

# Expert Witnesses: The Effect of Expertise on the Pleasure of Experiencing Films

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the fertile - and largely understudied - relationship between pleasure and expertise when experiencing art. Cinematography students at an Eastern Canadian post-secondary institution participated in this longitudinal study that collected their responses to attractive and unattractive films at the beginning and end of a semester of film study. The results suggest that expert film goers are more able to differentiate between attractive and unattractive films, garnering greater pleasure from the high quality films than their previous (naïve) assessments. The implications for arts marketers include both target marketing - that is, selecting audiences - and building in features that appeal to specific pleasures, whether sensory, social, emotional or intellectual. Suggestions for future research include verifying the results with larger samples and more broad-based choice of art forms.

## **Keywords**

Pleasure, expertise, arts, marketing, films.

Notwithstanding the existence of a substantial body of literature around the perceived benefits and motivations that drive art consumption, there is a paucity of research related to the structure and role of pleasure in the evaluation of cultural experiences. The current research addresses the question of how film viewers assess their enjoyment of a movie, and whether – and how – that assessment may change as the viewers' knowledge of the film-making craft is ameliorated. In other words, who finds more pleasure in experiencing a fine film – a seasoned authority or an ordinary film-goer?

When distilled to its most basic level, pleasure is the positive response to a consumption episode; that is, how good it feels to interact with an object. The pursuit of pleasure is indisputably a significant component of the motivation to seek a cultural experience. Over the last two decades, consumer behavior research has evolved from a discipline that took a purely rational/cognitive frame of reference (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) to a discipline that

has begun to embrace the affective aspect of human nature. As a consequence, interest in the study of consumption experiences – and their motivations and outcomes – has enjoyed a surge in popularity. Although this is a complex area of research, that very complexity exposes a field that is rich in possibilities for exploration and experimentation.

In the consumer literature, pleasure has been variously represented as valence, hedonic tone, utility, or approach response (Dubé and Le Bel, 2003). The cognitive approach has considered pleasure on only two dimensions: its existence or absence (ie. positive vs. negative affect). An experiential approach, however, suggests that a more complex representation of pleasure must be considered (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Recent research has shown that laypeople conceptualize pleasure as more than a simple summary judgment (positive or negative), instead being readily able to distinguish between four differentiated pleasures that are the consequence of specific emotional and experiential antecedents (Dubé and Le Bel, 2003). These four pleasures, considered from the least to most affectively complex, are sensory, social, emotional, and intellectual pleasure.

Dubé, Le Bel, Mukherjee and Vakratsas (2002) found that sensory (physical) pleasure is primarily associated with food, beverages, sports equipment, massage and fragrance. Sensory pleasure is described by experiences such as 'pleases all senses' and 'sexy.' While each pleasure is a complex phenomenon, the emotional makeup of physical pleasure is illustrated by positive, high arousal emotions.

Social pleasure is commonly associated with friends and products and services such as ground transport, travel agency, car rental, hotels/resorts, and games. The unique composition of social pleasure includes the experiential descriptor 'forge bonds' and the emotion 'relaxed;' that is, social pleasure is characterized by low arousal, positive emotions (Dubé, Le Bel, et al 2002).

Emotional pleasure is more affectively complex than either physical or social pleasure, nonetheless it shares several characteristics with social pleasure: experiential descriptors 'lose sense of self,' 'independence,' 'pleases all senses,' and 'sexy'. Products such as music, greeting cards, flowers, jewellery/accessories, clothing, home furnishings, and movies typify emotional pleasure (Dubé, Le Bel et al. 2002).

Intellectual pleasure is the most complex of the four pleasures, and the most clearly differentiated from physical pleasure. The experiential makeup of intellectual pleasure comprises 'lose sense of self,' 'independence,' 'good human nature,' when compared to physical pleasure (reference). The emotional descriptors 'irritated' (negative emotions) and 'accomplished' typify intellectual pleasure (Dubé, Le Bel et al. 2002).

