

CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE: THE IMPACT OF YOUTUBE FILM REVIEWS ON FILM AUDIENCES

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Abstract

This study presents an analysis of the impact of YouTube film reviews on Malaysian film audiences. The objective of this study is to explore whether personal taste and decision-making to watch films are influenced by film reviews on YouTube among Malaysian viewers. A qualitative methodology was employed through a series of interviews with 10 informants, all of whom are regular viewers of film reviews on YouTube and TikTok. The data obtained were analyzed to uncover various perspectives regarding the influence of YouTube film reviews on the Malaysian audience. All data were transcribed and analyzed verbatim. The findings suggest that YouTube film reviews significantly influence film viewership among Malaysians, particularly by shaping personal taste and guiding audience decision-making. This study underscores the growing importance of digital platforms as spaces for critical discourse and cultural engagement and contributes to a deeper understanding of how online media literacy intersects with film consumption in Malaysia. The insights provided offer a foundation for future interdisciplinary research on the relationship between digital media, audience behavior, and media sustainability.

Keywords – Impact, Film Review, Malaysia, Sustainability

Introduction

In navigating the current wave of technological advancement, society must also possess a high level of media literacy to accurately interpret information and support the development of media that benefits the public (Fatin Nor Shalihah Azman & Wan Amizah Wan Mahmud, 2019). According to Lewis and Jhally (1998), media literacy is an understanding of the cultural, economic, and political constraints embedded in the production and transmission of communication. They argue that media emancipation begins when individuals recognize that what they see on television does not reflect reality in their immediate surroundings.

Potter (2008) further posits that a person's level of media literacy is influenced by several characteristics, including the ability to think critically

about conveyed messages, the capacity to evaluate the credibility of each source of information, and the competence to construct diverse forms of knowledge across various media platforms.

The new media era has enabled societies around the world to adopt more flexible and conventional systems in terms of space and time. An annual report released by Meltwater, a global leader in media and social intelligence, along with the creative social agency We Are Social, revealed that Internet users in Malaysia engage with an average of seven social media platforms, with the majority, or 58.7 percent, using them to access information (Wartawan BH, 2023).

This shift has significantly impacted the local entertainment industry, particularly in the field of filmmaking today. This observation is further

supported by Ardhian Fahmi Sabani *et al.* (2022) noted that the rapid development of Internet network technologies has made it easier for audiences to access a wide range of films of their choice. Consequently, film reviews have become an inevitable factor, as they serve as a benchmark for viewers' satisfaction with the films they watch and can influence preferences and decisions regarding film viewership.

The rapid increase in Internet users has led to a higher frequency of searching, sharing, and disseminating information (Hamed Jelodar *et al.*, 2020). Social media platforms such as YouTube have become popular destinations for film enthusiasts seeking and engaging with film reviews.

In Malaysia, we can observe YouTube channels such as Zhafvlog, PurePixel, ML Studio, among others. This is evidenced by the number of views and comments on each video published on their respective channels. Such engagement significantly influences other viewers' decisions on whether to watch a particular film. Hamed Jelodar *et al.* (2020) also acknowledge that YouTube plays a vital role in introducing and popularising both new films and those that may lack substantial promotional campaigns but offer high-quality content.

A film, by its very nature, is a medium for conveying messages through distinct styles and techniques. From beginning to end, the construction of a film's narrative structure and visual style typically involves a range of cinematic techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, camera shots, editing, and sound.

According to Ahmad Zuli Amrullah *et al.* (2020), film reviews consist of viewers' opinions or perspectives on a particular film. In this regard, it is

important to examine how such reviews influence other viewers' decisions to watch the reviewed film. When influential figures within the film industry or prominent critics with a substantial following express negative opinions about a film, it can significantly shape public perception, leading audiences to believe that the film is unworthy of viewing.

This is due to the powerful influence these voices hold. According to Norinawati Kamarulzaman (2007), films that successfully integrate these elements are more effective in delivering messages to the audience. Therefore, many viewers tend to rely on reviews, critiques, and ratings before deciding whether to watch a particular film (Untawale & Choudhari, 2019).

