Linguistic Measures of Genre-Typicality Differentiate Between Critics’ and Audiences’ Ratings of Movie Scripts

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Introduction

LITERATURE REVIEW

• Film preferences of audiences and professional critics differ (Austin, 1983; Holbrook, 1999; Simonton, 2009; Simonton, 2011; Wanderer, 1970)
  • Audiences favor entertaining films that are easier-to-process on average
  • Critics more frequently favor complex, artistic films
  • Genres represent these differences to varying degrees
  • For example, action movies often prioritize entertainment, whereas tragedies more often aim to be artistic

HYPOTHESES

• Audiences but not critics would prefer genre-typicality in films
  • Such differences between audiences and critics would be clearer for genres that aim to entertain rather than challenge

Method

SAMPLE

• 509 IMSDB Drama Scripts
  • Year of Release: 1932-2014
  • Sub-genres: Comedy, romance, thriller/suspense, action/adventure, science-fiction/fantasy, history/war, tragedy, family/kids

MEASURES

• Screenwriters’ sex:
  • 87.4% male
  • 7.1% female
  • 5.5% mixed-sex teams

• LIWC (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015) measured relative frequency for each of the narrative arc-related language categories (% of total words used; Table 1)
  • Composite Rating Variables
    • Critic ratings (Rotten Tomatoes) and audience ratings (Rotten Tomatoes and IMDB)
  • Typicality in Languages of Genre

Table 1. Narrative Arc-Related Language Categories (Blackburn, 2015; Malin et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Categories</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorization</td>
<td>a, the, about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Action</td>
<td>someone, already, become</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Processes</td>
<td>infer, obvious, alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotion</td>
<td>dismay, unkind, lame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>joy, hugs, romantic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DESIGN

• To test whether audiences and critics differed in their preferences for genre-typical language patterns, we regressed film ratings on Fisher’s z-transformed profile correlations and rater role (audience or critic) separately for each genre

Results

• There were several main effects for genre-typicality while controlling for rater role as well as a two-way interaction effect:

![Figure 1. Main effects of genre-typical categorization language for action/adventure and romance movies](image)

![Figure 2. Main effects of genre-typical positive emotion language for family/kids and history/war movies](image)

![Figure 3. Action/adventure movie ratings as a function of rater role and genre-typical positive emotion language](image)

Conclusions

• Partly consistent with our predictions, professional critics preferred less genre-typical positive emotion trajectories in film actions, which coincide with research suggesting that critics may be drawn to more complex and artistic films (Austin, 1983; Holbrook, 1999; Simonton, 2009; Simonton, 2011; Wanderer, 1970)

• Contrary to our hypotheses and prior research findings that individuals prefer stimuli that can be processed more fluently (e.g., a familiar image, sans serif fonts; Kaspar, Wehlitz, von Knobelsdorff, Wulf, & von Saldern, 2015; Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004), audiences preferred less genre-typical (and theoretically harder to process) language patterns in most genres