

Research on the Impact of Parental Movie Choices on Children in China

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Abstract: In the context of growing global awareness regarding the influence of media content on young audiences, this paper focuses on the significant subject of film rating systems. Specifically, it explores the intricate landscape of these systems, their implementation across various countries, and the unique absence of such a system in China. Through an extensive analysis of existing rating systems, including those in the United States, the UK, and India, the study illuminates their influence on global cinema and cultural perceptions. Focusing on China, the paper employs a detailed survey of parents' experiences and opinions regarding movie selection for children in the absence of a formal rating system. Findings reveal that a majority of parents acknowledge that movies have an impact on children. Notably, parents express a strong desire for the implementation of a movie rating system in China to guide their choices and prevent the exposure of their children to adult or violent content. However, the study also uncovers potential challenges and complexities in designing a system that balances protection, choice, and cultural relevance. The paper concludes by advocating for a well-considered film rating system in China that aligns with international norms yet is sensitive to local values, aiming to foster a responsible and diverse cinematic culture.

Keywords: film rating systems, Chinese cinema, child behavior, cultural influence, parental guidance

1. Introduction

China's long-standing lack of a film rating system creates challenges for parents when selecting movies for their children, a topic that has been largely neglected in academic research. Employing a survey methodology, which includes open-ended and multiple-choice questions, the study seeks to understand parental preferences in movie selection and how these preferences affect children's development. In the current discussions about China's film rating system, most of them are expressions of personal opinions and research on the views of college students. As for the factors that parents consider when choosing movies for their children, there is still a lack of data support. The paper investigates the perceived impact of various movie content on children, as well as the parents' approach to movie selection in the absence of a formal film rating system.

This paper underscores the crucial role parents play in their children's media consumption in the absence of a rating system and highlights the necessity for the introduction of such a system in China.

2. Overview of Film Rating Systems

2.1. Definition and Purpose of Film Rating Systems

Film rating systems are mechanisms established by governmental bodies or industry associations to categorize films based on their suitability for certain audiences, particularly in regard to the age of viewers. They aim to guide consumers and help parents make informed decisions about the appropriateness of films for their children. Ratings are typically given based on a film's content, such as language, violence, nudity, drug use, and sexual activity. Besides, they serve to protect younger audiences from exposure to content that may be harmful or disturbing. However, these systems vary greatly worldwide in terms of their rating categories, guidelines, and the extent to which they are legally enforced.

2.2. Implementation of Film Rating Systems in Different Countries

Various countries have implemented their own film rating systems, which have influenced the distribution and consumption of films locally and internationally. For instance, the United States has the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating system, which includes classifications such as G for general audiences, PG for parental guidance suggested, PG-13 for parents strongly cautioned, R for restricted to adult viewers, and NC-17 for adults only [1]. This system has had a significant influence on the global film industry, as films often alter their content to achieve a certain rating to maximize their potential audience.

Similarly, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in the UK classifies films into categories including U for universal, PG for parental guidance, 12A and 12, 15, and 18, with each implying increasing levels of mature content [2]. The BBFC also provides detailed consumer advice explaining the reasons for a film's rating, aiding parents and viewers in their movie selection.

In contrast, countries like India have a more conservative Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) that can refuse to certify a film on the grounds of it being against the country's cultural or moral values. This has led to controversies and discussions about censorship versus creative freedom.

The various film rating systems worldwide have a profound impact on the film industry and viewing practices, shaping the type of content produced and consumed, and influencing societal norms and perceptions about what is considered suitable for different audiences.

