

**UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEIVED
CONTROL MEASURES OF ETHIOPIAN FILMS: THE CASE
OF IN-SCHOOL YOUTH IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

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Abstract

The study examines the effects of Ethiopian films in Addis Ababa. It looks into how young people respond to Ethiopian films in the media and how they perceive and interpret them in their daily lives. An approximate longitudinal survey design was employed to collect data from students in Assay Primary and Secondary School from November 20, 2016 up to June 10, 2017. The survey data were collected from 80 randomly selected students from those who had experience in watching Ethiopian films. In order to supplement the quantitative data, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) were used to collect qualitative ones. Accordingly, two focus group discussions were carried out with students, while parents and teachers participated in in-depth interviews. Hence, a triangular methodology was undertaken to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. The study reveals that young Ethiopian film viewers are influenced and affected in many ways, both positively and negatively. These include rushing to early and unsafe sexual practices, alcohol and substance abuse, distorting the value and image of women, imitating Western sexual acts and practices, abandoning family values, bad behaviour, among others. The study also demonstrates that the films, apart from sheer entertainment, have positive roles such as informing viewers how to improve their social interaction and behaviours to know and learn other cultures. The study concludes that, in spite of their undesirable consequences on various aspects of life, Ethiopian films have manifest entertainment and educative values for the adolescents.

Introduction and Problem Statement

These days, the media is a big part of people's everyday lives. It has influenced both how people see themselves and the world. These views can be negative and positive ones depending on the type of television show and movie that people watch. Movies and television shows do have influence on people as so many types of behaviour can be adopted (Katharine E. Heintz-Knowles, 2000). Media have a tremendous potential and responsibility to promote the positive values and practices of the community including its culture, value, and norms, while simultaneously suppressing the negative social habits. Media should play important roles in cultural transformation and should serve as an agent of change for the betterment of the society by raising public awareness (Krekovic, 2003).

The mass media exert great persuasive effects on the thoughts and behaviour of individuals, either by encouraging people into new lifestyle patterns, fashion, etc. or changing their personal views and actions towards societal norms and values. Among all media, Evra (1990: 239) notes that films play a major role in affecting the thinking pattern of the people. Social scientists and policy makers have long been concerned about the effects of the visual media (films and TV) on the attitudes and behaviours of young people. In particular, there are apprehensions about such exposure leading young people to risk-taking behaviours, including unsafe sex, alcohol use and violence (Vasan, 2010).

Ethiopia's diversity in culture, religion, history, language, and lifestyle makes it a lucrative hotspot to filmmaking (Mebrachten, 2011; Berhanu, 2013). All this could be taken as an input for story making (script writing). Moreover, the presence of large number of viewers, since more than half (70%) of the total population of the country are young, is an added advantage. With this, the possibility of producing numerous films with reasonably high quality while trying to satisfy the demands of such a large audience is questionable. Furthermore, the increasing tendency to imitate western films without considering the cultural differences has increased the threats of such films on the societal orientation of the youth. As a result, some Ethiopian youth are striving to talk, walk, behave, eat, and dress exactly like characters in films, to the detriment and abandonment of our indigenous cultures (Mebrachten, 2011).

Films play a major role in affecting peoples thinking, behaviour, lifestyle, etc. particularly the youth. Nowadays, young people have ready access to these films through cinema centres, or by renting from video

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shops, and from public media, namely Ethiopian Television. Strasburger et al., (2010) argue that films focus more on adverse behaviours like smoking, alcohol use, and early sexual initiation, aggressive and violent habits that bring several negative consequences at the personal, familial, and societal levels. These behaviours and practices affect school performance and promote high-risk behaviours. Even though the influence of films has been known, the nature of the influence, that is whether it is negative or positive, has not been well investigated and this becomes the question on the front burner of recent studies (Mebrahten, 2011) in that area. Studies were carried out on the effect of Television on children and young people (Worth et al., 2008; Strasburger et al., 2010; Ruchi and Manju, 2013). However, a sociological analysis about the effects of Ethiopian films on students was barely explored and thus the current study aims at examining the experience of students, parents and teachers with Ethiopian films; analysing the perception of respondents about the effects; and identifying perceived measures in addressing the negative effects.

There is no single universal definition for the word "youth". Some define it as persons whose age bracket ranges between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, while others fix age limits to express it. On the other hand, there are also others who define the term 'youth' from biological and psychological developmental perspectives as well as by considering both physical development and degree of maturity (Amanuel, 2007). The most commonly used international delineation of youth is between the ages of 16-24 (Jennings 1997, cited in Assefa, 2005). However, the Ethiopian National Youth Policy defines 'youth' as "... part of the society between 15-29 years of age" (National Youth Policy, 2005). Youth between the ages of 15-29, therefore, were involved in this study.

