

Information about film awards *versus* viewers' interests (audience pilot study)¹

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Abstract

Purpose: The topic of consideration is information about film awards and the interest of humanities and social sciences students in film (ad. information and knowledge management). The aim will be to determine whether there is a correlation between the access and use of information about film awards and the recipients' preferences regarding their general interest in the art of moving images.

Methods: Desk research and a CAWI survey were used.

Results: As a result, the initial hypotheses will be verified, including those concerning the greater interest of viewers in the works of the finalists and film award winners.

Keywords

Art of moving pictures. Audience research. Cultural information. Cultural interests. Film award.

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1. Introduction

The state of participation in artistic events, such as cinema, is a fact of culture (Kłoskowska, 1972, p. 129)² and, therefore, crucial information for understanding many mechanisms of symbolic activities in a given time and space. This type of research aims to show the social functions of cinema and its place in culture. Is it the case that the glamour accompanying this sphere of artistic activity is more

1 Unpublished excerpt from a forthcoming publication on a research study of film audiences and professional press readership.

2 Antonina Kłoskowska systematized the facts of culture as follows: "frame of culture includes symbolic activities taking place within the framework of direct interpersonal contacts"; "frame of culture includes content transmitted through local cultural institutions"; "frame of culture includes cultural products disseminated through mass media" (Kłoskowska, 1972, p. 129).

important than reliable information about it? (Szponar, 2022, 8). This is not a new thought, but it is important enough to be recalled as often as possible. Thanks to the knowledge of audience preferences in a specific space-time, we are able to say a lot about both the audience itself and the state's cultural policy in promoting contact with culture and, almost incidentally, providing information about the finalists and winners of film awards.

The Polish Film Institute (PISF) conducts annual audience surveys in Poland (e.g., PISF, 2023). The surveys show how many respondents from 2020 to 2022 declared their attendance at a movie screening at least once a year. This information is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it gives an idea of the changes that have occurred since 2020, which – due to the pandemic – forced many re-evaluations and revisions of the functioning and organisation of culture in the state. Secondly, considering the data from earlier years, it is possible to comment on a decline in the percentage of people declaring an interest in this type of entertainment – except when it comes to watching movies at home (the phenomenon of streaming services). This raises the question of whether this is a one-off event or a harbinger of a new trend. However, we must wait longer for a conclusive answer; nevertheless, it is a noteworthy issue.

This paper's scope is film awards and the humanities and social sciences students' interests in film. A significant gap in the literature was found in researching the key questions about the relationship between audience preferences and knowledge of film awards. While some studies discuss audience preferences (see Cześniak et al., 2021)³ or film awards in general (Bukowiecki, 1958; Hendrykowski, 1988; Michalska, 2010; Adamczak, 2015; Lipińska, 2018; Czajka-Kominiarczuk, 2019; Szponar, 2022), intriguing is the lack of research into the relationship between the two variables, and, if observed, the strength and shape of that correlation. After all, it may turn out to be a spurious correlation. While a statistically significant relationship can be observed along the line of marketing efforts of producers versus increased interest in a particular title rather than a film award specifically – which some viewers may not even be aware of.

It is worth highlighting one more theme. The findings of the Polish Film Institute clearly indicate that the art of moving pictures, and therefore also an accurate and reliable knowledge of the “film world” and the “cinematographic market,” is an important part of the lives of only those who like and can watch films (given their time and financial resources).

3 For example, the most popular film genre is comedies. Classics are ranked much lower, and even fewer respondents indicated high-art films, which are especially important in this paper since finalists for film awards are usually chosen from this genre. This is a continuation of trends from earlier years, which may raise concerns that audiences will begin to limit their choices to purely commercial, well-advertised productions featuring the same familiar names. It is worth thinking about this and indicating possible strategies to burst this audience “bubbles”.

