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# How the Academy Awards Influence Audience Perception of a Film

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The Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

How the Academy Awards Influence Audience Perception of a Film

By

Zoilo Pimentel

*A Thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

April 27, 2016

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## HOW THE ACADEMY AWARDS INFLUENCE AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF A FILM

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School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Masters of Science in Communication & Media Technologies

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Abstract

The Academy Awards are the most prestigious and influential award TV show in the film world; it is also the most watched among the big TV award shows. People's motivations for watching a film have been the subject of multiple research studies; however, few have focused their attention on how award shows might influence the public's decision to see a film. This study addresses this gap in the communication literature by implementing an experiment that addresses whether the Academy Awards nomination signal in movie advertisements influences audience perception of a film's quality and subsequently modifies their likelihood of watching a film. The study tested audiences with varying levels of interest in a film, while analyzing how they engaged with an Academy Award nomination signal in a movie advertisement as a cue to motivate, persuade or inform their interaction with an entertainment product.

*Keywords:* Academy Awards, Award shows, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Likelihood of seeing a film, Source Credibility.

### How the Academy Awards Influence Audience Perception of a Film

In the entertainment world, few award shows can bestow upon an entertainment product the distinction of being recognized as the best of the year. The movies that receive this honor go down in history as films of quality and prestige. The Academy Awards has become the *crème de la crème* in the current entertainment sphere. The name itself has come to represent a whole world of unmatched excellence; this is why it is best to start there, the Oscars.

Robert Osborne said it best when he described The Oscars and its cultural relevance:

It has become the epitome of an award, the worldwide symbol for the best and one that's been around forever. Everybody loves movies, and what's the one prize you can get for the movies? The Oscar—that's why nobody would dare give a prize for movies in the year after the Oscar. It's the final say. (Quoted in Verini, 2008, p. 78)

After World War I, in 1918, the United States was undergoing a cultural and technological upheaval. This was made evident by the end of the 1920s, specifically in the area of film. In January 1927 the first idea for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Science was planted by MGM studio chief Louis B. Mayer. Thirty-six representatives from all creative branches of the film industry gathered at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles for what is now a historical dinner. During this May dinner, the industry's heavyweights heard a proposal to found the International Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. After much deliberation, articles of incorporation were presented and officers were elected with Douglas Fairbanks as president (Academy History, 1927-1929).

The first Academy committee was the Awards of Merit; this seven-person committee suggested to the official board that awards be presented in 12 categories. MGM's art director,

Cedric Gibbons, designed the Academy statuette in 1928, and it has not been altered since. (Osborne, 2013). On May 16, 1929 the first Academy Awards ceremony was held at the Roosevelt Hotel's Blossom Room. Recipients of the award were announced three months earlier, and the following year the Academy gave the results first to newspapers to be published at 11:00 p.m. in an attempt to keep the results a secret. This approach continued until 1940 when the sealed-envelope system, which is still used today, was created. By 1930, enthusiasm for the awards grew, and the Los Angeles radio station was motivated to produce a live broadcast (Academy History, 1927-1929).

The nickname "Oscar" came about sometime after the first decade of the awards. The person who coined the name has never been identified, but the nickname caught on fast—especially with the press and the fans. As stated by the official Oscars website, the award show went through many homes during the years and also many changes in structure. In 1953 the first televised Oscar ceremony allowed millions throughout the United States and Canada to watch, and by 1966 the telecast was shown in color for the first time. The Oscars reached an all new high when, in 1969, the show was broadcast internationally for the first time and reached movie fans in 200 countries.

Undoubtedly watching the Oscar ceremony has become a sacred ritual in American culture (Levy, 2008). Many speculate for months about possible candidates and winners before watching the telecast. As Robert Osborne (2013) attests, the presentation of the Academy Awards is an indelible part of the public's consciousness. Prestige and profit impact still make the Oscars the most important TV award in show business. The broadcast continues to draw a bigger audience than any other awards show, and the Academy has become totally dependent on that broadcast's success (Walker, 2003). Shawn Robins (2014) explains that Oscar attention can be a

major boost to a film's success because it can make those pictures even more relevant to the general populace, thus increasing the desirability to watch the movie. This study seeks to explore how the Academy Awards influence audience perception of a film, if they do so at all.