Youths are most likely to become emotionally interested in the situations that concern their changing views of the world and growing status in the society. These issues include identity formation, college life, moving away from home, driving and cutting out parental control. The level of emotional involvement of youths with film content can affect aspects of their psychosocial development. This is not to say that films are completely negative (Bello, 2011). Olaleye (2007) notes that films are media of choice for many adolescents. It shows them some interaction and experiences which they may have encountered or will

encounter later in their development. He also adds that while wrong films give the youth wrong ideas, watching good films does benefit youth's cognitive development. Bello (2011) attributes this to the effect of modernisation caused by industrialisation, education, exposure, and enculturation, through the imitation of foreign films and cultures that are alien to the youth's cultures and values.

One area of media effects debate that has attracted much interest is the effects of television violence and sexually explicit material portrayed in films on children and youths. Anderson et al., (2003) in their study of media effects say television programme serves as a blackboard from which the children and the youth copy violent behaviour. Research has shown that human beings begin imitating other humans at a very early age, and the observation of the behaviours of others is the likely source of many of children's social skills (Bandura, 1977). Access to visual media has increased dramatically in the past decade, with cassette recorders, cable, and satellite television greatly expanding the access of children and young adults to movies and programmes intended for adults (Bandura, 1977).

Media effect studies have examined the negative vicarious impact, such as the learning of aggressive behaviour through viewing violence in films. When carried to its worst extreme, the modelling of such behaviour has been linked to violence and brutal "copycat" syndrome (Anderson et al., 2003). According to Gerbner & Gross (1976), heavy exposure to television is believed to be one of the causes of aggressive behaviour, crime, and violence in the society. The potential of the mass media for social mobilisation, education, and attitude change has been recognised and has been exploited in different parts of the world, with varying degrees of success. But the effect that the mass media will produce at a given situation still remains a subject of debate even today (Wilbur Schramm, 2011).

The processes and products of media influence act directly on targets (individuals and macro units of society and institutions) as well as indirectly on targets through other units. These effects can be intentional or non-intentional on the part of both the media practitioners as well as the target receivers. They can be manifested or hidden from natural observation. They are constant and ongoing, and they are shaped, not just by the media influence, but within a constellation of other factors that act in concert with the media influence (Anderson et al., 2003).

Research Design and Methods

The survey population was Assay Primary and Secondary School students who are in Grades 11 & 12. The school is located at Bole sub-city of Addis

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Ababa. It has a total number of 1,735 students (according to the 2015/16 enrolment figure). The study employed survey, focus group discussions, and individual in-depth interviews as methods of data collections and each of these methods is presented as follows.

Using an approximate longitudinal survey design, structured questionnaire was prepared and distributed to 80 randomly selected students from those who had experience in watching Ethiopian films. The selection of the students for survey purpose was done using the systematic random sampling technique by the formula $k=N/n$, where k is the sampling interval, $N=331$ (total number of students in grades 11 and 12) and $n=80$ (sample size). Accordingly the sampling interval is 4. The first unit was selected by the lottery method. However, the selection process ensured gender balance in the study. Taking the time, access and financial constraints into account, the researcher was obliged to limit the sample size; for quantitative based approach, 80 students from sections A, B, C and D from grades 11 and 12 were included in the current study. In order to produce data that can enhance understanding and reveal a wide range of flexible opinions, two focus group discussions (with a total of 9 males and 10 females) were conducted with representatives of grades 11 and 12 students in the study area. An in-depth individual interview was conducted to obtain much more detailed background information about the effect of Ethiopian films on youth from teachers and parents. The language of the interview was adapted to the ability or educational level of the person interviewed and misinterpretations concerning questions were avoided. The interviewers also collected supplementary information from the study participants' experience and environment. For individual in-depth interview, eight informants were selected, involving four parents and four teachers.

As this study is mixed in its approach, the data analysis and interpretation process were made in line with the process of data gathering. Information collected from individual in-depth interviewees and the focus group discussions, were subjected to content analysis method. A more interpretive process where the response, as well as what may have been inferred or implied, were included in the final analysis. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used in analysing quantitative data. Accordingly, all collected quantitative data were entered to SPSS sheet in order to analyse the data and present it in diagrams and tables.

