

BTEC L2 Creative Media Production

Unit 1 Research

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5325 words
20 pages

ZOOtopia

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Why was American animated film Zootopia so successful, both financially and otherwise?

“In Zootopia, anyone can be anything they want.”

Introduction

Background

Zootopia is a 2016 computer-animated, American-made 1-hour-48-minute-long film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. Directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore, the film revolves around the improbable cooperation between Judy Hopps, a rabbit police officer, and Nick Wilde, a red fox con man, in cracking a conspiracy involving mammals reverting back to their savage roots and into feral states.

Set in ‘Zootopia’, a “mammalian metropolis” (*Wikipedia*) bustling with an extensive variety of “anthropomorphic mammals” (*Wikia*), Judy and her new friend Nick find themselves uncovering a mystery far bigger than they had anticipated. Zootopia has been critically acclaimed worldwide and has received an almost overwhelming number of positive responses.

But how so? What is the reason for the immense success Zootopia has enjoyed after its release? This study aims to focus on the aspects of **audience** and **originality** to answer this question.

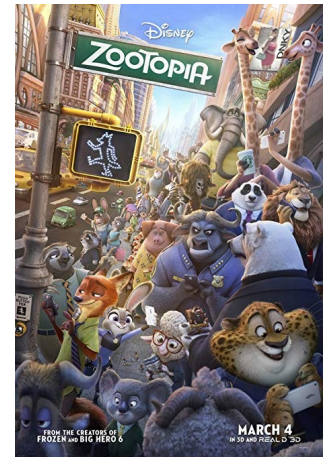


Figure 1: Zootopia theatrical release poster

Significance, definition of success

The significance of this study hinges on what it uncovers. My aim is to better understand the reasons for Zootopia’s success, which can then be applied to upcoming video productions.

The aim for almost any commercial film is financial success, and Zootopia is no different. Looking at its box office takings and the studio that had backed its production (to name two major indicators) it is undeniable that this film was no exception. This point naturally brings us to another: what is it that brings films financial success? The answer boils down to one thing – the audience. Regardless of which aspect this question is looked at from, everything comes down to whether the viewers – the end consumers – enjoyed the film (and what it brought), because they are the actual people who pay for what is produced. If we can gain a better understanding of what ‘clicked’ with viewers, we can get one step closer to understanding the reason behind Zootopia’s success.

Expected outcome

By the end of this study, I aim to

- Have better understood Zootopia’s audience (**demographics** and **psychographics**)
- Have better understood what the audience thought and why
- Have better understood how Zootopia stacks up against other films and why
- Have better understood how anthropomorphism and setting, paired with the originality (in multiple aspects) of the film contributed to its success

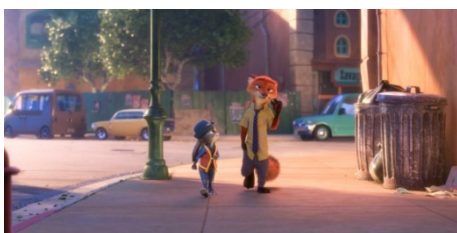


Figure 2: A screengrab of Zootopia

Hypothesis

In general terms, I believe Zootopia’s success was backed by its original storyline, that is, the unexpected twists and turns, well-developed and coherent narrative, excellent character and setting embellishment, and overarching leitmotif of justice and equality, paired with outstanding attempts to essentially subvert traditional storytelling norms employed by films targeted towards children through the inclusion of sparsely seen subgenres and themes.

Definition of terms

- **Demographics:** separation of people by income and occupation
- **Psychographics:** separation of people by how they think and what their psychological attributes are
- **Uses and gratifications**
 - **Diversion** - for entertainment / to go into 'another world'
 - **Personal relationships** - to associate with those who consume the same media / to maintain a place in a social group
 - **Personal identity** - to express themselves and who they are / to empathize with characters
 - **Surveillance** - for knowledge / to find out
- **Quantitative data:** numbers; numerical data, facts, and figures. Highly objective.
- **Qualitative data:** description and opinions; often characterizes responses through subjective approximation
- **Interview:** a one-on-one recorded conversation where an interviewer asks the interviewee questions that they have to answer
- **Focus group:** a group of people whose responses are studied as if they were representative of a larger population
- **Observation:** closely monitoring phenomena in an unobtrusive method
- **Questionnaire / survey:** asking a set of printed questions for the respondent to answer. Mostly quantitative.



Figure 3: An interview.
Image labelled for reuse.

Primary research

Qualitative data	Audience research
Subjective	Psychographic analysis

As part of my audience research, I employed three methods: a **questionnaire**, multiple **interviews**, and a **focus group**.

I chose to send out the questionnaire to about 300 people, sampling a variety of ages (from 11 to 16), ethnic groups, genders, and psychographics. It is noteworthy to mention that my **response rate** was not 100%; instead, I received a healthy **158 responses** – about **53%**. Nevertheless, this number of people was sufficient for my study, and gave me a lot of data to work with. I did not have a **biased sample** because of this.

My rationale behind using a questionnaire was that I could get **many responses, fast**. Easy to **administer**, my questionnaire allowed people to **think about their responses** before submitting them, as there was **no pressure for an immediate response**. I found this form of data collection to be, to my benefit, **standardized** with **categorized** ways of collecting information, which allowed for **effective analysis**. In addition, respondents may have felt a certain sense of '**anonymity**' as there was no 'face' to talk to, which allowed for **openness** when asking for details about **sensitive topics** (for example, respondents could broach topics of discussion through a comment box at the end of the questionnaire).

