



The appeal of violent content in entertainment media to Malaysian audiences: An inquiry into the influence of meaning-making

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Abstract

A focus on “meaning-making” entertainment may provide a framework for understanding audience viewing experience. This study is designed to contribute to the study of violence in the media along with finding out any hidden meaning behind the viewing attraction to violent content. A total of 233 randomly sampled participants from Malaysia was assigned to rate one of the eight film trailers that varied in levels of gore and meaningfulness but are equally suspenseful according to the pretest conducted by Bartsch and Mares (2014). The results suggested that meaningful contents somehow featured portrayals of gore and violence. These portrayals would either generate feelings of acceptance or aversion that were signified. Violent content was not inherently enjoyable, but instead was accompanied by other features that did increase enjoyment, and in this case, it was eudaimonia. Our data also suggested that some other factor was driving enjoyment of the films that often accompanied the violent content – meaningful feature.

Keywords: audience viewing behaviour, entertainment media, eudaimonia responses, meaning-making, trailers, violence

Introduction

The importance of positive effect in media enjoyment is reflected in a number of notable entertainment theories. For example, disposition theory generally argues that viewers experience the greatest pleasure when liked characters are depicted as triumphant and disliked characters are suffering (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986).

Viewers are motivated to use entertainment for a variety of reasons. For example, research from uses and gratifications perspective has sought to portray a variety of viewing motivations, including information, social interaction, personal identity and escapism (Mohd. Helmi Abdul Rahim et al., 2013).

Yet in general, theories on entertainment psychology have tended to focus on the response of enjoyment. Researchers like Oliver and Bartsch (2010) explored such questions as why viewers enjoy some types of entertainment genres, portrayals, or behaviors over others.

Meaningful, moving and thought-provoking types of entertainment are far less well researched than fun and thrill experiences. It is because they are seemingly in contrast with hedonism – pleasure-seeking (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010).

In another research, Oliver (2008) attempted to broaden the scope of the entertainment experience by suggesting that in addition to seeking pleasure from entertainment consumption, individuals also use entertainment as a means of seeking meaningfulness, which Oliver has labeled "eudaimonia."

As a result, the purpose of this research is to provide a study of entertainment gratifications by exploring quantitatively movie viewing experience in gore and violence while accompanying elements of

eudaimonia (meaning-seeking). The researchers propose the idea that meaningful content may generate feelings of acceptance or aversion to the portrayals of gore and violence. This study replicated measures done by Bartsch and Mares (2014) to illustrate that entertainment can be used as a means of experiencing not only enjoyment, but also as a means of engaging meaningfulness. Film context has been used in this study in representation as one of the forms of entertainment as it provides an opportunity to experience something which is ordinarily outside of people's experience in order to satisfy the human needs, and in this case, it's about meaning-making.

Violence in the media

Violence is a pervasive term in media language. In the United States, roughly two out of three programs on television contain instances of physical aggression (Wilson et al., 2002). Videogames also feature physical aggression. Even music, particularly rap and hip-hop, has been known to have excessively violent lyrics. How do American cultures influence our life? The answer is prevalent and intrusive. Thus, a considerable public concern about violence in the media may have harmful effects on individuals. Indeed, a lot of research topics of exposure to media violence and the increment of aggressive attitudes and behaviors in youth have been studied worldwide (Weaver & Wilson, 2009).

One reason for media violence continues to exist is because people think violence in entertainment is attractive. Violent programs differ greatly in how explicit or graphic they are (Wilson et al., 1998). Some feature blood, gore, and close-ups of the aggression and its consequences. Such stimuli could be attractive, but it may produce negative emotions, such as fear, disgust, or even pleasurable feeling (Jones, 2002). Some studies have found that violence make programs less enjoyable (Diener & Woody, 1981; Herman & Leyens, 1977).

To explore the dimensionality of viewing experience, with a focus on the domain of gory and violent content typically associated with genres such as drama, horror, or suspense, we conducted an online questionnaire study that employed closed-ended questions pertaining to perceptions of goriness, meaningfulness and suspense in the movie. Two hundred and thirty-three participants (119 female, 114 male) provided quantitative responses in viewing experiences after watching movie trailers.

