



## From ratings to discourse: Gen Z and film evaluation on rating platforms in Indonesia

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### Abstract.

Although film rating and review platforms, alongside social media, have rapidly expanded among Generation Z, most existing research examines these platforms in isolation. Consequently, there is limited understanding of their combined influence on contemporary film evaluation practices. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Gen Z audiences in Indonesia engage with these platforms as part of an interconnected digital ecosystem that shapes film selection, evaluation, and cultural participation. Employing a qualitative-descriptive methodology, the study utilizes semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six purposively sampled Gen Z informants who actively use film rating and review platforms (such as IMDb, Letterboxd, and Rotten Tomatoes) and social media. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns in platform use, evaluation practices, and social interaction. Technological determinism serves as the primary analytical framework, further refined by the concept of digital dialectic, which highlights the reciprocal relationship between technological structures and user agency. The findings indicate that film rating and review platforms function not only as evaluative tools but also as social spaces where ratings, reviews, and algorithmic recommendations intersect with social media discourse, collectively shaping evaluation practices. Gen Z audiences are positioned as active participants who negotiate technological affordances while reinforcing platform-driven logics of simplification and visibility. This study contributes to media and film studies by illustrating how platform infrastructures and user practices operate dialectically, transforming film criticism into a participatory and algorithmically mediated cultural practice.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, film rating and review platforms, technological determinism, film preference

## Introduction

Amid the rapid expansion of digital platforms, this study investigates the ways in which Generation Z engages with film evaluation through rating and review systems that shape both selection and discourse. The proliferation of digital platforms has significantly transformed Generation Z's interaction with media, especially regarding film evaluation and selection. The advent of the internet around 1995 coincided with the emergence of Generation Z, defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, whose formative years paralleled the swift advancement of digital technology. Consequently, they are frequently described as 'digital natives' (Patel, 2017). Therefore, Gen Z is greatly influenced by these technological advancements, which shape their character and personality across various aspects of life, including learning, work, and social interactions (Ismail et al., 2023). In this context, technology is not merely a tool but an integral part of Gen Z's daily lives, deeply embedded in how they communicate, access information, and construct their social experiences

(Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Unlike previous generations, they have never experienced a world without the internet and social media; this makes them highly digitally connected and quick to adopt technological innovations (Jalil et al., 2025).

Before the advent of the internet and social media, print media was the main platform for film discourse, primarily through film reviews. An example of how film discussions were previously conducted is the review of *Nyoman dan Presiden* by Rita Sri Hastuti (see Figure 1), published in the *Editor* magazine in October 1989. Although print media has now adapted to digital platforms and social media, with dedicated sections for film reviews, such as *Tempo*'s review column on *tempo.co*, the traditional form of film critique has gradually been replaced by rating and review features in digital platforms.



Figure 1. Film review section from of *Editor* magazine (1989).

Source: [https://warungarsip.co/produk/kliping/resensi-film-nyoman-dan-presiden-editor\\_no-06-oktober-1989/](https://warungarsip.co/produk/kliping/resensi-film-nyoman-dan-presiden-editor_no-06-oktober-1989/)

However, the rise of digital platforms marks a more fundamental transformation rather than a simple shift in medium. As previous studies have shown, the decline of traditional criticism has been accompanied by the proliferation of digital platforms that enable broader participation, where “anyone can be a critic,” thereby contesting the authority and professional boundaries of criticism (MacArthur et al., 2021). In this context, film evaluation increasingly shifts from structured, expert-driven critique to simplified, metric-based, and user-generated forms of judgment.

Film rating and review platforms such as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Letterboxd, and Rotten Tomatoes have introduced new modes of engagement (Switek, 2021; Trigueiro et al., 2025). British software engineer Col Needham founded IMDb in the year 1990 (Bahraminasr & Sadr, 2020) as a website, which later evolved into a widely used smartphone application. Accessible across platforms at no cost, IMDb provides comprehensive information about millions of films, television shows, and cast and crew, allowing users to rate films on a scale of 1 to 10 (see Figure 2). These user-generated scores are aggregated and displayed as the platform's overall rating on its interface.

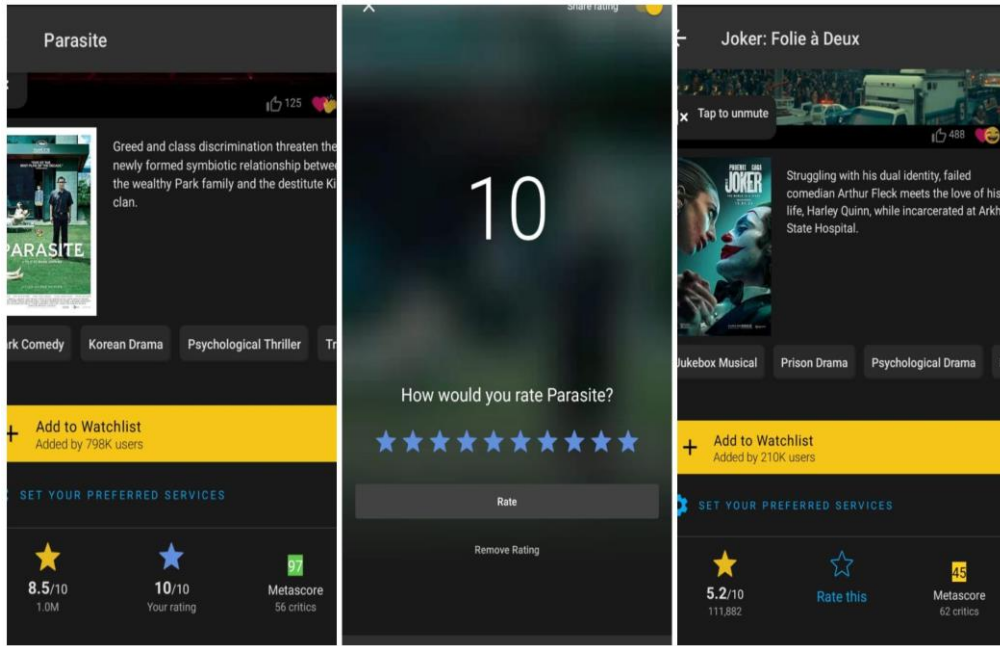


Figure 2. IMDb user interface, where users can rate movies.  
 Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Both film media accounts and influencers frequently use rating systems in their reviews on social media platforms, reflecting a broader shift in the movie rating mechanism as the rise of streaming media, emerging technologies, and diverse cultural participation has transformed traditional evaluation systems and enabled the emergence of amateur critics and vernacular reviewers as noninstitutional cultural voices in cultural criticism (Ameli & Farzaneh Siasi rad, 2025; Qian, 2025). Figure 3 demonstrates how an IMDb rating is employed in a film critique. This simplified evaluation is increasingly favoured over traditional, in-depth critical reviews (Pandey et al., 2024). This shift marks the emergence of a new dialectic of film discourse, which has become part of netizens' daily consumption habits on social media, specifically in Indonesia, the subject of this study.



Figure 3. Film influencers on X and official film accounts on Instagram discuss films based on ratings from the IMDb app.  
 Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Data published by CNN Indonesia reveal that Indonesian cinema attendance touched 60 million viewers by September 2024 (CNN Indonesia, 2024). A 2022 survey by Charity Research Indonesia reported that, as of 2021, Indonesia had 11.5 million Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD) users (Bestari, 2022). A 2019 survey by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) found that Gen Z was the most frequent movie-going demographic, with 36.4% in the 17-21 age group watching Indonesian films and 29.1% watching foreign films, compared to 19.5% and 22.4%, respectively, in the 22-25 age group (Matius, 2020). Further, a 2023 survey by the IDN Research Institute indicated that 65% of Gen Z preferred watching films and series on streaming platforms, whereas only 22% opted for cinemas (Puspa, 2024).

