

Study of Visual Semantic Attributes Responsible for Effective Communication in Bollywood Movie Titles

Mohammad Shahid and Dharmalingam Udaya Kumar

Bollywood is a Hindi language Movie industry based in Mumbai. In India, movie publicity is a part of diverse visual culture and one of the key factors for movie success. Print media publicity is evident from the beginning, wherein posters played a vital role. Movie posters act as a form of visual language through which the gist of the film can be perceived. To understand the role and communicative power of a poster, one has to understand its individual components as well as their interrelationship in the poster layout. The design elements in a movie poster can be grouped in to two major categories; non-textual and textual. Under textual content, title design is one of the key elements where creativity has been explored at its best. This article looks at the visual attributes associated with the title design and discusses their role in overall meaning creation. A semiotic approach has been used to structure the analysis in two parts: syntactics and semantics. Findings reveal significant visual attributes which have been used to design influential movie titles. The range of visual attributes listed in this article will provide an insight to designers/lettering artists to produce more persuasive typography/lettering.

KEYWORDS Bollywood, expressive lettering, film posters, semantic attributes, title design

Introduction

Bollywood is the Mumbai based cinema industry mainly known for the Hindi language movies. This industry is responsible for producing movies that are enjoyed by audiences in India as well as across the world. Throughout its journey, Bollywood has achieved the status of

one of the most popular movie industries in the world (Ahmed 1992, Matusitz & Payano 2011). Movie publicity is one of the key factors for the success of the movies. Since the beginning, different modes of movie publicity such as movie booklets, lobby cards, show cards, posters, banners, song synopsis booklets and large cut-outs have been used. Print media has been the dominant medium of publicity during the early years of Bollywood, with posters playing a vital role. Over the decades, the movie poster has become a visual artefact in terms of social and historical values. Researchers have perceived the movie poster as a 'cultural icon', a 'semiotic moment' and a 'commodity' (Mazumdar 2003), a 'mass medium' (Haggard 1988), an 'object of art' (Pinto & Sippy 2008) and a 'visual artefact' (Devraj & Bouman 2010). From a syntactic perspective, a movie poster is a composition of static images (graphical/non-textual) and texts (textual), intended to communicate the story of the movie in a single shot (Mazumdar 2003). The graphical content generally includes images of the protagonists, scenes from the movie and illustrations, whereas the textual content mainly includes the film's title, the tagline, the credit block and the protagonists' names. At present, literature has primarily covered the non-textual elements, especially protagonists' image and colour. Studies have acknowledged the importance of textual content, especially title design, without, however, dealing with it in any systematic manner. With the aim to understand the role of lettering/typography in movie posters, this study focuses on the title design.

By contrast to Western practices, concern with typography has not been appreciated in India till recently. This is evident in the majority of movie posters, where the central characters have always been considered as the primary element of the posters (Pinto & Sippy 2008, Devraj & Bouman 2010). The immense popularity of the movie stars, as well as the hierarchical tribute to the director and the producers, explain this bias.

Depending on their characteristics, letters can suggest romance, suspense, drama or other feelings (Dey & Bokil 2015). The whole purpose of 'graphically' treated lettering is to align the latter with the story subject, and, thus, function as an extension of the imagery (Eisner 1985). In this way, lettering design contributes to the creation of mood and bridges the communication gap between letters and the other design elements in a composition. For example, the graphical treatment of the titles *Jaal* (Net, 1967), *Paar* (The Crossing, 1984) and *Iqbal* (2005) support the theme of the respective movies (Figure 1). Lettering also helps to establish a connection of other design elements in the poster layout with the story. For example, most of the suspense thriller movie posters feature graphical elements such as cobweb or spiral lines. In *Jaal* (Net), the title has been treated with a cobweb that helps in creating a direct relationship with the literal meaning of the title and indirectly to the movie's theme. *Paar* (The Crossing) is a social drama movie, whose title has been designed using its mirror reflection. It is been supported by flat 2D illustration of a herd of pigs. In the movie, there is a key scene where the main characters are moving pigs through a river to earn their livelihood. It symbolically relates to the movie's theme which is based on the exploitation of poor people in the rural state of

Bihar. Similarly, in *Iqbal*, a sports drama movie revolving around the game of cricket, the graphically treated title directly conveys the message without any ambiguity. This kind of practice, which creates a direct as well as symbolic connection to the theme of the movies, has been significantly explored in Bollywood movie titles. This paper looks into these aspects in terms of their significance and role in the title design.

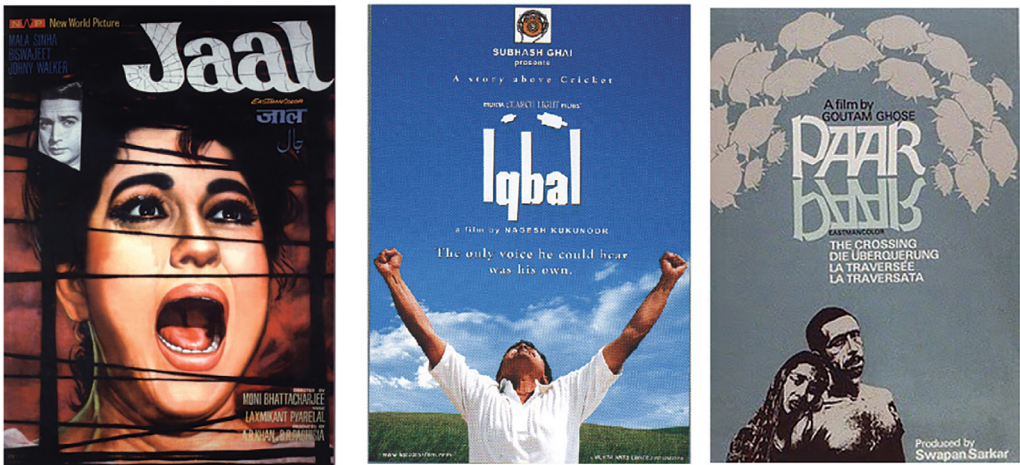


Figure 1. Graphically treated titles: *Jaal* (1967), *Iqbal* (2005), source: Pinto & Sippy, 2008 and *Paar Ban* (1984), source: Devraj & Bouman, 2010

Methodology

For our study we collected movie posters from different sources, including books, the National Film Archive of India, an online digital repository (Osianama), poster collectors, and poster shops in Chor Bazar (Mumbai). Further, this paper uses semiotic approach to study the visual attributes associated with movie titles. As movie posters are meant for advertising, where lots of meaning is communicated using many design elements in a single static image, it can be a good framework for the analysis. According to Daniel Chandler, semiotics teaches us that reality is a system of signs (Chandler 2002). Studying semiotics can help us to be more aware of reality as a construction and of the roles played by everyone in constructing it. It is a study of signs and according to Saussure's dyadic model; the sign is the whole that results from the association of signifier and the signified (Figure 2). This relationship is called 'signification', and the value confirmed by a sign depends on its relationship with other signs within the system (ibid.) Semiotics is subdivided into three areas: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Syntactics is the study of the relationship among signs in a formal structure. In this article, it has been used to investigate the syntax of the movie titles. Semantics is the study of meaning created by signs in a system, where they interact with others signs. This approach has been uti-

lized to understand the meaning-making nature of visual attributes with respect to the movie genre or story. Pragmatics is a study of the relationship between signs and sign-using agents. Here it is context and use that contributes to the meaning and interpretation of a particular design.

