

The role of anticipation in the pre-experience evaluation of motion pictures.

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Introduction

The pre-experience evaluation of a motion picture may seem a difficult task: How to have an opinion on an un-lived experience? How to know if it will be as entertaining as promised? How to interpret information from mass media and close friends?

The objective of this paper is to explore a possible answer to these questions. The importance of the motion picture economy within the world of arts is obvious. The financial investments made in motion pictures can no longer be based on managers' instincts. The motion picture industry already uses marketing tools in order to minimize the probability of a box office failure. For instance, screen tests aim at measuring consumers' attitude toward a movie during its postproduction stage. The different tests that are conducted are usually based on an intuitive framework. Today, a theoretical base seems necessary for building efficient marketing tools. Motion pictures are experiential goods, as defined by Holbrook and Hirshman (1982). This theoretical stream led to numerous publications. Nevertheless, marketing literature includes few references concerning pre-purchase product evaluation for experiential goods. The experiential consumption remains unexplained on many points. Thus, the comprehension of the pre-experience evaluation is a major stake as well on the managerial level as on the theoretical level. The study of a field such as cinema can lead to a significant improvement of the behavioral models of all of the experiential goods.

This paper aims at exploring the question of pre-purchase evaluation process for experiential goods. This will be done in three parts: (1) a literature review will show different researches giving us knowledge on our problem (2) methodology used in order to understand the pre-purchase evaluation process for motion picture and (3) we will present the results of our research.

Pre-purchase evaluation for experiential goods

The number of articles that have studied the pre-experience evaluation is low, as remarked by

Evrard and al. (2000). Choffray and Pras (1980) distinguish three steps in the motion picture choice: knowledge of the offer and its characteristics, perception of the characteristics and formation of the preferences and choice among films available. Möller and Karppinen (1983) complete for their part this model by adding the stage of the kind of motion picture. Their conclusions relate to the contextual aspect of motivations: each type of motion picture can lead to different types of motivations. Actually, many researches take into account the motivations in the choice of a motion picture. The problem is that, generally, the global motivation for cinema is measured. But these motivations may change when considering a specific motion picture. For instance, a person can love going to the cinema for entertainment, but go to see an movie about the world war two for its historical content. This aspect is highlighted by many authors such as Möller and Karppinen (1983, p241): « in different moments, different dimensions or needs may dominate the choice process ».

Most of the researches dealing with the subject of motion picture choice evaluate the impact of information on the final choice. For instance, Austin (1981) studied the importance of twenty eight variables including story plot, rewards, promotion, critics, friend's comments etc. His results show that the plot and the kind of movie as well as friends' comments are the most used information. Reddy and al. (1998) explore determinants of Broadway shows successes. They introduce in their pattern a great number of variables (critics from different newspapers, advertisement, movie clips, type of show, price etc....). Their research makes an important review of the information having significant impact on Broadway shows successes. This allows us to reach a better understanding of the useful information for shows-goers. Numerous researches investigate reasons for motion picture success. They usually include a great number of variables (Bagella and Becchetti 1999, Litman 1989, Ginsburg and Weyers 1999, Hirshman and Pieros 1985, Sawhney and Eliashberg 1996...) or focus on the effects of a specific feature such as the presence of a star (De Vany and Walls 1999, Albert 1998).

This type of research has the advantage of describing useful information from a consumer point of view. However, it does not explain how such information is interpreted. Moreover, even if numerous publications show the importance of features such as the presence of a star or favorable reviews, some motion pictures, which are greatly evaluated on these features, fail when launched on the market. Some authors then try to have a more global point of view proposing econometric frameworks. For instance, Neelamegham and Jain (1999) offer a conceptualization of the choice process. They integrate variables such as expectations, focusing on traits as emotional stimulation and motion picture features (story plot, cast, setting, special effects etc....). The interest of this research resides in the integration of the pre-experience

evaluation in the whole consumption process.

