

Personality and Film Genre Preferences: An Analysis Based on the Big Five Model

Jiexi Yang

*Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, V6T, Canada
jessieyang.0807@gmail.com*

Abstract: Studies have investigated the factors that affect entertainment preferences, including what we listen to, watch, and read. Only a few studies focused on the film genres and current findings are still insufficient. To explore the relationship between personality and film genre preferences, this study uses the self-reported questionnaire to collect data and test the correlations between the two variables. The personality traits are analyzed based on the Big Five Model, which consisted of Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experiences. The results indicate 1) there are positive correlations between the Big Five personality traits and film genre preferences, 2) the incorporation of Conscientiousness and Openness to Experiences could predict the film genre preferences, 3) the gender differences should be considered in the analysis of personality and film genre preferences as well.

Keywords: film genre preferences, Big Five Personality, gender differences

1. Introduction

Film has become a predominant important media type in our contemporary society, and the development of film genres has been a representative aspect of popular culture and trends. With the rapid development of the film industry, the mixture of commerce, business, culture and art is providing us with brand new worlds that we do not have access to in our ordinary life [1]. However, just like different people have distinctive music tastes, people always have their own preferences for some specific film genres. The reasons that could explain the individual differences in entertainment preferences are still being discussed by researchers. A wealth of studies has highlighted the importance of this topic, and a wide range of factors have been examined by previous research. According to Oliver and Raney's study [2], people's entertainment selection could be predicted by not only pleasure-seeking motivations (i.e., hedonic concerns), but also truth-seeking motivations (i.e., eudemonic concerns). In other words, our entertainment preferences mean not only enjoyment, but also grappling with life's purpose and meaningfulness [2]. Other elements are found to be correlated with film genre preferences, such as temperament [3]. For instance, cyclothymic temperament is found positively associated with horror movies, whereas depressive temperament is negatively associated with preferences of animations [3].

Consideration of the personality traits could also be a possible explanation for the different entertainment preferences. According to Hall's research, personality traits such as Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism are found to have correlations with media genre preferences [4]. Moreover, plenty of researchers have shown their interest in individual differences in music tastes.

The findings indicated that people's preferences for music could reflect specific personality characteristics [5,6]. Preferences for classical, jazz, blues and folk music genres have positive correlations with the character of openness, and preferences for the pop, country and Christian music genres have positive correlations with extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness [5,7]. Although current studies focused on the film genre preferences are still relatively rare, researchers also found unique correlations between personality traits, based on the Big Five model [8], and the five entertainment-preference dimensions (i.e., Communal, Aesthetic, Thrilling, Dark, and Cerebral) [9]. Researchers also argued that individuals with dark personalities (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) have a preference for the dark characters in the movie [10].

Although there have been robust findings on the relationships between personality traits and certain film genre preferences, a thorough discussion of the film genres is still insufficient. This study measures a total of twenty-one film genres, aiming to reach a comprehensive analysis of the individual differences in film genre preferences based on the Big Five Model. The hypothesis would be that there are correlations between personality traits and film genre preferences. Furthermore, the gender differences in film genre preferences would be discussed in this paper as well.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

This study consists of two parts and different participants were recruited through the online platform. Two hundred and forty-one participants were recruited in the first part of the study to investigate the correlations between personality and film genre preferences. Two hundred and fifty-eight participants were recruited in the second part to further test and verify the gender differences in film genre preferences. Through the second part, 48.45% of the participants are male and 48.45% of them are female (125 male, 125 female). Three percent (8) of the participants identified themselves as transgender. About 43% of them indicated that they were between the age of 24 and 35. Another 36% were between the ages of 35 and 44. Fifteen percent were between 18 and 24, and 6% indicated they were between 45 and 54. Two percent were under the age of 18, and the rest of the participants were 55 and older. All participants identified themselves as Asian.

2.2. Procedures

Participants in both parts are required to complete a self-reported questionnaire after signing in the consent form. The first part of the study included 31 questions. Twenty-one of the questions are aimed to measure the movie preferences and the rest 10 questions are to measure their personality traits including Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience. All questions are presented as the Likert Scale.

Participants of the second part are required to complete some questions ask about gender and age, then complete a series of questions to measure their movie genre preferences as well. These items were presented as multiple choice and Likert Scale. Participants in both parts of the research generally took 3 minutes to complete.

2.3. Materials

Personality traits. Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience were measured through the Ten-Item Personality Inventory [11]. A series of 7-point, Likert-type scales were used to indicate the level of agreement with each statement of the participants. The items are extremely brief but concise and reliable, and it is widely used for research measuring personality traits.

Film genre preferences. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 (really dislike) to 5 (really like) how do they like to watch the 21 movie genres. The list of film genres is adapted from previous studies and surveys [12].

