The Changing Nature of New Media Audiences: A Thematic Perspective on the Invasion of Digital Technology in Films Ensuing an Altered Film Audience

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Abstract - Film involves a filmmaker's relationship with the spectator. The presence of an audience is an essential part of the very definition of the medium. In other words, the role of the audience forms a linchpin in studying films. The evolution of film over years has resulted in a significant change in the perception of the film audience. The advent of digital technology in films have influenced tremendously in the film viewing nature of audience. The introduction of digital applications has altered the structure of film's art form. This paper explores the impact of digital technology in filmmaking and the corresponding changes film audience undergo cognitively. Perception of the audience has varied with the intrusion of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) and visual effects in films. The paper initially discusses the relation between film and audience, demarcating the new media audience and why they are christened as such and later goes on to elucidates the invasion of digital technology and applications in films thereby modifying the cognitive approach of audience towards film viewing. According to Wheeler Winston Dixon, the digital revolution has compromised the veracity of film, since CGI makes just about any effect possible, and as such the audience no longer believes in images. A discussion and validation of the theoretical approach towards film audience remarks an elaboration upon the changing trait of audience. Film scholars have barely broached the field of audience research. The paper concludes with a prognosticate opinion on how audience research should be busy in the years to come.

Keywords: Film, Audience, Digital Technology, Cognition

I. INTRODUCTION

Film is a beautiful art form which has evolved over a period of decades. The medium has taken various shapes from celluloid era to digital era. Though the transformation of films in making as well as reproduction has taken tumultuous progress, the one thing which remains unperturbed is the film viewership. Film Audience have been an integral part of the art.

There was a period once where there was a big question on how the films would survive after the advent of Television. But the medium found its way hurdling through the challenges posed by other mass media by advancing technically and garnering public to the big screen. With the emphasis thrown on film audience, their importance and connection to the medium, there has to be a profound change in the basic nature of film viewing demeanour among audience as the technology ameliorates.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have been carried out in the areas of New Media, but seldom in audience relation to film and technology. Audience perception towards film evolution has been an area which requires more attention. New Media

has made its foray into the lives of people. It has stormed into the palms of the public and as a means of which people are psychologically addicted to its yield (Krugman, 1985). As is new media, so are films in the digital era. As an evolution, it commenced as celluloid medium and gradually moved from black and white to colour and so came several technology pertaining to screen format, film stock, aspect ratio and finally came digital invasion (Boggs& Petrie, 2008). Digital technology dint just consume the process of filmmaking, rather it imbued into the artistic senses of the film audience with its CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) and its related applications (Mehraj et. al., 2014).

III. NEW MEDIA AUDIENCES

New Media audiences are nothing but audiences who are exposed to and using new media for communication and gratification. New Media forayed into the society and has created a remarkable effect in the everyday activity among the people (Kumar, 2013). Social media plays a pivotal role in discussing various entities and one of the key domains is films. People living in the new media era are highly influenced by reviews and expectations for films generated by social media (Napoli, 2010). Thereby, they are christened with the term new media audiences.

IV.   FILM AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Though film began as an art, at present the medium is considered one of the primary means of entertainment (Dworkin, 1969). The appeal of films has changed drastically with the transformation from analogue to digital. The term "digital" has encroached the world of filmmaking like a storm and thereby altering the core structure of film language. Compositing, 2D and 3D Animation, mapping, paint retouching, grading have earned their name up in the lexicon of filmmaking. These techniques help in creating fictional worlds in a way that audience presume them to be so real.

V.   METHODOLOGY

Since the paper is a thematic one, the sources of culling out data for the study were through text books, journals, articles and web sources. The key parameters taken up for the study includes film audience and digital technology used in films. Moreover, the theories employed in the study include audience theories and cognitivism. On the whole, the literature review was conducted by involving web-based search engines, i.e., Google as well as Google Scholar, and by using various electronic research databases to identify materials that describe the research topic of this paper or those homologous to it.