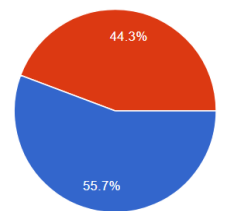


Figure 4: Example pie chart – survey results could be categorized

My decision to use interviews was backed by the knowledge that people **express more** when they speak. This allowed me to gain a **deeper understanding** of the **reasoning** behind people's **questionnaire responses**, and also offered me opportunities to **clarify any uncertainties**. Although **time-consuming**, these interviews were helpful in extracting **detailed information**.

I also chose to utilize a focus group, as I was able to use a **stratified sample** of people to be **representative** of a large population. The focus group allowed for **open-ended questions** and discussions,

Zootopia: A Questionnaire!

Hello there [insert hoonan's name here],

Thanks for taking out your time to fill in this questionnaire!

Your input really helps.

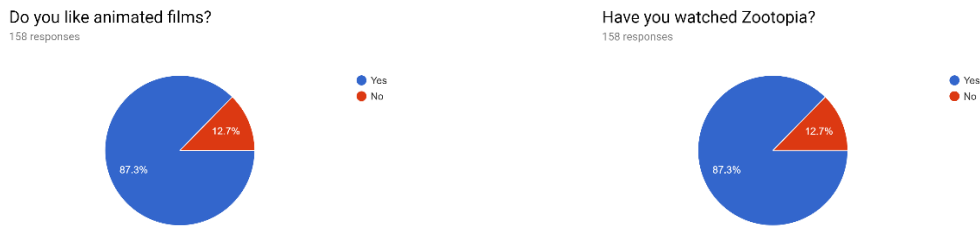
Officer Judy Hopps
Zootopia Police Department (ZPD)

Figure 5: I used bright colours, a playful font, and a welcoming introduction to attract responses

which was incredibly revealing. I was also able to talk to a few people at once as opposed to individually, which saved time.

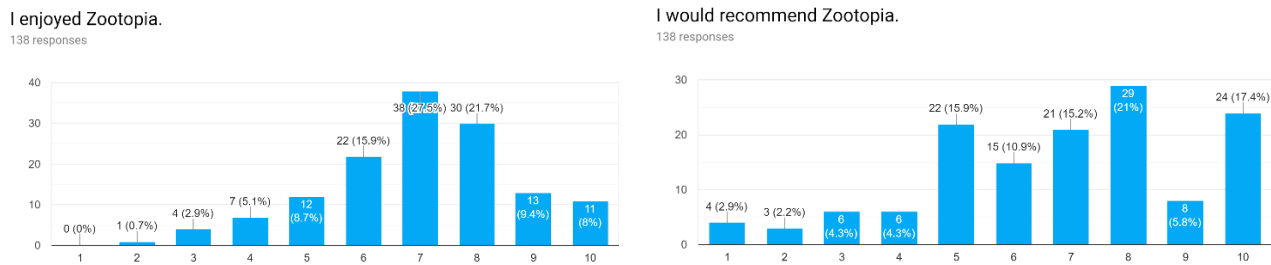
Findings: questionnaire

Through the use of a questionnaire, I was able to better understand **what people like**, but not their reasons for **uses and gratifications**. This data, I decided, was better collected through verbal interactions through interviews and focus groups.



This cannot be a coincidence! 100% of the people who like animated films have watched Zootopia.

The purpose of this question was to see whether there was a **correlation** between liking animated films and having watched Zootopia, and this proves there is a very strong one. This suggests that Zootopia was something of a ‘can’t-miss’ of a film; that it gained a lot of **popularity** and/or fame. So why did 100% of people interested in animation choose to watch Zootopia? I asked two questions after one another, stimulating a subconscious phenomenon that almost ‘tied’ the questions together, to find out whether people who enjoyed Zootopia were likely to recommend it to someone else. This also allowed me to see whether Zootopia really was *popular* and not simply famous.



Out of the 126 people who said they enjoyed Zootopia (5+ on the linear scale), 119 said they would recommend it (5+ on the linear scale). That’s 94.4% of people; this shows a strong association between liking the film and telling others about it –meaning that the reason behind Zootopia’s popularity lies within its **viewership satisfaction** (which was pretty high in my case). So what aspect of Zootopia did the audience love so much?

Why or why didn't you enjoy Zootopia? *

Three key points. No essays required :)