In order to address this eudaimonic concern of media consumption, the researchers proposed the following research question:

Problem statement

If audiences do not enjoy the depiction of violence, what do they actually look for when exposing themselves to violent media content?

Research goal

The goal of this research is to contribute to the study of violence in the media along with finding any hidden meaning behind the viewing attraction to violent content.

Research objective

The objective of this research is to examine whether the anticipation of meaning-making and related eudaimonic responses, which also refers to the happiness derived from meaning and insight, may sometimes be a motive for viewing violent or gory content.

Research scope

The research scope will be focused on the appeals and functions of violent media content, by focusing on a viewing motive – the anticipation of meaningful and thought-provoking content – across individuals of different background.

Theoretical framework

Drawing from ancient philosophical writings of Aristotle, Waterman (1993) differentiated two types of happiness: hedonic happiness that is conceptualized in terms of pleasure, and eudaimonic happiness that is conceptualized in terms of personal expressiveness, self-realization, and personal development.

Recognizing that happiness may reflect both pleasure and meaningfulness, it has indicated important implications in terms of understanding individuals' entertainment motivations, and in this study, we narrow it to viewing experience. We suggest that negative viewing motivations may be driven by meaningful-seeking (eudaimonia) motivations, causing one to choose a particular content for viewing selection.

Not only that, bringing together other researches by Oliver and Raney (2011), and Waterman (1993), the notion of eudaimonic happiness of striving for greater insight, meaning, and purpose in life may offer a new perspective on entertainment gratification. Oliver and Raney (2011) also states that searching for and pondering life's meanings, truths, and purposes are motivations characterized as "eudaimonic." In this sense, eudaimonic happiness embodies moral virtues noted by Aristotle, and intellectual virtues (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011).

The researchers suggest that the experience of negative affective reactions would give rise to meaning-making that may help explain viewers' selections and experiences in gore and violence.

Literature review

The original research being replicated was conducted by Anne Bartsch and Marie-Louise Mares. They wanted to find out if the violence in movies can still be enjoyed if balanced out with a high level of meaningfulness (Bartsch & Mares, 2014). Motives behind why people would want to immerse themselves in violent content could be related to guilty pleasure; the thrill of indulging in the "forbidden fruit of violence". The methodology involved categorizing selected movies into 4 categories: high gore, high meaning; high gore, low meaning; low gore, high meaning; and low gore, low meaning (Bartsch & Mares, 2014). Participants were asked for their responses to surveys after watching trailers to the films. The results show that apart from looking for suspense, the participants are able to find meaning in some forms of violent and gory content.

Rachel Louise Shaw also wrote a paper looking into making sense of violence though her focus is more on distinguishing between film violence and violence in real life and was conducted qualitatively (Shaw, 2004). Only six adults were interviewed due to the nature of exploring subjective experiences where only a small sample size is necessary. The interviews themselves were conducted separately in one-on-one sessions where the questions are open ended and the participants are encouraged to speak freely about their experiences. The participants also labeled films from different genres to be violent including *The Accused*, *Seven*, and *Trainspotting* along with their reactions (Shaw, 2004). The purpose was to form a connection between their reactions to their personal definition of violence. What Rachel found out was that the functionality of violent films depends on the story and narrative devices; when the violence can be rationalized and considered essential to the story, only then does the violence have a purpose in the story (Shaw, 2004).

Guang-Xin Xie and Moon J. Lee investigated the response of arousal to violent movies. Their initial research shows that the presence of violence in media promotions actually evokes the brain centers

associated with pleasure and excitement (Xie & Lee, 2008). From there, they asked 159 college students to watch 6 movie previews in both a violent and non-violent version. The results showed that high arousal seekers exhibited higher levels of excitement when watching the violent previews; on top of that, the difference in levels between the two versions was greater compared to the low arousal seekers who did not show that much difference between the two versions (Xie & Lee, 2008). This research has shown a correlation between arousal seeking and anticipated enjoyment of violent images.