2. Spectator – meaning who?

The question of audience preferences is answered mainly by the surveys on the subject. However, one must always remember to precede them with a question about the respondents to accept and respect the viewers' system of orientation in the world of film. Therefore, the crux of this type of research is determining who is the respondent we direct this type of question to. Each time, we confront not a theoretical construct or a virtual avatar but an actual, empirically available viewer (Szponar, 2022, p. 19), someone situated in specific social frames and surveyed because of their participation in culture. This raises a question of prime importance: What factors and indicators are important here? What rationale and mechanisms make them important? Among other things, it is worth pointing out accessibility, audience choice, reception, moving image art functions and film awards. The functions of film awards can be divided into three groups. The first includes promotional and marketing functions. The second group includes cultural-creating functions, such as opening debates on contemporary film culture. The last is the educational and identity-shaping function. It is important to remember the need to study the contemporary relevance of the conclusions made in close connection with social communication situations.

It has been known for a long time that the “ideal viewer” – if we consider his existence as real – is a viewer who not only watches but is also aware of many possible film choices. This viewer may be reached in various ways, for example, by analysing the types of cultural participants identified from time to time by various cultural institutions. The main goal of this research is to “conduct segmentation of cultural participants and characterise the identified groups by cultural needs, styles of using cultural offerings, spending on culture, preferred channels of communication, as well as interests and psychographic and demographic characteristics” (*Badanie segmentacyjne uczestników kultury*, 2016) (Figure 1).

Typically, researchers are concerned with creating “recommendations for tailoring cultural offerings to selected audiences, creating effective communications and selecting effective communication channels” (*Badanie segmentacyjne uczestników kultury*, 2016). The next step is considering how such findings translate to a specific audience, e.g., humanities and social sciences students. This is a matter for verification and discussion; however, in general, most researchers of cultural participation suggest an analogous phenomenon, emphasising the impact of their age and degree of education. “Knowledge gainers” predominate among students who, in a way, choose a film with an orientation towards pragmatic goals, not just pure entertainment.

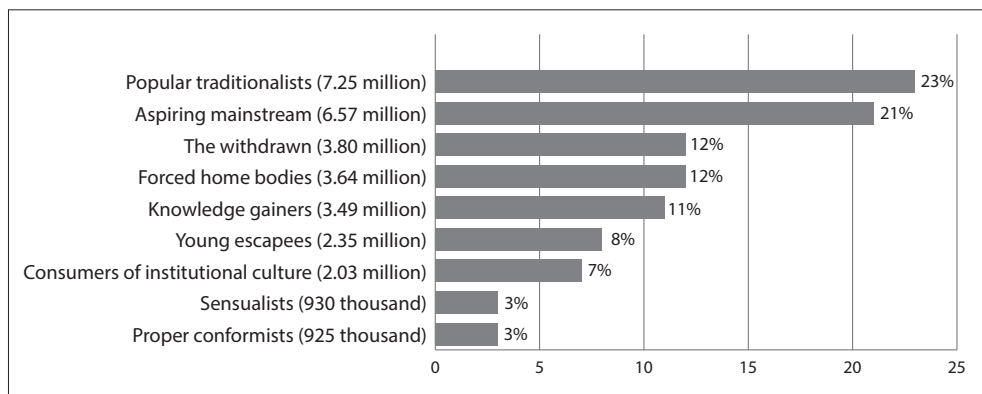


Figure 1. Share of segments in the population of cultural participants.

Source: *Badanie segmentacyjne uczestników kultury* (2016).

3. “Award” – an indicator of prestige?

Awards are given for significant achievements by a jury (a panel of experts) or by open plebiscite. In the case of film, it is about excellence in the mastery of the art of the image. There are many film awards,⁴ and it would be impossible to write about all of them in this paper. However, it is worth focusing on the audience’s interest in the awarded titles. A good example is the growing interest in the works of the winners of such awards as the Golden Lions in Poland and the global interest in the Film Academy Awards (the Oscars).

