Reviving Cinema: Understanding Audience Preferences, Cultural Norms, and Future Directions in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This research explores the key factors influencing audience preferences for cinema experiences, the relationship between cultural norms and expectations, and the development of a future research model for Saudi cinema audiences. Additionally, strategic insights for stakeholders such as content creators and cinema operators are proposed. The study involved 16 in-depth interviews with Saudi cinema-goers. A semi-structured interview guideline was prepared, and data were analyzed using a three-step coding analysis method to uncover the core themes related to cinema audience preferences, cultural dynamics, and future trends in the entertainment industry. Key factors such as cultural relevance, immersive experiences, and technological integration emerged as critical drivers of audience preferences. The findings highlight the tension between maintaining cultural authenticity and adopting global cinematic influences. The study also proposes a future research model focused on evolving entertainment needs and strategic recommendations for stakeholders to enhance audience engagement and adapt to changing cultural norms. This study offers a unique contribution by addressing the intersection of cultural norms and cinema preferences in a rapidly evolving entertainment landscape. The implications extend to stakeholders within the cinema industry, providing actionable insights to improve content creation, audience engagement, and business strategies in line with audience expectations.

Keywords: Cinema, Audience Preferences, Cultural Norms, Strategic Insights, Entertainment Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The changes which occurred in the industry of cinema have been vivid over the past two decades through the change in technologies, audience preferences, and cultural dynamics. Cinema is fundamentally an entertainment film which was locally done, evolved into a world industry, and allows people to utilize their talents and language towards storytelling and cultural expressions.[1] Cinema as a product of culture reflects the aspirations, wants and trends in society, and its attributes in connecting audiences with film have made it qualified for discussion at both popular and academic platforms.[2] Digital platforms and streaming services currently dictate how audiences interact with film, changing the way cinema has traditionally been run.[1] This leaves traditional cinema operators with no choice but to change their operations to survive in the new platform of entertainment delivery.[3]

Past empirical studies investigated various aspects of the film industry, ranging from audience behavior to the economic impacts of films on international markets.[4] Various studies have shown that audience tastes and preferences are formed through an intricate interplay of cultural, social, and technological factors in the market.[5] For instance, the viewership engagement study indicated a necessity for personalization as a way of enhancing the cinematic experience through the desire by audiences to have culturally and value-related contents in the preferred movies.[6] Other studies have identified the use of technologies, either virtual or augmented reality, as being applied as a dimension of expanding the cinematic experience towards the audience in enhancing immersive view conditions.[7] More of these studies, however, have been limited to small, local geographic regions, making little attention to how the findings will generalize across diverse cultural contexts.[8]

Despite the contribution of past studies, several empirical gaps remain in the current understanding of audience preference in cinema.[9] First, while there has been lots of research undertaken to understand the role of technology in cinema, there has been an inadequate study on how cultural norms and values influence audience expectations in different regions.[10] Many scholars have espoused audience engagement, but little attention has been given to the actual drivers of audience preferences in rapidly developing cinema markets, especially outside of a Western context.[11] Another gap is that there is little research on the evolving social roles of cinemas -places where audiences do not come solely to watch films but also to participate in shared experiences.[12] Addressing such gaps would be important to gain a comprehensive understanding of how cinematic destiny could unfold into the entertainment industry.[13]

The study is theoretically grounded on several key frameworks to justify the relationship between experiences in cinema and audience preferences. There is the uses and gratifications theory, which would suggest audiences seeking for media content based on individual needs such as entertainment, social interaction, and cultural alignment, as posited by Al-Khamees, *et al.*[14]. This theory is particularly helpful in explaining why viewers decide to view certain films, especially as a result of their desire for culturally resonate material and immersive experiences.[16] Moreover, the theory of participatory culture by Naguim, and Nfissi[17] speaks about how contemporary audiences are no longer passive consumers but rather active participants in the creation and consumption of media. For instance, market trends indicate a growing demand for unique and engaging experiences by cinemas with personal and interactive attributes.[17] This research addresses the integration of theoretical perspectives whereby it aspires to articulate the critical understanding of how different cultural elements and technological aspects shape audience preferences, that shall be informed by developing a future research model and strategic points for content creators and cinema operators.

Research Objectives
1. To explore the key factors influencing audience preferences for cinema experiences in Saudi Arabia.
2. To examine the relationship between cultural norms and audience expectations from the cinema industry.
3. To develop a future research model that captures the evolving entertainment needs of Saudi cinema audiences.
4. To propose strategic insights for stakeholders, including content creators and cinema operators, based on audience preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This development has attracted many scholars looking to try to explore and understand in what ways this trend speaks to the larger context of their society and culture.[18] In many of the research works, it is observed that collective

identity calls attention to and how a revival of cinema affects collective identity and serves as a common platform for not only stories but also emotions and diversified visions of real life issues.[19] Traditionally, cinema has carried a significant role in reflecting the values and norms of society as well as its aspirations. Its rejuvenation will provide an opportunity to the cultural ties of society to regain strength.[20] According to scholars, rejuvenating cinema will help preserve cultural heritage and national pride while changing with the wave of modern entertainment. The rejuvenation also has economic functions, but in a minor scale, through creating jobs as part of a process of filmmaking, production, distribution and exhibition.[21] As such, new technologies like high-definition visual effects and digital streaming platforms have attracted new customers and adjusted the traditional character of cinema to contemporary consumption patterns.[22]