Informing and framing this study is a detailed analysis of research on a variety of different concepts, including source credibility, awards as a signal of quality, and their influence of awards on contemporary society. The elaboration likelihood model is introduced as an explanatory tool to address interest and persuasion cues. An experiment was conducted to address three specific variables, one related to perceived credibility of the Academy Awards, perceived credibility of a film and the likelihood of seeing a film. Ultimately, this study seeks to fill a gap in communication research when it comes to the study of awards-show culture and its influence on the general public.

### **Rationale**

Movies are widely available on a variety of different platforms, there is nothing like going to the movies and sitting comfortably in a dark theater waiting for the flickering lights to start. This is a difficult experience to beat. Today our film landscape is filled with a large array of movies, and choosing a particular film is difficult. How do contemporary audiences do so? One way is to search for signals of quality to guide their choice. Movies are experience products (Gemser, Leenders & Wijnberg, 2008), which means audiences have to watch them to know whether they like them. The experiential aspect makes it difficult to determine what goes into a viewer's decision-making process when choosing to watch a film. According to Deuchert, Adjamah, and Pauly (2005), the decision to watch a movie depends greatly on factors including quality signals and word of mouth.

The most important quality signals for consumers are awards. According to Anand and Watson (2004), awards are an omnipresent phenomenon in the modern economy: there are few industries left in which no awards of excellence are given. In the cultural industries, awards have gained importance because they signal quality to consumers and guide them in their product selection (Gemser et al. 2008). In the movie industry, the Academy Awards are still the most important and prestigious awards. This is why many studies have been conducted on their importance as quality signals and box-office boosters (e.g. Deuchert et al. 2005; Gemser et al. 2008). Film studios still invest a large sum of money on promoting their films for the Academy Awards, and the award show itself still manages to obtain a big rating—in 2014, the ceremony obtained 43.7 million viewers, which according to Michael O'Connell (2014) made it the most watched Oscar ceremony in over ten years. This is a testament to the ceremony's relevance in contemporary society.

## **Literature Review**

### **Source Credibility**

According to Ohanian (1990), "Source credibility" is a communicator's positive characteristics that affect receivers' acceptance of a message. The model for source credibility is a landmark study by Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1953) that examined the factors that lead to the perceived credibility of communicators. Two important variables—trustworthiness and expertness—underscore the concept of source credibility. Their study defined both terms: trustworthiness as "the degree of confidence in the communicators' intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid," and expertise as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (Hovland, et al., p. 21).

The listener's degree of confidence in, and level of acceptance of, the speaker and the message constitutes the trust paradigm in communication (Ohanian, 1990). In 1967, Griffin concluded that what Aristotle called *ethos* and what Hovland et al. (1953) called "source credibility" are practically the same concept; they refer to a listener's trust in a speaker. Several studies support the effect of trustworthiness on attitude changes. For example, two different studies—Miller and Baseheart (1969) and McGinnies and Ward (1980)—found that a source considered both expert and trustworthy produced the most opinion change. In fact, regardless of their expertise, a trustworthy communicator is considered persuasive. This is why trustworthiness of the communicator is an important factor in persuasion and attitude-change research.

The second dimension of source credibility is expertise. Past research investigating source expertise in communication has asserted that a source's perceived level of expertise has a positive impact on attitude change (Horai, Naccari, & Fatoullah, 1974; Maddux & Rogers, 1980; Mills & Harvey, 1972; Ross, 1973). Source credibility literature provides evidence that credible sources are more persuasive than sources with low credibility. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that highly credible sources produce more behavioral compliance than less credible sources (Ross, 1973; Woodside & Davenport, 1974). Nevertheless, it is important to note that highly credible sources not always induce more persuasion than the less-credible ones, effectiveness of persuasion also depends whether the audience is predisposed to the message. Then, as a result, that less credible source would gain an advantage over the more credible one (Sternthal, Dholakia & Leavitt, 1978).

The concepts of source credibility and its components of trustworthiness and expertise relate to this study's addressed topic, which is award shows, since many industries do in some

way or another make use of award systems as a signifier and measure of quality. In the U.S. entertainment industry in 2000, 4,025 awards in 564 ceremonies were handed out (Dore & Gray, 2000b). Gemser et al. (2008) found that awards selected by experts are the most effective signifier of quality for independent films, while the film-going audience perceives the source credibility of consumer-, expert-, and peer-selected awards to be similar in the case of mainstream movies.

