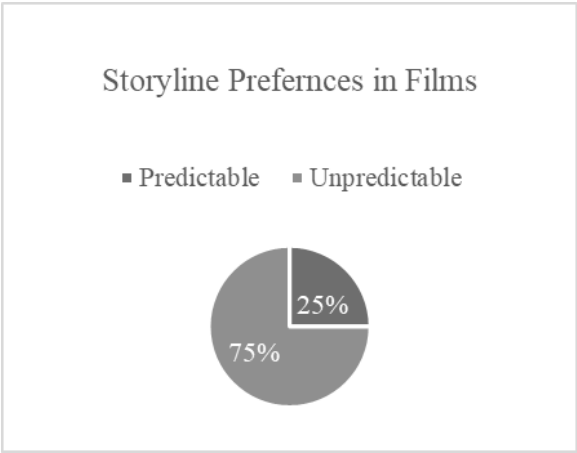
## Results and Findings

**Figure 1:** Regularity of Watching Bangladeshi Films



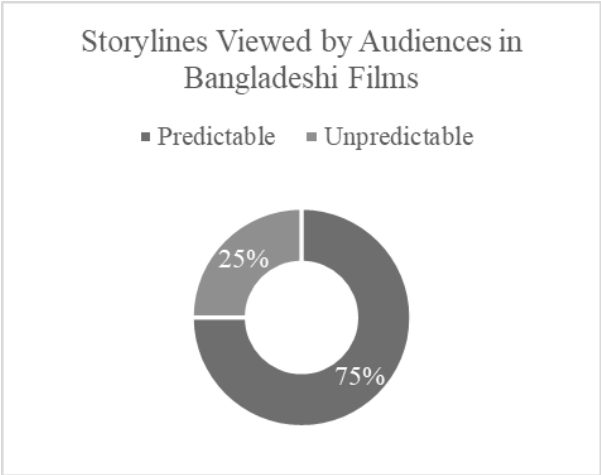
When it came to watching Bangladeshi films on a regular basis, 65 percent of the total respondents reported that they watch films sometimes, which was the most common response. Twenty percent participants stated that they regularly watch Bangladeshi films while 15 percent stated that they do not watch them regularly.

**Figure 2:** Storyline Preferences in Films



Regarding the preference for storylines in films, 25% of the respondents indicated that they preferred predictable storylines, whereas a significant number, 75%, preferred unpredictable storylines.

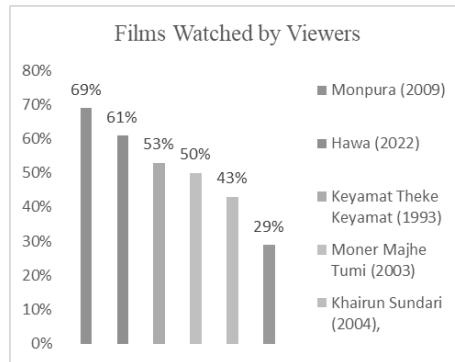
**Figure 3:** Storylines Viewed by Audiences in Bangladeshi Films





Seventy-five percent of respondents believe that storylines in Bangladeshi films are primarily predictable, while just 25 percent observed unpredictable storylines.

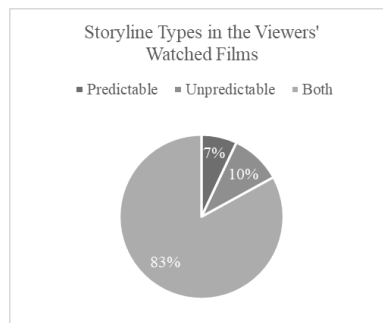
**Figure 4: Films Watched by Viewers**  
Frequency of Individual Films Mentioned by Respondents (N = 100)



**Note:** Participants were allowed to select multiple film titles.

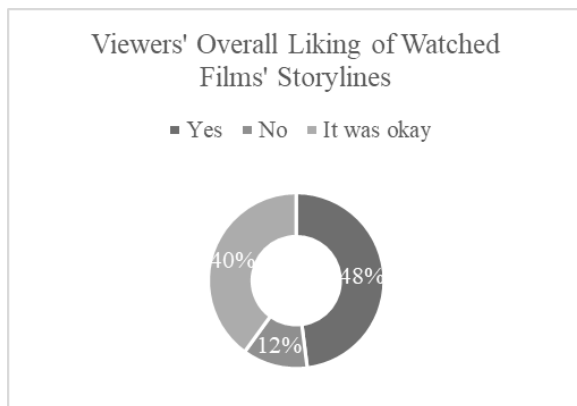
The most frequently watched film among respondents was Monpura (2009), cited by 69 percent of the total respondents. This was followed by Hawa (2022) with 61 percent and Keyamat Theke Keyamat (1993) with 53 percent. Moner Majhe Tumi (2003) was viewed by 50%, while Khairun Sundari (2004) and Poran (2022) were chosen by 43% and 29% of respondents, respectively.