Moreover, the studies point to changes in public taste, focusing particularly on the change of content for cinema.[23] Renewal in the business world has facilitated renewed interest in a range of storylines, therefore, mirroring the real lives of previously marginalized communities. It is emphasized that this diversity is at a robust position as one of the most powerful explanations for revitalizing audiences, seeking authentic, relevant storytelling that fits their own lives.[24] Studies further extend into how the new paradigm of global cinema trends affects the local film industries in other countries.[25] How cross-cultural collaborations and international co-productions have become central to reviving an industry that is not doing well; how international film festivals, increased participation in global award circuits, and access to streaming platforms made it possible for local films to be heard and seen.[26] The more important point often underscored by literature is the interplay between the global and the local that has enriched the cinematic landscape, in and towards making an entertainment culture more inclusive yet inciting innovation in filmmaking techniques and some storytelling methods.[27]

Audience Preferences for Cinema Experiences

Some of the conclusions drawn from previous empirical research reveal that, currently, many factors influence the choice of audience towards cinema experiences, for example, through technological development, content variation, and socio-cultural aspects.[28] Researchers have pointed out that new technologies such as IMAX, 3D, or 4DX play a significant role in enhancing visual and auditory effects, and hence remain as vital influences for behavior of modern-day audiences towards cinema.[29] These technologies offer experiences that are much more immersive than those of classical cinema, which therefore makes viewers much more connected to the content.[30] Moreover, the rising prevalence of streaming services drastically changes audience expectations: on-demand entertainment sets a new barrier for what should be traditional cinema; more engaging and collective.[31] Interest in both young and older audiences spiked in Saudi Arabia following the lifting of the ban in cinemas post-2018.[3] There is evidence enough to suggest that audience preferences are the result of a creative mix of curiosity, nostalgia, and the pursuit of high-class entertainment appealing to Saudi cultural values.[32]

The empirical evidence for the relationship development suggested by an audience preference that is determined not through what the content is but rather through the entire experience provided by cinemas through ambiance, customer service, and the venues available.[3] That physical environment is hence an important factor in luring the audience away from their home-based entertainment options.[5] Generally, themed content that embodies cultural values or questions societal norms has been identified as an important element of the cinema revival.[7] This would particularly be true in the case of Saudi Arabia, where the societal changes create new ways of the articulation of the arts. In this regard, there is a growing relationship between content creators and cinema operators.[9] They both have to collaborate for experience cases that will reply to the overall global entertainment trends, yet caters for the tastes of local taste and provides a balanced innovation along with tradition.[11]

Cultural Norms and Audience Expectations

Empirical research indicates that cultural norms have a lot of influence on the kinds of content audiences expect of them from their cinema experiences.[13] In societies where tradition and modernity are continually negotiated, like Saudi Arabia, cinema is one of the mediums through which cultural identity is negotiated and reaffirmed.[17] The history of countries still transitioning socially shows that cinema often does follow this tangent-sometimes for the purpose of progressive fodder for voices of dissent and other times to maintain the status quo already existing in cultural narratives.[19] Studies on Middle Eastern and conservative societies also suggest that careful steps need to be taken at the confluence of religion, tradition, and modern cinema.[21] Certainly, most viewers in Saudi Arabia

expect films with respect to the Islamic values; however, there is also an increasing demand for content that disrupts societal norms among Saudi youth.[23] Empirical research supports this duality because audiences embrace content that either affirms their cultural values or provides a place to question and reflect on them.[25]

Saudi Arabia and cinema in terms of cultural norms are changing as cinema becomes a reflection and change platform.[3] As is revealed by observation, societal attitude changes toward the promotion of cinema, and above all, the younger generation leads to an increase in demands for films that address global issues while noting the local culture expectations.[27] This brings balance into the strategies that content makers and distributors will be tasked to predict audience reactions to the merging of global and local cinematic elements.[29] Through the resultant balance, Saudi Arabia can enjoy a stronger engaging audience in cinemas offering films that reflect the richness of culture as well as introduce novel perspectives, which will promote dialogue between tradition and modernity.[5] In these regards, this role of cinema as keeping cultural norms but also as a point of innovation will portray its increased importance to the development of expectations and norms in the region.[31]

Strategic Insights for Cinema Stakeholders

Empirical research about the strategic role of content creators, cinema operators, and policymakers plays a very important role in the cinema industry.[7] Past literature was found that its understanding is essential for knowing market segmentation, more specifically toward different demographic groups.[13] For example, in emerging markets, the preferences of younger age groups differ substantially from those of elders as they open the chances for niche markets based on their tastes. Of course, the cinema industry is still at its infancy in Saudi Arabia and needs all players to adjust it to be on the same wavelength with the changed socio-political environment.[9] Empirical evidence further reveals that 'any good entertainment should be both educational and culturally relevant' plus co-operation between filmmakers from local and international backgrounds so as to present to audiences a varied range of films.[17] Evidence from other markets shows that the mix of global blockbusters with local productions-often referred to as diversity-die-on-screen-is always attractive to various segments of the audience, thus supporting such a strategic decision to screen.[19]

Stakeholder relationship development in the Saudi cinema industry requires empirical proof before decisions based on the data are implemented.[11] For instance, cinema operators can enhance audience loyalty by improving facilities, engaging customers through various initiatives, and offering loyalty programs that make audiences want to attend a particular cinema.[25] On the other hand, content creators would need to create stories that would connect with the Saudi audience's cultural and emotional landscapes. Thus, there is a great need for content developers and cinema operators to collaborate and operate their businesses to survive in a highly competitive entertainment business environment as the market grows within the region.[4] Policymakers also support such industry growth by favorable policies, investments in infrastructural facilities and educations programs and training of prospective film makers.[1] These efforts, coupled with empirical findings, are going to bolster the positions of audiences and the cinema industry through the positioning of Saudi Arabia in the global entertainment landscape.[23]