Pine II and Gilmore (1998), pillars of the experience design movement and pioneers of the experience-theatre metaphor, have posed the important question, "To what extent can you understand the core reason that people pay for an experience?" The current consumer focus on the pursuit of experiences - rather than traditional goods or services (Holbrook, 2000) - stands the arts in very good stead. However, to capitalize on this potential for growth, it is imperative that arts marketers develop a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations that drive consumers to purchase (and repurchase). The current research puts the first tentative furrow into very fertile ground: the link between pleasure and expertise in the arts experience.

## Research Objectives

This research focuses specifically on the pleasurable experience of watching a film, and the consequences of experienced pleasure on subsequent evaluations of the art form. In particular, we explore the effects of expertise on pleasure and the appreciation of an artistic experience.

Art consumption, much like the enjoyment of wine, is often recognised as an acquired taste (Throsby, 1994). The consumption experience is expected to become more enjoyable as knowledge is acquired by the spectator. However, a higher level of expertise also means that the individual acquires a superior ability to accomplish a task related to the consumption of a product (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Thus individuals with greater expertise are also expected to be better equipped to discern the differences among works of art of poor versus exemplary quality.

Alba and Hutchinson (1987) suggest that novices are more likely than experts to rely on non-analytical inferences to make a given decision. Furthermore, they propose that experts will use non analytic processing more judiciously than novices. Thus, we expect that expertise will not only affect the pleasure experienced during the consumption experience (ie. art attendance) but it will also modify the process that is used to make subsequent judgments about the quality of the experience. That is, we anticipate that experts – when contrasted with novices - will accord more weight to their affective responses when the film will be more attractive and less weight to their affective responses when the film will be less attractive.

## Method

An experimental methodology was applied to verify the hypotheses. The attractiveness of the films (two levels: less attractive, more attractive) and the level of expertise (two levels: no expertise, expertise) were used in a fully within-subject design. A sequence of two short films (each two to three minutes long) was presented to students in two college-level cinema production classes in Eastern Canada. Expertise was controlled by presenting one sequence at the beginning of the semester and the other at the end (i.e. after the students had acquired a common level of expertise through the course). To avoid a learning effect due to repetition of the same stimuli, subjects were exposed to a different sequence at the end of the semester. Group 1 saw Set A at the beginning and Set B at the end, while Group 2 saw Set B at the beginning and Set A at the end to counterbalance the experimental design. The two sets of two short films (total of four films in all) were selected from the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada archives. Each set was comprised of one “poor” or less attractive and one “exemplary” or more attractive film, assessed in collaboration with an NFB expert. After viewing each short film, subjects completed a set of questions about the quality of the film, as well as the type and intensity of pleasure they experienced.

## Measures

The pleasure measures were adapted from (Sears, 2003). Four series of 7-point bipolar scales were used. Sensory pleasure is defined by: please all of your senses, give you warm simple feelings, and engage many of your senses. Social pleasure is measured by enable you to forge bonds with others, enable you to enjoy social relationships, and make you appreciate what is good in human nature. Emotional pleasure corresponds to: give you a sense of escape, keep

you deeply involved, and give you a variety of emotions. Finally, intellectual pleasure is: allow you to test your skills, make you look at things differently, provide you with a challenge. These twelve items were translated (and back-translated to ensure accuracy) for use with the French-language film students who participated in the current study.

The perceived quality or overall appreciation of the films measure was derived from the measure of consumer reactions toward promotional offers used by d'Astous, Legoux and Colbert (2004). Six 7-point bipolar scales were used: pleases me, is of quality, interests me, unfavourable/favourable, negative/positive, and bad/good.

## **Results**

### **Description of the Sample**

Thirty six students in two different film classes taught by the same teacher participated to this study. Of the 29 students who completed the two parts of the survey, 16 were females. The age of the students ranged from 17 to 25 years old with a median age of 18. The totality of the students had never seen the films prior to this experiment.

### **Definition of Variables**

All variables were created by computing the mean of items composing the scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were in general satisfactory. The perceived quality of the films yielded a mean Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 while the alphas for the pleasure measures were all over 0.70 (sensory pleasure: mean alpha = 0.83; social pleasure: mean alpha = 0.83; emotional pleasure.

