

Predicting the Future Direction of the Film Industry Based on Audience Behavior

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Keywords: Audience Behaviour, Future Development of Film Industry, New Media Platform.

Abstract: With the rise of streaming platforms and the diversification of entertainment choices, there have been many changes in the behavior of moviegoers. Studying the future direction of the film industry based on audience behavior is of great significance to the recovery and development of the film industry in the present era. Based on the change of audience's behavior in film watching in recent years, this study uses the method of literature analysis and indexes analysis to predict the future direction of the film and puts forward relevant suggestions for the film industry. The study found that there is a need to make changes in content in terms of emotional resonance and selection of subject matter, in terms of technology there is a need to use special effects technology such as real-time data analysis, and in terms of marketing there is a need to make good use of streaming media platforms.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of new media pervasiveness, people have shifted from passively receiving media information to actively creating media content, it can be argued that viewers have become media users and producers simultaneously (Afifah et al., 2022). Social media and streaming services (e.g. Weibo and Tik Tok) have enabled people to watch films and TV series on their smartphones, tablets or other portable devices anytime, anywhere, and all they need is an internet connection (Chen, 2023). The strict scheduling system of traditional cinemas is gone, and if audiences want to watch a film, streaming platforms can help them do it. In addition, viewers can immediately spread the viewing experience through social media as well as the comment section of the streaming platform, thus creating a word-of-mouth effect. The instant feedback mechanism has had a profound impact on the way word-of-mouth marketing and box office success of films. Therefore, it is important for filmmakers to track consumer opinions on social media platforms in a timely manner and adjust their marketing strategies and promotional directions accordingly to enhance the audience's viewing experience.

The film industry has entered the digital age, fueled by streaming sites and technological advances.

The popularity of traditional cinemas is diminishing, with a growing mix of pay channels and soft platforms for film viewing. In 2020, the depth of film production in China is projected to be 37 percent, but the number of subscribers to streaming service channels has increased dramatically (Chen & Liu, 2023); Netflix has more than 200 million subscriptions to its service worldwide. While box office revenues once signaled success in the film industry, the emergence of streaming platforms has allowed films to be made directly by or for audiences. This has created new opportunities for filmmakers and distributors, as well as new challenges. Innovative mechanisms, including subscription schemes, derivative merchandise development, and intra-industry collaborations, have brought new dynamics to growth. In addition, the application of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, and big data to optimize content recommendations are changing the way films are made and presented, driving innovation in the film industry (Lee et al., 2016b).

In this context, this paper discusses the influence of audience behavior on the development of the film industry, to put forward some suggestions for reference on the future development of the film.

2 TRACKING AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR

2.1 Audience Viewing Habits

Audiences tend to watch movies online and are fragmented (Miles, 2019). At the beginning of the epidemic outbreak, Chinese cinema attendance dropped by 68%, but online viewing surged by 70%. Audiences favored short content (e.g., film reviews on Tik Tok) and often watched classic films (e.g., *The Shawshank Redemption*) multiple times.

Audiences watch movies through social media. Viewers interact with each other through barrage (e.g. Bilibili) or live streaming with microphones (e.g. TikTok), creating a "cloud movie watching" community. Users on Weibo and TikTok shared their opinions about *Detective Chinatown 3*, which became one of the key factors for the film's first-day box office to break 1 billion yuan.

2.2 Audience Consumption Behavior

The audience's behavior of paying to watch movies presents different wills. 70% of online viewers are willing to pay for the films they want to watch, but they want the films to be of high quality (e.g. original Netflix films). "*Ne Zha*" has also increased, resulting in total sales of more than \$200 million for the peripherals products. The subscription model of OTT platforms allows viewers to choose multiple sets and pay flexibly according to their needs (Chen, 2023). Therefore, the value of content to viewers is also related to the role of certain channels, such as social media and internet media, especially as viewing experiences shared on social media platforms can significantly influence the consumption decisions of other viewers. Audiences are more cautious about buying tickets and watching movies offline. 59% of viewers say they are saving money on trips to the cinema and instead investing in home cinema tools, such as projectors, and private on-demand services).

2.3 Audience Content Preferences

The current state of viewers is that they are increasingly demanding diverse content, mainly localized and regionalization content (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). OTT platforms cater to the different needs of viewers: they support multilingualism and multiculturalism. Viewers like content that is relevant to their own cultural backgrounds around the world. In addition, people want interactive and participatory

experiences, so the use of virtual reality and augmented reality technologies brings new forms of viewing. In addition, viewers show a strong interest in action, science fiction and superhero films, as evidenced by the global popularity of Marvel films.

2.4 Audience Viewing Mechanism

In the new media era, criticism of films is no longer focused on professional critics, but shifted to the public, with an emphasis on popularity, fragmentation and real-time feedback. Therefore, the ecology of film criticism is diversified. In the age of digital communication, the film viewer's experience does not end with the closing credits. Viewers can go to social media platforms such as Weibo or Tik Tok, or use streaming services such as Tencent Video, and post a large number of short comments, emojis, or barrage, creating what is known as "instant word-of-mouth". To illustrate, the film "*Hi Mom*" reached billions of readers on Weibo on its first day of release. The "mother-daughter love" video created by users in the style of "capsule" triggered emotional resonance and indirectly boosted box office growth.