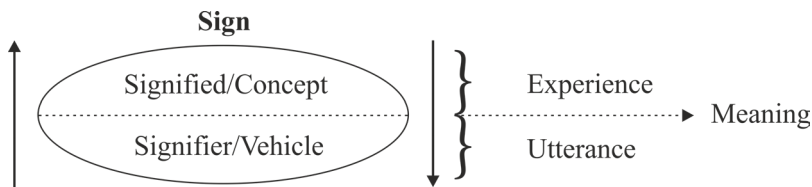


Figure 2. Saussure's dyadic model

The semiotic approach we used for the analysis aided to the understanding of the structural details of a movie title and its meaning-making both on connotative and denotative level. 'Connotation' and 'denotation' are two aspects of a sign which exist together in a sign-making agent. Denotation refers to the direct, literal meaning of a sign, whereas connotation deals with the deeper meaning which is indirect and associated with cultural components such as ideas, values, attitudes or behaviours (Tselentis 2011). Connotation is heavily reliant on previous socio-cultural experiences. For example, the term 'Bollywood' connotes things like glitz, glamorous, musical, melodrama, celebrity, stardom and much more. These associations come through our previous knowledge and experiences with Bollywood films. At the same time, Bollywood denotes the Hindi cinema industry based in Mumbai. The denotation/ connotation pair is found in movie titles as well. For example, in *Sholay* (1975), the shape of the title is narrowed down in the middle and flared out on all four corners, implying the shape of the 70mm widescreen and highlighting the spectacular aspect of the movie. Also, the texture of dry land and colours of flame connotes anger and evokes the *Angry Young Man* persona of the movie's protagonist. At the same time, flame and cracks resonate the literal sense of the word *Sholay* (which means Embers). Finally, the three-dimensional look and the cracks in the letters make them look as if sculpted from stone (Figure 3).

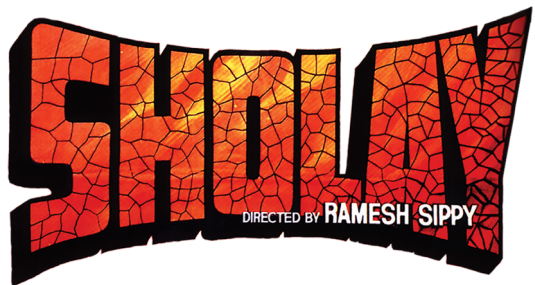


Figure 3. *Sholay* (1975) movie title designed by C. Mohan

Analysis and Observations

A word's meaning is produced at three distinct sites: its sound, its literal meaning and visual appearance (Dey & Bokil 2016). The same holds for movie titles. To explore the visual attributes and their meaning-making nature, our analysis is divided into two parts: the syntactic and the semantic, aimed at investigating the title's literal meaning and the title's visual appearance, respectively. Title sound and its influence on title design have not been covered in this study.

Syntactic approach

The syntactic approach reveals that title design has been explored in various ways which can be grouped into three major categories: 1) *The appearance of the title in the poster layout*, 2) *The features associated with letterform* and 3) *Use of external elements*. Visual attributes falling under these three categories have played significant role in the title design and its expressiveness.

Title appearance

The features commonly associated with title appearance are position, shape, direction and size. All these features have been methodically to produce impact and interest in the title design of Bollywood posters.

Position

Position defines the location of the title in the poster layout. In a visual composition, different spatial positions attract attention in different pattern. M. J. Friedlander suggests that, 'The middle appears as the distinguished position and toward the sides the importance of the locality grows less' (Friedlander 1941). Rudolf Arnheim adopted the same idea and advocated 'The power of centre' (Arnheim 1982). In an experiment conducted by I. C. McManus and Catherine M. Kiston, they have shown that the centre attracts more emphasis compared to other areas in a composition. They have further found that the bottom half of an image attracts more emphasis compared to the upper half (McManus & Kiston 1995). The positioning of the title is highly influenced by visual hierarchy. The study of visual hierarchy is defined as 'the study of the relationships of each part to the other parts and the whole, (Carter et al. 2002). In visual composition, the factors associated with letterform design that influence the

visual hierarchy are: *size, value or strength, colour, position and proximity* (Meggs 1992). Artists produce hierarchical arrangements in a composition by manipulating these factors. In a poster design, the title mostly takes a secondary position, since primary emphasis is given to non-textual, visual elements. Therefore, the position of the title is decided in accordance to the priority assigned to different design elements in a poster layout. In most cases, movie stars portraits occupy the major part and especially the central area of the poster layout; the title, on the other hand, appears either at the top or at the bottom. In some cases the placement is in the central area, depending upon the arrangement of visuals and the importance given to the title. Figure 4 illustrates three possible positions occupied by the title in a poster layout.

