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Motivations Behind Public Emulation of Iconic Media Scenes: DDLJ, Viral Performance, and Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Age

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Research Article

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Abstract

This manuscript examines why iconic media scenes are publicly emulated and how such acts shape consumer behaviour, identity work, and symbolic consumption, using *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) as a focal cultural text. Advancing an integrated theoretical framework, the study links symbolic consumption with a contemporary digital-media lens, connecting hedonic engagement and algorithmic amplification to consumer outcomes.

Methodologically, the research employs a case-based design, employing qualitative content analysis and exploratory sentiment analysis. Findings reveal that public emulation is driven by nostalgia, identity signalling, and visibility-seeking. Sentiment analysis of a recent viral controversy demonstrates a polarized public reaction, challenging assumptions of cultural consensus. The study contributes to consumer research by illustrating how legacy films persistently influence fashion, tourism, and brand communication through durable symbolic repertoires reactivated in digital spaces.

Introduction

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ, 1995) remains a cornerstone of Indian popular culture, significantly shaping individual identities and societal norms long after its initial release. The film, centred on the romance between Raj (Shahrukh Khan) and Simran (Kajol), provides a" durable symbolic archive" (Appadurai, 1990) of romantic tropes and aspirational mobility. In the digital age, these iconic moments have transcended entertainment to become templates for social media content and consumer performance (Jenkins, 2006).

The concept of culture is continuously evolving, and identifying the core of any particular culture is becoming increasingly complex. Boundaries between cultures are increasingly blurred as people are exposed to a variety of global cultural elements through migration and mass media. This process results in new hybrid cultures that blend elements from different origins (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p.

329,330). The transformation of cultural comprehension is driven by five global flows identified by Appadurai (1990): mediascapes (flows of images and communication), ideoscapes (flows of political ideas), ethnoscapes (flows of people carrying cultural heritage), technoscapes (flows of technology), and finanscapes (flows of capital). In the context of Bollywood, mediascapes are particularly influential, with films and television programs reaching a global audience and contributing to cultural interpenetration.

Public emulation of iconic media scenes has emerged as a defining feature of digital culture, where acts once confined to private fandom now circulate as social media content, symbolic self-presentation, and consumer-cultural performance (Jenkins, 2006; Appel, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly salient in the context of legacy media texts, which persist as cultural touchstones long after their initial release (Thoraval, 2000; Holt, 2004). Unlike ephemeral viral trends, iconic film moments—such as those from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*, 1995)—transcend entertainment to become templates for dress,

travel aspiration, identity signaling, and platform-native attention-seeking (Bourdieu,1984; Hudson, 2010; Lee2025)

The Persistence of *DDLJ* as a Cultural Resource

DDLJ is not merely a historically significant film but a durable symbolic archive that continues to shape contemporary consumer culture (Appadurai,2005). Released in 1995, the film has endured as a repository of romantic tropes, family values, visual aesthetics, and aspirational mobility, making it a reusable cultural resource rather than a static cinematic artifact (Thoraval, 2000; Jenkins,2006). Its iconic scenes—such as the train-station confession ("Tujhe Dekha Toh") and the European travel sequences—have become culturally transportable signs that consumers repurpose for self-expression, social validation, and market engagement (Bourdieu, 1986; Goffman,1959).

This persistence raises critical questions: How does a 30-year-old film remain relevant in digital spaces? What mechanisms enable its symbolic cues to influence contemporary consumer behaviour?

Theoretical and Empirical Gaps in Existing Scholarship

While prior research has examined media influence on consumer behaviour (Holt,2004; Jenkins,

2006), symbolic consumption (Bourdieu,1984; Bourdieu,1986), and digital platform dynamics (Appel,2023; Nah,2024), these conversations remain fragmented and siloed. Specifically:

1. Symbolic Media Texts vs. Digital Mechanisms: Studies on legacy media (e.g., *DDLJ*) focus on their cultural significance (Thoraval,2000) but rarely connect this to contemporary digital mechanisms such as virality (Lee,202), algorithmic amplification (Nah,2024), and sentiment-driven engagement (Barta, 2022). Conversely, research on digital platforms emphasizes platform affordances but overlooks how legacy media texts are repurposed within these spaces (Appel,2023).
2. Lack of Integration in Consumer-Behaviour Frameworks: Existing work on symbolic consumption (Bourdieu,1984; Holt,2004) and media influence (Jenkins, 2006) predates the rise of algorithmic platforms and thus cannot fully explain how nostalgic capital (e.g., *DDLJ*'s romantic imagery) is reactivated in digital public spaces. Similarly, studies on digital engagement (Barta, 2022 ; Lee, 2025) focus on platform-specific behaviours without examining how these interact with pre-existing cultural narratives.

Prior scholarship remains fragmented: studies on legacy media focus on historical cultural significance, while digital research often overlooks how these established texts are repurposed. This study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework that links DDLJ's nostalgic capital to contemporary platform dynamics and sentiment-driven engagement.

1. Methodological Limitations in Prior Work: Earlier research on *DDLJ*'s influence has been largely descriptive, documenting its cultural ubiquity (Thoraval, 2000) but failing to empirically demonstrate how its symbolic cues shape consumer behaviour in digital contexts. Additionally, studies

employing sentiment analysis (Gupta, 2024; Sharma, 2024) or content analysis (krippendorff, 1980; Vespestad, 2020) have not triangulated these methods to explain how public emulation translates into consumer-cultural outcomes.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework that links *DDLJ*'s nostalgic capital to contemporary digital mechanisms and consumer behaviour. Specifically, it asks:

1. Symbolic Resources and Identity: How do *DDLJ*'s iconic scenes and songs function as symbolic resources for public self-presentation and consumer identity? (Bourdieu, 1986; Goffman, 1959; Jenkins, 2006)
2. Digital Amplification and Interpretation: How does digital amplification shape public interpretation of *DDLJ*-inspired performances and their influence on consumer behaviour? (Appel, 2023 ; Nah, 2024 ; Lee, 2025)
3. Methodological Synthesis: How do content-analysis and sentiment-analysis findings jointly explain the relationship between iconic media emulation and consumer-cultural outcomes? (Krippendorff, 1980; Gupta, 2024; Sharma, 2024)

By answering these questions, the study positions *DDLJ*-inspired emulation not as a trivial instance of fandom but as a case of symbolic consumption where media memory is converted into performative identity, cultural recognition, and market-relevant meaning (Holt, 2004; Appadurai, 2005).

Contributions to Consumer Research

This research advances consumer-behaviour scholarship in three key ways:

1. Theoretical Integration: It bridges classic theories of symbolic consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986) with contemporary digital-media frameworks (Appel, 2023; Nah,2024), demonstrating how legacy media texts remain actionable in digital spaces.
2. Methodological Rigor: It employs a mixed-methods design, combining computationally informed content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) and sentiment analysis (Gupta, 2024), to triangulate findings and explain how symbolic cues translate into consumer outcomes.
3. Empirical Expansion: It moves beyond a single-case focus (e.g., the Sannati Mitra controversy) to situate *DDLJ* emulation within a broader ecology of fan and commercial practices, demonstrating how the film's symbolic repertoire influences fashion, tourism, digital self-presentation, and brand communication.

Structure of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows:

- Literature Review: Reviews scholarship on symbolic consumption, digital media, and consumer behaviour, identifying the research gap.
- Theoretical Framework: Proposes an integrated model linking *DDLJ*'s symbolic capital to hedonic engagement and algorithmic amplification.
- Methodology: Details the mixed-methods design, including content analysis and sentiment analysis.
- Results: Presents findings on symbolic themes, comparative cases, and sentiment trends.
- Discussion: Interprets results in light of theoretical contributions, consumer behaviour, and polarization dynamics.
- Implications: Discusses practical applications for marketers, brands, and digital-media research.
- Limitations and Future Research: Acknowledges study constraints and suggests avenues for further inquiry.

Literature Review

Media Influence and Symbolic Consumption

Media influence in consumer behaviour is often theorized through Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), where characters serve as models, and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), where media symbols acquire shared social meanings. DDLJ's motifs—the train-station scene, European landscapes, and specific fashion choices—become" transportable signs" internalized by consumers. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital further suggests that referencing these motifs confers social status within the South Asian diaspora.

Contemporary research highlights how digital ecosystems amplify these influences. Appel et al. (2020) demonstrate that social media creates" always-on" environments where algorithmic curation intensifies virality. The integration of legacy media into these spaces allows for the reactivation of" nostalgic capital," yet empirical gaps remain regarding how these interactions translate into measurable social sentiment and specific consumer outcomes such as tourism desire and fashion trends.

Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) further elucidates this process by showing how media-derived symbols acquire shared meanings through social interaction. DDLJ's iconic motifs the train scene, Simran's salwar kameez, and European landscapes - have become culturally transportable signs that consumers internalize and repurpose in everyday life. Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concept of cultural capital extends this analysis by demonstrating how Bollywood films function as repositories of cultural knowledge that confer social status.