Your answer

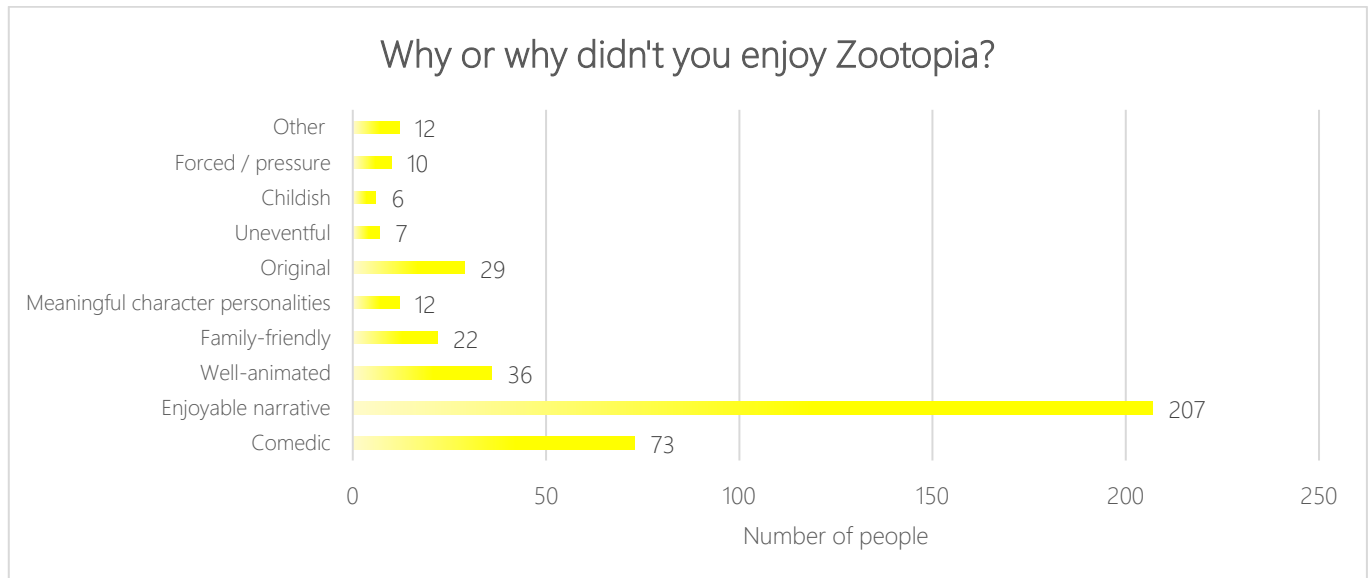
This question prompted respondents to give three key words, separated by commas. I received many responses similar to the ones below.

- Child Friendly. Funny. Creative
- Funny, Interesting, Fun
- Funny, family friendly, police story
- Fun, meaningful, great quality

This was excellent because I was able to group words into categories and then, using the values I recorded, present findings.

Good	Bad
Comedic	Uneventful

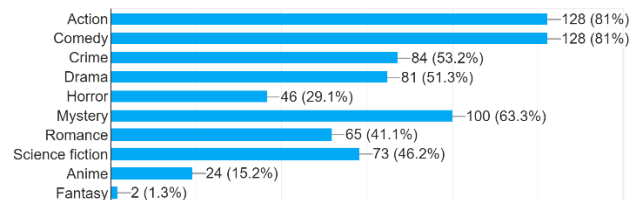
Enjoyable narrative	Unrealistic
Well-animated	Childish
Family-friendly	Forced (to watch) / pressure
Meaningful character personalities	
Original	



Perusing so much data took a long time, but the findings offered a very **deep insight** into why people enjoyed Zootopia. Looking at the graph above, it is visible that the biggest reason by far for why people enjoyed Zootopia was the narrative, which they found enjoyable. Paired with the following question, we can see what aspect of the narrative appealed to people.

What genres of films do you like?

158 responses

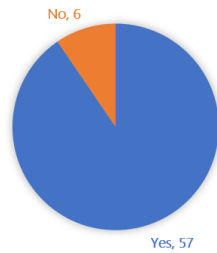


I ignored some responses because they were either too verbose or inappropriate.

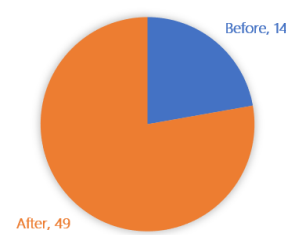
This data is useful because it is now visible that the **originality** seen in Zootopia, that is, **not conforming** to normal childish genres, was intrinsic to the response it got. Zootopia appealed to the same child audience *and more* by incorporating **mature themes** into the narrative. **Darker subgenres** may have actually driven up viewership, while elements of comedy would have maintained audience interest.

One more thing that may also have contributed to Zootopia's success is its featured artist, Shakira, and her featured song, *Try Everything*. To find out whether the song was in fact a playing factor, I added a question to my survey, albeit after I had sent it out. This meant that I did not get a complete 158 responses, but did get enough for a good general idea.

Have you heard the song *Try Everything* by Shakira?



Before or after you watched Zootopia?



Although the majority of people had not heard the song before watching the movie, this percentage of total viewers (22.2%) could have been sufficient to bring some people in to watch Zootopia. Also, the number of listens would have increased after the release of the film, and revenue earned from this could have contributed to the financial end of Zootopia's success.

Findings: interviews

I interviewed 6 people; 3 males and 3 females. I wanted to include multiple ethnicities, so I interviewed

- 3 Indians (male),
- 1 British (female),
- 1 Chinese (female), and
- 1 Pakistani/Chinese (female).

I was aware that I may see some **bias** if I interviewed in the 3:3 ratio of *Indians* : *other ethnicities*, but I was faced with a practical problem of finding willing participants in a school where there is a large Indian population.

I also chose not to solely interview my friends as this could also affect responses, but despite my attempts to refrain myself from doing so, I did interview one.

Below were my interview questions.

1. Have you watched Zootopia?
2. What did you think of Zootopia?
3. Why did you choose to watch Zootopia over some other film?
4. Did you watch Zootopia for entertainment, surveillance, to express yourself, or to maintain relationships?
5. Who watched it with you and where did you watch it?
6. How well do you think it did?
7. Zootopia was a box office hit, making \$1.024B. How do you feel about this?
8. Would you recommend Zootopia? Why or why not?
9. How would you describe yourself? Psychographics?
10. Which genres of film do you like? How about animation? How about crime and mystery?
11. What exactly did you (not) enjoy about Zootopia?
12. Name similar movies. // Have you watched Big Hero 6, Wreck It Ralph, Despicable Me, Cars 2?