Results and Discussion

Demographic and Socio-Economic characteristics of Survey

Respondents

From the total sample size of 80 survey respondents, 78 (97.5%) filled and returned the questionnaire to the researchers. Among the respondents 46(59.0%) are female whereas 32(41.0%) are male, with a female to male ratio of 1.5:1. Since the study focuses on adolescents, the majority 67(84.6%) of the participants are 17 and 18 years of age with only one student being 19 years of age and 10 (12.8%) are 16years of age.

With respect to living arrangements, almost all 77 (96.25%) of the adolescents live with their parents and similar proportion 76 (95%) of them have televisions in their homes. Among participants, 62 (78.4%) adolescents spend their leisure time by watching films twice a week 32(41%), twice a month 22 (28.2%), once or twice a day. The rest hang out with friends, do other activities or watch films occasionally.

The majority of the participants watch comedy (27 - 34.6%), romance or romantic comedy (25 - 32.1%). Less than a quarter of them reported action films and lesser proportions reported documentary, thriller, or all of the genres. The adolescents were also asked about their Ethiopian film watching habit with other family members or friends. Accordingly, the majority (50 - 64.1%) watch films with their friends and a fifth of the respondents with their families. The rest prefer to watch alone (10 - 12.8%), or with other people.

Before exploring the direct effect of Ethiopian films on the behaviour and social interaction of adolescents, the experiences of the participants with Ethiopian films and parental advice/control of films that should be watched by adolescents was explored. Initially, participating adolescents were asked to characterise their interactions with their family members and issues they discuss with their friends. Then their experience with Ethiopian films and possible changes brought to their life was investigated.

Experience of students with Ethiopian films and parental control

The respondents reported as they watched between 3-600 films with the majority of 19 (39.6%) watching between 26-50 films; 13 (16.7%) watched less than 25 films; whereas the other 13 (16.7) saw more than 76 films. Only three (3.8%) students responded that they watched between 51 and 57 films. With regard to the sources of the films, the majority of the respondents watch films from televisions (19 - 24.2%), followed by film renting shops (13 - 16.7%) or both sources (13 - 16.7%). A similar proportion of adolescents watch Ethiopian films from more than two

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sources that include the aforementioned sources, Internet, flash discs or cinema. Internet and flash discs alone are used by 8 (10.3%) and 4 (5.1%) of the respondents, respectively. Only 3 (3.8%) participants mentioned cinema as their source of Ethiopian films.

The monthly expense of the respondents to watch Ethiopian films was also assessed to approximate the economic burden it creates on families. On the average, twenty-seven birr and fifty cents (27.50) is spent per person according to this survey. The maximum expense per-month per person is one hundred and ninety (190) Ethiopian birr, which is equivalent to 5.12 US Dollars as of September 2020 exchange rates.

The survey result showed that male students reported that they have more experience of watching Ethiopian films twice or thrice a week. On the other hand, all female students reported sporadic habit of watching Ethiopian films, unless streamed on popular televisions like the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service (EBS). Female students were disinterested in Ethiopian films because of their inability at depicting Ethiopian culture, as well as the absence of suspense and attractive narrative stories in the films. One of the students who took part in the focus group discussions justified her lack of interest in Ethiopian films by saying *"when the movie begins, I know the end since the movie itself opens the door to guess what's coming next."*

Almost all of the focus group discussants stated they watched Ethiopian films just to spend their leisure time when they do not have alternatives. When asked the resemblances between western films and Ethiopian ones, almost all study participants stated that many of the Ethiopian films resembled the western ones. One student sympathised with the film makers, and associates the copycat syndrome to the desperation to survive in the business by pandering to the taste of the audience. But she argued that stories that focused on social issues such as a dialysis patient's struggle to pay for a daily medical bill, called as "Lamba", managed to stir many viewers. The focus group discussants agreed with the student's ideas and expressed that it is such desperation that compels the film makers to copy western films and setting within the Ethiopian community without any regard to the norms, social values and awareness, thus disrupting not only the audience's personality and behaviour but also diminishing the cultural values and norms that have been preserved through generations. Continuous misrepresentation in this

regard will ultimately present the youth in foreign personality in an Ethiopian setting, according to the participants.

Furthermore, the most common genre that interests the students is comedy. But most students are disappointed at not getting the chance to explore the vast Ethiopian history and culture of over three thousand years, in Ethiopian films. The sources of the films are diverse, but EBS television was mentioned by most students. In addition Nahu, Mabruk, and Kana television channels on satellite, local film shops, and cinema houses, internet platforms (Youtube, Dire tube, Sodere) were mentioned as additional sources of films. One student also mentioned sharing films through flash disks.