A scree-plot in a principal component analysis performed on the overall pleasure scales suggested that only one factor emerges from the pleasure measures. To simplify the analyses, a unitary pleasure measure was obtained by computing the mean of all the pleasure scales. This type of statistical analysis is tentative with a sample as small as it is the case for the present study. Nevertheless, it suggests that pleasure can be represented, at least in this case, by a unitary measure. The mean Cronbach's alpha for the unitary pleasure measure was equal to 0.92. Thus, in the following analyses, the results will be reported first by unitary pleasure and then by specific measures of pleasure.

### **Statistical Models**

The statistical analyses were performed by using the PROC MIXED procedure of the SAS 9.1 statistical package. This procedure is similar to a classical repeated measure analysis of variance with the difference being that it allows different types of variance structures for the repeated measures. The estimation method used for the parameters was maximum likelihood. A chi-square comparison of different variance structures (i.e. Huyn-Feldt, compound symmetry, and unstructured) for all the models tested below suggests that an unstructured covariance matrix is more appropriate. This implies that all the films presented to the students should be allowed to have different variances. Allowing for this heterogeneity of variance comes at a cost; more degrees of freedom must be sacrificed to accommodate an unstructured covariance matrix. As a consequence, the statistical tests for the significance of the independent variables will tend to be more conservative. The four films were aggregated into two categories (ie. attractive and unattractive) for the analyses since the results for individual films were comparable to the aggregated analysis by attractiveness. The first series of models uses

pleasure measures as dependent variables with expertise and attractiveness of the films as repeated measures or factors. The second series of analyses is a repeated measure regression model that employs perceived quality as a dependent measure. In this setting, expertise, attractiveness and the level of pleasure are used as predictors. Expertise and attractiveness are categorical variables and the level of pleasure is continuous.

## Pleasure and Expertise

The first set of analyses is meant to test the hypothesis that with greater expertise individuals will report an enhanced level of pleasure for attractive films compared with when they were novices. At the same time, the level of pleasure is expected to vary less for poor quality films, even as the individuals acquire more expertise.

Table 1 presents the mixed models results for three dependent measures: unitary pleasure, emotional pleasure and sensory pleasure. Results are not reported for social and intellectual pleasure because no significant relationships were found ( $p > .10$ ). This may indicate that the variation in unitary pleasure was driven by changes in emotional and sensory pleasure. For the three remaining pleasure measures, the two main effects and the interaction terms were significant predictors of the dependant variables.

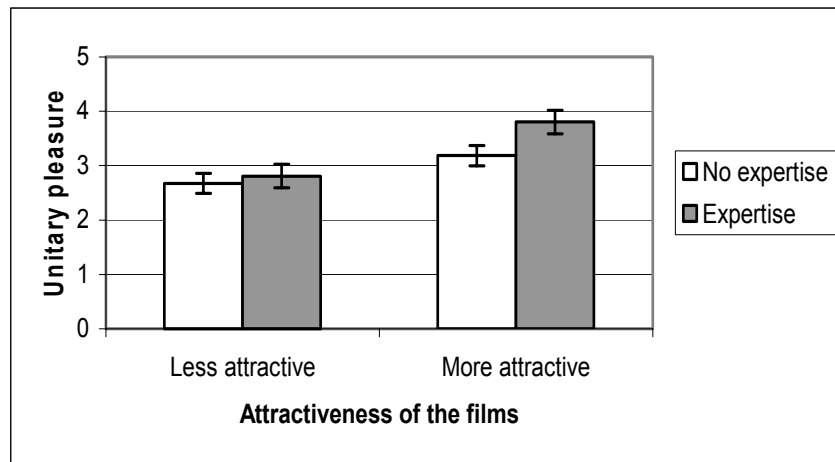
**Table 1:**  
**Pleasure Level as a Function of Expertise and Attractiveness of the Films**

	Dependant variables		
	<u>Unitary pleasure</u>	<u>Emotional pleasure</u>	<u>Sensory pleasure</u>
Source of variation	F statistic	F statistic	F statistic
Expertise (A)	7.05*	4.75*	11.40**
Attractiveness (B)	31.18**	29.07**	49.20**
A x B	4.56*	4.90*	11.22**

