Film Effects and Foreign Audiences' Perceptions of Countries' Brands: A Systematic Review of Theories and Methods

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Abstract:

Films are windows into their respective societies of origin. They have the potential to affect or shape foreign audiences' perceptions of the society they represent or brand. Although evident, this potential to shape foreign audiences' perceptions has not enjoyed all the scholarly attention it deserved. Indeed, a good number, nay most studies devoted to films' ability to shape foreign audiences' perceptions of countries' brands mainly hinge on speculative methods and/or theories. Only a very limited number of such studies are empirical in nature. In this paper, a systematic review is used to assess the methods and theories that have popularly or dominantly been deployed in the recent scholarly research works on films' impact on foreign audiences' perception of countries' brands. The paper addresses two principal things. In the first place, it provides a critical review of previous studies done on the effects of films on foreign audiences' perception of countries. In the second place, it critically examines the methodologies and research approaches deployed to research film audiences and film impact on these audiences.

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Introduction

Postulations on films' potency to affect audiences' perceptions of countries' brands have mainly been speculative and conceptual. Empirical studies devoted to the effects of films on international audiences' perception of (specific) countries seem to be very rare. Most Scholars interested to the question of films' impact on foreign audiences' perceptions have mainly hinged on questionable or doubtful theories. Many have for instance, simply interpreted the presence of specific stereotypes, myths and other salient elements of film contents as principal determinants of audiences' perception of the countries or cultures being depicted in films; thereby adopting a logic which is reminiscent of the Magic Bullet theory. Such a logic, is even contrary to Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory whose tenets argue in part that, audiences do not always read message encoded as intended by the filmmakers [1]. According to this Stuart Hall's theory, there may circumstantially be aberrant or oppositional readings of a film text.

It is therefore possible that a film "designed" to spread the American soft power in foreign countries across the world ends up tarnishing her image to some extent due to aberrant or oppositional decoding by some pocket of international audiences [2-4]. A good illustration of this truism is that publics with

Islamist affiliation as well as a big pockets of audiences in the Middle East naturally do not see the contents and ideologies sold by Hollywood films as (completely) sane and inspiring [3-4]. It therefore becomes important to proffer or review empirical research on the impact of films on foreign audiences' perception of countries. Unfortunately, very limited scholarly attention seems to have been given to this particular aspect of film experience. More interesting, no scholarly work in the literature available has assessed the pertinence of theories and methods deployed in both empirical and non-empirical studies devoted to the effect of films on foreign audiences. This paper attempts to fill the above mentioned gap in knowledge through a systematic review of some of the methodologies deployed by the very limited number of scholars researched the subject of film's impact on foreign audiences' perception of filmic representation of countries.

In line with the foregoing, this paper addresses two principal issues. In the first place, it provides a critical review of previous studies done on the effects of films on foreign audiences' perception of countries. In the second place, it presents a critical exploration of methodologies and research approaches deployed to research audiences and impact studies.

Material and methods
The present study is based on the descriptive research method. As its name indicates, this method aims to describe the state of a given phenomenon in a specific period of time and a specific geographical area. The method may involve the examination of opinions and views about the subject under study. In the context of this study, the model was used to review the state of research on films' ability to shape foreign audiences' perception of countries' brands. The principal method of data collection used in the study is documentary analysis. This method consisted in extracting relevant data from such secondary sources as books, book chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles, newspaper articles, official government publications and a variety of online contents. Thus, the paper relied exclusively on qualitative data.

Results and discussion

Previous Studies on Films' Impact on Audiences' Perception of Countries
The concept of Films' impact on foreign audiences' perceptions of country has attracted a number of non-empirical, semi-empirical and empirical studies. In this section the paper reviews studies on the issue according to the extent to which they are (un)scientific.
Unscientific Studies

In her online article "The Danger of a Single Story" Chimamanda Adichie uses her personal experience and observations to conclude that too much exposure to a one-sided media content – including films – can motivate one to build or believe in a distorted image of a country, a people and/or culture [5]. She underscores how some of her western friends' addiction to "Afrophobic" literature and films made them to internalise the negative image of Black Africa. These western friends often hinged on their racist film experience to view Africa or specific African countries as a universe characterised by primitive (human) beings, negatives, darkness, differences, dreaded epidemics and incessant fratricide wars. In other word, the films motivated her western friends to "otherise" Africans. Chimmamanda thus speculates/guesses that through the instrumentality of a wide range of media – including cinema – many Americans or westerners are made to see Africa in a negative light, this from the early stages of their lives. Thus, the media and some other image building agencies seem to bear some fruits. These fruits are evident in the fact that, in the perceptions a number of Americans (notably her lecturers, her roommates) with whom sshe sympathised with while in the US, Africa is just a compendium of negativities. Chimamanda notes that it is only after spending few years in America and after consideration of her experience with some Americans that she began to understand why most of them (US citizens) tend to view Africa as "a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner" [5, p.21]. She claims that if she had never had such an experience, she wouldn't have understood why these Americas tend to see Africa and Africans in such as bad light.