Another approach consists of focusing the research on the individual. For example, Eliashberg and Sawhney (1994) present a predictive model of the pleasure experienced while watching a movie. They study the impact of stable variables of the individual, the subjects' mood, and the emotional content of the experience. They obtain contrasted results according to different groups of consumers.

Thus, the majority of researches do not take into account the individual process of pre-experience evaluation. The question of the prepayment evaluation of experiential consumption remains large open. Thus, we propose to provide an analytical glance on this process.

Methodology

A protocol of qualitative data collection was set up. The goal was to collect information as precise and complete as possible to determine the complexity of the phenomenon studied. It was decided to compile various methods. Thus, a sample of twenty-four students was selected according to various criteria: frequency of attendance to movie theater (How often do you go to see a movie in a month?), subjective expertise in cinema (Do you think you are an expert in cinema?), relationship with cinema (Are you impassioned of cinema?) and their gender. Indeed, the criteria of representativeness of qualitative research are not the same ones as for quantitative research. The selection of the participants was thus made according to theoretical criteria of segmentation connected to the problems of research (Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, a complementary sample of four non-students was recruited in order to check the atypicality of the answers of the students. Let us note right now that no difference in the modes of pre-experience evaluation was noticed between the students and the non-students. The composition of the sample is presented in table 1.

Four meetings were organized with each participant:

The first one consisted of a semi-directive interview dealing with:

- Motion picture consumption: relationship with cinema, attendance, taste, motivation and subjective expertise.
- Consumption stories, film choice, information search.
- Current movies in movie theaters.

The second interview used two different techniques: an information display board and evocation tests. The information display board proposed a set of fourteen real movies. The movies were

not launched yet, and neither promotion nor reports had been published. This was done to control the effects of promotion and of word of mouth. Stimuli were selected in order to give as much variance concerning the types of movies as possible. Information given concerned title, director, leading actors, story plot, and two photographs of the film. A complete list of the films selected is presented in table 2. These information were selected for two main reasons:

- In one hand, we wanted to provide information as real as possible. That is why information as critic reviews or friend's comments were not included. Moreover, the information selected is usually used in promotional campaigns.
- On the other hand, we wanted to mix experiential and non-experiential information. Experiential information is usually not used in information display boards. But, regarding the experiential nature of theatrical films consumption, we founded it to be pertinent. Moreover experiential information source are of greater utility than non-experiential sources (Cooper Martin, 1992).

Then, we used a technique of evocation. This technique is very similar to the key word tests used in psychology. The respondent had to express all that came to his/her mind when he/she was thinking about a film. The selected stimulus for this task was the poster. Poster is a good way to help informants to retrieve information because it is composed of visual and verbal information about a movie. Moreover, moviegoers are usually familiar with posters. For reasons of feasibility, seventy-two tiny posters were proposed to respondents. A complete list of the posters is presented in table 2. Each participant was asked to make three groups with the posters:

- 1 – The motion picture that they had already seen.
- 2 – The unknown motion pictures
- 3 – The motion pictures that they knew about but had not seen

The third group of posters was used for the evocation test. The posters used in this test were all posters of films in the movies theaters at the moment of the interviews. The aim was to make people tell his/her attitude about the film and what the film evoked to them. These data collection was very useful in the comprehension of the prepurchase evaluation for movies.

The third interview consisted of a discussion regarding specialized reviews. For that, various French reviews were proposed to the respondents (Studio, Positif, Les cahiers du cinema, Première...), reflecting a great variance in the editorials. The participants were invited to read the reviews and to give their reactions about the articles, photographs and subjects. This discussion

had as a main objective to supplement the first two interviews and to comprehend the reactions of the respondents to a different medium.

Finally, in order to thank the participant and to collect "in vivo" data, the protocol method was used. Participants selected a film that they wanted to see, and we invited them to go with us. Data was collected before the projection concerning information, choice of the film, theater location, and schedule. Then, after the movie, data was collected regarding the experience, satisfaction, and a summary of the interviews concerning the feelings of the respondents regarding their participation to the study.