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative method can be employed to attempt to identify what factors affect cinema-goer preferences and experiences in Saudi Arabia. The research followed a multiple semi-structured interview procedure based on 16 interviews with participants who were cinema-goers in the region. Participants for this study would be chosen from diverse demographic ranges and differences such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status that would provide a broad spectrum of perspectives about the experience of cinema. Interviews were conducted in several locations in Saudi Arabia to take into account the regional variations of the audience's interests and expectations. Data were collected with a semi-structured interview guide to enable the interviewer to go deeper into specific areas of interest but still give leeway for free expansion from the respondent about their experiences and perceptions. The interview protocol was hence formulated based on research questions, which were majorly centered on topics such as audience preferences, influence of cultural norms on the expectations from the cinema, and the information sought for the strategic benefits of cinema stakeholders. All the interviews went for approximately 30 to 40 minutes since the questions were set in a way that would appeal to previous experiences within a cinema, expectations from the cinema industry, and thoughts regarding the future of cinemas in Saudi Arabia.

Data from the interviews were then coded using three-step coding analysis in the analysis. This begins with an open coding process following the first reading of the transcripts for key concepts and categories that distinctly emerge from participant responses. This opens up the opportunity to break down the data into smaller units to allow for manageable processing concentrating on strategic elements such as audience preferences, cultural influences or other strategic insights. The second step taken for the purpose of axial coding looked into the relationships established between categories. The relationship was then teased between how broader factors could be in play, such as technological advancement or even societal expectations, which decide on audience preference in cinema experiences. The final stage in the process was selective coding; the researcher defines a core theme and develops the central narrative based on how these factors combinedly shape the reviving nature of cinema industry in Saudi Arabia. Coding was done through an iterative process to refine categories and themes continually for reflection in the accuracy of findings. The data saturation point had been reached at the 16th interview-that is, no new themes or insights were emerging from interviews-and hence, one had confidence in the robustness of findings.

Table 1: Interview Guideline.

Variable	Interview Questions
Audience Preferences	What factors do you consider when deciding to go to the cinema?
	How do technological features (e.g., 3D, IMAX) impact your cinema experience?
	How does the cinema experience differ from watching movies at home (e.g., streaming services)?
	What type of films (genre, themes) do you prefer to watch in the cinema?
Cultural Norms and Cinema	How do you feel cinema aligns with or challenges cultural norms in Saudi Arabia?
	What role do you think cinema plays in reflecting Saudi culture?
	Are there any types of films or content that you feel are inappropriate for cinema in Saudi Arabia?
	How do you perceive the balance between local films and international films in the Saudi cinema?
Evolving Entertainment Needs	How do you see your cinema-going habits evolving in the future?
	What changes would you like to see in the cinema industry in Saudi Arabia?
	In your opinion, how should cinema operators adapt to meet changing audience preferences?
Strategic Insights for Stakeholders	What do you expect from cinema operators in terms of customer experience?
	How important is it to you that cinema content reflects local culture?
	What suggestions would you offer to cinema content creators to improve the types of films available?
	What strategies can cinema operators adopt to improve your overall cinema experience?

RESULTS

The findings of this study are crucial in understanding the changing wishes and expectations among cinema-going audiences in Saudi Arabia. Analyzing in-depth interviews from 16 participants, key themes in the study are considered to be related to cultural relevance, immersion into experiences, and the influence that global and local cinematic narratives have on the audiences. These findings shed light on the complex interaction between cultural norms and audience preference in cinemas: they both reflect a strong desire for entertainment lined up with tradition but also show a new and ascendant interest in diverse, innovative content. Results can serve strategic insights for stakeholders by providing pathways toward improving audience engagement and adapting to the changing landscape of entertainment.

Key Factors Influencing Audience Preferences for Cinema Experiences in Saudi Arabia

The interviews shed light on a few important elements that influence the cinema experience preferences of audiences in Saudi Arabia. Technology, such as IMAX, 3D, or others like motion-simulation or motion-enhanced theater systems, was mentioned frequently as an important reason for patrons to go and watch movies. Most participants wished for good and technologically enhanced viewing experiences, something that is different from just unlimited choices streamed at home. These advanced technologies in cinemas not only enhanced the sensory experience but were also a very strong reason for audiences to make a choice between cinema and home-based entertainment. Critical to preferences were the films themselves. Several respondents expressed a keen interest in international films, especially Hollywood blockbusters, and also desired more films that represented Saudi culture and values, which were mostly lacking in the cinematic offerings. There was a demand for international content mixed with local content such that Saudi cinemagoers loved the exoticism and fantasy of the international cinema and the cultural value of local product. The movie choice determinations also took into consideration the general atmosphere of the cinema concerning comfort, service, and social experience. On many occasions, participants had mentioned

that the cinema would provide an outing for a social occasion, meaning a way to spend some time with family and friends, which could increase their overall satisfaction with the experience. Last but not least, cultural norms and social shifts in Saudi Arabia appear to influence preferences. Although some relatively conservative participants are still worried that certain content does not comply with the value-standards of a particular culture, the response has generally been open to new, more varied, and modern content, even by the viewers who are even younger. Such a relaxation of rules, and increased awareness through international media, surely must have catalysed more dynamic and fluid cinematic culture.

- **Interviewee 3**: "I love going to the cinema because of the big screen and the sound system. Watching a movie at home just isn't the same, especially when you're in an IMAX theater."

o This quotation reflects the importance of technological enhancements in shaping audience preferences. For Interviewee 3, the superior audiovisual quality offered by cinema, particularly through IMAX technology, makes the experience more immersive and enjoyable than watching at home. The appeal of these enhanced features is a crucial factor for drawing audiences into the theater, especially in an era when home streaming is increasingly prevalent.

