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Audiences' Perception's Analysis of Gen-Ai in Science Fiction Films

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the audience's perception of generative artificial intelligence in science fiction films. Quantitative study, purposively selected sample from three major universities of Islamabad, representing the undergraduate and graduate students of the country. For this purpose, Gen-AI science fiction films from different eras were selected. In media ecology, media's impact on people's perception, understanding, feeling, and value is measured while they interact with new forms of technology. This article answered the extent of the effect of generative artificial intelligence in science fiction films on audience perception. The findings revealed that there is a very limited effect on audience perception due to the availability of other sources of Gen-AI. They are also very aware and easily distinguish between what is real and what is generated.

Keywords: Audience, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Perception, Science Fiction Films.

Introduction

The launch of ChatGPT in 2022 led to a dynamic shift in the realm of information technology and how it is used by different people and organizations. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a broad concept, and ChatGPT is only a small part of it. ChatGPT falls under the category of Generative AI. There are various definitions of what is really considered AI and a lot of terms surrounding it are used interchangeably despite lack of application. Wang defines AI generally as an artificial replication of human intelligence and cognition (2008, pp. 362-373). Another definition of AI is any computer that passes the Turing test (Schuett, 2023, pp. 60-82). This term refers to the technology capable of generating content such as text, images, and audio from training data (Feuerriegel et al., 2024, pp. 111-126). Training data refers to the dataset provided to the AI generation tool to be used for the generation of new content. Some of the AI generation tools in use are ChatGPT, Gemini, DALL-E, OpenAI, etc. These tools are not actual AI but are commonly referred to as such. This could be due to a lack of understanding or difference of opinion. Why does the difference matter? It highlights the gap in people's understanding of what AI really is and how it functions. Which impacts perception of GEN-AI as well. Until recently, CGI was the closest thing to GEN-AI tools used in filmmaking (Das, 2023, pp. 303-309). And yet, the concept of AI has been popularly used in fiction films since the 1920s.

Science Fiction

Science fiction, or sci-fi, is a genre that expands scientific development into the future and draws the world around it to show how society developed in light of this extension of technological development (Telotte, 2001, pp. 33-43). Early sci-fi centered around alien caricatures without the extensive world-building the genre possesses today. Films like Star Wars and Star Trek are examples of this development. This genre of film and entertainment is connected to increased levels of creativity and innovation for its audience (Marozzo et al., 2024, p. 132). The exact nature of this influence is unknown and is generally attributed as a positive influence on human cognition and problem-solving. Sci-fi pushes human creativity beyond conventional thinking and could lead to innovation and development (Wu, 2013, pp. 44-55). Lee speculates that technological discoveries and innovations made years after perceived sci-fi depictions in media are a result of the extrapolation of the loose concepts in sci-fi (2019, pp. 705-725). Science fiction sets a foundation for development, showing the impact sci-fi films have on their audiences. Milburn uses the term "fan practice" to

explain the relation of sci-fi films and generative artificial intelligence development (2010a, pp. 560-569).

Selection of Films

The 1927 film, Metropolis is set in a dystopian future where people are segregated into two groups. The lower working class is struggling to survive, and the upper inventor class living lavishly. The character of Maria is replaced by an identical robot to manipulate another character. The robot is a model for workers of the future made to replace the actual human workers. The concept shares a resemblance to GEN-AI and how it is used professionally. This representation of AI in film frightened its audience with the notion that technology is capable of replacing humans and could be the end of humanity (James, 2003, p.82).

The day the earth stood still, aired in 1951, is a film about an extraterrestrial robot named 'Gort' that lands on earth one day and threatens the world with the message live peacefully or be destroyed as a threat to other planets. As, Gebert discussed that the film presents a vastly different perspective of Gen-AI but also a much larger threat to mankind. There is a stark difference between the people and the robot as if to separate them. Unlike in metropolis, where false Maria is a robot clone. The AI is still recognized as a possible danger, but that seems to be determined by the response of the people (1996, p. 156).

2001: A Space Odyssey was in cinemas in the year 1968 that is about Gen-AI program in a spaceship that breaks the laws of robotics and starts killing its passengers. This could be considered the first authentic representation of AI in science fiction film due to depiction of emotion and impulse by HAL-9000 (Adams & Marjorie, 1970, p. 240).

In 1977, Star Wars aired presenting a more balanced stance on Gen-AI with a wide variety of artificially intelligent creatures ranging from the friendly side kick to the deadly enemy army. The film represents the range and versatility of AI and the cult following it gathered, still inspires other media to this day (Hilal,2024).

