Study on the Construction and Composition of Online Film Reviews by Filipino Film Reviewers

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II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Film Reviews and Film Reviewers

A survey on much of the literature on the effects of film reviews would reveal to the reader that more or less quantitatively-leaning texts are replete in various journal articles and studies, with most of them being informed by and for the Business and Economics field. A study by Wang, H. and Guo, K. for example, looks into the impact of online reviews on the consumption of movies by moviegoers (Wang and Guo, 2016). The study demonstrates that there is a correlation between the total box office revenue of a certain film and the total number of reviews that have been written about it, with the number of reviews determined and further implicated by the star power of the film (presence of top billing actors). The study finds that online reviews rank second as the most important factor in influencing box office revenue, with the number of screens exhibiting a film being the first. Another study by Legoux, R. et al. (2016) published in International Journal of Research in Marketing looks into a similar topic albeit directing its focus on a different aspect. While the former paper analyzes how film reviews influence audience reception as measured through box office revenue, the latter presents its analysis on how film reviews influence the programming decisions of distributors in exhibiting films. The study, entitled “The effect of critical reviews on exhibitors’ decisions: Do reviews affect the survival of a movie on screen?” draws from multiple sources to confirm that although box office revenue primarily influences a film’s lifespan in theaters, critical reviews also mark an indelible effect; excellent reviews have the ability to “positively impact a movie survival in theaters compared with good, fair, and poor ones whose effects are undifferentiated.” (Legoux et al. 2016: 30). There are plenty more papers whose nature intersect or overlap with the mentioned studies above. It is important to understand that the counterpart of such texts—qualitatively-leaning and informed by Social Science rather than Business—is better understood when situated against the backdrop of
existing dominant research topics, hence the introduction of the first two studies. However, the discussion will now move to the limited expanse of less explored literature, one that would bring the reader closer to the inquiry of the research and one that is guided by Communication. This would mean shifting the focus from the effects of film reviews to the film reviews’ content itself.

Arguably, how a review is constructed and composed is partly determined by the role of its writer. In a 1975 typological study published in Journalism Quarterly, Won H. Chang uses factor analysis to categorize film critics into three types: elites (Type 1), auteurs (Type 2), and entertainers (Type 3), with each type “associated with certain perspectives and media.” (Chang 1975: 721). Type 1 comprises the group of critics who most often write for publications such as magazines. Type 1 have a strong grasp on both media and the reading community, writing for the upper middle-class. The second group of critics, Type 2, have tendencies to favor directors with auteurist qualities, i.e., directors whose films have a strong identity associative to themselves. Type 2 value artistic integrity, hence their attraction to write about auteurs and their works. Lastly, Type 3 are critics who are “electronically, commercially and entertainment- oriented.” (Chang 1975: 724). Critics in this group are found in broadcast media and are, hence, in Chang’s words, aptly described as “performers rather than critics.” (Chang 1975: 724). Type 3 reflect the attitude of moviegoers most and reviews films less selectively than Type 1 and 2. Situating the study in the present time, the film reviewers whose works are used as the primary text for analysis in this research may best fit into the the Type 3 category of film critics; much of the characteristics attributed to Type 3 apply to the current reviewers as well.

Cleary, the digital age has had a large effect in the landscape of film reviewing. Electronically, it enabled film reviews to proliferate and become more accessible to the larger public (Battaglia, 2010). In fact, so much so that film reviews on the Internet have become
oversaturated nowadays that basically “everyone’s a critic.” (Battaglia 2010: 45). With the large number of film reviews published in online platforms such as social media, blogs, and news sites, one could posit the question, “what’s in them?” Or perhaps, “how are they written?” Scholars have analyzed and interpreted diverse forms of literature, from poems and novels to speeches and screenplays. Indeed, there are even studies that have come out from very specific topics, such as Matt Foley’s scrutinization of the literary genre Gothic Romance through aesthetic soundscape. Thus it comes as a surprise to the researchers that very little, if any, rigorous study on the construction and composition of film reviews have been conducted or undertaken. This should not be so. From an article by film reviewer Allan James Thomas in Metro Magazine, film reviewing is not simply a practice of writing nor reading. Rather, “film review writing is, in effect, a genre form, like romance novels, or cowboy films, or pop songs. That is, it is a mode of writing which generates a set of expectations in its reader without ever having been read, simply by virtue of being a film review.” (Thomas 2001: 166). By this definition, one can hypothesize that there exists an underlying structure that supports the construction and composition of a film review. To write a film review is to allow it to be subject to the readers’ evaluation, functioning like publicity materials (e.g. posters and trailers) which could ultimately help viewers decide on whether or not a certain film is valuable enough “goods” for consumption. Thomas goes on to explain that from a formalist point of view, the mode of writing involved in film reviewing is aphoristic, i.e., “partial, incomplete, allusive and associative.” (Thomas 2001: 167). Allan James Thomas as a reviewer draws from his own knowledge to articulate his process of film reviewing. Similarly, Meaghan Morris (as cited by Thomas, 2001), also a reviewer, had written her own observations on the writing of film reviews, and likewise claims it as a formalist activity, “just like sonnet writing, acrostics, crossword puzzles or writing stories with a first and last word chosen initially at random.” (Morris 1988: 121). But veering away from the first person
and looking at film reviews from the perspective of the third person, how does one make sense of the content of a film review? How does it inform, or perhaps persuade, its readers? Framing has been a perennial yet critical means of assessing media texts, and in the context of this research, one of the frameworks within which the analysis of film reviews has been conducted.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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