Figure 6: My interview questions

All my interviewees had watched Zootopia. Below are some excerpts from interview transcriptions. Key words are in bold.

What did you think of Zootopia?

"I thought it was **comedic**; I liked the humour. I also liked the **characters**, like the bunny and the crime boss."

"It was really good. I thought the **animation** was really good. Also, I could **relate** to the bunny, because I can't do stuff [on my first try]."

"It kinda [sic] showed good **morals** and values that were good for **children**."

"I really liked the **police-rabbit-dude**. And the **animation** was also pretty good."

“I think it was quite a good movie, because there were some interesting **twists**. I think the **animation** was spot on and the world was so colourful.”

Why did you choose to watch Zootopia over some other film?

“I was really **bored** at my friend’s house, and my **friend** really liked Zootopia.”

“Because my **friends** recommended it.”

“I thought it might be **unique** because it’s like *you* have to get used to [their world]. When I saw the poster, it was so different [...] so I thought it might be interesting.”

“It’s ‘cause [sic] my **sister** wanted to watch it, [so my parents] forced me to go watch it with her.”

Again, my findings reinforce what I found out through my questionnaire; that people enjoyed the narrative, the animation, the characters, the use of comedy, as well as the incorporation of good moral values. Also, it is visible that the majority of people interviewed watched the movie because it was *recommended* to them by someone – proof that Zootopia was a big conversation and that, because of its popularity, its name spread verbally from person to person.

In fact, the one person who chose to watch Zootopia after having seen the poster said it was their friend’s recommendation that turned the scales and was the deciding factor.

Psychographic impressions

“I don’t normally watch animation movies but, like, I wanted to try something new, I guess?”

Impression: **adventurer**

“I just watch what my friends watched...” Impression: **mainstream**

“I’m a *basic* type of girl... I dunno [sic], I’m unique!” Inferred psychographic: **mainstream**

“I like to stand out [...] I’m cool...” Inferred psychographic: **aspirer**

“Honestly? I sometimes need [...] security...” Inferred psychographic: **aspirer**

With two people fitting into the **mainstream** category, two more fitting into the **aspirer** category, and one fitting into the **adventurer** category, it looks like Zootopia didn’t appeal to a specific or single audience – this could be attributed to the variety of subgenres seen within the film, where there was something, it looks like, for everyone.

Also, there is no guarantee that this categorization is correct; after all, they were decided upon by means of personal impression – a very subjective decision indeed. If someone else were to analyse the interviewees’ responses, they might settle upon different uses and gratifications.

In addition, the interviewees were talking face-to-face with me; their responses may have been different if they had been talking to someone else, say an adult, sibling, or friend. This has to be taken into account to understand that these are not definitive results. Nevertheless, they do provide a better understanding of the types of audiences Zootopia may have appealed to.

Findings: focus group

I conducted an 18-minute-long focus group with a girl and boy of multiple year groups, from backgrounds as varied as possible. This allowed me to ask open-ended questions and let the members of the group discuss it amongst themselves, with me as the

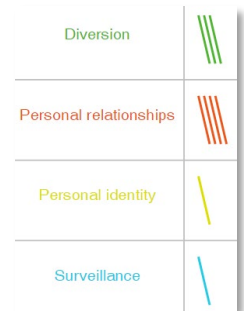


Figure 7: Why did you watch Zootopia? Tally marks were given based on inferred uses and gratifications for individual people.



Figure 8: Have you watched the following...?

moderator. Through the help of a transcription, I was able to better understand the honest and detailed thoughts of my **stratified sample**, which helped me to get a better understanding of the audience as a whole. Excerpts below (shortened).

“It’s the characters [in animated movies] that appeal to me.”

“Great. Do you want to add on to what he said?”

“I also like animated [movies], and I watch it for the story. Because usually, the stories are very intricate and, like, cool.”

“How about you? Do you feel the more intricate a story, the more it might appeal to you?”

“Oh, yeah. I like twists and turns in movies.”

“But, like, Zootopia was kind of dark – for a children’s movie.”

“No! What?! It wasn’t!”

[Disagreement]

“Well, I like ‘lighter’ [sub]genres.”

“I like action-y crime-y mystery-type films [...] because of the suspense.”

“Okay, so that’s useful: Zootopia does have suspenseful scenes, and there is an intricate story...”

“Yeah. It appealed to me because of the crime factor.”

“I really liked some of the characters, like, you know, the sloth-”

“Yeah, that was pretty funny.”

“-And the godfather-mouse. That was great.”

“I liked the comedy in it.”

“The comedy – okay. So did you like the physical or verbal comedy in the movie?”

“Both.”

“Why did you watch Zootopia – to find out what the hype was about, or for entertainment; to pass time?”

[Unanimous] “Both”.

“Did anyone sympathize or empathize with the characters? Did you feel like you could connect to them?”

“I don’t usually empathize with the characters, but they had good character development.”

“Same, but, like, I sorta [sic] felt like the bunny at times because of how they introduced the character...”



Figure 9: Me with some of my focus group members

These findings show that the narrative was the biggest reason for why people enjoyed Zootopia – characters within this also affected their opinions, but only to an extent. The occasional use of humour and suspense also kept viewers interested, although the latter may have proven to be too much for younger audiences, as seen in online critic reviews.

Qualitative data	Market and production research
Subjective	Competitor analysis

Findings: interviews, desk research and questionnaire

Zootopia was a box office hit, making 1.024 billion USD. How do you feel?

“Well, I’m not surprised – I expected it to do well.”