One of the functions of film competitions is the need to take over the multitude of films being made worldwide each year (Szponar, 2022, p. 12). With this in mind, cinema has always had great potential to influence social reality. Over time, other functions have emerged, such as stimulating and incidentally controlling the cinema market, steering the growth of specific genres, helping to include women filmmakers and debutantes, or developing films aimed at a specific audience.

The increase in the number of film festivals⁵ and awards observed over the years has triggered the need to select, highlight, and promote worthy authors

4 In selection): Academy Award (Oscar), Golden Palm, Golden Lions (Venice), Golden Bear, Golden Globe, BAFTA, César, Emmy Award, European Film Award, FIPRESCI Award; and in Poland: Golden Lion (Gdansk), Zbyszek Cybulski Award, Polish Film Award (Eagle) and others.

5 In selection: Venice International Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival; and in Poland: Polish Film Festival (Gdynia), Krakow Film Festival, Warsaw Film Festival, “Two Shores” Film and Art Festival, “Etiuda & Anima” International Film Festival, *Off Cinema*, Transatlantyk, New Horizons, Film Festival – Youth and Film, “Ale Kino!” International Young Audience Film Festival (see more at <https://pisf.pl>).

and titles. However, it is not so much a matter of dealing with *excess* but the need to think about film awards in the context of *multiplicity*. Each time, the focus is on directing the viewer's attention to achieve a specific goal. For example, "the use of film to drive the politics of place" or a general strategy for influencing the state of cultural participation.

It is worth revisiting this topic after several years if only to perform an ongoing diagnosis of the audience's knowledge of the awards and its correlation with the audience's interests. Most of the writings on awards are reviews or critical and journalistic texts, but they are not based on transparent criteria and empirical research. Furthermore, they are even less critical of cultural economics and social transformation (Budnik, 2020).

The fundamental question of whether the film award is a clear sign of prestige (English, 2013) still needs to be answered. Awards of any kind usually "(...) provoke questions about what is valued and how it is valued, as well as reveal the degree of entanglement of the author in market mechanisms and accentuate the role of the language of advertising in the very spectacle of rewarding" (Budnik, 2020). In this sense, the function of film awards is to transform symbolic capital into economic capital and vice versa. Recognition also reveals a dilemma regarding how many awards are established. In addition, awards are an important factor in stimulating and transforming culture and forms of cultural participation. They influence the formation of audience tastes.

To summarise, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – this experience of chaos in communication is increasingly becoming the subject of analysis. Researchers wonder whether a systems thinking approach can counteract it. Shaping the state's cultural policy through awards is one way to reach a broad audience by promoting and validating their needs. This has its advantages and disadvantages, which also need to be kept in mind, primarily in the context of the politicisation of cultural institutions and the initiatives they undertake.

4. Empirical study (pilot study)

Various studies on audiences in Poland have been reported over the years. However, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies on the impact of film awards on audience preferences. It is said that increasingly fewer Poles go to the cinema, while not much attention is paid to what causes specific titles or directors to be chosen more often (and sell better). Therefore, it is always necessary to return to questions like: When choosing a film, are viewers guided by whether a title has received any awards? Are awards given by the jury more important than those given by other audience members? Critics, producers, and jurors have usually addressed these questions and, less often – film scholars. In this paper, we propose

to look at the preferences of humanities and social science students (full-time and part-time) at the Poznan University of Social Sciences. For this purpose, a short pilot survey was conducted in May and June 2023 on a purposively selected group of respondents⁶. This pilot study intends not to diagnose the status of film awards as perceived by audiences or related trends in cinematography but rather to serve as a reminder of the need to expand and repeat research related to this area. In research methodology, “purposive selection” is a non-random way of building a sample. It is a reliable sampling method, but the Author is aware that random sampling is the most recommended. The latter guarantees that the sample is representative of the population, and thanks to this, “(...) the empirical study conducted in it will be characterised by high external validity” (Brzeziński, 2019, pp. 181–182). The study’s external validity depends on the sample’s representativeness and the reliability of the research results. Random sampling is recommended, but it is not always possible, in which case non-random selection is necessary with an awareness of its limitations.

