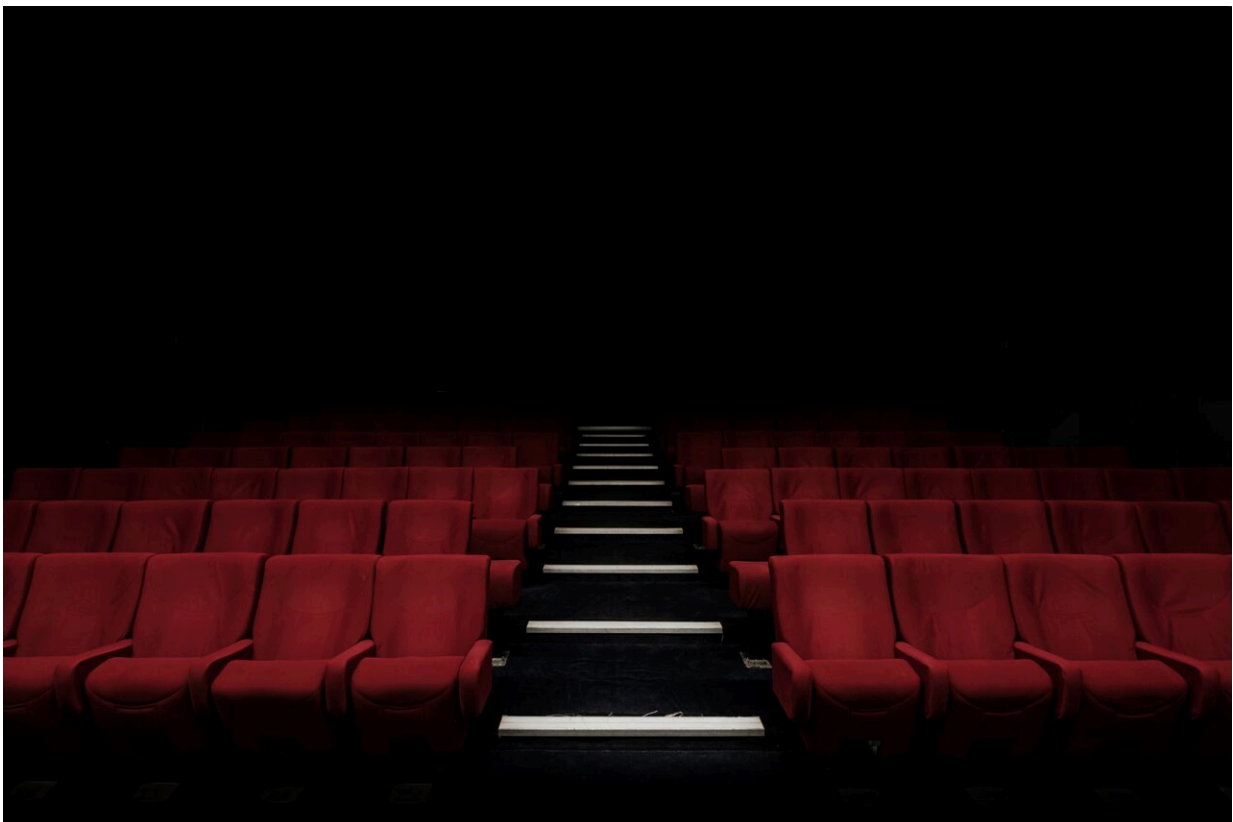


Similarities in movie review content by critics and general users impact movie sales, study shows

October 7 2022, by Shannon Roddel



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Consumers often read online reviews before seeing a movie at the theater. In 2018, 63% of U.S. adults indicated moderate to heavy

reliance on online reviews before seeing a movie.

While research has extensively explored the impact of [online reviews](#) on movie sales by focusing on review ratings and volume, scholars have less understanding of how similarities in review content by critics and general users impact consumers.

By analyzing movie reviews from Rotten Tomatoes, a film and TV review website, new research from the University of Notre Dame proposes a "topic consistency" measure to capture the degree of overlap between critic and user review content and finds that it does impact movie sales. If both critics and users discuss the same aspects, it will be more memorable and increase the likelihood people will go see a movie.

"Does Topic Consistency Matter? A Study of Critic and User Reviews in the Movie Industry" is forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing* from Shijie Lu, the Howard J. and Geraldine F. Korth Associate Professor of Marketing at Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

The study also shows the association is more prominent with movies that have mediocre review ratings than it is for movies with extreme ratings. It is also stronger when ratings by critics are similar to those of users—for example, when both include mentions of things like plot or acting.

"We were surprised to find the content overlap between the two groups is a positive predictor of box office revenue," Lu said, "whereas the content overlap within each group is not."

The study examined both critic and user reviews for the movie "La La Land," each discussing the movie's award potential.

"This is likely to make a potential moviegoer remember this particular

attribute and therefore make them more likely to see the movie in theaters," Lu said. "On the other hand, if critics and users are discussing totally different aspects of the movie, it will be less memorable and lower the likelihood of seeing a movie."

The findings can have a positive impact for movie producers and marketing agencies. Lu advises both to expand their attention beyond conventional online [review](#) information and actively listen to both professional critics and general consumers.

"To take advantage of the topic consistency effect, producers should identify similarities and differences between critics' and everyday moviegoers' responses and engage with both types of reviewers to find commonalities between reviews," Lu said. "Those should be leveraged and utilized as a part of the movie's promotion strategy."

Also, they can generate the common ground for discussion topics.

"They should introduce a common theme for critics and users to discuss," Lu said. "We observe that an increase of one standard deviation in topic consistency produces a 4.6% increase in box office revenue, all else being equal."

"Also, topic-driven promotion can be applied to movie trailers, posters, blogs and TV and online commercials. This will naturally lead critics and users to address the topics in question," Lu added.

Lu says the concept and measurement of topic consistency could be extended to reviews for other types of products that are difficult to evaluate before use, including cosmetics and book publishing.

More information: Eunsoo Kim et al, EXPRESS: Does Topic Consistency Matter? A Study of Critic and User Reviews in the Movie

Industry, *Journal of Marketing* (2022). [DOI:
10.1177/00222429221127927](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221127927)

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