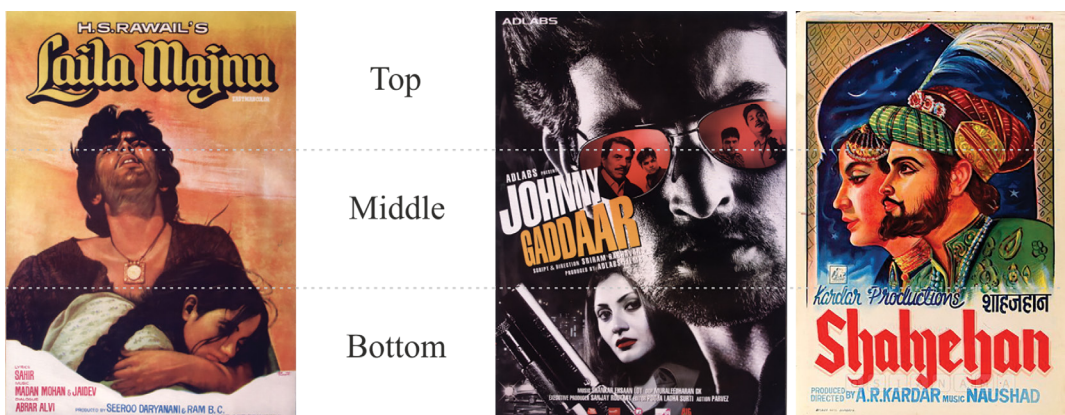


Figure 4. Three dominant positions of the titles in Bollywood movie posters, Image source: *Laila Majnu* (1976) & *Johnny Gaddaar* (2007) - Pinto & Sippy, 2008; *Shahjehan* (1946) - Osianama

Shape

Image creates more impact than the written matter which is understood by reading rather by looking at its visual form (Meggs 1992). Here, shape refers to the visual form taken by the movie title. It has been designed in different shapes to signify different aspect of the movie and create more emphasis. The significant shapes are rectangular, curve/wavy and cinemascope¹ style. Many other shapes, such as circular, triangular, trapezoid and trapezium, have also been used to design the titles. The rectangular shape is evident throughout the timeline. The use of the curve/wavy shape is more frequent from the 1930s to 1960s, mainly in movies based on romantic themes. When *Sholay* (1975) was released, the monumental title design in CinemaScope style was copied in different movies irrespective of their story, theme and genre. Field experts, such as Ausuja and Atmanand recall (Ausaja 2015, Atmanand 2015) that, at that time, it was a common practice to use a lettering style which was inspired from the popular movie posters. This might be the main reason behind the abundance of common shapes over a specific period of time. In Figure 5 we list a range of common shapes used for designing Bollywood movie titles with an example.



Figure 5. Common shapes used for the title design in Bollywood posters

Direction

This refers to the alignment of the title with respect to the general poster layout. In the case of Bollywood posters, title direction follows four basic ways: horizontal, vertical, diagonal and curvilinear (Figure 6). Horizontal is the most common, whereas vertical, diagonal and curvilinear has been used to create an unusual look that allows for extra emphasis. The appearance of different orientations is random. In most cases, it is decided on the basis of the conventional practice of writing in a horizontal direction. However, in some cases, it is contextual and used to signify movie themes. For example, the diagonal orientation of title in *Baarish* (Rain, 1957) poster, gives a feeling of rain that aligns with the title's meaning. Similarly, the curvilinear title style in *Geet Gaata Chal* (1975) relates to the melodious nature of the movie (Figure 6).

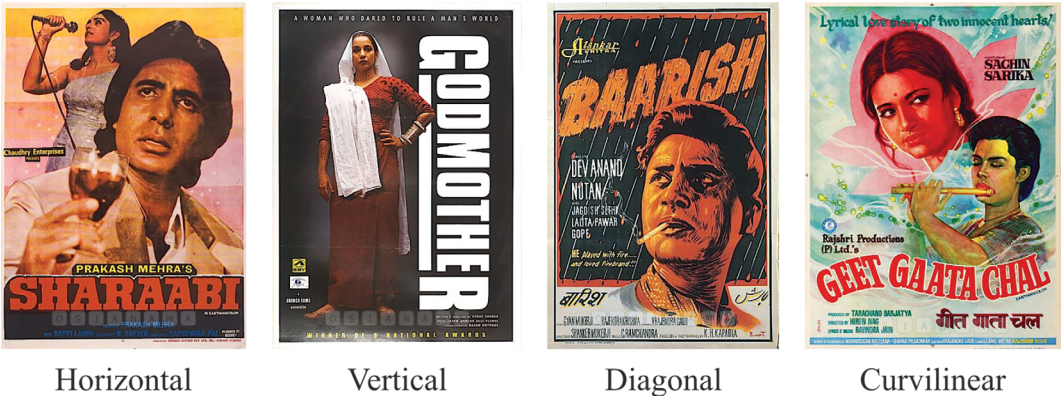


Figure 6. Title's direction in poster layout, image source: Osianama

Size

The size of an element and its relationship to the size of other elements in the design layout are significant emotive and communicative factors (Meggs 1992). It has been utilized effectively to create emphasis in a graphic space (Zelanski & Fisher 1996). Therefore, depending upon the importance given to the title design in the visual hierarchy, it has been mainly explored in three sizes: big, medium and small. Our findings show that in the majority of the posters, the title is given a secondary place in terms of visual hierarchy. However, depending upon the requirements, the title has also been used in bigger size, overshadowing the other elements in the poster layout (Figure 7). Medium size titles are more frequent across the timeline, whereas big size titles were popular during the early period of Bollywood, when the poster display platforms used to be further away from the viewers.

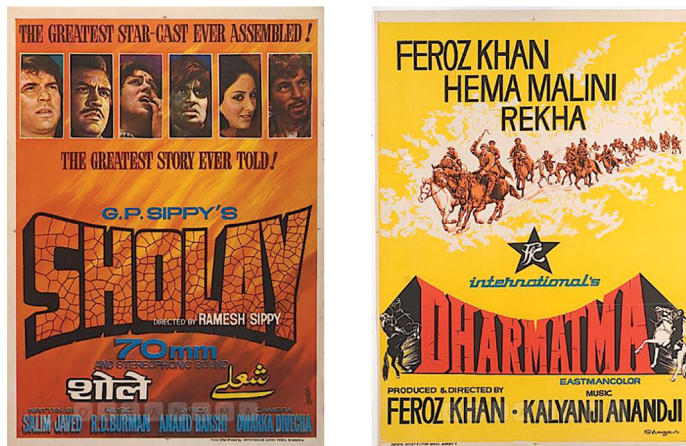


Figure 7. Movie posters with primary focus on the titles, image source: Osianama

Letterform

In title design, individual letters act as a building block where form and style suggests the movie's theme. Letterforms carry both denotative and connotative properties depending upon their visual/verbal syntax. The denotation is quite a straightforward task. Anyone who knows the written language can read and understand the literal meaning of a word. However, constructive meaning can only be generated through the understanding of the meaning hidden in the style and structure of the individual letters/fonts (Leeuwen 2001). Features associated with the letterform are: face, case, weight, stroke, posture, dimension, perspective, texture and colour. These features are explored to support the genre or storyline of the movies along with other motives such as creating impact and making it aesthetically pleasing.