In terms of social media activity, a 2024 Katadata report showed that of the 167 million active social media users in Indonesia, individuals aged 18–34 accounted for 54.1% of the total (Panggabean, 2024). Digital influencers are increasingly expected to have a stronger impact on Generation Z's film preferences than traditional film celebrities, as they are perceived to create more authentic and relatable connections with young audiences (Pereira et al., 2023; Souza-Leão et al., 2022; Xue, 2024). At the same time, the evolving perspectives and evaluative criteria of Gen Z are reshaping the meaning of celebrity status, emphasising the interplay between talent, project selection, relatability, and social influence within the contemporary digital media landscape (Shelton & Hughes, 2025).

Indonesian film influencers frequently incorporate film ratings—especially from platforms like IMDb, Letterboxd, and Rotten Tomatoes—into their content, targeting the Gen Z audience on social media. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between film applications and Gen Z in shaping the digital dialectic of film discourse and its influence on film-viewing preferences. Previous studies have examined digital film platforms such as IMDb and Letterboxd mainly from the perspectives of rating systems, recommendation algorithms, or user-generated reviews (Bahraminasr & Sadr, 2020; Trigueiro et al., 2025). Meanwhile, another body of research has explored the role of social media influencers and online communities in shaping audience consumption behaviour (Pereira et al., 2023; Souza-Leão et al., 2022). However, in the contemporary digital media environment, film evaluation is no longer dominated solely by professional critics. Instead, rating systems, user-generated reviews, and social media discourse increasingly serve as alternative forms of cultural evaluation, shaping how audiences discover, interpret, and select films (Basuroy et al., 2003). As a result, they have not sufficiently explained how film evaluation is produced through the interaction between platforms and social media within a shared digital environment. This study addresses this gap by analysing how film rating and review platforms and social media operate as an interconnected evaluative ecosystem that shapes how Gen Z audiences assess, select, and discuss films. This focus moves beyond treating these platforms as isolated tools, instead highlighting how their interaction reshapes evaluative authority and transforms film criticism into a platform-mediated, participatory practice.

This research examines the interaction between film rating and review platforms and social media in shaping Generation Z's film-viewing preferences in Indonesia. Utilizing the concept of a digital dialectic, the study analyzes the reciprocal relationship between technological infrastructures, such as platform features, rating systems, and algorithms, and user practices, including reviews, social media sharing, and influencer discourse. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How do film rating and review platforms and social media function as an interconnected digital ecosystem to influence Generation Z's film evaluation and selection practices? This research advances media and film studies by conceptualizing film discourse as an integrated platform ecosystem rather than as a collection of isolated digital spaces.

### **Technological Determinism: In the Age of New Media**

Technology has long been considered a central driving force in human history. With its advancement, tools emerged that not only assisted humans in various aspects of their lives but also revolutionised the way people live, work, and communicate (Webster, 2017). An influential perspective on how technological progress impacts society is 'technological determinism', which posits that human actions and behaviours result from and are shaped by technological development (Hauer, 2017). Technology

is central to social change, with technological advancements having a direct and inevitable impact on social structures and human life dynamics.

Marshall McLuhan, in his seminal work *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), discusses technological determinism by framing media as an extension of the human body. According to him, the media not only transmit information but also shape human interaction and thinking. He claims that electronic media in particular have transformed every aspect of human life, reshaping human perception and dictating how humans act, interact, and construct their understanding of unfamiliar environments (Lapalelo, 2021).

Further, proponents of technological determinism often view technology as an autonomous entity that drives change independently of human agency (Hallström, 2022). Ellul (1967) asserts that humans have become subservient to the logic of technology, in which each innovation necessitates subsequent innovations. McLuhan's famous phrase 'the medium is the message' emphasises that not only is the content delivered by the media important, but also that the media themselves play a crucial role in shaping human thought and behaviour. Within this framework, traditional communication technologies such as television and radio are tools that can not only deliver information but also redefine the structure of human life (Dima et al., 2014; Fauzan, 2025; Mohyeddin, 2024).

Nevertheless, this deterministic perspective has been criticised by scholars and researchers, who argue that technological determinism presents an overly simplistic and extreme view, suggesting that technology alone can reshape society without considering the complexities of social interaction. (De Abreu, 2013) for instance, highlights how technological determinism often overlooks human resistance and adaptability as active responses to technological change. In the context of new media, although digital platforms such as social media and mobile applications have introduced major transformations, individuals still retain agency in determining how they engage with and adopt these technologies (Dima et al., 2014).

Technological determinism is relevant in the present-day context of its application to the rapidly evolving media landscape. The rise of new media has propelled society from one era to the next, creating new patterns in how individuals think, act, and adapt to technological advancement. (Hauer, 2017) also emphasises that new media are fundamentally changing the structure of social life by restructuring human interaction and influencing thought processes through digital technology. New media—including the internet, social networking platforms, and digital applications—not only expand the scope of communication but also create a social environment deeply rooted in technological dependency (Simon, 2024; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Thus, technological determinism provides a compelling framework for understanding the relationship between technology and humanity, especially in the era of new media (Dafoe, 2015). Besides being tools for communication, media are also powerful agents in shaping human consciousness and interaction.

### Digital Consumption Habits of Gen Z in Indonesia

Gen Z currently represents more than 32% of the global population (Noor, 2025; OECD, 2021). According to IDN Research Institute (2024) data, Gen Z is the largest generational cohort, accounting for 27.94% of the total population, or approximately 74.93 million individuals. This generation holds distinct values, attitudes, and beliefs and tends to resist being stereotyped; instead, they pursue diverse, individualised ways of expressing their identities.

Gen Z's technology consumption patterns reflect their early and intimate exposure to digital devices and the internet. Social media, streaming platforms, and digital applications are integral to their daily routines. As a result, they are characterised by advanced digital literacy and high levels of screen time and technology engagement (Limilia et al., 2022; Maisuroh et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, especially in major urban centres, the internet is becoming increasingly accessible and affordable, accelerating the integration of technology into everyday life. This environment accounts for Gen Z's digital consumption habits. Studies 25/05/2026 16:37:00 have highlighted that, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, Gen Z in Indonesia has increasingly integrated digital behaviours, accelerating the adoption of technology across various aspects of their lives. Social media platforms

such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube remain the primary channels for communication, entertainment, and even education (Calista & Yenni, 2023; Evita et al., 2023).

Gen Z also proactively engages with digital technologies, transforming their technology consumption habits into more productive activities, such as online entrepreneurship and content creation (Ameen et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2022; Suryaputra et al., 2024). Their consumption decisions are shaped by influencers and digital promotions. When consumer trust in certain products or services is enhanced by positive reviews from trusted influencers, it indicates that technology is not merely passively consumed but also actively employed for economic activities and the construction of personal identity. These consumption patterns reflect Gen Z's adaptive engagement with modern technologies and their expectations from digital experiences that fulfil both their needs and desires.

