

Children's Subjective Film Evaluation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to learn more about children's subjective cinema ratings of recent films. The main question addressed in this study is what aspects children consider while evaluating films. When it comes to film evaluation, it is assumed that youngsters have different requirements. The researcher used the tool designed and standardized by Schneider (2012) for measuring subjective film evaluation. The sample selected for the study was comprised of 93 school children taken from a government school in Shamshabad district, Telangana, India. The research study was quantitative. It was found that boys and girls differ significantly in their subjective evaluation of films. Differences were observed in the perceptions of boys and girls concerning the eight factors: story verisimilitude; story innovation; cinematography; special effects; recommendation; innocuousness; light-heartedness, and cognitive stimulation. The observed differences may be due to the rigid gender roles and patriarchal value systems that groom and nurture children's thinking, imagination, reflections, and values. Furthermore, hegemonic discourses and socialization processes allow boys to walk around, converse, talk, and participate more with their friends, whereas girls are restricted to watching movies in theatres, with their peer groups, and freely participating in debates.

Keywords: subjective film evaluation; verisimilitude, innocuousness, cinematography and cognitive stimulation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

How do children evaluate films? Do children set any criteria to assess films? What do they feel and experience while watching films? What thoughts and ideas do the films provoke in them? Why do children like some films, but not others? What aspects do they feel are essential in evaluating films?

What beliefs and values influence their perceptions? These are some seminal questions in contemporary film studies in education. This study is an attempt to address a few of the above questions. What is fascinating about children is understanding their world of signification, meaning-making, involvement, and active participation in watching films. Films allow children to explore places, countries, people, and nature. Films arouse excitement, eagerness, enjoyment, pleasure, excitement, and imagination. Children are emotionally immersed in experiencing the images, symbols, and characters in films, and they imaginatively imagine and visualize what will happen in the film's story. Gone are the days when films were only seen on television on holidays. The advancements in science and technology, on the one hand, and liberal policies, on the other hand, have made watching films very convenient. Today's children use smart phones to watch films and even download films of their choice. Children usually watch films with their favorite actors and themes. The majority of today's children analyze films based on sound and music effects, heroic stunts and adventurous actions, and their favorite actors and actresses.

Most importantly, they rely on the peer group's opinions, feelings, and beliefs. The evaluation of films is no longer

limited to film critics, film theorists, or juries, "[it] is something that we do all the time" (Carroll, 2003, p. 148). The present research study deals with the investigation of children's subjective film evaluations of contemporary films. According to Schneider (2012), "drawing on social cognition theories, subjective movie evaluation criteria can be defined as standards that viewers use for assessing the features of films and conceptualized as mental representations of—or attitudes towards—specific movie features, guiding cognitive and affective information processing of movies and corresponding evaluative responses."

In the recent past, several research studies on children's perceptions of films have been conducted in cultural studies, media studies, entertainment studies, audience studies, and film studies. (Bryant & Vorderer, 2006; Oliver & Nabi, 2004; Soto Sanfiel & Vorderer, 2011; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). Most of these studies focused on analyzing film's aesthetic, moral, psychological, and socio-cultural aspects. Very little research is available today on how people appraise films while watching what they experience, primarily how children and adults evaluate films.

Evaluation of films is a subjective activity, and most importantly, it is a socio-cognitive process. Understanding cognitive appraisals is not simple. Such processes are multi-dimensional and reflect complex decision-making practices. Very few studies explored film evaluation criteria, including jury evaluation for nominating and declaring awards (Desai and Basuroy, 2005; Dodds and Holbrook, 1988; Gemser, Leenders, and Wijnberg, 2008; Nelson, Donihue, Waldman

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and Wheaton, 2001; Prag and Casavant, 1994; Simonton 2009a; and Smith and Smith 1986). Various expert organizations and media institutions across the globe are professionally involved in evaluating and critiquing films. They do this critical specialized activity through a set of standards and values (Basuroy, Chatterjee, & Ravid, 2003; Basuroy, Desai, & Talukdar, 2006; Boatwright, Basuroy, & Kamakura, 2007; Chang & Ki, 2005; Desai & Basuroy, 2005; Gemser, van Oostrum, & Leenders, 2007; Jansen, 2005; Litman, 1983; Plucker, Holden, & Neustadter, 2008; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005).

A few studies focused on understanding the dynamics of public opinion and how word of mouth, including the online social media fraternity, directs and constructs beliefs about films through their changing standards of judgement and evaluation (Chintagunta, Gopinath, & Venkataraman 2010; Cooper-Martin 1992; Eliashberg, Jonker, Sawhney, & Wierenga 2000; Liu, 2006; Mahajan, Muller, & Kerin 1984; Moul, 2007; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005).

From the literature review, it is found that not many research studies are available that address the question of what is essential when children like, watching, and evaluating films. What is important to explore is what subjective film evaluation criteria school-going children consider for judging and making opinions on films.