Cognitivism: Exploring the Evocation of the Tactility of Film Experience

Cognitivism studies about the relation between the cognition of the individual and the audio visual information projected. It explains about how the audience mind recognises, correlates, understands and infers meaning through audio visual medium (Donald & Renov, 2008). In fact the very existence and popularity of 3D and visual effects dominated films is based on the audience experiencing the depth factor and the work detail involved in each frame (Belton, 1993). It can be observed that technology dominated films have been crowd pullers and tend to dominate the box office as well (Shon et. al., 2014). Few examples supporting this statement are films like Avatar, Transformers, Star Wars, and Avengers which are an epitome of all time highest grossers in the box office.

People have succumbed to the pleasures of technology in films in the digital realm which is projected in the figure below which explains graphically the inclination in the number of 3D films released in North America and Canada from 2003 to 2017.
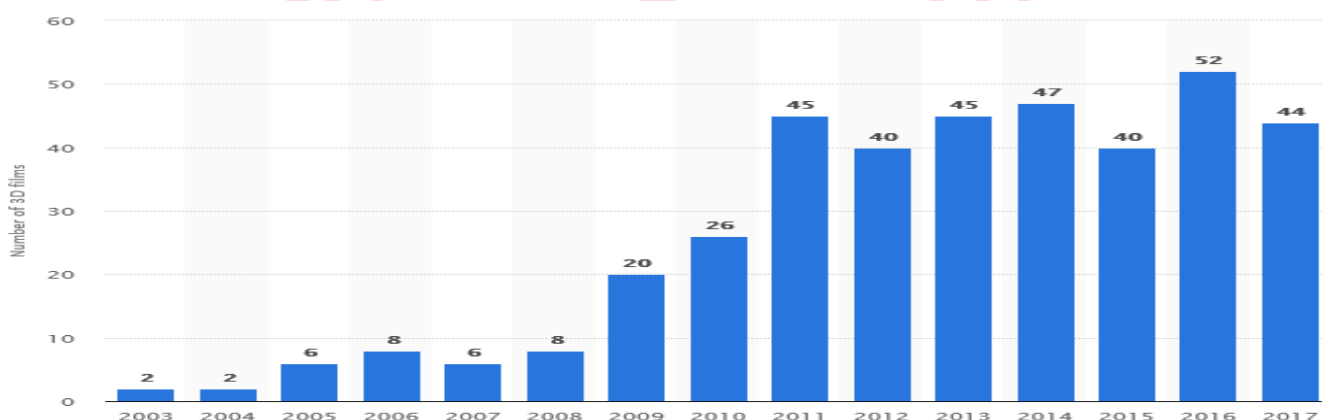

Fig. 1: Number of 3D films released in the United States and Canada from 2003 to 2017
Source:https://www.statista.com/statistics/243303/number-of-3d-films-released-in-north-america/

Similarly, the next graph (Fig.2) shows the number of 3D screens worldwide from 2006 to 2017 which implies the steep growth in how technology has been widely accepted and welcomed by audience throughout the globe.
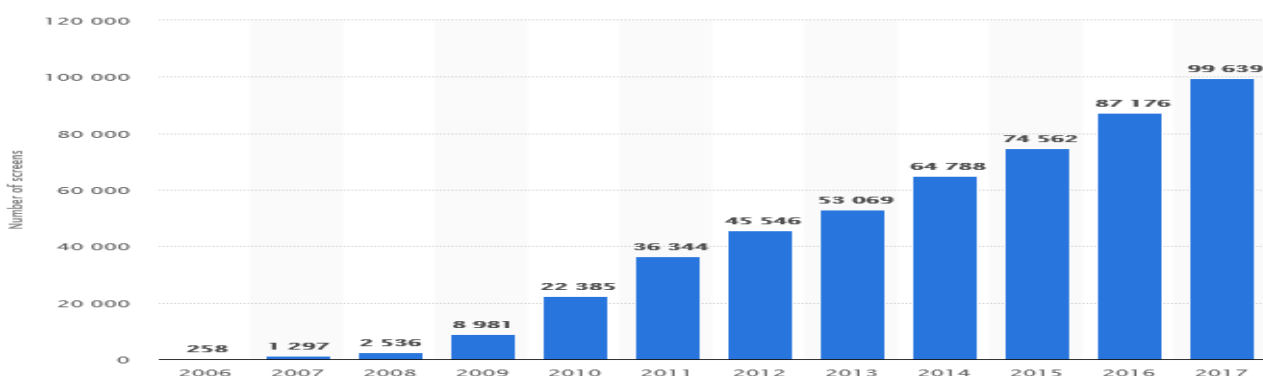

