

## Experiencing film

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# Experiencing Film: Subjective Personal Introspection and Popular Film Consumption

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## **Experiencing Film: Subjective Personal Introspection and Popular Film Consumption**

### **Abstract**

How and why audiences consume films is a much-researched yet inconclusive area of film marketing. Film is an experiential product and qualitative research methods are a suitable way of gaining insight into how people choose between different film offerings and how they assess their film viewing experience. Before we can understand others' choices and experiences, we first must understand ourselves. We therefore begin our investigation by taking a snapshot of our experiences facilitated by Subjective Personal Introspection (SPI) to gain insight into how the lead author makes sense of his film consumption. The key findings complement and advance current debates in film and experiential consumption. Indeed, the theoretical contribution is two fold; the development of a film consumption experience model based on three-interrelated classification dimensions (*film characteristics, viewing environment, situational environment*), which collectively impacts the lead author's consumption behavior, and our expansion of Schmitt's (1999) SEMs model.

### **Keywords**

Audience; Film; Introspection; Classifications; Experiential Consumption

## **Experiencing Film: Subjective Personal Introspection and Popular Film Consumption**

### **1. Introduction**

For over a century the film industry has been one of the world's most commercial and successful industries (Ravid, 1999), creating strong relationships with audiences' worldwide. In light of the increasing availability of affordable, high-end film production technology and new opportunities to distribute films, competition for audiences has become fiercer. Moreover, digital disruption has led to an increasingly competitive marketplace, particularly with regard to film distribution. Film production and distribution companies are in stronger competition with companies like Netflix and Amazon, as well as with private persons who, legally or illegally, use new streaming technologies to reach film audiences at home and while on the move (Veitch and Constantiou, 2012). Coupled with a financial crisis that has left many people economically poorer, these developments in the film industry have led to a drop in film theater attendance figures whilst, at the same time, the time people spend watching films has grown (BFI Statistical Yearbook, 2014).

In light of this growing competition in the film industry, marketing and consumer research scholars have shown an increasing interest in people's reasons for watching films, both in film theaters and elsewhere. Studies using survey methods and interview techniques to elicit information about film audiences' motivations offer post-hoc accounts for decisions about the selection of a particular film. These have focused on consumers creating hierarchies of effects in order to simplify understanding of such consumer decision-making and focus their analysis on measuring the effect of specific factors on consumer choice, rather than considering

film consumption as a holistic process, where a variety of factors influence film selection.

Taking a snapshot of a period of film consumption and interaction with film marketing communications, allows us to access wider influences and experiences, which informs our film consumption practices. While we know quite a lot about how cast, genre and release pattern impact on success at the box office, as consumers are increasingly monitored and profiled, (becoming what Pridmore and Lyon (2011) describe as consumers who are seen as ‘collections of data’), more fine-grained research is required to understand film consumption from a more naturalistic and holistic perspective. We are concerned with how consumers respond to marketing materials as well as other film related information, how prior film consumption influences how they make sense of such information, how this influences choice and decisions to watch or not, with whom and when. As such, our approach considers film consumption as a holistic process, where prior experiences influence sensemaking in relation to future film consumption activities.

Thus, the aim of our study is to understand what influences our decisions to choose to watch (now or later), with whom and in what environment, or to reject a film. Previously dominant research methods, while providing a valuable overview of how different elements influence our decision-making, fail to grasp the holistic nature, and how many of the processes and decisions that contribute to film consumption decisions are taken in private or contingently while people go about their daily routines. For the consumer, therefore, it is often difficult to remember in a survey or interview when, where and how they have come across information about a film they decided to watch. For that reason, we use a modified version of Subjective Personal Introspection (SPI) as a research method, which offers us full access to what

happens when we make sense of information we encounter about films, how that influences the choices we make, what expectations this sets, and how that feeds into the overall viewing experience. For the purpose of this paper, we will examine the lead author's documentation of his film consumption within a particular period (a snapshot) of time in order to at least begin to understand the various influences on people's film consumption decisions.

We thereby follow Gould (1991, 1995), who argues that before we can hope to understand others, we first must understand ourselves. By using Subjective Personal Introspection (SPI) as a data collection tool, the lead author provides us with documentation of his own mental and emotional processes during this snapshot of time that we, the author team of this paper, can jointly analyze. Rather than providing an autobiographical essay (Brown and Reid 1997) by the lead author, the authors analyzed the document containing the lead author's transcription of his reasoning when making decisions about and assessments of films. Thus, the lead author and the document of his consumption experiences became the primary data analyzed for the purpose of this paper. The study demonstrates the contribution that introspective techniques can make to our understanding of film consumption. In examining the sensemaking process underlying film consumption from the perspective of SPI, we complement and expand upon existing studies on film consumption (the introduction of a film consumption experience model based on three classification dimensions) and experiential consumption (such as Schmitt's SEMs model), through our focus on understanding film consumption from a collective and holistic perspective. The following section reviews existing film consumption literature in order to identify the research gap we are addressing and highlight the contribution which our study makes before outlining the methodology and discussion of key findings.

## 2. Audience Film Consumption Literature

### 2.1 Overview of Past Studies

Two significant considerations within film marketing are the concepts of *marketability* and *playability* (Kerrigan, 2010). *Marketability* indicates how attractive a film is to its intended target audience; comprising key marketable and commercial elements to consider when taking a film to market. Significantly, these marketable components formulate a presentation of clues to consumers, which may or may not initiate interest when making sense of new (and old) films. These elements may consist of, but are not limited to: actor(s), creative team (behind the film), genre, age classification, release strategy, and so on. *Playability* relates to the film itself in terms of production value, quality of script, acting and so on. Following viewing, consumers consider the playability of the product by comparing their pre-expectations of the film (based on the above marketable elements or other outside factors) to the consumption experience itself. The concept of playability ties in with seminal work on satisfaction by Oliver (1980, 2010) who defines satisfaction as; “the consumer’s fulfillment response... a judgment that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a *pleasurable* level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over fulfillment” (Oliver, 2010: 8). Pleasure connects with Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) conceptualization of experiences as derived from fantasies, feelings and fun. Fantasies can play a role in pre-selection of films, where imagining the watching experience is related to fantasies conjured up by communications clues. Fantasy can also relate to feelings provoked by film marketing materials. Fantasy or escape can also take place during viewing, where feelings such as fear, excitement, and so on occur. Fun can be derived from the contents of the film itself, as well as the collective nature of film consumption. A



pleasurable experience is likely to extend the consumption experience, such as initiating positive word-of-mouth, as well as influencing audiences' future decisions and perceptions regarding similar films (Kerrigan and Yalkin, 2009). Indeed, according to Addis and Holbrook (2010), playability (and film satisfaction) has previously been measured in relation to favorable critical reviews, awards and nominations, and positive word-of-mouth. These can all be seen as proxy measures for playability, as all relate to approval of the film itself on viewing from the perspective of professional critics, industry professionals and the viewing public.

To date, a number of quantitative studies have explored the impact of marketability and playability on film consumption choices with box-office performance as the dependent variable. From a marketability perspective, studies have considered the role of the actor (Wallace et al. 1993; Albert 1998; De Vany and Walls, 1999), genre (Litman, 1983; Litman and Kohl, 1989; Eliashberg et al. 2014), age classification (Austin, 1980; Ravid, 1999; Leenders and Eliashberg, 2011), and release strategy (Krider and Weinberg, 1998; Radas and Shugan, 1998; Elberse and Eliashberg, 2003; Eliashberg et al. 2009) in relation to box-office performance. To measure playability, researchers have considered film reviews (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997; Holbrook, 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2012a), awards (Dodds and Holbrook, 1988; Addis and Holbrook, 2010), and word-of-mouth (Dellarocos et al. 2007; van der Lans et al. 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2014) as indicators of box office success.

Eliashberg et al. (2007, 2014) indicate the need to consider both marketability and playability through their analysis of film scripts. In considering genre signals as well as textual features, their work illustrates the importance of perceptions (from genre) and delivery (through the quality of the script and semantic devices). Our

work leads on from this, by looking outward from these texts to the experience of film consumption. O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013) also highlight the importance of the text and genre in positioning a film in the market, and in doing so they highlight the need to introduce granularity and temporal considerations to the study of film marketing and consumption. We can assume that consumers develop their tastes over time through the consumption of other films, therefore, they can make assumptions about a film based, at least to some degree, on prior experience of actors, genre, director or other elements of the film brandscape.