Data analysis

The verbatims categorization of the interviews led to a pre-purchase evaluation model for movies. We will present here the results of the evocation test (second interview). Indeed, the nature of the test led to very useful data for the comprehension of our research. Four categories of verbatims were found:

- (1) *Information about the motion picture.* Information can be objective (cast, director, plot...) or subjective (critics reviews, friend's comments...). Concerning information, most of the researches do not seek to understand the action of each information in the construction of the evaluation. For instance, the presence of stars is unanimously recognized as having a significant positive impact on the financial results and the evaluations of movies. However, the qualitative data show that the star can be appreciated for very different aspects according to the individuals. Debraix and al. (1992) postulate that consumers formulate preference judgments (emotional) more reliable than similarity judgments (cognitive) towards the actors and actresses of cinema. Our data analysis shows that an actor(-tress) of cinema can be appreciated for his/her appearance, his/her acting abilities, his/her political convictions or his/her adequacy with the role. Thus, each objective information can be used in a very subjective way to evaluate various dimensions of the experience, as figure 2 shows.
- (2) *Anticipated behavior.* When respondents formulated the evocations, they spoke about their behavioral intentions. If this could be judged as very similar to the concept of intention of purchase, it should nevertheless be specified that the intentions are based on the anticipated responses, that we will study in the continuation of the communication. The anticipated behavior does not comprise only of verbatims like "I'm thinking of going to see this movie", which would be purchase intentions. The anticipated behavior also

gathers information on the context of consumption of the experience. For example:

- The watch mode:
 - The choice between going to see the movie in a theater or to rent a video/DVD or see it on television.
 - The desired social environment (with friends, close relations, alone...)
 - The kind of movie theater:
 - The type of theater (repertoire theater, multiplex, large theater...)
 - Choice of language (original version or translated)
 - The equipment of the theater (sound system, seat comfort...)
 - Movies in competition at the time of release
 - Individual contextual variables.
 - The mood.
 - The passive or active attitude triggering the act of purchasing (waiting for an offer or suggesting a movie choice to other people)
- (3) The comparison with existing films. The films proposed were very often compared with other films. This phenomenon reflects the use of the heuristics of representativeness that, as defined by Creton (1987, p183), "consists in judging an event by its resemblance to another event". The comparisons can be based on the presence of an actor or a director, on the genre of story, the kind of film. They can also refer to non-cinematographic objects, such as novels or role-plays.
- (4) The anticipated responses. They can be defined as a mental representation of the future experience. The detail of the anticipation of the experience is the subject of our next part.

Results: Anticipating the Experience...

What is anticipating the experience?

The analysis of the collected data highlighted a central phenomenon in the comprehension of the process of pre-experience evaluation of film: the anticipation of the experience. The texts of the interviews reveal the existence of an anticipation of the responses that the films can provoke. For example, the fact of thinking that a film will be funny, that it can be a piece of art, or that it can be shocking, shows that various types of responses are anticipated according to information the individual have received. These anticipations are based on a global mental representation of the experience. The individuals, according to information they have, will create a mental representation of the experience, project themselves there, and draw various responses that

they anticipate. The study of anticipation is still embryonic in market research, although conceptual bases exist. Shiv and Huber (2000) propose that when the consumers anticipate their satisfaction, they form mental images. Then, the decision of purchase relies on such images. MacInnis and Price (1987) propose for their part the concept of pre-consumption mental imagery. McGill and Anand (1989) work is based on the heuristic of imagery and postulate that the experience is imagined then its desirability is based on the emotional responses resulting from imagination. Arts seem to us particularly well adapted to this theoretical vision. The qualitative data support the thesis of the anticipation of the response to a film via a process of mental representation.