It is important here to underline the risk that may arise from generalising from a particular instance. It goes without saying that Chimamanda's argument or logic in "The Danger of a Single Story" may be taxed on the basis of its being unscientific. In line with this basis, the talk may to an extent be described as a form of hasty generalisation. The validity of the conclusion is doubtful since Adichie clearly induces from particular cases of Americans which may not be representative of the whole Americans or westerners. However, though unscientific, Adichie observations provide a body of empirical evidence

on how films and other forms of media can affect foreign audiences' perceptions of exogenous places and cultures.

In a similar unscientific study, Ansen (cited by Fafiolo) hinges on some qualitative data to theorise on Hollywood films' impact on foreign audiences' perception of America [6]. They author hinges specifically on estimated number of tourists drawn to America and number of daily visitors to the film site to infer the magnitude to which the film *Titanic* affected non-American audiences' perception of America. He notes that one amazing thing about the movie *Titanic* is, the impressive number of audiences (tourists) it drew to Americans few years after its release. According to him, films generally draw 2% foreign audiences, "but by February 1998 *Titanic* had drawn 20% of the world to Americans. Like all megahits, the movie had become a kind of religion". Ansen attributes this impressive attraction of tourists to the fact that the film (*Titanic*) was positively received in many countries including Mexico, Hong Kong, France, Slovenia and South Africa among others. Ansen's theory hinges on the arguable premise that falling in love with the film was tantamount with falling in love with the culture that produced it. Ansen equally based his deduction of the film's ability to positively affect audiences' perception of America on the basis that the film's website was averaging 4 Million hits daily (cited in Fafiolu) [6, p.22].

Another unscientific investigation conducted by Zainab yields a number of paradoxical results, pointing to a constant dynamism in the Muslim world's perception of America and the rest of the West [3]. Zainab uses a mix of empirical understandings, observations and informal interviews with diplomats, politicians and influential personalities from the Arab world to examine the degree to which Hollywood films and Western countries' foreign policy in the Middle East spread America's soft power in the region. A major finding in the investigation is that, though Hollywood films have contributed in no small measure to "lure" Arab audiences into admiring and aspiring to the essence of the Western life (freedom of expression, great opportunities in life, freedom of creativity and other goodies), most Arabs continue to nurse suspicions against the West, seeing it as a people having a hidden agenda, which can only be destructive for the interests of Middle east people. Based on this, Zainab interprets the Middle Easterners attitude towards the West as one of love-hate-resentment. As she notes, West-mania in most Middle East countries is visible in 1) people's love of Western popular movies and TV series, 2) people's heavy consumption of the latest western fashion and the latter's imitation of the latest western style of haircuts and 3) the remarkable obsession these Arab audiences have with celebrities and what these celebrities do or say [3].

The craze for the western way of life is also seen in the fact that Western music has since the 80s been one of the most consumed cultural products in the region. These indexes of West-mania are however challenged or neutralized by the crushing realization that the Western standard of success is not reachable by the majority of the countries that are part of the Middle Eastern Nations of Asia (MENA) region. Zainab explains that this difference in standard of success is visible in the disparity between the ideals defended by the Western world and the socio-economic hardship witnessed by the majority of the populations in the MENA region; a hardship which is partly caused by the Western world or the application of what is popularly believed to be Western values in the region. She pointedly notes that "being in America, you may say: That is not my problem. And you may be right. But what people in the MENA region hear and believe is that America held out hope to all, came to Iraq, promised it liberation and prosperity, and ended up destroying the country" [3, p.4].