The impact of film reviews on audience personal taste is also considered a crucial factor in the film industry, as reviews on platforms such as YouTube and others significantly influence viewers' opinions and decisions about films. Audiences' personal tastes play a key role in shaping their perceptions and interpretations of a film. For instance, viewers often have specific interests or inclinations toward certain types or genres of films.

According to Raihan (2021), a strong film must maintain the viewer's engagement and fully immerse them in the narrative without creating a perception of excessive or insufficient duration, which may result in fatigue. However, the quality of a film cannot be solely determined by box office numbers or audience turnout at cinemas, as there are films of exceptional quality that may receive limited attention due to weak marketing efforts.

This argument highlights the fact that audience taste is inherently subjective

and influenced by multiple factors. Therefore, film critics and reviewers play a vital role in shaping public awareness and impacting viewership, ultimately contributing to the growth of the film audience in Malaysia.

Audiences are the backbone of the Malaysian film industry, and a film must be able to capture their attention and interest to ensure viewership. Thus, platforms such as YouTube and the presence of content creators who produce film reviews play a significant role in influencing viewers' physiological and psychological decision-making processes when choosing to watch a film. This is because each viewer possesses unique preferences.

However, according to Ridzuan Abdul Rahman (2020), in an interview with Zulkifli M. Osman, it was emphasised that YouTubers who provide film critiques should possess extensive knowledge and experience in cinema.

Otherwise, unqualified commentary may adversely affect a film's reception and box office performance. Therefore, a solid understanding of film is essential for reviewers to ensure that their evaluations are meaningful and not perceived as baseless opinions.

In line with current trends, a wide array of film reviews can now be found across YouTube. Various genres and thematic content are readily available on multiple platforms, and it is merely a matter of using the appropriate keywords to discover them. Moreover, with the advancement of information technology, audiences can easily access information that aids in the growth of the local film industry. For instance, before watching a film, viewers can explore others' opinions and reviews, allowing them to gain general insights

into the content beforehand. Therefore, this study will investigate the impact of YouTube film reviews on Malaysian film viewership in terms of personal taste and decision-making.

Literature Review

Personal Taste in Film Viewership

Debates often arise among viewers regarding the films they watch; some may describe a film as highly enjoyable, while others may not share the same sentiment. This phenomenon reflects the concept of taste, which is inherently subjective and deeply personal (Reynolds, 2017).

According to Glevarec and Cibois (2021), individual taste can be influenced by socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, occupation, and level of education. Their study indicates that a higher level of education strongly correlates with a greater tendency to engage with films.

However, age also plays a role, as increasing age may result in a decline in the inclination to watch films. In an interview with *Berita Harian*, the President of the Malaysian Board of Counsellors, Associate Professor Dr. Mohamed Fadzil Che Din, stated that a significant proportion of cinema audiences consists of individuals aged 15 to 35. If a film resonates with this demographic and leaves a meaningful impact, it is likely to succeed both in terms of revenue and viewership (Rozdan Mazalan, 2014).

Decision-making in Film Viewership

The decision to watch a film may be influenced by several elements, including the storyline, access to information, the film's appeal, production quality, and public perception or feedback on the film (Diana Hassan *et al.*, 2017). According to Fauziah Kartini Hassan Basri *et al.*

(2009), Malaysian film audiences are exposed to a wide variety of film choices. This is due to the availability of not only local productions but also films from other countries such as the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea.

As such, to attract audiences to watch local films, these productions must compete with international films by understanding the developments within the global film industry. Currently, there remains considerable room for improvement to strengthen the position of local films in the evolving film landscape. This includes the need to understand audience behavior among Malaysian filmgoers (Ubong Imang, 2015).

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), the consumer decision-making process comprises five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. This is supported by Anindita Lintangdesi Afriani *et al.* (2023), who argue that seeking additional information and reading online reviews are key components that determine an individual's decision to watch a film. This is because audiences often seek such information to assess whether the film is worth watching, both in terms of time and financial investment.

A study by Gavilan *et al.* (2019) also found that viewers pay considerable attention to film reviewers on websites they frequently visit, as this helps guide their decision on whether the film meets their expectations and justifies a trip to the cinema.

Method

There are three primary research approaches commonly used in academic studies: qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed methods, which combine elements of both. This study adopts a qualitative approach, as it involves collecting data through interviews to capture participants' perspectives.