The platform presents differentiated characteristics. The success of art films and the audience's decision on which film to watch is directly related to Douban's in-depth and lengthy review and rating system. For example, *Return to Dust* rating on Douban largely helped viewers choose the film, which had a rating of 8.4, allowing it to transition from niche to mainstream. A film's highlights or shortcomings quickly go viral through short 15-second videos. By highlighting certain details in micro formats, short videos have an impact on potential viewers. For example, the topic "*Moon Man*" has over 2 billion views, directly influencing people's decision to watch the film. Bilibili, the culture of screen comments brings people together, creating a collective atmosphere for watching films. The implementation of this "barrage" reinforces the audience's emotional engagement. For example, in the screen comments of *The Wandering Earth 2*, high-frequency words such as "tears in my eyes" and "the rise of Chinese sci-fi" reinforce the audience's emotional identification. Words reinforce the audience's emotional identification.

Algorithmic Recommendation and Film Review Visibility. Positive feedback loops and information filtering: Streaming media platforms use data algorithms to automatically present and filter certain film reviews, creating a "review filter bubble". Based on monitoring the behavior of Netflix viewers, similar movie reviews are recommended to viewers,

who are mostly fans of Marvel movies. As a result, reviews such as "explosive special effects" and "tight plot" continue to appear, confirming the audience's genre preference and leading to under-exposure of niche films.

However, certain platforms do not hesitate to influence word-of-mouth by filtering unfavorable reviews or purchasing many promoters to boost ratings. For example, the film *Shanghai Fortress* saw its rating plummet to 2.9 on Douban, suggesting censorship of negative reviews and mistrust among viewers.

The Reverse Impact of Film Reviews on the Industry Chain. Nowadays, audience reviews are no longer limited to consumer satisfaction but cover almost the entire process from review creation to production decision-making, so this concept can be called the closed loop of "review to creation". Marvel has responded by deepening its Asian characters in subsequent series, tapping Chinese director Zhao Ting for the lead role in the film *Eternals*. The trailer for *The Wandering Earth* has been edited to focus on the comedic elements, appealing to a different type of audience, reminiscent of the "Shen Teng style" of popular comedy clips popularized by TikTok.

3 STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FILM INDUSTRY BASED ON AUDIENCE VIEWING BEHAVIOR

3.1 Content Suggestions

Works should deeply study the emotional characteristics of specific cultural groups, such as the Chinese nation's unique concept of family affection. 2020-2022 audience feedback data for the anti-epidemic-themed films (Murthy et al., 2023). *Embrace Again* and *Chinese Doctors* show that words such as "touched", and "tribute" appeared as frequently as 73.6%. " And other words appear as frequently as 73.6%. This not only reflects people's emotional memories or feelings in a specific period but also reflects people's strong need for a sense of belonging.

Contemporary audiences are often too critical of works that lack emotional sincerity, and creativity should not be empty sermons or idealized expressions. It is recommended to adopt the "grey scale narrative" technique to face up to real conflicts

while maintaining humanistic concern. For example, family-themed content should not rely on the traditional narrative structure of portraying all parents as perfect but should build a more believable emotional bond by showcasing the many facets of human nature in the intergenerational conflict, like Su Daqiang in the TV drama *All is Well*.

Emotional expression should resonate with the current social fashion, and can focus on three main directions: firstly, reconstructing more than 30 women's images in the era of gender issues to "enhance women's status"; secondly, humanistic reflection on the ethics of technology, such as the series *"Black Mirror"*; Finally, it reflects the existential anxiety of the post-pandemic era. When portraying the mentality of modern people, new forms such as multi-stranded narratives and open-ended endings should be adopted, such as the metaphorical class ending in *"Parasite"*.

Family ethics (42% share), growing pains (31%), and identity (19%) are still the emotional conventions of the global market. The creative strategy suggests adopting an "emotional modularization" design to dismantle and reconstruct the traditional emotional elements. For example, *"Lighting Up the Stars"* combines the funeral theme with a childish perspective to realize the contemporary transformation of the theme of affection in the innovation of the genre.

Emotional representation should dare to make a breakthrough based on ethics, involving multiple age groups and multiple fields, increasing the demand for emotional impact from film viewers (Nie, 2022). Vertically, it deals with the online loneliness of Generation Z (e.g. *Eighth Grade*) and the digital skills gap of previous generations (e.g. *The Father*). Horizontally, it expands into new territory, addressing topics such as human-computer emotions (*Her*) and ecological empathy (*Wolf Totem*). It is proposed to create a multidimensional parametric model using sentiment spectrum analysis to characterize emotions.