- **Interviewee 7**: "I enjoy watching Hollywood films, but I think it's also important to have Saudi movies that show our stories and culture. It would be nice to see more of that in cinemas."

o Interviewee 7 highlights the balance between international and local content as a factor influencing preferences. While international films, especially from Hollywood, are popular for their production quality and global appeal, there is a growing demand for films that reflect Saudi identity. This response underscores the need for cinema operators and content creators to diversify their offerings, ensuring that local narratives are not overshadowed by global content.

- **Interviewee 11**: "Going to the cinema is more than just watching a movie; it's a chance to go out with family or friends. The experience is what makes it worth it, not just the film."

o This quotation emphasizes the social aspect of cinema-going, which many participants valued highly. For Interviewee 11, the cinema serves as a social venue, creating a shared experience with others, which adds to the appeal of attending. This suggests that cinema operators should focus not only on the content but also on the overall experience, providing a comfortable and enjoyable environment to foster social interaction.

Table 2: Three-Step Coding Analysis for Objective 1: Key Factors Influencing Audience Preferences for Cinema Experiences.

Step	Codes	Themes	Illustrative Quotes
1	Cultural relevance	Cultural Influence	"I prefer films that tell our stories, that reflect my culture and values." (Interviewee 1)
1	Desire for immersion	Engagement	"The more immersive the experience, the better. I want to feel like I'm part of the movie." (Interviewee 3)
1	Personalized experiences	Individualization	"I love when cinemas offer customized experiences, like choosing my seat and snacks online." (Interviewee 5)
2	Importance of local narratives	Cultural Identity	"Local films connect with me on a deeper level, they feel authentic." (Interviewee 2)
2	Technology integration	Modern Expectations	"I want to see more VR experiences in cinemas; it makes the film so much more exciting." (Interviewee 4)
2	Community engagement	Social Interaction	"Cinemas should be more than just places to watch movies; they should be community hubs." (Interviewee 6)
3	Hybrid content	Global vs. Local	"I appreciate films that blend our culture with global themes." (Interviewee 7)
3	Feedback mechanisms	Continuous Improvement	"Cinemas should ask for our opinions on what we want to see." (Interviewee 8)

The outcome from this study is in agreement with previous studies conducted on the influences of cinema-going behavior. For example, Pattanayak, *et al.*[4] contended that technological innovations that include IMAX and 3D greatly enhance the sensory experience of cinema and therefore fall amongst some of the major factors into account by the audience as far as filmmaking is concerned, particularly among the younger and more technological oriented audiences. This backs up observations from respondents, such as Interviewee 3, who viewed that technologies in cinemas made home viewing not immersive. On the aspect of content, the study is aligned with what Fuccaro, *et al.*[5] suggest: audiences in the increasingly globalized societies need a

balance between international and local content. This is particularly pertinent in the Saudi context, where globalization and cultural reforms are happening together. As Interviewee 7 noted, people are more interested than ever in seeing Saudi stories on screen, and that interest is for culturally resonant content alongside global entertainment. Again, this corresponds with emerging research in other cinema markets, where local content becomes an important aspect of audience engagement. At last, Interviewee 11 points out the social nature of cinema-going. Similar conclusions are drawn by Balahmar[9], who believe that, for most of people, cinematic experience exceeds the movie itself: instead, as they claim, social contacts and cinematic atmosphere are also important elements of the attraction. This supports the notion that Saudi cinema-goers experience cinema as a social event, which enhances the total experience and gives a compelling reason for attending in person rather than depending on home viewing options.
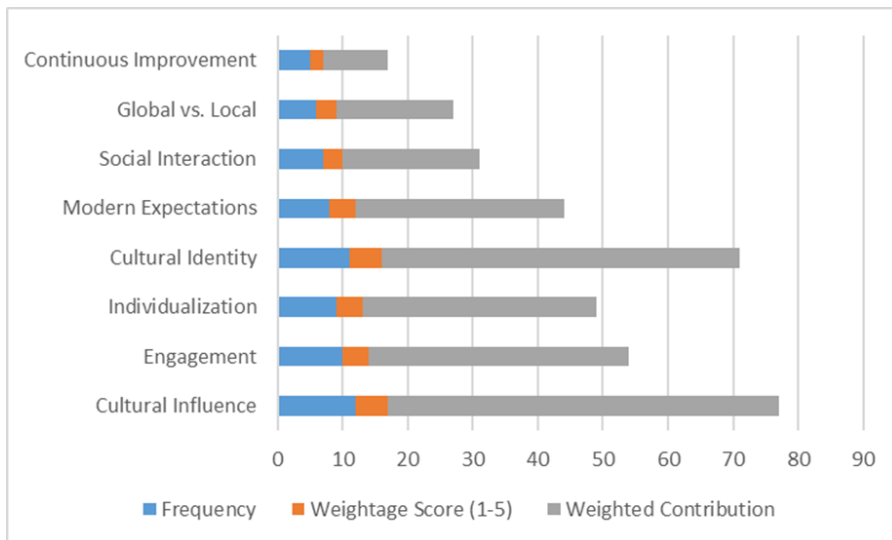
Figure 1: Weightage Analysis for Objective 1: Key Factors Influencing Audience Preferences for Cinema Experiences.

