How do Filmmakers Keep the Viewers Bolted to the Screen?

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Abstract

Cinemas have a significant experiential quality: because as the pictures move, the audience also moves and this way it connects with the senses of the audience. At whatever point we head out to the motion pictures we not just observe the film, the universe of the screen conveys a message to us, as well as get the chance to be drenched in situations, which animates to various levels of awareness and recognition. The Film Psychologists in their endeavours to clarify the processes of perceptual experience, have started delving into incorporating the artificial intelligence and neurosciences and have tried to understand the artificial neural networks which provide with clues on why a film is more influential and successful compared to others and what knowledge film makers require to reshape the idea of a film to suit the target audience. This study, from the perspective of excitation theory, tries to understand how do producers draw the audience into the show and keep them bolted to the screen? How do films drive the feelings of the audience? And, for what reason some motion pictures are more appealing or convincing? These questions have always remained the areas of concern whenever the cinema is studies from Psychological perspective. But, for a logical understanding, the more scientific approach is required. This study looks for exact search of variables for building the hypothetical construct which best fits the studies in this dimension.

Introduction

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) had introduced the concept of “imperceptible” and “percipiendium”. Emanuel Kant’s idea of “object” and “sublime” are at the core of the concept of these ideas (Kant, 1987). When a film fails to comprehend the external world to the viewer it is the state of percipiendium. This idea of Deleuze moves forward the Kant’s idea of “cogito” and “cogitandum” to the idea of “sensible” to “sentiendum”. So, a “being of sensation” is at the core of the Deleuze’s idea of the “validity of beings”. This ontological view of these Philosophers has provided the scholars of aesthetics with the idea of comprehending the logic of sensation and the distribution and diffusion of the sensible. Rudolf Arnheim (1974) added scientific dimension to Munsterberg’s conviction that film isn't an impersonation of life. Arnheim exhibited a stock of developmental means for imaginative controls of visual scenes. With the improvement of imaging systems, especially functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), it has become possible to map the neural processes. For sure, it is currently possible to observe using the scanning machines the influence of cinema on the senses. Along these lines, Psycho- Cinematic offers a chance to consider our motion picture understanding from a logical viewpoint that interfaces psyches, cerebrums, and involvement with the motion pictures. The Film Psychologists in their endeavours to clarify the processes of perceptual experience, have started delving into incorporating the artificial intelligence and neurosciences and have tried to understand the artificial neural networks which provide with clues on why a film is more
influential and successful compared to others and what knowledge film makers require to reshape the idea of a film to suit the target audience. The Cognition Emotion Labs are already using different ways to measure the effectiveness of the films and the overall message the film has, but this study also requires the variables which could prove a tool for measuring the “logic of sensation” and “distribution of sensible”.

Statement of the Problem

Directing the audience’s attention to the sensuality of the medium is the purpose of haptic imagery. The works of Bolter and Grusin (1999) emphasize on the idea of disappearing and past images that go beyond the responsibility of preservation of culture. It confronts the sensuality of the medium with historicity, temporality and materiality of the story. Films have a significant experiential quality: because as the pictures move, the audience also moves and this way it connects with the senses of the audience. At whatever point we head out to the motion pictures we not just observe the film, the universe of the screen conveys a message to us, as well as get the chance to be drenched in a situation that animates to various levels of awareness and recognition.

In the previous decades the unfathomable increase of the advancements through which moving pictures can be delivered, created new settings for coming into contact with pictures that move, and an extension of the "artistic" encounter itself that can never again be associated solely to films. Though the films have broadened in their canvas, the majority of methodologies have ignored the accentuation on bringing together impact of film on the society and the senses.

Therefore, from the perspective of excitation theory, this understanding further paves way for psychological analysis of how do producers draw the audience into the show and keep them bolted to the screen? How do films drive the feelings of the audience? And, for what reason some motion pictures are more appealing or convincing? These questions have always remained the areas of concern whenever the cinema is studies from Psychological perspective. But, for a logical understanding, the more scientific approach is required. This study looks for exact search of variables for building the hypothetical construct which best fits the studies in this dimension.