### Film Rating and Review Platforms as a Focus of Study

Over the past decade, digital technology has advanced and transformed various aspects of human life, including how people perceive and engage with the film industry, from consumption and production to evaluation. Film rating and review platforms such as Letterboxd, IMDb, and Rotten Tomatoes have emerged as key platforms for assessing and discussing cinematic works. They serve not only as sources of film-related information but also as interactive spaces for sharing opinions, writing reviews, and rating films, ultimately influencing individual preferences in film selection (Gifari et al., 2021).

Traditionally, professional film reviews who published reviews in print media or on major media platforms were influential in shaping audiences' selection, judgment, and engagement with films (Tetteh & Thushara, 2023). This conventional model primarily fostered a one-way communication system, leaving little room for transactional interaction or sustained dialogue between critics and audiences (Fiske, 2010).

In his seminal work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), Henry Jenkins argues that digital platforms have enabled new modes of user participation in the creation and distribution of content and that the emergence of film applications has disrupted the traditional paradigm by democratising film criticism, allowing anyone to become a critic. Features such as user reviews, interactive discussion forums, and film rating systems have created a more dynamic and participatory ecosystem within the film industry.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design and used in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. Purposive sampling was applied to select informants who met the following criteria: (1) belong to Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010); (2) are regular film viewers, defined as individuals who watch films at least once per week or at a minimum of 3–4 films per month; and (3) actively use film rating and review platforms (e.g., IMDb, Letterboxd, or Rotten Tomatoes), either for checking ratings, reading reviews, or sharing their own evaluations. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between October and November 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted online via video conferencing platforms. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while maintaining consistency across key themes.

The platforms (IMDb, Letterboxd, and Rotten Tomatoes), were selected due to their widespread global use, accessibility, and relevance in shaping film-related discourse among Gen Z users. The films discussed in this study are not limited to a specific national origin but reflect a combination of global and Indonesian films commonly accessed by participants through cinemas, streaming services, and social media.

The guiding questions focused on participants' film-viewing habits, their use of rating and review platforms (e.g., IMDb, Letterboxd or Rotten Tomatoes), their engagement with film-related content on social media, and how ratings, reviews, and influencers affect their film preferences. Follow-up

questions were used to probe participants' justifications, meanings, and reflections on their practices. The participants were based in urban areas in Indonesia, where access to cinemas, streaming services, and digital platforms is more prevalent. While the study does not aim for statistical representativeness, the selected participants are considered analytically appropriate for capturing patterns of platform-based film evaluation among digitally engaged Indonesian Gen Z audiences.

A total of six informants participated in this study. Although the number appears limited, this sample size is consistent with qualitative research principles, which prioritise depth of insight over breadth of generalisability. Participants were selected based on analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness, with variation in age, educational background, and levels of engagement with film rating and review platforms and social media to capture diverse patterns of film-viewing practices. (Guest et al., 2006) have shown that thematic saturation in qualitative research can often be achieved with relatively small samples, depending on the study's focus and sample characteristics. However, the findings of this study are not intended to represent Generation Z audiences in Indonesia as a whole. Instead, they provide analytically grounded insights into how a specific group of digitally engaged Gen Z participants interpret and engage with platform-based film evaluation practices. In this sense, the study aims to contribute to theoretical understanding rather than to produce statistically generalisable claims (Boddy, 2016; Sim et al., 2018).

To ensure transparency and enhance the study's credibility, the demographic profile of each participant is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Profile

Informant	Age	Sex	Education Level	Occupation / Status	Primary Film Platform(s) Used	Social Media Actively Used	Film-Viewing Frequency
I1	21	Female	Undergraduate student	Communication student	Letterboxd, IMDb	Instagram, X (Twitter)	3–4 films/week
I2	21	Female	Undergraduate student	Media studies student	Letterboxd	Instagram, TikTok	2–3 films/week
I3	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	Freelance creative worker	Letterboxd, Rotten Tomatoes	Instagram, TikTok	1–2 films/week
I4	27	Female	Master's degree	Office employee	IMDb, Letterboxd	Instagram	1–2 films/week
I5	26	Male	Bachelor's degree	Digital content editor	IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes	X (Twitter), Instagram	2–3 films/week
I6	15	Male	High school student	Student	IMDb	TikTok, YouTube	1 film/week

Source: Researcher processed data, (2024)

The inclusion of students, working individuals, and a younger participant (aged 15) allows the study to explore different stages of media engagement and platform literacy within Gen Z. This variation supports the exploratory aims of the research and enables a more nuanced interpretation of how film applications and social media shape viewing preferences across different contexts.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. First, all interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarisation. Initial open coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns in film preference formation, platform use, and social interaction. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories through axial coding, yielding several key themes that reflect the digital dialectic among film applications, social media, and audience practices. To enhance the analysis's credibility, the coding process was conducted iteratively, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data while remaining informed by the theoretical frameworks of technological determinism and participatory culture.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed several qualitative rigor strategies. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by means of ongoing memo-writing and critical self-

reflection during data analysis. This practice facilitated examination of underlying assumptions and interpretive positions when engaging with participants' responses. The coding process was iterative, beginning with open coding and followed by refinement of categories through repeated comparison across transcripts. Emerging themes were systematically reviewed and re-evaluated against the data to ensure consistency and to avoid premature interpretation. To minimize interpretive bias, the analysis utilized constant comparison across participants and maintained a close connection between interpretations and supporting quotations. These procedures ensured that the findings remained grounded in the data while preserving analytical depth and coherence.

This study has obtained ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga (Certificate Number: 8960/B/UN3.FISIP/III/PT./2025). All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, ensuring compliance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Subsequently, the interview conversations were transcribed, and data reduction was conducted by selecting and categorising information relevant to the study's objectives.

## Result and Discussion

### The Gen Z Phenomenon in the Digital Film Consumption Ecosystem

Gen Z is not a passive market for the film industry but an active agent of change in redefining how films are produced, promoted, and discussed within the digital ecosystem (Yu, 2025). For Gen Z, film is no longer perceived solely as a medium of entertainment, but as a social tool as well. They use film both as a starting point for discussion and a medium for interaction among fans by building digital communities (Wibowo et al., 2024). These communities emerge from shared interests in various film formats and genres (Switek, 2021), encouraging individuals to gather and share information.

As (Jenkins, 2012) suggests in the concept of participatory culture, audiences in digital environments do not only consume media texts but also contribute to the circulation and reinterpretation of cultural content. Within this participatory ecosystem, film-related platforms function as social spaces where users connect with others who share similar cinematic interests and identities. As revealed through the interviews, fans engage in creating, modifying, and distributing content about films, thereby enriching their viewing experiences and strengthening their sense of identity as members of a fan community. Such communities enable exchanging information and perspectives and expand the discourse surrounding the themes of the films they consume.

*"When I joined Letterboxd, it felt as if I have my own community—especially with fellow film enthusiasts. It's hard to find people who are into films in real life, so I really liked the vibe here."* – (I2, Personal Communication, 7 November 2024)

*"I personally prefer using Letterboxd because it's much easier to find other films. Sometimes, users post lists of the films they've watched, and I can get a lot of information from there."* – (I3, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)

Gen Z's digital activities are often influenced by whether the services of the platform align with their personal values and beliefs (Harahap et al., 2023). They tend to choose platforms based on the features and interface, commonly referred to as the 'user interface' (UI). Gen Z users are particular about several UI elements, including content quality, privacy and security, responsiveness, and communication features (Iskandar & Yunita, 2025; Kaur et al., 2025). These interface elements structure how users discover films, interpret ratings, and participate in film-related discussions.