### **Awards as a signal of quality**

Signals of quality are very important when it comes to film because they can be taken into consideration in consumers' decision-making processes, especially since films are an experience product. Consequently, the decision to watch a movie depends greatly on factors such as quality signals and word of mouth (Deuchert et al. 2005).

The most important post-release quality signals are awards, and the most important one in the movie industry is the Academy Awards. Some awards come first in the mind of the consumers. This top-of-mind awareness according to Gemser et al. (2008), is referred to as awards salience. In marketing, this term is used to refer to "the level of activation" a brand has in the memory of the consumer (Alba & Chattopadhyay, 1986). Therefore, brands that exhibit high salience have a higher probability of being purchased (Sutherland & Galloway 1981). Intense media attention, as well as voting by more than 5,800 industry professionals who are themselves members of the Academy, furthermore give the Oscars more credibility than do awards decided upon by small jury experts (Deuchert et al. 2005).

The way that consumers determine the quality of a film tends to be hedonistic in nature rather than utilitarian: it depends on the level of enjoyment and pleasure they feel while watching a film (Neelameghan & Jain, 1999). Nevertheless, knowing in advance which film is going to

provoke these feelings of pleasure without actually watching it is difficult (Sawhney & Eliashberg, 1996). This is why viewers tend to look for signals of quality, like award shows that can help them determine the film's quality before consumption (Basuroy, Desai, & Talukdar, 2006).

It is not easy to know the quality of a movie because determinant factors such as acting, directing, and writing can only be appreciated after experiencing the movie. Therefore, the quality factors that influence the pre-decision of whether the movie is "good" and therefore worth seeing are worth consideration. This is why the Academy Awards can be a proxy for quality. According to Deuchert et al. (2005), the "Oscar effect" on revenues indicate that, while the awards have a positive effect, the award nominations generate the most box office. People see the Oscar nominations as incentive to go to the movies to pick for themselves the winners.

An award's perceived prestige is an important predictor of an audience's source credibility. Consumers give different degrees of credibility to different types of awards (Leenders & Wijnberg, 2008). This is why, in this study, source credibility is important—because it focuses on how different communication characteristics can influence the perception of a message (Blach-Orten & Burkal, 2014). There are two models associated with source credibility: trustworthiness and expertise. In their study, Hovland et al. (1953) defined these two important factors. First, expertise is the extent to which a communicator is perceived capable of making valid assertions; second, trustworthiness is the degree to which the audience perceives the communicator's intent to convey valid assertions. This exemplifies how a source's claims are valued and perceived by the audience. It is important to note that attitude change is positively affected by expertise and trustworthiness according to empirical evidence (For a review see McGuire, 1985; McGuinnies, 1973; Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977).

### **Academy Awards Influence**

The Academy Awards has become a time-honored American tradition, with the ceremony sometimes being as good as the movies themselves (Gehring, 2011). This makes the Oscar ceremony one of the most viewed and well known of the live-broadcast award shows (Haastrup, 2008).

Past research has attested that Academy Awards has a financial impact on the box office during three different stages: before, during and after the award ceremony. Aside from the prestige associated with the coveted golden statuette, there also is a financial boon to going home a winner (Galloway, 2005). This is reinforced by Nicholson (2009) when she wrote that, of the last 30 best picture winners, 27 made more than \$50 million, and 19 made more than \$100 million; these numbers show that success wags the Oscar's tail. These results might indicate that audiences seek these movies out because of their perceived quality. These statistics bring into question whether the benediction of the Academy pushes people to see films they might not have bothered checking out otherwise.

Nicholson (2009) suggests breaking down the total box office for an Oscar contender into three time periods—before and after the Oscar nominations announcement, and then after the award show—to see whether audiences react differently to a nominated film, a potential winner, and a definite winner/loser. This might also shine light on how the Academy Awards influence people's perception of a film. Box-office numbers can solidify whether the film got a boost solely from being nominated.