The study’s main objective was to investigate the respondents’ interest in film and then to verify their knowledge of film awards. The final step was checking whether knowledge of the film awards influences their declared film interests. This research provides knowledge on an issue that needs to be deepened and constantly updated.

The survey consisted of respondents’ particulars and six questions, one open-ended and three partially open-ended. The particulars included five variables. The survey was conducted on a sample of $n=75$ using a Computer-Assisted Web Internet (CAWI) survey. Respondents completed the survey in several waves, at a time of their choice and from any device with internet access. The results presented in this paper are from the third wave, conducted in May and June 2023. A one-time-code mechanism was introduced to give respondents a sense of comfort and anonymity, which was expected to increase the propensity of respondents to give honest answers. It provided an opportunity to introduce graphic and audio-taped materials to the questions. Respondents were recruited for the survey at the university as part of empirical work in the *Public Opinion* class. In determining the necessary sample size, a formula that considers the number of students attending, the confidence factor, and the maximum error of $d=4\%$ (0.04) was used (Brzeziński, 2019, p. 194).

A total of 75 responses were collected. Forty per cent of women, 58.7% of men and one person who did not disclose gender participated in the anonymous survey. Those asked were born between 1973 and 2005. As a place of residence, 80% of the respondents indicated a city of more than 10,000 residents, 15% a city of up to 10,000 residents, and 5% a village. Respondents aged 23–39 were the most likely to speak about the awards, followed by those aged 40–45, with fewer answers from those aged over 46 and 18–20. 49.7% of respondents declared secondary education

and 49.3% higher education. Almost 90% of respondents indicated social sciences as the field of study in which they graduated. The remainder declared humanities (8%) and other (2%). For 60% of respondents, the monthly income per person in the household was 3000–4000 PLN; the other options were indicated much less frequently. Part of the initial questions was to check the general interests of the respondents and their level of interest in the art of moving pictures. Forty per cent of those questioned put sport first; only 31% chose art as their most important interest, and the remaining answers were related to interests in travel (25%) and fashion (3%); only a few put science in the first place. On the second issue, responses revealed that only 26.7% of respondents had a strong interest in film, which might be considered low for humanities and social sciences majors (Figure 2).

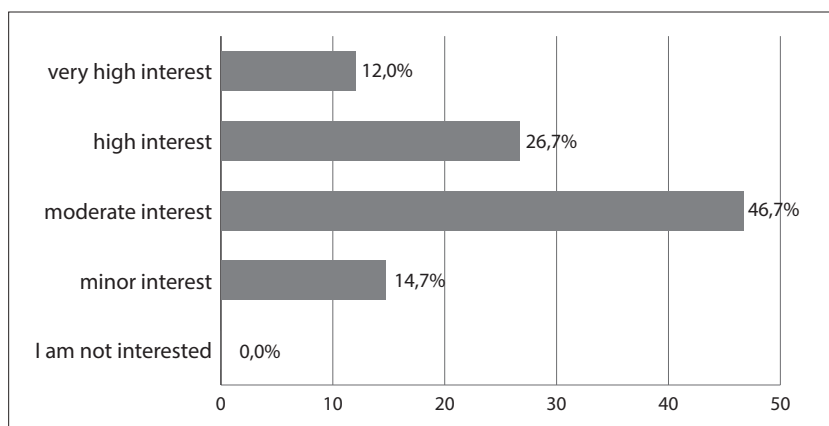


Figure 2. Distribution of answers to the question:
How would you describe your interest in the art of filmmaking (partially open)?

Source: Author's study.

