

Focus Group Research Report

Susan Chiano

Audience Analysis and Communication Research

Problem Statement

Most people enjoy watching films, whether it is a social activity that they do with friends, or it's simply something used to pass the time. All films differ in many ways, much like the opinions that people have towards a film. Whether it's the writing of a film or the technical effects there are many different reasons for a viewer to enjoy or dislike a movie. These many opinions that people can gain towards film can lead to many discussions towards what makes a good movie or not. This can lead to the question of whether or not someone's prior opinions can affect their viewing experience. Are there common reasons why someone would want to see a new movie? With the popularity of review sites such as Rotten Tomatoes, there is a rise in people relying heavily on film reviews to help determine whether they view a movie or not. Do the opinions of others play a large role in watching a movie? Is there an understanding of what makes a movie "bad" and what makes a movie "good"?

Justification

Now, why is this important? Why should these questions be studied? Well, this research can help a lot with both filmmakers and reviews for films. If there is a stronger understanding as to how someone's prior opinions could affect their viewing experience, filmmakers can learn how to use these opinions to create a more well-liked film. Such as avoiding certain tropes that are typically disliked or changing a technical aspect. Along with this if it is more common for people to pay attention to movie reviews and analyze films, this can bring a boost to the involvement of film review sites. The research found in this focus group could also come into play with the advertisements of the film, as filmmakers can put more of a focus on different

aspects of the film to attract a larger audience. This problem has led to the research question:
How do someone's prior opinions towards movies affect their viewing experience?

Research Question

This focus group will study the relationships between someone's prior opinions of a film and how it affects their viewing experience. The outcomes will lead to whether or not prior opinions play a large role in watching a film.

Method

This survey was conducted as a focus group, with four participants. The study environment for this survey was very regulated and sectioned off. Having taken place in a Learning Lab within Aurora University's library, there was barely any distracting noise or environmental issues. Only once had to pause the recording due to loud background noise outside of the study room. The focus group occurred at around 3:30 p.m. just after those who were a part of the group were getting off of class. A few members of the group did have later commitments to attend to at 5:00 p.m. so there was a slight time constraint. Luckily though, no parts of the survey felt rushed, and there was more than enough time to complete each question. All participants were of college student age, ranging from 18 to 22. There were three women and one man who participated to be a part of this focus group. All four although similar in age, and majority female all differed in background and major. Along with this before asking the participants to participate, they all expressed their enjoyment of watching films. Some of the participants knew each other, but most had only seen the others in passing, allowing there to be less of a need to put up a front when answering questions.

Research Design and Procedures

The participants of this focus group were recruited through text message, all that accepted and attended the focus group got free complimentary candy once the group ended. The focus group was overall semi-structured, there was a script that included the necessary questions to be answered. But as the survey went on there were a few follow-up questions that were not originally planned to be asked. Overall there were 9 questions asked during the focus group, not including the small follow-up questions asked. The questions were all open-ended, primarily consisting of descriptive, anecdotal, and contrast questions.

- 1.) How do you typically watch new movies? (at home? In theatre? Do you use specific streaming sites?)
- 2.) Do you prefer watching movies with other people or by yourself?
- 3.) How do you get info about the movies you watch?
- 4.) Tell me about the type of movies you enjoy watching.
 - Is there a specific genre?
- 5.) What convinces you to watch a movie you've never seen?
- 6.) Describe an experience in which you watched a movie that you thought you'd dislike but ended up enjoying?
 - What was the thing that convinced you to like it?
- 7.) What would you consider a "bad" movie and why?
- 8.) What aspects of a movie make or break it?
- 9.) How often do you look at reviews for movies?

While conducting the focus group, the participants were recorded along with notes taken of them. The analytical process for reviewing the data and developing interpretations was thematic. So conceptual themes were created while analyzing the data based on recurrence,

repetition, and forcefulness of the answers. Both the strongest and weakest themes of this focus group were analyzed.

Interpretations

The first few questions of this focus group centered on how the participants watched movies. Such as whether or not they often go to movie theaters. A recurring answer during this question was that they had once frequently attended the movie theater, but they no longer feel the need to. Due to COVID and the rise of streaming apps such as Disney+ and Netflix most members of the group rarely go to the theater. The group then varied with how they felt about watching films with friends, there was a common consensus though that it depended on the type of movie. One of the women within the group stated “I have a family who does not take sad scenes in movies seriously, so I typically watch sad movies on my own.” which led to other members of the group to agree in regards to watching sad movies by themselves. Overall a recurring opinion regarding watching films with friends is that it relied on the genre or theme of the film.

When given the topic of reading film reviews, the answers were much more varied. One of the participants voiced how they often relied on film reviews, whereas another voiced how they never really paid much attention to reviews and would rather get recommended a film from a friend than actively look for film reviews online. The group then came to the consensus that word of mouth and recommendations from friends can lead them to watch a movie. Along with this, as they all primarily use streaming apps, they frequently rely on the recommendations that streaming apps make for them regarding what movies the app believes that they will like. From this, we can tell that although reviews can play a role in advertising a movie, the group is more likely to rely on the recommendation from those they know than on the internet.

When questioned about what type of films the participants enjoyed watching the answers all differed in many different ways. Each participant had different types of films they enjoyed watching, the only similarity is that two out of the four enjoyed watching sci-fi films, specifically *Star Wars*. Now this data only having one similarity is still very important. As although they all enjoy differing film genres, they still had similarities in regards to the aspects of films they enjoyed and disliked. When discussing what they believe to make or break a film they all had similar answers. The group relied heavily on discussing how characters are written. They especially focused on how films sometimes create characters as stereotypes, whether focusing on gender or ethnicity. The group although enjoying different genres, came to the consensus that no matter the genre, films should write realistic and understandable characters. With their own prior opinions regarding stereotypes, they often judge films based on those as well. Along with this, they believe that representation plays a huge role in movies, they enjoy seeing diversity within the films they are watching.

From the data collected, prior opinions regarding film do play a role in how one views a film. With this group, we can see that they heavily rely on recommendations from those they are close to. This could be due to their friends or family having a similar taste to them. Along with this opinions regarding representation with gender and ethnicity also plays a large role in forming opinions while watching a film. The participants believed that while watching a film the characters should be relatable and realistic regardless of the genre the film is a part of.

Limitations and Estensions

Overall this was a very successful focus group. Not only did the answers vary in different ways, but also there were very apparent and obvious patterns found within the answers. A possible issue regarding the focus group was the noise that was occurring outside the library.

There was construction going on, so as stated earlier the recording had to pause for a minute or two. Due to the majority of the participants being female, there could have been a bit more diversity regarding gender, but in the end, they all had opinions they agreed and disagreed on. An extension to the focus group would probably be to add questions regarding how characters are written due to it being such a recurring topic during the session. In conclusion, the focus group was very successful and came out with a lot of usable data.