Hypothesis

In this study, we explored the perceptions of how gore and violence influence our perceptions to watch the movie that have been identified in prior research of Bartsch and Mare (2014). Therefore, we predicted that:

Hypothesis 1: High levels of gore are aversive rather than appealing if the level of suspense is held constant: The degree to which respondents perceive a movie to be gory, based on the movie trailer, will be negatively related to their reported likelihood of viewing the full movie, when suspensefulness is controlled.

Hypothesis 2: The degree to which respondents perceive violent portrayals in a movie to be meaningful, based on the movie trailer, will be positively related to their reported likelihood of viewing the full movie.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived levels of gore and meaningfulness will interact in predicting viewing interest, because viewers may be willing to tolerate aversive experiences associated with gory portrayals if they feel that there is meaning in confronting these violent aspects of reality.

Methodology

Design

To examine the hypotheses about the influence of perceived gore and meaningfulness on viewing interest proposed from the prior research by Bartsch and Mares (2014), we conducted a survey of individuals' perception of film trailers, and their reported likelihood of viewing the full movie. A sample of 233 participants from Malaysia are randomly assigned to rate one of the eight film trailers that varied in levels of gore and meaningfulness but are equally suspenseful according to the pretest conducted by Bartsch and Mares (2014).

Stimuli and pretest

From the original research, a pretest was conducted with a sample consisted of 187 students at a German university (76 male, 102 female, age: $M = 24.24$, $SD = 5.83$) (Bartsch & Mares, 2014). Eight film trailers that varied in levels of gore and meaningfulness but are equally suspenseful were suggested according to the pretest ratings.

The following film trailers were selected for the main study:

Film Type 1 (gore high, meaning high): *Saving Private Ryan*, *Hotel Rwanda*

Film Type 2 (gore high, meaning low): *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*

Film Type 3 (gore low, meaning high): *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Green Mile*

Film Type 4 (gore low, meaning low): *Quantum of Solace*, *The Bourne Identity*

We conducted the main study by taking a sample of participants from Malaysia to measure the hypotheses based on these eight film trailers.

Participants

A total of two hundred and thirty-three participants were selected randomly to participate in the survey that involved completion of an online questionnaire. The sample consists of 114 male (48.93%) and 119 female (51.07%) participants. All are from Malaysia. 165 participants (70.82%) age between 18 to 25 years old, 56 participants (24.03%) age between 26 to 49 years old, and 12 participants (5.15%) age between 50 to 82 years old. The mean age of the sample is 28 years old ($M=27.64$, $SD=11.24$). 207 participants (88.84%) have at least college or university education level while the remaining 26 participants (11.16%) have at least secondary school education level.

After reading an informed consent page, and filling out a questionnaire that contained a set of demographic items (e.g. sex, age, ethnicity), and movie genre preferences, as well as a prior exposure to horror films scale, and a prior interest in horror films scale, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of eight different movie trailers.

Procedure

The data of this research are collected using an online survey. Eight sets of survey form are designed with exact same questions but assigned with different stimulus trailers. The first page of the questionnaire is the consent page explaining the study about viewers' perception of the movie trailers, and that the trailers included in the survey have been approved for all audiences by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) (Bartsch & Mares, 2014).

In Part A of the questionnaire, participants were asked to complete a demographic profile and movie genre preferences. Participants were asked to select one or more of the following categories: comedy, drama, action, thriller, war, horror, or to name other genres using an open-ended answer field. Then participants were randomly assigned to watch one of the eight stimulus trailers by clicking the YouTube link provided in the questionnaire.

After watching the film trailers, participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the trailers, and their likelihood of watching the full movie. In Part B (i) of the questionnaire, participants rated their impressions of the movie trailers by using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Finally, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of watching the full movie, be it they have seen the movie before, or they have never seen the movie.

Each set of survey has at least 25 participants.

Also, in Part B (i) of the questionnaire, 12 questions were used to assess participants' perception of movie trailers with three factors. The first factor was to test goriness, and included the terms gory, bloody, and brutal. The second factor was to test the depiction of violence in the trailer, and included the terms meaningful, moving, and thought-provoking. The third factor was to test suspense, and included the terms suspenseful, keeping one at the edge of the seat, and heart-pounding.