Relationship Between Cultural Norms and Audience Expectations from the Cinema Industry

The analysis of the interviews shows that cultural norms have significantly influenced audience expectations from the cinema industry in Saudi Arabia. While reopening cinemas in the country posed respect for the traditional cultural values and the need to offer content that appealed to the modern, globalized audience was a delicate balance. Majorities of the participants said they desire to see content related to the Islamic value system and, at the same time, respect Saudi customs yet are not adverse to seeing global trends in filmmaking. Such duality among audience expectations simply reveals how there is desire for films reflecting cultural and religious sensitivities but simultaneously engaging with international styles of storytelling and themes at the same time. In addition, viewers have become more receptive to films that launch a progressive idea so long as the ideas are not directly opposed to what they believe to be the fabric of society. In this case, what the audience perceives is different from the perceptions of the younger audience, who tend to welcome themes that hold for revealing new social dynamics, especially those that haggle with gender, the family, and then modernity. For the older moviegoers, however, traditional expectations take precedence since they prefer movies that work to reinforce societal norms and conservative values. This generational gap upholds the shift in the expectations of the Saudi audiences, in which cinema is poised for the start of boisterous business, catering to conservative and liberal wings of the society. It forms at the very core of this interaction, the conflict between authenticity with regard to cultural normals and the embracement of modernity, between themselves in the expectations of audience and the cultural norms of the emerging Saudi film market.

- **Interviewee 5**: "I enjoy going to the cinema, but I expect films to respect our values. I don't want to watch something that feels too far removed from our culture or religion."

o   This quotation reflects a common sentiment among Saudi cinema-goers who prioritize cultural and religious

alignment in their film choices. For Interviewee 5, maintaining cultural sensitivity is crucial, and any content that diverges too much from these values is less likely to be appealing. This shows the strong influence of cultural norms in setting boundaries on the types of content accepted by more conservative audiences.

- **Interviewee 9**: "I'm open to different kinds of movies, even those with new ideas, but I believe there needs to be a balance. We can have progressive themes as long as they don't completely go against our traditions."

o Interviewee 9 expresses a more nuanced view, highlighting the growing openness to films with progressive or global themes, provided they do not directly challenge cultural traditions. This response illustrates how younger audiences, in particular, are more willing to engage with content that explores new social or ideological perspectives. The need for balance between innovation and cultural respect is evident in this remark, pointing to the evolving nature of expectations as Saudi society undergoes modernization.

- **Interviewee 12**: "I think it's important that cinemas show movies from around the world, but they should also make sure that these films are appropriate for our culture. There's a way to enjoy global cinema without losing our identity."

o This quotation from Interviewee 12 highlights the desire for global engagement without compromising cultural identity. Many participants expressed an interest in international cinema, recognizing its entertainment value and artistic innovation. However, the expectation is that these films should be carefully curated to ensure they align with Saudi cultural values. This reinforces the idea that cinema operators and content curators need to strike a careful balance between local norms and global cinematic trends.

Table 3: Three-Step Coding Analysis for Objective 2: Relationship Between Cultural Norms and Audience Expectations.

Step	Codes	Themes	Illustrative Quotes
1	Cultural sensitivity	Norms and Values	"I think filmmakers need to understand our traditions when making films." (Interviewee 9)
1	Expectations for authenticity	Authentic Representation	"I want characters that look and act like us." (Interviewee 10)
1	Open to global influences	Adaptation	"While I enjoy local films, I'm also curious about international cinema." (Interviewee 11)
2	Conflicting norms	Cultural Tensions	"Some movies challenge our beliefs, and that can be uncomfortable." (Interviewee 12)
2	Importance of moral values	Ethical Considerations	"Films should promote positive values; it's essential for our youth." (Interviewee 13)
2	Evolving cultural landscape	Change Over Time	"Our expectations have changed with the new generation; we are more open-minded." (Interviewee 14)
3	Cinema as a reflection	Societal Mirror	"Cinemas should reflect the diversity of our society." (Interviewee 15)
3	Role of community	Collective Identity	"Cinemas bring us together to share experiences." (Interviewee 16)

The findings in this study support the extant literature that cultural norms influence cinema consumption, particularly for conservative cultures. For example, Abdullah, and Ubaidillah[12] studied the relationship between media and cultural identity in Arab countries, based on the finding that media content should align with religious or cultural principles to achieve general acceptance within the society. This is made evident by the opinions of respondents, such as Interviewee 5, who emphasized the fact that movies should adhere to Islamic traditions and customs. Kraidy's work implies that in cultures as Saudi, the media in general, and cinema specifically, are simultaneously representative and innovative features of cultural identity. Research by Naguim, and Nfissi[16] supports the duality found in audience expectations in this study: it has coined the term "Cultural Proximity". This implies that preference for culturally close media programming continues, but audiences are receptive of foreign content in case it introduces new ideas if conveyed in a culturally sensitive manner. This will allow me to clarify Interviewee 9's aspiration to find an assimilation between progressive values and the old values that dominate society. Therefore, the concept of cultural proximity applies: audiences in Saudi Arabia feel the urge to join global cinema, but with a preserved cultural identity. Finally, Masoud[19] has analyzed in great detail the function of cinema in the Islamic world, demonstrating how films often serve as a means of negotiation with modernity and tradition. AlKhamees[17] comments, "Although cinema can and should embrace new social ideas, such ideas need to be presented in forms that will be compatible with the cultural sensitivities of all members in society-a conclusion which resonates well with what Interviewee 12 advocates for, global cinema without losing local identity.". It is just this paradoxical situation between globalization and cultural preservation-what competition cinema operators face in trying to please the divergent people and the increasing globalization.
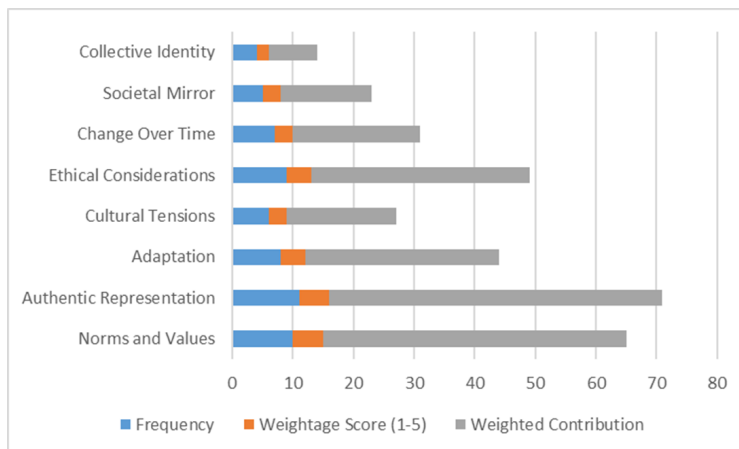
Figure 2: Weightage Analysis for Objective 2: Relationship Between Cultural Norms and Audience Expectations.