Face

It is an attribute given to a particular letter font. The type classification system broadly categorizes letters/fonts into two groups, serif and sans-serif (Lupton 2010, Tselentis 2011). Serifs are a 'slight projection finishing off a stroke of a letter', whereas sans-serifs are without any such projections. To make it more explicit for the case of movie titles, two more sets have been added to this feature, i.e. script/calligraphic and combination (Figure 8). Combination is basically mixing of serifs and sans-serifs letters.



Figure 8. Letter faces: serif, sans-serif, script and combination

Serifs and sans-serifs are the two basic and most common typefaces evident in title design. Most of the titles are designed in sans-serif letters followed by serifs and occasional use of script and combination style. Sans-serif's characteristic features, such as simplicity, mono line weight, balanced proportions, pleasing form and easily distinguished word pattern, make it more legible and readable (Kibbee 1948). This might be one reason behind the dominance of sans-serif letters. Combining different faces is less popular and occasional. It provokes intense and somewhat funny sensation, and are widely used in the comedy genre. It also helps in creating contrasting flavours and texture in the title design. Figure 9 shows examples of movie titles in each group.



Figure 9. Letter face as a visual attribute

Case

Here the basic distinction in any writing system is that between large uppercase, also known as capitals, and small lowercase letters. In title design, this has been explored in four ways: uppercase, lowercase, title case, and combination (mixing of upper and lowercases). Although lowercase letters are easier to discern and recognize than uppercase (Lonsdale 2014), uppercase letters have been widely used in title design. They take up more space in the layout (ibid.) and make titles big and wider, and thus more easily noticeable. This was especially important before the digital revolution, when the display platforms were the side walls of the streets, rather far from the viewers. The practice of combining upper and lower case letters is also evident, mostly in movie titles related with the comedy genre. Combined lettercase adds casualness as well as appeal to the title design, and this makes them particularly suitable for the comedy genre. The playful combination of upper and lower-case also helps in attracting more attention (Carter 1997). Figure 10 shows examples of titles designed using different lettercase.



Figure 10. Lettercase as a visual attribute

Letter's weight

Weight is defined as the visible impact of type achieved through the contrast of line thickness and boldness (Tannen, 2009). It is measure by the ratio between the relative widths of the strokes of letterform to their height. Bold letters possess a stroke width of approximately 20% of height or more than that whereas medium letter possesses a stroke width of approximately 10% of height. Light letters are having stroke width less than 10% of the letter height. Four types of letter's weight; bold, medium, light and combination of three has been used in the title design of Bollywood movies. Bold letterform is more evident and has added in designing powerful, visible and effective titles. Combination of different weights is rare and used purposefully to emphasize certain part of the title (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Title designs with combination of different letter weight

Stroke

This feature refers to the visual appearance of letter's stroke, i.e. the contour of the letter-form. Flat rectangular stroke is a commonly used feature in Bollywood titles. Other stroke features have also been used to accompany different movie themes. For example, grunge style is mainly evident in action movies and thrillers. The rough texture enhances the movie's theme in both connotative and denotative ways. The use of decorative stroke is more apparent in mythological and romantic movies whereas the rounded stroke is a common feature in the titles of comedy movies. Decorative lettering is often use when posters use Hindi titles in prominence. This reflects the influence of the Indian art and craft style, which is deeply rooted in tradition. Figure 12 illustrates commonly used letter strokes in Bollywood movie titles.



Figure 12. Movie titles with different letter strokes

Style

Type style refers to the regular and italics shape of letters/typeface used in writing system. This attribute has been used to design persuasive titles in Bollywood posters. The conventional upright is the most abundant style used in the title design. Researchers have observed that inclined letterform imitates the active posture and can be perceived as energetic and forceful. Letters with more extreme slant appears more kinetic and aggressive (Carter, 1997). This fea-

ture can be used effectively to achieve dynamic effect in the title design. For example, italic shape in *Bheegi Raat* (1965) resonates with the rain mentioned in the title, whereas in *Race* (2008) it visually renders the sense of speed (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Title design using italic/oblique letter style

Quite often a combination of upright and italic/oblique letters is used to evoke the comic and carefree feeling of comedies. Movie titles such as *Munimji* (1955), *Rafoo Chakkar* (1975), *Awara Paagal Deewana* (2002) and *Grand Masti-2* (2013) are few examples that feature combination of upright and oblique letters (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Examples of titles having combination of type styles

Spacing

Spacing is another important variable for exploration in lettering/typography. It refers to the spacing between two letters in a word and it has a significant impact on its legibility (Carter et al. 2002). Designers manipulate the space between letters to create beautiful and harmonious yet readable typographic communication. Depending upon individual interest and design requirement, spacing can vary. It can be categorized into four major groups: normal, tight, overlapping and loose.

Bollywood poster titles mostly appear in tight spacing. One reason behind this choice might be the aesthetics of the title whereby designers have manipulated the space around the letters to create lasting visual impact. When there are many elements around the title, tight

letter spacing helps in better organizing the text, making it more distinguishable from other elements in the layout (Yu 2008). It brings letters together and unites them. Letter spacing is utilised cleverly to create theme-based, catchy titles in movies related with action and comedy. Movies related to the action genre have extensively used tight spacing whereas in comedy movies, they are generally overlapping. Tight and overlapping spacing can produce interesting title shapes. Figure 15 shows examples of title designs with different letter spacing.



Figure 15. Examples of titles with different letter spacing

Dimension

The element of dimension concerns the volume of the letters. A two-dimensional (2D) form, for example, is without volume, whereas a three-dimensional (3D) is with volume. In Bollywood film posters, two-dimensional letters are mainly used for the title designs. The use of three-dimensional letters was more widespread from the 1970s to the 1990s. This was the time when action and violence movies were more popular. In most cases, three-dimensional titling has been used to enhance the overall effect and create a lasting impact on viewers (Atmanand 2015). Figure 16 shows examples of Bollywood titles designed using 3D letters.



Figure 16. Three-dimensional title designs

Perspective

Perspective concerns the creation of the illusion of depth and volume on a flat surface. It has been exploited to create visual interest and provide a monumental appearance. Till the 1940s, most of the titles were flat without any perspective. Movies such as *Arzoo* (1950), *Aan*

(1952), and *Karigar* (1958), produced in the 1950s, witnessed the occasional use of perspective in the titles to create visual interest. With the release of *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Superman* (1960) and *Hercules* (1964), the 1960s witnessed the beginning of a trend for the perspective style. Perspective became a significant aspect of title design in the 1970s mainly associated with the action, adventure, crime and historical film genre. The trend dominated until the mid-1990s. With the success of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* in 1995, the late-1990s and early 2000s saw many releases based on the romantic family drama theme. Movies such as *Akele Hum Akele Tum* (1995), *Sajan Chale Sasural* (1996), *Pyaar Kiya To Darna Kya* (1998), *Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha* (1998), *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (1999) and *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) featured long titles devoid of perspective. In the later period perspective has occasionally been used in a deliberate, retro fashion. Figure 17 illustrates movie titles in perspective.