A general knowledge of Polish and foreign film awards was also in the scope of the study. The most well-known Polish film award in the surveyed group was the Polish Golden Lions (more than 60% of indications). Knowledge of foreign film awards turned out to be limited. The most frequently mentioned was the Oscars/Film Academy Awards (more than 80% of indications). There was much buzz about both awards in Poland due to the success of filmmakers like Andrzej Wajda, Agnieszka Holland, Jerzy Skolimowski, Paweł Pawlikowski, and Małgorzata Szumowska. Other well-known awards include the Golden Palm and Golden Bear. This list shows that students' knowledge is based mainly on the awards most celebrated by the media. This situation is confirmed by the viewing preferences of those surveyed, who, paradoxically, did not indicate an interest in artistic (non-commercial) film in the first place. Nearly 80% of viewers preferred comedies (66% of indications) and thrillers (34%). Morality films, dramas and biographies occupied further places.

Regarding specific movie-going decisions, it turned out that only 13.3% of the respondents indicated that knowing the film had received an award was of great importance to them. In contrast, for 30.7%, this information was of little importance. However, when asked whether the awards were necessary, almost 90% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. Sceptical voices suggested that the importance of such awards has declined. The evaluations of specialists, such as critics, were more reliable for the respondents, helping to search for exceptional examples among the sheer number of films and the passage of time, proving the actual value of a particular film achievement.

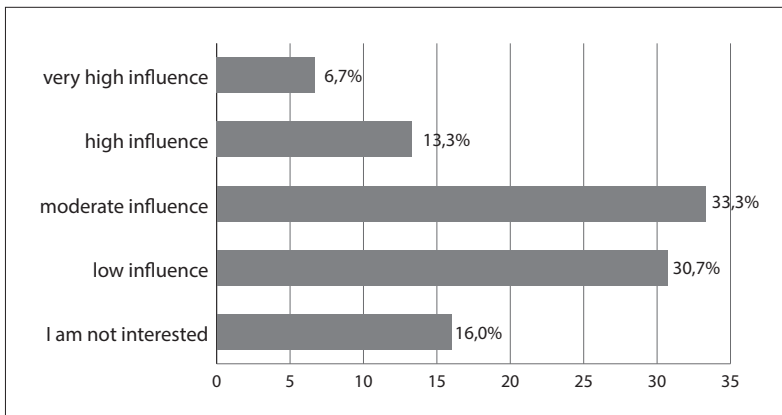


Figure 3. Distribution of answers to the question: *How would you describe the impact of your knowledge of film awards on your interest in a particular work or its maker?*

Source: Author's study.

The last was a control question, asking whether awards were needed at all and whether a survey on the proposed topic contributed to the likelihood of respondents following media information on film awards more closely in the future: 25.3% answered in the affirmative, 26.7% in the negative, and as many as 48% found it difficult to say. This demonstrates not only the possibility of manipulating the interests of questioners through surveys but also of leaving them in a state of confusion, which can be fodder for generating interest in the media.

So why are the awards necessary? According to the respondents, they help choose what is worth watching, indirectly promoting participation in culture. On the other hand, from the directors' point of view, they are a motivation to create.

Due to the limited scope of this study, which involved only one environment, no generalisation can be made with any certainty. It is possible, however, to consider this study as a pilot for further studies on the subject.

5. Conclusions

Respondents' opinions on film awards and their influence on viewing decisions were divided. Nevertheless, thanks to the survey, it is worth promoting an interest in cinema for the future by pointing out the benefits of greater awareness of the presence of noteworthy titles in the cinema market. A good tool might be to improve students' familiarity with the film press and websites dedicated to the subject. The survey revealed that those who read the professional press talked more freely about film news and awards.

In conclusion, for many years, film has not only been a mirror of reality but, first and foremost, an art seeking to explain how we seek to understand it. Audience research is one technique that fosters this, allowing us to expose false preconceptions. It is about deconstructing the existing hypotheses, a manifesto as an expression of critical insight and/or persuasion of a different perspective or a sign of change of a broader nature. This is another instalment in the "game... of wisdom."