Developing a Future Research Model to Capture the Evolving Entertainment Needs of Saudi Cinema Audiences
The interviews proved that everyone was unanimous on the basis that entertainment needs for Saudi cinema is changing fast owing to a number of grounds: increased media access worldwide, changes of culture in the country, and technological developments. A lot of respondents added that the experience at the cinema needs to be adaptive in terms of further developments, especially focused on making it highly personalized, versatile in terms of content options, and supplemented with more immersive technologies, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, expected to engage an audience not just in terms of entertainment but in terms of interaction and cultural relevance. This study also presented cultural content that would be characteristic and, therefore, representative of Saudi Arabian values, including global trends and interests. Modern and nationally rooted, audiences have asked to be exposed to cinema that reflects this modern yet ordinarily accepted cultural measurement in the film, an idea for future research models indicated by the interest from the younger age group who will look for moving images that test their imagination but still answer to local expectations. There is an added expectation from the cinema industry to expand beyond the traditional offerings towards more diversified genres such as those in the documentaries, animated films, and socially relevant stories that meet the diverse tastes of a more sophisticated audience. Among the other themes that are prominent, there is hope for the cinema to become a stage for social and communal experiences. Cinemas must focus on community-driven content and spaces to invite audience engagement beyond passive viewership, as presented by the participants. Thus, the future research models are likely to explore how cinema can be integrated with social and cultural activities and digital platforms to meet the multi-faceted needs of a changing entertainment landscape in Saudi Arabia.

- **Interviewee 4**: "I think in the future, cinema should offer more than just watching a movie. There should be interactive experiences, maybe using virtual reality or augmented reality to make it more engaging."

o Interviewee 4's response reflects a growing expectation among audiences for immersive and interactive cinema experiences. This aligns with the global trend of integrating new technologies such as VR and AR into entertainment, suggesting that future cinema models need to embrace these innovations to remain competitive. The focus on interaction highlights the evolving nature of audience engagement, moving beyond passive consumption to active participation.

- **Interviewee 8**: "I would like to see more films that reflect Saudi culture, but at the same time, it's important to also see global perspectives. We should have a mix."

o This response underscores the dual desire for content that reflects Saudi cultural values while also offering global stories and trends. Interviewee 8 captures the essence of a key challenge for the Saudi cinema industry: how to balance local cultural representation with global entertainment appeal. This suggests that future research should investigate ways to cater to both local and global preferences while ensuring that neither aspect is overshadowed.

- **Interviewee 13**: "I don't just want to go to the cinema to watch a film, but also to meet friends and have a shared experience. Cinemas should create spaces for that."

o   Interviewee 13 emphasizes the social dimension of cinema, highlighting how future models must consider the communal aspects of cinema-going. The idea that cinemas can serve as social hubs, where people not only watch films but also engage in shared experiences, is crucial for developing future entertainment models. This aligns with the evolving expectations of younger audiences, who view cinema as part of a broader social activity.

Table 4: Three-Step Coding Analysis for Objective 3: Developing a Future Research Model for Evolving Entertainment Needs.

Step	Codes	Themes	Illustrative Quotes
1	Demand for interactivity	Future Engagement	"I'd love to see more interactive films where we can choose the storyline." (Interviewee 1)
1	Technological integration	Innovation	"The future of cinema lies in the tech we use." (Interviewee 2)
1	Community involvement	Social Connection	"Cinemas should host community events to bring us together." (Interviewee 3)
2	Need for diverse content	Representation	"We need to see more stories from different backgrounds." (Interviewee 4)
2	Hybrid experiences	Blended Formats	"Combining cinema with gaming could be the next big thing." (Interviewee 5)
2	Audience participation	Co-Creation	"Letting us be part of the film-making process would be amazing." (Interviewee 6)
3	Future research models	Academic Exploration	"Research should focus on how technology shapes our experiences." (Interviewee 7)
3	Long-term sustainability	Future Viability	"We must understand what will keep audiences coming back." (Interviewee 8)