**Figure 5: Storyline Types in the Viewers' Watched Films**



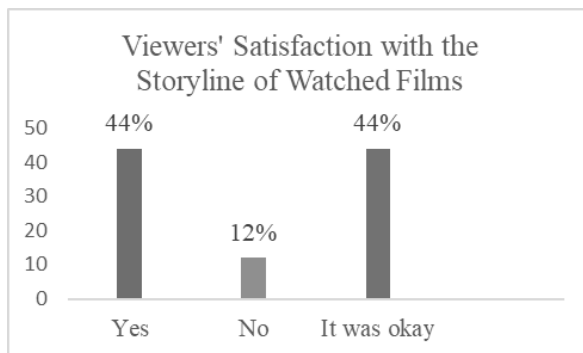
When asked about the types of storylines in the films they watched, most respondents (83 percent) reported watching both predictable and unpredictable storylines. Meanwhile, 7 percent reported watching films with exclusively predictable storylines, and 10 percent reported watching films with exclusively unpredictable storylines.

**Figure 6:** Viewers' Overall Liking of Watched Films' Storylines



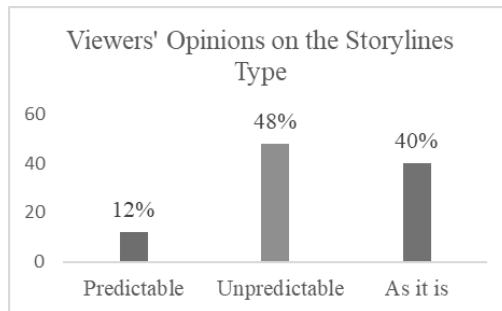
Regarding the overall liking of the storylines in the films they watched, 48 percent of respondents gave a positive response, indicating that they liked the storylines. Forty percent felt that the storylines were okay, suggesting a neutral or moderate level of liking. A smaller percentage, 12 percent, responded no, suggesting they disliked the storylines.

**Figure 7:** Viewers' Satisfaction with the Storyline of Watched Films



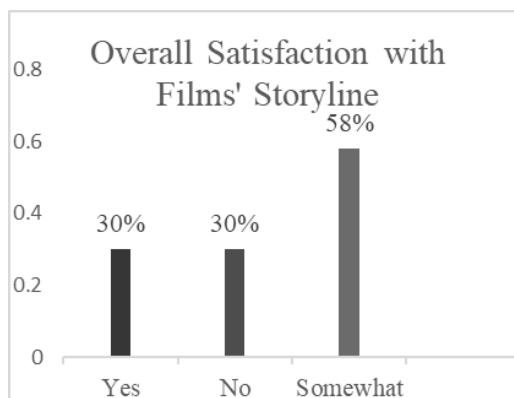
When asked if they were satisfied with the storylines of the films they had seen, 44 percent said okay, indicating a neutral or moderate level of satisfaction. An equal proportion (44 percent) responded yes, reflecting a positive level of satisfaction. Only 12 percent of viewers expressed dissatisfaction by choosing option no.

**Figure 8:** Viewers' Opinions on the Storyline Type



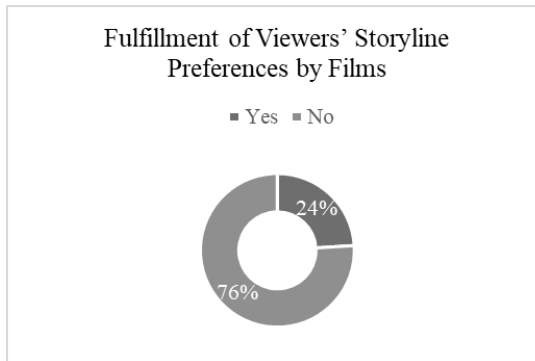
In response to how the storylines should have been, 48 percent of viewers preferred unpredictable storylines, implying they wanted a more suspenseful or surprising story. Forty percent were content with the storylines, expressing no desire for change. Meanwhile, 12 percent said the storylines could have been more predictable, indicating a preference for familiar or expected stories.