Regarding the construction of the anticipated responses, it seems that two major processes exist. On one hand, when the individual is submitted to experiential information, he/she allots to the film qualities perceived in this information. For instance, a funny clip from a movie will make the individual anticipate emotional responses similar to those experienced during the clip. Secondly, the experiential or non-experiential information will be processed by the memory of the individual who will use them in order to anticipate the reactions. For instance, a new film by Lars Von Trier will make people anticipate emotional, aesthetic, morals or artistic responses drawn from last experiences by this director.

Information will allow the individual to create a mental representation of the experience, and to project himself/herself there giving place to anticipated responses that he/she will think he/she might have during the film. Our qualitative data analysis led to a typology of the anticipated responses. We will present it in the following section.

Typology of Anticipated Responses:

The analysis of the anticipated responses of the interviews led to a nine-group typology. Even if there is very little research about anticipated responses, the responses to a work of art were the subject of some research. For example, Belk (1987) distinguishes six types of responses to a work of art:

- (1) Aesthetic responses “relate to the affect evoked by experiencing an artwork”.
- (2) Artistic responses are based on knowledge of the historical context of a work of art or information about other artworks.
- (3) Economic responses relate to the price of the artwork.
- (4) Moral responses arise from ethic judgments.
- (5) Cognitive responses “refer to the knowledge about the world that an artwork may convey or bring to realization”.

- (6) Social responses refer to status judgments of consuming an artwork

The presentation of these different kinds of responses is the point of a discussion. Belk (1987) explains that his proposition do not reflect an ambition of exhaustiveness. Moreover, Belk underlines on several occasions that interrelationships exist between various dimensions. It is clear that these last are not orthogonal, independent.

For their part, Lacher and Mizerski (1994) made a study on the reactions associated with rock music. They distinguish:

- (1) The global affect response to music, linked with the emotional dimension to the experience.
- (2) The experiential responses that relate to the notion of in-depth experience.
- (3) The sensory reaction seems to be the most primitive response to music. This kind of reaction appears with rhythmic movements of the body.
- (4) Imaginative responses refer to mental images that music can create (for instance, *La Mer* by Debussy).
- (5) Emotional responses are the feelings experienced while the listening of music.
- (6) Analytic responses. This is linked with music analysis. To recognize a precise rhythm or a musical form

Lastly, Jullier (2002) proposes an answer to the question "what is a good movie? ". He distinguishes six recurring criteria:

- (1) Box office. The box-office seems to be the most common indicator of quality for motion pictures. A film seen by so many people cannot be that bad!
- (2) Technique. Fascination for technique is recurring in arts: techniques of painting, musical virtuosity etc. are common criteria of evaluation. Films with "great expenditure" and "visual effects" attract a great mass of public. However, Jullier stresses the fact that the technique is not only sufficient for the realization of a good film.
- (3) The edification. A good movie makes you learn things. Cinema is a vehicle of culture, even if it is known that a director and a technical team build what is projected on the screen. What one sees must be true. Cinema allows an approach of reality.
- (4) Emotion. A good movie provides sensations. The body responds to images and sounds. Even if, according to the author, this criterion is not avowable, emotion is central in the cinematographic experience.
- (5) Originality. This criterion is also largely used in the other artistic disciplines. The artist cannot repeat what was already made. He must create new things, be perceived like

original by the viewer and his peers. The originality can also come from the artist who completes a work different from those for which he/she is known for.

- (6) Coherence. Coherence is a criterion reserved for the specialists. It is difficult to appreciate it with the first viewing. It relates to the respect of narrative logic, to the sequence of the plans...

These three researches seem capital to us in our research. Indeed, Belk (1987) and Lacher and Mizerski (1994) respectively studied the responses to an artwork and to music. Jullier (2002) proposed criteria for post-viewing evaluation of films. Our work consists of a transposition of this on pre-viewing evaluation.