The overall twenty-one film genres were examined by the factor analysis and six factors were produced, which are serious films (western, war, documentary, sport, independent), light films (rom-com, romance, comedy), fantasy-oriented films (fantasy, science fiction, animation, foreign), action-oriented films (action, adventure), horror films (horror, thriller), and dark films (crim, film noir, mystery). There were two items (musical, drama) that failed to meet the above .40 criterion, so they were dropped from further analyses.

2.4. Analyses

The impact of the Big-Five model on film genre preferences was investigated through several correlation analyses. Moreover, the regression test was conducted to test the predictors of the personality traits. To further explore the gender differences, the independent t-tests were carried out to assess how males and females were different in the preferences of the film genres.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary Analyses

Correlation analyses indicated several correlations between the Big Five personality traits and all of them were significant. Agreeableness was positively correlated with Conscientiousness ($r = .28, p < .01$), Emotional Stability ($r = .31, p < .01$), and Openness to Experiences ($r = .23, p < .01$). Conscientiousness was positively correlated with Emotional Stability ($r = .32, p < .01$) and Openness to Experiences ($r = .22, p < .01$). Emotional Stability is positively correlated with Openness to Experiences ($r = .22, p < .01$).

The mean of Extraversion was 4.12 ($SD = 1.12$), which was the lowest mean among the personality traits, and the mean of Agreeableness was 4.96 ($SD = .97$), which was the highest. The mean of Conscientiousness was 4.42 with a standard deviation of 1.12. The mean of Emotional Stability was 4.17 ($SD = 1.21$) and the mean of Openness to Experiences was 4.53 ($SD = 1.09$).

The light films and fantasy-oriented films had the same and highest average among the six film genres ($M = 3.84, SD = .81$), followed by dark film genres ($M = 3.70, SD = .93$). The mean for action-oriented films was 3.68 ($SD = .98$), and the mean for serious film genres was 3.19 ($SD = .80$). Horror films had the lowest preference rating average, whereas the highest standard deviation ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.25$).

3.2. Film Genre Preferences and Personality

Agreeableness was correlated positively with the preferences of light films and fantasy-oriented films, with exactly the same r-value ($r = .14, p = .02$). Conscientiousness was correlated positively with the preferences of serious film genres ($r = .25, p < .001$) and action-oriented films ($r = .19, p < .01$). Emotional Stability was correlated positively with the preferences of serious films as well ($r = .18, p < .01$). Openness to Experiences was positively correlated with the preferences of serious films ($r = .25, p < .001$) and action-oriented film genres ($r = .19, p < .01$) (Table 1).

The incorporation of the Conscientiousness and Openness to Experiences significantly predicted the preferences of serious film genres, and the results indicated the two predictors explained 10.9% of the variance ($R^2 = .109, F = 14.49, p < .001$). The correlation coefficient of Openness to Experiences was significant ($\beta = .16, p < 0.001$), as did the Conscientiousness ($\beta = .13, p = .001$). Meanwhile, the two predictors also explained 6% of the preferences of action-oriented films

($R^2 = .06$, $F = 7.79$, $p < 0.001$). It was found that Openness to Experiences significantly predicted the action-oriented film genre preferences ($\beta = .14$, $p = .01$), as did the Conscientiousness ($\beta = .13$, $p = .02$).

3.3. Gender and Film Genre Preferences

No significant result was found between the six film genres and gender, probably because the six film genres are too broad for analyzing gender differences. However, significant effects on gender were found in specific film genres. The 125 males ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .74$) compared to the 125 females ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.00$) demonstrated significantly greater preferences of action films ($t = 4.68$, $p < .001$). Meanwhile, Female participants ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.06$) indicated significantly higher preferences for romance comedies ($t = -2.96$, $p = 0.03$) than males ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.16$). Males ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.17$) demonstrated a stronger preference for thriller films ($t = 2.83$, $p < 0.01$), compared to females ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.29$). Furthermore, preferences of war movies for males ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .95$) are significantly higher than females ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.19$), with t -value of 3.59 ($t = 3.59$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1: Summary of Correlational Coefficients of How Personality Predicts Film Genre Preferences.

	light	fantasy-oriented	action-oriented	horror	dark	serious
Extraversion	.01	.01	N/A	.07	.03	-.06
Conscientiousness	.09	.09	.19**	.07	-.04	.25***
Openness to Experiences	-.06	-.06	.19**	.14*	.05	.25***
Emotional Stability	.06	.06	.04	N/A	-.09	.18**
Agreeableness	.14*	.14*	.09	.01	.02	.08
N	241	241	241	241	241	241

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the correlations between film genre preferences and personality traits based on the Big Five Model. According to the above analysis, there were indeed several significant positive correlations found between the two variables. Low positive correlational relationships were founded between the personality traits of agreeableness and the preferences of light films and fantasy-oriented films. Conscientiousness and Openness both have positive correlations with serious films and action-oriented films. In addition, the serious film genres are also positively correlated with the traits of Emotional Stability. As the serious film genres were intimately related to personality traits, Conscientiousness and Openness could significantly predict people's preferences for serious film genres. Overall, the findings are consistent with the research hypothesis. Remarkably, all of the correlation coefficients are relatively low, indicating that the personality traits would have limited effects on the individual differences of film genre preferences. This result is consistent with Hall's previous work [4]. However, 21 film genres were measured and analyzed with the personality traits, and the outcomes of the six dimensions do not seem to have been evaluated previously. In contrast to

the work of Rentfrow et al., this study did not find evidence of a correlation between extraversion and any film genre preferences [9]. One possible explanation of the divergence in the results could be the differences in film genre measurements. It could also result from the relatively small sample size of this study.