## **2.2 Joining the Dots: A Case for Qualitative Research**

The above section has shown that a range of studies have examined discrete elements of influencers on film consumption. Additionally, the findings of such research indicate a level of complexity and contingency in film consumption choices and assessments, suggesting that it is difficult to develop standard, generalizable measures of how consumers, as a whole, respond to the various films presented to them. These studies (such as Swami et al.'s, 1999; Eliashberg et al.'s, 2001 SilverScreener model; and MOVIEMOD, from Eliashberg et al. 2000) have proven valuable to film studios in trying to predict the success of films. However, returning to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), film is an experiential product, which proves difficult to evaluate until consumers have actually experienced it, and therefore it is difficult to forecast success (or failure).

Addis and Holbrook (2001) note that technological developments have resulted in “break(ing) through old limitations imposed by space and time”, subsequently foregrounding the symbolic meaning of consumption above previous concerns with ‘function’. This links to contemporary film consumption, where

increasing numbers of choices are available regarding how, where and when we consume film. Evidently, what is missing from existing marketing studies is the idea of film consumption, which includes consumption both inside and outside of the film theater environment. Undeniably, consumer technologies and media streaming devices such as Amazon Instant, Netflix, Apple Television and so on allow consumers wider access to film content when they want and provide alternatives to film theaters. Building on Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) – who, in turn, build on Howard and Sheth (1969), Alderson (1957), and many others – Schmitt's (1999) paper on experiential marketing which outlines five types of experiences or SEMs (strategic experiential modules), SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT and RELATE, argues for new thinking to follow the experiential turn in practice. Schmitt (1999) reminds us of the need to focus on understanding customer experiences, which specifically requires the use of eclectic methods; acknowledgement of the blend of emotional and rational decision-making; and the need to understand consumption as a holistic experience.

Existing studies have established the complexity of film consumption, with many factors impacting consumer choice and sensemaking. By taking a snapshot in time of film consumption, we acknowledge that previous experiences feed into decision-making and that our relationship to film changes over time, as a result of these collective experiences. In doing so, there is a need to explicate which films have been dismissed as well as a more nuanced understanding of why they were not selected at the time. Through the use of SPI, we can understand how and why consumers, using the signals provided by a marketing communications campaign, prior experience and other information, reject a film as not for them or decide against film theater attendance in favor of home viewing. We can also understand the

influence of whom they watch films with on their experience, or how they feel after consumption. Embracing the experiential perspective allows us to focus on a combination of rational and emotional elements of the decision-making process.

Studies relying on box office data to signal interest or disinterest in a film cannot capture the reasons for ‘rejection’ of film, as such rejection may result from a total lack of awareness of the film, an aversion to an actor, director, genre or other key element. ‘Rejection’ could also be situational, such as due to a lack of resources or time. However, as researchers are now focusing more on analysis of social media content around film (such as Henning-Thurau et al. 2014) we will be able to expand our understanding of both acceptance and rejection of film. Although past literature on consumer preferences (evaluated through box-office figures) reveal the end point of the decision-making process, our study complements this information by offering insight into how consumers arrive at this decision, and, in fact, how they feel after consuming the film based on their expectations pre-decision.

Our research approach acknowledges the social aspect of film consumption: people watch films together, films are a popular discussion topic in daily conversation, and other people generally influence one’s interaction with films and decision processes. This collectivity often results in ‘fun’ and provokes a range of ‘feelings’ (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), as discussed in our findings. The following broad stroke research questions were developed to inform this study:

1. How does the consumer make sense of film communications materials?
2. How does this impact if, how, when, and where we consume films?
3. What consumption experiences provide film satisfaction?

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, we use a snapshot of film consumption to understand from a holistic perspective how audiences make sense of their film consumption. As such, the consumer must be given a voice by focusing on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness from a real insider perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Thompson et al. 1989; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2008, 2012). As Gould (1991, 1995) argues, using SPI allows us to examine our own individual subjectivity. The aforementioned studies of film choice and consumption establish this as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. To complement existing studies we have adopted a research approach which incorporates in-depth reflexivity, in order to capture rich holistic data of how we consume films. Gaps remain in the existing literature around how we interpret film marketing communications prior to viewing (including what prior experiences we draw upon) and how this then impacts on our satisfaction and future film consumption. SPI can be seen as fitting Hurston's depiction of research as "poking and prying with purpose" (cited in Silverman, 2010: 81), which can reveal insight into the film consumer's experiences.

### **3.1 The Origins and Values of Introspective Research**

More than twenty five years ago, Holbrook (1986, 1995, 2005) introduced a new qualitative research method to consumer research, *Subjective Personal Introspection* (SPI), which focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences. Inspired by Montaigne, Holbrook (2005) believes that since he is human, when he writes about himself, he unavoidably describes some aspect of the human condition. Therefore, when pressed for a 'scientific justification' of such a method, Holbrook proclaims that SPI is an extreme form of participant observation or observant participation of one's own life. Put simply, SPI produces an

‘autoethnography’ through which an author can benefit from privileged access to the relevant phenomena of interest. Holbrook has provided autoethnographic writings about personal consumption experiences stemming from an enthusiasm for jazz music (1986) and photographic collections (2005).

One of the challenges facing qualitative researchers is what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as habitus and an understanding of the realm of the undiscussed. Therefore, asking respondents to talk about their decision-making and consumption experiences may not result in getting the level of detail possible from SPI. In our adaptation of this method, the first author’s introspection was interrogated in discussion with two additional co-authors, allowing a collective ‘poking and prying’ with purpose. Looking back at the development of SPI, it has been established as an appropriate approach to the study of arts marketing (Kerrigan and Dennis, 2011), specifically film (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2008, 2012) and music consumption (Holbrook 1986; Shankar, 2000). The method allows unlimited 24-hour access to the film consumption experiences, from understanding the film communications to the actual viewing experience, and in so doing, highlights the key moments in the process that the lead author finds noteworthy and relevant with regard to film selection.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The introspective data were collected concurrently over a period of two weeks (26 November 2012 to 9 December 2012). As a heavy film consumer with an academic background in film studies, thinking about and watching films is a significant interest of the lead author. Therefore, the two-week study period produced a substantial volume of material, specifically relating to film consumption. The contemporaneous

data were recorded as typed daily notes using the iPhone notes application and these notes were used to create a narrative diary of the film consumption experience (Patterson, 2005, 2012). Patterson (2005: 142) argues that such a diary offers, “an innovative way to capture rich insights into processes, relationships, settings, products, and consumers. A diary is a personal record of daily events, observations and thoughts.” Of course, the use of an introspective diary might permit consumers to alter one’s behavior or refrain from publically addressing the consumption of particular films (e.g., a pornographic film). As such, this method could be deemed problematic since it may allow the opportunity to conceal the consumption of films not seen as socially acceptable. However, the benefit of being both the researched and the researcher is that the lead author is able to confirm that this is a typical introspective account of how he consumes films. Therefore, the use of a film diary provides an appropriate platform to record the first author’s everyday film-related experiences.

Throughout the two weeks, the lead author had his iPhone to hand at all times to ensure he expressed his immediate thoughts and feelings concerning his personal film consumption. In total, approximately 9,000 words of raw data were collected documenting his everyday film related experiences during the fortnightly period. Here, it is worth noting that although the diary was kept over a two-week period, the experiences reported on were much wider than that, specifically reflections on prior interaction with film/ information/ elements of film, which are all relevant in assessing the first author’s film consumption. Additionally, when reflecting on the film information, the diary provided links to websites which he visited, as well as documenting other sources that were used during the process. Consequently, the amount of detail regarding the various elements of the consumer experience was rich

and there was evidence of repeated patterns of behavior, resulting in the above research questions being addressed effectively.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically. In order to implement a thematic coding schema, a provisional list of codes was defined before the coding process began, including themes and patterns derived from theoretical knowledge of film studies, the literature review, the researcher's conceptual framework, and the research questions. During the process of data analysis, the codes that emerged from the data were then added to the overall list of codes allowing for new concepts and categories to be created, forming the basis for the creation of a contributing theory to the existing literature. This thematic approach was used to inform the understanding of the lead author's film consumption during this snapshot in time.

The data coding and analysis involved several stages. Firstly, the introspective diary was thoroughly read and reread. Secondly, influenced by prior knowledge acquired through past film consumption literature and film theory, the diary extracts were coded into key points. These included, but were not limited to, 'Actor', 'Director', 'Genre', 'Seasonality', 'Mood', 'Theater Consumption', 'Home Consumption', 'Lone Consumption', 'Group Consumption', and so forth. Thirdly, one of the key criticisms of SPI lies in the researcher presenting their own data and the biases that this could imply. As such, the data analysis involved two further co-authors, who questioned the interpretation of the data and explored alternative explanations until consensus was reached. Fourthly, from the initial coding and consultation with the co-authors, prominent patterns in the consumption experience were identified and validated through the same codes reappearing, allowing specific



codes to be grouped together into similar concepts, such as ‘Artistic Clues’, ‘Commercial Clues’, ‘Viewing Environment’, ‘Situational Environment’ and so on. Finally, from these concepts, categories could be formed, and after revisiting the original research questions, these were subsequently divided into three principal categories: *Sensemaking*, *Decision-Making*, and *Film Experience*. Here, it was important to visualize and chart the data analysis process (see Figure 1).

