

Chinese Broadcast Students and Envisionment of the Physical Characteristics of Male Antagonists in Film

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ABSTRACT

Positive values, often universal in nature, foster a strong audience connection with protagonists in visual content. Conversely, antagonists, usually driven by culturally specific fears, struggle to resonate as deeply. While studies of antagonists in visual content, particularly films, tend to focus on physical portrayals and broad thematic meanings, limited research has explored the early stages of content creation and the creators' perspectives. This study bridges the gap by delving into how aspiring future content creators, specifically Chinese content creators, conceptualise and intend to portray antagonists in their envisioned visual content. The research focused on seven selected Chinese students studying for a broadcasting degree programme at a local private higher education institution in Kuala Lumpur and explored the nature of the physical characteristics envisioned for male antagonists, the underlying reasons behind these visions, and their possible sources. Utilising qualitative content analysis, the study conducted text-based interviews via Google Chat with seven selected participants over three months between July and September 2023. The findings revealed that media consumption exerts a significant influence over the participants' perceptions of the physical traits towards the portrayal of the male antagonists in visual content. Familial media consumption habits were the primary influence during their formative years. As the participants moved towards self-selected media content, it assumed a more prominent role in shaping their perceptions. Race-based or religion-based cultural factors did not appear to have a substantial influence on their portrayals. This study suggests that the nature of family media consumption culture and the later shift towards self-directed media consumption warrant further investigation.

Keywords: characterisation, film antagonist, media consumption, new content creators, qualitative content analysis

INTRODUCTION

Antagonists are important characters as they will determine the plot development of the narrative, and in recent years antagonists in films have undergone significant transformation (Wang, 2024). In film production, directors need to materialise these antagonists. While the scripts may indicate the actors's appearance, directors often have the last say on how actors will eventually appear on screen (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier, 2020). Thus, a director's approach can significantly shape the portrayal of an antagonist in a film. While directors play a crucial role in shaping character portrayals, it is important to explore the underlying motivations and perspectives of directors themselves. By investigating the underlying motivations of directors' approaches to antagonist portrayal, we can delve into unexplored avenues for antagonist development in film, foster interdisciplinary connections between film studies and other academic fields, and offer valuable insights for content creators at all stages of the filmmaking process.

In other words, it is noteworthy to understand where the directors' point of view of the characters' portrayal derived from. To exclude possible external decision-making considerations, this study gained insights into the unfiltered creative process by focusing on future directors at their 'purest,' meaning new content creators in training and operating within the least external constraints and limitations on their creative expression. As narrative is the foundation of a good film, which is usually carried by film characters, this study focuses on content creators and

their physiognomic perception of the evil film characters; the antagonist and their facial features with their personality. Although the primary focus is on facial features, it can be extended to other physical characteristics.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The idea of evil is strongly tied to the culture and societal changes of the observed society, and the idea of morality differs from society to society and from period to period (Aktaş, 2016). Cultural factors such as religion, social ecology, and regulatory social institutions could affect one's perception of evil (Graham et al., 2016). What evil can be observed via the values and fear system at a certain point in time of history through the tangible form of characters in films - the antagonists.

Antagonist characters in films are interesting as viewers are entertained by impulse actions that many viewers have but cannot act on (Zubernis, 2023). This study concentrates only on a male character with a physical body. The traditional idea is that antagonists are often based on their physical outlook, and usually carry some aspect of physical ugliness (Arenas, 2011). Croley, Reese & Wagner (2017) study that focuses on the dermatologic aspect noticed villains display a higher incidence of dermatologic than heroes, while Bagdan et.al (1982 in Safran, 2016) noticed that people with disability were often stereotyped as dangerous, especially in the horror and suspense genre. Ugliness is the fastest stereotypical way to allow the viewers to have a snap judgement on the character's role in the content (Arenas, 2011).