According to Stephen Galloway (2005), it is nearly impossible to quantify what an Oscar nomination is worth, let alone an actual Oscar. Recent history indicates that an Academy Award is more valuable than ever both to the films themselves and to the individuals whose careers gain

an added sheen. "Historically, the nominations have the biggest impact," Focus Features president James Schamus says, "far more than the actual awards themselves, especially recently because of the intensity of the campaigning and the amount of media you get once a film is nominated. *Million Dollar Baby* most significantly was able to ride those nominations, rather than the awards, into higher box office" (Galloway, 2005, p. 22).

According to Walker (2005) "the Oscars qualify as a venerable institution by pop-culture standards". Robins (2014) explains Oscar attention can be a major boost to a film's success because it can make those pictures even more relevant to the general populace. For Walker (2003), prestige and an increase in box office still make the Oscars the most important award in show business.

After the 2003 Oscars, ABC network, which has been broadcasting the awards since 1976, asked a group of 20 viewers some questions regarding the awards. According to Bruce Davis, the academy's executive director, the researchers discovered that most of them had not seen any of the nominated films. ABC later shared the results with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Belloni, 2010).

Seven years later another study was conducted before the production of the 83rd Academy Awards started. According to Belloni (2010), *The Hollywood Reporter* enlisted global research company Penn Schoen Berland to conduct an online poll of 700 award-show viewers on a wide range of Oscar-related topics. The results revealed a significant boost in interest in the nominated movies and also a notable increment on the awareness of the Academy Awards in relations to the box office. This put into evidence how the box office might indicate the level of awareness of the viewers.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

In order to frame the present study, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was used, not tested, as an explanatory tool to address interest and persuasion cues. ELM is a theoretical model for attitude change concocted by Petty and Cacioppo (1981). With this model they aimed to analyze, organize, categorize and understand the effectiveness of persuasive communication. During their research they outlined two distinct routes to persuasion. The first one is the central route to persuasion, which results from people's thoughtful and careful considerations of the information presented to them. In contrast, the peripheral route to persuasion relies on the appearance of a simple cue in the persuasion process to originate change without further consideration of the information's true merit (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

The various applications of the ELM model, which are based on these two routes of persuasion, were widely researched by Petty and Cacioppo and encompass a series of fields such as mass media advertising and selling (Cacioppo & Petty, 1985; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1984b; Petty, Cacioppo, & Shumann, 1984) and psychotherapy and counseling (Petty, Cacioppo & Stoltenberg, 1985; Petty Cacioppo & Heesacker, 1984).

ELM seeks to organize the psychological research on persuasion, which can exhibit high and low signs. According to Petty & Cacioppo (1984a) the "central route" represents the process when ELM is high, and the "peripheral route" identifies the process when it is low. Individuals in high-elaboration likelihood states tend to engage in thoughtful processing of information and are usually more likely to be persuaded by argument quality. On the contrary, people that exhibit low elaboration likelihood base their attitude change on peripheral cues (Petty & Wegener 1999).

The effects on attitude changes are closely moderated by ELM, especially when it comes to argument quality and peripheral cues (Sher & Lee, 2009). An individual's motivations and

ability to elaborate are determined by elaboration likelihood (Sher & Lee, 2009). Sher and Lee reported that motivation refers to an individual's personal pertinence to the persuasive message, while ability is present in the individual's cognitive capacity or prior knowledge of the attitude object. It is important to know the individual's level of motivation to process information in order to determine which route will be taken (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1986a, 1986b, 1990).

ELM could prove valuable in predicting whether the persuasiveness of an Academy Awards nomination signal on a movie advertisement depends on the relevance of the movie they support or whether the Academy's signal works as a positive cue when the consumers cognitively elaborate on the advertisements. In most empirical tests of the ELM, peripheral cues were shown to be more effective when elaboration likelihood was low rather than high (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Shumann, 1983).

A study by Trampe, Staple, Siero and Mulder (2010) on the effects of attractiveness and ELM on advertising effectiveness, explored how a peripheral cue such as a model's attractiveness in an advertisement could also serve as an argument. As stated by Petty and Wegener (1999), this focus on attractiveness depends on the overall elaboration likelihood, or the level of motivation and ability of consumers to process issue-relevant information presented in an ad. When a consumer is presenting low-elaboration likelihood, a model's attractiveness can induce a positive attitude reaction thus functioning as a cue to elevate the product. However, when elaboration likelihood is high, individuals are persuaded by arguments. Trampe et al. (2010) observed that a peripheral cue is more likely to constitute an argument when it is pertinent to the product relevance and merit, as opposed to when it is not.