Figure 17. Titles with perspective

Visual Texture

Texture is used to enhance the meaning of the titles as well as to communicate the movie's theme. It is achieved by manipulating the letterform structure or through colours (Figure 18). Visual texture makes the title more expressive through both connotative and denotative meanings. Till the 1950s, when the poster-making technique involved hand painting, flat colour titles without texture were more common. This technique allowed poster artists to use rich colours (Pinto & Sippy 2008). Therefore, designers may have preferred to use flat colour without any texture in the title design to make it stand out in the rich colour background. The use of texture has expanded significantly in later on. The reason behind this is uncertain. Developments in poster making and printing techniques, as well as demand for more expressive titles may be the main reasons.



Figure 18. Use of texture in the title design

Colour

Colour is an important dimension of title design. Along with its visibility, its symbolic meaning has been utilized extensively in film poster art. Eventhough Bollywood poster art is, in general, very rich in colour (Pinto & Sippy 2008), the use of colour in title design is quite specific. Solid red, yellow, white and black are the most extensively used colours. If titles feature more than one colour, a combination of these four colours is used in the majority of cases. In a rich colour background, solid bright colours like red and yellow have an ability to stand out strongly. Red and yellow are the colours which are visible from the furthest distance. However, visibility also depends upon the contrast between the colours. In many cases, the subject (title)-background (visuals) difference is created through an outline or shadow in a contrasting colour. According to the colour theory developed by Albert Henry Munsell, in the 1990s, each colour has three attributes: *Hue* (individual colour such as red, green, and yellow), *Value* (the lightness or darkness of a colour) and *Chroma* (the saturation or brilliance of a colour) (Munsell 2017). Poster artists have played with these attributes to create impressive titles, mostly with hand painted techniques. In order to discover the colour pattern in the titles of popular movie posters, 10-15 popular movies from each decade (1940s to present) were selected. The title's body colour as well as the colour used for extra treatment, such as outline and shadow were also included. Figure 19 shows the colours used in the title design of popular movies across the decades.

A title's colour treatment is based on the 'colour context'. Colour context comprises of the surrounding colours and their impact on the colour used for the subject. The yellow, red and white colours look brilliant in dark background. As a result, in most cases, the titles are placed in the darker area of the poster layout. If not, then a separate background has been created or an outline has been used in dark colours.

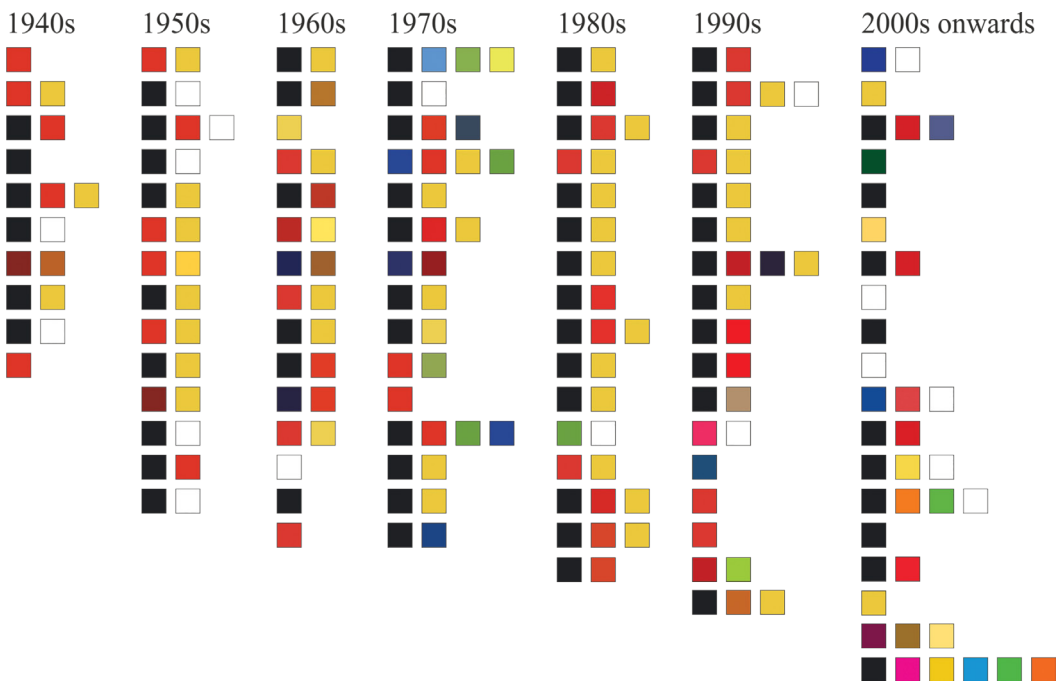


Figure 19. Colours used in significant Bollywood movie titles across decades

The use of colour is deeply symbolic, bearing a close connection the meaning of the title as well as the theme of the movie. For example, the red colour, which symbolically relates to love, has been an obvious choice for the romantic genre. It is also popular in movies based on themes such as crime, thriller, horror and violence. Use of pink is also very common in the romantic genre. Use of the yellow colour is random, whereas multicolourisation is more common in movies related to youth cultures, such as *Bobby* (1973), *Rangeela* (1995), *Dev-D* (2009) and *Queen* (2014) (see Figure 20).



Figure 20. Multicolour composition in *Bobby* (1973), *Rangeela* (1995), *Dev-D* (2009) and *Queen* (2014)

Use of decoration

Movie posters are made to attract the viewer at first sight (Mazumdar 2003). They compete with many other visual messages across the city wall to draw attention (Pinto & Sippy 2008). This competitive streetscape culture may have led designers to add some ornamentation to letters as well as to the entire title. These decorative elements make the titles more prominent and appealing, enhancing their salience in the poster layout. As shown in Figure 20, decoration or ornamentation is carried out at two levels: individual letterform and the entire title. Experimentation is evident in the decorative terminals, both in Latin as well as in Devanagari letters. Sometimes, the strokes of the letters are decorated using different motifs, such as creepers and stars. Decorative treatment is also evident in the entire title with the aim to establish a thematic connection with the movie, for example, in *Umrao Jaan* (2006), *The Dirty Picture* (2011) and *Bol Bachchan* (2012) (Figure 21).