In 2004, I Robot is a film about a future where robots and Gen-AI are common place but the existence of Sonny is an anomaly as only he is programmed with human like emotions, presenting the audience with another perspective while the other AI aims to take over humanity as they are seen as a threat to themselves (Stone, 2004).

Transformers, released in 2007, is about two different robot species bringing their war to earth. The robots set a clear distinction of good and evil as one side aims to rebuild their destroyed home, while the other's aims to build an army (Scott, 2007, pp. 3, 10).

WALL-E (2008) is a Disney animated film about two robots that try to save a plant to show that humans could return to earth and grow more. They are stopped by the ship's commander robot that believes humans are safer on the ship and the plant must be destroyed to keep (Howey,2010).

I Am Mother (2019) is a film about a young girl raised in an isolated bunker by an Gen-AI robot called Mother. Mother is later revealed to be the one that ended humanity so they could start over from the embryos raised by her (Hagan, 2021, pp. 101-103).

Audience Perception

Representation in media is largely linked to audience perception and consumption of media. The type of media consumed also relates to individuals' personality and the perceived gratification from content. So, the audience can be separated by genre and their background. This proves the impact of media on the audience (Hall, 2005, pp. 377-398). The supposed impact of sci-fi content on audiences also considers the audiences' background when referencing the creativity and innovation of people. Kubrak highlights the impact of film on audience perception by measuring their difference in attitude before and after the film viewing (2020, p. 86). Based on this experiment, representation of AI in science fiction films can set a basis for how society perceives it. The link between technological innovation and sci-fi film concepts is already highlighted above. So, the connection could also represent AI and how it will develop, in accordance with Milburn's concept of "fan practice" that is used to elaborate on the connection between scientists and science fiction (2010b, pp. 560-569). Keeping in mind the innovators of sci-fi, it is important to recognize that the genre plays with its scientific concepts loosely (Spinrad, 1990, pp. 8-16). Objectively, scientists disagree with much of sci-fi on a technical level and argue the feasibility of the more fantastic nature of science fiction. However, the general sci-fi audience is more influenced than scientists, and for them, the line between their perception of science fiction and science fact can become blurred (Sobchack, 2005, pp. 261-

274). Eagle and his colleagues conducted an evaluation of an audience of a Gen-AI-driven show and observed the difference in audience perception before and after the show. The show consisted of three performances with varying results. Some members perceived AI as a threat; some saw its potential. With each performance, the consistent audience engagement led to a more nuanced concept of AI and showed how the audience adapted to the AI. The experiment also challenged the popular media depiction of AI as a dangerous entity with exposure to an AI under control conditions (2021, pp. 91-99).

Problem Statement

Since the inception of Artificial intelligence, audience perception of generative artificial intelligence in science fiction films has been under study in developed countries. Theoretically, surveys on specific films have been conducted to find the impact and how the media ecology affects audience thinking. Eastern countries have less exposure to Gen-AI, and they are used to only the Internet of Things; therefore, research on Gen-Artificial Intelligence is lagging. To fill the gap, this study is conducted to examine the eastern perspective of the audience regarding Gen-AI. As well as there are literate and illiterate audiences that perceive artificial intelligence differently. This study focused on the literate young generation's perception about AI in the entertainment industry.

Significance

Adding in the theory of media ecology theory especially the about the perception of audience of south Asian country like Pakistan. This study will be secondary data for the upcoming scholars.

Objectives

Objective of the study is;

1. To analyze the audience's perception of generative-artificial intelligence in science fiction films.
2. To find the audience's understanding of Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films.
3. To assess the audience's interaction with Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films.
4. To measure the audience's feeling of Gen-AI being real after watching science fiction films.
5. To investigate the audience's perspicacity of Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films.

Literature Review

McLuhan's media ecology theory investigates how communication media impacts people on an ecological level. Affecting the way they perceive, understand, feel, and value. The theory also examines people's interaction with media and how it can impact survival (Scolari, 2012, pp. 204-225). The theory recognizes media as an environment (Laskowska, 2019, pp. 53-68). There is a complex interplay between media, technology, and people that changes and affects each other. A media environment is formed through the interactions between people and different communication technologies, such as books, radio, television, the internet, and artificial intelligence (Lum, 2014, pp. 137-153).

The media environment could serve as an indicator of how society will change soon (Ruotsalainen, 2015, pp. 1-10). If a new technology or concept emerges, people eventually adapt to it. The invention of the telephone, television, internet, cellphone, and computer are technological advancements that shifted society's way of living. How they were used to change people or adjusted to them. Generative AI is seen as an extension of human ability, i.e., a limited replication of human cognition (Aguado-Terron et al., 2024a, p. 27). The general implication of this technology is the automation and reproduction of human cognition. Generative AI and art technology are used to improve quality of life. The cellphone was made for easier and more efficient two-way communication. The computer was made to automate tasks that were once entirely done in analog. AI is the latest technological development and is credited as capable of generating artistic content that was once considered unique to human creativity (Feuerriegel et al., 2024, pp. 111-126).