“I’m not surprised, honestly.”

“You’re not surprised?”

“No! I loved the characters so much; I can’t have been the only one!”

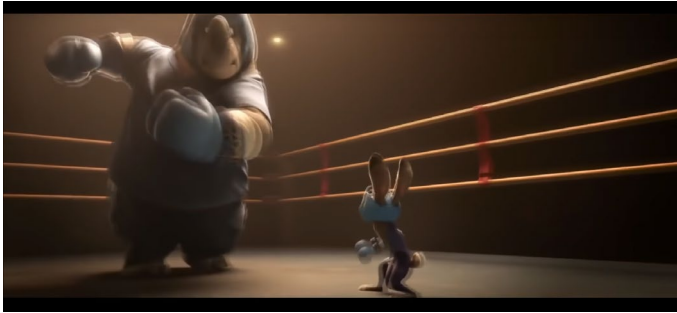
“Surprised-” “Surprised, like, about how much money there was [...] but not that it did well.”

“It was expected, it was a really good movie...”

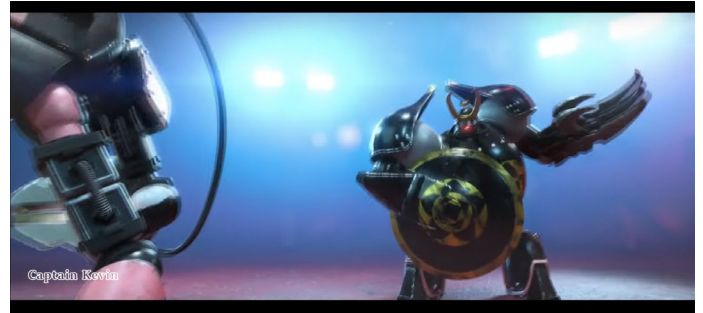
Everyone expected Zootopia to do well; some people were quite surprised, however, at exactly how well that was.

To better understand the reason behind why everyone I interviewed thought Zootopia would do well, I decided to do a scene analysis with other successful films. This, I felt, would better allow me to break down the actual production techniques of the film and how this might have subconsciously caused viewers to like the film.

Zootopia



Big Hero 6



Harsh overhead lighting allows for dramatic shots, and the weaker character is almost always smaller than their opponent. In animated films, where the target audience includes children, controlled fights (like ones inside rings) are a good way to present opposing physical capabilities while staying away from too much violence. This scene allows for lots of motion, surprising twists in the fight (which is always interesting), and also takes the narrative forward.

Zootopia



Shark Tale (2004)

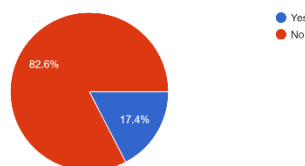


Low-angle shots show dominance, while backlit shots allow for harsh lighting. As visible, both scenes have windows with light flooding through them; these light up the shots and bring in a desired hue. These shots have no violence or gore, and as such are appropriate for children. They show how submissive and threatened the protagonist is feeling and allows for the audience to sympathize with them.

As seen, children-friendly but revealing scenes take the narrative forward and allow for the audience to empathize with characters.

So, if films like Zootopia are so good at drawing viewers in, do they also make them crave similar works? I asked my questionnaire respondents a question to find out.

I searched for movies similar to Zootopia after I watched it.
138 responses



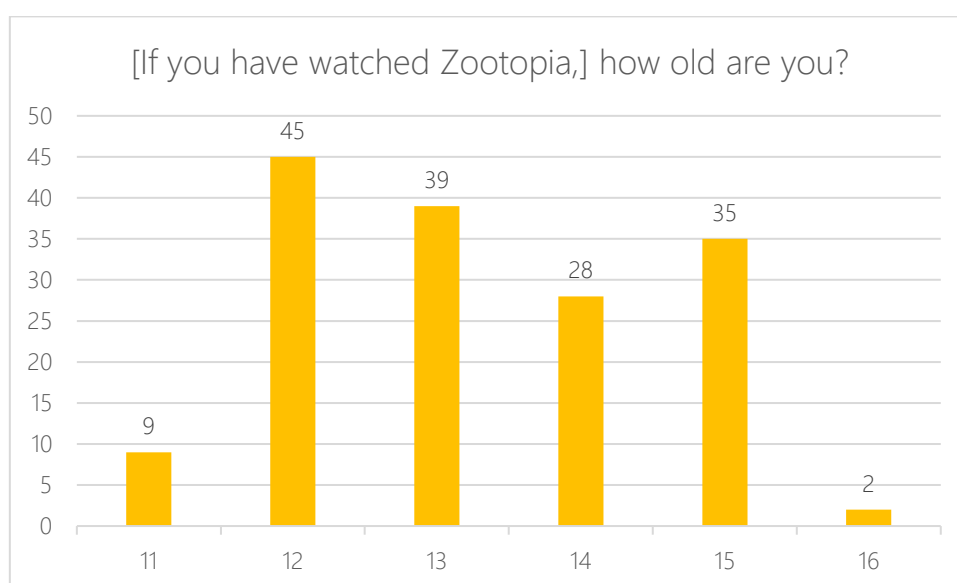
With a majority vote of 'no', it can only be assumed that, because Zootopia's storyline was so radically different and original, as established by my questionnaire and interview results, people simply did not think to look for similar movies. It is also possible that this is simply not something people do to find new movies – they may rely on other ways, such as their friend circle.

