Hidden in Plain Sight: The University’s South Asian Film Collection

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RESEARCH QUESTION
Are students utilizing the South Asian Film Collection of the International and Area Studies Library at UIUC to its potential? If not, what can be improved?

OVERVIEW
The International and Area Studies Library provides access to interdisciplinary services and collections related to area, international, and global studies in vernacular languages and English. It is located in room 321 of the Main Library.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this project is to determine if the resources Illinois has to offer are being fully utilized and if not, determine what can be done to solve this problem.

METHODOLOGY
Students were divided into groups in discussion section for the class CWL 207, Indian Cinema in Context, and were each tasked with conducting interviews to determine if students had used the South Asian film collection here at UIUC. Once these results were collected, each group analyzed their information and produced a summary of their findings. All in all, there were 9 groups researching this topic. The results of the 9 groups were then aggregated and the findings of the class collectively were used to answer the research question.

RESULTS
Students are not aware enough to utilize the film collection: The results we got back indicated that many students have not even heard of the South Asian Film Collection at UIUC, despite most interviewees being of Asian descent and most having watched dozens of Bollywood movies before. Of the students who have heard about the South Asian film collection, only a select few have actually visited it in person at the IASL.

After being informed, students have mixed thoughts regarding the film collection: When asked after being informed of this collection whether they would use the South Asian film collection in the future, interviewees had split opinions. For some students, this information was met with indifference while others cited this resource as a novel way to experience South Asian culture. A third group of interviewees found this resource to be worth exploring only for use during a research project. However, the underlying consensus is that the South Asian film collection here at UIUC is vastly underutilized.

CONCLUSION
Broadcast Information: Our findings indicate that the South Asian film collection’s use from our student body is only marginal. Based on feedback given during our interviews, it would be beneficial to better advertise the South Asian film collection to create awareness on campus of this resource’s existence since a startling amount of people are unaware of this film collection. Some ways that this can be accomplished are having free movie screenings, creating posters, sending email newsletters, and collaborating with South Asian RSOs. Although the IASL actively maintains a social media presence on Twitter and Facebook, it needs to find ways of reaching a broader audience in order to promote itself and its various services. This should attract potential visitors and drum up support for the South Asian film collection.

Distinguish from competing services: The other side of the coin involves digitalizing movies for easier access. Students that had heard about the South Asian film collection were still reluctant to visit it because of their pre-existing access to South Asian films. These students described methods such as YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and DVDs as quick and reliable means of watching the movies they enjoy. In order to appeal more to busy students, having part of the South Asian collection be digitalized will incentivize the collections’ use. Furthermore, highlighting the historical nature of the film collection and the evolution of the film industry will help the South Asian film collection carve out a niche role, so that it can compete with other streaming services.