In effect, the images of the U.S. and the West generally projected by Hollywood films are clearly contrasted or contrastable – to a number of realities bordering on Western countries' foreign policies in the Middle East. Zainab thus posits that Arab audiences mainly interpret most Hollywood films as a mere lure. These audiences tend to give greater credence to popular myths stipulating that the West is inconsistent in its advocacy of liberal democracy and economic prosperity in the region, given the fact that it has in several instances, supported corrupt and dictatorial regimes in Egypt (notably Mubarak's government) and in Libya (Kaddafi's regime), obviously for some geo-political dividends and the control of natural resources. According to this, Arab people, according to the scholar, dominantly tend to regard Western countries' foreign policies in the Middle East as a phenomenon which is principally driven by the prospect of controlling the oil reserves of the region. Hollywood films' positive depictions of the West are equally contrasted with, or simply neutralised by the pornographic or sexually/culturally illicit contents that characterise a good number of Hollywood films. As Zainab observes, this pornographic content is viewed by many Arab audiences as an epitome of the West's moral corruption. "Just as the West stereotypes all Muslim women as being oppressed, the East's stereotype of Western women is that they are all morally loose" [3, p. 8].

As noted for the two first investigations mentioned in this section, Zainab's analysis hinges on partially unscientific and non-rigorous methodologies (informal interviews and personal observations). Though they provide a number of empirical understandings bordering on the effects of films on audiences' perceptions of countries (as brands), the results of her investigation may not have great authority and validity.

Few Empirical Studies

One of the rare scientific studies – in the literature available – devoted to the question of films' impact on foreign audiences is experimental in nature. It is conducted by American political science scholar, Pautz [7]. The study considers two recently produced Hollywood films, *Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty* to test the potential influence movies on audiences' perception of the American government and its foreign policy. The two films represent the American government in a very positive light, as a government which is at the vanguard position to combat terrorism and protect its citizens at all cost. The films highlights American secret service's competence and bravery in locating, tracking, capturing and executing dreaded terrorists such as late Osama Ben Laden.

Pautz deploys a scientific method combining experimental research and survey. She hinges on an initial survey of over 69 undergraduates' perceptions of the American government and its international policy. She thereafter compares the results of this survey with the outcome of a second survey, conducted by her after the students had been exposed to one of the two movies mentioned above (*Argo* or *Zero Dark Thirty*). One of her major findings is that, within a very short period of time (the time length of the movies) the films could significantly push the students surveyed to dramatically revise their perception of the American government. Though most of the perceptions are negative in both surveys, this negativity considerably reduces in the second (the post-screening) survey. 22 percent of the viewed demonstrated a marked improvement on their perception about the American government while 76 percent of the students maintains their negative perception. Despite these results, Pautz recognises that "naturally, claims about the direct causality of movie watching and its effects on its audience cannot be made" [7,p.16]. This is predicated on the fact that audiences are generally affected by a mix of factors and films may just be an integral part of this mix.

A study similar to that conducted by Pautz was carried out by Pruseviciute, to measure the impact of a total of ten films trailers on international audiences' perception of China [8]. The study was based on a number of hypotheses that: (i) a movie will likely depict a country in a more realistic way when produced by filmmakers who are natives of the country being depicted meanwhile foreign directors will likely, innocuously or not, distort reality about the country depicted and (ii) audiences will likely have a better perception of the country being depicted when they are exposed to films directed by filmmakers who are native of the country depicted in the film. Based on these hypotheses, her study aimed at investigating the relationship between the immediate movie-induced perceptions of China as touristic destination and the origin of movies' directors. Prusevicuite deployed an online survey which was based on a sample of exclusively non-Asian audiences who had never been to a South Eastern country. After being exposed to the trailers of the ten films on China, these respondents were asked to elicit their perceptions of China as informed by the films. Respondents' perceptions of China as informed by the films directed by Chinese were viewed against their perceptions of the country, as informed by the other set of films directed by non-Chinese. The Chinese-directed films selected for the study included Xiaoshuai Wang's *Beijing Bicycle*, Wong Kar Wai's *2046*, Tiang-Ming Wu's *The King of the Masks*, Kaige Chang's *Together with You*, Jin-ho Hue's *Dangerous Liaisons*; while the films directed by non-Chinese included John Curran's *The Painted Veil*, James Ivory's *The White Countess*, Ken Kornviser and David Ren's *Shanghai Kiss*, Harald Zwart's *Karate Kid* and Jon Avnet's *Red Corner*.

