

Original Paper

How do Films Reflect our Societies Today? An Analysis of Films and Film Genres

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Abstract

“Avengers: Endgame”, released in 2019, became the highest-grossing film of all time, surpassing \$2.8 billion in worldwide box office revenue. Its massive success demonstrates the immense popularity and widespread appeal of blockbuster films, attracting millions of viewers and generating significant economic impact. Thus, today, films are not only a form of art, but also play a significant role today as a powerful medium of storytelling, entertainment, and reflection of culture and society. In the digital age, films have evolved to encompass various genres, styles, and distribution methods, making them a powerful medium that continues to play a significant role in shaping our world.

Keywords

films, film genre, influence

1. Introduction

Films provide a snapshot of the prevailing attitudes, norms, and concerns of a particular time and place. Through storytelling and characterization, films shed light on social events and cultural diversity, fostering empathy and understanding among audiences. Thus, it's important to analyze the role of movies today.

2. Changes in Main Forms of Genres

In general, films can be classified into these main genres: action, comedy, drama, fantasy/sci-fi, horror, mystery, romance, and the western (Aldredge, 2022). However, as the art of film evolved, more and more genres developed as filmmakers moved towards finding new and creative ways to subvert and combine them” (Aldredge, 2022, p. 21). One example of this fusion is the “Star Wars” franchise. It blends elements of science fiction, fantasy, and action, creating a unique and captivating cinematic

experience. The series incorporates action-packed sequences, epic battles, and a richly developed universe, appealing to audiences across different genres and age groups. By merging these diverse elements, “Star Wars” has become a cultural phenomenon and a prime example of genre fusion in film.

3. What Films Do in Modern Society

Media giants such as Disney and Warner Bros. have emerged in the development of capitalist societies, creating one global blockbuster after another. The films produced by these studios have garnered countless fans and spawned a series of Intellectual Properties (IPs), even leading to the construction of theme parks around the world. The characters portrayed in these movies serve as both the fantasies of children and the embodiment of heroism for adults, profoundly influencing people’s lives. Hence, films have extended their influence beyond the screen.

3.1 Movies as a Form of Entertainment

Films are primarily a form of entertainment, offering an escape from reality and providing audiences with enjoyment, excitement, and emotional experiences. They can transport viewers to different worlds, evoke various emotions, and provide a shared experience for people to connect with each other.

The Harry Potter film series, based on the books by J.K. Rowling, can be categorized as fantasy films. The films transport audiences to the magical world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where they follow the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends. The films offer a captivating escape from everyday life by immersing viewers in a richly imagined world filled with magic, spells, mythical creatures, and epic battles between good and evil. They provide a sense of wonder and allow audiences to experience the excitement of discovering a hidden realm beyond the boundaries of the ordinary.

By combining elements of fantasy, adventure, drama, and even elements of mystery and coming-of-age, the Harry Potter films appeal to a wide range of audiences. They offer a magical and immersive experience that allows viewers to temporarily escape from their everyday lives and be transported to a world of enchantment and imagination.

3.2 Movies as a Reflection of Culture

Films often reflect the values, beliefs, and aspirations of a society or culture. They can depict societal trends, social dynamics, and cultural practices, providing insights into the way people live and interact. By portraying characters from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, films can promote inclusivity and foster understanding among different communities. Films can critique and comment on social, political, and cultural issues by providing social commentary. Through storytelling, they can address topics such as inequality, discrimination, gender roles, environmental concerns, and more. Films can challenge the status quo, provoke thought, and encourage dialogue and debate about important societal issues. “Parasite” (2019)—Directed by Bong Joon-ho, this movie depicts two families’ lives, Park’s family and Kim’s family, where the social conditions and the daily lifestyles are very contrastive. Park’s family is

rich while Kim's family is poor. This South Korean film delves into socioeconomic status, class supremacy, and social injustice. It offers a thought-provoking critique of the wealth gap and the struggles faced by the lower class.