Subsequently, in Part B (ii) of the questionnaire, participants were asked about their likelihood towards viewing the full movie after watching the trailers. Participants were asked whether they had "seen the movie advertised in the trailer." They would then be directed to another page of questionnaire asking about "how much they are interested in seeing the movie again," or "how much they are interested in seeing the full movie", depending on the answer provided.

Findings

Demographics

In the first section of Part A in the questionnaire, participants were requested to provide their demographic information which includes age, gender, country, ethnicity and education level.

Horror and other genre preferences

As part of the background information, participants were also required to choose their genre preferences from the following film genres: comedy, drama, action, horror, war, thriller and others (to be provided by participants). Participants were allowed to choose more than one genre. Comedy and drama genre have the highest preferences among the participants while war and thriller genre are less favorable among the participants. Some participants also specified sci-fi, romance and fantasy genre.

Table 1. Participants' film genre preferences

Film Genre	Percentage (%)
Comedy	69.53
Drama	66.95
Action	48.50
Horror	33.91
War	25.75
Thriller	24.03
Other	16.74

Then the participants were asked to rate the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*once a day or more*) for their “prior exposure to horror films” and 1 (*don't like at all*) to 7 (*like very much*) for their “prior interest in horror films”. From the results, although the participants have less exposure to horror films (M=3.21, SD=1.37), they tend to have positive interest in horror films (M=3.68, SD=1.89).

Expectation of the film

In Part B (i) of the questionnaire, participants were required to watch one of the eight movie trailers assigned randomly by the researchers before answering the questions. Then participants were asked to rate the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) to anticipate the “goriness”, “meaningfulness” and “suspense” of the film based on the movie trailers. The data from the current research are tabulated and analyzed based on the film type.

Film Type 1: *Saving Private Ryan, Hotel Rwanda*

Participants have shown only moderate response that the movie would be “gory” (M=3.65, SD=1.29), “bloody” (M=3.63, SD=1.65) and “brutal” (M=3.98, SD=1.56). This is different from what the pretest has shown (gore high). Also, participants have shown positive response towards the depiction of violence in this movie would be “meaningful” (M=5.31, SD=1.36), “moving” (M=5.0, SD=1.27) and “thought-provoking” (M=5.28, SD=1.37). Participants have also shown positive response that the movie would be “suspenseful” (M=3.87, SD=1.49). However, they have shown positive results that the movie “would keep them at the edge of their seats” (M=4.78, SD=1.36), “would be heart-pounding” (M=5.07, SD=1.20), which are different from the prior research. Overall, participants think that both of the movies have high gore and high meaningfulness when the suspense level is controlled.

Film Type 2: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Hills Have Eyes*

Participants have shown positive response that the movie would be “gory” (M=5.10, SD=0.68), “bloody” (M=5.49, SD=1.26) and “brutal” (M=5.39, SD=1.54). Participants have somehow shown positive response that the movie would be “meaningful” (M=3.97, SD=1.24), “moving” (M=3.49, SD=1.48) and “thought-provoking” (M=4.36, SD=.43), which are slightly higher than prior research. Also, participants have shown positive response that the movie would be “suspenseful” (M=4.80, SD=1.37), “keeping them at the edge of their seats” (M=4.84, SD=1.43) and “heart-pounding” (M=5.37, SD=1.24), based on the expectation of suspense in the content.

It is said that participants think that both of the movies have high gore but the overall mean of meaningfulness is the lowest in comparison with film type 1 (M=5.31, SD=1.36), film type 3 (M=4.55, SD=1.39) and film type 4 (M=4.19, SD=1.35) in our study. The suspense level is controlled.

Film Type 3: *A Beautiful Mind, The Green Mile*

Participants have shown negative response that the movie would be “gory” (M=3.38, SD=1.52), “bloody” (M=3.13, SD=1.59) and “brutal” (M=3.36, SD=1.48). Most of the participants think that the movie would be “meaningful” (Mean=4.55, SD=1.39), “moving” (M=4.42, SD=1.27) and “thought-provoking” (M=4.24, SD=1.47). More than 57% of the participants also think that the movie would be “suspenseful” (M=4.40, SD=1.47), “keeping them at the edge of seat” (M=4, SD=1.6) and “heart-pounding” (M=4.22, SD=1.40). Overall, participants think that both of the movies have low gore but high meaningfulness. The suspense level is controlled.