Film rating and review platforms such as Letterboxd, IMDb, and Rotten Tomatoes each offer distinct interface designs that shape different forms of user engagement. Letterboxd, for instance, emphasises a social and diary-like interface that allows users to log films they have watched, create personalised lists, and follow other users' activity feeds. This design encourages a sense of community and continuous interaction among film enthusiasts.

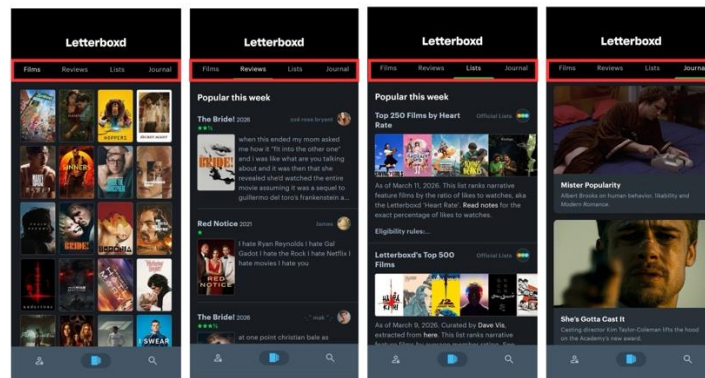


Figure 4. The Letterboxd app's home screen with 4 (four) main submenus (highlighted in red box)  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Figure 4 depicts the Letterboxd interface, organized around four primary menus: Films, Reviews, Lists, and Journal. Each menu structures user interaction into distinct yet interconnected evaluative practices. Rather than functioning as a neutral interface, this design actively shapes how users encounter, interpret, and engage with films. The prominence of sections such as “Popular this week” and curated lists (e.g., “Top 250 Films”) demonstrates that visibility is both algorithmically and socially constructed, directing users toward films that are already highly rated or widely discussed. This interface design reinforces a feedback loop in which visibility and evaluation are mutually constitutive: films that attract attention receive more ratings and reviews, which further increase their prominence on the platform.

The separation between menus such as “Reviews” and “Lists” reflects distinct modes of participation, ranging from individual expression to collective curation. However, these participatory forms are structured by platform logics that prioritize quantifiable metrics, including ratings, popularity, and interaction frequency. As a result, the interface encourages simplified and rapid evaluation, with numerical ratings and short-form reviews becoming the dominant modes of judgment. In this context, the Letterboxd interface not only displays film information but also actively shapes evaluative behavior. It organizes user attention, standardizes judgment, and reinforces platform-driven notions of visibility and legitimacy within film discourse.

One informant highlighted how the simplicity of Letterboxd’s interface supports accessibility for new film enthusiasts:

*“...I use these apps—especially Letterboxd—because its UI is really helpful for beginner cinephiles. The features are not complicated, and it’s very user-friendly even for first-time users.” – (I3, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)*

In contrast, IMDb presents a more information-oriented interface that prioritises film metadata, detailed user reviews, and rating aggregation.

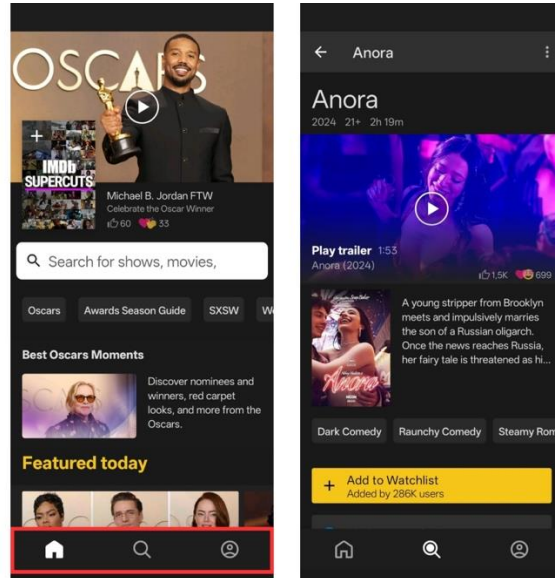


Figure 5. The IMDb app's home screen, which features three submenus represented solely by icons (highlighted in red boxes) and a search bar that displays detailed information about movies (on right figure).

Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Figure 5 depicts the IMDb interface, featuring a minimalist design with icon-based menus and a prominent search function. In contrast to community-oriented platforms, IMDb emphasizes searchability and direct access to film information, positioning users primarily as information seekers rather than active participants in discourse. The prominence of the search bar as a central feature directs user behavior toward intentional, goal-oriented navigation. Films are typically accessed through prior knowledge, such as title, actor, or trending content, rather than through exploratory browsing. This design differs from feed-based or socially curated interfaces by diminishing communal discovery and reinforcing an individualized mode of engagement.

The film detail page (right figure) presents a hierarchical arrangement of information, foregrounding elements such as ratings, trailers, and popularity indicators. These features serve as evaluative cues, enabling users to quickly assess a film's perceived quality and relevance. The "Add to Watchlist" feature further integrates evaluation with future consumption by transforming user intention into trackable data within the platform. Thus, the IMDb interface not only provides information but also structures evaluative behavior by prioritizing efficiency, standardized metrics, and individualized navigation. This approach reinforces a model of film evaluation that is less dialogic and more data-driven, embedding authority in aggregated ratings and platform-organized visibility rather than in extended critical discourse.

This information architecture positions IMDb not only as a social platform but also as a reference-oriented knowledge hub for film audiences seeking detailed contextual information about cinematic works. Previous studies have highlighted how digital film databases such as IMDb function as informational infrastructures that structure how audiences access, evaluate, and interpret film-related knowledge (Switek, 2021). One informant described how IMDb provides access to more detailed film discussions compared to short-form social media reviews:

*"I use IMDb while learning English. I enjoy giving ratings there. On social media like TikTok, people's reviews are short and lack detail. On IMDb, many users write very detailed reviews."* – (I6, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)

Meanwhile, Rotten Tomatoes foregrounds its critic–audience score system, visually separating professional critic evaluations from general audience responses. Through these design choices, each platform structures how film evaluation is presented and interpreted by users.



Figure 6. Rotten Tomatoes App Guideline

Source: <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/app/>

Figure 6 presents the principal interface features of the Rotten Tomatoes application, organized into three core functions: film discovery (“Find What to Watch”), watchlist management (“Curate Personal Watchlists”), and evaluation (“Let Your Voice Be Heard”). These features structure user engagement by determining how users encounter, organize, and assess films on the platform.

The “Find What to Watch” function serves as a discovery tool that guides users to curated and recommended content. Rather than enabling neutral exploration, this feature structures visibility by prioritizing specific films, thereby influencing which titles users are most likely to encounter and consider.

The “Curate Personal Watchlists” feature allows users to create and organize watchlists for future viewing. This function extends engagement beyond immediate consumption by embedding films within a personalized system of anticipation and planning. Furthermore, it generates user data that informs subsequent recommendations.

The “Let Your Voice Be Heard” feature emphasizes rating and review practices, presenting evaluation as a visible and quantifiable activity. By encouraging users to rate and share opinions, the platform incorporates individual judgments into an aggregated evaluation system that shapes broader perceptions of film quality and legitimacy. Collectively, these features demonstrate how the platform organizes film engagement into three interconnected processes: discovery, watchlist formation, and evaluation. Through these mechanisms, user behavior is guided and standardized within a platform-mediated environment.

From the perspective of technological determinism, interface design can be understood as a technological structure that shapes patterns of media consumption and participation. As (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) argue in their Uses and Gratifications 2.0 framework, features embedded within digital platforms such as rating systems, comment sections, and recommendation lists create new forms of gratification that influence how users interact with media. Similarly, interface design functions as a form of “technological affordance” that guides user behaviour by making certain actions easier or more visible than others.