This research seeks to determine the extent to which the Academy Awards nomination signal used as a peripheral cue could influence people who exhibit either high or low interest on

a film, judging by the reactions and end results. If Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is working, there should be no difference between the groups. The Academy Award nomination signal should be an incentive for people with low interest. This follows ELM standards, because the signal would make the two closer to being the same. Thus, people with low interest would be more likely to see the film.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature and knowledge of this topic by analyzing people's perceptions regarding the Academy Awards nomination signal as a credible source in movie advertisements and how this aspect may moderate their interest in a film and influence their likelihood of seeing it.

**RQ1:** What is the difference in perceived credibility of a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal versus without a signal?

**RQ1a:** What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and perceived credibility of the film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal?

Since this study seeks to determine whether the Academy Awards influences people's perception of a film, RQ1 seeks to establish the difference in perceived credibility of a film poster with the Academy Awards nomination signal and one without. RQ1a investigates the relationship between the level of interest and the perceived credibility of a film with an Academy Awards nomination signal. Answering these questions could determine if the audience perceives the Academy Awards nomination signal to be a credible source when viewing a film poster that showcases this particular sign and how this sign moderates their interest level.

**RQ2:** What is the difference in likelihood of seeing a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal versus without a signal?

**RQ2a:** What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and likelihood of seeing the film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal?

RQ2 seeks to establish the differences in likelihood of seeing a film with and without the Academy Awards nomination signal. Meanwhile, RQ2a looks at how the interest level of a film and the likelihood of seeing a film with the Academy Awards nomination signal in the poster might relate to each other. Both questions can answer how the Academy Awards nominations signal could likely incentivize an audience to watch a certain film.

**RQ3:** What is the difference in the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards between the two groups?

**RQ3a:** What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards when viewing a poster with the Academy Awards nomination signal?

The final research question focuses on the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards. RQ3 investigates a difference in the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards between two groups, one that has been exposed to the Academy Awards nomination signal and one that has not. On the other hand, RQ3a seeks to see if a relationship between the level of interest of a film and the Academy Awards perceived credibility exists.

### **Method**

To investigate how audiences' perception of a film might be influenced by the Academy Awards nomination signals in movie advertisements, an experiment was conducted. Two groups of fifty people were tested; both were shown a movie advertisement made especially for the study. Group A's advertisement was presented with a stimuli in the form of an Academy Award

(Oscar) nomination signal, while Group B was also shown a movie advertisement but without the stimuli.

Gathering data was accomplished via two surveys registered on *Survey Gizmo*; each survey contained two scales and the link was distributed on social media and *Reddit*, an online platform for discussion among community members. The first scale, a Likert scale, measured self-reported behavioral information regarding the fictional movie advertisement while the second scale, a semantic differential scale, measured each respondent's perception towards the Academy Awards (the Oscars). This scale was based on two proven source credibility scales, Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1970) and McCroskey (1996), both of which have been successfully used in similar studies to determine credibility.

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of one hundred subjects was tested and for the purpose of the experiment divided in two groups of fifty. Group A featured a stimuli and Group B did not.

### **Stimuli**

As mentioned earlier two fictional movie advertisements were created for the purpose of this study; one had the Academy Awards nominations signal in the top part of the ad and the other did not, and the signal functioned as a stimuli. The two advertisements are described as follows:

**A. Movie advertisement with the stimulus.** A fictional movie advertisement was presented with the Academy Awards nomination signal. In the top part of the ad the Academy Awards information was displayed in text, explaining the amount of nominations and highlighting the most important one, best picture. To reinforce the number of nominations, images of six Oscar

statues accompanied the text. Both text and figures had a golden yellow color against a black frame to highlight importance.

**B. Movie advertisement without the stimulus.** An identical movie advertisement was presented without any sign of the Academy Awards nomination signal.