Decorative treatment at the level of individual letters



Decorative treatment at the level of whole title

Figure 21. Ornamentation used in title design

Letterforms have also been produced through the help of design effects which bring an illusion of dimensionality to flat letters. Usually, these design effects fall under four main groups, i.e. outline, drop shadow, dimensional block shadow and dimensional letterface. All other *type effects* are combinations of these four groups (Cabarga 2004).

1. *Outline*: It helps in unifying groups of letters or words and provides a pleasing and ornamental effect. It is also used to separate letters from the background, improving legibility and contrast.
2. *Drop shadow*: Originally inspired by dimensional sign letters that cast actual shadow against actual background, it helps in improving the contrast between letters and background. Drop shadow creates an illusion of letters lifted off from the flat background.
3. *Dimensional block shadow*: It mimics three-dimensional sign letters mainly popular in shop signs, which are generally cut from wooden blocks or made up with metal sheet. It lends volume and monumental look to the title design.
4. *Dimensional letterface*: This includes effects like embossing, debossing, chisel edge and pillow edge. These types of effects were in use from the early period and are popular even today in digital medium.

Title design using external elements

Until the mid-1990s all the titles were designed manually. Quite often poster designers combined image and text in new and unexpected ways to enhance the visual impact. This was achieved either by juxtaposing or by fusing type and image. Juxtaposition or fusion of type and image helps in intensifying the communicative power of letters as well as of words. When image and word are used together, they create a powerful denotative capacity and communicate meaning without ambiguity (Meggs 1992). This provided a key asset to the artist who had to communicate effectively with both literate and illiterate audiences.

In Bollywood movie titles, external elements has been exploited in two ways: 1) Juxtaposition of type and image, and 2) Fusion of type and image. The latter has been further explored in three ways: 1) letter as an image, 2) image as a letter, and 3) word as an image.

Juxtaposition of type and image

In the case of juxtaposition, titles are directly juxtaposed with an image. In most cases, e.g. in *Ghulami* (1985), *Hatya* (1988) and *Apna Sapna Money Money* (2006), the title's meaning has been taken into consideration while selecting appropriate images (Figure 22). The title design of *Ghulami* juxtaposes a chain with letters carved in stone. This kind of title design aims to di-

rectly communicate the theme of the movie. In this kind of association we have a simple case of proximity² (Meggs 1992) that aims to intensify the meaning and make the title an integral part of the composition. A similar approach is used in other examples (Figure 22). This technique is used all across the timeline, irrespective of the movie's theme.



Figure 22. Juxtaposition of type and image

Fusion of type and image

This is another significant practice in Bollywood title design. Till the 1950s, title design in Bollywood film posters was little based on combining type and image, and in most cases, it was plain. Variations were limited to orientation, colour and letterform structure. From the 1960s onwards, titles became more expressive. By the 1970s, designers and artists started using type and image together to make the title more persuasive. In this way a symbolic language was developed to communicate with literate as well as illiterate people (Pinto & Sippy 2008). Fusion of type and image has been pursued in three ways:

Letter as an image

This technique involves a title design whereby letterforms are altered and manipulated so that they can act as an image and a letter simultaneously. Figure 23 shows different examples of this category of title design. In *April Fool* (1964), the two closely placed letters 'O' have been transformed into two eyes to give a comic feel, whereas in *Bandhan* (Bond 1998), the terminals of the first letter and last letter are transformed into the ends of a tied rope, in order to visualize the title's literal meaning. Similarly, in *Agneepath* (The Path of Fire, 2012), the letter 'T' has been transformed into a dagger, in order to give a feeling of danger associated with the film's crime/thriller genre. This kind of manipulation creates a visual-verbal synergy and makes titles more effective and communicative.



Figure 23. Letter as an image

Image as a letter

This involves a process of substitution, whereby an image plays the role of a letterform. This technique is cleverly utilised in several cases in the title design of Bollywood movies. As shown in Figure 23, letterform can be constructed from images based on the context and requirement. The title design of *Gharaonda* (The Nest, 1977) presents an excellent example: the letter 'O' has been substituted by a bird nest directly associated with the meaning of the title. Based on a family drama theme, the movie is about the lives of a middle class family. Similarly, in *Shahid* (2012), the letter 'A' has been replaced by a barrister's band that relates to the main character of the movie. *Shahid* is a story of the lawyer and human right activist Shahid Azmi, who was assassinated in 2010, in Mumbai. In *Maqbool* (2004), the letter 'q' has been replaced by a dagger, which evokes the committal of crime, whereas in *Metro* (2007), the letter 'O' has been replaced by the metro logo. All these makeovers and substitutions have some kind of a direct connection with the storyline of the movie and, thus, make the meaning of the title clearer, more suggestive and catchy.

Sometimes only part of the letter is replaced by a story-related image. At several instances, the dot on top of letter 'i' or 'j' known as tittle, is replaced by a symbolic image. In the case of romantic movies it is usually a flower, a star or a heart shape. For crime/thriller movies, the images are usually in the form of spirals or splatters of blood. In some cases, a red dot (Bindi), symbolizing a married woman, has been used in family drama movies to connect with the theme. In Figure 24, *Taj Mahal* (1963), *Priyanka* (1997) and *Parineeta* (2005) are a few examples of this category.



Figure 24. Image as a letter

Word as an image

Sometimes the visual form of a word is manipulated and used as an image to expand and extend the meaning out of it (Figure 25). This kind of title design was more evident from the 1970s to the 1990s, and is still popular. For example, in the movie poster for *No Smoking* (2007), the title takes the form of a cigarette. Similarly, in *Jhootha Hi Sahi* (2010), the title design takes the form of an old telephone. Based on a comedy theme, the movie is about a suicidal woman, whose ‘final’ call mistakenly connects her to a man who provides her with a reason to live for.



Figure 25. Whole title as an image

Semantic approach

Semantics is the study of meaning. It deals with the production of meaning from any visual sign. As we pointed out earlier, a movie title is composed of many design elements. These contribute to meaning-making by their individual characteristics along with the combined effect produced by their interrelationships (Dey & Bokil 2015). In the previous section we discussed

the role of each element in the design in Bollywood film titles. In this section, we turn to the understanding of connotative and denotative meaning generated by the titles.