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Unitary pleasure.* In general, the intensity of pleasure experienced by watching a superior film was greater at the end of the semester than at the beginning ( $F=7.05$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As a result of increased expertise, subjects were able to experience greater enjoyment when viewing the films (mean=3.30 vs. 2.92). Not surprisingly, attractive movies (mean=3.49) were perceived as more pleasurable than unattractive ones (mean=2.93) ( $F=31.18$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). As illustrated in figure 1, the effect of increased expertise was greater for attractive movies than for less attractive examples ( $F=4.56$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As viewers became more expert, the more attractive movies were appreciated even more (mean=4.80 vs. 3.19) than in the case of less attractive ones (mean=2.81 vs. 2.67). These results suggest that with greater expertise, individuals tend to become simultaneously more enthusiastic and more critical. Thus, the first hypothesis is supported.

**Figure 1:**  
**Unitary Pleasure as a Function of Expertise and Attractiveness of the Films**  
 Error bars are based on standard errors



*Sensory and emotional pleasure.* As stated above, the variation in unitary pleasure is mainly tributary of changes in emotional and sensory pleasure. All of the relationships were consistent with the results obtained with a unitary pleasure measure. The main effect of expertise (as shown in table 1) was weaker in the case of emotional pleasure ( $F=4.75$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and stronger than unitary pleasure in the case of sensory pleasure ( $F=11.40$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The interaction term was also more significant for sensory pleasure ( $F=11.22$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) than for emotional pleasure ( $F=4.90$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This set of results may suggest that expertise does not affect all the types of pleasure in the same way. Education can focus on certain types of pleasure that are less accessible to novices. For example, it could have been expected that as students became experts, they would learn how to appreciate art at a more intellectual level. Surprisingly, this type of pleasure was not affected by learning. This inconsistency may be due to the training program in itself but also to the stimuli presented to the participants. The films presented were short in duration and fast-paced with images shot to dazzle the sight. This was particularly true in the case of the attractive films. This play on sight may also be a reason for the emphasis on sensory pleasure in our results.

### **Perceived Quality as a Function of Pleasure**

A set of regression analyses was employed, using a mixed model to compensate for the repeated nature of the study. For the second hypothesis to be supported, a triple interaction between the attractiveness of the films, expertise and the level of pleasure must be significant. With an expert audience, it is expected that pleasure is a stronger predictor of perceived quality of attractive films and a weaker predictor when the movie is less attractive. With novices, the relationship between pleasure and perceived quality should be less differentiated between attractive and less attractive movies. However, the results cannot be said to fully support this hypothesis. Using unitary pleasure as a covariate, in an unstructured covariance matrix, this triple interaction is not significant ( $F=2.12$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p>0.10$ ). From a statistical perspective, using this type of covariance structure is a conservative approach. Indeed, when a Huynh-Feldt covariance structure is applied, the interaction term is significant ( $F=6.07$ ,  $df=1,79$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Moreover, a compound symmetry covariance structure also yields a significant interaction term ( $F=4.07$ ,  $df=1,79$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). These two covariance structures, as mentioned earlier in the text, does not fit the data as well as an unstructured covariance matrix and, therefore, should be

interpreted with caution. Consequently, although the hypothesis cannot be rejected, the results should be considered with vigilance.

*Unitary pleasure.* To test the hypothesis further separate analyses were performed by levels of expertise. As shown in table 2, the interaction of the attractiveness of the films with unitary pleasure is non-significant with low levels of expertise ( $F=0$ ) and significant with a higher level of expertise ( $F=14.84$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 2:**  
**Perceived Quality of the Films as a Function of Unitary Pleasure**

	<u>Lower level of expertise</u>	<u>Higher level of expertise</u>
Source of variation	F statistic	F statistic
Attractiveness (A)	39.76**	53.10**
Unitary pleasure (B)	29.88**	130.47**
A x B	0.00	14.84*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

With a low level of expertise, the estimate for unitary pleasure is equal to 0.62. When the level of expertise rises, the estimate for unitary pleasure is equal to 0.74 in the case of an attractive film and 0.27 in the case of a less attractive film. This set of results supports our contention that experts are more adept in the use of non-analytical cues such as pleasure to support their judgments.

