CHANGES AND TRENDS BASED ON PERCEIVED LIFESTYLES REFLECTED IN MOVIES

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Abstract: *Researchers and film professionals have studied the impact of cinema on society for decades. However, less attention is paid to the changes and trends in the perception of lifestyle reflected in the cinema. This article studies the main themes and trends of non-advertising marketing content in films. Because movies are public and popular media, they can influence a person's values, lifestyles, and attitudes toward certain aspects of life. The relevance and importance of the study of consumer culture are because it forms such cultural phenomena as tastes, desires, values, norms of behavior, and interests. The article's research object was the works of Western cinema of recent years, the largest share of which was produced in the United States of America. The work analyzes cinematographic works and highlights the main themes and trends that have a transformative impact on the way of life and society's perception of the environment: health awareness, addictions (especially to tobacco products, alcohol and drugs), environmental awareness and sustainability, privacy and relationships (due to the representation of men and women at different stages of the life cycle and the perception of sex by young people), as well as the geek subculture. The study results showed that the themes mentioned above, reflected in the films, can influence life values, lifestyle and people's attitudes to perception, possession and use of certain products. Health and environmental awareness are essential not only at the individual level but also at the societal level. According to the results of the content analysis of the films, it was recorded that nowadays, the frequency of the appearance of cigarettes and similar products has significantly decreased, especially in films with limited access for children. The geek subculture has gained much popularity and recognition in recent years.*

In addition, the paper has practical value for any researcher who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of non-advertising marketing content that manifests its influence through popular films about society and consumer behavior.

Keywords: consumer behavior, cultural marketing, lifestyle, movie consumption.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, movies have become a natural part of our lives. The global movie industry, which generates major income on a year-on-year basis, offers countless opportunities for the audience to relax, to be entertained and to be immersed in various stories and worlds, gaining memorable experiences. Consequently, apart from the now commonly recognized forms of advertisements in the environment of movies (such as product placement or merchandising) we have also witnessed the emergence of such non-advertisement based marketing content. These carry messages through the movies which may impact – in varying strength and direction – the consumer behavior (Ma et al., 2020). By watching the films, the receptive viewers gain the opportunity to interpret the messages and the represented values, contrasting them with their own sense of values and opinions (Kerrigan et al., 2004; Shrum and Lee, 2012; Gierzynski et al., 2013; Manoliu, 2018).

In accordance with the above sentiment, we have explored and analyzed the main themes and trends that stem from changes to lifestyle and societal perception of our surroundings, acting both as representation and in some ways a form of guidance: through health awareness the emergence of healthy living and nutrition – and the possible negative consequences of junk food; the increasingly conscious presentation of the various forms of addictions and their related social problems; the portrayal of environmental awareness (primarily witnessed in documentaries); the increasingly realistic and diverse representation of private lives and relationships; and last but not least the geek subculture and its' increasingly accepted and sought after tropes and characters. In the process of collecting and organizing these trends we tried to highlight the main changes that appeared through movies and – while not advertisement-like in nature – have had major impact on consumers in recent years. Their importance lies in the fact that they amplify and promote the spread of society-wide currents and changes, which may or may not already existed in certain segments of population.

2. Methodology

In the study we have collected literary sources for review purposes in connection to major themes and trends of non-advertisement based marketing content in movies. We have structured these sources in a way to explore these theoretical and previously collected research data in a review paper format, while also providing actual examples of movies – and in certain cases, television series.

It is important to highlight that the study does not currently involve any primary research, only secondary data based on external sources and studies. The following chapters disclose the results of our literature review in the matter.

3. Health awareness

Being conscious about one's health is one of the most prevalent trends of our times, depicted in almost all forms of media – hence, even in movies. We can see it reflected in the various sports movies – focusing on individual athletes, sport teams or the people supporting their endeavors – or when sport activities are shown as part of the day-to-day life (Pearson, 2010; Crosson, 2013; Wakefield et al., 2017). As these sport activities appear as a regular occurrence, they highlight that participation does not necessarily have to be a special, unique event: often even character dialogues are set in the environment of a gym or during a run.

Healthy and nutritious eating is often a basic principle in movies (characters chopping up vegetables in the kitchen or ordering salads in restaurants), strengthening certain characters' positive attributes. Contrasting this we can observe how unhealthy food choices and snacking – junk food in general – often represent the downward spiral of a characters, potentially highlighting all kinds of negative effects in the process (Chaput et al., 2011). The relevance of these are underlined in related studies, such as the one conducted by Ma et al. (2020) which showed a spike of interest towards organic food products following the 2008 release of a documentary based on food processing facilities and their less-than-optimal conduct entitled "Food, Inc.". The study also highlighted that information in relation to healthy eating or the portrayed characters' general health awareness and related goals may also subconsciously activate the viewers as well. If, however, the observed movie character gives up on his or her aspirations, this activating effect might weaken as a result. (Lee and Shapiro, 2016; Zhou et al., 2017).