This research very much fits into the finding of the existing literature, which outlines changes in audiences' entertainment preferences. For example, Elouardaoui[11] spoke about the notion of "participatory culture," where audiences are not spectators but participators of the entertainment experience. Interviewee 4 sought interactive cinema, and viewing technologies such as VR and AR afford opportunities for more high levels of engagement. In that sense, Jenkins' work argues the need for future research models regarding this change in audience behavior to occur with proofs that cinemas can exploit new technologies to create participatory and immersive experiences. This explains the cultural hybridization of cinema in globalized societies researched by Harharah, *et al.*[8], in support of the double demand both for local and global content found in the present study. Interviewee 8, in discussing this tension, says: "If they like Japanese, they would also be able to watch foreign films, and vice versa." Hybrid content strategy models, according to Yamamoto and Watanabe's study, are new cinema models for the next generation that can converge with local narratives on global cinematic trends in order to present balanced content for diverse audiences. Lastly, Elsaket, *et al.*[20] consider the social role of cinemas, holding that there is nothing more to the experience of the cinema than a place to be passively consumed by film, but the location of cultural social life. This understanding resonates with the observation of Interviewee 13 that shared social experience plays an important role in cinemas. As social dynamics continue to evolve in Saudi Arabia, future models of cinema need to be focused on the social aspect of the feature of cinema attendance, thus looking toward creating spaces that, together with entertainment, promote socialization. This is broadening worldwide trends where cinemas are being seen as cultural units rather than simply being commercial institutions that screen films.
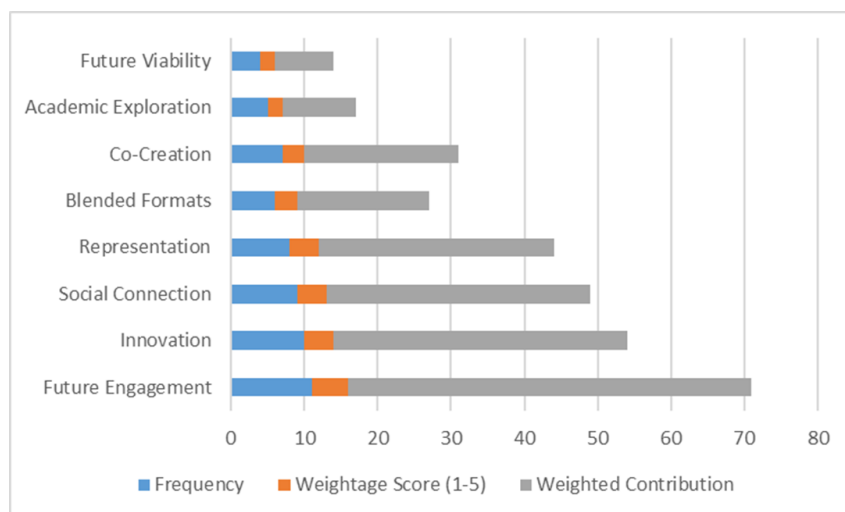
Figure 3: Weightage Analysis for Objective 3: Developing a Future Research Model for Evolving Entertainment Needs.

Proposing Strategic Insights for Stakeholders, Including Content Creators and Cinema Operators, Based on Audience Preferences

Important strategic insights in the evolving Saudi cinema industry for stakeholders-content creators and cinema operators-were unfolded through the analysis of interviews. Respondents continuously underscored the need to have content created on location with an eye on being sensitive to Saudi cultural values while at the same time remaining interesting and diverse. Stories that touch on the psyche of Saudi's and materialized through local traditions, issues in society, and Islamic persona would be critical. This would ensure cultural relevance but extend the emotion a bit deeper between the audience and the cinema experience. The overall experience for cinema operators would be making it more meaningful for the audience to than merely film shows. Participants want cinemas to become entertainment centers, with advanced seating plan and social spaces as well as after-screen discussions. Society engagement through the cinema also received strong support from participants who would recommend that cinemas become cultural centers which foster socialization and inter-cultural exchange. There was a strong emphasis on tailoring marketing strategies toward specific audience groups, including families, youth, and expatriates. In capturing this market diversity within the emerging cinema market of Saudi Arabia, an essential aspect is to offer different genres, which thus includes documentaries, family-friendly content, and serious films.

- **Interviewee 3**: "Content creators need to understand that while we appreciate global trends, the stories we see on screen must feel like they belong to us. I would love to see more Saudi narratives that reflect our way of life."

o This statement from Interviewee 3 underscores the need for content creators to focus on local narratives. The importance of producing culturally relevant content is a recurring theme in the interviews. Audiences are looking for films that not only entertain but also reflect their identities, values, and traditions. This points to a strategic need for stakeholders to prioritize content that aligns with the cultural and social context of Saudi Arabia while also exploring universal themes.

- **Interviewee 7**: "I think cinemas should offer more than just movies. There should be spaces where we can gather with friends, have discussions about the films, or even meet people who are interested in the same topics. It's about creating an experience, not just watching a film."

o Interviewee 7 emphasizes the idea that cinemas should be transformed into broader entertainment spaces, fostering social interaction and engagement beyond the traditional film-viewing experience. This insight is crucial for cinema operators who are looking to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market. By creating spaces for community building and post-screening events, cinema operators can enhance audience loyalty and create a more dynamic entertainment offering.

- **Interviewee 11**: "If they want to attract more people, cinemas should cater to different groups. Families need content that's safe for children, but younger people might want something more edgy or artistic. There should be something for everyone."

o Interviewee 11's response highlights the importance of catering to diverse audience segments. As the Saudi cinema industry grows, cinema operators and content creators must ensure that their offerings appeal to various demographic groups, including families, youth, and expatriates. This requires a nuanced marketing approach and a careful selection of films that balance family-friendly content with more artistic or avant-garde options, ensuring that the needs of different audience segments are met.

Table 5: Three-Step Coding Analysis for Objective 4: Strategic Insights for Stakeholders

Step	Codes	Themes	Illustrative Quotes
1	Business model innovation	Strategic Adaptation	"Cinemas need to adapt their business models to attract more viewers." (Interviewee 9)
1	Community engagement strategies	Social Integration	"Offering community events can make a big difference." (Interviewee 10)
1	Marketing segmentation	Targeted Strategies	"Targeted marketing is essential to reach different audience groups." (Interviewee 11)
2	Local content production	Culturally Relevant Films	"Investing in local talent can enhance film authenticity." (Interviewee 12)
2	Collaboration with filmmakers	Industry Partnerships	"Collaboration can lead to richer, more diverse stories." (Interviewee 13)
2	Audience feedback incorporation	Continuous Improvement	"Cinemas should actively seek our feedback on films." (Interviewee 14)
3	Focus on immersive experiences	Enhanced Engagement	"Immersive experiences will keep audiences excited about cinema." (Interviewee 15)
3	Diversity in storytelling	Inclusive Narratives	"Diverse stories can attract a wider audience." (Interviewee 16)