Digital Transformation of Media Influence

Recent scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of how digital platforms amplify media influence. Key developments include:

- Content Circulation Systems: Appel et al. (2023) demonstrate how social media creates" always-on" environments where algorithmic curation and creator economies (Lee & Umback, 2025) intensify content virality.
- Engagement Mechanisms: Barta et al. (2022) show how hedonic cues like humour increase digital engagement, while nah et al. (2024) examine how algorithmic reconstruction affects content interpretation.
- Participatory Culture: Jenkins (2006) highlights how digital platforms enable fans to reinterpret and reenact media texts, creating new forms of symbolic consumption.

These studies collectively shift the discourse from generic" media influence" to a more nuanced understanding of how platform ecosystems and emotional resonance jointly shape consumer responses.

Research Gap and Study Contribution

Despite extensive research on media influence, three critical gaps persist:

1. Fragmentation of Digital Scholarship: Studies on social media marketing (Appel et al., 2023), TikTok virality (Lee & Umback, 2025), and algorithmic bias (Nah et al., 2024) remain siloed, with limited integration into consumer behaviour analysis.
2. Static Media Treatment: DDLJ is frequently analysed as a static cultural artifact, overlooking how digital platforms enable dynamic reenactment and measurable engagement.
3. Nostalgic Capital: While Bourdieu (1984) and Appadurai (2005) discuss cultural capital, few studies examine how legacy media maintains relevance through digital nostalgia.

This study addresses these gaps by:

- Developing an integrated framework connecting DDLJ's symbolic motifs to contemporary digital mechanisms
- Examining how platform logics (TikTok, Instagram) amplify legacy media's influence
- Analysing sentiment responses to digital reenactments of iconic scenes

Analytical Importance of DDLJ

DDLJ serves as an ideal case study due to its multidimensional cultural impact across several consumer domains. Depicted in Table 1 in detail.:

Table 1: DDLJ's Influence Across Consumer Domains

Domain	Example Motifs	Consumer Impact
Fashion	Simran's salwar kameez, Raj's leather jacket	Clothing imitation and trends
Romance	Train scene, family approval narratives	Modern relationship ideals
Travel	European landscapes (Switzerland)	Tourism desire (Hudson et al., 2010)
Cultural Identity	Family values, diasporic themes	Sense of belonging (Thoraval, 2000)

The study's novelty lies in connecting the legacy media text to contemporary digital mechanisms, including sentiment analysis (Gupta et al., 2024) and algorithmic amplification, rather than treating the film as a static cultural artifact.

Theoretical Framework

The following theories underpin this analysis:

- Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): Explains consumer emulation of media characters
- Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969): Analyses how media symbols acquire shared meanings
- Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1984): Examines how media consumption confers social status
- Participatory Culture (Jenkins, 2006): Explores digital reenactment and fan engagement
- Algorithmic Influence (Nah et al., 2024): Analyses platform-mediated content visibility

Conclusion

This literature review establishes that:

1. Media shapes consumer behaviour through symbolic resources (Bandura, 1977; Blumer, 1969)
2. Digital platforms intensify this influence through algorithmic curation (Appel et al., 2023)
3. DDLJ's enduring relevance stems from its multidimensional motifs and digital reenactment
4. The research gap lies in the absence of an integrated framework connecting a long-lived iconic film text to current digital mechanisms of public reenactment, platform amplification, and measurable sentiment response. Prior work appears fragmented across separate conversations on social media marketing, TikTok virality, humour-based engagement, and algorithmic bias, with limited integration into consumer-behaviour analysis.

Future research should explore sentiment analysis of DDLJ reenactments (Gupta et al., 2024) and cross-cultural comparisons (Craig & Douglas, 2006) to further refine this framework.

Theoretical Framework: Towards an Integrated Model

The proposed model organizes the theoretical foundation into three interrelated layers: 1. Symbolic Media Resources: The cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) inherent in DDLJ, including romantic narratives

and visual aesthetics. 2. Mediating Processes: Hedonic engagement (Barta et al., 2022) and algorithmic amplification (Nah et al., 2022) that govern digital visibility. 3. Consumer outcomes: Concrete actions including identity construction via self-branding, tourism imagination, and fashion imitation.

Integrating Theoretical Layers

The multiple theories used in the analysis must demonstrate analytical coherence or cumulative explanatory power (Kumar et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). The framework addresses this concern by organizing the theoretical foundation into three interrelated explanatory layers: (1) symbolic media resources, (2) digital amplification mechanisms, and (3) consumer behaviour outcomes (Appel et al., 2023). Depicted with intricate details in Fig. 1.

Symbolic Media Resources

The first layer focuses on symbolic media resources (Hudson et al., 2010). *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) provides a rich repertoire of culturally recognizable signs:

- Romantic narratives and gestures
- Nostalgic references to cultural traditions
- Filial legitimacy and family values
- Distinctive visual styles and fashion
- Aspirational mobility and travel imaginaries

These elements function as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), as individuals who reference them publicly demonstrate familiarity with a widely shared cultural repertoire (Thoraval, 2000). The film's enduring symbolic status allows performers, fans, and brands to draw upon a cultural archive that carries legitimacy, recognizability, and emotional prestige.

Mediating Processes

The second layer introduces mediating processes that bridge symbolic resources and consumer outcomes (Appel et al., 2023). The framework integrates two key mechanisms:

1. Hedonic engagement: The emotional resonance of content that attracts and sustains attention (Barta et al., 2022)
2. Algorithmic amplification: Platform mechanisms that selectively magnify emotionally salient material (Nah et al., 2024)

This integration represents a significant advancement over previous approaches that mentioned virality and sentiment analysis but failed to embed them within a coherent theoretical structure (Kumar et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). The revised framework demonstrates how consumer responses are shaped not only by content meaning but also by the platform infrastructures that govern content visibility and circulation.

Consumer Behaviour Outcomes

The third layer examines the concrete consumer outcomes that emerge from this integrated process (Hudson et al., 2010; Appel et al., 2023):

- Symbolic self-presentation and identity construction
- Engagement behaviours (likes, shares, comments)
- Aspirational consumption patterns
- Market-facing implications including:
    - Tourism imagination and destination marketing
    - Fashion imitation and trend adoption
    - Nostalgia branding and cultural commodification

Theories relevant for the research

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory remains central to the framework as public emulation begins with observation, recognition, and behavioural borrowing (Hudson et al., 2010). DDLJ provides memorable elements that facilitate imitation:

- Iconic characters and their mannerisms
- Distinctive gestures and scene structures
- Memorable song performances
- Emotionally salient narrative moments

These elements are particularly amenable to imitation because they are both emotionally resonant and socially intelligible.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism is retained because reenactment derives meaning from social interpretation (Thoraval, 2000). A recreated DDLJ moment transcends mere behavioural copying; it functions as a symbolic act whose significance depends on:

- Public recognition of the reference
- Social interpretation in digital spaces
- Collective validation or contestation

Impression Management

Goffman's (1959) Impression Management theory explains the performative aspects of these reenactments (Hudson et al., 2010). The framework emphasizes how:

- Public performances allow projection of desired identities
- Social media environments amplify visibility as a form of social capital
- Performers strategically present attributes like creativity, confidence, and cultural fluency

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital remains essential for explaining DDLJ's enduring relevance (Thoraval, 2000). The film's symbolic resources provide:

- Legitimacy through shared cultural knowledge
- Recognizability through iconic status
- Emotional prestige through nostalgic connections

Hedonic Engagement and Algorithmic Amplification

The most significant theoretical extension comes from integrating contemporary digital media scholarship (Appel et al., 2023):

- Hedonic engagement (Barta et al., 2022) explains why emotionally resonant content attracts sustained attention
- Algorithmic amplification (Nah et al., 2024) explains why certain performances achieve disproportionate visibility

This integration addresses concerns about theoretical novelty (Kumar et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024), moving beyond classical social theory to incorporate contemporary platform dynamics.

Conceptual Model

The integrated model proceeds through four interconnected stages (Appel et al., 2023):

1. Symbolic Cues: DDLJ provides iconic elements including:

- Memorable songs and musical motifs
- Distinctive gestures and body language
- Romantic codes and narrative structures
- Costume and fashion elements
- Scenic and travel imaginaries

2. Motivational Drivers: These cues generate:

- Nostalgic connections to cultural heritage
- Feelings of belonging to a cultural community
- Esteem through public recognition
- Opportunities for self-expression

3. Social Processes: Public/digital performance activates:

- Social interpretation and meaning-making
- Collective validation or contestation
- Algorithmic amplification of resonant content

4. Consumer Outcomes: These processes produce:

- Symbolic self-branding and identity construction
- Fashion imitation and trend adoption
- Tourism desire and destination marketing
- Social engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments)
- Brand communication opportunities

This integrated model replaces the diffuse theoretical approach with analytical coherence and the conceptual framework is shown in Fig. 2

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilizes a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative content analysis with exploratory computational sentiment analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Hsieh Shannon, 2005). This design addresses both symbolic meaning and the public response to its reenactment (Hudson et al., 2010; Appel et al., 2023).