A special mention should be made about movies that specifically target and criticize fast restaurants and junk food, or even consumption focused societies as a whole. One such example is the documentary entitled "Super Size Me", where writer and director Morgan Spurlock examined the influence of the fast-food industry as well as the consequences of a McDonald's only diet (naturally, as a result of the unavoidable sudden weight increase his health condition has also suffered). Ultimately movies such as this one have greatly contributed to a shift of consumer perception to these types of fast food (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2008; Ma et al., 2020).

4. Addictions

The narrative and visual imagery of movies may have a significant role in the viewers' understanding and perception of when consumption is socially acceptable and when does it become an addiction. Movies both entertain and instruct at the same time, thus in recent years' filmmakers have adapted their messages about tobacco products, alcohol and drug use in accordance with the social climate (Tebbe-Grossman, 2003; Kniazeva, 2004).

4.1 Tobacco products

In recent decades, awareness of the harmful effects of smoking has increased. Such awareness has led many countries to introduce stricter regulations on smoking as well as to place higher emphasis on smoking prevention and cessation. In this context, the issue of tobacco use in films is of particular interest. Similar to the real world, smoking slowly fades out of the movie scenes as well. In the past decades, numerous researches have showcased how the depiction of tobacco products in movies impact movie viewers, especially when it comes to underage people (Sargent et al., 2002; Kniazeva, 2004; Charlesworth and Glantz, 2005; Shmueli et al., 2010; Shadel et al., 2011; Mejia et al., 2017; Adibah et al., 2021). By today, the occurrence of cigarettes and similar products has greatly decreased, especially in age restricted movies, as it can be observed on Figure 1, where Adibah et al. (2021) presented the number of tobacco incidents in the top 71 movies of the year 2020.

Table 1. Tobacco product incidents in films by rating (2020)

Rating	Cigarettes	Cigars	E-cigarettes	Pipes	Smokeless Tobacco	Total Incidents
G (n=2)	0	0	0	0	0	0
PG (n=16)	0	8	0	5	0	13
PG-13 (n=28)	35	57	0	3	0	95
R (n=28)	520	331	1	26	0	878
Total (N=71)	555	396	1	34	0	986

Source: Adibah et al. (2021).

This was a direct result of both the shift of public perception and the various amendments of legislation spearheaded by the aforementioned researches and also the constant lobbying by many non-government organizations and civic groups (Tebbe-Grossman, 2003; Kollath-Cattano et al., 2016; Mejia et al., 2017; Gartner and Hall, 2020; Adibah et al., 2021). Probably as a result of all this, smoking increasingly appears as a common attribute in the characterization of negative characters in new movies (Kollath-Cattano et al., 2016), as well as more prevalent depiction of the harsh consequences, an example being the continuously coughing and out of breath title character in "Constantine" – a comic book adaptation released in 2005 about a chain-smoking detective who fights demons (Yang et al., 2004; Russell and Russell, 2012). At the same time, tobacco products have started to play an important role in the definition of context: smoking thus may be a tool in showcasing a given time period (one when it was less prohibited and frowned upon), or may be depicted as an interaction of social integration (Shadel et al., 2011).

4.2 Alcohol

Towards alcohol as another form of possible addiction, both legislation and the filmmakers can be seen as less restrictive: alcohol consumption often appears in the case of positive characters as well (as opposed to smoking), sometimes presented as a romantic, fun or lifestyle element, which gives it an attractive image. Furthermore, certain high grade alcoholic beverages are often used in association with high class and social status (Russell and

Russell, 2012; Kollath-Cattano et al., 2016). At the same time, movies are not afraid to show the negative consequences of the limitless consumption: depicted characters often become more violent in nature due to excessive alcohol intake, which can lead to conflicts in their relationships, in certain cases they might even lose self-control. Another continuously reused trope is the dangers of drunk driving is (Tebbe-Grossman, 2003; Russell and Russell, 2012; Bleakley et al., 2014; Bleakley et al., 2019). Being an alcoholic is unequivocally showcased as a negative character trait, whether it belongs to an over-all negative or positive character – in the case of the latter it is commonly used tool, to add shades to the tragic hero trope (Shary, 2002; Wakefield et al., 2017). At the same time, the positive impact of these cinematic portrayals is also very important: they depict the negative consequences of alcoholism without suggesting hopeless pessimism, often emphasizing that there is always a way out, a solution. In an indirect manner they raise awareness of the possibilities of quitting, be it the detoxification treatments or the aid of anonymous alcoholic support groups – highlighting that these issues can (and should) be talked about openly and that help is available. In certain American researches the scholars have – among other sources – used this aspect of movies in the development of rehabilitation programs (Kniazeva, 2004; Motyka and Al-Imam, 2021).