2.3. The Current Situation for a Film Rating System in China

China presents a unique case as it lacks a formal film rating system. Instead, the National Film Administration (NFA) approves all films for distribution, enforcing content regulations that promote socially acceptable and politically correct material according to the Chinese Communist Party's standards [3, 4]. Films with content deemed inappropriate can be denied distribution, and a quota limits the number of foreign films allowed each year. This system, which requires films to be suitable for all ages, significantly impacts both domestic and international filmmakers. In a survey conducted among college students by Pan Xianwei, the analysis of 754 questionnaires revealed that college students in China have great expectations for the implementation of a movie rating system in the country. Those in favor of introducing a movie rating system accounted for 93.56%, those who wanted to keep the current Chinese movie system unchanged were 4.15%, and those who were against the movie rating system made up 2.29% [5]. This broadly reflects the attitude of the Chinese college student audience towards movie ratings in China. The majority strongly agrees with the classification of Chinese films, and the main reason is that classification can protect minors. Of

those who agreed with the purpose of movie ratings, 86% did so to protect minors, while 14% did so to give adults more film choices.

A study conducted by Bandura et al. revealed that children who were exposed to videos of either cartoon violence or human violence displayed greater levels of aggression compared to those not exposed to violent videos. This study focused on how children, when frustrated, responded after watching violent or non-violent videos. The findings showed that the children who viewed the violent content were more prone to resort to aggressive behavior as a means of resolving their frustration [6].

Thus, A well-structured rating system would not only align China's film industry with international norms but also provide clearer guidance to viewers, particularly in protecting minors from inappropriate content. Such a shift could foster a more diverse and responsible film culture, aligning content with audience maturity and societal values without stifling creative freedom.

3. Research Design

This age threshold was chosen in reference to international film rating systems, such as PG12 or PG13, which are typically used to delineate films that contain mild violence, horror, profanity, or other mildly adult themes. The survey aimed to understand how these parents navigate film selection for their children in the absence of such a rating system. The survey was created using the Wenjuanxing application and disseminated via WeChat. A total of 85 parents responded to the survey.

The survey consisted of 17 questions designed to assess the parents' experiences and opinions related to selecting films for their children in the absence of a film rating system. Questions included single-choice, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of parents' attitudes and experiences.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to delve into several core issues related to parents choosing films for their children, particularly in the absence of a film rating system. First, the questionnaire collected demographic information to better understand the characteristics of the respondents. The subsequent questions focused on whether parents actively choose films for their children, how they determine the suitability of films, and the difficulties they encounter when choosing films without a rating system, as well as the impact of this situation on their selection. Following that, the survey explored whether parents watch films with their children, whether they discuss the content afterward, and whether they notice any changes in their children's behavior or social interactions after watching certain films. Moreover, the inquiry sought to gain insight into parents' beliefs about the influence of films on their children's understanding and views of the real world, and what elements of films have the most significant impact on their children's behavior and attitudes. Finally, the questionnaire attempted to understand the parents' opinion on the implementation of a film rating system, and what they perceive to be the potential advantages or disadvantages of such a system. By organizing the survey around these core dimensions, the investigation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' attitudes and practices related to choosing films suitable for their children to watch, as well as the potential influence of a film rating system on these selections.

The data collected from the survey responses were then analyzed to identify patterns and draw conclusions. Here is the link to the questionnaire: <https://www.wjx.cn/vm/Q4md9hr.aspx#>

4. Results

4.1. Parents' Preferences in Movie Selection

The data indicates that a staggering 98.63% of parents participate in the selection of movies for their children. The primary factors influencing their decisions are the theme and content of the movie, accounting for 93.06% of their consideration, followed by reviews and ratings on the internet, accounting for 68.06%. Less importance is given to factors like movie trailers or the reputation of the director and actors.

However, the absence of a movie rating system seems to create difficulties for 61.11% of parents when choosing films. The primary concern being the potential exposure to inappropriate content, which 80.56% of respondents worried about.

4.2. The Impact of Parents' Movie Choices on Children's Behavior

The movies that children watch can significantly impact their behavior. This is reflected in the data, with 27.4% of parents noting a behavioral change in their children after watching certain films, and 50.68% of parents have observed their children imitating characters from the films.