Film Type 4: *Quantum of Solace, The Bourne Identity*

Participants have shown positive response that the movie would be “gory” (M=4.0, SD=1.32), “bloody” (M=4.07, SD=1.41) and “brutal” (M=4.09, SD=1.39). Besides, participants have shown positive results that the movie would be “meaningful” (M=4.19, SD=1.35), “moving” (M=4.22, SD=1.16) and “thought-provoking” (M=3.94, SD=1.19). Although the data has shown positive results that the movie would be meaningful, the average mean of meaningfulness is lower than film type 1 (M=5.31, SD=1.36) and film type 3 (M=4.55, SD=1.39). Participants have also shown positive results that the movie would be “suspenseful” (M=5.0, SD=1.88), “keeping them at the edge of seat” (M=4.85, SD=1.38) and “heart-pounding” (M=4.8, SD=1.32). Overall, participants think that both of the movies are high in gore but low in meaning. The suspense level is controlled.

Table 2. Participants’ expectation toward the film type

	Film Type 1	Film Type 2	Film Type 3	Film Type 4
Goriness	M=3.65 SD=1.29	M=5.1 SD=0.68	M=3.38 SD=1.52	M=4.0 SD=1.32
Meaningfulness	M=5.31 SD=1.36	M=3.97 SD=1.24	M=4.55 SD=1.39	M=4.19 SD=1.35
Suspense	M=3.87 SD=1.49	M=4.8 SD=1.37	M=4.40 SD=1.47	M=5.0 SD=1.88

Likelihood of viewing the movie

Lastly in Part B (ii) of the questionnaire, participants were asked about their likelihood towards viewing the movie after watching the trailers. Participants were asked whether they “had seen the movie advertised in the trailer.” For participants who answered “yes”, they would be directed to the question of “how much they are interested in seeing the movie again.” For participants who answered “no”, they would be directed to the question of “how much they are interested in seeing the full movie”. Participants were required to rate the questions with the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*).

Participants who chose 1 (*very unlikely*), 2 (*unlikely*) and 3 (*somewhat likely*) are considered as having negative likelihood towards viewing the movie; participants who chose 4 (*neutral*) are considered as having neutral likelihood of viewing the movie; participants who chose 5 (*somewhat likely*), 6 (*likely*) and 7 (*very likely*) are considered as having positive likelihood towards viewing the movie.

Table 3. Participants' likelihood of viewing the movie

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Overall Mean
Film Type 1	59.26%	20.37%	20.37%	M=4.70, SD=1.87
Film Type 2	37.14%	12.86%	50.0%	M=3.44, SD=2.03
Film Type 3	49.09%	25.45%	25.45%	M=4.25, SD=1.52
Film Type 4	53.70%	37.04%	9.26%	M=4.76, SD=1.24

After watching the movie trailers, an average of 59.26% of the participants have shown positive likelihood towards watching film type 1 (M=4.7, SD=1.87); half of the participants have shown negative likelihood towards watching film type 2 (M=3.44, SD=2.03); 49.09% of the participants have shown positive likelihood towards watching film type 3 (M=4.25, SD=1.52); 53.70% of the participants shown positive likelihood towards watching film type 4 (M=4.76, SD=1.24).

Discussion and implication

Discussion

The data has shown a slight different result between the original research conducted by Bartsch and Mares (2014) and the present study. The original research was conducted with a sample consisting of 482 participants from the U.S and German while the current study took a sample consisting of 233 Malaysian participants.

The sample of the current study has shown that participants have higher preferences towards comedy and drama genre. There are less than 35% of participants showing the preferences towards horror, war and thriller genre.