Another important area of discussion with the focus group participants was the experience of watching Ethiopian films with parents and siblings and the existence of parental control and advice to the students. According to the participants, most of the sources of Ethiopian films are satellite televisions, and they watch the films with their parents. As a result parental control over the content of the films is common in most families. But such control comes after substance abuse or sexual content is revealed in the scenes and this results in the total abandonment of the whole film by the family which, in turn, forces the youth to seek the film from other sources and watch it with peers, or alone. As a result the parental control does not seem to help the youth from the acquisition of bad habits and it was advised that the rationale for censoring such films should be justified. Preventing adolescents from watching adult rated films at homes does not help them; rather thorough discussion while watching them was agreed to benefit the youth. Though some participants believe that adolescent stage is a good period for a person to wisely make decisions by themselves, others raised the importance of guidance and advice from parental experiences.

Yet another important point that was discussed by the focus group participants was related to age rating of films and parents' understanding of such restrictions. As the participants stated, most parents either do not know the meaning or ignored age ratings in films until they reach scenes that contain sexual content or undesired behaviours which drives the adolescents to seek the films elsewhere. The students mentioned that one of the Ethiopian film streaming satellite television outfits, "Mabruk", have age ratings in their films but parents are unable to understand and act on it before watching the films with all family members including children who are not expected to see it by the rating. One student shared his experience in which his ten-year-old brother was not prevented from watching a film rated PG13. (Parents are seriously advised to note that some material may be inappropriate for

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children under 13). On the other hand, students mentioned a strict control of western films in households, according to the ratings. But the perceptions among parents regarding Ethiopian films streamed in televisions are that the stations should censor the contents of the films before broadcasting them. As a result, the control and restrictions on Ethiopian films in families is minimal. In addition, the designation of parental guidance in Ethiopian films is not often correct. In western films, each segment of the film is examined to rate the film for sexual content, violence and strong language. But in Ethiopia only cultural considerations with subjective decisions guide the ratings.

According to the survey result, the majority of respondents (49 - 62.8%) discuss with their families at least once a day, 18 (23.08%) once in a week 17 (21.79%) once in a month, and so on. Whereas, 14 (17.9%) discuss sometime, 10 (12.8%) never discuss about education, friends, social values, and so forth, with their parents.

Experience of parents and teachers with Ethiopian film

All participants of the in-depth interview, except one, have immense experience with Ethiopian films. The major film genres reported by the participants to be their liking are romance and comedy. Some mentioned actions and documentary as their favourite films. Respondents mentioned that the choices depend on genres available in the Ethiopian film industry. All reported seeing the films with their families.

One of the in-depth interview participants believes in the lack of identity in Ethiopian films as most of them copied from western films, with distortion. With respect to their perceptions on the positive and negative effects of the films, one teacher stated that Ethiopian films erode the very existing natural social contract and try to teach crime, cynicism and absurdity. According to him, there are no positives from the films but bad and negative influences over adolescents, pushing them to live a fictional life in reality, like seeing drug abuse as normal. Another teacher associated the negative influences with the film's lack of awareness of Ethiopian societies and their life. The positive thing is its improvement overtime in quality and quantity. But its role in shaping adolescents' behaviour remains poor. The teachers acknowledged that students even talk about the films in schools and classrooms. Others mentioned the films' power to relax adolescents' minds, to help them learn language, communication skills, and modern technologies. Few

also mentioned that it could encourage adolescents to achieve their goals through hard work. Teachers and parents believe that, among all media, films play a major role in affecting the thinking patterns of adolescents, who are going through active emotional developmental stage, and easily imitate the characters in real life.

It is believed that with regard to the mass media, parents are expected to control the type and number of mass media their children, especially adolescents, should be exposed to and guide them accordingly. However, due to their age group, adolescents are difficult to control by their parents but could be easily influenced by their friends. So, the respondents were asked to share their experience with parental control and its acceptance. In view of that, out of the 78 survey respondents, 60 (77.9%) of them sometimes watch Ethiopian films with their parents, whereas, 8 (10.4%) of them never saw films with their parents.

Perception of Students about Effects of Ethiopian films

As the first part of our quest for possible effects of Ethiopian films on adolescents, we investigated existing perceptions within the study participants. The adolescents were asked if they believed Ethiopian films bring positive and negative changes to adolescents and to describe some of such changes, if any. Accordingly a little less than half of survey respondents (43.6%) believed that Ethiopian films can bring changes to Ethiopian adolescents. Some of the types of changes that the respondents believe are induced by watching Ethiopian films include change in the use of bad words, and exposure to early sexual activities.