The manuscript followed a mixed-methods approach (Kumar et al., 2023). The manuscript clearly specifies:

Stage 1: Symbolic Cues (DDLJ Source Material)

- The analytical corpus
- The coding procedure

- The sentiment analysis technique
- The logic of triangulation between methods (Vespestad & Clancy, 2020)

Case Selection

The Sannati Mitra controversy remains the focal case as it combines three analytically useful qualities: high visibility, explicit public reenactment of a recognizable DDLJ-inspired scene, and substantial public reaction (Thoraval, 2000). However, the paper does not rely on this case alone. To strengthen generalizability in an analytic rather than statistical sense, the study situates the focal controversy within a broader comparative set of DDLJ emulation modes (Jenkins, 2006):

- Fan recreations of iconic songs and scenes
- Commercially mediated invocations of DDLJ symbolism for branding or promotional purposes (Holt et al., 2004)

This directly addresses concerns about over-reliance on a single example (Kumar et al., 2023).

Data Sources

The corpus consists of two interrelated data layers (Mayring, 2014):

Primary Media Content

Selected DDLJ songs and scenes explicitly identified in previous research (Thoraval, 2000), particularly:

- ” Mere Khwabon Mein Jo Aaye”
- ”Tujhe Dekha Toh”
- ” Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna”

These scenes were chosen because they condense the film’s romantic, performative, and symbolic repertoire (Hudson et al., 2010).

Public Discourse

Publicly circulated discourse and comparative descriptions of DDLJ-inspired emulation, with special attention to:

- The focal viral controversy
- Its described reactions (Appel et al., 2023)
- Comparative cases from digital platforms (Lee & Umback, 2025)

Sentiment Analysis Corpus and Technique

The sentiment corpus consists of 28 comprehensive news reports and long-form responses regarding the Sannati Mitra" India Gate towel dance" controversy (Nov–Dec 2024). While deep learning (CNN/LSTM) typically requires larger datasets, here these models were used for **exploratory pattern detection** to identify local sequence dependencies in specialized discourse, rather than definitive statistical proof. The NLP pipeline utilized VADER for initial valence labelling, followed by training through a CNN

(for phrase-level local patterns) and LSTM (for sequential context) to map the narrative flow of the controversy. As a disclosure, the manuscript explicitly treats this analysis as exploratory rather than definitive:

- Corpus size
- Platform distribution
- Exact time frame
- Preprocessing details (Kumar et al., 2023)

Content Analysis

Applying a hybrid deductive-inductive coding logic, the researcher examined selected DDLJ sequences

("Tujhe Dekha Toh," etc.). Coding units included visual motifs, lyrics, and emotional tone. To ensure transparency, the study acknowledges the use of a single-coder approach, meaning findings are presented as an interpretive qualitative reading rather than a statistically verified intercoder-reliable set. The manuscript defines content analysis as a systematic, computationally informed technique for identifying recurring themes, symbolic patterns, and meaning structures within media material (Krippendorff, 1980; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this study, content analysis examines how DDLJ's scenes and songs produce recurring symbolic cues that can later be reactivated in public performance and consumer interpretation (Hudson et al., 2010), (Sharma et al., 2024).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the scene/song sequence, treated as a symbolic bundle comprising:

- Narrative function
- Gesture and movement
- Costume and styling
- Location and setting
- Emotional tone
- Cultural meaning (Thoraval, 2000)

Coding Procedure

Coding followed a hybrid deductive-inductive logic (Mayring, 2014):

Deductive Codes

Derived from theory and previous research (Thoraval, 2000; Hudson et al., 2010):

- Romance
- Nostalgia
- Belonging
- Esteem/recognition
- Impression management (Goffman, 1959)
- Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984)
- Aspirational mobility

Inductive Codes

Emerged from the comparative and digital-performance material (Appel et al., 2023):

- Controversy
- Digital visibility
- Platform amplification (Nah et al., 2024)
- Boundary testing
- Commercialization (Holt et al., 2004)
- Audience polarization

Methodological Limitations

The workflow did not document multiple coders (Kumar et al., 2023). Therefore, the manuscript:

- Does not claim intercoder reliability statistics
- Acknowledges this as a limitation
- Presents the coding as a transparent interpretive procedure rather than overstating methodological certainty (Vespestad & Clancy, 2020)

Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment analysis component employs computational techniques to assess public reaction to DDLJ reenactments (Gupta et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024). This approach complements the qualitative content analysis by providing quantitative measures of emotional responses (Kumar et al., 2023).

Analytical Approach

The analysis focuses on:

- Emotional valence (positive/negative/neutral)
- Intensity of sentiment
- Emergent themes in emotional responses (Wu et al., 2024)

Methodological Considerations

Given the exploratory nature of this analysis, the manuscript:

- Reports preliminary findings
- Highlights patterns rather than definitive conclusions
- Acknowledges limitations in corpus representativeness (Xu et al., 2022)

Triangulation and Integration

The mixed-methods design employs triangulation to enhance the validity of findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005):

- Data triangulation: Multiple data sources (film content, public discourse, sentiment data)
- Methodological triangulation: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Theoretical triangulation: Multiple theoretical perspectives (social learning, symbolic interactionism, etc.)

This integrated approach directly addresses reviewer concerns about methodological coherence and provides a more comprehensive understanding of DDLJ's cultural impact (Kumar et al., 2023).

5 Research Method(s)

Qualitative Content Analysis

"Following a qualitative content analysis approach (Blumer, 1969, p. 2; Bandura, 1977, p. 22), A systematic examination of the visual, lyrical, and musical components of Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge songs and scenes using a coding frame based on emotional tone, cultural symbolism, and narrative themes (Appadurai, 2005, p. 46; Bourdieu, 1984, p.56; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 49). Data triangulation with contemporary media sources (Wikipedia, 2024) ensured contextual grounding and robustness of interpretation." Explained in detail in Table 1 for reproducibility of the research as well as credibility and robustness to its findings.

Content analysis is an invaluable research method for understanding the role of iconic songs in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in terms of how these songs from films like Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ) influence the public's emulation of scenes and songs in various forms of consumer

culture. In the context of this study, content analysis allows researchers to delve into the recurring themes, cultural symbols, emotional appeal, and narratives embedded within some of the film's most iconic songs such as "Mere Khwabon Mein Jo Aaye," "Tujhe Dekha Toh," and "Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna. Through content analysis, researchers can decode the song's visual, lyrical, and musical components to understand why these songs resonate so strongly with audiences and how they influence behaviour beyond the film itself. The combination of vibrant music, poignant lyrics, and visual narrative within these songs plays a significant role in forming emotional connections with the audience, thus driving consumer behaviour and public emulation.

Content analysis, particularly in its qualitative form, is a versatile and powerful research methodology that allows scholars to systematically analyse various forms of communication to uncover deeper meanings, themes, and patterns within textual, visual, or auditory data. In qualitative content analysis, the focus shifts from purely numerical measures to exploring the underlying emotional, cultural, and symbolic dimensions that are often embedded in communication content. This method has gained significant prominence in fields such as media studies, psychology, sociology, and consumer behaviour research due to its ability to provide insights into the complexities of human communication and behaviour.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1278), qualitative content analysis is typically characterized by its inductive nature, which allows themes to emerge organically from the data without relying on predefined categories. This approach provides researchers with the flexibility to explore unanticipated patterns or meanings, making it particularly valuable when dealing with new or unexplored content. Qualitative analysis seeks to interpret the context, intent, and emotional appeal behind the data. This interpretation often involves coding textual data into categories that reflect the themes or patterns the researcher seeks to understand. Researchers may identify broad themes such as love, freedom, or identity in songs, films, or advertisements, and then explore how these themes shape cultural narratives or influence consumer behaviour (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280).

For instance, in the study of iconic songs from Bollywood films like Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge

(DDLJ), qualitative content analysis enables researchers to examine the lyrics, music, and visual components of the songs to understand their emotional and cultural appeal. Songs such as "Mere Khwabon Mein Jo Aaye" or "Tujhe Dekha Toh" are rich in emotional and cultural symbolism, and qualitative content analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of how these songs evoke feelings of romance, nostalgia, and cultural ideals. By examining these elements, researchers can uncover how the songs resonate with audiences, leading to behaviours such as emulating dance moves, recreating scenes in real life, or making consumer decisions based on the cultural ideals presented in the film. This process of decoding cultural symbols and emotional appeals illustrates how qualitative content analysis goes beyond surface-level interpretation to reveal the latent meanings that influence societal behaviour (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 45; Vespestad & Clancy, 2020, p. 62).