As from the pretest done by Bartsch and Mares (2014), eight film trailers are selected as the stimuli and categorized in four groups according to the genre:

- Film Type 1 (*Saving Private Ryan, Hotel Rwanda*): War, Drama
- Film Type 2 (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Hills Have Eyes*): Horror
- Film Type 3 (*A Beautiful Mind, The Green Mile*): Drama
- Film Type 4 (*Quantum of Solace, The Bourne Identity*): Action

During the study, the gore and meaningfulness in the films are the manipulated variables while the suspense is controlled. According to the data collected from the current research for film type 2 (gore high, meaning low) and film type 3 (gore low, meaning high), it matches with the results of the original research. However, regarding the expectation of the film in the current research for film type 1 and film type 4, it is different from what the original research has shown. Participants expected film type 1 to be low in gore (M=3.65, SD=1.29) and film type 4 has higher level of gore (M=4.0, SD=1.35).

Table 4. Participants expectation of film in original and current research

	Film Type 1		Film Type 2		Film Type 3		Film Type 4	
Comparison	Original Research	Current Study	Original Research	Current Study	Original Research	Current Study	Original Research	Current Study
Goriness	M=4.98 SD=1.40	M=3.65 SD=1.29	M=6.01 SD=1.25	M=5.1 SD=0.68	M=2.70 SD=1.64	M=3.38 SD=1.52	M=3.84 SD=1.55	M=4.0 SD=1.32
Meaningfulness	M=5.84 SD=1.48	M=5.31 SD=1.36	M=3.16 SD=1.95	M=3.97 SD=1.24	M=5.72 SD=1.34	M=4.55 SD=1.39	M=3.98 SD=1.60	M=4.19 SD=1.35
Suspense	M=5.34 SD=1.52	M=3.87 SD=1.49	M=4.98 SD=1.76	M=4.80 SD=1.37	M=5.16 SD=1.53	M=4.40 SD=1.47	M=5.26 SD=1.42	M=5.0 SD=1.88
Film Types	Original Research			Present Research				
Film Type 1	Gore High Meaning High			Gore Low (M=3.65, SD=1.29) Meaning High (M=5.31, SD=1.36)				
Film Type 2	Gore High Meaning Low			Gore High (M=5.10, SD=0.68) Meaning Low (M=3.97, SD=1.24)				
Film Type 3	Gore Low Meaning High			Gore Low (M=3.38, SD=1.52) Meaning High (M=4.55, SD=1.39)				
Film Type 4	Gore Low Meaning Low			Gore High (M=4.0, SD=1.32) Meaning Low (M=4.19, SD=1.35)				

According to the findings, film type 2 (gore high, meaning low), which included horror genre movies *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, has received the least likelihood of viewing the full movie from participants (M=3.44, SD=2.03). 59.26% of participants (M=4.70, SD=1.87) have shown positive likelihood of viewing the full movie towards film type 1 (gore low, meaning high) and 53.70% of participants (M=4.76, SD=1.24) have shown positive likelihood of viewing the full movie towards film type 4 (gore high, meaning low). Thus, participants have shown positive responses on watching war drama and action genre.

H1: High levels of gore are aversive rather than appealing if the level of suspense is held constant.

Film type 2 has the highest level of gore (M=5.10, SD=0.68) and film type 4 is also expected by participants to have high level of gore (M=4.0, SD=1.32). Based on the movie trailers, half of the participants have shown negative likelihood (M=3.44, SD=2.03) towards viewing the full movies of film type 2, and in contrary, although film type 4 has high level of gore, 53.7% of participants have shown positive likelihood (M=4.76, SD=1.24) towards viewing the full movies. Thus, the results could not support hypothesis 1.

H2: The degree to which respondents perceive violent portrayals in a movie to be meaningful, based on the movie trailer, will be positively related to their reported likelihood of viewing the full movie.

From the data, film type 1 (M=5.31, SD=1.36) and film type 3 (M=4.55, SD=1.39) are expected to have high degree of meaningfulness based on the movie trailers. 59.26% of participants have shown positive likelihood (M=4.76, SD=1.24) towards viewing the full movies of film type 1, and 49.09% of participants have shown positive likelihood (M=4.25, SD=1.52) towards watching the full movies of film type 3. In contrary, film type 2 is expected to have the lowest degree of meaningfulness (M=3.97, SD=1.24). In the study, half of participants have shown negative likelihood (M=3.44, SD=2.03) in viewing the full films. In this case, hypothesis 2 is supported.