The study also reveals that film viewers become cautious about external environment, changes in the use of language, including their way of talking, developing sense of mistrust, becoming disrespectful to their parents, and creating wrong opinions of other people. In an attempt to know the benefits of film watching for youths, the study depicted the following as benefits: it creates awareness about culture, educates youths about social life, improves discussion with family, makes them interactive, playful and vibrant, shows the mistakes and their consequences, gives new information, teaches self-expression, improves awareness about sex before marriage and, teaches social life and relationship.

The survey respondents were asked to indicate if they believed the changes as a result of film exposure brought positive or negative effects to adolescents. Accordingly, 58 (74.4%) students think that the consequences bring positive effects, but the remaining 20 (25.6%) do not think so. In other words, 47 (62.8%) of the respondents believe the changes convey negative consequences to adolescents.

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With regard to the negative effects, only one participant believed the films encourage early initiation into sexual activities, while another one mentioned that the films are capable of distorting the viewers' perception of reality. From the respondents that believe Ethiopian films have negative effects on the society, 20 (41%) of them said bad behaviour can be induced in the adolescent viewers by watching Ethiopian films while 16 (33%), 6 (14%), and 5 (12%) identified the negative effects as encouraging high risk, shredding family values, among others. A high proportion of the respondents (58 - 74.4%) believe that Ethiopian films have positive effects on youths, adding that films are means of entertainment, while 21(35%) believe that films are helpful in improving prosocial behaviour and social interaction, and 13 (20%) believe that Ethiopian films help in acculturating the youths.

The participants' perceptions regarding unsupervised or excessive consumption of Ethiopian films and its role in distorting adolescents' views and beliefs about family, friends and external environment, was also explored. Accordingly, half of the students (40, representing 51.9 %) do not think that uncontrolled consumptions may damage their views towards family, friends or the environment, while 32 (41.6%) students recognise such distortions with respect to confusing real life experience with dramatised existence. From the total of 32 students that recognise uncontrolled consumption, 20 (66.67%) of them have feelings of apprehension and doubt about external environment, 4 (13.33%) put them at high risk of violence, while those who believe in all of the above effects combined amount to 4 (13.33%). 10 (8%) of the total participants failed to report any views associated with the different suggested effects.

The effects of exposure to different factors are difficult to measure in observational studies as there are often a multitude of other factors that play a major role in such changes, and individuals might not notice the causes very well. In the current study, proximate characteristics that describe some effect variables were explored.

This paper has tried to employ discussion questions on issues which students can easily notice and extrapolate possible effects from such practices. Detailed changes and effects were measured using the Likert scale measurement system. With regard to habits developed after watching Ethiopian films, only 14 (17.9%) respondents of the survey question mentioned developing specific habits. Among these 14, 6

(42.8%) reported violent behaviour. Addiction to films, bad habits and drinking alcohol are reported by 3 (21.4%) respondents. While one participant indicated development of a good habit of perseverance, 4 (28.6%) did not specify any habit. Students were also asked to identify any changes they observed in their friends in fashion choices/clothing, language use, increased interest in acting, aggressive confrontations during arguments and mentioning of their favourite actor or actress during communications.

Strikingly, the students who took part in focus group discussions were able to identify specific references on changes developed after exposure to films. One of the students mentioned his friend who impersonated a well-known bad character in a drama series, while others mentioned the use of mockery and jokes they heard from a film. Certain changes were observed as direct effects of Ethiopian films on youth by fellow students in the school. For instance, the use of swear words and adoption of foreign accent are believed to be direct influences of Ethiopian films, which are steeped in foreign values.

The use of such foul expressions is meant to intimidate some students in the school. Another student described how one of her friends tried to make her eyebrows look like those of her favourite character in a film. Following film characters, clothing styles are identified as a common practice in schools among students. One student mentioned that he actually changed his personality after one of his favourite characters. He said “because I like him, I always mimic his personality in my communication and behaviour in the school.” When asked about one of the roles his favourite character, Amalayu, plays in which he is fond of dating multiple women, the student responded that the character demonstrates the existing reality and that it is a civilised man’s habit. He added that at the end of the film the character finally settles with one woman, and that is instructive. But the participant failed to see the point that, in real life, such endings do not usually exist, and many people end up hurting others and themselves, as people do not have the luxury of time to undo their previous negative actions.

Some participants also argue that dating multiple women or men is against religious and societal values of Ethiopia, which stand against the western culture that was directly copied by the film producers for a foreign audience. According to participating students, dating multiple women is considered as “being smart or civilised.” This is the direct reflection of western societies where such practices are the norm. So, adolescents in Ethiopia are literally colonised by these negative notions, and Ethiopian films are one of the propagators of such norms to Ethiopian youth.