To further explore the factors influencing film genre preferences, this study analyzes the gender differences as well. Based on current studies, males and females have distinctive gender differences in the Big Five personality development [13]. Generally, females scored significantly higher on Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness [13]. On the contrary, males scores higher on Emotional Stability [13]. Therefore, gender differences could be another mediated variable to consider when studying personality traits and film genre preferences. Consistent with the previous results, females show a preference for romance comedies [14]. Meanwhile, the results indicate that males prefer action and thriller films, which are also consistent with Krcmar and Kean's research [15].

The limitations of my work are that the sample size is relatively small, and all the samples are Chinese. The data could be biased, and the generalizability could be relatively low. Furthermore, there are other variables that should be investigated in future studies such as ethics, income, age, levels of education, the frequency of watching films and so on. The application of individual differences has been recognized as key to understanding both the uses and effects of the mass media [16,17]. I believe the results of this study are only a preliminary analysis of this topic, and more studies should be further conducted.

References

- [1] Anderson, D. (2010). *Love and hate in dementia: The depressive position in the film iris*. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 91(5), 1289-1297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-8315.2010.00324.x>
- [2] Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). *Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful: Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption*. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 984-1004. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01585.x>
- [3] Infortuna, C., Battaglia, F., Freedberg, D., Mento, C., Zoccali, R. A., Muscatello, M. R. A., & Bruno, A. (2021). *The inner muses: How affective temperament traits, gender and age predict film genre preference*. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 178, 110877. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110877>
- [4] Hall, A. (2005). *Audience personality and the selection of media and media genres*. *Media Psychology*, 7(4), 377-398. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0704_4
- [5] Rentfrow, P. J., & Gosling, S. D. (2003). *The do re mi's of everyday life: The structure and personality correlate of music preferences*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(6), 1236-1256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.6.1236>
- [6] Schwartz, K. D., & Fouts, G. T. (2003). *Music preferences, personality style, and developmental issues of adolescents*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32(3), 205-213. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022547520656>
- [7] Rentfrow, P. J., McDonald, J. A., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2009). *You are what you listen to: Young people's stereotypes about music fans*. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 12(3), 329-344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430209102845>
- [8] Goldberg, L. R., & Sweeney, D. (1996). *The Big-Five factor structure as an integrative framework: An analysis of Clarke's AVA model*. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66(3), 441-471.
- [9] Rentfrow, P. J., Goldberg, L. R., & Zilca, R. (2011). *Listening, watching, and reading: The structure and correlates of entertainment preferences*. *Journal of personality*, 79(2), 223-258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00662.x>
- [10] Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, J., Fiskaali, A., Høgh-Olesen, H., Johnson, J. A., Smith, M., & Clasen, M. (2021). *Do dark personalities prefer dark characters? A personality psychological approach to positive engagement with fictional villainy*. *Poetics (Amsterdam)*, 85, 101511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101511>
- [11] Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P. J., & Swann Jr, W. B. (2003). *A very brief measure of the Big-Five personality domains*. *Journal of Research in personality*, 37(6), 504-528.
- [12] Perse, E. M. (1996). *Sensation seeking and the use of television for arousal*. *Communication Reports*, 9(1), 37-48.
- [13] Vecchione, M., Alessandri, G., Barbaranelli, C., & Caprara, G. (2012). *Gender differences in the big five personality development: A longitudinal investigation from late adolescence to emerging adulthood*. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(6), 740-746. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.05.033>

- [14] Oliver, M. B., Sargent, S. L., & Weaver, J. B. I. (1998). *The impact of sex and gender role self-perception on affective reactions to different types of film*. *Sex Roles*, 38(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018760427785>
- [15] Krcmar, M., & Kean, L. G. (2005). *Uses and gratifications of media violence: Personality correlates of viewing and liking violent genres*. *Media Psychology*, 7(4), 399-420. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0704_5
- [16] Kerrigan, F. (2010). *Film Marketing*. A Butterworth-Heinemann Title; 1 edition.
- [17] Weaver, B. J. III. (1998). *Personality and self-perceptions about communication*. In J. C. McCroskey, J. A. Daly, & M. M. Martin (Eds.). *Communication and personality: trait perspectives* (pp. 95-117). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.