H3: Perceived levels of gore and meaningfulness will interact in predicting viewing interest, because viewers may be willing to tolerate aversive experiences associated with gory portrayals if they feel that there is meaning in confronting these violent aspects of reality.

Film type 1 and film type 3 are both expected to have low gore but high meaning while film type 2 and film type 4 are both expected to have high level of gore but low degree of meaningfulness. It somehow differs from the pretest result done by Bartsch and Mare (2014). The results of the current research have failed to support hypothesis 3.

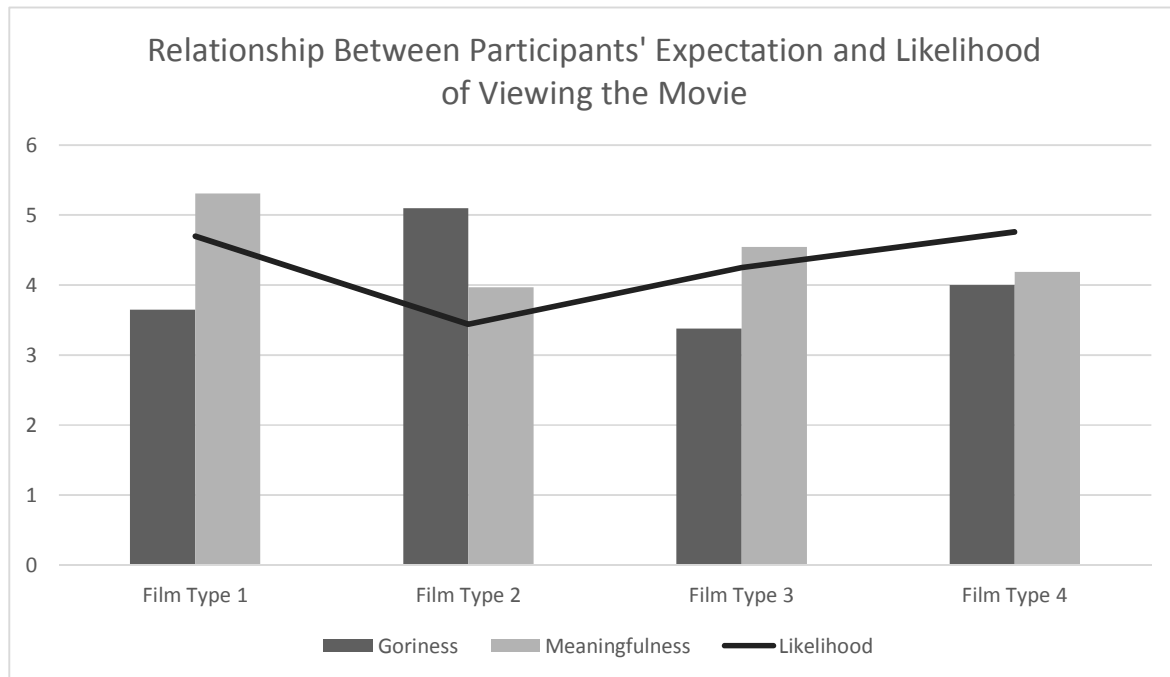


Figure 1. Relationship between participants' expectation and likelihood of viewing the movie

Research implications

The implication of this study is to suggest the film producers to profitably focus on meaning-making and eudaimonic appreciation as a strategy for increasing audience appeal, rather than escalating the level of blood and gore.

These results also hold implication for scholars who may be interested in prosocial effects of media entertainment. These findings suggest that rather than providing viewers with gore and violence, generating meaningfulness may further increase the likelihood of engaging viewers in viewing behaviors.