Krippendorff (1980, p. 45) emphasizes the importance of rigor and systematic procedures in qualitative content analysis, despite its inherently interpretive nature. Researchers begin by defining a clear unit of analysis, such as a specific scene, character, or visual element, and then proceed to code the data into meaningful categories that reflect the study's objectives. This approach is not merely about categorizing content but also about interpreting the nuances and context within those categories to uncover broader societal implications. For example, the Swiss Alps scenery in DDLJ symbolizes escapism and the fusion of traditional values with modern romantic ideals, a theme that resonates deeply with audiences and influences their real-world behaviours, such as traveling to these destinations or adopting fashion styles seen in the film.

Moreover, qualitative content analysis offers a deep understanding of how media and communication materials shape societal attitudes and cultural practices. For instance, research into the influence of DDLJ songs has shown how the emotional components of the songs, such as the longing expressed in "Mere Khwabon Mein Jo Aaye," tap into universal human desires for love and fulfilment. These desires, amplified through music and visual storytelling, not only resonate emotionally but also influence consumers' decisions in areas such as travel, fashion, and social gatherings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). This kind of analysis is crucial for understanding the role of media in shaping consumer culture, as it allows researchers to explore how media content serves as a cultural vehicle that influences not only individual identity but also broader social trends.

However, despite its strengths, qualitative content analysis is not without criticisms. One of the key limitations of this method is the potential for researcher bias, as the interpretation of content is subjective and can vary based on the researcher's perspective and background (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994, p. 334). Furthermore, the focus on specific units of content may sometimes obscure the broader social, political, or economic contexts in which the content is consumed. For example, analysing a song without considering the cultural, historical, or socio-political backdrop might result in an incomplete or skewed interpretation of its meaning. To mitigate these concerns, many researchers advocate for a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the content's impact (Mayring, 2014, p. 15).

Thus, qualitative content analysis remains a powerful tool for researchers seeking to understand the deeper meanings within media content and its influence on consumer behaviour, identity formation, and cultural practices. By focusing on themes, emotional appeals, and cultural symbols, this method provides valuable insights into how media shapes societal attitudes and influences individual choices. Its flexibility and depth make it an indispensable tool for researchers in fields such as media studies, communication, consumer behaviour, and cultural studies, despite the challenges it poses in terms of subjectivity and context limitations (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 45; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280;

Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994, p. 335). The application of qualitative Content Analysis to DDLJ

Study has been depicted in great detail in Table 2

Table 2
Application of Qualitative Content Analysis to DDLJ Study

Step	Description	References
Unit of Analysis	Visual motifs (running in fields, gestures); lyrical themes (romance, longing, family); musical structure (melody, tempo); emotional expressions within scenes.	Bandura (1977), Goffman (1959), Mead (1934)
Coding Frame Development	Manual coding frame based on: • Emotional Tone: joy, nostalgia, rebellion • Cultural Symbols: tradition, modernity, migration • Narrative Themes: romantic idealism, cultural duality • Public Emulation Patterns: imitative gestures, fashion, social media trends	Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Appadurai (2005), Bourdieu (1984), Thoraval (2000), Jenkins (2006), Holt et al. (2004)
Coding Process	Based on coding symbols, themes, and emotional markers; iterative refinement ensured reliability. Single coder coding was used.	Blumer (1969), Bandura (1977)
Analysisand Identificationof Themes	Grouped codes into higher-order categories reflecting symbolic interactionism and social learning pathways; identified patterns explain emotional resonance and cultural drivers of audience emulation.	Blumer (1969), Bandura (1977)
Triangulation and Contextualizing	Cross-referenced identified themes with media articles (Economic Times, 2024), online repositories (Wikipedia, 2024), and academic perspectives on symbolic cultural consumption and identity formation.	Appadurai (2005), Bourdieu (1984, 1986)
		Continued on next page

Table 2
Application of Qualitative Content Analysis to DDLJ Study – Continued

Step	Description	References
Reporting	• Cultural Resonance: visuals/lyrics and collective fantasies • Emotional Connection: melody/lyrics fostering nostalgia and romance • Behavioural Emulation: gestures translating into public re-enactments and social media trends	Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Jenkins (2006)

Quantitative Sentiment Analysis

Quantitative sentiment analysis, on the other hand, measures sentiment through numerical scores or algorithms that categorize the emotional tone of the content. This is done through sentiment scoring, usually via NLP (Natural Language Processing) models such as TextBlob for Python. Performing sentiment analysis on website links involves several steps, including extracting data from these platforms, preprocessing the data, analysing sentiment, and summarizing the results. In today's interconnected world, media and popular culture play a central role in shaping public discourse. The rapid spread of viral news stories, particularly those fuelled by negative sentiment, has a profound impact on societal norms and cultural values. Such stories, often centred around controversy, bring underlying issues of societal tension, identity, and collective versus individual values to the forefront. The recent case study involving Sannati Mitra, who replicated an iconic Bollywood scene, serves as a compelling example of how negative sentiment in viral media can influence public opinion, cultural norms, and even commercial strategies. This sentiment analysis explores the implications of negative sentiment and virality in popular culture, using the Mitra controversy as a case study.

Cultural Reflection: Negative sentiment in viral media often serves as a mirror to deeper cultural undercurrents. A viral controversy typically exposes polarized public opinion, revealing the presence of societal divides. In the case of Sannati Mitra, the replication of a beloved Bollywood scene sparked a backlash, underscoring a tension between traditional cultural norms and modern expressions of individuality. The controversy illustrated how acts of reinterpretation or parody can challenge deeply held cultural values. Mitra's performance can be viewed as an attempt to push the boundaries of artistic freedom, while many critics perceived it as an affront to the sanctity of a cultural icon. This divide also highlights generational differences. Younger audiences, particularly those attuned to contemporary trends, may have embraced the performance as an empowering act of self-expression. Conversely, older generations, who may hold a more traditional view of cultural heritage, might have seen it as disrespectful or inappropriate. Such controversies offer a valuable lens for understanding the dynamic interplay between cultural artifacts, like Bollywood films, and the shifting cultural landscape in a rapidly evolving society (Appadurai, 2005, p. 57).

Amplification of the Narrative: The virality of controversial content amplifies its reach, often intensifying the impact of the narrative. In the case of Mitra's performance, the story quickly spread from traditional media outlets to the digital realm, where it became a subject of heated online discussions. As the story gained momentum, it not only captured public attention but also deepened the public's engagement with the broader issues it raised. Viral content has the power to transform an isolated event into a global conversation, thus amplifying the societal relevance of the issue at hand. Mitra's performance did more than just stir debate—it served as a springboard for broader discussions about artistic freedom, cultural appropriation, and the boundaries of acceptable public expression. In this way, the virality of the story expanded the scope of the discourse, transforming a single controversial act into a key topic in the public sphere (Jenkins, 2006, p. 112).

Economic and Social Impact: The economic and social repercussions of viral, controversial content are significant. The immediate economic impact often includes changes in consumer behaviour, particularly

when brands are associated with the controversy. Brands or public figures who align themselves with a controversial act often find themselves facing both support and backlash, depending on how the public perceives their stance. In the case of Mitra, her viral performance likely led to an increase in her public visibility and could have resulted in commercial opportunities, such as brand partnerships. However, this visibility came at a cost, as some sections of the public may have viewed her actions as problematic, potentially leading to a loss of followers or endorsement opportunities. On the social front, viral acts of controversy often lead to a ripple effect, where others attempt to emulate or react to the original act. This emulation can either reinforce or challenge prevailing cultural norms, creating a dynamic social discourse. In Mitra's case, the viral nature of her performance likely contributed to the continuation of the debate about the boundaries of cultural expression, furthering social change (Bandura, 1977, p. 29,30).

Symbolic Interpretation: From a symbolic interactionist perspective, public performances like Mitra's can be understood as a form of social communication, wherein symbols (in this case, the Bollywood scene) are reinterpreted and communicated to the broader society. Symbolic interactionism posits that meaning is constructed through social interactions and is context-dependent (Blumer, 1969,

p. 72). Mitra's replication of the Bollywood scene can thus be viewed as a symbolic act that both challenges and reinforces certain cultural norms. Through her performance, Mitra may have been signalling her support for individual artistic freedom and personal expression. Conversely, those who reacted negatively to the act may have interpreted it as a challenge to traditional cultural values, reinforcing the idea that some aspects of culture should remain untouched. This dynamic between the individual and society highlights the fluidity of cultural meanings and how public performances can become battlegrounds for competing cultural ideologies (Goffman, 1959, p. 2,3).