Quantitative data | **Audience research**
Objective | Demographic analysis

Findings: questionnaire

As I sent my questionnaire to an equal number of people from each cohort, by asking whether people had watched Zootopia, and if they had asking them how old they were allowed me to find out which ages Zootopia most appealed to.

However, it is important to take note that there is not much distinction between these age groups, as I was not able to send the questionnaire to people drastically younger and older.

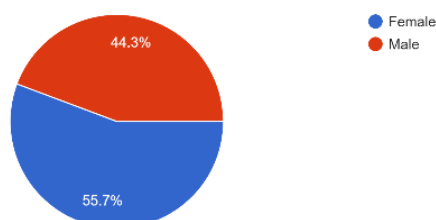


The film was popular amongst children aged 12 to 15. However, low response rates could be bringing values down for ages 11 and 16.

I was also able to find out, in the same way, which gender Zootopia may have been targeted towards.

What is your gender?

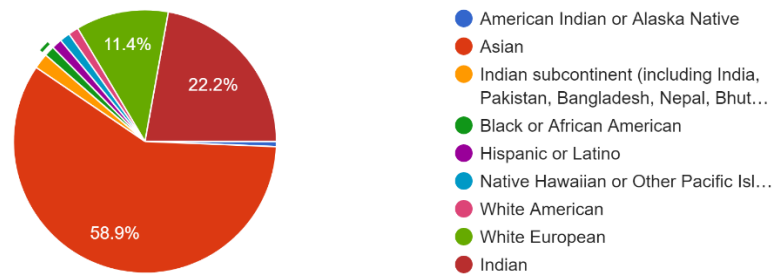
158 responses



This shows an almost equal segregation of genders, suggesting that Zootopia was fairly gender-neutral and showed no bias towards any single gender. Below depicts the spread of ethnicities.

What is your ethnicity?

158 responses

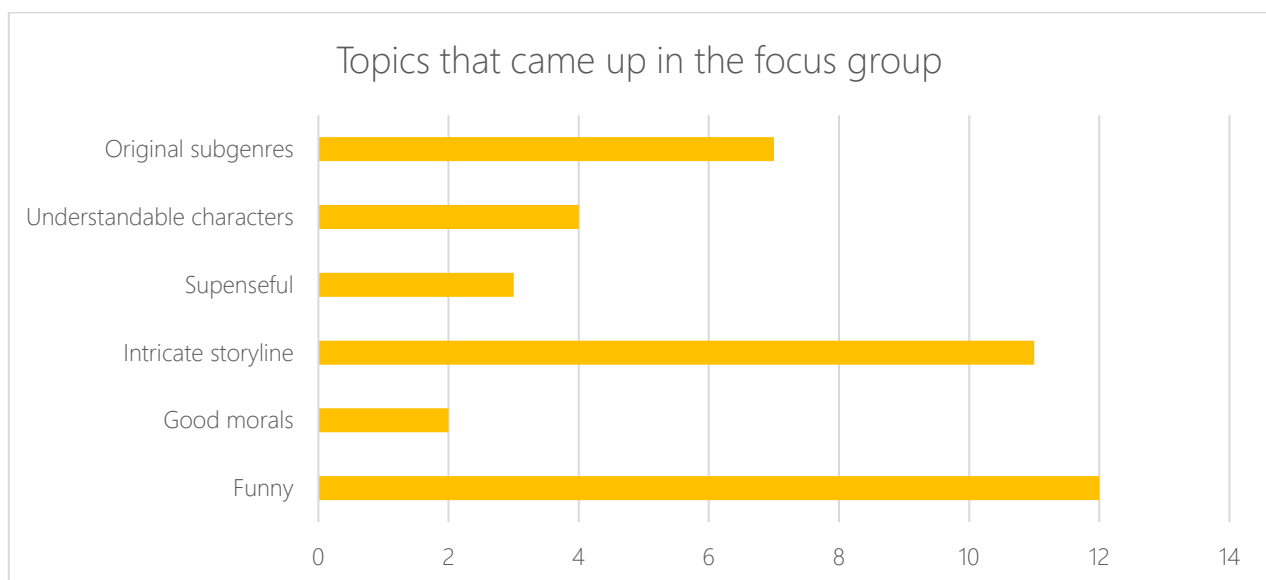


As visible, Asians were the largest audience – however *this is extremely biased*. These results depended *heavily* on the people I sent the questionnaire to, and in effect reflected them more than it did Zootopia viewers. As such, this data is simply not reliable enough to draw any conclusions.

The combination of age and gender neutrality meant that Zootopia had a huge target audience, and by pleasing everyone through their excellent "storyline", "characters" and "animation", they were able to enjoy huge viewership volumes.

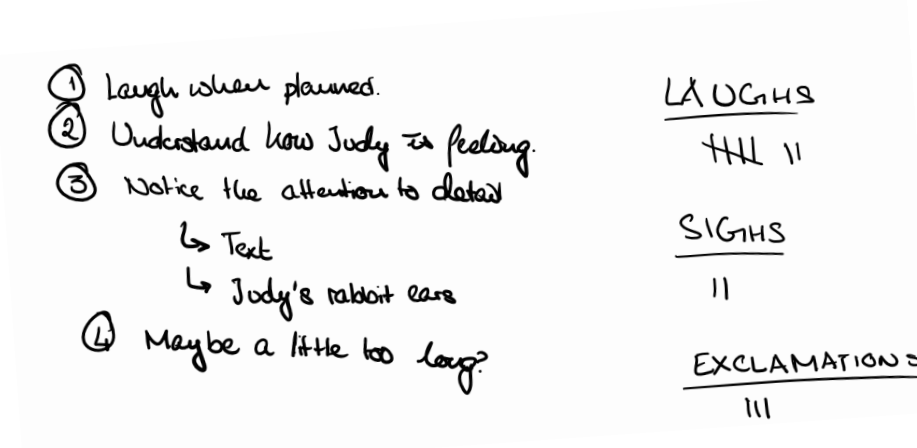
Findings: focus group

I used a scoring system to keep track of the number of times a topic came up in my focus group discussion. This allowed me to further understand who Zootopia's audience is through what they like.



Findings: focus group – observational analysis

Through an observational analysis of my focus group, I was able to find out what parts of a scene *worked*. I showed my group an extract of Zootopia, which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SmyATAYsNs>



Although in handwritten note form, it can be seen that the scene was effective in making people laugh while taking the narrative forward. The group noticed little details, which is surprising but shows how engrossing the extract was. Despite the situational comedy present, the group did feel like the scene may have dragged on too long and some said that they lost some interest near the end.

Quantitative data | Market research
Objective | Competitor analysis

Findings: questionnaire

I also used my questionnaire to find out more about where Zootopia's business came from, and how it fared in comparison to other films on the market.

I own Zootopian merchandise.
138 responses

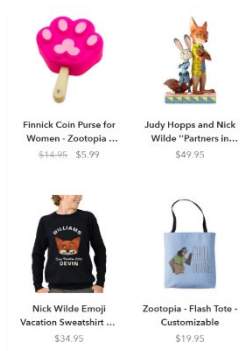
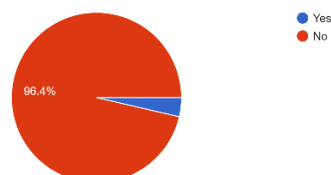
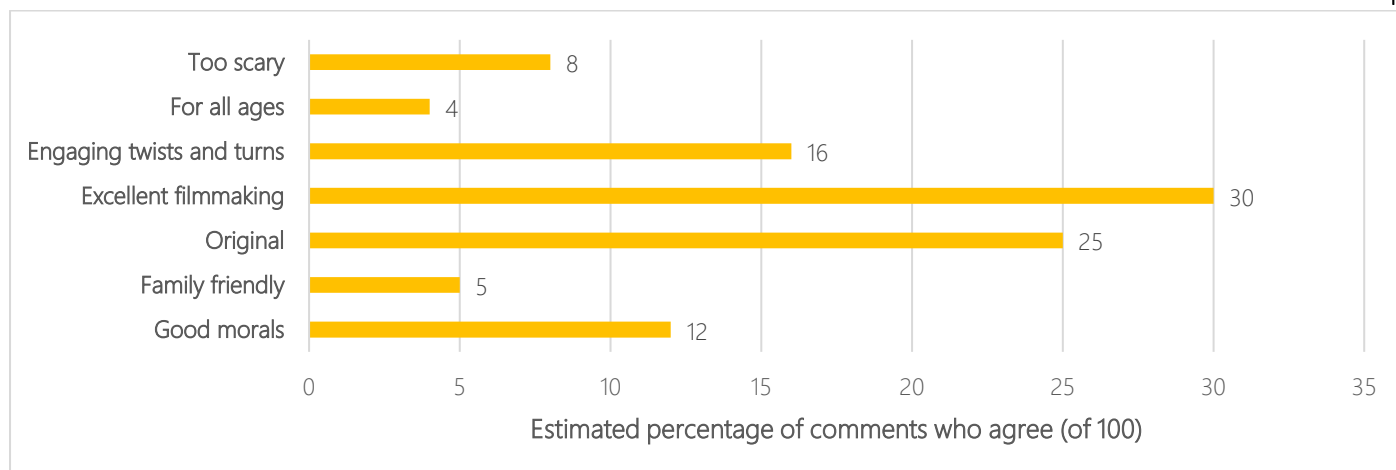


Figure 10: 'Zootopian' merchandise available on the Disney website

It is visible that the majority of people (nearly 152 of the 158) did not own 'Zootopian' merchandise; it can be inferred that merchandise such as toys, stuffed animals, games, etcetera were not large contributors to the film's financial success. Of course, products such as stuffed toys and card games may not always be directed to the demographic that responded to my survey, and this has to be taken into account; just because these 152 people don't own 'Zootopian' merchandise, doesn't mean it doesn't sell well.

Merchandise such as games, clothing, mugs, bags, etcetera are available on multiple online and physical platforms, and retail for rather high prices. If following basic economic laws, this is because of high demand – however, the Disney and Zootopia brand itself is so valuable (monetarily) that selling such products for low prices would simply make them look cheap and uncollectable.

Findings: focus group



As visible, the review comments are largely similar to those I got from my primary research. This reinforces those findings and shows that these mutual opinions were universal, across all ages.

Some parents may have felt the film was too scary for their children – however, this is a small percentage and this opinion is largely subjective. Other parents thought the film was “family friendly” and “good for all ages”.

Quantitative data
Objective

Audience research
Desk research

Findings: star ratings

IMDB: 8.0/10 (358,354 reviews)

Rotten Tomatoes: 8.0/10 (266 reviews)

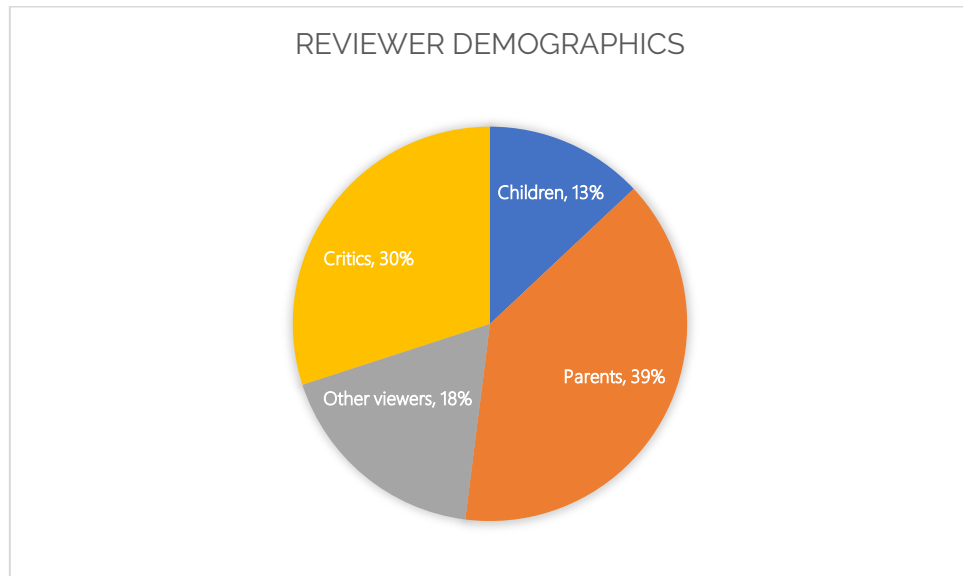
Metacritic: 8.7/10 (1465 reviews)

Common Sense Media: 4/5 (150 child + 223 adult reviews)

The average reviews from these four sources is 8.175 of 10 stars (multiplying the Common Sense Media reviews by a factor of 2 to match the rest). This is a rather high score, and can be explained by means of my primary research findings.

As seen by a study conducted by the University of Colorado Boulder, when researchers examined ratings of 1,272 products from consumers on online retail giant Amazon’s website, they found little correlation, based on objective tests, between how well a product did and the ratings it got. This simply shows that most reviews are specific to the reviewer and are reliable.

Findings: demographics



Analysis of reviewer demographics show a large percentage of parents at 39%, followed by critics at 30%, other viewers (mostly adults) at 18%, and children at 13%. This is an estimate based on tally marking 100 critic reviews, and as such is not definite and accurate – however, it does give a good representation of the age groups reviewing Zootopia.

Quantitative data
Objective

Market research
Desk research

Findings: awards won

46 awards won and 67 nominations received

Including

Oscar (2017) for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year

Golden Globe (2017) for Best Motion Picture – Animated

BAFTA Children's Award (2016) for Best Feature Film and BAFTA Kids Vote - Feature Film

Findings: box office

Total Lifetime Grosses

Domestic: \$341,268,248 33.3%
+ **Foreign:** \$682,515,947 66.7%

= **Worldwide:** \$1,023,784,195

Films released after Zootopia

Film	Release date	Budget	Box office
Finding Dory	June 17, 2016	200 million USD	1.029 billion USD
Moana	November 23, 2016	150 million USD	643.3 million USD
Cars 3	June 16, 2017	175 million USD	383.9 million USD
Coco	November 22, 2017	175 million USD	807.1 million USD
Incredibles 2	June 15, 2018	200 million USD	1.228 billion USD

Findings: song – charts

Charts – **all-time worldwide:** #34

The song got into **18 chart lists worldwide**, topping at **#1** in the 2016 charts Japan Hot Overseas and The Official Lebanese Top 20.

Artist: Shakira

Album: Zootopia (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)

Released: 2016

Nominations: Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media, etc.

As visible, Zootopia was widely acclaimed for its excellent employment of production techniques, and both won and was nominated for numerous awards. Bringing in a total revenue off over 1 billion US dollars, it was also highly financially successful, most probably for the reasons stated above – in essence, the fact that it was, quite frankly, a highly engaging and very eventful film, with something for everyone throughout.

Conclusions

The secret behind Zootopia's success lies with its excellent narrative. Boasting a plethora of twists and turns, and a variety of subgenres that include comedy, crime, mystery, and more, the film cleverly incorporates excellent animation and character development to please audiences of a varied demographic – this being both males and females of all ages, particularly around age 12. Psychographic analyses show the film presents no discrepancies in viewership (and satisfaction of the same) between categories – it instead actually appeals to all groups.

Questionnaire and interview results show that there is a correlation between audiences enjoying films and recommending them to others – logical reasoning can then be applied to derive this fact: Zootopia's overwhelming viewership numbers can be attributed to the fact that people enjoyed the film, suggesting it to others. Majority positive online reviews may also have pushed audiences to watch the film, while featured song *Try Everything* by celebrity artist Shakira would have increased overall revenue and may also have promoted the film before and after its release.

In addition, the use of contemporary animation genre conventions, paired with authentic originality in multiple aspects of production meant that the film offered audience a welcome crispness. Harnessing the success that this brought, the launch of 'Zootopian' merchandise would have further both directly and indirectly advertised the film, as well as brought in extra revenue.

Moreover, thanks to industry-leading production quality, as well as popular vote, the awards Zootopia won and was nominated for would have increased public awareness of the film, as would have media reports on box office takings and critic reviews.

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APPENDIX

1 OF 1

To listen to the full focus group recording, visit

<https://drive.google.com/a/kgv.hk/file/d/10xYvFrBTa30EOxVgt6dB7hTdqm3je4eS/view?usp=drivesdk>