Films in genres like science fiction, fantasy, and superhero movies offer audiences a chance to escape from reality and immerse themselves in imaginative worlds. These genres often explore themes of heroism, morality, and the human condition, providing allegorical narratives that reflect and comment on real-world issues. For example, "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy (2001-2003)—Directed by Peter Jackson, this epic fantasy shows the enchanting world of Middle-earth, filled with diverse landscapes, mythical creatures, and magical elements. From the majestic beauty of Rivendell to the treacherous depths of Mordor, the films create a rich and immersive fantasy setting that allows audiences to escape into a realm different from their own (Angelo, 2020).

3.3 Movies as a Catalyst for Change

Movies can also be a catalyst for social and political change. Many movies have addressed sensitive issues such as racism, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights, bringing attention to these issues and sparking conversations that can lead to change. For example, the movie "Milk" directed by Gus Van Sant is a biographical drama based on the life of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California. The film depicts Milk's activism and his fight for LGBTQ+ rights. "Milk" provides historical context by portraying the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the 1970s. It educates viewers about the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community during that time, including widespread discrimination and the fight for equal rights. Understanding this history can motivate people to continue the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights today.

4. Case Study

4.1 Case Study: "Frozen"

"Frozen" is an animated musical fantasy film directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee and produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. The story revolves around two royal sisters, Elsa and Anna, in the kingdom of Arendelle. Elsa possesses magical powers to create ice and snow, which she struggles to control. The film explores themes of self-acceptance, love, and the bond between siblings.

"Frozen" became a cultural phenomenon, captivating children and families around the world. The film's catchy songs, endearing characters, and enchanting visuals appeal to young viewers. "Frozen" has become a beloved part of many children's lives, and taught children valuable life lessons. Through the plot and characters, the film offers messages of self-discovery, the importance of familial love, and the power of embracing one's true self.

"Frozen" became a cultural phenomenon among children and families worldwide. The film's relatable characters, catchy songs, and heartwarming story resonated with young audiences, capturing their

imagination and becoming an instant favorite. It inspired a sense of wonder and sparked a wave of merchandise, costumes, and themed parties, creating a lasting impact on children's entertainment and family experiences. "Frozen" has been hailed as a feminist film due to its emphasis on strong female characters. The story subverts the traditional princess narrative, portraying Elsa and Anna as independent and capable individuals. The film encourages girls to be confident, embrace their uniqueness, and reject societal expectations. It has become a symbol of empowerment for young girls, inspiring them to be brave, resilient, and true to themselves.

"Frozen" had a significant impact on popular culture, with its songs, such as "Let It Go", becoming global sensations. The film's success led to merchandise, theme park attractions, and a sequel, solidifying its place in the Disney canon as well as its place in popular culture. It also contributed to the revitalization of the animated musical genre, sparking a resurgence of interest in musical storytelling in animated films.

4.2 Case Study: "The Social Network" (2010)

"The Social Network" is directed by David Fincher, and is a biographical drama that chronicles the founding of Facebook by Mark Zuckerberg and his legal battles with his co-founders and associates. The film explores themes of ambition, betrayal, and the impact of technology on society. The success of "The Social Network" lies in capturing the fever of Facebook's startup.

"The Social Network" resonates with those interested in the tech industry and its impact on modern society. The film offers insights into the creation of one of the world's most influential social media platforms and delves into the complexities of entrepreneurship and innovation. It sparks discussions about the ethical and societal implications of technology's pervasive role in our lives.

The film's exploration of legal disputes and business negotiations appeals to audiences with an interest in law and entrepreneurship. It provides a behind-the-scenes look at the legal battles that accompanied the rise of Facebook, shedding light on the challenges faced by young entrepreneurs navigating the complexities of corporate law.

"The Social Network" prompts conversations about the ways in which technology has reshaped communication and interpersonal relationships. The film's portrayal of the creation of Facebook and its subsequent cultural impact invites viewers to reflect on the ways in which social media platforms have transformed how we connect, share information, and interact with others.

4.3 Case Study: "The Godfather" (1972)

Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, "The Godfather" is a classic crime drama based on Mario Puzo's novel. The film chronicles the saga of the Corleone crime family and their patriarch, Don Vito Corleone. It delves into themes of power, loyalty, and the complexities of organized crime.