Prusevicuite's study had a number of major findings, one of which is that, (irrespective of their directors' origins,) the movie trailers pushed a majority of the respondents to associate China with dictatorship, insecurity, strange laws and the exotic. Only a minority of these audiences viewed China in a positive light, as a destination worth visiting [8, p.41-43]. The results of the study showed that the films mainly had negative impacts on the non-Asian audiences. The latter dominantly described China as an unfriendly holyday destination. A large percentage of the respondents expected the mood to be dark and negative. They assumed that they would experience hostility and will not be welcomed in China. All these further point to their expectation of danger [8, p.43].

Another scientific study worth mentioning in this section of the systematic review of literature was conducted in 2003 by the New Zealander government (through NFO New Zealand). The study aimed to measure the impact of *Lord of the Rings* (trilogy) on international audiences' perceptions of New

Zealand. The study considered a survey of both international visitors (tourists) to New Zealand and visitors to the Tourism New Zealand website (where the film was publicised). The research work sought specifically to identify and measure the influence of the trilogy as an image maker for New Zealand. It equally aimed at understanding the extent to which the films influenced visitors to go to New Zealand, and particularly identified the level of awareness and resulting impact of the trilogy on travel decision making. The results of the study revealed that *Lord of the Rings* had serious impact on international perception of New Zealand, inducing a good number of tourists to visit the country or to want to visit it. In effect, a majority of visitors and potential visitors surveyed in the context of the study confirmed that they had watched one of the films, and 95% of current visitors knew that New Zealand was the filming location for *The Lord of the Rings*.

In terms of the measurable impacts of the movies, it was found that 9% of visitors identified *The Lord of the Rings* as being one of the reasons, though not the main motive, motivating their visiting New Zealand; meanwhile, 0.3% stated that the films were a main, though not sole reason for visiting the country. Of the total number of potential visitors, 65% indicated that they were more likely to visit New Zealand because of the films or the associated publicity [9, p.22-26]. Based on these this findings, it was concluded that the films seriously raised awareness of New Zealand as well as triggered motivations or likelihood among international audiences to visit New Zealand. Further observations have confirmed the results of this study. In his study titled "Planning for Film Tourism: Active Destination Image Management", Glen Reviews a handful of such observations. He writes that:

> The impact of *The Lord of the Rings* on New Zealand's international tourist numbers […] is often overstated in all-encompassing phrases such as "*Lord of the Rings* sent a huge wave of British tourists scurrying to New Zealand", […] "tens of thousands of fans were attracted […] to the twin antipodal islands to see the movie locales first-hand", […] and "the three films created a massive tourist industry in New Zealand". In fact, any change in international visitation has been slight, and in line with previous trends. [10, p.25]

The results of the various studies reviewed in this section tend to confirm theories stipulating that films have serious a potential to affect international audiences' perception of a country or culture. However, as clearly demonstrated by the majority of these studies (the one reviewed above), most observers have developed the tendency of using unscientific methodologies to conclude on the effects of films on foreign audiences perceptions of countries.

Characteristics of the Popular Methodological Approaches
The literature explored in the preceding sub-head indicates that there is a wide avalanche of methods deployable to study or research films' effects on audiences. These methods naturally depend on contexts and objectives of the film/audience research. In spite of this flux of methods, the question of the most appropriate method for such film (audience) research has remained topical among film critics and specialized film research institutions. As noted by USC Annenberg professor and Lear Centre Director Martin Kaplan, there is no doubt that "entertainment [notably cinema] affects audiences … the challenge for scholars has been measuring that impact, especially for mass media, without requiring a fortune to spend on valid datasets" (cited in DeMos) [11, p.14].

In other words, researching films effects on audience – particularly foreign audiences – has always been a complex task from the methodological point of view. This has been so for a number of reasons; the first being the fact that film researchers most often depend on the responses of viewers meanwhile, the latter most often do not have sufficient visual literacy to adequately describe their film experience. Huw notes for instance that "even if you do successfully conduct audience research, the results are not always that enlightening. The average film viewer cannot always put into words what a film means to them in quite the same way as a professional film critic" [12, p.11]. It is thus axiomatic that ordinary audiences (under study) most often conjure their feelings and cannot for instance master the psychological tools a researcher may use to describe audiences' reception and attitude to a film. A related problem is that audiences selected through methods such as focus group discussion, survey and observations are rarely really representative of the whole population under study.