In this context Schneider(2017,p.1) says,

“Conceptually speaking, it is assumed that subjective movie evaluation criteria are mental representations of important attitudes toward specific film features that have been formed during our cinematic socialization. These specific film features can be broadly categorized as film-inherent features (e.g., story, cinematography), film-external features (e.g., awards, film critiques), or anticipated effects of use (e.g., features that might be entertaining or require cognitive effort to cope with). Like attitudes, subjective movie evaluation criteria can vary in their importance. Especially important attitudes have been found to be stable over time, resistant to persuasion, influential in information processing, and predictive of behavior”.

In light of the foregoing, a study has been conducted to determine what factors children consider when evaluating films.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this research is to investigate children's perceptions of film appraisal and determine whether there are any differences between boys' and girls' subjective film evaluations.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in a government school in India's Telangana state's Shamshabad area. A total of 93 pupils from class XI, ranging in age from 15 to 17, were included in the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify the study's sample. To investigate the study's goal, a descriptive research approach was used. The subjective film evaluation questionnaire designed by Schneider (2012) was adopted in the study. The subjective film evaluation criteria

are divided into eight categories with a total of 32 elements. Story Verisimilitude, Story Innovation, Cinematography, Special Effects, Recommendation, Innocuousness, Light-heartedness, and Cognitive stimulation are the eight elements of this instrument. The scale for this instrument is a 5-point scale. Number 5 indicates "extremely important," number 4 indicates "very important," number 3 indicates "moderately important," number 2 indicates "somewhat important," and number 1 indicates "not at all important." Children's scores are divided into three categories: low, moderate, and high. A pilot study was done to determine the instrument's suitability and feasibility.

The test-retest method was adopted to calculate the reliability of the instrument. The tool was pilot tested with 40 school children from a government school in Telangana, in the Hyderabad district. The statistical analysis during the first pilot testing showed that the mean score was 51, and the standard deviation was 2.8. On the second pilot test, the mean score was 53, and the standard deviation was 2.5. The reliability coefficient (r) was found to be 0.73. Since the reliability coefficient (r) was significant, the test was used for the main study.

The subjective film evaluation criteria are defined as the criteria that the viewers use to evaluate the film's features. Subjective film evaluation is conceptualized as mental representations or perspectives regarding specific movie features that guide cognitive and affective information processing of movies and correspond to evaluative responses (Schneider, 2012). The subjective film evaluation tool was circulated among the children identified for the study, and their responses were collected, analyzed, and interpreted through appropriate statistical procedures and tests.

The sample distribution concerning subjective film evaluation is presented below. Subjective film evaluation consists of the eight following factors, which are discussed below.

1. Story verisimilitude,
2. Story innovation,
3. Cinematography,
4. Special effects,
5. Recommendation,
6. Innocuousness,
7. Light-heartedness, and
8. Cognitive stimulation.

The perceptions of children with respect to these eight factors are presented and discussed here under.

3.1. Story Verisimilitude

The first factor is story verisimilitude, which consists of three elements that are related to current events. The following are the three items that represent story verisimilitude:

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the story the film tells is based on true facts (e.g. based on historic event or tells the story of a real person)?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the story the film tells is realistic?
- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film addresses contemporary issues?

Children were asked to respond to the above three items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the story verisimilitude for them, while evaluating a film.

3.2. Story Innovation

The second factor is the story innovation, which reflects the originality of the story. The two items reflecting story innovation are as follows:

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film tells a story in a novel way?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the story the film tells is unusual?

Children were asked to respond to the above two items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the story innovation for them, while evaluating a film.

3.3. Cinematography

The third factor is cinematography, which comprises four items reflecting the cinematic techniques (e.g. the film's camera work and the shots). The items, which signify cinematography, are presented below.

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the film's camera work and the shots?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the way how the film is cut or how individual shots are cut together?
- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the illumination and lighting in the film?
- iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the color scheme in the film (e.g., the use of black-and-white, red as symbol or signal color, etc.)?

Children were asked to respond to the above four items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the cinematography for them, while evaluating a film.

3.4. Special Effects

The fourth factor is special effects, which focuses on technical effects. It also reflects cinematic techniques. Special effects consist of four items, which are presented below.

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the production of the film was extravagant?
- ii) When evaluating film, how important for you personally is the digital (post) editing of the film?
- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the film illusions (e.g., special effects such as fire, explosions, stunts, combat scenes)?
- iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the technical design of the film altogether?

Children were asked to respond to the above four items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is

assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important are the special effects for them, while evaluating a film.

3.5. Recommendation

Recommendation consists of five items reflecting external resources for film evaluation. It is the fifth factor. The five items representing recommendation are as follows.

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the award(s) for the film?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the reviews of the film in the "media" (e.g., press, radio & TV, film sites in the internet)?
- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the opinions of friends, acquaintances, etc. about the film?
- iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is how the film is advertised (e.g., on TV or movie trailers, posters, newspaper, and magazine ads)?
- v) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is the fact that the film is considered a classic movie?

Children were asked to respond to the above five items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the factor recommendation for them, while evaluating a film.

3.6. Innocuousness

The sixth factor innocuousness consists of four items which reflects that there are no cruel scenes which are frightening, violent or enraging (Schneider, 2012, p. 79). The items representing Innocuousness are presented below.