The analysis of the qualitative data shows the presence of different types of anticipated responses. A step-by-step categorization led us to distinguish nine types of anticipated responses:

- (1) The global affective anticipated response. This particular type of anticipated response reflects the global affect that the individual has the presentiment of enjoying the film. Verbatims such as "I think that I will like this film" are typical of this kind of anticipated responses. .
- (2) Aesthetic anticipated responses: these anticipated responses relate to the Holbrook and Hirschman's 1982 model of experiential consumptions. These responses can be divided into two sub-groups: anticipated emotions ("this movie is horrible, we live the fear with the characters") and the stricto-sensus esthetic quality of the film ("there could be very nice sunsets on the hills")
- (3) Original anticipated responses. This kind of anticipated response may have different causes: artistic originality, emotional originality, cognitive originality... Originality is a factor most appreciated in movies. The desire for discovering new feelings, a new artistic, or a specific point of view led in the majority of the cases to an intention to see the film. However, it seems that there is a threshold, such as what exists within the framework of the stimulation search, which should not to exceed because the individuals will have then the feeling of being lost.
- (4) Self-Oriented anticipated responses: The individual make a reference to his self-concept. This type of response is related to the self-concept congruity theory formulated by Sirgy (1982). The individual may tend to accept or reject a movie by an identification process.

There are two levels of identification: the first one concerns the motion picture itself: the characters, the story, the historical and geographical context... the second one concerns the representation of the typical public of the motion picture. The self-congruency is not always sought. Cinema can be an opportunity to experience another self (Dampérat and al. 2002).

- (5) **Cognitive anticipated responses.** This type of anticipated response includes two dimensions: on one hand, the degree of anticipated cognitive stimulation and on the other, the anticipated acquisition of knowledge. The knowledge to watch a motion picture can convey is greatly appreciated. Even if acquiring knowledge is not the main outcome of cinema, some movies can make viewers learn things, at an historical, cultural or other level.
- (6) **Artistic anticipated responses.** They relate to the artistic quality of the film. The quality of the setting in scene, of the photography is part of the artistic quality of the film. It is not only a question of subjective aesthetic perception, but of objective evaluation. For example, the quality of framings and photography takes part in the emotion but can be evaluated in a technical way.
- (7) **Social anticipated responses #1: Conviviality.** The cinematographic experience includes an important social dimension. Participants of the study often evoked this dimension. Moreover, it seems that the anticipated conviviality is strongly linked with the anticipated behavior. A motion picture comprises an intrinsic social dimension that will have important impact on behaviors. For instance, comedies lead to a high level of anticipated conviviality. Then, people are willing to go see comedies with friends to share a pleasant moment. On the contrary, dramas may be perceived as more intimate and will lead to a very different kind of conviviality: intimacy. Then, people are willing to go with their close friends or partners.
- (8) **Social anticipated responses #2: recognition.** Cultural activities are known to be social status symbols (Bourdieu 1979, Kelly 1987). This response is anticipated too. However, the stricto-sensu social recognition has been little evoked. Participants spoke more about social integration. For many respondents, it was important for them to be able to feel integrated in the conversations about a film, to give their own point of view etc....
- (9) **Moral anticipated responses.** Two different dimensions of the cinematographic experience may lead to moral anticipated responses: production and the film in itself. With

regard to the production, films with large budgets can be rejected for the intention one may lend to them to exist only with a one aim of profitability. The film in oneself can lead to moral anticipated responses too. For instance, American films can be judged as tools of propaganda of a manner of thinking, engaging social stereotypes and a vision of the world sometimes considered excessively oriented, hiding a part of reality. The story or the treatment (in the cinematographic direction of the term) that is made of the story has a significant influence on the anticipated behaviors. For example, "Irreversible" film by Gaspard Noé gave rise to an important polemic due to the realization. The extremely raw scenes of this film led some people to anticipate a moral insult, whereas they had not viewed the images yet.

A model of pre-experience evaluation for motion pictures.

The analysis of the data collected leads to the formulation of a sequence allowing a better understanding of the role of anticipation in the pre-experience evaluation of motion pictures. The role of anticipation may be extensible to the whole field of experiential consumption. The proposed model is presented in figure 1.