**Figure 9:** Overall Satisfaction with Film Storyline



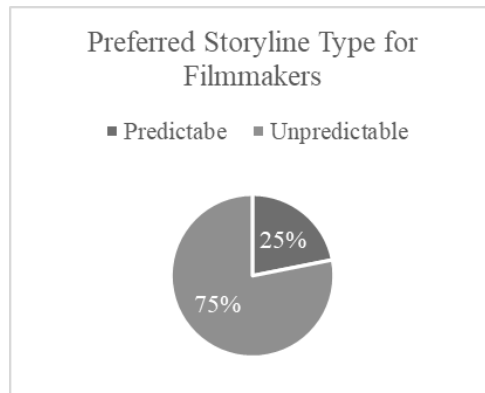
When asked about their overall satisfaction with the storylines of Bangladeshi films, most respondents who are 58% said they were somewhat satisfied, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction. Thirty percent of the survey respondents expressed dissatisfaction by selecting no, while only 12% reported being completely satisfied.

**Figure 10: Fulfillment of Viewers' Storyline Preferences by Films**



When respondents were asked whether Bangladeshi films fulfil their storyline preferences, 76 percent said no, showing that most believe their storyline expectations are not reached. In comparison, only 24% of respondents said yes, indicating that a limited proportion of the population is content with the storylines in Bangladeshi films.

**Figure 11: Preferred Storyline Type for Filmmakers**



In response to the type of storyline Bangladeshi filmmakers should follow, a significant majority of respondents, which is 75 percent, favored unpredictable storylines, while only 25 percent preferred predictable storylines.

### **Discussion**

This study's findings revealed the preferences, fulfilment, and satisfaction of storylines in Bangladeshi films from both decades (1990s and 2000s). When examining viewer preferences across both generational strata, the majority of the participants expressed interest for unpredictable storylines. 75% of the participants showed a clear preference for the unpredictable storylines. The results also indicate that the Bangladeshi film industry offers storylines that contrast with audience preferences. Though many participants acknowledged Bangladeshi film incorporates both predictable and unpredictable storylines, the dominance of predictable storylines limits the film industry's overall influence. This also implies a lower proportion of regular viewership of Bangladeshi films, with only 20% of participants reporting watching Bangladeshi films regularly.

In terms of satisfaction, only 12% of respondents indicated being fully satisfied with the storylines in Bangladeshi films, whereas 58% were somewhat satisfied and 30% reported being not satisfied at all. Although films such as *Monpura*, *Hawa*, and *Keyamat Theke Keyamat* were among the most popular among participants, only 44% considered their storylines completely satisfactory, with an equal amount reporting moderate or neutral satisfaction. Furthermore, 75% of participants indicated a desire for Bangladeshi filmmakers to prioritize unpredictable storylines, and 76% explicitly stated that current films do not fulfill their storyline preferences. This suggests that the storylines in Bangladeshi films do not please or meet the preferences of the audience.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and analysis, this paper makes the following recommendations for future research and filmmakers:

- Future researchers may conduct further studies on storyline preferences, including broader demographic characteristics or qualitative methodologies, to better understand the field.

- Filmmakers are encouraged to adopt unpredictable storylines to better align with audience preferences and increase viewer engagement.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research underscore the importance of understanding and responding to audience preferences in the Bangladeshi film industry. While a minority of participants reported regular engagement with Bangladeshi films, the majority expressed concerns regarding the predictability of their storylines. This indicates a potential disconnect between current content offerings and viewer expectations.

Notably, participants expressed a desire for more unpredictable storylines, suggesting an appetite for innovation and creativity in Bangladeshi films. Many respondents reported that their expectations regarding film storylines are not being fulfilled. This allows filmmakers to experiment with varied storytelling techniques, including unpredictable storylines. Moving forward, Bangladeshi filmmakers are encouraged to consider audience preferences and embrace unpredictable storylines. This will enable the industry to bridge the gap between filmmakers and viewers by aligning storytelling strategies with audience expectations.

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