## Variables

The three main research questions for this study are comparative research questions, the dependent variable in RQ1 is “Perceived Credibility,” while in RQ2 it is “Likelihood of Seeing the Film,” and in RQ3 it is “Perceived Credibility of the Academy Awards.” These comparative research questions have two groups each, which are also independent variables. The two groups they focus on are: group 1 “Academy Awards signal” versus group 2 “Academy Awards no signal” (treatment vs. no treatment).

On the other hand, RQ1a, RQ2a, and RQ3a are relationship-based research questions. The independent variable in all three is “level of interest”, while the dependent variable remains the same one as their original counterpart. The focus is going to be on one specific group “poster with the Academy Award nomination signal”. The independent variable “level of interest” had two levels: high and low interest. First, scores for each variable were created, secondly an Independent Sample *t*-test was applied, and finally a Pearson Correlation test was executed.

## Survey and Measures

Both fictional ads were presented separately in the form of two online surveys. The link was distributed on social media and *Reddit*. After each ad there was a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); this scale included behavioral statements to help determine the subject’s interest in the film, their perceived credibility, and

their likelihood of seeing the movie based on the film ad. The scales for both ads have nine statements in common, with the exception of the last two, statement number ten and eleven.

Immediately after there was a source credibility scale with ten statements in a semantic differential scale. This scale determined the subject's perceptions about the Academy Awards (the Oscars) as a credible source. The statements included in the instrument were:

1. I would be interested in watching this film
2. The title of this movie seems interesting
3. This movie seems like it could earn critical acclaim
4. I feel this movie might be remembered
5. This movie looks important
6. This movie looks good
7. I would watch this movie
8. I can see myself talking about this movie with other people
9. This movie looks high-quality
10. I would watch this movie because of the Academy Awards (Oscar) nominations it has received. \* (*Poster with the stimuli*)
10. I wouldn't watch this movie because it is not nominated for any awards \* (*Poster without the stimuli*)
11. The Academy Awards (Oscar) seal on this poster means the movie is good.\* (*Poster with the stimuli*)
11. If the poster indicated the movie had earned Academy Award (Oscar) nominations, I would be interested in watching the movie.\* (*Poster without the stimuli*)

All of these statements went through a reliability analysis, where a Cronbach's Alpha test was implemented to measure the reliability of each statement according to the variables they measured.

**Statements to measure interest level:** 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8

-Cronbach's Alpha was reliable with a .846

**Statements to measure perceived credibility:** 3, 4, 5, and 9

-Cronbach's Alpha was reliable with a .890

**Statement to measure likelihood of seeing the film:** 1, 7, 10 (Poster with the stimuli), and 11 (poster with the stimuli).

-Cronbach's Alpha was reliable with a .668

**Statements to measure source credibility:** Following the 5-point Likert type scale used to measure the likelihood of seeing a movie based on the ads, a measure to determine perceived credibility regarding the Academy Awards was applied. Ten attributes were tested to measure how the participants evaluated the credibility of the Academy Awards. A combination of statements found in source credibility scales by Berlo et al. (1970) and McCroskey (1966) were used to help determine the subject's perceptions regarding the Academy Awards. The design follows a 7 point Likert-type scale, and the statements tested were:

Safety Factor

- Just 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unjust
- Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest

Qualification

- Experienced 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Inexperienced
- Qualified 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unqualified
- Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed

### Authoritativeness

- Reliable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unreliable
- Valuable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Worthless
- Expert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Inexpert
- Knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unknowledgeable
- Influential 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Influential

-Cronbach's Alpha was reliable with a .829

### **Ethical checks and balances**

An informed consent was featured at the beginning of the study to help the participants obtain valuable information regarding their participation. The consent explained that participation was voluntary and that there were no known risks, benefits or compensations to participants. The consent included the steps that were going to be taken to assure participant's anonymity. At the end of the two scales there was a debriefing of the fictional advertisements used, along with contact information in case participants have any questions regarding the research or their participation in the study.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Information.**

In this section participants were asked questions regarding their age, ethnicity and education. This information helped identify subjects and their education levels. The 100 survey respondents' ages were: 18-24 (15%), 25-34 (58%), 35-44 (21%), 45-54 (3%), 55-64 (1%), 65-74 (1%), 75 or older (1%). Their ethnicity was 5% Asian, 28% White, 57% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian / Alaskan Native, and 9% preferred not to answer. The sample group was highly educated, with 44% having an advanced degree (Master's, Ph.D., M.D.) and another 44% had

earned a Bachelor's degree. The rest went as follows: Associate degree 2%, Some college, no degree 7%, Trade/technical school 2%, and 1% Less than high school.