Conclusion

The objective of this communication was to present some results of a more global research aiming at providing a comprehensive framework for the pre-experience evaluation of motion pictures. The results of the research show that a central phenomenon in this evaluation: the anticipation of the responses. A typology of the various anticipated responses was proposed. It is now a question of verifying this typology in a quantitative research. Moreover, a quantitative research could try to measure the impact of anticipated responses on the anticipated behavior. This could lead to a model forecasting the tastes as well as the box office.

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Figure 1: Position of the anticipated responses in the process of pre-experience evaluation for cinematographic consumption

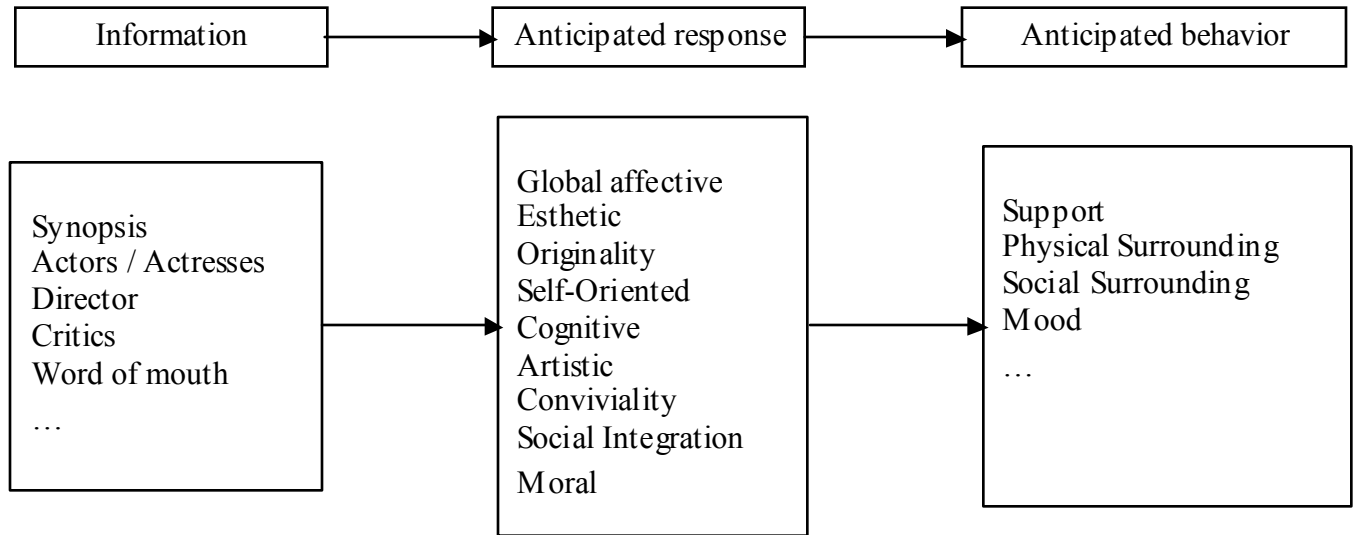


Figure 2: example of the influence of information on the pre-experience evaluation of a movie: the role of the actor

