

THE EFFECT OF MUSIC ON THE PERCEPTION OF A SHORT FILM'S NARRATIVE STRUCTURE: HOW THE EARS TELL THE EYES WHAT TO SEE

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Background

The effects of music on the viewing of films/videos have been demonstrated in numerous empirical studies. In most cases, the film excerpts used were silent pictures with often rather stationary camera angles (faces, landscapes), so that the effects could as well have been demonstrated with photographs (as in the oft-mentioned Kuleschow effect).

Aims

The goal of the experiment reported here was to test if the use of different sound tracks would influence the audiences' interpretation of the narrative structure of a short film.

Method

337 students, aged 11 to 17 viewed one of two versions of a short film (about 4 minutes in length), differing only in their soundtracks. The musical backdrop was either a piece of popular music with a tense middle-part or taken from J. Brahms' "Hungarian Dances." Subjects were asked to provide short story lines for the film and judged their impressions of the protagonist on rating scales.

Results

The qualitative data revealed an influence of the two types of music on the interpretation of events, and a cluster analysis of the rating data yielded large differences between versions that could not be explained by demographic variables.

Conclusions

Future research should pay more attention to the effects of music on the narrative aspects of films and take into account the biographies of media users when trying to explain individual differences in the interaction of eyes and ears.