Fig. 2: Number of 3D cinema screens worldwide from 2006 to 2017
Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/271863/number-of-3d-cinema-screens-worldwide/

This graph aids in understanding the fact that digital technology applied in films have tremendous impact on the film viewing conduct among the audience.
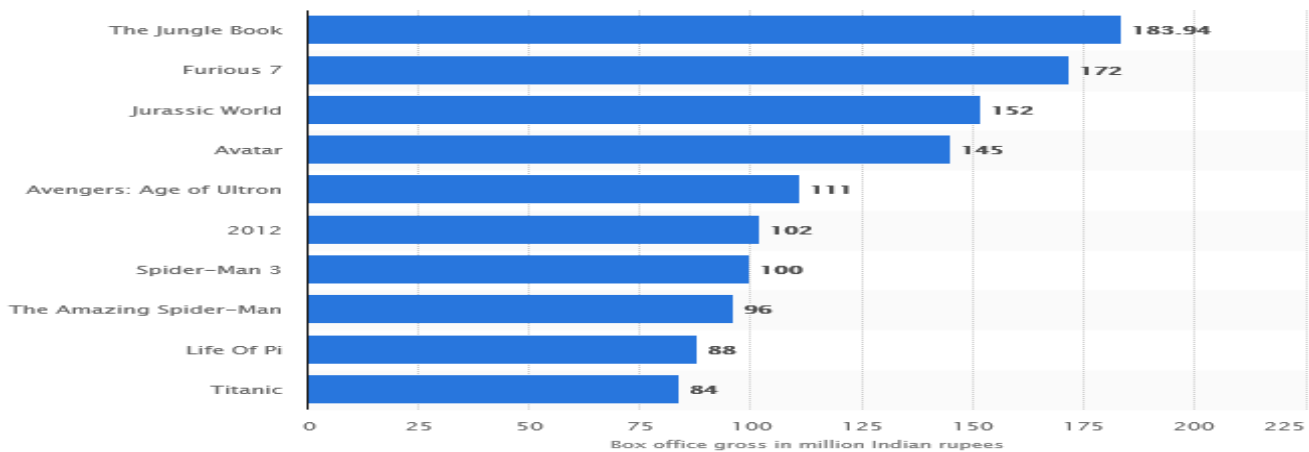

Fig. 3: Highest grossing Hollywood movie productions in India of all time (in million Indian rupees)

Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/695625/highest-grossing-hollywood-movies-india/

Likewise, the figure (Fig.3) above projects the highest grossing Hollywood film production in India of all time. It is observed that every single film listed in the table has majority of portions created using CGI and digital applications.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, concepts related to film audience in the digital era and their adaptation to the technological changes in filmmaking are discussed. As Audience theory says, the audience are a heterogeneous group and complex in nature. With film being a medium where the audience are mere spectators gathered in one location with their attention focused, it is mandate that any film audience adopt to the technological advancements. And it is the cognitive change in the minds of the individuals like adapting to any new media, which has aided filmmakers employ further concoction in filmmaking. For instance, filmmakers like James Cameroon are in the hunt for manufacturing new camera technologies for delving further into technical progression banking on the inclination show by audience towards digital technology.

The study concludes by summarizing the evolving and modifying nature of new media audiences and their perception changes towards film viewing. With the digital gimmicks in films becoming crowd pullers, film audience have been enamoured to the visual grandeur projected on screen. Audience research pertaining to film viewing is sure to grab much attention in the years to come.

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