Cinema and the Senses

Commitments of the brain can go significantly beyond evident movement. The intellectual unrest in scholastic mind research took off during the 1960s and it expanded the conceptualization of commitments of the brain to the understanding of the impact of the films on the senses of human being. This psychological transformation includes the idea of mental portrayal as a vital component to understand the connection between tangible impressions from the world in one hand to individuals' reactions to it on the other. Also, these psychological structures were seen useful in mapping the cognitive activities like memory, induction and attribution. These were very mind boggling in contrast with perceptual and psychophysical reactions. Early uses of the psychological point of view in the research on films can be found during the 50s in work by Albert Michotte (1946) and Heider and Simmel (1944).

The cinema and the senses as a sub-order of scholarly research truly took off in the late 1970s. This is the background against which James Gibson (1979) noticed the virtual nonappearance
of a brain research of the moving picture, persuading his part on the film understanding. Gibson’s general hypothesis of visual recognition depends on the idea that a scene presents itself to the spectator as a surrounding optical exhibit that instantly and physically mirrors the structure of this present reality. Changes and advances in the stream of the optical exhibit are because of characteristic causes, for example, variations of lighting force of the scene, e.g., because of mists, or development of items in the scene or of the spectator. These varieties in the optical stream empower the programmed set of invariants. Model invariants are the adjustment in size of bits in the cluster, and the thickness of surface in that bit when the spectator draws nearer to, or more remote far from the object. The adjustments in these parameters are connected with profundity data in a way that is steady crosswise over various scenes, onlooker speeds, lighting conditions, and so forth. Invariants empower the immediate impression of this present reality in the administration of versatile activity. Further, Münsterberg and Landale’s (2002) led to better understanding of the psychology of photoplay. Unsettling influences of the optic stream can consequently be seen as occasions. The occasions are arranged based on the idea of the aggravations, e.g., as earthly, vitalize, or substance occasions. Moreover, the immediate tuning of the perceptual faculties to the structures of the earth empower a quick impression of affordances, for instance the incline of a slope causes the immediate view of ‘climbability’.

The images have cognitive impacts. The perception of safety and threat, love and hate, fun and danger is directly affected by the images. The immediate and delayed effect of images have been studied previously by a lot of scholars, who concluded that sanitized and threatening images have different effects on viewers. The threatening images portraying deep hatred and intention to harm others changes and shifts the perception toward blames (Zillman, Gibson & Sargent, 1999).

The struggle against the threat ahead is the basic component of suspense and mysteries in films and drama. This proves to be one of the best recipes of entertainment in the cinema industry. This suspense ignites the mind for the possible solutions of a problem, if the protagonist of a film or drama follows a difficult path. But in drama and cinema most often the solutions looked for a problem are charismatic and unbelievable. The theory of suspense takes its lead from the “affective disposition” and the “excitation transfer” theories and includes the propositions like hedonic symmetry, empathy and antipathy. The degree of arousal and its outcome as appraisal has remained major area of inquiry in the field of communication and emotions. The predictive inferences of the suspense have been studied by Tan and Diteweg (1996). The theoretical speculations on mystery have neglected the questions of why viewers of cinema turn to the mysteries. The predicted reason sought for this question was the tendency of the human being to toy up with the possibilities.

The dispositional determinants of horrors have been explained by Zillman (1998). The reason why the horror cinemas have been attended by the viewers since decades is worth investigation. The desire for fright and shock may be among some of the physiological and psychological factors. The predictors of exposure and appeal in the psychological studies of films see different empathies associated with the phenomena. The special cognitive coping abilities of the human beings may be one of the reasons which determine the worth of the horror. May be the test of the courage is also a determinant of why people watch horror films. But it is evident from the experiences of the scholars that it is the intensity of the experience which matters the most. The
concepts of “empathic distress” and “response energizer” are the close determinants to explain these phenomena. The “exhilarating” and “enjoyable” stimulations reinforce the idea of response energizer as these concepts fall in line with the theories of arousal and laws of emotions (Rickey, 1982).

“Excitons” in Horror Cinema

Three broad factors affect our senses while watching horror and all these factors are generated by some audio visual as well narrative attributes of the films (Walters, 2004). The “tension” is the first factor which is created by a combination of mystery, terror, gore, shock and suspense. The second factor is “relevance” which is generated by personal experiences or perception of the threat, the cultural meaning of the threat and probably the ultimate fear of death.