Earlier studies had also indicated antagonists in films were often portrayed unattractively physically. They were frequently scarred and gaunt (e.g. Lord Voldemort in Harry Potter series, The Beast in *Kung Fu Hustle*, 2004), have grotesque features (e.g. Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, 1984 and Lo Pan in *Big Trouble in Little China*, 1986), and have menace demeanour (e.g. Hans Landa in *Inglourious Basterds*, 2009 and Brother Sum in *Kung Fu Hustle*, 2004). In the context of American films, the antagonists were getting more complex (McClure, 2014), getting heavier (Sim, 2018) and had worsened facial scars (Wagner et al., 2023). Viewers tend to make negative snap judgments about characters depicted with stereotypical features of unattractiveness (Arenas, 2011). Further reinforcing this idea is research showing that physical attractiveness biases moral judgments, particularly in the domain of purity, where attractive people are perceived as more morally upstanding (Klebl et al., 2021). This suggests a moral dichotomy in how audiences perceive people, and content creators could fully utilise this to hasten their narrative.

Generally, films use things people are already afraid of or dislike to make the villains seem evil, although it can be unfair because it makes people seem bad just for being different. Thus, Disney films have begun to avoid physically unattractive cues from their antagonists (Schmidt & Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 2019). The question of where these images of physical images of antagonists derived from could be traced to several aspects; the content creators' background. It is believed that beyond entertainment value, films, particularly through the portrayal of antagonists, can offer valuable insight into a society's self-image and how it views others (Cohen, 2010). This is supported by Schmidt & Kjeldgaard-Christiansen (2019) who argue that biological and cultural factors play a role in shaping the depiction of villains in films. The socialisation of the content creators would have also allowed the acquisition of certain logic to the physical representation of an antagonist without the need to be extremely accurate (Arenas, 2011).

New content creators are freer to project their antagonists physically in their production and could try testing their ideas in shorter-length films before venturing into feature-length films (Carter, Hawkins, & Young, 2016). However, due to limited funds and a lack of necessary connections, new content creators have to come up with their unique narrative to accommodate lesser production costs, but at the same time have more control over the characters in their films. While most established content creators have clients, sponsors or audiences to please and limit the process of antagonist creation, broadcasting students as future content creators would have less restraint and have more opportunities to come up with their antagonist characters.

The study of film antagonists could have been more extensive (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2019). This could be due to protagonist characters being more relatable to the audience as the positive values that protagonists portray are more universal on top of the nature of protagonists' character development as the film progresses. In comparison, antagonist values are more constricted to the specific cultural fears relevant to the content creator (McClure, 2014). Generally, positive values are more universal, and negative values are more culturally based. The available but limited studies on antagonist characters would usually look into the antagonists' looks and assess the antagonists' thematic and symptomatic significance (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Schmidt, 2019). To complement current studies of the antagonist, this study seeks to understand film production at its source; new content creators.

This study believes that the physical design of antagonist characters without the parameters of the clients or sponsors would depict the perception of future content creators regarding what forms of antagonists could elevate the overall narrative of a film. This research focused on collecting opinions and perceptions from selected Chinese students from a local private higher education institution on their physical envisionment of male antagonists only for several reasons. Being a Chinese male and having been attached to the said institution for more than 20 years, these contexts provide a good background and context for interpretational purposes due to the existing rapport the researcher had with the selected students on top of understanding how the broadcast programme goes about over the years. Since the medium of films is visual based, it makes more sense to focus on the visual portrayal of the antagonist character. Thus, this study comprehends how Chinese students studying broadcasting programmes at a local private higher education institution described the characteristics of their envisioned male antagonists in relevance to the physical traits of the male antagonists, the reasons behind those visions and the participants' backgrounds.

METHOD

This study adopted the approach of qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA systematically describes the meaning of qualitative material by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame (Schreier, 2012). This allowed the study to better understand various elements that are already established in the study of visual content while further unearthing the themes in the aspects of the portrayal of the antagonist and the conflict created. The first stage was to gather and organise the relevant data. For this stage, the study used the facility of Google Chat (GChat) that allows direct messaging to initiate the first contact with the initial participants on 1st August 2023.

Given the institution's extensive use of GChat as a primary communication tool during Malaysia's lockdown, participants were well-versed in the platform. On top of that, GChat's ability to function with relatively low internet speeds further alleviated concerns about technological proficiency and reliable internet access for online interactions (Azrina, Chai & Anderson, 2022). The usage of GChat allowed the participants to review the questions and reflect on the questions at their own pace before crafting their responses to the researchers. As for the researcher, this platform allowed the researcher to review the responses, and do some quick coding and analysis on the participants' responses before seeking clarification for the answers given or following up with another question. Similar to email interviews but faster, GChat usage for this study was able to obtain detailed and rich experiences from the participants as they had sufficient time to contemplate and respond to their ideas to the researcher (Faizah & Fadilah, 2021).