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A number of students also proudly explained how they change their personality when they walk or talk after their favourite character. However, some students held the view that in films, it is possible to choose between the bad and good actions. For instance, if the character is lazy and does not want to work at the start of the film, but manages to improve his life after changing his habits, or by being advised by a close friend, people can still learn from such a scenario. In the film, *Lamba*, for instance, the male character tries to raise money for his sister's dialysis, and one can learn from his courage and strength to help his families. One student said that adolescents of this age are wise enough to identify the good from the bad, and are able to take decisions that will benefit them. He also added that, in many films, characters that harm others are seen paying the price for their actions, and such scenarios are educational for the youth.

Another important issue raised by the students is the representation of girls in Ethiopian films with its negative effect on their self-confidence and the attitudes of men towards girls and women. As one student put it, Ethiopian films depict girls and women as people who only care about money and do everything to get it from men who are depicted as hard workers, businessmen with a lot of money. Though they believe such things exist in real life, its exaggeration makes it seem to be applicable to all. Its influence can easily be noticed in people's attitudes when asked about Ethiopian girls. Some of the high school students even consider dating, smoking and drinking alcohol as a normal habit. Current Ethiopian films can drive the youth with poor awareness of high risk behaviours into harmful practices and false personality, just to be seen as being cool around their peers. Students want to try everything they see in the films whenever there is no family supervision. Most of the girls who participated in the discussion noted that Ethiopian films do influence their personality, including the way they dress, talk and live their day to day life.

In addition, bad habits and actions tend to be found easier to copy if seen in the films. Excessive depiction of night clubs, bars, alcohol and substance abuse, often indicates that the films are direct copies of western films, and such depictions can easily be imbibed by Ethiopian youth. The current epidemic of substance and alcohol abuse by Ethiopian adolescents is a demonstration of such trends. One female student frankly said that "we, adolescents, took everything from films,

whether the small or the big things as well as the bad and good actions and practices we saw from films.” Others argued that such situations did not come from the films but are part of our societal beliefs that had existed for a long time, and only just being propagated by the films. Regardless of how it is seen, films tend to distort the general social structure. In Ethiopia, the man chooses his wife, and lords it over her with violence, while she stays at home, caring for the children and cooking meals, and this is considered perfectly normal. The situation might be said to be improving, as a result of affirmative action and girls’ education; but the culture is harmful to women.

The films’ excessive depictions of opposite sex relationships are also influencing adolescents to focus only on such practices. One student passionately argued that there are more stories that need to be told in Ethiopia, like how to contribute to societal economic development, help one another in difficult times (e.g. the *Lamba* film), preserve our forefathers’ patriotic legacy (e.g. *Arbegnaw*), promote our rich cultural heritage, as in *Amen*.

The negative influence of Ethiopian films is not affecting only those who watch the films regularly, but their peers too. One student explained that since the number of Ethiopian films that are being done increased, students are under pressure to spend weekends in house parties and night clubs or risk being labelled as lame and uncivilised. Most of the students agreed that the Ethiopian films are creating fictional characters that do not exist in Ethiopia and students are trying to live their life like those fictional characters, even without knowing it. The female participants believed that the films affect girls more than boys as a result of the way female characters are constructed in the films with emphasis on fashion and cosmetics.

When asked to rate most Ethiopian films whether they have positive or negative effects, almost all students agreed that the negative effects are more prominent for adolescents. But they admitted all the fun they had watching comedy films and the good things they learned by watching even negative characters in Ethiopian films.

There is a stringent resistance among participating students about Ethiopian film genres. According to them most films are romantic comedies with scenes fabricated or non-existent in reality let alone in the Ethiopian community, deliberately introduced to get financial gains without regard for the message to the youth audience. One student ridiculed the films in their obsession with enticing the youth to the cinema by copying western ideals without any regard to cultural differences and audience.

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Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with relevant issues that can measure the effect of films on adolescents. The results are summarised below. A separate questionnaire, based on the Likert scale measurement system, was distributed to the same respondents and the data collected is analysed using SPSS for frequency distribution of the different responses. The respondents were asked if they have a habit of watching Ethiopian films. 50 (65%) of them do not agree with this assumption, while 65 (84.4%) of the respondents always watch their favourite film.