This process of data analysis, whereby the research team collectively analyzed the data, engaged in further probing with regard to the analysis and agreed on the key themes emerging, highlights one of the shortcomings of another popular qualitative research method - the use of in-depth interviews. The production of the introspective text can be viewed as a similar approach to the qualitative interview. Questions are posed and answered and some further probing takes place. However, when putting the researcher in the position of the researched, as is the case of SPI, we gain further insight into how consumers view their decision-making and the possibility of overlooking some elements of this process. The ability of the research team to collectively analyze the introspective account, probe further, offer alternative interpretations of the data in a much more detailed manner than is possible in an in-depth interview, means that the data are interrogated thoroughly. This approach drew on studies based on interviews with experts (Bogner et al. 2009) by treating the first author as an expert in film consumption and film consumption experience, as well as on the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) in aiming for increased researcher reflexivity through collective interrogation and sensemaking.

#### **4. Findings**

The following section outlines the key findings of this introspective diary study. In

doing so, our unit of analysis is the film consumer and their interactions with film and film related communications during a snapshot in time. Considering film consumption as a holistic process whereby previous experiences influence future choices, this approach allowed us to understand how prior consumption impacted on film consumption during this period. As such, we have presented the findings in accordance with Schmitt's (1999) SEMs model, in order to describe the different types of experiences in evidence and how these experiences interrelate. Throughout this section, the lead author is referred to in the first person, as the data presented come from his introspective account.

#### 4.1 *SENSE*

This experience relates to how consumers interpret and make sense of the film marketing communications on an aesthetic level, based on their past and repeated experiences with film. The consistency within the marketing communications materials creates rules and/or cultural cues, allowing the consumer to set their expectations from the way the information is portrayed, presented, and/or displayed. As such, sense is linked to marketability and a consistent film brandscape, where consumers assess the level of attractiveness of a film based on this initial interaction. In my case, both active and (at times) passive interactions with the film information provided familiarity with and understanding of a film in terms of utility and symbolism. This set expectations regarding the film and signaled appeal or indifference for me.

*'In the Metro, there was an advertisement page, showcasing a variety of films on DVD and Blu-Ray from Blockbuster in the build up to Christmas ... For instance, Super 8 is a sci-fi I have been meaning to see since its release last year, and interestingly the DVD cover clearly accentuates the use of director J.J. Abrams and producer Steven Spielberg to promote the sci-fi content. Additionally, I have been meaning to buy Transformers: Dark of the Moon (to*

*go with the other two Transformer films I own), as I really enjoyed this in the cinema ... For audiences who do not know what to expect (probably very few), they can use the clue of director Michael Bay (Armageddon, Pearl Harbor) on the cover to gain insight. Another film I have been meaning to buy since viewing it in the cinema is The Woman in Black. Having read the book and seen the theatre play in London, I expected a horrifying ghost mystery, which it very much delivered. My only doubt before seeing the film was that Daniel Radcliffe (Harry Potter) was playing the lead protagonist, but I felt his presence did not detract from the film in anyway.’ (06/12/12)*

Here, the data suggest that I initially exploit the film’s *commercial* (marketability) characteristics such as the *director* and *lead actor* (or any other members of the cast and crew), and, through using their film history from previous consumption, assign meaning to the film offering and conclude with what ‘type of film’ is being proposed. Furthermore, marketers and producers frequently portray such commercial characteristics as brand vehicles. Branding in film is evident through *people* brands (actor, director, producer), *character* brands (James Bond, Harry Potter), *studio* brands (Warner, MGM, Fox), and so on. O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013) argue that brand meaning comes from previous experiences that consumers have had with the various brand elements. Therefore, by associating an actor, director, studio or character with a particular style of film, the consumer can indicate that the film fulfills a certain standard, influencing its attractiveness and reducing consumer uncertainty. Through SPI, it is possible to understand the relationships between the various elements of what O’Reilly and Kerrigan (2013) refer to as the film brandscape. Prior studies have considered *genre* or lead actor, but have not adopted a relational approach where director, actor or other elements can signal *genre* (type) or *grade* (quality signal) (Kerrigan, 2010) of a film.

For me, however, the director, as the project’s artistic head, arguably bears most responsibility for the final product and overall quality, providing insight into the ‘type of film’ on offer, thus supporting the theory of auteurism. This paper is not

intended to debate the auteur theory, but as a former film studies student, part of my analytical lens is the view that certain directors can be perceived as auteurs and convey a specific brand of film, which can be easily identifiable and thus help in the sense-making process (setting expectations/ pre-perceptions). Stoddart (1995: 40) states that; “a true auteur...was distinguished by the[ir] presence in each film.” Indeed, specific film directors carry an artistic signature or creative fingerprint in their work, and the likes of Alfred Hitchcock (suspense thrillers), Martin Scorsese (crime/gangster) and Woody Allen (dry witted comedy) among others, all deliver a style and brand of film which is recognizable to audiences and critics alike. This can also apply to other members of the creative team, ranging from the producers, screenwriters, cinematographer, film composers and other creative individuals involved in the filmmaking process. The influence of a specific filmmaker in my film consumption habits applies to Guillermo del Toro’s new film *Crimson Peak* (2015):

*‘I was ... drawn by a news headline concerning filmmaker Guillermo del Toro in his directorial appointment of new haunted ghost story Crimson Peak ... This appointment excites me greatly, since del Toro is known for his horror filmmaking qualities. To date, his filmography includes directorial credits in Cronos, The Devil’s Backbone, and Pan’s Labyrinth, as well as producing credits in The Orphanage and Julia’s Eyes, among others. These are all films I have seen previously given that I am a horror enthusiast and thus enjoy the way del Toro extracts mythic fantasy horror, usually through the innocence of children. Furthermore, the article also states how Universal Studios first picked up the project. Indeed, Universal Studios have contributed plenty to the horror genre, particularly their involvement in adapting the classic horror literature to the big screen, such as Dracula and Frankenstein. Consequently, due to the combination of del Toro’s horror vision and Universal Studio’s historical background in the same genre, I very much look forward to the release of Crimson Peak in a few years time.’ (04/12/12)*

This extract suggests that, as a film consumer, I look for clues regarding the type of horror on offer, through combining the various marketable elements, such as the director, the track record of the director in making this style of horror, and the role of the studio in facilitating this process. There are certain *sub-classifications* within

horror that appeal more than others, in this case fantasy horror. Additionally, after closer analysis with my co-authors, I similarly find enjoyment in supernatural and satanic horror, but am not overly keen on zombie and spoof horror. This information clearly excited me, as my expectations regarding the feelings and fun (see Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) of the consumption experience were set by the association with this director.

The leading actor(s) also cultivates a specific image and (like the director) provides clues into what 'type of film' is on offer, in terms of genre and quality, thus reducing my uncertainty (Levin et al. 1997). The aforementioned research into film consumption has seen several writers (Wallace et al. 1993; Albert, 1998; De Vany and Walls, 1999) study the effect of actors on box-office performance, in an attempt to provide insight into audience consumption. However, the findings remain inconclusive and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) posit that the results are somewhat limited, as there is a need to differentiate the impact of stars on box-office revenues with regard to the film's genre and the degree of 'type-casting' (the similarity of the star's role with his or her previous films). Therefore, is it the actor we enjoy watching, or is it the actor performing a similar role in the same type of film we enjoy watching? Interestingly, my introspection suggests that I agree with the latter and situate actor(s) as a point of reference when selecting films. For instance, Bruce Willis was identified within the action genre, most specifically the *Die Hard* (1988-2007) franchise:

*'I remembered seeing an advert ... for what seemed like another installment of the Die Hard series ... The clue was seeing Bruce Willis (wearing his white vest covered in blood) appear to be performing his favorite action hero, John McClane ... The tagline for the film is 'Yippee Ki-Yay Mother Russia' which also reinforces one of McClane's favorite quotes.'* (28/11/12)

Other actors (to name a few) that impacted the lead author's film consumption processes throughout the study include John Wayne (classic American Western), Ralph Fiennes (period drama and classic literature adaptations), and Cameron Diaz (silly comedy). These are all examples of how I made sense of the 'type of film' on offer based on the actor(s).