Only one question was forwarded a day, and a reminder was sent after three or four days of no response from the participants. The GChat interview allowed the researcher to handle several participants simultaneously.

Questions asked and probed accordingly were

- How would you define an antagonist?
- What signals or symbols indicate the antagonist character?
- What are the key physical features of your envisioned antagonist?
- How do you see your personal preferences, life experience, and cultural background shape your perception of antagonists?
- What is the role of morality in judging antagonists?

Despite the benefits of GChat interviews, the risk of participants dropping out at any time was a significant concern in this study (Dahlin, 2021). By the end of the study period of two months that formally ended on 30 September 2023, only seven participants remained responsive to the GChat sent. Since this study was exploratory and intended to generate initial insights for further investigation into the subject matter in the future, the study perceived the number of participants; seven of them, as appropriate. The basic background of the more regular participants was as follows.

Table 1: Participants' Background

	Age	Gender	Year of Study	Semester	Participant Status	Number of Semester Receiving Instructions
Participant 01	20	Female	Year 1	3	Existing	3
Participant 02	25	Male	Year 2	1	Existing (Promoted)	7
Participant 03	21	Male	Year 2	1	Existing (Promoted)	7
Participant 04	21	Female	Year 2	1	Existing (Promoted)	7
Participant 05	21	Male	Year 3	1	Existing (Promoted)	10
Participant 06	25	Female	Year 3	1	Existing	7
Participant 07	23	Female	Year 3	1	Existing	7

This study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants from the Broadcasting programme with varied academic backgrounds, seeking a richer understanding of the research objectives. Selection criteria focused on two key factors: number of years of study and participant status within the programme. Year of Study served as an indicator of the duration of formal instruction received. Participant status further distinguished enrolment types: "Existing (Promoted)" denoted those who completed a six-semester diploma before promotion to the fourth semester of the bachelor's programme, while "Existing" participants entered the bachelor's programme directly from pre-university qualifications, following the standard programme structure. This heterogeneous sample aligns with the exploratory nature of the study. Generalisability is not the primary aim. Instead, the diverse participant backgrounds offer a valuable opportunity to gain an initial understanding of the Chinese students studying broadcasting programmes describing the characteristics of their envisioned male antagonists in relevance to the physical traits of the male antagonists, and the reasons behind those visions. Their opinions served as a foundation for formulating more refined research questions for future investigations.

The number of participants in this study was small but adequate for several reasons. Firstly, since the participants were Chinese students undergoing a similar programme structure in the same tertiary institution, it is appropriate to assume that the participants are culturally homogenous in terms of their ethnic background. These small numbers allowed the study to effectively capture the shared experiences and perspectives within these broadcasting students for patterns and themes at the data analysis stage. Generally, through continuous analysis whenever the participants replied to the questions, the study had observed similar patterns and themes from the responses of participants indicating data saturation had been reached. The study did not prolong the duration of the interview as the data was taken to already being saturated. The gathered data was prepared and organised into a manageable format in Excel. Transcription was fast as the received answers from the participants were originally in text form. The unit of the analysis for the responses was the sentences that provided a more comprehensive understanding of the original text's meaning and context.

The next step involved developing the categories and the coding scheme to represent the themes or concepts relevant to the research question. From the to-and-fro of the GChat conversation, the study went through the process of coding the participants' replies against the questions asked based on the set categories. Based on the GChat conversation and the adopted QCA analysis, the study analysed the complexity surrounding the Chinese students studying broadcasting programmes at a local private higher education institution and the manner they described the characteristics of their envisioned male antagonists in relevance to the physical traits of the male antagonists, and also the reasons behind those visions and the participants' backgrounds. A set of relevant conditions based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks which include envisioned physical traits, the reasons they find those traits important, and background relevance were defined. The GChat conversation focused on these conditions for the data collection. Upon the completion of the GChat conversation, the study systematically analysed the data to identify patterns of these conditions. By employing QCA, this study explored the interplay of factors shaping the participants' imagination of male antagonists, the reasons behind their vision, and how these reasons are related to their background, and is presented in the next section.