Through these interviews, this study aims to derive meaningful insights relevant to the research objectives. According to Sulaiman Tahajuddin *et al.* (2021), qualitative methods are characterized by their originality and richness, as each interviewee contributes distinct opinions and viewpoints, which in turn support the depth and validity of the research.

Additionally, Azizah Hamzah (2010) asserts that qualitative research places strong emphasis on collecting unique and detailed data, offering in-depth descriptions or interpretations of specific topics or issues, distinct from the quantitative approach.

Creswell (1998) recommended that a sample size of approximately 10 participants is sufficient for interview-based qualitative research and that data collection should cease once saturation is achieved. In this study, a total of 10 informants were interviewed during the data collection phase until the point of data saturation was reached.

Saturation occurs when interviews begin yielding repetitive information and insights. In other words, data saturation is reached when the final interviewee reiterates points already made by previous informants.

As Hennink *et al.* (2019) note, in qualitative research, saturation is a key concept used to determine sample size, although only a limited number of factors influence the saturation point. Therefore, the estimation of an appropriate sample size and the assessment of saturation depend on

clear parameters established during data collection.

Finding and Discussion

The Impact of YouTube Film Reviews on Personal Taste Among Malaysians

1.1 Changes in Personal Taste Driven by In- Depth Film Review Narratives

According to Informants 1 through 10, the mode of delivery is one of the elements that can influence audience taste. This view is strongly supported by Informant 1, who stated that detailed and engaging film review presentations have the potential to alter an individual's preferences and may even prompt them to watch a film they had not previously considered. For instance, although the informant generally prefers films with emotional storylines, a poorly delivered review could dissuade them from watching.

Meanwhile, Informant 2 highlighted that film reviews accompanied by strong video editing skills tend to attract more interest from viewers. This is because well-edited videos are often more visually appealing and engaging, thereby increasing the likelihood of influencing audience decisions.

In addition, Informants 3, 5, and 8 emphasized that objective delivery, supported by well- reasoned arguments and accurate facts about the film being reviewed, can encourage the public to watch a particular film. For instance, if the film is a comedy and the review clearly presents it as entertaining, viewers are more likely to be persuaded to watch it. Meanwhile, Informants 4, 6, and 9 stated that positive and honest reviews significantly influence their taste and motivation to watch a film. This is because audiences tend to gravitate toward optimistic and encouraging content.

Informants 7 and 10 further noted that every aspect of a film should be reviewed thoroughly, as different viewers have varied interests; some may focus solely on the storyline, others may be interested in the film's art department, while some pay particular attention to cinematographic elements. Detailed film reviews, therefore, provide audiences with an early impression or preview that helps shape their expectations and decision-making before watching the film.

1.2 Changes in Personal Taste Influenced by the Perceived Quality of Films

The advancement of the times has made Malaysians more exposed to the quality of products, and in the context of filmmaking, films must meet the standards of audience taste by offering high production quality. For instance, platforms like Rotten Tomatoes and IMDb, which provide low ratings, can influence viewer preferences by raising doubts about whether a film is worth watching.

According to Informant 2, film quality begins with the production house and the storyline itself, as a film reflects the reputation of everyone involved, just as a single flaw can spoil the entire effort. For example, casting an actor who is unpopular among viewers may negatively affect the film's ratings and audience turnout, ultimately altering viewer preferences.

Moreover, Informant 4 stated that if a film is of good quality, the reviews it receives will likely be positive, which in turn will attract audiences to cinemas. Informant 7 shared that the quality of a film directly influences their viewing choices; if a film is perceived as insipid, they would choose not to watch it.

Informant 8 added that watching film reviews helps enhance their taste, particularly in assessing a film's quality, leading to more informed and satisfying viewing decisions. They also mentioned that if a film is portrayed as lacking in quality, they would be disinclined to watch it.

1.3 Personal Taste Shift Due to Unbiased Film Reviews

A good film review is one that presents opinions objectively and fairly while avoiding personal biases that may influence viewers' judgment, as it is important to respect the diverse tastes and perspectives of the audience. For instance, Informant 2 emphasized that film reviewers should remain neutral and avoid biased commentary so that viewers can assess and decide for themselves whether to watch a film.