Alongside asserting meaning to the commercial (marketability) characteristics (notably the creative cast and crew), I also seek out *artistic* clues (iconography, plot, themes, title, etc.) from the communications to evaluate whether my initial pre-perceptions (gained from the commercial elements) equate to the visual imagery portrayed in the materials. Schroeder (2002) discusses visual consumption in terms of decoding images and understanding the symbols, conventions and stereotypes used in the materials to fully understand the film offering. Thus, films and their corresponding materials can be defined through a visual medium and conventional iconography. Hutchings (1995: 64), drawing on Alloway's work on genre in the 1960s, reflects upon the importance of iconography, suggesting the use of recurring images and typical patterns transport meaning from one film to another. Accordingly, consumers draw on past experiences in interpreting film materials, such as character stereotypes, settings, props and iconic images, along with any other visual and/or sound aids to further make sense of the film proposed. Upon first discovering Tarantino's new film, *Django Unchained* (2012), I was able to establish the iconic Western archetypes (and the filmmaker's presence) from the trailer:

*'[Firstly] it was made extremely clear that this film was a Tarantino vehicle ... This to me is important as Tarantino's films deliver a specific style of cinema and a brand of film which is clearly identifiable; his films guarantee a large degree of violence, humorous dialogue, a rapid paced plot ... [Secondly], I purposely looked for genre associations throughout the trailer, and while the title didn't give much away, the Western content of the film was delivered in the iconic form of rural settings, cowboys, and bounty hunters. And the film's*

*story centered on a revenge plot concerning slavery, a common theme in Western films. However, these Western conventions will no doubt be blurred with other genres in a typically Tarantino fashion ... Tarantino's work has been labeled Tarantinoesque, as he carries a universal signature on all his work.'* (03/12/12)

Arguably, by making collective sense of the artistic (iconography, plot, themes, title, etc.) and commercial (actor, director, studio, franchise) clues, I am able to *classify* the film accordingly within a specific genre and/or film type. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) argue that different genre classifications provide viewers with a first reference point for a film, and function as a 'quasi-search' characteristic through which consumers assess product traits without having seen a particular film. Many prior film consumption studies consider genre as a determinant of box office success (Litman, 1983; Litman and Kohl, 1989). However, the holistic SPI approach provides some empirically based support for the concept of the film brandscape of O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013), in that one factor alone did not influence initial interpretation, rather a collective mix of film characteristics acted as a series of clues to understand the film classification. Furthermore, we develop nuanced categorizations which go beyond simplistic genre to a more developed response.

#### **4.2 FEEL**

This experience, clearly linked to Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) 'feelings', can relate to the inner feelings and emotions triggered prior to and during the actual film consumption experience. Subjectively classifying the film (sense) in terms of a specific sub-genre and/ or film type is an important process, since it forms pre-expectations and notions for particular films. Firstly, I am able to resonate with past film experiences and stimulate pleasures based on accessing feelings from previously enjoyed similar films to influence film selection:

*'I came across a new film called Trouble With The Curve which was presented as a Clint Eastwood vehicle ... I initially associate Eastwood as a Western icon, both as actor and director. However, since leaving the genre, his films (acted or directed) have been what I would describe as powerful and thought-provoking dramas, such as Mystic River, Million Dollar Baby, and Grand Torino, to name a few. This new film (Trouble With The Curve) appears to follow suit, in particular with Million Dollar Baby through the idea of a surrogate father-daughter relationship, and I look forward to its release.'* (29/11/12)

This extract shows how my feelings towards Clint Eastwood have changed over time as I have encountered his later work. Alternatively, I may reflect on past negative feelings towards particular film classifications, which may lead to a likely dismissal:

*'I came across the film Jack and Jill starring Adam Sandler, which I almost instinctively ruled out, based on the actor alone. Whilst he may well be a popular choice for some people, I personally don't get his sense of humor nor the silly characters that he so frequently plays, and so his brand of comedy is just not for me.'* (26/11/12)

Through developing a personal classification scheme (based on past experiences), one can select films to consume in order to fulfill a certain want, need, or desire. By this I mean particular film classifications have the ability to evoke certain *emotions* or make us feel a certain way. For instance, horror films incite fear, comedies make us laugh, action films thrill and excite us and so on. Consequently, having previously classified these films (sense), one can make an assumption regarding how they intend to make us feel and their sought-after end goal, and thus we choose to consume or (momentarily) reject particular films as a result of our mood and/ or situational circumstance. Trusting one's own feelings generally points consumers' towards the "right" direction in terms of judgments and decisions (Avnet et al., 2012). From a film consumption perspective, Caruso et al. (2006) examine the impact of *mood* on consumer choices, and argue that attending to mood can have a marked effect on ensuing choices. Similarly, the diary data suggest that classified films were often selected and consumed as a consequence of my (and/ or the wider groups) emotional



mood at the time. By reflecting on the impact of mood with my co-authors, this seemed to differ depending on my general frame of mind at that moment, the time of day, the day of the week, or seasonal changes. For instance, high consumption of Christmas films due to the Christmas period, consumption of family-orientated films on Sundays, as well as consumption of light, uplifting films to offset one's negative mindset, are just a few cases from the diary indicating how mood can affect preference construction. The film is then evaluated on the basis of it fulfilling the intended emotional mood or feeling, which can result in both *positive* and also *negative consumption experiences*:

*'In the evening, Lydia [wife], Tyler [stepson] and I decided to watch a film. I proposed War Horse, which had recently been released on Sky On Demand. It's a film I had wanted to see for a while, since it's another acclaimed Spielberg war drama. However, in hindsight, it perhaps wasn't the best film option for a family Sunday evening in. I personally wasn't in the mood for a long and intense war drama on a Sunday evening, and then to top it all off Tyler was not enjoying it. So we turned it off forty or so minutes in and looked for something else to watch. However, this will be a film I will go back to on a more suitable occasion [with just Lydia]. Plus, turning the film off ended up being a blessing in disguise, because the live-action version of 101 Dalmatians was showing on BBC Three. This for me is a perfect family film, it's warm, it's relaxing, and it's set around Christmas time so it allowed us to continue our theme of watching all things Christmassy. This film also gives me a sense of nostalgia, as it reminds me of constantly watching it around Christmas time with my own family when I was younger. Overall, a perfect Sunday night family film.'* (02/12/12)

Here is a typical example of when film satisfaction cannot be achieved when one is not in the right mood (wrong day of the week) or frame of mind to appreciate a particular film (*War Horse*). This aligns with Staiger's (2005) seminal work on media reception, which examines how emotion influences meaning-making, aligning with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) concentration on feelings. Undoubtedly, emotion and mood impacts on sensemaking, whereby consumers attempt to determine which option will feel most appropriate given their affective state and motives

(Hennig et al., 2012; Mogilner et al., 2012; Di Muro and Murray, 2012). Thus, the benefit of constructing personal film classifications (sense), which accommodate a variety of emotional and mood-based consumption experiences, allows the consumer to pick and choose accordingly, depending on their situational circumstance. Reflecting on previous experiences, sometimes a sad and emotional film can result in a positive experience if that was the sought-after goal and intended feeling. Incidentally, the subsequently consumed film above (*101 Dalmatians*) was more pleasurable on the basis of it providing a more relaxing family Sunday evening viewing, having previously watched the film multiple times before. Arguably, certain film classifications lend themselves to repeat consumption or reconsumption (Russell and Levy, 2011) in home settings, as they can evoke nostalgic (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Schindler and Holbrook, 2003) and hedonistic FEELINGS, specifically Christmas and family-orientated films.

#### 4.3 THINK

This experience appeals to the rational, and problem solving experiences that engage consumers. Often it is difficult to make sense of the film materials in order to classify the film appropriately within a particular sub-genre and/ or film type, and thus know the intended feeling of the film viewing experience. In the instances where I could not classify the film from the artistic and commercial film characteristics, I would seek additional information such as *friends' opinions* and *critical reviews* (playability factors) to clarify the film's proposition. This meant actively researching the film further (*IMDb, Facebook*), which was the case for *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012):

*'The advertisement left me somewhat confused as to what the film is about. The artwork was centered around the two main actors; in this case Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper. Putting the action trilogy The Hunger Games aside, I associate Jennifer Lawrence with dramatic roles in acclaimed films*

*such as Winter's Bone. Whereas, with regards to Bradley Cooper, I naturally identify him with his comedy roles in The Hangover films. Therefore, is Silver Linings Playbook a drama, a comedy, or a hybrid of both genres? For this reason, I am not convinced about the film and would need to investigate further to ascertain the genre before deciding whether or not to view the film.'* (29/11/12)

This confusion is referred to by Zhao et al. (2013) as category confusion, where the various elements of the film cause consumer uncertainty as to what is on offer. Since actively researching the film through various user and critical reviews (on *IMDb*), the type of film on offer appeared to be an acclaimed comedy drama, which addresses mental health issues rather than an outright comedy. Consequently, it was a film that appealed to me, offering a *theater* consumption opportunity with my wife.