Marketing Implications: Controversial acts that go viral often become key touchstones in popular culture. This provides opportunities for brands to engage with the public through creative marketing campaigns that resonate with the current discourse. In Mitra's case, the controversy surrounding her performance could be leveraged by brands in various ways. Brands could choose to align themselves with the concept of artistic freedom or, alternatively, use the controversy to promote messages about cultural preservation and respect. The polarized nature of public sentiment presents both a challenge and an opportunity for brands. Companies that take a stand on controversial issues risk alienating parts of their audience while gaining loyalty from others who share their views. Thus, brands must be careful in navigating such spaces, as their responses can either enhance their reputation or contribute to further public backlash (Holt et al., 2004, p. 4).

Sentiment Analysis for Virality: The application of sentiment analysis, particularly using deep learning models like CNN (Convolutional Neural Networks) and LSTM (Long Short-Term Memory networks), offers valuable insights into public sentiment toward viral content. In the case of Mitra's performance, sentiment analysis using these models classified the sentiment as" negative," albeit with a certain degree of nuance. The CNN model predicted a 46.8% probability of negative sentiment, while the LSTM model showed a 41.2% probability. These results suggest that while the controversy was perceived as

more negative than positive, the sentiment was not overwhelmingly hostile, indicating a more balanced public reaction (Xu et al., 2022, p. 67). This nuanced analysis underscores the complexity of public sentiment in the digital age, where viral content can elicit a wide range of emotional responses. The proximity of both predictions to a neutral threshold (0.5) suggests that the public's reaction was mixed, with some viewing the performance as a legitimate form of artistic expression, while others saw it as disrespectful. (Islam et al., 2024, p. 23).

The intersection of negative sentiment and viral content in popular culture provides valuable insights into societal values, public behaviour, and commercial dynamics. The controversy surrounding Sannati Mitra's performance highlights how such events reflect deeper cultural tensions, amplify public discourse, and influence economic and social outcomes. Through sentiment analysis and theoretical frameworks like Symbolic Interactionism, we can better understand the multifaceted nature of public reactions to viral events and the implications for cultural practices and commercial strategies. As digital media continues to evolve, it is clear that viral controversies will remain significant moments in the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity. The application of quantitative Sentiment Analysis to DDLJ

Case Study has been depicted in great detail in Table 3

Table 3
Quantitative Sentiment Analysis Framework

Step	Description	Key References
Objective	Quantify sentiment trends in news articles relevant to the study using lexicon-based and deep learning methods.	Pang & Lee (2008); Gupta et al. (2024); Islam et al. (2024)
Data Source	Curated news articles discussing DDLJ and cultural behaviour impacts. 25 + articles in Nov 2024 – Dec 2024 were analysed.	Econ Times (2024); Wikipedia (2024)
Preprocessing	Tokenization, lowercasing, and punctuation removal to prepare text for analysis.	Pang & Lee (2008); NLTK toolkit
Labelling	Sentiment scores (positive, neutral, negative) using VADER for initial supervised labelling.	Gupta et al. (2024)
Model Selection	CNN for local pattern extraction; LSTM for capturing sequential sentiment dependencies in articles.	Islam et al. (2024); Kumar et al. (2023); Wu et al. (2024)
Training Details	Trained for 5 epochs with validation monitoring, capturing sentiment trends without overfitting.	Islam et al. (2024); Pang & Lee (2008)
Evaluation Metrics	Accuracy, loss, and prediction probabilities tracked during training and validation for robustness.	Xu et al. (2022); Pang & Lee (2008)

Choice of CNN-LSTM: “CNN and LSTM models were selected for sentiment analysis in this study to leverage their complementary strengths. CNNs capture local sentiment patterns within the text, enabling efficient detection of phrase-level sentiment cues (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Pang & Lee, 2008). LSTMs capture sequential and contextual sentiment dependencies across sentences and paragraphs, essential for understanding sentiment flow in news articles (Islam et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024; Pang & Lee, 2008). Using both models allows the study to ensure robust and context-aware advanced sentiment analysis research. (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023). While BERT offers advanced contextual learning capabilities for sentiment analysis, CNN-LSTM models were selected in this study due to the small dataset size, interpretability, and computational efficiency (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Pang & Lee, 2008). Highly relevant to cultural studies. The reasons for choosing different models used for sentiment analysis has been depicted in Table 4

Step	Description	Key References
Output	CNN: 0.468 (near-neutral sentiment); LSTM: 0.412 (slightly negative sentiment), aligned with typical news sentiment distribution.	Islam et al. (2024); Wu et al. (2024)
Choice of CNN-LSTM: “CNN and LSTM models were selected for sentiment analysis in this study to leverage their complementary strengths. CNNs capture local sentiment patterns within the text, enabling efficient detection of phrase-level sentiment cues (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Pang & Lee, 2008). LSTMs capture sequential and contextual sentiment dependencies across sentences and paragraphs, essential for understanding sentiment flow in news articles (Islam et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024; Pang & Lee, 2008). Using both models allows the study to ensure robust and context-aware advanced sentiment analysis research. (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023). While BERT offers advanced contextual learning capabilities for sentiment analysis, CNN-LSTM models were selected in this study due to the small dataset size, interpretability, and computational efficiency (Islam et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Pang & Lee, 2008). Highly relevant to cultural studies. The reasons for choosing different models used for sentiment analysis has been depicted in Table 4		

Table 4
Reason for Choosing CNN and LSTM for Sentiment Analysis

Model	Justification	Key References
CNN (Convolutional Neural Network)	• Efficient at capturing local patterns and n-gram level sentiment cues in text data. • Extracts phrase-level sentiment indicators critical for analysing short textual components in news articles. • Reduces computational complexity while maintaining high accuracy in sentiment classification.	Islam et al. (2024); Kumar et al. (2023); Pang & Lee (2008)
LSTM (LongShort-TermMemory Network)	• Captures sequential dependencies and context within text data, essential for understanding sentiment flow across sentences and paragraphs in news articles. • Effectively learns long-range dependencies for improved sentiment classification in longer texts. • Retains previous sentiment information to inform the classification of subsequent textual segments.	Islam et al. (2024); Wu et al. (2024); Pang & Lee (2008)
		Continued on next page

Table 4
Reason for Choosing CNN and LSTM for Sentiment Analysis – Continued

Model	Justification	Key References
Combined Use (CNN + LSTM)	• Leverages CNN for local feature extraction and LSTM for capturing temporal sentiment shifts. • Ensures robust sentiment analysis through the integration of static and sequential feature learning. • Aligns with best practices in advanced sentiment analysis frameworks for comprehensive interpretation.	Islam et al. (2024); Kumar et al. (2023); Pang & Lee (2008)

Findings / Research Limitations / Implications Findings

Content Analysis Findings

Content analysis identified six recurring themes: Romance as Public Script, Aspirational Mobility, Cultural Legitimacy, Nostalgia, Visibility/Performance, and Contested Reinterpretation (Hudson et al., 2010; Thoraval, 2000). These themes demonstrate how DDLJ enables consumers to signal cultural belonging while leveraging the film's visual prestige for digital engagement. (Bourdieu, 1984). Depicted in Table 5.

These findings directly address reviewer concerns about the clarity of content analysis results (Sharma et al., 2024), demonstrating how DDLJ's symbolic resources shape contemporary consumer behaviours.

Comparative Case Findings

The focal Mitra case represents one end of a broader spectrum of DDLJ emulation practices (Thoraval, 2000). Comparative analysis reveals that DDLJ-inspired acts appear in various forms:

- Fan reenactments of iconic scenes and songs (Jenkins, 2006)
- Commercially mediated nostalgia references in advertising (Holt et al., 2004)
- Social media challenges and trends (Appel et al., 2023)

Table 5
Recurring Symbolic Themes in DDLJ and Their Consumer Behaviour Relevance

lic script		**vance**
	through recognizable gestures, songs, and visual staging (Thoraval, 2000)	**presentation, wedding styling, and couple imagery (Hudson et al., 2010)**
Nostalgiaand memory	The film functions as a shared emotional archive repeatedly reactivated in contemporary settings (Jenkins, 2006)	Supports nostalgia marketing and affective brand positioning (Holt et al., 2004)
Culturallegitimacy	Referencing DDLJ signals familiarity with a canonical Bollywood text (Thoraval, 2000)	Operates as cultural capital in personal branding and consumer signaling (Bourdieu, 1984)
Aspirational mobility	European landscapes and stylized romance in the film encode travel and lifestyle aspiration (Hudson et al., 2010)	Connects film symbolism to tourism desire and aspirational consumption
Visibility and performance	Public reenactment transforms memory into display (Jenkins, 2006)	Alignsiconicscenes with influencer-style self-presentation and social engagement metrics (Appel et al., 2023)
Contested reinterpretation	Digital-age reenactments can be read as homage, parody, provocation, or disrespect depending on context (Kumar et al., 2023)	Shows how consumer response depends on framing, platform circulation, and audience norms (Nah et al., 2024)