The third major factor which acts as “excitons” in the horror films is the “unrealism”, because horror films have a mix of realism and paradoxes. The excitons are not always visual; it may be a sound as well. The types of soundtracks which are actual and whose source is known is termed “diegetic”, but the audio source which is not actual is “non-diegetic”; it may be a narrator’s commentary, or the sound effect used for making the scenes dramatic. In horror cinema “nondiegetic” soundtracks play a significant role and hence it is another “exciton” in the cinema which affects our senses.

“Excitons” in Romantic Cinema

Film represents the world to the senses that are calibrated to that world. Although romantic films may have a reputation for not reflecting reality as we know it, this study finds some real values and takeaway lessons that can garner from these stories. These values are the “excitons” in the romantic cinema. There are a lot of romantic movies which have been very successful as they chance the encounters as it was in the movie “Sleepless Seattle”. The feeling and belief that even the death can’t do lovers apart was demonstrated in the film “PS: I Love You”. The love never sank with the ship in the movie “Titanic” which was clear reflection of the belief and feeling that it is better to hold onto motivational memories of a tragic incidence. Even a few romantic stories are based on the learning from the bad memories like Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. This state of mind is helpful in erasing even the worst experiences of one’s life. In some movies the protagonist has to accept the realities which seize the life, because there is no other option to move ahead.

“Excitons” in Humour Cinema

Contrariety to seriousness is the basic attribute of the comedy and hence it leads the audience not to take anything much seriously. The humour therefore is connected to the representation of the intended and unintended meaning. And it gives clues accordingly to the audience to categorize it into “tendentious” and “non-tendentious” humour (Freud, 1905/1958). So, the comic frame of mind is also a psychological phenomenon associated with the intended meanings of the messages. The misattribution theory of humour delineates the psychological phenomena as postulation of the contents with greater amusement and misattributed enjoyment of the humour that is hostile (Zillman & Bryant, 1980).

“Excitons” in Action Cinema

The modalities of storytelling are different for different genres of films. In action and thriller films the focus remains on transportation of narratives with the action, persuasion and the
enjoyment. Constructing the different pictures and scenes that viewers experience is probably the most important and distinguishing factor of filmmaking as every movement drives attention and establishes connect of the action with the audience. The success of action film depends on the journey of the protagonist, the moral transgression message given by the protagonist, establishment of the good and bad and the ways portrayed for overcoming the bad. Plot, character, theme melody and spectacles are usually there in all the films, but the transportation of narratives is different for action and thriller films as it leads to a visible change through actions of the protagonist which is persuasive to the viewer.

Conclusion

The “Psychocinematics” and the “Media Psychology” are the two areas which require extensive exploration of the elements of cinema from the perspective of sensation and sensible. This approach will bring the neuroscientists, film theorists and obviously the philosophers and novelists to further the study in the dimension of cinematics. Such studies provide an alternative way of looking at realities and explain the techniques filmmakers use to convert and ordinary idea into a brilliant concept. The action, adventure, erotic, fantasy, horror, mystery, science fiction, war, and Western genres were more strongly preferred by men than by women. But only romance and drama were more preferred by women. The remaining genres were equally popular among men and women. The preferences for a movie genre seem to guide the attention and help us in remembering more details about a film. When the excitons are identified both for the cinema and senses it becomes easy to understand the whole dynamics of how a film influences the senses of the audience and what expectations the viewers have from a film of particular genre.

The understanding of cinema needs to move step forward because it should not limit to the mere understanding of what happens to the characters. Our senses have ability to perceive the ordinary meaning of the messages, but the cinemas are meant not only for offering empathy with the characters. In the age of “Artificial Intelligence” and “Augmented Reality” the researchers need to apply more scientific approach for understanding what are the mental processes involved at film making level and what are the elements which have discrete impact on the senses of the viewers. The layered meanings of the events portrayed in a cinema and comparing it to the real-life events is a process which needs more synchronization in new age cinema. The Theory of Mind and Attentional Theory of Cinematic Continuity deserve more dynamic exploration for identifying the proposed excitons in the cinema and senses.

References:


