



Op-ed: How a little chaos can help us leap forward

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The CNC (France's national film body) numbers for 2022 are out. Last year, French theaters managed to garner nearly 152M admissions with the total box office for the year on pace to exceed \$1 billion, representing an estimated 59.2% increase compared to the 2021 results. Unsurprisingly, with a \$100 million BO, *Avatar: The Way of Water* ranked top movie of the year, turning France into the #2 international market for the film behind China. In many ways, the Avatar sequel seems to follow the trend set by Adam McKay's *Don't Look Up* in 2021, which showed that 'impact films' (films that encourage audiences to commit and act consciously - whether via fiction or non-fiction), freed themselves from activist media and independent documentary releases' affiliation, becoming mainstream and providing entertainment industry leaders with the opportunity to capitalize.

In 2021, the UK-based Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) and operator Sky TV partnered to publish "*The Power of TV: Nudging Viewers to Decarbonize their Lifestyles. An evidence-based guide for broadcasters*". The report highlights that one-third of the 3500+ sample of people questioned believe films have indeed inspired them to change their way of life. With over 4.5 billion consumers of audiovisual material worldwide averaging 2h54 per day, the influence of content on people's actions is undeniable. However, according to the BIT report, 8 out of 10 people do expect audiovisual content to address sustainable and socially responsible topics, as well as produce and release films sustainably. The industry is facing a trend that cannot be denied or ignored if audience expectations are to be met. The film promotion sector, responsible for alerting the optimal target of an upcoming release while bringing audiences together, is no exception. Creatively speaking, *Avatar: The Way of Water* is indisputably environmental. What's more, acting quicker than most, director James Cameron has been campaigning for sustainable productions for years. In 2012, he expressed his wish to produce the Avatar sequel leaving no carbon footprint behind. With the extensive use of solar panels, exclusive vegan meals on set, and the use of drones instead of helicopters for air shots, *Avatar's* message is indeed in line with the way it was produced. On a promotion level, however, things seem to take a bit of a different turn.

A new marketing mechanism

In order to successfully market impact films a paradigm change is required.



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subject matter has the potential to be more valuable than reaching high-level decision office results. As a historical example, when the United States entered WWII, the national food supplies needed to be rationed. The US Department of Agriculture called upon German-American social psychology 'founding father' Kurt Lewin (doctor in psychology at Cornell University and director of the Center for Group Dynamics at MIT) to help craft a message that would convince housewives to use more offal (liver, kidney, and other entrails or organ meats) in their home cooking, meaning the higher-quality meat supplies could then be sent to soldiers on the war front. For this endeavor, 6 groups of 13 to 17 women volunteering for the American Red Cross were gathered for 45 minutes sessions. Half of the women (group A) were simply lectured on the idea that eating offal was nutritionally beneficial for them and their families. They were then benchmarked with the other group. Group B was encouraged to debate and discuss the food shortage problem and eventually concluded that if women used secondary cuts of meat, they could significantly contribute to the war effort and resolve part of the soldiers' food supply issue. Only 3% of group A cooked offal on the first week following the experiment, against 32% of group B.

Comparing wartime meat consumption trends to modern film promotion strategies may appear far-fetched at first glance. However, the experiment shows us - 1940s housewives and 2020s film audiences alike - that engaging people in a debate and allowing them to come to their own conclusions has more impact than trying to convince them or forcefully change their behavior. Impact films are defined as such because they motivate audiences to change, get involved or act in regard to social and environmental subject matters. Social media algorithms have been capitalizing on this theory for some time. Engagement is one of the key factors of the Instagram algorithm, which allows for more frequent delivery of content to a user. The more people that comment and debate your content, the wider your audience reach will be. The more engagement a content gets, the more likely it is to be rewarded by the algorithm. Therefore, the most efficient way to engage a follower or subscriber base is by fostering debates and creating enticing Q&As where the audience can interact, connect, and participate.

The personal decisions made do not come from an external request, they originate from internal reflection and exchange. Debate, and confrontation of points of view, lead to perception modifications and conviction reinforcement. To define a K.I.I (*Key Impact Indicator*), we must think outside the box. Creating a buzzing debate around a film's release will soon become a testament to its success. Consensus only shows that the content missed the target by reaching an audience already sympathetic to the topic addressed and failed to spread its message to a wider crowd. The world won't be changed by pleasing the masses.

By *Caroline Safir, Director General of Commune Image*



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