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is free of scenes that you find disgusting?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is free of scenes that make you angry?
- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is free of scenes that you find frightening?
- iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is free of scenes containing violence?

Children were asked to respond to the above four items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the factor innocuousness for them, while evaluating a film.

3.7. Light-heartedness

The seventh factor is labeled light-heartedness and comprises of five items reflecting enjoyment and pastime. The five items, which represent light-heartedness, are presented below.

- i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film puts you in a cheerful mood?
- ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that you find the film humorous?

- iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that you find the film entertaining?
- iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that you find the film relaxing?
- v) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film takes your mind off everyday things?

Children were asked to respond to the above five items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the light-heartedness for them, while evaluating a film.

3.8. Cognitive-Stimulation

The eighth factor is cognitive stimulation and consists of five items reflecting the viewer's cognitive progressions such as reflection or learning. It is uniform with previous factors. The items representing the cognitive stimulation are presented below.

- (i) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is thought-provoking?
- (ii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film is intellectually challenging?
- (iii) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film communicates values?
- (iv) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that watching the film broadens your knowledge?
- (v) When evaluating films, how important for you personally is that the film motivates you to do something (e.g., politically, socially, search for information)?

Children were asked to respond to the above five items. Their perceptions were collected on a five point Likert scale. It is assumed that the evaluative responses of children represent their perceptions about how important is the cognitive-stimulation for them, while evaluating a film.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: SUBJECTIVE FILM EVALUATION

The subjective film evaluation tool was distributed to the children of the sample, and their impressions were collected and analyzed, as previously mentioned. The information gathered has been organized and presented in the following table.

Table 1: Distribution of children with respect to subjective film evaluation

Gender		Subjective Film Evaluation How important films are?			Total
		Low	Moderate	High	
Boys	Count	5	16	25	46
	% Within Gender	10.9%	34.8%	54.3%	100.0%
Girls	Count	6	28	13	47
	% Within Gender	12.8%	59.6%	27.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	11	44	38	93
	% Within Gender	11.8%	47.3%	40.9%	100.0%

The table above shows that 11.8 percent of children believe story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, lightheartedness, and cognitive stimulation are less significant. Story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness, and cognitive stimulation are all moderately significant to 47.3 percent of children. In analyzing films, 40.9 percent of children opined story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness, and cognitive stimulation are very significant.

The gender wise analysis of the perceptions of children about story verisimilitude of the films is as follows:

It is observed 10.9% of boys and 12.8% of girls opined that the story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness and cognitive stimulation of films is less important to them. For 34.8% of boys and 59.6% of girls expressed moderate importance of all the eight factors.

Boys and girls who felt that the story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness and cognitive stimulation of films are highly important to them in evaluating films are 54.3% and 27.7% respectively. It is evident that the percentage of boys who felt that the story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness and cognitive stimulation are greatly important to them in evaluating films is high compared to girls.

From the above, it is observed that there are differences between the responses of boys and girls concerning their subjective film evaluation of the films. Hence, there are strong reasons to formulate the following hypothesis.

Boys and girls differ significantly with respect to their subjective film evaluation.

The above alternative hypothesis is translated into null form and was tested with Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistical test. The results are furnished below.

Table 2: Distribution of Mean Ranks and Mann-Whitney-U

Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Boys	46	52.79	2428.50
Girls	47	41.33	1942.50

	Subjective Film Evaluation
Mann-Whitney-U	814.500
Wilcoxon W	1942.500
Z	-2.256
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.24

The above table shows that the mean ranks of boys and girls are 52.79 and 41.33, respectively. From the Mann-Whitney test statistics analysis, the U value is 814.500 and the Z score is -2.256. The p-value is 0.024. The p-value measures the strength of the data evidence against the null hypothesis. The smaller the p value, the stronger the sample evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis. The p-value indicates that there are only 2.4% of the chances that the null hypothesis is correct. Hence, the sample results are not consistent with the true null hypothesis.

Since the p-value is small enough, the sample is so incompatible with the null hypothesis that one can reject the null for the entire population. Hence, it can be inferred that boys and girls differ significantly in their subjective film evaluation. In other words, based on the strong evidence (p-value <0.05, i.e., 0.024), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that the difference between boys and girls concerning subjective film evaluation is statistically significant.

V. CONCLUSION

This study shows that story verisimilitude, story innovation, cinematography, special effects, recommendation, innocuousness, light-heartedness, and cognitive stimulation are important to more number of boys than girls in evaluating films.

This finding could be that boys move freely in society, are easily affiliated, and build social networks across age groups. This would enable them to discuss, acquire, share, and exchange ideas with others. Peer group influence is generally very high in boys compared to girls. Generally, boys move around, chat, talk, and participate in gossip making and dialogue with their friends about the films, and they learn new languages and strategies for evaluating ideas and images. However, girls like watching films, but the social norms and restrictions don't allow them to cross borders and immerse themselves in debates, discussions, free talk, and various discourses outside the home. Due to social exposure and continuous interaction with others, boys become critical and develop awareness about various aspects of film production. In other words, the gender role prescriptions and the restricted social environment at home and school would significantly influence girl children's evaluation of films.

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