4.3 Drug use

The appearance and representation of drugs in movies is another complex and sensitive issue. It is important to discuss the appearances and treatment of soft- and hard drugs separately. Among the soft drugs, marijuana is the most dominant one, characters of contemporary movies often use it in a sort of trivial manner, showing an acceptance rivaling – or in some cases surpassing even – that of the tobacco products even. This is probably in correlation with the fact that the production, distribution, ownership and use of cannabis-based products are quickly becoming legal in many American states, moreover the rules on product placement have a looser hold on these products than tobacco (Caulkins, 2017; Gartner and Hall, 2020). When it comes to on-screen marijuana consumption, there is no difference between the gender or age of the characters, nor does it reflect on their mainly positive or negative nature (Tebbe-Grossman, 2003; Gunasekera et al., 2005). At the same time, the social status of the characters is also somewhat indicated by who can afford to use cannabis products in a state or country where it is not legal. Meanwhile, as a status symbol and generally associated with higher social circles (notably in certain high earning but stressful work and social environment), cocaine is not considered a soft drug, and its use often has a negative connotation (Motyka and Al-Imam, 2021).

The attitude of movies towards the hard drugs, however, is clearly negative: heroin and its companions are only depicted as the drug-of-choice for down-spiraling characters or junkies; in other cases the negative consequences themselves are placed in the focus point of the movie itself – such as "Trainspotting" or "Requiem for a Dream". In these movies the impact of drugs on all aspects of the characters' lives – be it their human relationships or their total personal physical and mental degradation – are traceable step by step (Shary, 2002; Derry, 2009). Hard drugs also share the connection with dealers (and their morally unacceptable behavior of dealing to their drug addict clients) and organized crime (Hughes, 2006; Motyka and Al-Imam, 2021). Similar to the case of alcohol, movies also often showcase the possibility of rehabilitation: full-on withdrawal and detoxification treatments, anonymous support groups or long format treatments such as the infamous 12-step program (Kniazeva, 2004).

5. Environment awareness, sustainability

Being conscious about the environment, the ecological footprint of an individual has become a topic of interest in today's developed societies. Documentaries create a sort of "situation report" from the current state of our planet, thus becoming excellent tools to transfer messages of global societal interests to the masses (Chris, 2006). There are examples for both individual movies (like "Plastic Ocean" which focuses on what happens with all the plastic waste, produced constantly) and also documentary series with changing thematic focus on each episodes, such as the educational programs depicting the flora and fauna of different parts of the world, or the ones highlighting architecture built with sustainability in mind. They might showcase the current destruction of the environment or even – as in the case of the documentary series "Planet Earth" – the possibilities of nature to survive alongside humanity (Schubert, 2010; Kránicz and Lichter, 2019).

Environment consciousness in movies appears more and more frequently as well. According to the previous common understanding, the root causes of environmental problems were the well identifiable corrupt leaders of giant corporations who were also punishable by law. However, similar to the academic literature of the climate change the newer movies have also placed their focus on the consumer societies, raising awareness to the notion that "we are all accessories to the upkeep of the harmful system" (Hódosy, 2018, p. 19). Thus, the emphasis in movies have shifted from the creation of scapegoats to collective remorse and search for solutions.

Ecological thinking and the feeling of responsibility towards preserving our planet is also more and more prevalent on the level of individual characters as a positive (albeit sometimes a bit naïve) trait. The mathematician lead character of "Independence Day" for example collected waste selectively, rode a bicycle to his job and throughout the movie has emphasized the faults of limitless consumption multiple times. In contemporary movies there is a higher occurrence of tools using various alternative energy sources as well as electric- and hybrid cars, similar to the changes in real world transportation (Hódosy, 2022).