DATA ANALYSIS

This QCA study explores the multifaceted perceptions of Chinese broadcasting students regarding male antagonists in films. Their visions, influenced by ethnicity, age, genre, and social media exposure, paint the antagonist as predominantly Chinese, around 35 years old, and fitting the crime film genre. Interestingly, social media's portrayal of scams can bias participants towards associating Chinese ethnicity with villains. Facial features, especially eyes, are seen as key to conveying the antagonist's inner world, while physical stature is considered less important. Finally, the study highlights the significant influence of childhood media consumption, shaped by parents and teachers, on the participants' understanding of evil and its visual representation.

From the GChat with the seven participants, generally, the envisioned male antagonists were mainly of Chinese ethnicity around the age of 35 years in crime-related film genres. The participants that highlighted Chinese ethnicity as their main choice of envisioned male antagonists generally believed that similarity of cultural background would be more relatable to them leading to the ability to create a more authentic and believable character, especially with the current issue of cyber scam groups from China.

I chose to portray the antagonist as Chinese is due to I'm more familiar with Chinese culture and I was able to imagine a better image to make the antagonist more vivid. (Participant 05)

Then there is the recent social influence. Because I saw a lot of news about Cambodian fraud groups on social media, I would imagine that the villains are Chinese. (Participant 04)

There was disagreement, however, about resorting to the usage of stereotypes of any ethnicity in the portrayal of the antagonist. Participant 02 was aware of his biases when he commented that "if anything, it's a display of my biases", especially when working in a situation with no context in terms of plot and storyline. On the other hand, Participant 07 intended to specifically break the common stereotype by indicating the use of American characters as male antagonists to break away from Hollywood's regular use of non-Americans as antagonists.

The reason why I chose this, is because I'm the kind of person that wishes to break stereotypes and allow the audience to see a wider perspective. From what I have observed, a lot of Hollywood movies often make Americans the protagonist or a hero, and villains are often from other nationalities or "outsiders". (Participant 07)

The participants mentioned the age range of their envisioned male antagonist to be around 35 years old. The participants perceived antagonists of this age range should have been through enough life struggles and experiences that provoke the antagonist's behaviour. The male antagonists of the mentioned age would have a fleshed-out backstory that incites the antagonist's behaviour and would be mentally capable to plan and execute their plans. The participants were looking into how their envisioned male antagonists would develop over time, and how their past would shape the narrative of their production of crime or action films. Their complex and interesting backstory would be helpful in the narrative telling. With this perception, the participants felt that they were familiar with men of this group thus able to create more believable and interesting characters from this background.

The reason why I chose 40 years old is probably because it allows more space and time for character development, as the person has already lived for 40 years and may have experienced life compared to a younger person. (Participant 07)

This age gap is exactly that they have the amount of experience facing challenges personally and the physical body that better than higher age people. For crime films, I am able to focus on the protagonist and antagonist fighting both mentally and physically which makes the film interesting. (Participant 03)

Young male antagonists would not have gone through enough to provoke the desired behaviour for the envisioned film genre. However, if the focus of the film was predominantly physical action, younger male antagonists would be envisioned for their looks on top of their brute physical strength as “they are most energetic to fight with the main character” (Participant 06).

The crime film genre that was mentioned by the participants was generally fast-paced films with dangerous and suspenseful content. Visually, crime-related films tend to have more dynamic camerawork, fast-paced editing, low-key lighting settings, and usually with the usage of stylised violence. The participants highlighted that crime-related genres were their focus due to being exposed more frequently to fictional crime-related content (Participant 05) or non-fiction content from media social as stated by Participant 04;

Then there is the recent social influence. Because I saw a lot of news about Cambodian fraud groups on social media, I would imagine that the villains are Chinese.

Physical Portrayal of Envisioned Male Antagonists

The physical characteristics of male antagonists in film are of central importance to this study, which examines how the participants envision the portrayal of male antagonists in a production. Two key areas of concern are face characteristics and physical body characteristics, with a focus mainly on the former as in film production because “after all, it is the face that appears majority in the camera” (Participant 05).