**RQ1: What is the difference in perceived credibility of a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal versus without a signal?**

An independent-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the difference in perceived credibility of a film when viewing a poster with the Academy Awards signal versus without a signal. There is a statistically significant difference between Signal ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) and No Signal ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) conditions;  $t(98) = 2.51$ ,  $p = .01$ . The results indicate that when this sample observed a poster with an Academy Award signal their perceived credibility of the film was higher.

**RQ1a: What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and perceived credibility of the film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination?**

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between level of interest in a film and perceived credibility of a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal. There was a positive correlation between the two variables [ $r = 0.67$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. This indicated the higher the interest the higher the perceived credibility.

**RQ2: What is the difference in likelihood of seeing a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal versus without a signal?**

An independent-sample *t*-test compared the difference in likelihood of seeing a film when viewing a poster with the Academy Awards signal versus without a signal. There was no statistically significant difference in the scores for Signal ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) and No Signal ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) conditions;  $t(84.29) = -1.740$ ,  $p = .09$ . These results suggest that the likelihood

of seeing a film is not noticeably affected when viewing a poster with the Academy Awards signal. Specifically, the results suggest that when the sample observed a poster with or without an Academy Award signal their likelihood of seeing a film is not noticeably affected by the signal.

**RQ2a: What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and likelihood of seeing the film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal?**

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between level of interest in a film and likelihood of seeing a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal. There was a positive correlation between the two variables [ $r = .81$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between level of interest in a film and likelihood of seeing a film when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal such that the higher the interest, the higher the likelihood of seeing the film.

**RQ3: What is the difference in the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards between the two groups?**

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards between the two groups; one group was exposed to an Academy Awards signal and the other was not. There wasn't a significant difference in the scores for Signal ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) and No Signal ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) conditions;  $t(98) = 1.10$ ,  $p = .27$ . The results indicate that when the sample observed a poster with or without an Academy Award nomination signal their perceived credibility of the Academy Awards did not vary.

**RQ3a: What is the relationship between level of interest of a film and the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards when viewing a poster with the Academy Awards nomination signal?**

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between level of interest of a film and the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards when viewing a poster with an Academy Awards nomination signal. There was a significant negative correlation between the two variables [ $r = -.250$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p = .012$ ]. Sig. 2 (2-tailed) was less than .05. There is a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. The negative correlation indicates that when level of interest (first variable) of a film increases, the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards (second variable) decreases. Therefore there is a decreasing relationship.

### **Discussion**

Through an experiment, this study sought to determine how the Academy Awards influence audience perception of a film. This method observed how a sample interacts with an Academy Award nomination signal in a movie advertisement, paying specific attention to their level of interest, perception of quality and, consequently, their likelihood of seeing a film. This research objective is to offer insight on how the Academy Awards might function as a signal of quality that could persuade, motivate or inform the interaction with an entertainment communication medium.

The instrument shone light on several specific topics, starting with perceived credibility. The results indicate perceived credibility of a film is higher when an audience is exposed to an Academy Awards nomination signal in a movie poster. This relates to Basuroy, et al's (2006) findings on how viewers consider signals of quality, like awards, to determine a film's quality.

Furthermore, these results also reinforce the notion expressed by James Schamus on how an Academy Award nomination has a notable impact on a film (Galloway, 2005, p. 22).

Level of interest played an important role in these research findings. Results indicated that when the sample was exposed to the Academy Awards nomination signal, the higher the interest, the higher the perceived credibility of a film. This supports Penn Schoen Berland's 2010 Oscar poll, in which the global research company highlighted a notable boost in interest in Academy Award nominated movies (Cited in Belloni, 2010).

However, the Academy Awards nomination signal was not a determining factor when it came to audiences' likelihood of seeing a movie. The Academy's signal did not yield any identifiable differences when it came to audiences' possible interest in seeing a movie. This contradicts Deuchert et al's. (2005) "Oscar effect" findings, which states that an Oscar nomination functions as an incentive to go to the movies.