Another challenge in film audience research is the fact that in a bid to control particular stimulus and "single out" specific areas of films impact, researchers most often resort to the experimental design which, like all other methodological approaches to film audiences study, is not without serious weaknesses. One of such weaknesses is the fact that experimental design creates an artificial setting

which is rarely, or hardly reflective of the way audiences consume films in normal/natural circumstances. Sharing corollary, Rabe-Hemp and Navarro pointedly contend that one of the major the advantages of the experimental design in the studying of audiences' reception of films is that the researcher has power to control the environment, the conditions and the variables that are under study [13]. In spite of these strong points, the method is characterised by a good number of limitations some of which include the fact that "the precision and control utilized in experiments make it difficult to apply the findings to the real world, referred to as generalizability" [13, p.1].

It goes without saying that the artificial setting created in the context of an experimental research affects the quality of results obtained by the researcher at the end of the process. In other words it may be relatively hazardous to conclude or generalize from the results of an experimental research. Besides this difficult – nay impossible – "generalizability" of the results obtained in experimental studies, the very idea of controlling particular stimuli or extra-venous variables appears extremely herculean or relatively futile in the context of media effects study. In other words, it is not always possible to perfectly control stimulus or all extra-venous variables. Biswajit, Durgesh and Sunitha note this possibility in their identification and definition of systematic errors likely to mare an experimental research initiative. The three scholars contend that "despite taking preventive measures, some other external factors with no direct connection with the study may also affect the experiment. This affects the result. This type of error may be surprising for the researcher" [14, p.7]. In the same line of thought, The World Bank submits that:

> One great difficulty for researchers is how to measure media effects. Media consumption may affect a person's thoughts, emotions, or behaviors in ways that could be direct or indirect, immediate or delayed, fleeting or lasting. It is impossible for scientists to control for all of the mediating factors, from levels of media consumption to demographics such as age, race, and socioeconomic status to harder-to-measure variables like environment, upbringing, values and previous experience. A researcher would not be able to prove, for example, that playing a violent video game caused a person to commit a violent crime, even if an association existed between the two behaviours. Did playing the game lead to the violent behaviour, or did a propensity toward violence encourage use of the game? Why didn't all individuals who played the game commit acts of violence? Traditional methods of research such as surveys, experiments, and panel studies cannot adequately solve this cause-and-effect dilemma. [15, p.1]

Another serious problem in audience research is the fact that films considered for such studies are usually selected according to some psycho-philosophical and cultural biases which in most cases affect the quality of results. For instance, most researchers tend to believe that their reading of a particular film is universal and that audiences are just likely to share their positions even though Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory informs us that audiences may sometimes exhibit aberrant reading of a film under study. In the same line of though, most semioticians and structuralist critics will agree that, like the other media texts, filmic productions are open texts in that, they can generate multiple interpretations and exegeses. As Morley [16] insightfully argued, filmic texts are polysemic as they can attract diverse/divergent readings and interpretations which may range from (i) preferred/dominant reading, (ii) oppositional reading to (iii) negotiated reading [17]. It is therefore questionable that a film used for screening in a focus group or observation context is "rigidly" viewed *a priori* as representing a particular country in a good or bad light. A researcher may think the selected film presents country X in a pejorative way meanwhile his presuppositions are faulty or just highly subjective.

The majority of studies reviewed in the preceding section of this sub-head make this mistake. Authors of these studies tend to select their case studies (films) with a number of pre-conceived appreciative frameworks. In her study that examines the attitudes of some American college students towards the US government as informed by two films, Pautz chooses *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo* which she *a priori* classifies as movies that portray America in a negative light. This pre-conception is questionable given the open nature of filmic text [7]. Similarly, Pruseviciute chooses ten films which she has *a priori* rated as damaging to the image of China in her study devoted to how foreign audiences perceive China through Mandarin popular culture [8].

A similarly questionable culture has been to select specific film genres and use them for screening as well as topic of discussion in focus group forums or semi-structure interviews. While castigating such a research tradition, Rauch argues that: "existing studies tend to focus on the effects of, or responses to,

one film or to one type of film, which results in skewed ideas about 'Holocaust films and their audiences" [18, p.148]. Instead of limiting audiences to specific films which the researcher has subjectively appreciated, it may be more productive to allow audiences build their personalized film experience and to express their perception of a given country from such personalized film experience.

The above-mentioned challenges of film audience research have not deterred film scholars' interest in film influences on viewers. In effect, issues such as the degree to which film impact viewers, the specific pockets of audiences which are the most-impacted, how and when they are impacted among other themes have remain a topical problematic in media studies in general and film studies in particular [15, 19-20]. In a bid to counter some of the challenges mentioned above, film audience experts have tended to motivate researchers to adopt mixed methods and other innovative approaches among other approaches. Huw notes for instance that by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to studying film effects and film audiences, researchers will be able to build a fairly robust picture of how audiences engage with films and challenge existing myths bordering on the how these films work [12,p.16].