I will be focusing on facial characteristics instead of physical body characteristics as portraying an antagonist with facial characteristics is a multi-ways method. In my perspective an antagonist's image is from their facial characteristic, when we look at people's faces, we are hard to find out their personalities however when we focus on a certain part of their face, it is able to give a sense or feeling, uncomfortable, insecure, weird, unspeakable. (Participant05)

In terms of face characteristics, the participants emphasised the importance of the eyes of the male antagonists compared to other features of the face; nose, mouth, teeth, chin, hair and ears. On top of just being the most attractive features, participants believed that eyes could tell the backstories of the antagonist better than other features. The eyes are an essential tool for communicating the character's inner motivations and intentions to the audience. This is because the eyes can convey a wide range of emotions, from anger and hatred to cunning and deceit. This makes them an ideal way to communicate the character's inner motivations and intentions to the audience.

Eyes are most important because two people having eye-to-eye contact can understand or read some of the characteristics of each other. For example, if we look at the eyes of Loki we can know that he is a person that doesn't simply trust people and has a lot of tricks. (Participant 03)

Normally, at every moment we look at a person, the first observation will be on the person's eyes ...eyes are a tool to express emotion towards others. It is more attractive if an actor is able to perform their acting skills through their eyes. Actually, what is important about the eye is its sight and the feeling it gives us. (Participant 05)

I think that a person's eyes can convey a lot of messages, emotions, and feelings. There is a quote "the eyes are windows to the soul", I truly believe that you can get to know a person a lot by looking at their eyes. (Participant 07)

Other face features were deemed to be weaker, but not impossible, to visually indicate the antagonist role of a male character in films.

The ears, I put it as the least important because ears are a less effective way to perform an acting skill towards an audience. And of course, we won't purposely shoot an ear scene at the audience unless the ear is related to the character's background story. (Participant 05)

I rate the chin as the least important because I don't think there is any significance in portraying an antagonist I personally don't think that the chin can really play an important role in the character development of the antagonist. I mean who says a person with a pointy chin is a bad guy or a person with a rounder chin is a good guy? (Participant 07)

Physical Body

The participants also emphasised the importance of physical characteristics in their envisioned male antagonists. They believed that the envisioned male antagonists needed to possess the physical prowess to confront the film's protagonists, as this contributed to the "mental and physical fight" that made the film engaging (Participant 03). To a certain degree, they felt that the physical body characteristics of an antagonist should complement their facial features to fully convey their capabilities.

Because I think the physical body characteristic can bring out the aura of the character. Let's say the character is very fit, the audience can feel that he worked hard to build his body and is able to fight the main character. If the antagonist is very skinny but with a very fierce face people will feel that he is weak. The antagonist should be strong enough to fight the main character. (Participant 06)

Source of Influence

The participants were aware of the origins of their envisioned physical characteristics of male antagonists. They recognised that their exposure to television and film during their youth played a significant role in shaping their perceptions of the male antagonist's physical appearance.

I fall back on the typical presentations of heroes and villains, good and bad with whites presented to me during my childhood and that's basically Disney Nickelodeon and some Hong Kong action movies so typically it's the dark colours, evil and all that jazz. Unless somehow the movie states otherwise. (Participant 02)

Because I watch Western films more than Hong Kong films, I only watched Hong Kong films when I was a kid. However, when I think of an antagonist, the first thing that comes to my mind is Chinese guys like in Hong Kong films. (Participant 06)

The media consumption of the participants during their youth was heavily influenced by the authority figures they respected. In other words, when the participants were young, their media choices were dictated by the higher hierarchy within their families, with little room for personal preference. Their media consumption and the lessons they learned from it were shaped by this dynamic.

Personally, I fall back on the typical presentations of heroes and villains, good and bad with whites presented to me during my childhood and that's basically Disney Nickelodeon and some Hong Kong action movies so typically it's the dark colours, evil and all that jazz. Unless somehow the movie states otherwise.
(Participant 02)

The participants reported that their envisioned male antagonists could also be influenced by their own choices of media consumption, which typically focused on more real-life events, such as media reports or personal experiences.