When it comes to imagined visions of the future, the movies also present a great opportunity for confrontation: they present what we can expect if we do not change our own behavior and way of life (Cubitt, 2006). The tropes of a worn-down environment, or an ever-increasing amount of trash (piling in mountains) are often common ground among these movies (like in "Idiocracy" or "Ready Player One"), while the ever-shrinking amount of natural resources might be represented in social divide even greater than today – in "Elysium" the upper 1% of society has literally risen above and left behind the majority stuck on the barren and desolate lands (Hódosy, 2022)

Animal welfare appears as an important theme in movies about the environment, which we can observe in both documentaries – such as "Blackfish" focusing on the cruelty of captured orcas, or "The Cove" where the brutal practices of mass dolphin fishing (still going on today) is depicted –, and feature movies – like "Gorillas in the Mist: The Story of Dian Fossey", showcasing the life and work of the anthropologist named in the title. Sometimes, however, the message of feature movies might miss the mark, a famous example being "Finding Nemo", an animated movie standing clearly against animal captivity. While the movie soared in popularity, so did the demand towards clownfish in animal trade. All the while the case of those who have been affected by the movie's moral also warns u to be cautious: so many children have tried to imitate the movie's story by flushing their fish down the toilet that in certain states public announcements were made that these "liberated" fish will not reach the ocean in one piece (Bruckner, 2010; Hódosy, 2018).

6. Private lives, relationships

The lifestyle and personality of consumers may affect their preferences of choice in their movie consumption (be it the genre, frequency, or time and place of watching). Alongside the more precise segmentation, filmmakers and distributors must also consider this in the content of the movies (Palomba, 2020).

6.1 Single lifestyle

A major factor in the social acceptance of singles has probably been the long history of movies ("Bridget Jones", "How to be Single") and television series ("Friends", "Seinfeld", "Sex and the City") representing this way of life as perfectly natural. Young adults in-between their thirties and forties take a central role in these stories, who live a dominantly single lifestyle, albeit with the constant theme of seeking companionship (Monaco, 2013). Usually of course this is just a temporary state as romance also often appears in these stories – independently from genre, studio, director or release year –, thus the newly formed relationship might serve as an example to follow for the younger generations (Butler, 2002; Shary, 2002; Schubert, 2010). According to Kránicz and Lichter (2019) this is the reason why the romantic comedy genre is an important rite of relationship in modern societies (also connecting the culture of love with laughter and joy).

6.2 Youth and sex

The portrayal of sexuality in movies has undeniably contributed to the topic of youth and sex no longer being taboo. When the characters are young, the focus is placed on the discovery of sexuality and the loss of virginity

and such movies might impact on the youth's attitudes and behavior towards sex – occasionally raising awareness to the potential consequences of unsafe, perhaps alcohol- or drug-affected sex (Gunasekera et al., 2005; Chandra et al., 2008; Bleakly et al., 2011). The portrayal of the first sexual experience is often emphasized as part of their individual development or as a kind of initiation ceremony into adulthood (Shary, 2002). Sex itself is usually presented in a positive way in movies, but instead of actually showing the act, the characters often just talk about it, or some cueing actions are shown, such as a passionate kiss or an intimate touch (Bleakley et al., 2011). It is also important to mention movies that present stronger emotional attachments or emphasize the positive aspects of a mature sexual relationship (Lev, 2000; Basinger, 2014). In such cases the nature of the romantic relationship becomes the central point alongside the characters' perception of life and their views on sexuality – like the unfolding of romance in "Titanic" (Plantinga, 2009).

6.3 Marriage

People usually see more marriages in movies than in their own lives, which is why it is understandable, that the grandiose weddings depicted in movies may have a great influence. Under the same vein, the cultural and visual patterns and insight of American weddings have a significant impact on people planning their own – similar to their own national traditions, they might also serve as examples (Jarnkvist, 2013). Even though we live in modern societies, the patriarchy is still perceived as the dominant social system in movies regarding both the wedding and marriage (Tasker, 2004): many romantic comedies are carried by the dynamic between the father of the bride and the groom (usually in the form of seeking approval, from the future father-in-law), while the bride only appears as an objectified prize to be won over (Shumway, 2012; Kránicz and Lichter, 2019).

The timing of the marriage has nowadays delayed substantially – or in some cases may be completely off the table even – which is reflected in movies as well: people looking for serious relationships and commitment are more often in their thirties and above (Basinger, 2014). While the ultimate desire of characters is still romance and (often) marriage, they leave the previously established norms of timing and matchmaking behind and – as a form of reinforced independence – seek their future partners on their own terms and methods. They persevere with their partner of choice even if their choice is unapproved by their families, as this might represent both personal fulfillment and a form of revolt against the entrenched habitual systems of society (Shary, 2002).