As studies on digital applications have shown, visual interface design can significantly influence how users perceive quality, emotional engagement, and behavioural responses when interacting with digital platforms. For instance, (Saha & Mathew, 2025) demonstrates that visual aesthetics embedded in app interfaces play an important role in shaping the emotional responses and behavioural engagement of digitally native consumers, particularly among Generation Z users. Thus, using digital platforms or applications for entertainment purposes as well as building communities and forming identities as film enthusiasts lead Gen Z to create meaningful social discussions about films on these platforms. Consequently, Gen Z is not merely a consumer of cinema, but also a transformative agent driving innovation within the film industry.

### Film Rating and Review Platforms and Gen Z Viewing Preferences

Film rating and review platforms such as IMDb, Letterboxd, and Rotten Tomatoes function not only as informational resources but also as infrastructures that shape how Gen Z discovers and evaluates films. Features such as curated lists, user reviews, and recommendation systems facilitate film discovery and contribute to preference formation. As one participant explained,

*“Features like playlists or user-created lists are helpful. Sometimes they help me discover films I haven’t watched yet or plan to watch, and reading the reviews posted there gives me more insight into the film.” – (I1, Personal Communication, 5 November 2024)*

Additionally, these platforms promote organic marketing through word of mouth, with fan-generated content and recommendations playing a significant role in attracting new audiences (Hidayatullah et al., 2025; Jingke & Jiayi, 2021). However, interview findings reveal that these platforms pose a challenge to the credibility of user-generated reviews. Some informants expressed concerns that reviews may sometimes (a) not reflect the true quality of the films, and (b) be overly subjective, biased, or lacking in analytical depth.

*“Compared to professional critics, reviews on film apps and social media are easier to understand. But I prefer (influencer) reviews on social media over those in apps. On Letterboxd, some reviews are nonsensical, while on social media, influencers are firmer.” – (I4, Personal Communication, 9 November 2024)*

*“But honestly, none of them can be considered consistently reliable. I personally believe that Letterboxd is more for entertainment. The reviews are sometimes silly or just jokes.” – (I1, Personal Communication, 5 November 2024)*

Figure 7 illustrates examples of these ‘nonsensical’ or humorous reviews on the Letterboxd app (circled in red). On the left, a user humorously notes in their review of *A Quiet Place: Day One* (2024) that the film's aliens should be hired to work at movie theatres. On the right, a review of *Like & Share* (2022) includes a fabricated quote from an international football player.

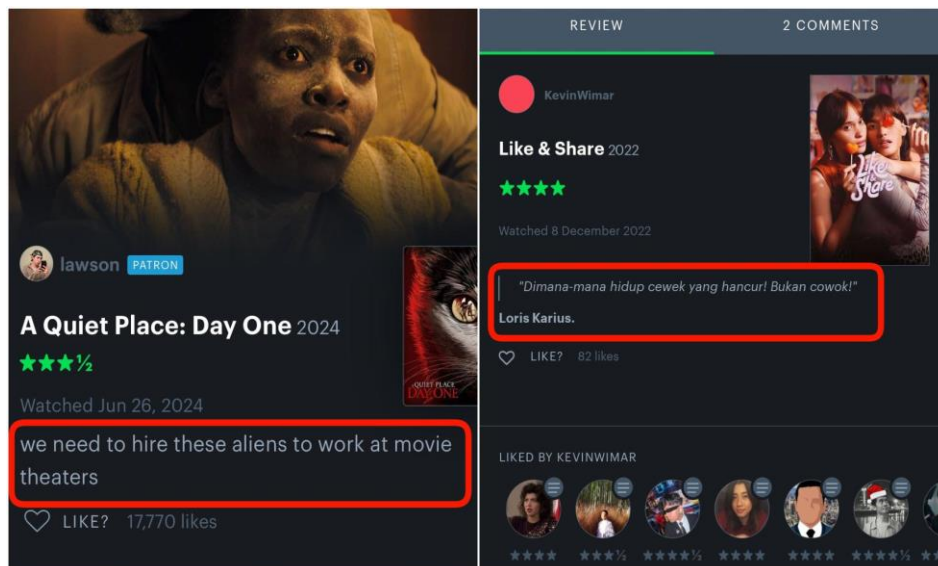


Figure 7. Reviews from Letterboxd app users.  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

These examples illustrate a shift in the function of film reviews from analytical critique to expressive and performative communication. In this context, reviews are often designed not to evaluate films in a traditional critical sense, but rather to entertain, signal personal taste, or facilitate engagement with other users within the platform’s social environment. This trend corresponds with the broader logic of participatory media, in which visibility and engagement frequently take precedence over analytical depth and rigor (Carpentier, 2016; Karanasios et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, the prevalence of these reviews raises questions regarding evaluative authority and credibility. Although these expressive forms contribute to a more accessible and inclusive discourse, they also obscure the distinctions between critique, commentary, and entertainment. Consequently, users must navigate these diverse evaluative forms through selective interpretation, distinguishing between informative reviews and those primarily motivated by humor or social interaction.

In this context, the Letterboxd interface facilitates a form of participatory evaluation that is both democratizing and destabilizing. It broadens participation in film discourse while simultaneously complicating the criteria by which films are meaningfully assessed. Despite these reviews, film applications such as Letterboxd remain widely used by Gen Z for sharing film reviews and fostering shared viewing preferences. Letterboxd, in particular, offers social and audiovisual features that enhance its recommendation algorithms for users (Penning, 2022).

*“Yes, it affects my preferences—especially since films from the West are often released a day or two later in Indonesia. So, if I want to read their reviews, I check them on Letterboxd.” – (I1, Personal Communication, 5 November 2024)*

*“Sometimes I check IMDb for ratings first, but I use Letterboxd for reading comments or reviews.” – (I5, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)*

Additionally, IMDb utilises aggregated user ratings, enabling audiences to evaluate films on a numerical scale that frequently serves as a rapid reference for assessing a film’s popularity and perceived quality.

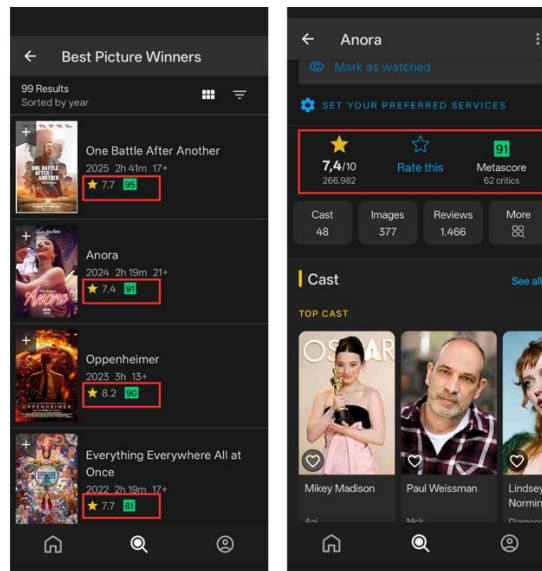


Figure 8. Reviews from IMDb app users.  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

As shown in Figure 8, these ratings are prominently displayed alongside other metrics such as Metascore, creating a layered system of evaluation that combines both audience-generated and critic-based judgments. This interface design foregrounds numerical indicators as primary evaluative cues, allowing users to form quick judgments without engaging in deeper critical analysis. The visibility of ratings in list-based formats (left figure) further reinforces comparative evaluation, in which films are assessed relative to one another using quantifiable scores.