Then there is the recent social influence. Because I saw a lot of news about Cambodian fraud groups on social media, I would imagine that the villains are Chinese. (Participant 04)

I think the media content, script design of movies, and observations in life are quite influential to my mindset on thinking of an antagonist. I mean I am still young, and all of my thinking still remains in the phase that is based on the telling and learning from other people, an image of an antagonist that I imagine is also a character that compiles from all I have learned from movie script, the way people treat others, a personal story of people.
(Participant 05)

I'm not really sure. I guess reading the news and watching short documentaries about criminals have influenced me in this part.
(Participant 07)

This study explored the influence of cultural background on Chinese broadcast students' perceptions of evil and their expectations for the physical portrayal of male antagonists in film. The findings suggested that the participants' cultural upbringing, particularly their respect for authority figures like parents and teachers, shaped their media consumption habits and sensitivities toward Chinese culture. This, in turn, influenced their perceptions of how evil should be represented in film. For instance, Participant 02 attributed his perception of evil and envisioned portrayal of male antagonists to his parents' preference for mainstream media and his subsequent exposure to recommendations from the entertainment section of newspapers. Participant 02 believed this was due to his parents' rural background, socioeconomic status, and strong cultural identity. Additionally, Participant 02 also saw the strongest influence coming from his teachers, who introduced him to online information and the tools necessary to access it, further broadening his media consumption landscape. These findings highlighted the complex interplay between cultural background, media consumption, and the formation of perceptions of evil among Chinese broadcast students.

The information that I was exposed to when I was young was a combination of my parents and my teachers from school With my parent being from a rural background, the socioeconomic status and culture reflect this. They have mainstream tastes and generally get recommendations from the entertainment section of newspapers. Teachers, on the other hand, led me to discover tools that would better access online information, and I basically started rolling from there. Most influential to me were tuition teachers where I attended the classes in the evening after school.
(Participant 02)

The reason I consider these actions to be bad is because of the moral education I received since childhood, the teachings of my parents, and the cultural influences I've been exposed to. They have all taught me that things that can harm humans and disrupt society are categorised as "bad". These actions can lead to the

breakdown of social harmony and cause harm to people's physical and mental well-being. (Participant 04)

It could be very much influenced by our Chinese culture as we grow up watching a lot of action movies in particular from Hong Kong and China. The influence probably starts from there. (Participant 07)

DISCUSSION

This study delves into the perceptions of Chinese students enrolled in the broadcasting programme at a local private higher education institution regarding the physical characteristics of male antagonists in films, exploring the underlying reasons behind their visions and the possible source of the visions. The study comes to understand a few insights from the interviews with the participants.

The characterisation of film characters in film generally encompasses physiology, psychology and sociology (Reich, 2017). This study looked into the aspect of physiology; mainly age, appearance, and defects of the male antagonists envisioned by the participants. Within the realm of visual production, the physiological aspects hold particular significance. The discussions with the seven participants revealed a consistent focus on facial characteristics when portraying their envisioned male antagonists. This emphasis is unsurprising given that the face constitutes the central element of film visual representation. In films, the expressive potential of the face is amplified with different cinematography techniques to draw the attention of the audience to subtle nuances of facial expressions which allows the audience to perceive emotions, thoughts, and even the soul of a character (Steimatsky, 2017). The camera is often perceived as an extension of the audience's gaze, making the face the primary point of focus for the audience.

The eyes, especially, serve as a window into the character's inner world. Thus, the eyes play a pivotal role in shaping the envisioned antagonists. This prominence stems from the widespread belief that the eyes possess the ability to convey emotions, intentions, and narratives. Various human communication studies like Chrones et al. (2023) and McCrackin et al. (2023) had shown that facial feature was the most powerful and versatile tool for conveying emotions, behaviours, mental states, and inner selves, with the eyes serving as the utmost powerful and versatile tool for conveying emotions, behaviours, mental states, and inner selves. This sense of emotion was strengthened when it takes place in the context of interethnic (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). The eyes' ability to express a wide range of emotions with subtlety and nuance makes them indispensable for effective social interaction and understanding human behaviour. Physiologically, the intricate muscles around the eyes do allow a person to express various expressions.

This study also comes to understand that the portrayal of male antagonists in film is profoundly influenced by media consumption patterns. This pattern could be categorised into two distinct phases; the formative phase and the self-directed media phase. The formative phase was characterised by externally determined media exposure. During the formative phase, participants' perceptions of male antagonists were primarily shaped by media depictions that accentuated physical traits associated with negativity. This underscores the perceived necessity of stereotypical villainous appearances. Consistent with earlier studies like Arenas (2011), Croley et al. (2017) and Bagdan et.al (1982 in Safran, 2016) that emphasised the connection between antagonist portrayals and physical unattractiveness, participants during the formative phase favoured antagonists embodying this stereotype.