Interestingly, if the feel stage considers how mood and circumstantial factors may impact our preference construction (specifically in *home* settings), we also think about what films classifications warrant the film theater environment. Arguably, consumers are motivated to consume particular types of films in the theater setting to ensure a more pleasurable experience. In my case, although this study took place within a two-week period, by reflecting on past theater consumption with my co-authors, these theater experiences are largely driven by four motivational factors that we refer to as; visual, acclaim, event/ urgency, and social. Certainly, any film that is visually enhanced by the theater environment is considered a motivation, such as summer blockbusters for their special effects, or supernatural/ satanic horror as a result of the dark and mysterious atmosphere one experiences in the theater setting. Additionally, critically acclaimed films (like *Silver Linings Playbook* above) or what I would classify as award-based films (commonly films based on true stories, biopics, thought provoking dramas etc.) are also a motivation and deserve a theater viewing on the basis of their perceived playability. Indeed, researching the film further and assessing the film's likely playability arguably speeds up and/ or slows down the

consumption process, as films that appear less ‘playable’ may be relegated to later home viewing:

*‘On IMDb [I] was attracted by a news headline concerning a box-office record for Thanksgiving weekend in the US, particularly the performance of Lincoln ... It made a positive impression, as the film’s description centered on the role of President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, offering a biopic drama. Having studied American History in my undergraduate degree, I am fascinated by the topic and was very much looking forward to its release in the UK early next year ... Both Spielberg and Day-Lewis are highly acclaimed and award winning in their field, and are familiar with biopic and war dramas. Incidentally, Spielberg won his two Best Director awards for his efforts in Schindler’s List and Saving Private Ryan, whereas many remember Day-Lewis for his performance in Last of the Mohicans ... This is definitely a cinema film.’ (26/11/12)*

Based on the quality and acclaim of the film classification (biopic drama) supported by the lead actor, director, and release date during the awards season (January to March), *Lincoln* deserves a film theater viewing. Similarly, films that I would label as event films create urgency and are eagerly anticipated, thus attract you to the theater. These are often sequels, prequels, or remakes of big film franchises, such as *James Bond* or *Lord of the Rings*, for which I simply cannot wait until home release. Then, finally, there are motivational factors related to the social experience and occasion that the theater provides, whereby the selection of film might take a secondary role in order to socialize with friends/ family/ spouse and so on. However, as highlighted below, these occasions can still provide positive viewing experiences due to the greater possibility of the film exceeding expectations, as well as the social interaction of film consumption:

*‘In the evening, Lydia and I went to the cinema to watch the final Twilight film. Lydia, having read all the books and seen all the previous films, is a huge fan. I, on the other hand, am not a huge admirer of the franchise, but undeniably had no choice but to accompany her ... Following viewing, I was mildly entertained by the film, and felt it was the best addition to the series by far. The film built slowly, building tension and suspense and climaxed with an epic fight scene akin to the Lord of the Rings fight sequences, which was also enhanced by the huge screen and the surround sound. Moreover, there*

*was little romance in this one, and the romance that was evident was fairly adult in nature, rather than soppy teenage interpretations. By and large, I did walk out the cinema a happy customer [leading to further discussions on the journey home], and it was a nice film to watch with Lydia, who also enjoyed it so it was a successful evening.'* (27/11/12)

It is worth noting that these are not distinct motivational categories and it is likely many films will fall into more than one category. For instance, for me, *Avatar* (2009) fell into acclaim (Oscar nominated), visual (shown in 3D and motion capture technology, whilst shown in IMAX and 3D), and urgency (hype around director James Cameron after twelve year absence), which therefore increased the theater desire even further. Whereas, in contrast, the majority of films consumed at home were for more relaxing recreational purposes, or those that did not warrant the theater environment, such as family films, comedies, romantic comedies, and so forth. Additionally, as shown in section 4.1, earlier enjoyment of films at the film theater (in the case for *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* and *The Woman in Black*) prompted me to buy physical copies to repeat consume at home.

#### **4.4 ACT**

This experience relates to how we act during, pre-, and post-consumption, both on an individual and a collective level. Arguably, our actions, decisions and experiences may (or may not) surprise us and lead to behavioral change, affecting future consumption. Thus, while individually I might not have associated an actor with a certain role (sense), this can change based on further experiences. For example, Bradley Cooper (mentioned above regarding *Silver Linings Playbook*) moving from comedy-based films to acclaimed drama. Returning to this notion of category confusion (Zhao et al., 2013), the potential comedy aspect of *Silver Linings Playbook* brought about my perplexed FEELINGS towards the film, as a result of past negative experiences within comedy. This view also corresponded with my initial hesitancy

towards Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011), which demanded consultation with friends (think):

*'Judging by the lead actor (Owen Wilson), I initially thought the film would be a comedy and when I later researched the film on IMDb and noticed Woody Allen as the director, this confirmed my suspicions about the genre. Allen is best known for his comedic films such as Annie Hall and Manhattan, however his recent films have been somewhat derided ... But Woody Allen comedy is very much a different brand of comedy underneath the umbrella of comedy, so perhaps more information on this film is needed before making final judgment.'* (07/12/12)

*'My friends agreed that some of the recent UK based films like Match Point and Scoop were dreadful, but I was also assured that Woody is very much back with a bang with his European renditions and that Midnight in Paris and even Vicky Cristina Barcelona are both a must watch. I know Lydia likes Woody Allen so perhaps this could now be an option for a lazy Sunday afternoon viewing.'* (09/12/12)

Firstly, on an individual level, since the director is acclaimed, knowledge regarding his previous films can be seen as contributing to the creation of new type classification (Woody Allen comedy) within the comedy sphere. Further still, perhaps the Woody Allen comedy can be split into additional sub-categories consisting of New York (*Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*), London (*Match Point*, *Scoop*), and European (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *Midnight in Paris*) Woody Allen comedy. Nevertheless, similar to my past experiences with the horror genre (sense), comedy also can be segmented into different sub-genre classifications, such as slapstick, screwball, spoof, teen and romantic, among others. After closer analysis with my co-authors, it was in fact the spoof and slapstick films that are perhaps not to my liking, which aligned with other neglected comedy-based films throughout the study.

Secondly, the above extract indicates I would be willing to adapt my behavior and preferences in order to consider situational factors, such as group and mood-based (feel) consumption. Therefore, whilst there are clear brands of comedy that do not

interest me, every film serves a purpose, which was the case with *Scary Movie 2* (2001):

*'Tyler and his friend somehow talked us [Lydia and I] into watching Scary Movie 2 ... I had never seen any of the Scary Movie series but was aware it is a successful comedy franchise starring Anna Faris, which could only mean one thing; a spoof. However, to keep everybody happy it seemed to be the right film to watch. Also, as the majority of the spoof elements were based on past horror films, Lydia and I saw it as a mini challenge to see who could claim the most horror references.'* (08/12/12)

The desire to put aside my own preferences in order to facilitate an enjoyable family experience came through from this study. So, despite such films being at the top of my 'not to my taste' list, I was willing to watch the chosen film within this family consumption context. This demonstrates how one's film consumption behaviors can differ depending on the company you are with at the time. Similar to how we select theater consumption (think), we also consider what film classifications (sense) should be consumed *individually* and/ or *collectively*. Several films were consumed as a consequence of the group or family setting, whereby collective *decision-making* was necessary in order to find an appropriate film (previously classified) suitable for the audience and/ or social situation. Here, a compromise would often take place in order to find a film classification that would accommodate everyone's taste preferences or mood (feel) at the time. Whilst reflecting on past positive experiences with my co-authors, arguably certain film classifications benefited from the group environment and social interaction, such as horror (being scared collectively is more enjoyable than individually) and comedy (laughing and sharing jokes is more rewarding in a group setting) based films. Whereas negative group experiences often result in changing the group dynamics in accordance with the film classifications, as was the case with *War Horse* (earlier).