A further exploration into the imitation of movie characters by children reveals detailed insights into this phenomenon. Among the surveyed respondents, 67% of parents identified specific imitative behaviors in their children. These behaviors include mimicking movie characters' language, actions, conflict resolution methods, and even emulating specific role models like Elsa from "Frozen" and Spider-Man. Examples given ranged from imitating action-packed fighting scenes to singing like movie characters and copying how characters walk or talk. In contrast, 15% of parents reported no noticeable imitation in their children's behavior after watching a movie. Additionally, 18% of parents were uncertain whether the movies had led to any imitative behaviors in their children. These varying responses highlight the diverse influence that movies may have on children and demonstrate that imitation can be an intricate and multifaceted aspect of children's engagement with films.

The detailed observations of imitative behavior underline the significance of the characters and role models portrayed in movies. It showcases how specific characteristics and actions can be transferred to children's daily behavior, either positively or negatively.

Furthermore, 28.77% of parents believe that the movies their children watch can affect their social interactions, while 35.62% think that it can influence their understanding and view of the real world. When asked which elements of movies might impact children's behavior and attitude the most, respondents highlighted character behavior (82.19%), moral concepts (79.45%), violent scenes (71.23%), and sexual content (57.53%) as significant factors.

This demonstrates a strong link between the movies children watch and their subsequent behavior. The new data adds depth to this understanding by revealing both the variety of possible impacts and the uncertainty that exists among some parents. It highlights the importance of careful movie selection and the potential benefits of a robust movie rating system. To that end, it's noteworthy that 91.78% of respondents support the implementation of a movie rating system.

4.3. The Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Implementing Film Rating Systems in China

The data concerning the potential benefits and drawbacks of implementing a film rating system in China yield various perspectives and insights. On the benefits side, respondents believe that such a system could provide crucial assistance in avoiding negative influences, particularly by filtering out inappropriate content, thus shielding minors from exposure to harmful material such as violence and adult themes. Moreover, parents recognize the importance of having guidance in selecting

age-appropriate films, which would make the selection process more accessible and trustworthy. Some respondents also see the potential for a rating system to enhance children's cognition and morals by helping them better understand the world and learn valuable lessons about human conduct. The convenience factor is also emphasized, with several participants noting the ease of quickly filtering and selecting movies based on personal preference or suitability for children.

However, there are also drawbacks to consider. Some respondents expressed concern over potential bias in the rating system, fearing that it might lead to prejudiced judgments that could marginalize specific types of movies. Others questioned the actual effectiveness of such a system, citing instances where the intended protection of minors was not achieved in other countries. Concerns about the system being overly simplistic or restrictive were also raised, with fears that it might be too rigid or overcorrect, thus losing some of the nuances of movie selection. Finally, a subset of respondents identified both benefits and drawbacks, acknowledging the complexity of the issue. They appreciated the potential in guiding age-appropriate viewing but also recognized that a diverse and multifaceted world might require more flexible guidance. This multifaceted response underscores the need for a balanced and careful approach to implementing a film rating system in China, taking into account both its potential advantages and possible pitfalls.

5. Conclusion

In summarizing the findings of this paper, it is evident that the implementation and structure of film rating systems are of profound importance in shaping both the industry and societal perceptions of film content. Throughout the world, rating systems, though varied, serve the common goal of aligning films with audience suitability, an aspect that finds resonating support across different cultures.

The examination of China's unique absence of a formal film rating system, coupled with an exploration of parents' practices and concerns, illustrates a substantial need for a structure that recognizes the impact of films on children's behavior. The survey data gathered from parents underscore the urgency and complexity of this matter, reflecting a clear desire for guidance in movie selection without undue restriction or bias.

The potential benefits and drawbacks of a movie rating system, as expressed by the respondents, provide a nuanced understanding that emphasizes the need for a balanced and culturally sensitive approach. The support for avoiding negative influences, guiding choices, and enhancing cognition must be weighed against concerns over potential bias and oversimplification.

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