*Sensory and emotional pleasure.* The interaction terms are also significant for sensory ( $F=6.24$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and emotional pleasure ( $F=13.53$ ,  $df=1,29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) when individuals develop more expertise. This interaction term is non-significant when the students were novices ( $F<1$ ). The interaction terms are non significant for intellectual and social pleasure. These results are consistent with the idea that the movies presented were mainly conducive of emotional and sensory pleasure.

## Discussion

This study supports the notion that by acquiring expertise, individuals become more discriminating in the pleasure they feel from art consumption. When presented with attractive short films, individuals who acquired expertise tended to report higher levels of pleasure than when they were novices. However, expertise did not affect the level of pleasure for less attractive films. In the context of this research, these results can be traced more precisely to a variation in sensory pleasure and to emotional pleasure to a lesser degree. Furthermore, results from a second set of analyses suggest that when people become expert, they use their pleasure evaluation to a greater degree for more attractive films and to a lesser degree for less attractive films. This is consistent with the claim that experts are more proficient in using their non analytical evaluations to make quality assessments.

Taken together, our results suggest a number of managerial implications for marketing efforts in the arts. Organizations may be better served by focusing on the types of pleasure that will reap greater rewards in the overall assessment of pleasure intensity. In the setting of promotion short film festivals, for example, sensory and emotional pleasure should be emphasized. An organisation may segment the advertising and public development according to the level of

expertise of the potential audience. However, our results suggest that the pleasures emphasised should not vary, but rather the depth of the information given about these pleasures. As it was mentioned earlier, for other artistic forms, the structure of the pleasures may change as the level of expertise increases. In this case, an arts organisation may find it advantageous to change the type of pleasure that is addressed in communicating with the different segments of the audience.

## Conclusion

It should be kept in mind that this study has methodological flaws and is meant as an exploration of a broad and fertile topic of research. First, the small sample size ruled out any complex analysis of the data. Future research may explore individual characteristics, such as susceptibility to reference group influence (Bearden and Etzel, 1982), that may moderate the relationship between pleasure and perceived quality. Second, the experimental design was not fully balanced in the sense that the less attractive film was always presented before the more attractive film. This configuration of the experimental conditions, imposed by the availability of only two cinema classes at the time of the data collection, may well have created an anchoring effect. By acquiring expertise, participants may become more apt at comparing films presented sequentially. The evaluation of the attractive films in the expert condition may have been adapted and thus inflated by comparison to the less attractive films. In a fully balanced design, the less attractive film may have been appreciated less when presented to experts after an attractive film than before. Third, a future study on pleasure and expertise could measure the propensity of individuals to recommend the films to their entourage. Experts and novices may have different patterns of recommendations that are essential to a word-of-mouth effort for arts managers. Fourth, the present study was limited to short films and should be extended to other types of art. Other forms of art may entail a greater pressure from the norms of “good taste” than cinema. Finally, the dependant variables were attitude measures and were not measures of direct behaviours. A research opportunity would be to compare the capacity of experts versus novices to predict the enjoyment in an art experience based on the prior viewing of previews, the reading of a review article, or the viewing of advertising.

Expertise may entail some pitfalls in the evaluation of the quality of works of art. As Alba and Hutchison (1987) propose, expertise may lead individuals to overly strong beliefs about one’s true level of knowledge. Even though expert art patrons may have a higher capacity to discern and compare art, their search process for really new experiences may be truncated by this high level of confidence. Additionally, in some cases, the experienced pleasure may in fact diminish in predicting the evaluation of quality of an object of art as expertise increases. As a person learns more about an art form, he/she becomes more aware of the social norms involved in evaluating objects. These norms may function independently from experienced pleasure. One may think about the “snob appeal” in the consumption of art. Reversely, an expert art patron may recognise the poor quality of a given work of art but nevertheless enjoy heartily this “guilty pleasure.” The interplay between pleasure and perceived quality may thus a topic for future enquiries in the context of cult b-movies and retro-kitsch singers.

Finally, this study explored expertise at a moderate level. The students who took part in the research had only a semester to learn about film making and analysis. It is unlikely that they became filmographic authorities. Additional research needs to be done to extend the present results and conclusions to experienced connoisseurs and critics in the art world.



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