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Annexe

Survey questionnaire (selection of questions, analysed in the above considerations)

Participant particulars

- (1.1) Gender:
- (a) female
 - (b) male
- (1.2) Age:
- under 25
 - 25–40 years old
 - 40–50 years
 - over 50 years old
- (1.3) Place of residence:
- city of more than 10,000 inhabitants
 - city of up to 10,000 inhabitants
 - village
- (1.4) Education:
- basic
 - professional
 - secondary
 - higher
- (1.5) Approximate household income per person (in PLN):
- up to 2000
 - 2000–3000
 - 3000–4000
 - above 4000

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- (1) Academic field of the current stage of education (partially open question)⁷ :
- humanities
 - social sciences
 - sciences
 - biosciences
 -
- (2) Current interests (open-ended question).
- (3) How would you describe your interest in the art of filmmaking (partially open-ended)?
- very high interest
 - high interest
 - moderate interest
 - minor interest
 - I am not interested
- Justify your answer and (optionally when choosing a, b, c) indicate particularly valued people associated with the film (directors, actors, etc.) and favourite film genres.
- (4) How would you describe the impact of your knowledge of film awards on your interest in a particular work or its creator (partially open)?
- very high influence
 - high influence
 - moderate influence
 - low influence
 - I am not interested
- Justify your answer and (optionally when choosing a, b, c) indicate particularly appreciated film awards (Polish and/or foreign).
- (5) From the cinema-goer's point of view, are film awards necessary?
- yes
 - not
 - hard to say
- Justification (optional)

⁷ The survey was also open to postgraduate students (i.e., master's graduates), so it was possible to answer about the currently learned field of study or professional competence held.

- (6) After completing this survey, will you be following media coverage of literary and/or film awards?
- yes
 - not
 - hard to say
-

Informacja na temat nagród filmowych *versus* zainteresowania widzów (badanie pilotażowe)

Abstrakt

Cel/Teza: Tematem rozważań są informacje o nagrodach filmowych oraz zainteresowanie studentów kierunków humanistycznych i społecznych filmem (ad. zarządzania informacją i wiedzą). Celem będzie odpowiedź na pytanie, czy istnieje korelacja między dostępem i wykorzystaniem informacji o nagrodach filmowych a preferencjami odbiorczymi respondentów w zakresie ich ogólniejszego zainteresowania sztuką ruchomych obrazów.

Koncepcja/Metody badań: Wykorzystana została analiza raportów i badań ankietowych.

Wyniki i wnioski: Wniosek z przeprowadzonych badań pozwala rekomendować na przyszłość konieczność promowania zainteresowania kinem poprzez wskazywanie korzyści wynikających z większej świadomości obecności na rynku kinematograficznym tytułów godnych uwagi, niezależnie od tego, czy są to filmy nagrodzone czy też nie.

Słowa kluczowe

Badania publiczności. Informacja o kulturze. Nagroda filmowa. Sztuka ruchomych obrazów. Zainteresowania kulturalne.

IWONA GRODŹ, doktor, literaturoznawca, filmoznawca, historyk sztuki, muzykolog. Interesuje się ponadto teatrem, kulturoznawstwem, filozofią i psychologią, a także ideą „korespondencji” sztuk, szczególnie: literatury-filmu-malarstwa-teatru i muzyki. Autorka książek (m.in.): „Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie” Wojciecha Jerzego Hasa. 2005. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM; Zasztyfrowane w obrazie. O filmach Wojciecha Jerzego Hasa. 2008. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Obraz-Słowo-Terytoria; Jerzy Skolimowski. 2010. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo „Więź”; Synergia sztuki i nauki w twórczości Zbigniewa Rybczyńskiego. 2015. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN; Between Dream and Reality. 2018. Berlin: Wydawnictwo Peter Lang; Hasowski Appendix. 2020. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas; Artysta i sztuka w polskich filmach fabularnych powstałych po II wojnie światowej. 2023. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

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