On the other hand, likelihood of seeing a film did have a strong correlation when paired with level of interest. RQ2a showed there was a significant relationship between these two conditions when exposed to a poster with an Academy Award nomination signal. This result asserts the notion that interest level might have the wherewithal to positively influence a condition, as was the case with RQ1a and now with RQ2a, where both experienced high correlations when paired with the interest level condition. Higher interest in a film resulted in both a higher perceived credibility and likelihood of seeing the film.

The decreasing relationship, found on RQ3a, between the level of interest on a film and the perceived credibility of the Academy Awards; meant that the Academy's credibility did not influence the sample's interest when observing a movie poster with an Academy Award

nomination signal. This decreasing relationship puts into question Robins (2014) finding on how Oscar attention can make a film more relevant to the general populace.

Interest plays an important role when it comes to the selection of an entertainment product. However, both high and low interest can be affected by various factors. Although this study did not test for high or low signs of interest on a film before implementing the instrument, it did utilize the Academy Award nomination signal as a cue in the persuasion process, which is defined by ELM as the peripheral route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Although in past studies peripheral cues were shown to be more effective in samples with low interest rather than high (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Shumann, 1983), the findings in this research show that the Academy Awards nomination signal used as a peripheral cue was effective on both counts because it functions as an incentive for people with low interest, ultimately triggering a positive reaction. Audiences exposed to an Academy Awards nomination signal expressed a high level of interest and a high level of perceived credibility on the entertainment product they were exposed to. The relationship between level of interest in a film and perceived credibility of the film when exposed to an Academy's signal resulted in a positive correlation between these two conditions, such that both can experience increases or decreases harmoniously.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The convenience sample for this study was limited to 100 respondents, and all came from the same platforms. This convenience sample limited the study because the sample does not represent the population as a whole. This can result in a low external validity of the study and it might be affected by biased volunteers. It would be ideal for future research to explore other sampling methods. In an area like entertainment, for example, which reaches millions of people, multistage sampling or stratified sampling could achieve interesting results, especially when

employing an experiment, since randomization is extremely important both in treatment condition and treatment assignment.

Other than the sampling method, limitations for this study can derive from the instrument used to take the measurements. Two scales were used, a Likert-type scale and a semantic differential scale. Both of these scales come with their advantages and limitations. I suggest that any future interest in conducting a similar research should include a pilot study. In the case of the semantic differential scale, this could better ascertain which measures are better for this particular study, thus ensuring meaningful adjectives that are tailor made for the research at hand.

One of the biggest disadvantages of Likert-type scales is that they are uni-dimensional, because they only give a certain amount of choices; this could mean the space between each possibility is equidistant, which does not hold true in real life. This ultimately means that true attitudes were not measured. Likert scales also have the disadvantage of previous questions influencing responses to further questions. As mentioned before a pilot test can help determine the adequate scale that should be used in a particular study. Using complementary questions, such as open-ended and close-ended questions, could help gain access to a more precise answers.

The movie advertisement created for this study were limited to printed ads, primarily because the inclusion of other media would lengthen data gathering and also still images were easier to implement in survey platforms. Since the majority of the participants were between the ages of 25-34 (58%) followed by 18-24 (15%), which constitutes a young demographic, I suggest any expansions or interest in pursuing this type of research should create more diverse materials; such as videos, radio spots, internet ads, apps, and podcasts, among others.

Thematically, for future research it would be interesting to look at the entire process a film goes through during awards season, focusing specifically on the Academy Awards pre-

nomination, post-nominations and after the Academy Awards ceremony. Information about this process would further our understanding of the influence of award shows, most notably the Academy Awards. Furthermore, categorizing specialized samples in areas like award voters, film critics, entertainment professionals, and Academy members could provide interesting results.

As explained earlier, this study only used Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as an explanatory tool. Future research could focus on both routes to persuasion while observing quality signals in movie advertisements, thus engaging in a more in-depth exploration of ELM's effectiveness as an instrument to measure persuasive cues.

This present study only scratched the surface on how the Academy Awards can influence audience perceptions and subsequently modify their movie decisions. This initial data provides some insight on how audiences with varying levels of interest can be influenced by a specific entertainment signal, the strengths of which derives from the credibility of its source.

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