As Törőcsik (2011) pointed out, more and more women all over the world seek higher education and employment, which adds up to an overall increasing economic power and capacity for advocacy. As it can be seen on Figure 1., according to MPA (2022) data, the ratio of men and women are about the same in all manners of movie watching.
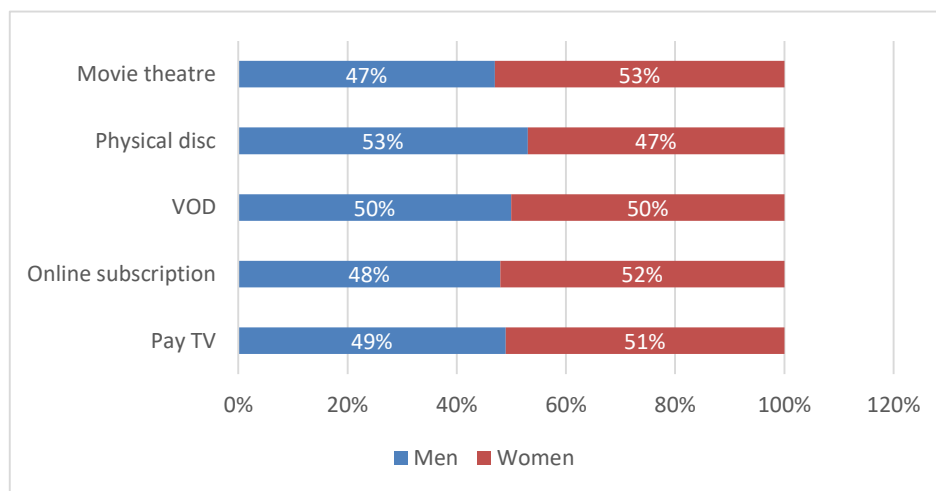

Figure 1. Gender share of moviegoers and home/mobile viewers

Source: MPA, 2022.

Moreover, there is an increase in the women-oriented movies and television series (be it from a narrative or a target segment standpoint) in multiple genres and formats. Apart from the above we can also see that the importance of career – as opposed to early marriage and having children – is in ever greater emphasis in many currently produced movies' stories.

The spread of American cultural patterns is also noticeable in the way divorces are treated as a rather common occurrence in movies (Basinger, 2014). We can see many characters who are divorced – sometimes even multiple times – and discussing payment of child support has also little weight (in comedies it might also be a source of humor, like the studio head in "Episodes" who is even proud of having to pay multiple wives' alimony and child support). The act of divorce itself is also depicted in a less negative point of view, often as an event that establishes opportunity for another marriage as filmmakers still wish to portray marriage es the natural end goal of love and relationships (Shumway, 2012; Kránicz and Lichter, 2019).

7. Geeks as a subculture

The geek subculture has gained a lot of popularity and acceptance in the past years. Hobbies and interests that were previously frowned upon became mainstream: comic books – especially those related to super heroes (Kránicz and Lichter, 2019); desktop role playing games – such as "Dungeons and Dragons"; and video games all can be labeled geek topics with increasing fandom (Barker, 2009; Woo, 2012; Banks and Wasserman, 2019). Similarly, the geek characters – who were once look down upon – are receiving ever greater roles in blockbuster movies and highly popular television shows (Csordás and Varga, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2018), all the while alongside the spread of geek culture the ownership of merchandising products has also become an important tool of one's expression of identity (Woo, 2012; Tóth, 2015). For the filmmakers the stories of geeks are always welcomed, as these characters stand out due to their uniqueness (often due to their peculiarity), or to some kind of additional knowledge or skill that helps them achieve outstanding results and become beloved protagonists – such as the cast of "The Big Bang Theory" (Csordás and Varga, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2018).

8. Conclusions, limitations

The main objective of the study was to review and present the various changing trends of lifestyle that are emerging as a result of marketing-related (but non-advertisement oriented) content found within movies. Health awareness, addictions, environmental awareness, private life and the geek subculture are all themes that have the capacity to influence people's values, lifestyles and attitudes through their representation in movies as a commonly accessible and popular medium.

Health and environmental awareness are important not only at an individual level but also at a societal level: healthy lifestyles and sustainable development can contribute to a better quality of life and a better future. At the same time, the problems presented in movies may help society to achieve a better understanding of them and to aid further by raising awareness of possible solutions.

The study does not currently involve primary research and is therefore more of a literature review: the knowledge and data used and presented are all from external sources. In presenting these sources, we have tried to explore the connections that have merit on an international scale about social changes and trends reflected in contemporary movies. In the future, we plan to conduct targeted primary research in the area of film consumption, with a special focus on marketing content – both advertisement and non-advertisement oriented in nature – that influences movie consumption.

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