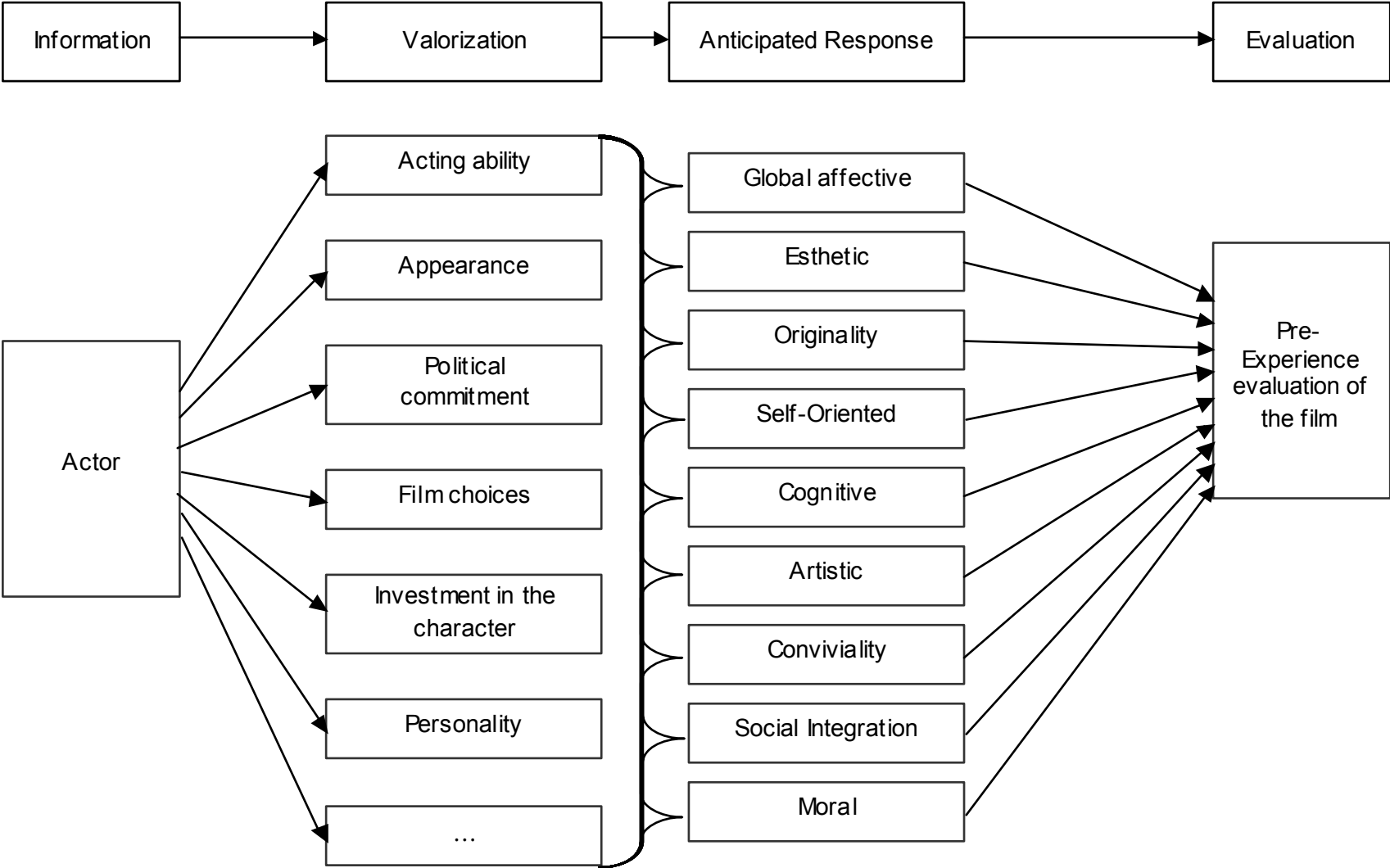


Table 1: Sample characteristics

Respondent	Interest in cinema	Frequency of consumptions	Expertise	Gender	Occupation
1	High	Twice a month	Low	F	Student
2	Low	Less than once a month	Low	M	Student
3	High	Once a week	High	M	Student
4	Intermediary	Once a week	High	M	Student
5	Intermediary	Once a month	Low	F	Student
6	Intermediary	Once a week	Intermediary	F	Student
7	High	Once a month	Intermediary	F	Student
8	High	Once a week	High	F	Student
9	Intermediary	Once a month	Low	F	Student
10	High	Once a week	High	F	Student
11	Low	Once a month	Low	F	Student
12	High	Once a week	High	M	Student
13	Low	Once a month	Low	F	Student
14	Intermediary	Once a week	Low	F	Student
15	Intermediary	Once a month	Intermediary	M	Student
16	High	Once a week	Intermediary	F	Student
17	High	Once a month	Low	M	Student
18	High	Once a week	High	M	Student
19	High	Once a month	Intermediary	M	Student
20	Intermediary	Less than once a month	Intermediary	M	Student
21	High	Once a week	High	F	Student
22	Intermediary	Once a week	Intermediary	M	Student
23	High	Once a month	High	M	Student
24	Low	Once a month	Low	M	Student
25	High	Less than once a month	High	M	Retired
26	Low	Less than once a month	Low	F	Craftsman
27	High	Once a month	High	M	Manager
28	High	Once a week	High	M	Trader