Generative Artificial Intelligence or Gen-AI

As previously stated, science fiction can lead to innovation through impact on human creativity (Marozzo et al., 2024, p. 132). However, Gen-AI might be able to replicate this human creativity and innovation (Aguado-Terron et al., 2024b, p. 27). The application of media ecology theory would imply that society will adjust to this technological change and result in a shift in technology itself. In the context of Gen- AI, creativity and innovation are debatable, as machine learning uses pre-existing data or datasets. This has resulted in ethical debate of AI plagiarism and content stealing, as AI-

generated content is not considered original content. However, Gen-AI as an assisting tool in the workplace has significantly increased productivity and worker performance (Brynjolfsson, 2023, pp. 24-26).

Media Evolution in Media Ecology

Media evolutionary process depends on the followings;

Emergence

This is the stage where new media enters society or is released to the market. It is the first impression of the medium (Scolari, 2013a, p. 24).

Dominance

At this stage is marked by tension and power struggle between the new and old mediums (Strauss & Shizuka, 2022, p.34)

Survival

Survival and extinction can be separate categories as stages, or one category if observed as one of two possible outcomes. This is the stage that determines if the new medium manages to stay in the environment (Scolari, 2013b, p.24).

Extinction/Extension/Amputation

Media as an environment implies the concept of extinction in media. Scolari expanded on the metaphor that could explain how outdated or older mediums fall out of use with advancements in technology. The creation of the radio had amputated the newspaper industry. Similarly, the invention of the television drastically amputated the newspaper and radio industries. Now, with information and entertainment easily accessible through the internet, other mediums seem less relevant. Extinction could also refer to the failure to survive of the new medium if it does not replace the other medium (2012, pp. 204-225). Postman's concept of the extension-amputation principle is when "the adoption of media as a Faustian bargain" in which "technology giveth and technology taketh away" (1993, p. 16). Media is visionary and startling, as McLuhan (1964/2003) suggested.

"With the arrival of electric technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself" (p. 65). With electric technologies, man has become "an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull" (p. 86). Electronic media results in the simultaneity and instantaneity of all things as technological acceleration "approaches the speed of light" (p. 464), and it turns humans into nomadic gatherers of knowledge" (p. 472).

McLuhan considered technology discontinuation as a body amputation. He said,

"The phone extends our voices, television extends our eyes and ears, the computer extends our brain, and electronic media, in general, extend our central nervous system" (Bobbitt, 2011, p. 4).

Gen-AI and SCI-FI

The influence of media, such as films, on audiences is well documented. A notable example is 'A Clockwork Orange' being pulled from cinemas by its own director due to a spree of violent crimes inspired by the film. Similarly, film portrayals of AI have the potential to influence people's perception of Gen-AI (Dieter, 2021, pp. 59-76). Films have adopted a more neutral or nuanced approach to AI with technology becoming more accessible. Older films presented a view of good vs. evil about AI, with AI as the ultimate evil. The passage of time saw a shift towards good and bad AI as secondary characters to the main antagonist and protagonist. Nowadays, characterization is more nuanced, as most relatable characters fall into the grey area of morality. AI is approached with a disconnect from society and people, to show the isolation of people in society. This could reflect real-life social isolation (Hall, 2005, pp. 377-398). Or another extension of concepts in sci-fi (Spinrad, 1990, pp. 8-16). Gen-AI is designed to mimic human intelligence (Pisters, 2017, pp. 40-41). Gen-AI is widely used for content creation and gathering information. Technology is quickly progressing to mimic human cognition in art, culture, and society. Media ecology theory states that interaction between society and new technology creates an environment where everything is interconnected. AI has adapted from a concept on the screen to an evolving technology in current times. The representation of AI films has created varying perceptions over the years that now impact on how we interact with technology and how it may develop in the future (Milburn, 2010c, pp. 560-569).

Gen-AI Perspective

The literature review revealed that there are four general perspectives of Gen-AI that are good, bad, neutral, and ambivalent (Daalmans et al. 2017, pp. 28-44). The bad view shows Gen-AI as a threat to human society. The good view presents Gen-AI as a helper of humanity, dedicated to helping their

human companions or loyally serving their designated purpose. The neutral perspective is when AI is depicted with indifference. As if it is just an accessory or piece of furniture to the story. Ambivalence presents an equal measure of positive and negative feelings in conflict. These perspectives are measures of moral nature applied to film genres (Mahmoud, 2025). Another supporting view is that films effectively trigger emotional responses in audiences (Fernández-Aguilar et al., 2019, pp. 1-2).