Title design based on the meaning

So far, we have seen how title design gives an identity to the movie and has a vital connection to its plot and storyline. At the beginning of Bollywood, title designs show only minimal variations in the letterforms they use, irrespective of the meaning of the title. This may be due to the then existing limitations in printing and lettering skills. Letters were designed randomly, exhibiting personal artistic styles. Some exceptions, in this early period, were *Najma* (1943), *Mirza Sahiban* (1947), *Shaheed* (1948), *Footpath* (1953), *Toofan Aur Diya* (1956), *Baarish* (1957), *Night Club* (1958), *Kaajal* (1965), *Jewel Thief* (1967), *Raat Aur Din* (1967), *Talash* (1969) and *Aradhana* (1969). In all these examples, the title's visual features are strongly influenced by its literal meaning and show a direct association with it (Figure 26). Sometimes, in addition, it is influenced by the language used and the connection is built through an indirect association with it. For example, the letterform style used for designing the titles of *Najma* (1943) and *Mirza Sahiban* (1947) show the influence of Urdu calligraphy.



Figure 26. Title designs based on literal meaning of the titles-I

The beginning of 1970s witnessed a dramatic increase of expressive lettering in title design. Along with the visuals, additional elements were used in title design to enhance the communicative power of movie posters. Titles such as *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), *Gomati Ke Kinare* (1972), *Gora Aur Kala* (1972), *Sholay* (1975), *Andhi* (1975), *Bajrangbali* (1976), *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1977), *Haiwan* (1977), and *Apna Khoon* (1978) have used different visual features to reflect the title's meaning. In *Mera Naam Joker*, the flowy and curved strokes has been used to give a sense of comical and jovial mood (Figure 27). In *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, each letter has been designed to look like 'Mohra' (64 square pieces in chess), relating directly to the chess game. Similarly, letters designed with the use of blood drops in *Haiwan* reflect the literal meaning of the title (Figure 27).



Figure 27. Title designs based on literal meaning of the titles-II

Title design inspired by the title's literal meaning continues also in Bollywood's later period, with prominent examples *Garam Khoun* (1980), *Disco Dancer* (1982), *Coolie* (1983), *Anmol Sitarey* (1983), *Ghulami* (1985), *Tezaab* (1988), *Agneepath* (1990), *1942 a Love Story* (1994), *Rangeela* (1995), *Satya* (1998) and *Dhool* (2007). Along with the manipulation in letterform structure, the timeline shows an extensive use of image and text combination to depict the intended meanings.

Title design based on movie theme

Literature has shown that most of the Bollywood movies have a multi-genre character and contain different themes, such as action, romance, comedy, family drama etc. This represented a challenge to the movie poster artists, which have to express a range of diverse film dimensions (Pinto & Sippy 2008). It is also evident that each Bollywood period has been dominated by a specific thematic emphasis: mythological in the early years, social drama during the golden period, and action from the 1970s onwards. The title design of all these movies has utilized certain common features, such as bold letters in uppercase, shadow and outline, irrespective of movie themes. However, in many cases, it has used different approaches to reflect specific aspects of the movie theme. This has been achieved by manipulating letterform structure, its spatial organization, image-text relation, colour and texture.

In mythological/religious movies, such as *Sati Savitri* (1927), *Har Har Mahadev* (1950) and *Tilotma* (1964), movie themes are associated with the decorative letterform for both Latin and Devanagari script titles. In many cases, lettering artists have utilized decorative terminals to suit the theme. Sometimes letters have been modified into icons, as in *Bajarang Bali* (1976), *Jai Ganesh* (1977) and *Veer Bheemsen* (1985), to provide a direct connection with the story. Movies based on love/romance themes were always at the centre of Bollywood cinema and are still popular. The title designs of these movies show a significant degree of decoration as well as the use of symbols like hearts and flowers. Red and pink were the most preferred colour shades in the romantic genre. In the case of action and violence movies, popular during the 1970s, designers have used three-dimensional features along with shadow and outline. Yellow and blood red colour, flame and broken texture became a key feature of the title design. Movies such as *Sholay* (1975), *Don* (1978) and *Muquaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978) are prominent

examples in this category. Action movies established the trend of using three-dimensional lettering. This style prevailed throughout the different decades, irrespective of movie themes and remained dominant till the mid-1990s.

Titles of horror and crime movies were made expressive with the use of blood red colour and texture. Their exaggerated look, achieved through colour and texture, immediately reflects their theme. *Garam Khoon* (1980), *Ek Aur Khoon* (1985), *Cheekh* (1985), *Satya* (1998), *Apaharan* (2005) and *Haider* (2014) are typical examples of the title designs for crime movies. *Bees Saal Baad* (1962), *Wo Kaun Thi* (1964), *Darwaza* (1978), *Kabrastan* (1988) and *Raaz* (2002) exhibit the typical visual characteristics of horror movie titles. In the digital period, a unique feature, i.e. the blur effect, is also evident to support the horror theme and create enigma.

In the case of comedy movies titles we often encounter squeezed letterform, in tight or overlapping position, that alludes to their comic theme. Mixed posture, rounded letter's stroke and uneven size have been also utilized to support the comedy theme. Dacoit or Bandit movie is another common genre in Bollywood cinema. Blockbuster *Sholay* and the highly acclaimed *Mother India* have featured bandit characters in their storylines. Almost all the dacoit movies have featured bold three-dimensional title design with few exceptions, such as *Bindia Aur Bandoork* (1972), *Bandit Queen* (1994) and *Pan Singh Tomar* (2012). Figure 28 shows examples of titles based on the popular genres in Bollywood cinema.

Findings and conclusion

The article provides an overview of the development in title design across the timeline of Bollywood cinema. Findings show that designers/poster artists have creatively exploited the visual form of letters and text-image relationship to make titles more attractive and meaningful. Table 1 summarises our major findings from the title design's syntactic and semantic analysis. The analysis reveals that variation in the structural elements of title design has a range of semantic effects. The latter are detectable on two levels: the whole title and individual letterform. At the level of the entire title, these effects regard the reinforcement of the meaning-making and visual look of the titles by variations in terms of positioning, shape, orientation and size. At the level of individual letterform, variations are in terms of typeface, case, weight, stroke, posture, spacing, dimension, texture and colour. Semantic impact can also be noticed in connection to decoration and the use of external elements.

Figure 29 lists all the visual attributes and values associated with each attributes synthesised using syntactic approach.