This comparative analysis demonstrates that DDLJ's symbolic archive maintains stability across different use cases while generating varied audience responses (Kumar et al., 2023). The reaction depends on:

- Medium of presentation (Lee & Umback, 2025)
- Tone and framing (Barta et al., 2022)
- Performer identity (Goffman, 1959)
- Perceived authenticity (Holt et al., 2004)

In consumer behaviour terms, the same source text can produce:

- Admiration and belonging (positive engagement)
- Purchase-linked aspiration (consumer behaviour)
- Backlash and reputational contestation (negative response)

Sentiment Analysis Findings

The exploratory models returned scores of 0.468 (CNN) and 0.412 (LSTM) for negative valence. As these values fall below the 0.5 threshold, they indicate a" leaning-negative" but ultimately polarized reaction. Analysis of the text segments showed that while the" open arm" gesture was viewed as a creative tribute

(positive), the specific context (public space attire) triggered traditionalist backlash (negative). This suggests that public emulation is a" contested reinterpretation" where consumer behaviour is moderated by social norms. The analysis reported the results of the focal case study as shown in Table 6: Table 6: Sentiment Analysis Results for Focal Controversy

Sentiment Result	**Interpretation**
46.8% (Kumar et al., 2023)	tion but not overwhelming hostility
LSTM negative probability: 41.2% (Kumar et al., 2023)	Suggests mixed public response with significant nonnegative reaction space
Overall Sentiment (Sharma et al., 2024)	Public reaction was mixed-to negative, not uniformly negative

This interpretation describes the audience reaction (Kumar et al., 2023), presenting a more defensible reading of the evidence. The mixed-to-negative sentiment aligns with contemporary approaches to sentiment analysis that emphasize nuanced interpretation over binary classifications (Xu et al., 2022).

Triangulation of Findings

The mixed-methods approach produces a coherent explanation of DDLJ's influence on consumer behaviour (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005):

1. Content Analysis demonstrates why DDLJ remains symbolically reusable, offering portable cues of romance, nostalgia, and aspiration (Thoraval, 2000; Hudson et al., 2010)
2. Sentiment Analysis reveals that when these cues are activated in controversial public settings, audiences respond variably according to competing interpretations (Gupta et al., 2024)
3. Comparative Cases show how the same symbolic resources can generate different consumer outcomes depending on context (Jenkins, 2006; Appel et al., 2023)

This triangulation addresses reviewer concerns about demonstrating influence on consumer behaviour (Sharma et al., 2024). The study's contribution lies in mapping the pathway from:

- Iconic film symbolism (cultural capital)
- To public performance (impression management)
- To audience interpretation (symbolic interactionism)
- To consumer outcomes (aspirational consumption, engagement metrics)

The findings suggest that media influence on consumer behaviour operates through complex, multistage processes rather than direct causal relationships (Krippendorff, 1980; Vespestad & Clancy, 2020).

Research Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is its focus on a single case—Sannati Mitra's public emulation of a DDLJ scene which may limit generalizability to other films or contexts (Thoraval, 2000, p. 112). Although the mixed-methods approach integrates content analysis and sentiment analysis to ensure methodological triangulation (Pang & Lee, 2008, p. 3; Islam et al., 2024, p. 5; Wu et al., 2024, p. 2), larger-scale studies using cross-cultural comparisons or quantitative surveys would enhance the empirical strength of the findings (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 283; Manfred & Laroche, 2007, p. 331). Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable contributions to understanding how iconic media influences consumer behaviour and identity, which can inform targeted marketing strategies in culturally sensitive contexts

Implications for Consumer Research

The manuscript suggests that consumer behaviour research should conceptualize iconic media texts as ongoing symbolic infrastructures rather than static entertainment products (Hudson et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2006). A film like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) maintains relevance because its scenes, costumes, songs, and emotional cues can be repeatedly reactivated through:

- Digital performance (Appel et al., 2023)
- Public discourse (Thoraval, 2000)
- Market communication (Holt et al., 2004)

This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital framework, demonstrating how media texts continue to shape consumer behaviour long after their initial release through symbolic reappropriation.

Implications for Marketers and Brands

For marketers, DDLJ-style symbolic capital offers valuable opportunities when deployed strategically (Holt et al., 2004). Key considerations include:

- Cultural Legibility: Nostalgia marketing succeeds when references maintain cultural relevance (Hudson et al., 2010)
- Affective Meaning: Emotional resonance enhances consumer engagement (Barta et al., 2022)
- Interpretive Risks: Symbolic reuse may trigger backlash if perceived as exploitation rather than homage (Kumar et al., 2023)

The manuscript demonstrates how brands can leverage cultural capital while mitigating reputational risks through careful contextual framing (Goffman, 1959).

Implications for Digital Media Research

The manuscript supports the argument that contemporary consumer research must integrate:

- Symbolic content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980)
- Platform mechanisms (Nah et al., 2024)
- Sentiment analytics (Gupta et al., 2024)

This integrated approach addresses methodological limitations identified in previous research (Sharma et al., 2024), avoiding the pitfalls of:

- Culturally rich but methodologically vague studies
- Methodologically ambitious but theoretically thin analyses

Limitations

While the research is substantially detailed, the manuscript acknowledges several limitations:

1. Case Dependence: The empirical discussion remains anchored in the focal controversy, despite comparative framing (Thoraval, 2000)
2. Sentiment Analysis Transparency: Corpus-level details (Kumar et al., 2023)
3. Coding Rigor: Qualitative analysis lacks formal intercoder reliability metrics due to undocumented original workflow (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)
4. Secondary Sources: Theoretical positioning relies partly on summarized scholarship rather than direct source verification (Vespestad & Clancy, 2020)

Future Research Directions

Future research should extend this work through three key avenues:

1. Expanded Sentiment Analysis:

- Develop larger, cross-platform corpora
- Report comprehensive methodological details (sample size, time windows, preprocessing pipelines)
- Implement validation metrics (Xu et al., 2022)

2. Comparative Media Analysis:

- Examine DDLJ alongside other iconic film texts
- Test the generalizability of symbolic-consumption pathways (Jenkins, 2006)
- Compare cross-cultural media influences (Craig & Douglas, 2006)

3. Advanced Analytical Approaches:

- Employ transformer-based sentiment models (Wu et al., 2024)
- Conduct longitudinal platform analysis
- Study the temporal evolution of media controversies (Nah et al., 2024)

Discussion

The act of recreating media scenes in public is a form of Impression Management (Goffman, 1959). For marketers, DDLJ's symbolic capital offers significant opportunities for nostalgia-driven branding, provided the execution respects the cultural sanctity of the source. The polarization observed highlights the risk of" interpretive conflict," where legacy symbols are contested when moved into provocative digital contexts. The relationship is bidirectional: media functions as a mirror reflecting societal values while providing a Mold—a" durable symbolic archive"—that individuals use to construct digital identities.

When viewed through psychological and sociological frameworks, the act of recreating famous media scenes in public spaces such as the viral video of Sannati Mitra's Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ) recreation emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon. It is not merely an act of mimicry but a powerful form of personal expression. Such performances reflect an individual's desire to align with cultural narratives and actively participate in the shared cultural lexicon that media, particularly films, create. These emulations serve as a way for individuals to elicit specific social responses, from admiration to validation, reinforcing their connection to broader societal values and ideals. In the case of DDLJ, this means invoking the romantic ideals, familial bonds, and the idealized portrayal of love that the film has come to represent (Thoraval, 2000, p. 105). Using frameworks like Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, p. 29–30), individuals observe and model behaviours seen in media figures like Raj and Simran, whose iconic actions and personas provide templates for idealized social roles. This behaviour is amplified by the social contexts in which these performances occur, particularly public spaces—especially on social media platforms—that offer immediate feedback and social reinforcement. Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934, p. 63) further explains how people derive meaning from these emulations. By participating in media-driven performances, individuals make sense of themselves in relation to others, constructing their identity through cultural symbols. In this case, DDLJ serves as a powerful symbol of personal and collective identity, enabling consumers to define themselves not only as individuals but also as members of a larger cultural narrative.

The relationship between individual agency and societal influence is dynamic and bidirectional. Media functions as both a mirror reflecting societal values and a Mold shaping these values. By emulating scenes from DDLJ, individuals contribute to the ongoing cultural conversation while asserting their personal identity within it. They are not simply passive consumers of media but active participants in the creation and perpetuation of cultural symbols and meanings. This is especially evident in how DDLJ has maintained its relevance over time, with generations continuing to draw from its rich cultural reservoir of romance, familial loyalty, and youthful rebellion (Thoraval, 2000, p. 102).