Limitations

Based on the pretest it was expected that among the four film types, film type 1 and film type 3 would receive the highest level of moving/thought-provoking experiences. Further, the researchers assumed that film type 2 would receive the lowest scores on enjoyment whereas film type 4 would receive the highest suspense ratings. Horror films like *The Hills Have Eyes* undeniably feature horror stories that typically generate gore. Some other films like *Saving Private Ryan* depict characters that embody profound and moving virtues such as strength, courage, wisdom, and sacrifice. Although not all hypotheses are being

proved to be in line with the original research, this present study has shown the tendency and preferences of how Malaysian audiences' viewing experience is being mold and portrayed. The current study has produced inconsistent results, in part because of methodological shortcomings. In the current research, the researchers did not do the pretest to ensure the achievement of similar results with the replication. Online survey is the most cost effective and convenient survey method. However, due to the lack of trained respondents, it might lead to less reliable data (Gingery, 2011).

The researchers are also mindful of the limitations of the current research that the future studies may attempt to address. First, this study suffers from employing a narrow sample of respondents—individuals who are from Malaysia and are mostly Chinese. 70% of them age between 18 to 25 years old. It may represent a limitation in our ability to generalize these findings to a wide age range of participants who may hold divergent entertainment preferences. Future studies that employ a more diverse sample of cultures and age ranges to allow for comparative findings would clearly add to the breadth of this research.

Secondly, in this research, the researchers randomly assigned a film trailer for each participant. Some participants have never seen the movies due to the movie content is not a familiar context to them, or it is high concept, or it has never been screened in the local cinemas. Even if some of them have watched the films, due to recalled viewing experiences, they may have forgotten the content. The researchers also found that Malaysian audience seems to have a preference towards movies with action and suspense genre. The researchers propose that future research should more closely examine whether or not the gratification potential of suspense is dependent on more basic gratification factors such as fun or moving/thought-provoking experiences. For future research, it can also be done at places with potential movie-goers.

Thirdly, as most the movies trailers are in English, there might be a possibility when it comes to understanding of the content shown. Language barrier has to be considered. As questions are replicated from the U.S. and Germany researchers, the diverse backgrounds may have caused a different understanding towards terminology or descriptions used in the questionnaire. Most people share a common meaning for key symbols of the dominant culture, but people may read a symbol differently. People always have incomplete, mistaken, or distorted views. It applies to the understanding of language too. Thus, generalizations that researchers try to make on the quantitative study are limited to the cultural communication itself.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the eudaimonic concerns that responses to violent films may be interpreted. Meaningful films were associated with perceptions of portrayals in moral virtue.

On the basis of these findings, the results speak to the idea that people's responses to films may reflect not only about gory reactions but also elevated feeling in response to portrayals of meaning-making. However, the researchers are not suggesting that all violent viewing results in elevating experiences.

Studies of viewers' enjoyment of media entertainment are voluminous and diverse, including studies that examine the uses that people may have for specific types of media content, or research exploring individual differences that predict greater or lesser enjoyment of particular genres.

Generally speaking, comedies, suspenseful action movies, romantic love stories would generate the majority of entertainment offerings. Tragic drama, tearjerkers, gore and violence may not be "enjoyed". For example, it is odd to say that one "enjoyed" watching *Hotel Rwanda* which explores genocide. With different movie genres, it is also revealed that dramas and more serious films received the highest ratings on the moving/thought-provoking scale compared to movies pertaining to other genre categories (horror, and thriller/action oriented films). This conclusion also points to the importance of continued research on additional genres.

However, people like to or tend to appreciate films based on their preferences and interpretation. How films communicate with viewers is via messages. It can be messages from the surface or with the interior meaning. In this study, appreciation of films included both cognitive and affective responses as reflected

in items such as “I found this movie to be gory,” “I found the depiction of violence in this movie to be meaningful,” “The movie was suspenseful,” or “The movie was frightening.” Based on the trailers, for instance, *Saving Private Ryan* can be categorized as meaningful through its depiction of courage. It is again proved that eudaimonia was associated with greater preferences for more serious entertainment, including *Saving Private Ryan*, *A Beautiful Mind*, and lesser preferences for *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Quantum of Solace*. This study also provides evidence that individuals turn to entertainment for purposes of meaningfulness even if there is gore or violence, although not all hypotheses have been supported.

Entertainment preferences also obviously vary over time, within individuals. Donald Polkinghorne (1988) states that meanings are not concrete because we are continuously reconstructing them. Each of us might only be aware of our own unique realm of meaning, and continued research would be further contributing to the aspect of media communication.

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