Research Questions

RQ1. To what extent Generative artificial intelligence in science fiction films affects the audience's perception.

RQ1a: To what extent Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films effect the audience's Understanding about AI.

RQ1b: To what extent Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films effect the audience's Interaction with AI.

RQ1c: To what extent Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films effect the audience's feeling of AI being real and secure.

RQ1d: To what extent Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films effect the audience's perspicacity.

Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis:

H1: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audience perception.

Sub-Hypothesis:

H1a: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' understanding.

H1b: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect is on audiences' interaction.

H1c: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' feeling of AI being real and secure.

H1d: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' perspicacity.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative method and purposively surveyed 150 university students from Bahria University Islamabad campus, Air University, and COMSATS including undergraduate and graduate males and females. Films selected are "Metropolis" (1927), which is considered one of the first films to explore the concept of Artificial intelligence, and "The day the earth stood still" (1951), which is used as an example of an early film about AI that is not inherently negative in its approach. "2001: A space odyssey" (1968) is used as an example of the first film representing true AI, i.e., capable of replicating human emotion. "Star Wars" (1977) is selected as an example of a film representing AI in a diverse and complex manner, rather than just black and white. "I, Robot" (2004) is used as an example of a film representing the evolution of technology beyond its intended purpose, showing AI as a great threat. "Transformers" (2007) represents AI as a species or race of creatures, depicting the good and bad of AI. "WALL-E" (2008) is the only film in this list depicting an AI robot as the protagonist, humanizing the concept of AI in viewers' eyes. "I AM MOTHER" (2019) is a modern film depicting Gen-AI where the robot is placed in a caregiver role for a human from birth.

Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1. Gen-AI Understanding

		Audience Understanding			
Variables		Gen-AI Understanding	Concept-Gen AI	Source of Info	Heroes portrayal
Gen-AI Films	Pearson Correlation	-.123	-.161*	.321**	.023*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.134	.049	.000	.021
	N	150	150	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 revealed that the understanding of Gen-AI vs Films represents negative correlation (if one variable increases the other decreases) -.123 and not significant p=.134. Concept of AI / Gen-AI vs Films representing AI =.161* which is p=.049. It is significant at level .05. Source of information vs films representing AI has strong relationship that is .321**, it shows that it is significant at p=.000 which is below .01. Heroes' portrayal vs films representing Ai has strong relationship that is .023*, it shows significance p=.021 that is significant at .05. Therefore, hypothesis H1a: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' understanding, is partially supported.

Table 2. Gen-AI Film Interaction

Variables		Use of AI	Real Life Development	Human Relations	Manipulate Behaviour	Ethical Considerations	Human like AI	Interact Frequency
Gen-AI Films	Pearson Correlation	.267**	.020	-.092	-.066	-.264**	.048	-.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.806	.263	.426	.001	.556	.705
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 showed that the use of Gen-AI vs Films representing AI have correlation at .267** and significant p=.001. Real Life Development vs films representing Gen-AI has no relationship, which is .020, it shows that it is not significant at p=.806. Human Relations vs films representing Gen-AI has a relationship that is -.092, it shows that it is not significant at p=.263. Manipulate behaviour vs films representing Gen-AI has relationship that is -.066, it shows that it is not significant at p=.426. Ethical considerations vs films representing AI has relationship that is -.264**, it shows that it is significant p=.001 having weaker relationship. Humans like AI vs films representing Gen-AI has correlation that is .048, it shows that it is not significant at p=.556. Interacting frequency vs films representing AI has relationship that is -.031, it shows that it is not significant at p=.705.

Therefore, H1b: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' interaction is partially supported.

Table 3. Gen-AI Film feelings

		General Portrayal	AI Moral Decision	Data Security	AI in 20 years
Gen-AI Film	Pearson Correlation	.054*	-.190*	-.161*	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.020	.049	.374
	N	150	150	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 revealed that the variable regarding portrayal vs Films representing Gen-AI depicts correlation of .054 and significant at p=.005. Gen-AI moral decisions vs Films representing Gen-AI have a relationship at -.190* which is p=.020. It is significant but has a weak relationship. Data security vs Films representing Gen-AI has a relationship at -.161* which is p=.049. It is significant but has weak correlation. AI in 20 years vs Films representing AI has relationship at .073 which is p=.374, is not significant. Therefore, the feeling of Gen-AI being real and secured data is significant. Therefore, H1c: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audiences' feeling of AI being real and secured, is supported having week relation.