Following a similar logic, Davis and Michelle make a case for the use of Q Methodology in audience research and media effect, underscoring the fact that this method has many advantages not found in traditional approaches to researching film/media effects [21]. They note that some of the many advantages of the Q methodology are that (i) it provides "insight into audience subjectivities in a much richer way than that provided by conventional surveys, while providing more structure and better replicability than purely qualitative approaches such as focus groups or ethnographic observation". Also, Q Methodology's consideration of various audience experiences gives it the ability "to develop, explore, and test theory before moving to large scale surveys". Finally, the application of advances in software in Q Methodology is really adapted to present trends in data collection traditions. In effect, recent advances in software could enable Q Methodology surveys to be administered online and to "thereby engage online users of a wide variety of media forms located on and offline" [21, p.527].

It should be underlined that Q Methodology is a research approach used in psychology and social sciences to measure people's viewpoints technically called "their subjectivities". Originally developed in clinical settings by psychologist William Stephenson, the Q Methodology is most often applied when assessing patient progress over time (what is called intra-rater comparison). The approach has recently been adopted in research context to examine how people think about a topic (inter-rater comparisons). Following the same borrow logic, audience researchers now advocate the use of this method in film audience research; two good examples being Davis and Michelle investigation [21, p.527] mentioned above.

Although there is a popular culture among audience researchers to shortlist specific methodologies to the obvious detriment of others, it must be highlighted that there is no superior and cardinal method in audience research or film effect investigations. Generally, the suitability of a method will very much depend on the orientation of the researcher that is the objectives and aims of their study [22-24]. Corroborating this position, Chatoo and Das flatly contend that there is no such thing a specific formula suitable to investigate or articulate impact. In their words, "there is no one single way to perform impact evaluation. There are many" [25, p.5]. In guise of further explanations, the two researchers cite Napoli as saying "a comprehensive approach to impact assessment typically requires the application of multiple methodological approaches that address different levels of analysis that reflect the different spheres of potential impact (e.g. on individual attitudes/behaviour, on media debate/discussion on public policy" (Napoli cited in Chatoo & Das) [25]. The implication of the above-mentioned observations (made by Chatoo and Das on one hand and Napoli on the other hand) is that, rather than rigidly and/or dogmatically sticking to a specific method, the audience and film effect researcher should contextually choose and apply his method. This means that serious justifications should be provided for choosing a specific research method. Another implication of the above-mentioned observations is that inter and/or cross-disciplinarity is not heretical when it comes to researching impact (particularly film/media impact). This conclusion is enough to debunk popular – but faulty – assumptions that only experimental research can adequately assess media and film impact [14].

Conclusion
Films are windows into their respective societies of origin. They have the potential to affect or shape foreign audiences' perceptions of the society they represent or brand. Although evident, this potential to shape foreign audiences' perceptions has not enjoyed all the scholarly attention it deserved. Indeed, a good number, nay most studies devoted to films' ability to shape foreign audiences' perceptions of countries' brand mainly hinge on speculative methods and/or theories. Only a very limited number of

such studies are empirical in nature. This paper used a systematic review to assess the methods and theories that have been deployed in the recent scholarly discourse on films' impact on foreign audiences' perception of country's brand. The paper provided a critical review of previous studies conducted on the effects of films on foreign audiences' perception of countries. The paper also critically examined the methodologies and research approaches deployed to research audiences and impact studies.

The systematic review conducted in this paper confirms theories stipulating that films have serious a potential to affect international audiences' perception of a country or culture. However, as clearly demonstrated by the majority of these studies (the one reviewed above), most observers have developed the tendency of using unscientific methodologies to conclude on the effects of films on foreign audiences perceptions of countries. The systematic review presented in the foregoing also suggests that, rather than rigidly and/or dogmatically sticking to a specific method, the audience and film effect researcher should contextually choose and apply his method. This means that serious justifications should be provided for choosing a specific research method. Another implication of the above-mentioned observations is that inter and/or cross-disciplinarity is not heretical when it comes to researching impact (particularly film/media impact). This conclusion is enough to debunk popular – but faulty – assumptions that only experimental research can adequately assess media and film impact

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