Conversely, there are specific film classifications that are only suited to my individual taste preferences and thus merit lone consumption. This was apparent for the acclaimed biopic drama *Lincoln* (mentioned above), as well as my selection of the gangster series *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-present):

*'Until now I have never had the chance to watch [Boardwalk Empire] as Lydia despises gangster films (portrayal of women is disgusting apparently) and it is not really suitable for Tyler ... I have always been fascinated with the gangster film, particularly the idea of the anti-hero apparent in these films; a character we should really dislike but instead we admire their glamorous lifestyle ... When I later studied film theory in my undergraduate degree, I researched the historical and developmental aspects of the gangster genre ... Upon first discovering Boardwalk Empire, I felt the show had all the main gangster ingredients and this was exerted on all the marketing materials ... It was set during the classic gangster 1920s prohibition era in the US (alcohol, tommy guns, and classic automobiles). [From a commercial perspective] the show is created by Terrence Winter (The Sopranos), and executively produced by Martin Scorsese. It also stars Steve Buscemi as the leading protagonist, who is also familiar with the gangster genre with roles in Reservoir Dogs and The Sopranos ... The show completely delivered what I expected; set in urban 1920s US during the prohibition era with gangsters making their living through the sale of illegal alcohol (rise), whilst introducing conflicts and battles with rival gangs (eventual fall). There was even the appearance of notorious gangster Al Capone as a young driver for one of the rich gangsters.'* (27/11/12)

Interestingly, other people, particularly those in the same household, can still influence my lone consumption, as I select films/ shows that do not align with their interests and classification schemes. Moreover, my positive response to this experience can be explained by looking at the UK Film Council's (2007) Avids study, where they found that heavy film consumers used film for both entertainment and educational purposes. The intersection of entertainment and education has influenced my wider film taste and preference. As a result of studying specific genres of film and historical periods, certain preferences emerged, particular my interest in Western and gangster films. Throughout the diary period, I continued to watch the series (individually), which drew many parallels to modern classic gangster films like *Once Upon A Time in America* (1985) and *The Untouchables* (1987), specifically the latter



in terms of the period setting and involvement of Al Capone. Indeed, inspired by the TV show, I extended the consumption experience (Kerrigan and Yalkin, 2009) of the prohibition gangster film by watching *The Untouchables* (again) within the two-week period. Here, we propose that film consumption is a cumulative experience, with cultural capital earned throughout a film consumer's life, which informs future film selection. Using this concept, one can exploit an audience's film consumption experience regarding repeat viewings of films, as well as recommending films to friends and family. Equally, the positive experience may increase the likelihood of repeating the consumption process in the same *viewing* (consuming in home or film theater settings) and/ or *situational* environment (consideration of companions, mood, seasonality, etc.). For instance, continuing to watch certain film classifications individually rather than in a particular *group setting*, or at the film theater rather than home.

Conversely, if a viewing experience is surprisingly negative, it may affect my perception of that film or similar, often demanding further research (think) of related films prior to future consumption. Firstly, as indicated in the previous stages, I may need to reevaluate the viewing and/ or situational factors, which may have impacted satisfaction. Or I may have simply *misclassified* the film in the classification process (sense), and subsequently the viewing experience does fulfill pre-expectations set prior to consumption. This results in creating new classification schemes to ensure avoidance of this mistake in future consumption situations, much like my experience with the 1998 version of *Les Misérables*:

*'Having ... seen the theatre show in London, I was expecting a cathartic emotional drama supported by strong musical numbers. Yet, during viewing, I soon realized that the film is in fact based on the novel (period drama) and not the modern day theatre production (musical period drama). Consequently, my pre-perceptions did not deliver what I was expecting and thus resulted in a*

*negative view of the film. Initially, my disappointments of this version stretched to the up and coming release due early next year. I researched the new version ... on IMDb. The first name I noticed was Tom Hooper as the director, who I initially did not locate within the musical genre, however he is known for his filmmaking of period dramas (akin to the time period of Les Miserables) ... I was further put at ease when establishing that Cameron Mackintosh (producer of theatre version of Les Miserables) is collaborating with Working Title Films, ensuring the latest version will be a musical, inspired by the stage production. Furthermore, the involvement of musical performers Hugh Jackman and Amanda Seyfried as leading protagonists confirmed the musical approach. Even the film's promotional poster resembles the theatrical production advertisement, as it is centered on the young girl (Cosette) and the trailer emphasizes the popular songs taken from the theatre show.' (30/11/12)*

Consequently, after further research resulting from the initial disappointments from the 1998 version of *Les Miserables*, there is still hope and high expectation that the new film adaptation (based on the musical theatre production) will deliver and possibly even surpass the theatrical achievements of the show. It also facilitated in the creation of a new classification scheme within the *Les Miserables* format (the novel adaptation 'period drama' versions and the theater adaptation 'musical' versions), which will impact future consumption choices.

#### **4.5 RELATE**

This experience collectively combines all the other experiences mentioned above. Therefore, it is important to revisit Figure 1 and conceptualize my consumption processes, in order to understand the many important aspects/ drivers which facilitate consumption. By judging a film on first contact via active (and passive) forms of communication (sense), one is able to subjectively classify the film offering in terms of a particular micro-genre or film type using the artistic (iconography, plot, themes, title, etc.) and commercial (actor, director, studio, etc.) clues available. This is seen as a key process since it determines if, how, when, and where I will consume the film (feel/ think/ act) based on the viewing (home or film theater) and/ or situational

(considerations around seasonality, mood, companions, etc.) environment. Arguably, the flexibility of creating personal classification schemes enables consumption experiences for all manner of different occasions and scenarios. In my case, particular films were consumed individually for entertainment and/ or educational purposes (Westerns, biopics, gangster/crime films), while others were consumed for more mood-based (feel) and seasonal purposes (Christmas films). Particular classifications demanded consumption in film theaters (supernatural horror, big action blockbusters, critically acclaimed films) to enhance the hedonic experience (think), whereas others allowed for a relaxed consumption experience at home in a group or family setting (various comedies, Christmas films).

Certainly, the data revealed a difference in decision-making when selecting different types of films for lone consumption or those consumed in a family context (act), linking to Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2012b) understanding of the need to view decision-making around film consumption as a collective act. Lone consumption choices were based on my wider individual experiences and preferences, derived from prior positive consumption experiences, and/ or wider interest in specific historical periods, such as gangster films and Westerns. Decision-making regarding basic interest followed by an attempt to 'grade' the film in terms of consistency or quality played into this film selection. In terms of family-focused consumption, collective decision-making was at play, and we can see that nostalgia and the desire to recreate previous family times influenced decision-making, suggested by the repeat viewing of Christmas and other family films.

Following viewing, film satisfaction can be achieved by comparing pre-perceptions of the film (based on the initial classification and subsequent marketability cues) to the consumption experience itself (relating to playability). In

addition, the various factors surrounding the viewing and situational environment also strongly influenced consumption and had the ability to either heighten or ruin the overall viewing experience. If the experience was positive (lived up to expectations or suitable viewing/situational environment), this extended the consumption experience and influenced active research and viewings of related films (in terms of genre, director, actor, and so on) in similar environments. Whereas, if the experience was negative (initial misclassification of the film or inappropriate viewing/situational environment), this affected future decisions regarding that film or similar, thus demanding further research (think) in order to create new classification schemes as well as a revaluation of the overall environmental factors prior to future consumption. In summary, film consumption is a complex process and accounts for a variety of differing experiences, and, as such, I am constantly creating new and/ or amending my personal classification schemes in order to facilitate my future film consumption practices.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

This introspective paper has used SPI to empirically provide a holistic overview of the lead author's film consumption behavior through a snapshot of his film consumption. The use of the SPI method is appropriate in understanding this process as an experience. In furthering this understanding of experience within the context of the dominant literature, our findings contribute to expanding both Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) conceptualization of consumption experiences as consisting of fantasies, feelings and fun, and Schmitt's later (1999) SEM framework, which focuses on experiences orchestrated by marketers to facilitate consumption. We find that the consumption experience needs to be viewed in terms of questions related to 'with whom' and 'where', rather than just in relation to the product/ service and the

consumer. Therefore, in terms of mapping this onto Schmitt's (1999) framework, consumer interpretation of marketing communications as well as their experience of viewing the film are in line with sense; in responding to sensory experiences. Thus, experiential designers can look to the film industry to understand responses to the sensory elements of film marketing and consumption experiences. One important element of this is the recognition that this sensory interaction is informed by prior knowledge, experience and influences, such as the attitudes and recommendations of friends.

Following on from sense, similar elements map onto Schmitt's module feel. In viewing and evaluating film-marketing materials, as well as in the reception of the film itself, consumers develop emotional responses as a result of key motifs designed to make us happy, sad, scared, amused, thrilled and so on. Schmitt's think module has relevance in terms of problem solving and the need for the consumer to interpret a set of 'cultural cues' (Kerrigan, 2010) provided to them by the film marketers. Our study shows that resources such as online review sites, friends' social media pages or interaction with peer groups help us to decode these clues further and understand if a film is for us, as well as whether or not the film warrants the theater environment.

With regard to act and the focus on changing behavior through experiences, this can relate to the holistic nature of film consumption found in our study. While the classification systems employed by consumers may allow them to reduce risk in selecting films, being surprised by a film which challenges existing understanding of your taste, or interpretations of communications cues, can lead to developing a more inclusive approach to consumption, thus, expanding the classification process.