Furthermore, if a film does not meet expectations, reviewers should not dismiss it outright but instead provide clear justifications so that audiences can understand and evaluate the critique from an informed perspective.

Informant 4 similarly noted that honest and unbiased reviews motivate them to watch a film, stating a lack of interest in reviews that are overly subjective or one-sided.

This is because positively framed, balanced reviews can enhance the perceived appeal of a film. If a critique is necessary, it should be based on factual analysis to avoid unjustly damaging the film's reputation. Informant 7 concurred with Informants 2 and 4, stressing the need to reduce favoritism in reviews. They are more inclined to watch a film when reviews are delivered neutrally and grounded in the actual content and features of the film.

1.4 Personal Taste Shift Due to an Engaging Storyline

It is undeniable that an engaging storyline can capture the audience's attention and sustain their interest or emotional tension throughout the film. This view is supported by Informant 1, who, having a background in film studies, evaluates the narrative in terms of whether it is flat or dynamic and whether the intended message is effectively conveyed.

The informant often watches multiple reviews until one is convinced that the film is worth viewing. Informants 2, 5, and 6 shared that if a storyline is unique or offers something fresh within the cinematic landscape, particularly in terms of its premise, they are more likely to watch the film. For them, going to the cinema is also a form of support for creative and innovative filmmaking.

Informant 7 expressed that they are particularly interested in how a story is told and the overall impact it delivers, which directly influences their decision to watch. Similarly, Informant 10 stated that their viewing preferences are shaped by elements such as storyline, cinematography, and how effectively the director conveys the narrative to the audience. If these elements are highlighted positively in a review, they are more inclined to watch the film.

The Impact of YouTube Film Reviews on Film Viewership Decisions Among Malaysians

2.1 Increased Motivation to Watch Films

The rise of social media has become one of the driving factors encouraging the public to watch films. Social media also serves as a platform for reviewers to share their opinions, perspectives, and critiques of the films they have

watched. Although some reviews may receive backlash, readers can still evaluate the validity of these critiques on their own.

According to Informants 1, 2, and 6, they typically watch film reviews two to three times a month, using platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. However, Informants 1 and 6 prefer TikTok due to its concise and straightforward review format. In contrast, Informant 2 favors the platform X (formerly Twitter), but visits YouTube when they want a more in-depth understanding of a film before deciding whether to watch it. This allows them to assess how much the review influences their decision-making.

Informant 5 mentioned watching film reviews whenever time permits, typically via Facebook and TikTok. According to this informant, film reviews are more likely to go viral on social media, which in turn positively influences a film's performance, particularly in boosting box office revenue and audience turnout—as the information effectively reaches viewers and motivates them to attend screenings.

2.2 Obtaining Additional Information Prior to Watching a Film

Informants 1 and 3 expressed a preference for conducting a preliminary study prior to watching a film, such as browsing reviews to acquire essential information, in order to mitigate any disappointment. They seek to determine whether a film is truly worth watching. Informants 5 and 9 indicated that they want concise information about a film before watching, mainly to prevent wasting a lot of time on a film that may not fulfill their expectations. They underscored the significance of matching the film with their own

preferences, indicating that collecting fundamental information aids in determining the film's compatibility with their tastes.

Furthermore, Informant 4 observed that film reviews facilitate the acquisition of additional information regarding future films. For the informant, film reviews offer preliminary insight into the subject matter and mood of a film prior to its cinema premiere. A ticket purchaser does not wish to perceive that time or money has been squandered on a film that eventually falls short of expectations. Lastly, Informant 7 emphasized the importance of gathering at least some information beforehand, as audiences may otherwise overlook elements that are essential to the storyline. Therefore, film reviews are considered valuable tools in supporting the decision-making process regarding film viewership.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study underscores the powerful role YouTube film reviews play in shaping Malaysian audiences' personal taste and guiding audience decision-making. Insights from the interviews indicate that regular engagement with these reviews significantly influences audience personal taste and decision-making processes. Through a qualitative lens, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how digital review platforms serve as a form of creative expression that actively shapes film consumption behavior. The findings highlight the increasing prominence of online film discourse while providing a foundation for future research into the interplay between media criticism and audience engagement within the Malaysian context.

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