Tableau 2: List of the films presented in the information display board.

Titles	Directors	Actors
Ecks versus Sever	Kaos	Antonio Banderas and Lucy Liu
Sonny	Nicolas Cage	James Franco and Mena Suvari
40 days and 40 nights	Michael Lehmann	Josh Hartnandt and Shannyn Sossamon
La espina del diablo	Guillermo del Toro	Eduardo Noriega and Marisa Paredes
Dracula : la résurrection	Patrick Lussier	Jason Scott Lee, Rutger Hauer and Steve Billington
Zeno, le parole de moi padre	Francesca Comencini	Fabrizio Rongione and Chiara Mastroianni
Return to Never Land	Robin Budd and Donovan Cook	Peter Pan and Tinkerbell (!)
Showtime	Tom Dey	Robert De Niro and Eddie Murphy
Minority Report	Steven Spielberg	Tom Cruise and Collin Farell
L'adversaire	Nicole Garcia	Daniel Auteuil and Emmanuelle Devos
Hart's War	Gregory Hoblit	Bruce Willis and Collin Farrell
And now ... Ladies and Gentlemen	Claude Lelouch	Jeremy Irons and Patricia Kaas
Des anges	Julien Leloup	Clara Guerlin, Vincent Vidal and Anthony Azoulay
Muno	Bouli Lanners	Alphonse Massin, Stefan Liberski and Nicole Colchat

Table 3: Films used for the evocation tests

1. 40 jours et 40 nuits
2. 8 Femmes
3. A la Folie Pas du Tout
4. Ali
5. AMEN.
6. Annie-Mary à la Folie
7. Atamajuat
8. Audition
9. Avalon
10. Bandits
11. Big FAT Liar
12. Casino Royale
13. Collateral Dammage
14. Crossroads
15. Cube 2
16. Distance
17. Fantômes
18. Fatma
19. From Hell
20. Gangsters
21. Glitter
22. Goldmember
23. Gosford Park
24. Hollywood Sunrise
25. Jimmy Neutron
26. John Q.
27. Kate et Leopold
28. La Chute du Faucon Noir
29. La Forteresse Suspendue
30. La Maison sur l'Océan
31. Le Frère du Guerrier
32. Le Mariage des Moussons
33. Le Raid
34. Le Sang des Innocents
35. Le Seigneur des Anneaux
36. Le Stade de Wimbledon
37. Les Autres
38. Les Couilles de l'Eléphant
39. Lundi Matin
40. Manhattan
41. Matrix II
42. MIB II
43. Millenium Mambo
44. Mischka
45. Monsieur Batignole
46. Monster's Ball
47. Monsters Inc.
48. Monty Python
49. Nid de Guêpes
50. Ocean Man
51. Ocean's Eleven
52. Porn Star
53. Resident Evil
54. Roller Ball
55. Rue des plaisirs
56. Sangue Vivo
57. Spiderman
58. Spy Game
59. Supertroopers
60. T angy
61. Terre Neuve
62. The Barber
63. The Time Machine
64. Training Day
65. Un Amour à New York
66. Un Amour Extra Large
67. Un Homme d'Exception
68. Un Moment de Bonheur
69. Vanilla Sky
70. Versus
71. Vivante
72. Y tu Mamà tambien