Mythological	Romantic	Action	Crime
 <p>1950</p>	 <p>1975</p>	 <p>1978</p>	 <p>1985</p>
 <p>1954</p>	 <p>1992</p>	 <p>1986</p>	 <p>1980</p>
 <p>1977</p>	 <p>1990</p>	 <p>1994</p>	 <p>2014</p>
Horror	Musical	Bandit	Comedy
 <p>1964</p>	 <p>1951</p>	 <p>1987</p>	 <p>1958</p>
 <p>1988</p>	 <p>1982</p>	 <p>1989</p>	 <p>1974</p>
 <p>2002</p>	 <p>1979</p>	 <p>2001</p>	 <p>2009</p>
 <p>2010</p>			

Figure 28. Title's visual features based on popular movie genres in Bollywood

Framework used for the analysis	Results
Syntactic	Syntactical analysis reveals all the visual attributes associate with Bollywood titles and their role and interrelationship in the poster layout. It shows how these features along with their individual effects; also generate collaborative effects/meanings especially in image-text combination. This section emphasizes the role of image-text combination in terms of creating direct meaning and persuasive titles.
Semantics	Semantic approach reveals that title designs have been done based on the meaning of the title as well as movie theme. Manipulations have been done in letterform structure as well as external elements are used to reflect the different themes. Uses of visual attributes are also specific to movie genres. For example, decorative lettering is more evident in mythological and romantic genre. Action and historical movie titles are Bold and 3D. Texture is common in social drama, crime/thriller and horror movies.

Table 1. Major findings

Title's Visual representation

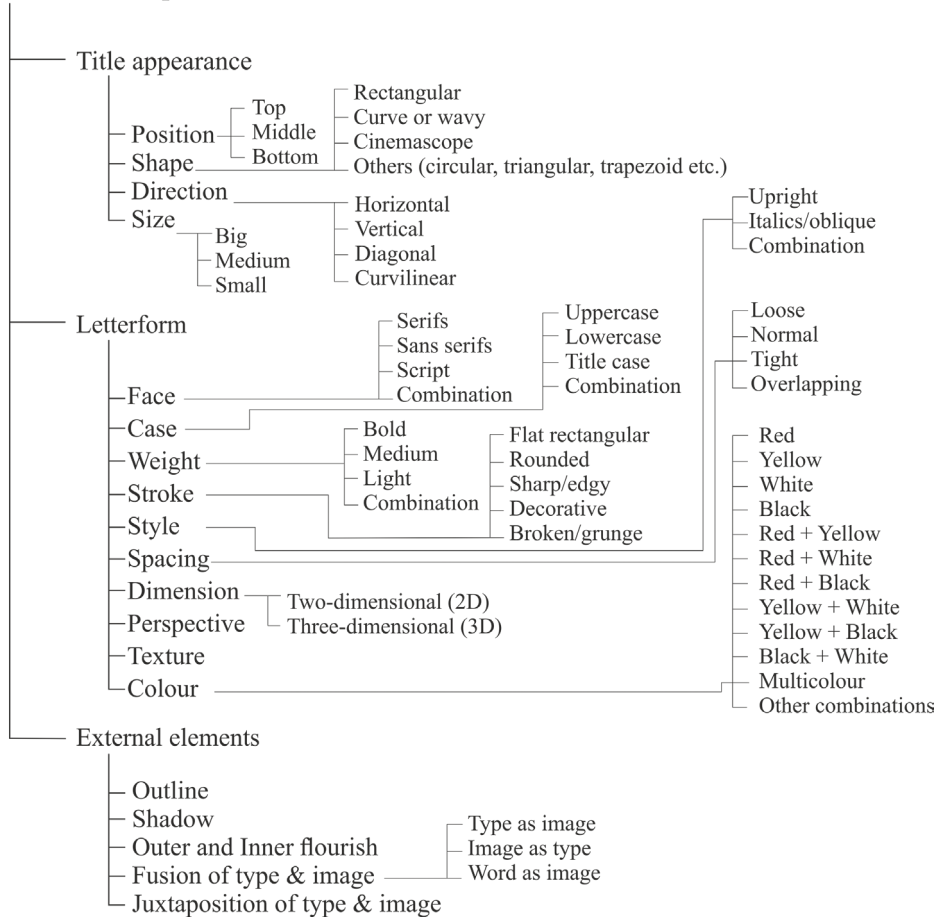


Figure 29. Lists of key characteristic features used in Bollywood titles

Table 2 summarises the significant visual attributes of the title design in Bollywood movie posters and their major contributions.

Features	Major Contribution
Title Shape	Contribute directly to the perception of meaning without any ambiguity.
Size	Creating emphasis and to increase legibility from the far. In most of the cases, larger x-height and condensed letterforms are evident.
Direction	Helps in creating emphasis as well as dynamic effect.
Letter case	Creates emphasis and increases the readability and legibility. Uppercase is evident in most of the titles.
Weight	Creates emphasis and makes the title aloud. Mostly bold titles are evident.
Letter stroke	Helps in depicting connotative meanings. For example rounded forms are associated with comedy whereas sharp and edgy with action and adventure.
Posture	Helps in depicting mood and feelings such as steady, comic, speedy etc.
Spacing	Helps in creating harmony and togetherness between letters. Also utilized to create theme based titles.
Dimension & Perspective	Creates a lasting impact and mood associated with genres like historical, action and adventure.
Visual Texture	Depicts denotative and connotative meanings related to mood and theme of the movie.
Colour	Mostly associated with connotative meanings. Extensive uses of red and yellow colour reflect the concern of colour legibility aspects.
Shadow	To create contrast between rich coloured background and the title. Also used as ornamentation.
Outline	
Letter as an image	To generate direct and symbolic meaning. Acts as an effective tool to communicate the theme of the films to illiterate as well as the literate audience.
Image as a letter	
Word as an image	To create direct meaning associated with the movie.
Juxtaposition of letter & Image	Helps to intensify the communicative power of the title and show a strong denotative property.

Table 2. Significant attributes and their role in Bollywood movie poster

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NOTES

1 **CINEMASCOPE**: Oxford dictionary defines CinemaScope as “a cinematographic process in which special lenses are used to compress a wide image into a standard frame and then expand it during projection. It results in an image that is almost two and a half times as wide as it is high”. This technique has been used for shooting widescreen movies.

2 Oxford dictionary defines term ‘proximity’ as, nearness in space, time, or relationship. Here it is related to the compositional and relational proximity between title and image.

Mohammad Shahid, Assistant Professor, Graphic Design MAEER's MIT Institute of Design, MITADT University Pune, Maharashtra, India

Email: mohammadshahid@mitid.edu.in / m.shahid0082@gmail.com

Udaya Kumar (PhD), Associate Professor, Department of Design, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, Assam, India

Email: d.udaya@iitg.ernet.in