The film's influence extends beyond its genre, as it has become a cultural touchstone. It is frequently referenced and parodied in popular media, and its iconic quotes and scenes have become part of the

collective consciousness. “The Godfather” has left an indelible mark on cinema history and has contributed to shaping popular perceptions of organized crime.

“The Godfather” appeals to fans of crime dramas and organized crime narratives. The film’s intricate portrayal of the Corleone family’s dynamics and its exploration of the criminal underworld resonate with viewers who are intrigued by themes of power struggles, loyalty, and moral ambiguity. It offers a deep dive into the psyche of characters involved in illegal activities.

“The Godfather” also sparked discussions and debates within the Italian-American community. While some praised the film for its compelling storytelling and cinematic achievements, others criticized it for perpetuating negative stereotypes about Italian-Americans and their association with organized crime. Many Italian-Americans were initially unhappy with their representation in Hollywood films and TV. The Order Sons of Italy in American (OSIA), for example, is the biggest and oldest national organization for men and women of Italian heritage in the United States. It was founded in 1905 and has thousands of members. According to one OSIA study, up to 40 percent of movies featuring Italian-American characters, 40 per cent are depicted as being involved in organized crime—and they did not like this.

5. Reasons for Genre Persistence

Crime dramas like “The Godfather” continue to be made because they offer a compelling lens through which to examine human nature, morality, and societal structures. These films provide a platform to explore themes of power, loyalty, and the consequences of criminal activity. Additionally, the genre’s exploration of moral ambiguity and ethical dilemmas allows filmmakers to engage audiences in thought-provoking narratives that resonate with our fascination with both the darker and more complex aspects of human behavior.

As a drama film, films like “The Social Network” examine the evolving landscape of technology and its influence on society. The drama genre allows filmmakers to explore real-life events and figures, providing audiences with insights into the human stories behind major technological advancements. Additionally, the film’s focus on ambition, betrayal, and the complex dynamics of human relationships taps into timeless themes that continue to captivate audiences across generations.

Moreover, Fantasy films, particularly animated ones, have a unique ability to evoke strong emotions and create deep emotional connections with audiences. The colorful and expressive animation, coupled with compelling storytelling, can evoke joy, laughter, sadness, and empathy. “Frozen” effectively tugs at the heartstrings of viewers through its memorable characters, heartfelt moments, and emotional arcs.

6. Factors that Would Make some Genres Become Less Relevant in Today's Society

6.1 Cultural Relevance

Western films often depict the American Old West, a historical period characterized by cowboys, outlaws, and frontier life. As society has evolved and become more urbanized, the cultural connection to this specific historical setting has weakened. Audiences today may find it harder to relate to the themes and settings of traditional Westerns. Western films were particularly popular during a specific period in American history when the Westward expansion and cowboy culture held a significant place in the national consciousness. As society has progressed and become more diverse, the relevance and resonance of Western films may have diminished for many viewers.

In addition, Western films often depicted a specific portrayal of Native Americans, which has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and historical inaccuracies. As societies become more aware of cultural sensitivities and strive for more accurate and inclusive representations, the Western genre may face challenges in finding a balance between historical authenticity and cultural sensitivity.

6.2 Changing Audience Preferences

While musicals have a rich history in cinema, they have become less common in recent years. One reason could be that modern audiences may have different expectations when it comes to storytelling and pacing. Additionally, successfully executing a musical requires a unique blend of acting, singing, and choreography, which can be challenging to pull off convincingly.

7. Summary

Serving as a platform for social commentary, films can shed light on topics such as inequality, discrimination, political unrest, environmental concerns, and more. In addition, films play a crucial role in representing diverse cultures and identities. They can showcase different ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic backgrounds. Film genres often reflect societal trends and interests. For example, superhero films have become prominent in recent years, reflecting our fascination with larger-than-life heroes, and exploring themes of power. Thus, films play a significant role in reflecting and influencing our collective consciousness, shaping public discourse, and providing a lens through which we can examine and understand our contemporary societies.

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