Finally, relate, the focus on external perceptions or the idea of projecting an ‘ideal self’ can be seen as linked to the deployment of classification systems in order to maintain consumption practices in line with the ideal self, as well as the adaptation of our consumption practices to fit in with others in our lives, so adapting personal taste and choice to account for collective experiential sharing. However, Schmitt’s ‘ideal self’ is a unified notion; whilst we would argue that this self is, in fact, a distributed self, or more accurately seen as ‘multiple ideal selves’; so ‘ideal individual self’, ‘ideal partner self’, ‘ideal parent self’ and so on. Thus the self is situationally focused rather than absolute.

This study has further illustrated how complex film consumption can be and has highlighted the various factors and sensemaking processes that are undertaken throughout the consumption experience. In addition it has also shown how audience members (in this case the lead author) create their own personal classification schemes based on a series of clues (sense/ feel/ think). However, relying on predetermined notions of genre is not always helpful in understanding this process, since genre is too overly simplistic a concept. Instead, we create new subjective classifications based on past and repeated engagement with film. For instance, traditional genres like Westerns, comedy, horror and so on are still apparent and are all factors which allow us to hone in on something and initially attract our attention. Yet, once they grab our attention we do further analysis (think) to sub-categorize until we find a sub-category that is consistent with what we want.

Genres are often conceived as objective classifications assigned to particular films to help consumers make viewing decisions. They are considered to exist prior to consumers’ decision-making as objects they can orient to when choosing films to watch. As we have seen in the analysis, film selection is a much more intricate

process. Consumers interweave past experiences of film and film related information, utilizing both artistic and commercial elements, with current information about films (and other activities) they are about to choose to engage with. Through this interweaving of information and experiences, consumers create subjective personal types of film or personal classification schemes that allow them to account for their decision to view one film rather than another. These subjective personal types of film often overlap with genres communicated by advertising and promotion.

Incidentally, these personal classification schemes affect how the lead author (and audiences) initially perceives, selects and finally evaluates a film. More importantly, however, these classifications heavily impact the environment (and vice versa) in which the lead author consumes films and, as a consequence, reveal a notable distinction between film theater and home consumption, and lone and group consumption. Figure 2 below illustrates how the classification process involves *three dimensions*, which further impact the decision-making practices and overall viewing experience of the film. The first classification is related to issues such as *film characteristics* (genre, type, style) using various artistic and commercial clues to conceptualize this classification accordingly (sense/ feel/ think). Sometimes further analysis and research (consultation with friends and family and/or consideration of critical reviews) is needed to make this classification more precise (think/ relate). However, once the classification is confirmed, this then helps classify the film further on a secondary level, based on the viewing environment (home or film theater consumption), and a third level influenced by the situational environment (impact of companions, time, seasonality and mood). Although the three areas of the classification process are separate dimensions and play out at different times, they are nevertheless interrelated and facilitate in making the consumption decision, which

impacts the overall viewing experience. One might start from the classified film and elect to consume or ignore based on the viewing and/ or situational environment. At other times this influence may be a particular set of circumstances (i.e. a rainy family day inside) inspiring the selection of an appropriate film, which suits that moment, having classified the film at an earlier time. In short, to understand the film consumption decision process, one must consider all three dimensions of the classification process, and how they take into account all the elements of the experience, which leads onto the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

### **5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, genre is a category introduced by the film industry, however considering the data presented above, we have an opportunity to take the subjective experience much more seriously and conclude that film selection is not about genre, rather it is the broader expected/ anticipated/ hoped for experience of a film. This anticipated experience is shaped by a whole range of elements that the consumer assembles by drawing on the resources offered by the film producers and their marketing team. From our analysis we see that the lead author draws on genre-related information, yet at the same time uses other resources to assemble the idea of a film that materializes only when he watches it. Viewed this way, there is no definitive list of film genres, but instead a number of terms which can be used to subjectively identify different film types and classifications, thus allowing consumers to select the films they desire (and marketers to target their prospective audience). We have shown that audiences do have preferences when they select films to consume (Austin and Gordon, 1987), but in doing so, they create their own personal classification schemes on three levels (film characteristics, viewing and situational environment) in order to fulfill various wants, needs and desires throughout their consumption



experiences. Therefore, while using genre to predict success is welcomed, such research needs to be nuanced with more fine-grained understanding of how consumers deal with category confusion (Zhao et al., 2013) and how they make sense of the overall film brandscape, prior to and following consumption. It seems more helpful to think in terms of classification schemes, which are derived from the personal tastes and experiences of the film consumer, but rely on conventional clues in facilitating this classification process. These classification schemes allow the consumer to assess the film in relation to its marketability based on the sets of clues offered and their own previous experiences.

Our study expands existing work on experiential consumption by mapping Schmitt's (1999) experience modules onto our findings. In doing so, we illustrate the importance of looking to existing experiential 'products' to develop commercially driven experiential consumption. By understanding how consumers react both emotionally and rationally to communications about and then the experience itself, and how this feeds into their attitude to future consumption, experience designers can develop their experiences with this learning in mind. As such, we develop on from Schmitt's (1999) work to note the multi-dimensional nature of the ideal self, where the consumption situation influences the ideal self which filters the film consumption process. Such emotional and rational reactions can influence playability, where we match the promise and delivery based on both rational and emotional evaluation.

Practically, it is important to understand that audiences interpret information in different ways based on their past experiences with films and their personal interests and circumstances, thus breaking down a film into its constituent interest. When producing a film, if the above three dimensions are used to gauge it, then practitioners can effectively evaluate whether the film should go to theaters or not;

when to release and schedule the film; who to target; what kind of messages to put forward in the marketing communications and so forth, in order to help consumers make the correct classifications. Indeed, Madrigal (2014) reminds us of the need for increasingly sophisticated and individualistic classification of films in order to help consumers navigate the increasing numbers of films available via on demand services. Our study highlights the holistic nature of film consumption where prior experiences influence future sensemaking and film consumption experiences.

## 5.2 Methodological Contribution

From a methodological perspective, the diary-based introspective study was also undertaken to document the effectiveness of introspective techniques when conducting qualitative research and whether or not such data can direct future research opportunities in film marketing and consumption. Undoubtedly, this study has shown that through diary-based introspective research it is possible to gain a holistic understanding of film consumption in everyday situations; it is a research method that gives the consumer a voice (Stern, 1998), whilst also allowing the researcher unlimited 24-hour access to the observed phenomenon of interest. As such it heeds Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) and Kerrigan's (2010) call to complement previous quantitative studies with film consumption studies (using qualitative approaches) from a sociological and psychological perspective in both home and film theater environments. In so doing, this study responds to Wohlfeil and Whelan's (2008) call for more interpretative methods in order to understand audience consumption and therefore illustrates the value of introspective research. Indeed, this paper has expressed the thoughts and feelings regarding the lead author's film habits and offered valuable insight into what elements of the film medium inspire, influence and inform his consumption processes.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The benefit of the introspective diary method lies in the in-depth nature of enquiry possible through SPI, although the period of data collection was limited to two weeks, which may be viewed as too short to be meaningful. However, as the first author is an avid film consumer, these two weeks consisted of intensive engagement with film consumption experiences and therefore give a snapshot of his film consumption. It could also be argued that by keeping a diary on a day-to-day basis, one becomes more self-aware and therefore changes one's behavior. Reactivity is a general problem of all social-scientific research and maybe even more so when the research-subject himself gathers the data. We acknowledge that the data gathering itself and in this case the note taking and diary writing themselves are an activity the film consumer only engaged in for the purpose of the research. The impact of the research on the first author's behavior therefore could not be excluded completely. For the purpose of the research however it was our prime concern that the first author did not change his film consumption behavior. We have dealt with the possibility of reactivity by encouraging the first author to turn diary writing into a routine behavior deployed as a daily practice of good researchers. The co-authors also have probed the first author in discussions about the data to ensure that what they were examining and analyzing were not extraordinary behavior produced in response to the research process but descriptions of the first author's common and generic film consumption.

We also are aware that others will be looking at this behavior and therefore one might be inclined to edit the diary to change the research subject's behavior and design accounts to come across as more socially acceptable. The research has indeed changed the first author's behavior in that it encouraged him to embed the writing of notes about his encounters with and experience of film information and films. Thus,

his information gathering behavior, as well as his film experiences, were augmented by reflective practice. We have therefore encountered the challenge of ensuring that our analysis is not unduly influenced or even biased by this reflection. In this case, we have strived to address this possible short-coming of the analysis in two ways: first, the principal author confirmed that his viewing during the two week period was typical of his general viewing habits. Being a co-author of this paper, he was aware that the integrity of the research relied on his transparency in recording his responses during this time. And second, as a team of authors we discussed the data and, at all stages of the analysis, made sure that they conformed with the pattern of the introspector's typical viewing behavior. The co-authors challenged the lead author's accounts of his experiences, forcing him to return to and further examine the data for possible inconsistencies and bias.