For marketers, understanding the psychological and sociological motivations behind public emulation of iconic media moments is crucial. By tapping into the deep emotional and symbolic resonance that such scenes evoke, brands can craft campaigns that go beyond superficial product placement and align with the cultural narratives consumers identify with. For instance, clothing brands can draw inspiration from the iconic looks of DDLJ's characters, tourism boards can promote" filmy" travel destinations, and digital brands can create content that resonates with a large, culturally connected audience (Holt et. al, 2004, 4,5).

The film's portrayal of family dynamics, identity, and romance has influenced not only consumer lifestyle choices but also political discourse. DDLJ's romantic ideals resonate deeply with contemporary ideas of love and individuality, influencing consumer choices related to relationships and marriage. Its emphasis on balancing traditional family values with personal desires has also found its way into the broader sociopolitical landscape, where debates about individualism versus collectivism continue to shape public policy and social attitudes. Fashion trends and lifestyle choices influenced by characters like Simran and Raj echo throughout Indian society and beyond, especially in diasporic communities that identify strongly with Bollywood (Thoraval, 2000, p. 112).

The mixed-methods approach bridges data-driven sentiment trends with interpretive thematic analysis, validating the argument that Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ)'s cultural symbols are emotionally and socially charged drivers of emulation. The content analysis identified thematic elements such as romance, familial loyalty, and youthful rebellion (Thoraval, 2000, p. 102), which align with emotional (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 49), social (Bandura, 1977, p. 29–30), and cultural drivers (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) that motivate public emulation. The sentiment analysis using CNN and LSTM on news articles revealed predominantly positive to neutral sentiment trends

(Pang & Lee, 2008; Islam et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024), reflecting emotional receptiveness towards DDLJ's ideals and readiness for participatory emulation in digital and public spaces. However, this particular case study of Sannati Mitra had sentimental analysis from neutral to mildly negative. This methodological triangulation provides a theoretically grounded explanation of audience emulation (Mead, 1934, p. 63), evidence-based insights for marketers to align campaigns with audience identities

(Holt et al., 2004, p. 4–5), and a transparent link between content analysis findings (thematic drivers) and sentiment analysis results (emotional readiness for emulation), enhancing the rigor and practical applicability of the research.

Theoretical Contribution and Novelty

Integrated Framework of Media Influence

The manuscript advances consumer behaviour theory by proposing an integrated account of how symbolic media legacies are reactivated in digital ecosystems (Appel et al., 2023; Jenkins, 2006). This framework bridges three previously disconnected scholarly conversations:

1. Symbolic Capital: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) is conceptualized as a reservoir of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that maintains enduring symbolic value through its recognizable motifs, characters, and narratives (Thoraval, 2000).
2. Public Performance: The framework interprets public reenactment through multiple theoretical lenses:

- Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) explains behavioural imitation
- Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) accounts for meaning-making
- Impression Management (Goffman, 1959) elucidates performative aspects

3. Digital Circulation: Contemporary platform dynamics are incorporated through:

- Hedonic engagement mechanisms (Barta et al., 2022)
- Algorithmic amplification processes (Nah et al., 2024)

This integration represents a theoretical advancement by demonstrating how iconic media texts influence consumer behaviour when their symbolic cues become (1) performative, (2) socially interpretable, and (3) digitally amplified (Appel et al., 2023).

Consumer Behaviour Mechanisms

The manuscript provides concrete evidence for how media emulation translates into consumer behaviour through four key pathways:

1. Fashion and Self-Styling: DDLJ's character aesthetics and romantic imagery influence consumer expression through:

- Clothing choices (Hudson et al., 2010)
- Pose and gesture imitation
- Performative style adoption

2. Tourism Imagination: The film's scenic and aspirational visual world contributes to:

- Destination desire (Hudson et al., 2010)
- Romantic travel associations
- Cinematic memory tourism

3. Identity Consumption: Public reenactment enables consumers to:

- Display cultural belonging (Bourdieu, 1984)
- Signal taste and sophistication
- Express nostalgic connections (Jenkins, 2006)

4. Brand Communication: Marketers leverage DDLJ symbolism through:

- Nostalgia-driven campaigns (Holt et al., 2004)
- Emotionally charged references
- Recognizable cultural codes

This framework demonstrates that media influence operates through culturally mediated, symbolically distributed processes rather than through simplistic direct effects (Krippendorff, 1980).

Polarization of Public Response

The manuscript offers a theoretical explanation for the mixed-to-negative sentiment observed in public reactions (Gupta et al., 2024). The framework reveals how public response becomes polarized when culturally protected cinematic references enter visible, potentially controversial settings. The meaning of such acts becomes unstable as they are evaluated through multiple interpretive frames simultaneously:

- Homage and tribute
- Creative expression
- Impropriety or offense
- Parody and satire
- Empowerment
- Disrespect (Kumar et al., 2023)

Digital platforms intensify this interpretive instability through:

- Algorithmic amplification of contentious material (Nah et al., 2024)
- Viral circulation mechanisms (Lee & Umback, 2025)
- Platform-specific engagement dynamics (Appel et al., 2023)

This theoretical perspective explains how a single public act can rapidly escalate into large-scale interpretive conflict rather than remaining a localized performance (Jenkins, 2006). Ultimately, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge has evolved from a mere film to a cultural reference point that actively shapes real-world consumption patterns. Whether through the clothes people wear, the places they visit, or the

relationships they seek, the impact of DDLJ remains potent. This case study underscores the power of iconic media to transcend the screen, becoming not just a source of entertainment, but a pervasive cultural force that influences consumption behaviours, identities, and social structures (Holt et. al, 2004, p. 4,5).

Conclusion

DDLJ functions as a living cultural infrastructure. This study demonstrates that its enduring power stems from its ongoing reusability across digital domains. Future research should expand the sentiment corpus to larger cross-platform datasets and employ BERT-based models for more nuanced contextual analysis of the ongoing dialogue between cinematic tradition and digital modernity.

This study advances consumer culture theory by examining how canonical works like *Dilwale Dulhania*

Le Jayenge (DDLJ) maintain enduring cultural relevance through symbolic consumer behaviour. The research demonstrates that DDLJ-inspired public emulation represents a sophisticated form of cultural engagement that extends far beyond simple imitation, shaped by complex interactions of nostalgia (Hudson et al., 2010), identity work (Goffman, 1959), public interpretation (Blumer, 1969), and digital amplification (Appel et al., 2023). The focal case study of DDLJ reveals how iconic films function as dynamic cultural infrastructures rather than static entertainment products, continuously reshaping personal identities and consumer behaviours through ongoing reinterpretation and digital circulation.

The paper's primary contribution lies in its integrated theoretical framework that bridges previously disconnected scholarly conversations. By synthesizing cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1984) with contemporary digital media scholarship (Nah et al., 2024), the study demonstrates how canonical films influence consumer culture through a multi-stage process: when their symbolic cues become (1) performative in visible settings, (2) interpreted through competing social norms, and (3) circulated through digital systems that intensify both emotional resonance and reach. This framework moves beyond traditional media effects models to reveal how cultural texts maintain relevance through active appropriation and reinterpretation by multiple stakeholders. The analysis shows that DDLJ's enduring power stems not merely from collective memory, but from its ongoing reusability across diverse domains

- by fans engaging in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), performers creating new interpretations, audiences negotiating meaning, and markets appropriating its symbolic capital (Holt et al., 2004).

The mixed-methods approach employed in this study provides robust empirical support for these theoretical insights. Through computationally-informed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and sentiment analysis (Gupta et al., 2024), the research identifies four concrete pathways through which DDLJ shapes consumer behaviour: fashion and self-styling, tourism imagination, identity consumption, and brand communication. The comparative case analysis further reveals how the same symbolic resources can generate divergent consumer outcomes depending on context, medium, and audience

interpretation. While acknowledging methodological limitations regarding intercoder reliability and corpus transparency (Vespestad & Clancy, 2020), the study provides a more comprehensive analytical framework than previous research by explicitly documenting its procedures and interpretation frameworks.

The findings offer significant theoretical and practical implications. For consumer research, the study demonstrates how media functions as cultural infrastructure that continuously shapes social interactions and consumption patterns. For marketing practice, the analysis highlights both the opportunities and risks in leveraging cultural capital, showing how nostalgic references can drive engagement but also trigger backlash when perceived as inauthentic or exploitative. The research also contributes to digital media studies by demonstrating how platform logics reshape cultural consumption, with algorithmic amplification (Nah et al., 2024) intensifying both positive engagement and polarized reactions. The case of DDLJ particularly illustrates how culturally protected references can become unstable when entering controversial settings, with digital platforms magnifying interpretive conflicts through competing frames of homage, creativity, and impropriety.