Participants were also asked about association of events in films with real life. Accordingly, 21 (27.3%) relate the bad incidents of their life to the film they saw and link it to their friends who tried to harm them. The remaining 55 (71.5%) do not agree to the relationship of real life incidents and the films because the characters in the films do not reflect real life. Participating students' response on the possibility of harm by others coming to them or their families, has the same trend as the friends in the films, but with higher percentage, i.e 28 (36.4%) of persons who believe that the other person is capable of doing harm on the respondent or his families, under the influence of the films.

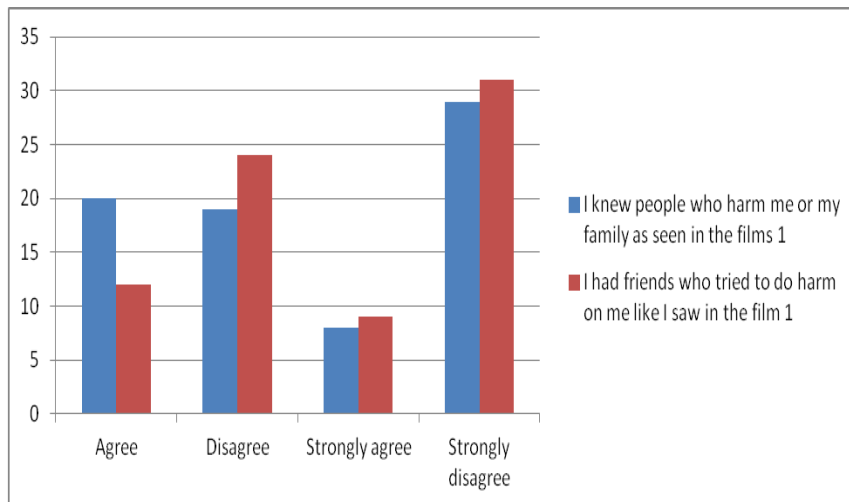


Figure 1: Associating events in films with real life events

When asked if watching Ethiopian films made them change their behaviour, 33 (42.9%) admitted this to be true. On the positive side more than three-quarters of the respondents say they learned problem solving and communication techniques from their favourite films. On the other hand, when the correspondents were asked if they learnt a bad culture, only 15 (12.5%) agreed.

In another area of effect measurement, 1 out of 5 respondents admitted to being affected by the Ethiopian films and 17 (22.31%) respondents say they are influenced on the way they dress. The majority of the respondents believe the characters portrayed in Ethiopian films reflect the real life (58 - 75.4%), and that they see and feel themselves in their favourite films. When asked if the families characters are the reflection of real life, only 29 (37.7%) agreed while 47 (61.2%) do not agree (see Figure 2 below).

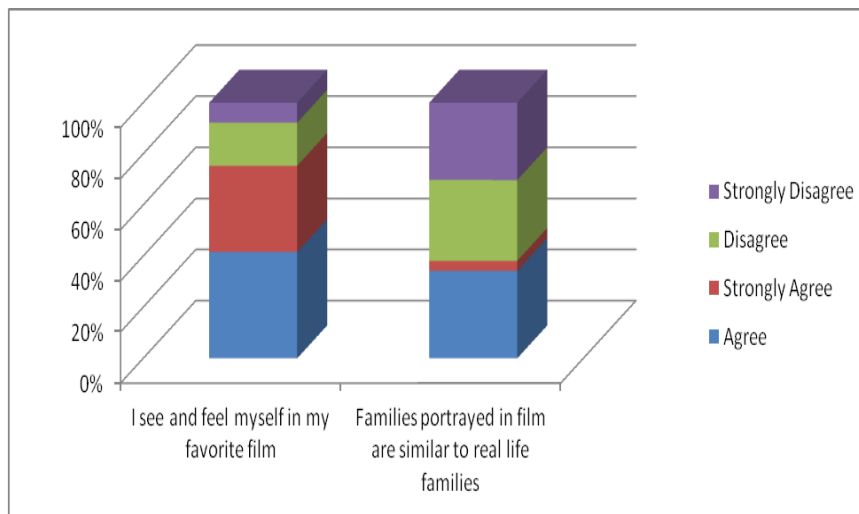


Figure 2: Effects of Ethiopian films reflected on mental structure of reality

Perceived Measures and Responsibilities of Stakeholders to avert the negative effects of Films

Students were asked to suggest possible solutions to avert negative effects and enhance positive effects of Ethiopian films on adolescents by artists, parents, teachers and adolescents. Accordingly, it was suggested that film writers and directors should show appropriate measures for perpetrators of evils or criminals in the films and research their main film stories before writing scripts and shooting. They should promote