As a result, evaluation becomes increasingly compressed into numerical values that are easily scannable and comparable. At the same time, the coexistence of multiple scoring systems—such as user ratings and critic scores—introduces a hierarchy of evaluative authority within the platform. While user ratings reflect collective audience opinion, critic-based metrics such as Metascore retain a form of institutional legitimacy, creating a hybrid evaluative structure that blends popular and professional judgments. In this sense, IMDb does not merely present ratings as neutral information

but structures evaluative behavior by prioritizing speed, comparability, and quantification. This shifts film evaluation toward a data-driven logic, where numerical aggregation becomes a dominant mechanism through which films are interpreted, ranked, and legitimized within digital platforms.

Rotten Tomatoes employs a dual-rating system, comprising the Tomatometer, which reflects critics' reviews, and the Audience Score, which represents the opinions of general viewers.

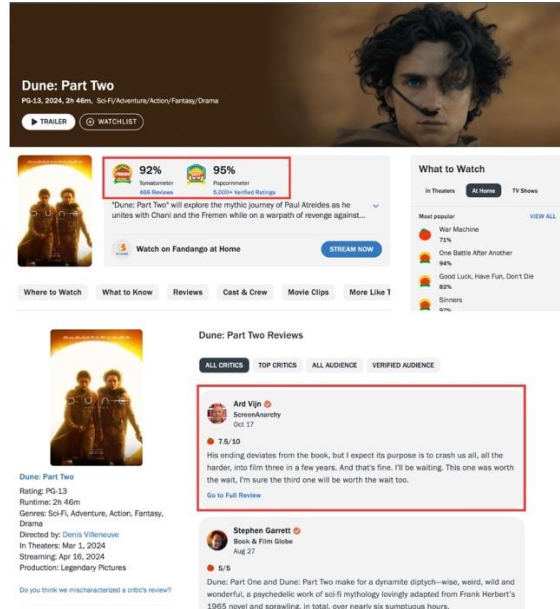


Figure 9. Reviews from Rotten Tomatoes app users.  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

This dual system introduces a structured distinction between expert authority and audience opinion, positioning film evaluation as a site of negotiation rather than consensus. Unlike single-score platforms, Rotten Tomatoes explicitly foregrounds the possibility that critics and audiences may evaluate the same film differently, thereby exposing tensions in how cinematic quality is defined and legitimized. The visual prominence of both scores encourages users to compare and interpret these differences, shaping evaluative behavior through contrast rather than uniformity. In this sense, the platform does not simply provide ratings but stages a form of evaluative dialogue in which authority is distributed across competing sources.

Consequently, Rotten Tomatoes constructs a hybrid evaluative framework that both reinforces and destabilizes traditional criticism. While the Tomatometer preserves the role of professional critics as cultural arbiters, the Audience Score simultaneously challenges this authority by making collective user judgment equally visible. This reflects a broader transformation in digital film culture, where evaluative authority is no longer singular but negotiated across multiple, platform-mediated voices.

For Gen Z, IMDb is often seen as a practical, straightforward platform for checking ratings before watching a film, serving as an initial filter in the decision-making process. As one informant explained:

*"I usually check IMDb ratings first before deciding whether to watch a film" - (12, Personal Communication, 7 November 2024)*

Similarly, another participant emphasised the impact of ratings,

*"When the ratings are low, I tend to reconsider watching the film" - (16, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024).*

In contrast, Rotten Tomatoes offers a more nuanced evaluative framework, in which discrepancies between critics' and audience scores may elicit curiosity or scepticism regarding a film. As one informant explained:

*"if the critics and audience scores are different, it makes me curious, but also a bit doubtful about the film" - (13, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024).*

A similar perspective was expressed by another informant, who noted,

*“When the critics’ score is high but the audience score is low, I usually hesitate, because it feels like the film might not match what I expect” - (I4, Personal Communication, 9 November 2024).*

These findings demonstrate that discrepancies between institutional critics and general audiences can generate uncertainty, prompting users to question the credibility of both sources. Such differences indicate that rating systems are not neutral; rather, they actively construct meaning around films by framing them through specific evaluative perspectives (Basuroy et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the visibility of scores across both platforms shapes collective perceptions, as high or low ratings can significantly influence audience expectations before viewing. This trend reflects a broader shift in film evaluation, where numerical ratings and aggregated opinions increasingly guide audience behaviour (Pang et al., 2022a). Consequently, IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes not only disseminate information but also actively shape film reception, reinforcing the role of digital platforms as central agents in influencing cultural consumption patterns among Gen Z.

From the perspective of technological determinism, technology is not a passive tool but an active agent in shaping human behaviour and preferences (Qureshi, 2014; Țicău & Hadad, 2021). The use of film applications—particularly the way personalised recommendation algorithms function—plays a key role in determining what content users consume. These algorithms analyse user activity data such as watch history and reviews to suggest films aligned with user interests (Saini et al., 2024). Simultaneously, dedicated users who provide reviews and recommendations also influence users’ viewing preferences (Nikolic et al., 2023).

The features integrated into Film rating and review platforms actively shape the behaviours and preferences of Gen Z. Informants described how ratings and reviews influence their decisions and responses regarding film selection:

*“I always take my mom’s permission when I want to watch a movie, and my older sibling usually accompanies me. When Joker 2 was released, I wanted to watch it. But its ratings were poor. Many TikTok influencers also said that the film was not good, so I decided not to go.” - (I6, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)*

*“I have my own preferences when I wish to watch a film. I don’t always go by ratings. I like reviews, especially those that give a clear summary of the plot—that’s usually what I share with my friends when I recommend a film.” - (I4, Personal Communication, 9 November 2024)*

Thus, by both reflecting and actively shaping user interests, these technologies support the concept of technological determinism, which asserts that technology influences cognition, behaviour, and decision-making processes (Tiwow et al., 2023). New media platforms also enhance human connectivity and enable individuals to access tailored information more efficiently (Febriana, 2018; Zumstein & Hundertmark, 2017).

### **Global and Local Dialectical Shifts in Film Discourse**

The dialectics of media ethics in the digital age have been significantly transformed by technology, with traditional journalistic practices now challenged by the internet and mobile-based platforms on Android or iOS devices (Jin, 2020; P. Pathak, 2016). Professional journalists, experts, and film critics must now share the platform with tweeters and bloggers on social media. Discussions on ethical considerations in media are no longer limited to journalists and academics; everyday users of digital platforms also have a say on these issues. As Ward (2011) highlights, the domain of media ethics construction is no longer restricted to professionals.

Previously, film reviews were understood as a form of ethical and structured critical writing, in which a review functioned as a formal assessment of an intellectual or artistic work. However, the assumption that movie critics act independently in evaluating films has been increasingly questioned, as critics may also be influenced by audiences through informational and normative pressures that encourage them to align their ratings with popular tastes in order to maintain favorable relationships with the public (Deng, 2020; Pang et al., 2022b). Safitri (2022) outlines the systematic structure of a review: title, introduction, work identity, content, strengths, weaknesses, and conclusion. However,

this dialectical structure has seen a marked shift with the rise of social media discourse around films. The change has been catalysed by the presence of rating and review features on film applications. Based on social media activity observations, the following key transformations are observed in the discourse:

### 1. Changing Patterns in How Films Are Reported in Digital Media

Professional film reviews follow a conventional format including the title, director, writer, cast, synopsis, strengths, and weaknesses. In contrast, social media content creators often begin with a film's rating—sourced from platforms like IMDb, Letterboxd, or Rotten Tomatoes—before offering a short commentary or link to further reviews. Figure 10 illustrates this trend: media accounts use ratings as a core element in their posts. On the left, Screen Rant opens by citing the Rotten Tomatoes score and ends with a review link (underlined in red). Similarly, *DiscussingFilm* on the right starts with an IMDb rating.