3.2 Topic Selection

Nowadays, people are under high social pressure, and they like to get emotional resonance and escape from reality with short entertainment. Therefore, the choice of film themes should meet the audience's psychological expectations. Themes should be differentiated, avoiding overly personal expressions and traditional "formula scripts". Even in a fast-paced culture, creators still need to keep their heads down and maintain the depth of their content and the visual

appeal of scenes. In addition, they should favor topics that are familiar to the audience, such as the production of popular IP and sequels. Be adept at capturing the emotional pain points and social concerns of the times to win the audience's empathy.

3.3 Technology Applications

Using high-precision CGI and VR/AR technologies, the rendering of micro-expressions of the characters is enhanced to enhance emotional expression. To reduce costs and increase efficiency while ensuring picture quality, we give priority to IMAX-compatible equipment and efficient filming processes (Paksiutov, 2021). Research on the integration of virtual and real modes, such as combining virtual idols and real performances to achieve interdimensional performance innovation.

Intelligent assisted script generation, automated post-production special effects, real-time multi-language translation and audience behavior prediction systems are all based on artificial intelligence technology of the whole industry chain (Peng, 2023). The box office prediction model based on machine learning combines traditional indicators such as actor influence, film type, production budget, etc., and at the same time, simultaneously captures news heat, social media opinion and user emotional tendency data to build a multi-dimensional prediction system. Using big data tracking technology, we can analyze audience feedback in real-time and dynamically adjust operation strategies. For example, we responded to negative feedback by releasing undisclosed clips on official microblogs, producing documentaries for explanation, and initiating a local content reset mechanism.

3.4 Marketing Model Innovation

Optimize the recommendation mechanism of the platform's homepage through machine learning algorithms to achieve accurate and personalized content delivery. Aiming at the trend of rising home viewing ratio, it is necessary to build a multi-platform distribution matrix: after the film finishes cinema screening, simultaneously expand TV media (basic/pay channels) and streaming media cooperation channels and enhance user participation through enhanced interactive functions (Shi, 2023). Adopt a tiered viewing strategy, e.g. offer free trials to attract users, then guide them to buy individual films or sign up for membership packages, coupled with an online pre-sale system to fully convert premiere ticket sales into revenue. Through the short-

video platform, its operations are achieved by placing targeted adverts through the purchase of "Douban" promotion services and creating an account matrix by integrating IP-derived content such as extra scenes from undisclosed episodes and early soundtracks of band-themed works. In addition, interactive topic challenges were introduced to inspire users to share content.

Implement a diversified marketing approach: including non-theatrical advertising campaigns such as movie trailers, celebrity road shows and special screenings; develop movie-centric theme parks, as well as IP peripherals and co-branded games to expand the value chain; and social responsibility can be fulfilled by developing relevant public service organizations in line with the theme of the film. In order to satisfy the needs of moviegoers to watch movies at home, we have launched the "Free Projector with Super VIP" campaign, as well as "Gift Packs with Exclusive Movie Sources" and "Movie Gift Packs with Home Theatre Ambient Lighting and Customized Snacks", which provide movie gift sets. Movie gift sets such as "gift packs with exclusive movie sources" and "gift packs with home cinema ambient lighting and customized snacks" were also launched to meet the needs of viewers for immersive movie watching when they could not go out due to time constraints.

Although it is the era of big data, workers should maintain professional ethics and respect for the industry, support originality, and oppose plagiarism and AI scripts. To balance commercial and artistic values, know that the audience's IQ is online; Make proper use of the "fast food culture" industrial chain in combination with the times, so that the film industry can make a big profit and meet the needs of the audience.

4 CONCLUSION

The study found that audiences' viewing habits have become more online and fragmented, and that they are more cautious in their consumption, preferring to save on cinema spending and only consume films with high word-of-mouth and quality. In the age of digital communication, word-of-mouth doesn't end when the credits roll - everyone is a critic, and every comment on a film has the potential to influence its success. With the leisure time of the audience (20–35-year-old) being drastically reduced, if a film fails to satisfy the audience's quest for quality entertainment, the audience will turn to other diversified forms of entertainment. With the increasing variety of

entertainment choices, people's expectation of entertainment experience has also increased, which makes the traditional film industry face unprecedented challenges, and innovation and transformation has become an urgent task. The traditional mode of film production, distribution and marketing is undergoing a profound change, and the film industry must quickly adapt to this change to meet new market trends and the growing demands of audiences. Against this backdrop, every aspect of the film industry needs to be re-examined and adapted to ensure that it can continue to attract and meet audience expectations. Therefore, it is recommended that the film industry make certain changes in three areas: content, use of technology and marketing methods. The content and themes of future productions should be chosen to be as close to the audience's lives as possible, evoke sufficient emotional resonance, and be in line with localization, authenticity, contemporaneity, universality and diversity. The plot should be compact and avoid formulaic expressions to retain the audience. Technologically, there should be extensive application of real-time data analysis and dynamic optimization of media as well as audience opinion, and application of VR, AR, CGI, etc. to enhance visual impact. In terms of marketing, it is necessary to make efficient use of the resources of network platforms (e.g., premium-cable TV, TikTok), build a diverse entertainment ecosystem, shoulder social responsibility, and balance the commercial value and artistic value.

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