Much of the criticism of this method is aimed at the lack of separation in the roles of the researcher and introspector, and its exclusive focus on one individual (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993; Woodside, 2004, 2006). Yet, the sociologists Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue for the importance of reflexivity, in which authors must conduct their research with conscious attention to the effects of their own position, their own set of internalized structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their objectivity. By engaging in collective sensemaking in the data analysis stage, this reflexivity was reinforced. In short, the author(s) conducted their research with one eye continually reflecting back upon their own habitus; their dispositions learned through long social and institutional training. Moreover, by being both the researcher and the researched, one must constantly question and interpret one's own behavior and query the validity of responses; what this points to is

how we create our own classification schemes developed from previous experiences with film and non-film interests.

Clearly, by focusing on just one respondent, this paper cannot claim generalizability, but in developing a complex map of the film consumption experience, we can move our research focus towards understanding this complexity. In developing this work further, additional participants can be recruited to use guided introspection, where participants are selected and asked by the researchers to introspect (film diaries), followed by an interview (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993). The major advantage of employing this guided approach is that casting numerous introspective perspectives over a particular marketing phenomenon (in this case film consumption), allows the possibility of capturing many responses, rather than relying on a solitary perspective (Patterson et al., 1998; Patterson, 2005; Baron et al., 2007). Finally, the findings of this paper can inform the development of more nuanced pre-release audience research, which can inform distribution and release strategies for film.

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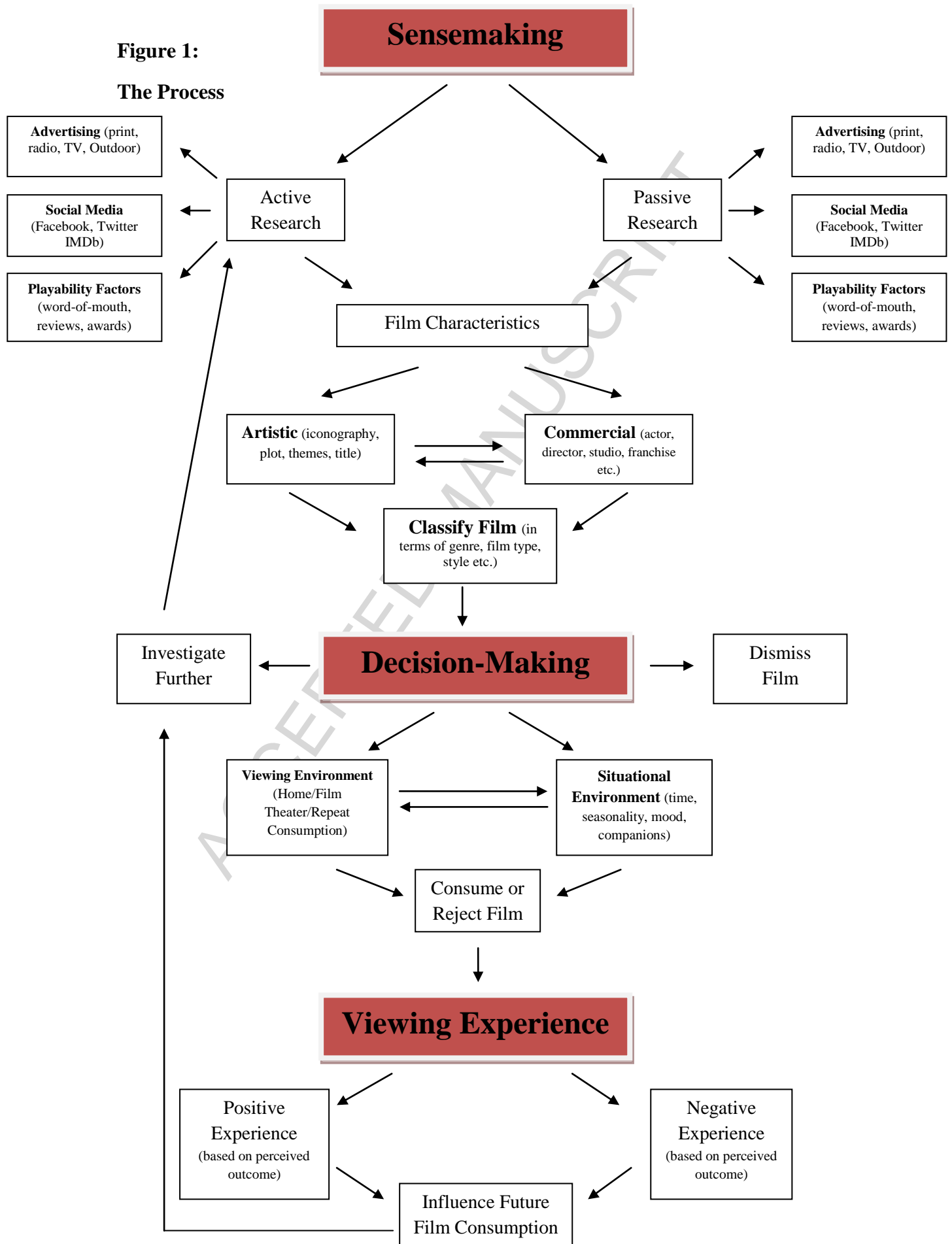
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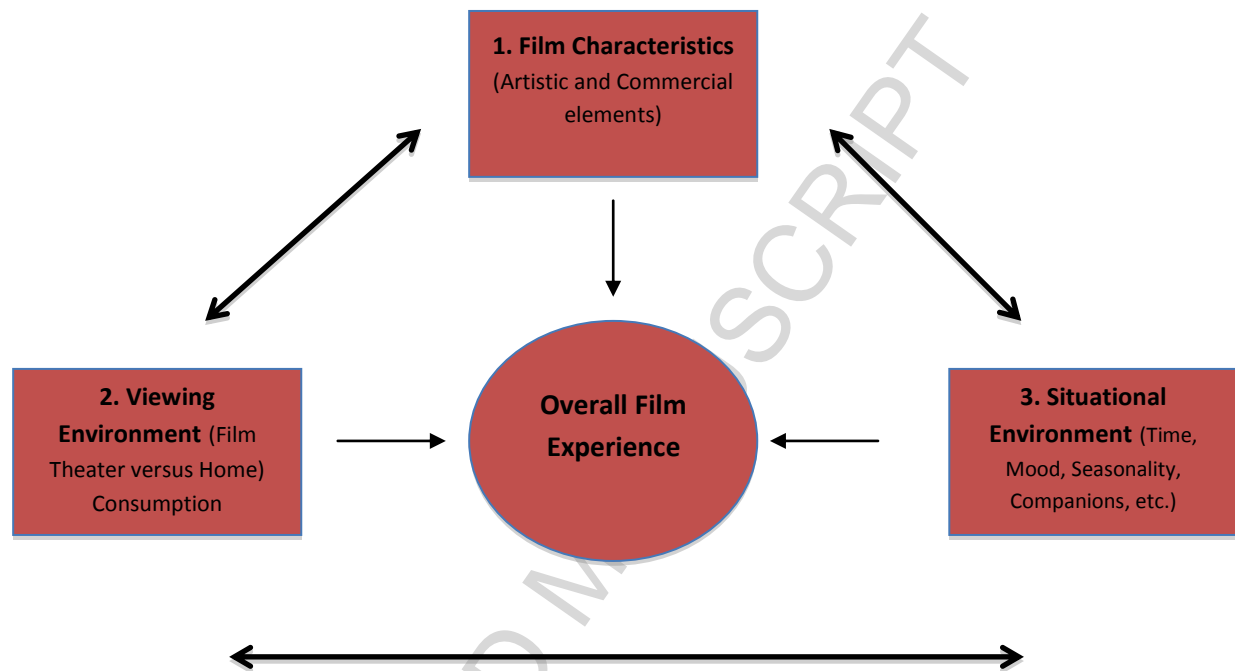
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**Figure 1:**  
**The Process**



**Figure 2:****The Film Consumption Experience Model**

**Highlights**

- Used SPI to understand how the lead author makes sense of his film consumption.
- Analysed a snapshot of experiences including pre and post consumption processes.
- We introduce a film consumption experience model based on three classifications.
- This consists of film characteristics and the viewing and situational environment.
- This facilitates consumption choices whilst impacting the overall film experience.