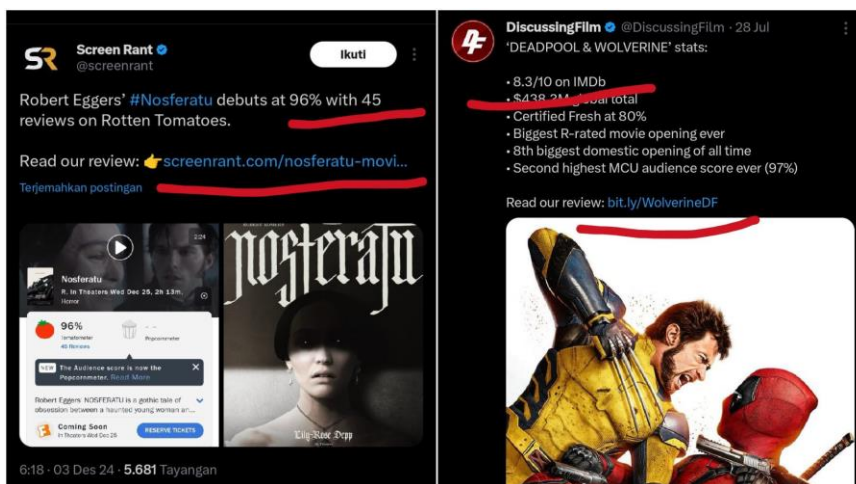


Figure 10. Rating text continues. Separate reviews from Screen Rant and *DiscussingFilm*.

Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

This pattern can be interpreted through the affordances of digital platforms, which emphasize visibility, brevity, and rapid information consumption. Numerical ratings serve as concise evaluative signals that are readily recognizable, easily shared, and quickly interpreted within fast-paced social media environments (Kunst et al., 2022). As McLuhan (1962) argues through the phrase “the medium is the message,” the structure of media platforms shapes not only how information is delivered but also how it is understood by audiences. Instead of entirely supplanting traditional forms of film criticism, this trend indicates a reconfiguration in the presentation and consumption of film-related information. Ratings increasingly function as preliminary framing devices, shaping audience perception prior to more in-depth engagement with critical analysis. Consequently, platform architectures promote a shift toward concise, metric-based communication, while conventional review structures persist alongside these emerging practices. Consequently, the technological architecture of these platforms encourages reviewers and media accounts to foreground ratings before deeper commentary, reshaping the conventional structure of film criticism (Fleming & Brown, 2015; Pickard, 2024).

### 2. Changing Patterns in the Expression of Praise and Disappointment

Traditionally, film reviews include both commendation and criticism expressed through structured written analysis. However, as illustrated in Figure 11, some Letterboxd users express evaluation solely through star ratings without accompanying written reviews. The absence of written commentary, indicated by the lack of the three-line review icon, suggests a tendency toward simplified forms of evaluative expression.

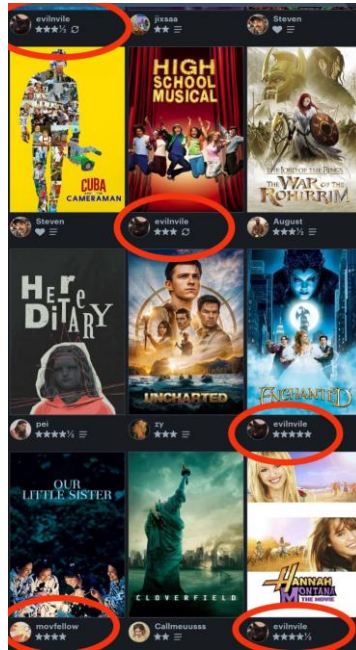


Figure 11. User interface Letterboxd  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

This pattern can be interpreted in relation to platform affordances that facilitate rapid and low-effort interaction. Features such as star-rating systems enable users to convey approval or dissatisfaction with minimal effort, thereby reducing reliance on extended written analysis. (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) observe that interface elements such as rating buttons and likes promote frequent yet simplified participation, a trend similarly identified in recent digital media environments (Krämer et al., 2021; Tenenboim, 2022). Instead of eliminating critical engagement, this tendency indicates a transformation in the modes of evaluative expression. Digital interfaces increase accessibility by reducing cognitive and temporal demands, while also promoting more immediate and concise responses. Consequently, technological design influences not only the manner in which users express evaluation but also the depth and structure of film discourse (Wessels, 2023).

### 3. Emerging Patterns in Platform-Based Film Promotion

The TV series *The Penguin* (2024) did not rely on traditional promotional campaigns. Instead, it showcased high IMDb ratings through its official media channels on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram (see Figure 12).

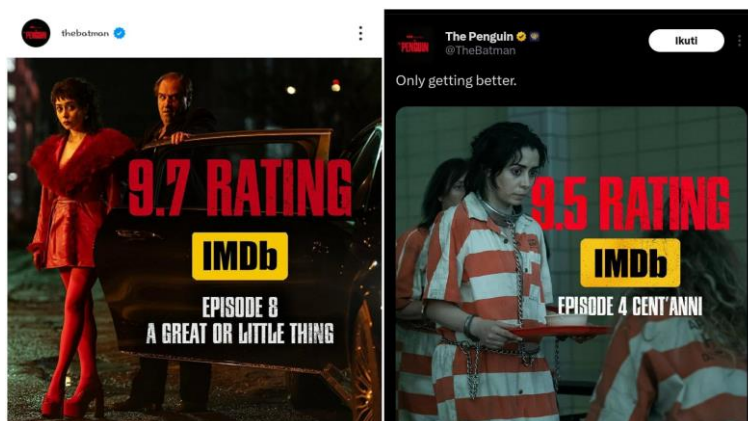


Figure 12. Batman's official accounts on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram show off their IMDb ratings.  
Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Interview data support this shift, showing that both film applications and social media are used to promote or share reviews.

*“Previously, I would share good reviews from IMDb to my Instagram story—or post my own reviews. But now, most of the time I just repost from the film’s official social media accounts.” – (I5, Personal Communication, 8 November 2024)*

Today, social media is a vital promotional tool for the film industry as viewers consult social media reviews or trailers before deciding whether to watch a film (Suvattanadilok, 2021; Xie, 2023). This accessibility helps shape audience expectations and enhances viewing satisfaction. From a technological determinism perspective, this promotional shift illustrates how technological infrastructures influence industry practices. Ellul (1967) argues that technological development often produces self-reinforcing cycles in which each innovation creates new communicative norms and expectations. In the contemporary digital environment, the widespread visibility of rating systems on platforms such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes has transformed these numerical indicators into powerful promotional tools. Film studios and official accounts strategically highlight these ratings to signal quality and attract audiences, demonstrating how technological systems shape not only audience behaviour but also marketing strategies within the film industry (Lee & Peng, 2024; Wu & Niyomsilp, 2022)

#### 4. Changing Patterns in How Film Recommendations Are Presented

Similar to how book reviews help determine whether a book is worth reading (Sasa & Dahlan, 2011), film reviews guide users on whether a movie is worth watching. However, currently, mentioning a film’s rating often substitutes for in-depth analysis. Figure 13 shows two film influencers on X who recommend films. Their posts incorporate rating elements either in the text or embedded images (highlighted in red boxes).