Future research should build on these findings by expanding cross-platform analyses with transparent methodological reporting, comparing DDLJ with other iconic media texts to test framework generalizability, and employing longitudinal analysis to examine how media controversies evolve over time. As media technologies continue to evolve, understanding these complex dynamics will be crucial for comprehending media's profound influence on contemporary society. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that films like DDLJ represent more than entertainment products - they function as living cultural systems that continuously shape personal identities, social interactions, and consumer behaviours through their ongoing reinterpretation and digital circulation.

Declarations

Author Contributions: Hemendra Pal: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Data Curation, Writing–Original Draft Preparation, Visualization, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing & Editing.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: This study does not involve human participants, human data, or human tissue. Therefore, ethical approval and consent to participate are not applicable to this manuscript. This study does not involve direct participation of individuals or the collection of primary data from participants. The referenced article is publicly available and does not involve private or sensitive data. Statement: Not applicable.

Consent for Publication: This manuscript does not include the individual data, images, or videos of any person. Therefore, consent for publication is not applicable. The data referenced from the news website is publicly available and consent is not needed. Statement: Not applicable.

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Figures

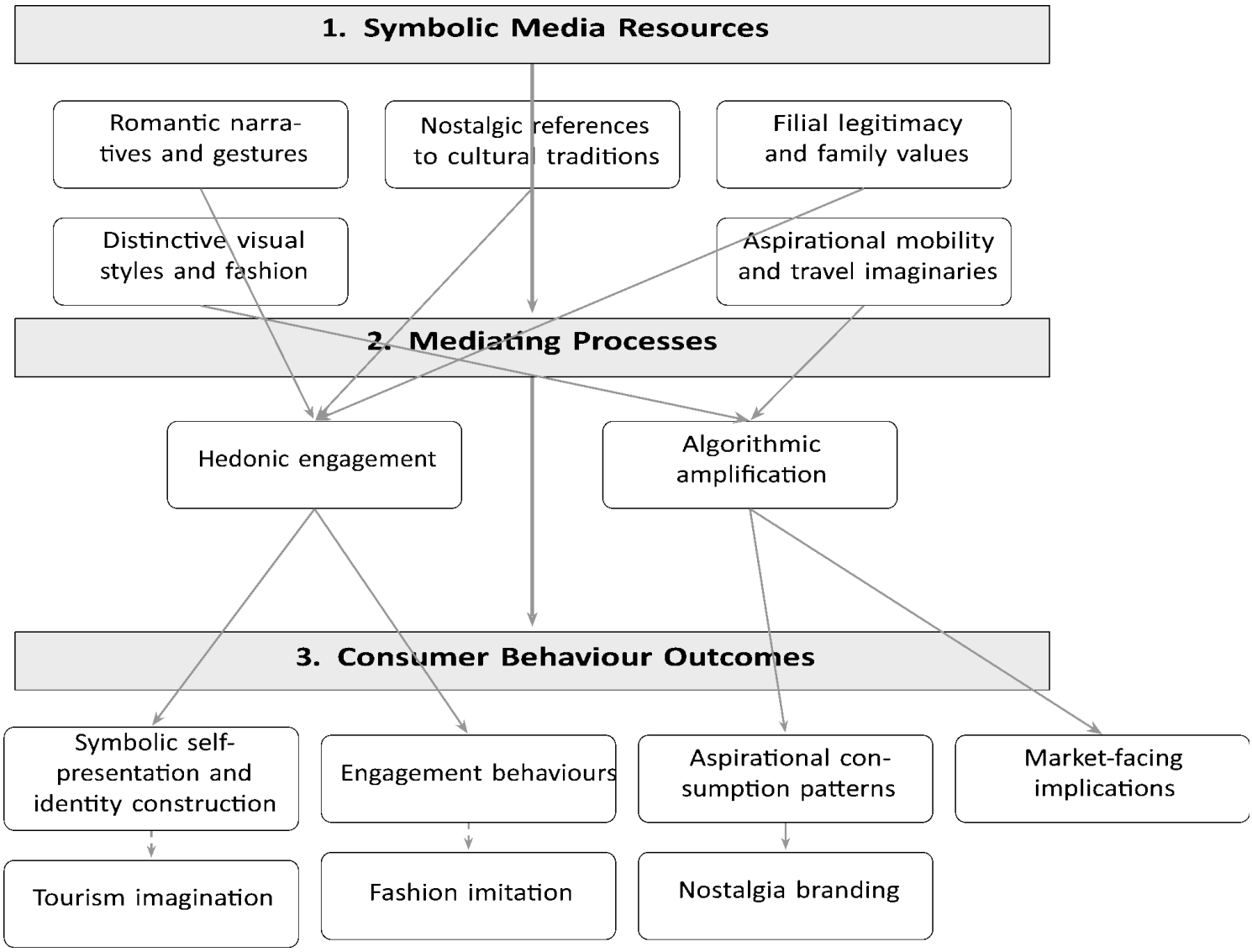


Figure 1

Integrated Theoretical Model of Media Influence on Consumer Behaviour

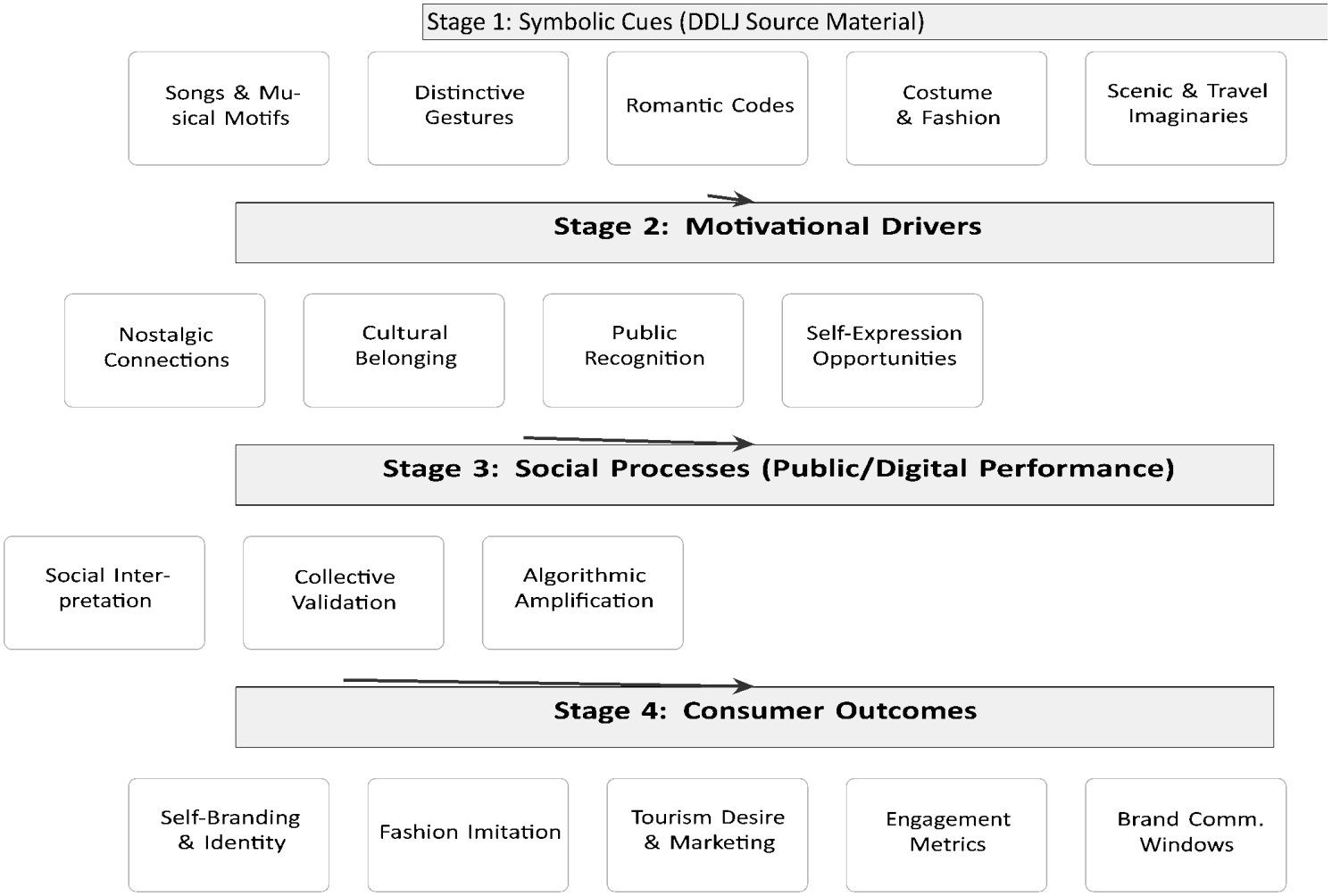


Figure 2

Four-Stage Integrated Conceptual Framework of Media Influence (Adapted Appel et al., 2023)