Conversely, during the self-directed media consumption phase where participants were allowed to consume their preferred media content, participants' perceptions of male antagonists evolved towards a more nuanced and "humane" representation. The male antagonists were often derived from real-world events devoid of visual cues that explicitly signal the antagonist's character. Notably, the settings (the time and place in which a story will be told) that the participants projected shifted towards more realistic environments. Through socialisation during the self-directed media consumption phase, participants internalised certain logics of human behaviour patterns.

This suggests that media consumption could indeed cultivate specific media archetypes, particularly in the context of male antagonists. As evidenced by participant interviews, media consumption continues to influence new content creators in terms of male antagonist representation. However, the idea of media consumption and behavioural patterns linkage was not without awareness. The interviewed participants were very much aware of the media influence, but at the same time understood the necessity of these stereotypical portrayals in the content creation.

The participants in this study exhibited a marked degree of self-awareness concerning the genesis of their conceptualisations of male antagonists. They were able to identify the sources from which they drew their inspiration. This heightened awareness stands in contrast to the general populace, wherein many individuals remain oblivious to their own biases and stereotypes. This distinction could be ascribed to the nature of the participants' work, which compels them to translate their perceptions into visual representations. Consequently, they are inherently inclined to seek reference points. However, rather than shunning biases and stereotypes, the participants embraced the stereotypes as integral components of their visual narratives. This acceptance stems from the comprehension that their creations are fictional and serve the purposes of visual delight, provocation, and subtle antagonism.

What is interesting about this study was the finding that race or religion factors were not raised as part of the element that influenced the participants' envisioned male antagonist characters in films. Religion was less significant in comparison to social ecology and regulatory social institutions when it came to being the direct influential factor on participants' perception of evil to be used as the base of their projection of the antagonist characters. Participants attributed their perception of evil to moral education and surrounding social institutions rather than their religious upbringing. This led to the envisioned of antagonist characters who would reflect contemporary concerns and at the same time possess certain stereotypical physical attributes of an antagonist.

LIMITATION OF STUDY

This study that had a specific sample limits the generalisability of the findings. The unique cultural experiences and perspectives of Chinese students studying broadcasting programmes at a local private higher education institution, as well as the specific context of the institution, may influence the results. Additionally, the study had not taken into account other matters of diversity such as socioeconomic status, academic performance, participant learning styles or other demographic factors, which could affect the discussion of the research topic.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed the nature of the physical characteristics of male antagonists as envisioned by Chinese students studying broadcasting programmes at a local private higher education institution, and found that a collection of reference points underpins participants' conceptualisations of male antagonists. Formal education plays a pivotal role in establishing these moral frameworks. Regarding visual representation, media consumption, regardless of age or era, exerts a significant influence on the participant's perceptions of the ways to project the male antagonists. During their formative years, familial media consumption habits remained the primary basis for their envisionment of male antagonists. For those who deviate from familial media consumption patterns, self-selected media content assumes the primary role in shaping their perceptions. Interestingly, race-based or religion-based cultural factors do not appear to exert a substantial influence on the participants' portrayals of male antagonists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research could delve deeper into the dynamics of family media consumption culture, particularly the transition from shared viewing experiences to more individualised media consumption. Additionally, examining the influence of socioeconomic factors on these patterns could provide valuable insights.

IMPLICATION OF STUDY

The implications of this study are twofold. For academia, it opens new avenues for interdisciplinary research between media studies and psychology. By examining the relationship between media content creators' minds and behaviours, researchers can better understand the psychological factors influencing content production. The research additionally highlighted the importance of screenwriters to the development of the narrative produced. While directors have creative freedom in casting decisions, they must remain faithful to the screenwriter's vision for the characters. This includes ensuring that the actors' physical appearance aligns with the script's descriptions. Thus, screenwriters should provide more detailed descriptions of antagonists' physical appearances in their scripts. By doing so, the industry can avoid instances where antagonists are portrayed in a way that reflects the director's personal preferences or biases rather than the screenwriter's original intent. This attention to detail will ultimately enhance the overall quality and authenticity of the films produced.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The author is solely responsible for all research aspects.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I declare no conflict of interest. There are no financial interests to disclose.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

The author confirms the study's accuracy and completeness, ensuring no omissions or discrepancies.

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