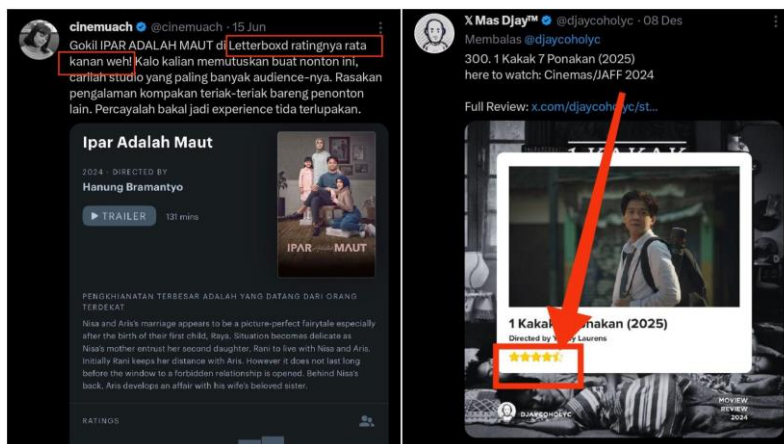


Figure 13. Two film influencers on X (formerly Twitter) recommend films with rating tags.

Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

#### 5. Changing Patterns in the Depth of Film Commentary

As was seen in Figure 14, Letterboxd users often post non-substantial or humorous reviews, mostly lacking analytical or contextual depth; these reviews are not subject to content warnings or editorial standards. Figure 14 displays further examples of non-substantive reviews from Letterboxd, circled in red.

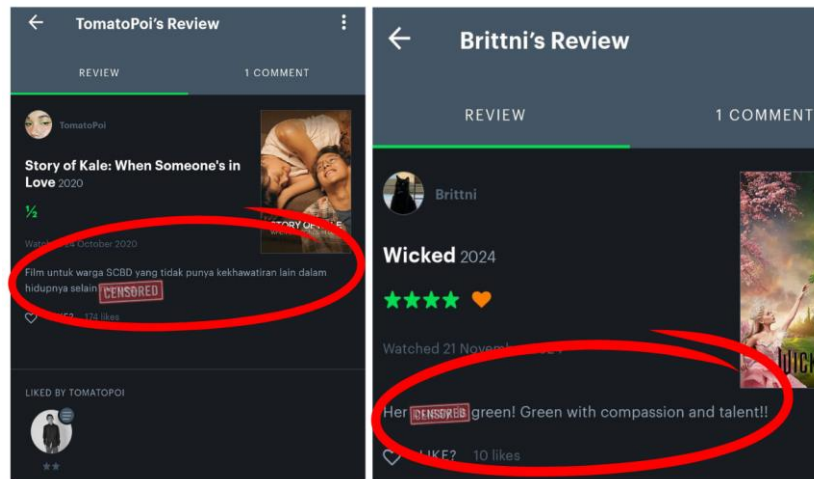


Figure 14. Insubstantial reviews by Letterboxd app users.

Source: Researcher documentation, (2024)

Modern communication technologies have fundamentally altered media consumption patterns, shifting audiences from passive recipients to active participants in media discourse (Alzubi, 2023; Ertz et al., 2024; Sutrisno, 2023). This shift is consistent with technological determinism, which posits that technological infrastructures shape social and cultural behaviors. The emergence of film rating and review platforms, together with social media, has enabled broader public engagement through features such as ratings, comments, and algorithmically curated content, thereby fostering new forms of interaction and participation (Prihantoro & Handayani, 2022). Consequently, film evaluation is now situated within dynamic, networked environments that emphasize visibility, interactivity, and rapid information circulation.

These global developments are evident in the restructuring of film criticism as an ecosystem shaped by platform-based visibility, interface design, and participatory practices. Audiences increasingly move beyond reliance on traditional authorities, instead engaging in pragmatic skepticism by critically navigating multiple sources of information across platforms (Andersen et al., 2023; Kyriakidou et al., 2023). In this context, digital media infrastructures shape not only film evaluation but also the processes of recommendation, circulation, and promotion, thereby reinforcing the central role of platforms in contemporary cultural consumption (Siciliano, 2022).

However, these transformations manifest differently across contexts, with the Indonesian setting introducing distinct conditions that influence platform-mediated film discourse. A significant factor is the temporal gap in film distribution, as international releases frequently reach Indonesian audiences later than elsewhere. This delay prompts users to engage with global platforms such as Letterboxd to access early reviews and discussions. As a result, Indonesian audiences participate in global evaluative discourse before their own viewing experiences, leading to asymmetrical media consumption.

Additionally, the prominent role of social media influencers in Indonesia significantly shapes platform-based evaluation. Instead of depending exclusively on platform-generated ratings, users often consult influencers who act as interpretive intermediaries, contextualizing and validating film evaluations within local cultural frameworks. This dynamic produces a hybrid evaluative practice, where global metrics are interpreted through locally trusted voices.

Furthermore, the integration of global platforms into everyday media practices in Indonesia is influenced by a highly social and networked digital culture, where sharing, reposting, and discussing film-related content are central to participation. Consequently, film evaluation is not solely an individual cognitive process but also a socially embedded activity negotiated across platforms, communities, and cultural contexts.

These dynamics indicate that the relationship between global platforms and local practices is generative rather than merely adaptive. Indonesian users do not simply adopt global evaluative systems; instead, they reinterpret and reconfigure these systems within locally situated media cultures. This process produces distinct forms of film discourse shaped by both technological infrastructures and cultural practices.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that film-viewing practices among Generation Z are increasingly shaped by the interaction between digital platforms and user practices. Rather than functioning as neutral tools, film rating and review platforms operate as infrastructures that organize visibility, structure evaluation, and influence how films are interpreted and selected. Within this environment, numerical ratings, simplified review practices, and social media amplification function as key mechanisms through which films gain visibility and perceived legitimacy.

At the same time, these processes are not unidirectional. The findings indicate that Gen Z users actively negotiate platform-based evaluation by combining ratings, reviews, and social media discourse with their own preferences, reflecting a digital dialectic between technological structures and user agency. Evaluation, therefore, is not simply determined by platforms but is continuously interpreted and reconfigured through everyday media practices.

This study contributes to media and film studies by offering an empirically grounded perspective on how film criticism can be understood as a platformized, algorithmically mediated cultural process rather than solely as a discrete textual practice. By examining the interaction among film ratings, review platforms, and social media, the study provides a more integrated account of how film discourse is produced, circulated, and engaged with in contemporary digital environments. Within the scope of this qualitative inquiry, the findings suggest a reconfiguration of evaluative authority, in which professional critics increasingly coexist with users, influencers, and platform algorithms in shaping how films are interpreted and valued.

In the Indonesian context, these global platform logics are locally mediated through influencer cultures, social sharing practices, and asynchronous access to film releases, producing distinct patterns of engagement and evaluation. This highlights how global technological infrastructures and local media practices interact to generate context-specific forms of film discourse.

While limited by its qualitative scope and relatively small sample, this study provides a foundation for future research on platform-mediated cultural consumption. Further studies could extend this work through comparative, longitudinal, or mixed-method approaches to better understand how digital infrastructures and social practices co-evolve across different cultural contexts.

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