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Ethiopian golden past history and heritage in their films. It is possible to use western technologies and demonstrate Ethiopian heritage in films. Age ratings on films should be given objectively and accurately by analysing every segment of the films. In addition, considering the low awareness level of Ethiopian parents for age ratings, it is good if the ratings are given by action at the beginning of the film, rather than writing it at one corner of the screen. Story and screen writers responsible for developing characters should reflect the reality of Ethiopian people in their scenarios, and find creative ways to include educational actions in the films. In this regard, instead of going to bars and drink alcohol every time someone gets angry, characters can be portrayed as using walking, reading of books or gardening as a solution. As earlier pointed out, parents should actively get involved in the films their children watch, according to their age grades and levels of awareness. More importantly, regular discussions and seminars on the effect of Ethiopian films on adolescents are crucial. Films should always be made with intellectual focus before considering their financial values. Exploiting social media platforms for such purpose can enable filmmakers achieve their goal and reach the target population easily and effectively.

One female student also stressed that an Ethiopian film should not always be about love and relationships. Ethiopian films can be done with other worthy objectives presented in artistic and entertaining ways which can appeal to the adolescent. The student mentioned how she was moved by the *Teza* film which elegantly demonstrates a certain time point in Ethiopian history. Films should not be just done to entertain adult audience but to teach adolescents about their country's history, culture, family and societal norms and values.

As described earlier, parents and teachers expressed grave concerns on the negative effects of Ethiopian films on adolescents. But they indicated important measures that can help to avert the negative effects and capitalise on the positive ones. We also asked the parents and teachers about the most important body that should take responsibility for such measures and changes. Six of the eight respondents mentioned that the film industry and film associations should take the major role. Higher education institutions, family and society and the government are also suggested by others.

The major measures that can be taken with respect to the respective bodies are summarised below:

The film industry should work objectively and focus on producing films that encourage adolescents to learn about their country and culture, good work ethics and family values. The films must focus on positive messages while being driven by financial considerations. Different professionals in the industry should be involved, culture should be promoted, history preserved, and latest technology employed. In this regard, films should reflect the societal structure, culture and norms as well as Ethiopian values. The industry should focus on constructive films, and conduct fundamental research before writing scripts or shooting episodes or scenes. Some argue that the film industry is unable to contribute in bringing about positive changes because it is more concerned with financial gains and lacks skilled professionals, experience, and, most importantly, objectivity.

The study also indicated the responsibility of schools and student-based clubs and suggested that schools should reach out to students on how to select films for educational purposes and how to avoid inappropriate films, organise awareness creation campaigns, help adolescents focus on building their future careers, hidden inside fictional stories. Schools should step up their influence by penalising students involved in distributing or watching films during school time. Teachers and school administrators should be more involved in guiding students as much as their parents, conduct regular discussions with students on time management and such courses should be organised for adolescents.

The relationship between families and adolescents should improve as families need to be more open while discussing with their children about films and other media that affect their behaviour and social interactions, instead of throwing them to their bedroom to watch in isolation films that negatively influence them. Parents should follow up and organise regular and open discussions with their children, help build their self-confidence by themselves not by characters they saw in the films. The society should get continuous awareness on the current trends of Ethiopian films and express due concerns about their effects on adolescents.

In this era of globalisation, everyone is well informed about different issues and so can identify and decide the good from the bad, and be communicative in giving feedbacks after watching films. The government has to improve censorship of films with special focus on their effect on adolescents, organise trainings and consultative meetings with people involved in the film industry on the ethics and objectivity of film production.

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Conclusion

According to the results of the survey among adolescents, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with parents, teachers and adolescents, the following observations and conclusions are drawn.

Participating adolescents in the selected school spend most of their leisure time, study time and even class and lunch periods to watch films. Participating adolescents spend a considerable amount of money to watch Ethiopian films, despite availability of free satellite televisions that air Ethiopian films. Parental control of adolescents' exposure to Ethiopian films, and level of acceptance by them, was very low which is further complicated by lack of originality, creativity and respect for societal values and norms by the film industry. Parents can control the type and number of Ethiopian films their adolescent children should be exposed to. A fifth of adolescents develop harmful habits as a result of watching Ethiopian films. A further two-fifths of them change their behaviour either for the better or for the worse. A considerable number of adolescents admitted that bad things seen in films were attempted on them, or happened to them in real life. The majority of the adolescents see themselves in their favourite films, and one-third of them believe that fictional families are exact replicas of the real life ones. Adolescents are consistently copying fictional conversations, insults, curses among themselves in schools, as well as fictional cultures such as dating multiple people, spending weekends at parties, seeking luxury lifestyle and getting disappointed in their current living conditions.

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