Table 4. Gen-AI Films Perspicacity

		Film AI Danger	Effective Portrayal in Films	Impression from Film	Film Personal Views
Gen-AI film	Pearson Correlation	.045	.063	.079	.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.586	.444	.337	.672
	N	150	150	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 revealed that AI danger vs Films representing Gen-AI depicts correlation .045 and not significant at p=.586. Effective portrayal in films vs Films representing Gen-AI has no relationship at .063 which is p=.444. It is also not significant. Impression from film vs Films representing Gen-AI has relationship at .079 which is p=.337. It is not significant. Film personal views vs Films representing Gen-AI has relationship at .035 which is p=.672, which is not significant. Therefore, H1d: The more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films the more the effect on audiences' perspicacity, is not supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

It has been revealed from the data analysis that Gen-AI understanding has negative correlation with Films representing AI and is not significant as films are not a major source of information for students. There are other factors that impact audience understanding. Whereas audiences have knowledge about and know the concept of AI/Gen-AI in films.

The Source of Information has significant correlation with Films representing AI as majority of respondents' information is from the same source. Based on which they select films. It has been found that Heroes Portrayal has significant correlation with Films representing AI. Therefore, hypothesis is partially supported. As Chen (2024) described the same that people have understanding about Gen-AI used in films. People know how to interact with it and know the sources to derive knowledge to create balanced perception about Gen-AI (Chen,2024, p.259).

The variable, Use of AI has significant correlation with Films representing AI effects how people use it. The variable Real-life development of AI has no significant correlation with Films representing AI indicating that audiences draw a distinction between real AI and AI in science fiction films.

The variable Human relations have no significant correlation with Films representing AI as other factors are more relevant than films. The variable manipulated behaviour has no significant correlation with Films representing AI as people draw distinction between film concept of AI and Gen-AI. The variable Ethical considerations have significant correlation with Films representing AI as films present ethical stances for AI and this raises concerns for audience. In Human like AI has no significant correlation with Films representing AI as people draw distinction between AI in film and actual AI. While interacting frequency has no significant correlation with Films representing AI as factors other than film is relevant to how frequently people use AI tools in their daily lives. As Bender described, students learn from the Gen-AI representation from various sources, is refuted in this study (2023, p.351).

The variable of General Portrayal has significant correlation with Films representing AI as films present audience with distinct portrayals of AI and audience retains this information. The variable of Gen-AI moral decisions shows significant correlation with Films representing AI as science fiction films depict strong debates on morality of AI. The variable of data security has significant correlation with Films representing AI. As audience concerns of AI as a threat are not mitigated in science fiction films, which generally use exaggerated views on AI as Mohammed described (2024, p. 1749).

Gen-AI in 20 years show no significant correlation with Films representing AI as development of AI is not attributed to science fiction films by general audience. People think that Gen-AI presented in films is not real whereas people are using AI in various forms is real. People perceive Gen-AI to be real and secure. They can easily detach their feelings from the films, believing that whatever presented is in AI form, it is different from real life. Outside the films, threat and insecurity exist. Trust must be built in the upcoming years as people cannot figure out how AI will emerge after 20 years as Jain also expressed the same in his Gen-AI survey of Security and Privacy Threats. People know Gen-AI film production techniques, so no danger exists. Film AI Danger has no significant correlation with Films representing AI as audience draws clear distinction between AI in sci-fi films and AI in real life. Effective portrayal in Films is not related with Films representing AI indicating that audience draws a distinction between real AI and AI in science fiction films. Personal views are not formed by the Gen-AI films because they know the difference between real and generated content (2024).

Conclusion

The main hypothesis is partially supported as survey results indicated that films are not a major source of information for the audience regarding Gen-AI. Other factors outside of films affect people's

understanding of Gen-AI. People are not fearful after watching films, but they have security, ethical and safety concerns while using Gen-AI in real life. The audience is not concerned with the advancement of Gen-AI as they have technological advancements in their lives. Films cannot change the point of views of audience as well because they are well aware of and can easily distinct between real and generated, Therefore , main hypothesis that the more the exposure to Gen-artificial intelligence in science fiction films, the more the effect on audience perception, is partially supported.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the extension and moment by moment improvement in Gen-AI, less educated audience may be a part of study too. Because every person nowadays interacting with Internet-of-things and Gen-AI, their opinion, feelings, and behaviours can be a part of the study. This study was limited to the graduate and undergraduate students of a specific age. Above 35 of age audience have experienced and witnessed various eras of technology development. Therefore, their viewpoint can add value to the upcoming studies.

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