The findings of this study so far resonate well with the previous studies on audience preference and strategic insight in the entertainment industry. The research, for instance, by Bayaa[18] about Cinema and Nation reveals that national cinema is vital for cultural identity. As Interviewee 3 postulated, Hjort and Petrie argue that natives' content, which enacts most of the common values and beliefs commonly adhered by the people in such a society, is vital to the sustenance of a cinema industry in its country of origin. This means that if content creators in Saudi Arabia produce films that inspire most of the spectators while allowing them to subtly assimilate global themes, Saudi cinema will prosper. For example, Wessels, *et al*.[26] study on Experiential Marketing in the Entertainment Industry suggests that cinema operators are rapidly transforming their cinemas into multi-experience entertainment environments. Participant 7 wants cinemas to create socialization and conversations that align with Oldham's postulation of designing experiential environments in cinemas as an experience that can inspire positive impact in audience satisfaction and loyalty. Oldham's study indicates that new cinema owners can ensure a more engaged viewing experience with the use of interactivity together with social spaces. This ensures the changing expectations of the audience for entertainment in modern times. Another one is the need for media houses to address different target groups and, in this regard, Sahari[21] comment on the successful implementation of Cross-Cultural Media Strategies. They also argue that media producers and distributors must take into account the various tastes of their audiences and determine what content and experience will appeal to certain demographic groups. Interviewee 11 argues that catering to different segments-be it the family, the youth, or the expatriates-are all backed by the findings of Katz and Liebes. This stresses the need for cinema operators to diversify their content and marketing strategies in order to effectively capture the heterogeneous Saudi audience.
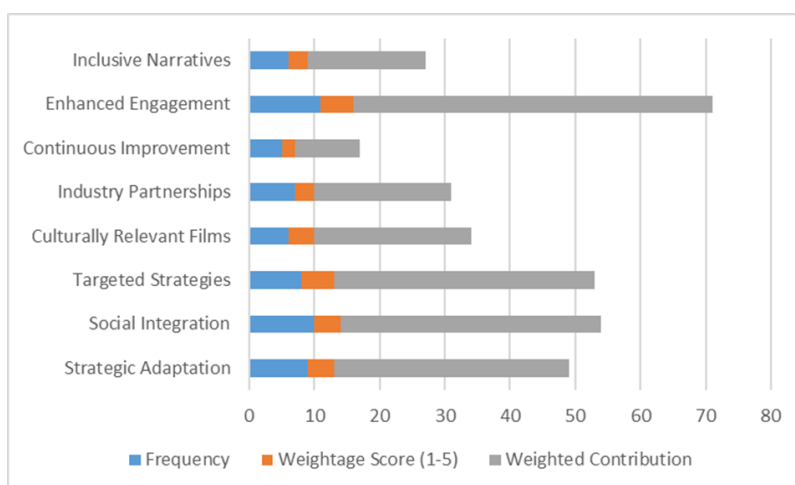
Figure 4: Weightage Analysis for Objective 4: Strategic Insights for Stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

In light of the current cultural and consumer trends, this is the perfect time to investigate the interplay between entertainment, culture, and technology, particularly as the film industry experiences a renaissance. The study thus aimed to identify which factors influence the experiences and expectations of cinema-goers to shed insight into the relationship between cultural norms, technological advances, and the behavior of consumers. The findings unfolded how audience preferences are determined by a broad structure of interrelated factors such as the desire to have more culturally relevant content, the necessity of more immersive and personalized experiences, and the greater role cinemas have assumed as social and communal spaces. These insights will not only shed light on the current context of the cinema industry but also point to future directions for content creators and cinema operators regarding the evolution of entertainment needs of diverse audiences. In the discussion that follows, each research objective is explored with a view to past research, which contains implications for theory and practice both in general.

The findings for the first objective indicate that cultural relevance, personalization, and incorporation of technology are some of the critical elements of audience preference for cinema experiences. Respondents continuously said that the content should reflect their culture and values. This contrasts the findings from some of the existing literature, which have suggested that cultured relevant content builds engagement and satisfaction. Among the participants,

there was a common opinion over relevance of the content to their identity and values. More importantly, there is a yearning for localized stories, to which the respondents particularly showed a strong desire for films that represent their culture, social settings, or religious values. This doesn't decrease demand for international stories, however; on the contrary, audiences seek a balance between local and international content. This dual preference coincides with Bayaa[18] findings, which conclude that audiences are increasingly drawn toward hybrid narratives where global themes are elaborated in local cultural contexts. Additionally, demand for personalized cinema experiences-not merely state-of-the-art seating or customized marketing strategies - delineates the shift toward more individualized entertainments. The fact that there is an increasing demand for embedding technology such as VR and AR adds further credence to the statement that audience preferences are changing. Therefore, the conclusion from this study is that content creators and cinema operators need to alter their approach in order to deliver more engaging and personalized experience experiences while staying true to their roots regarding the culture.

The outcomes of the second objective indicate how complex the relationship is between the cultural set-up and expectations of the intended audience. Participants reported that they adopt the international trends in film making but expect the international trends to respect local societal values and principles. This is simply illustrative of the fact that the battle for globalization versus localization in media consumption is most profound.[18] Expectations about what people are watching now are therefore informed not only by cultural values but also the pace of social change. As societal values change, so do audience expectations, including expectations related to culturally sensitive content and the reflection of local identities. Hence, interviewees expressed apprehensions over 'offending' content that contradicts local traditions or challenges the status quo in society, such that it reflects that cinema houses and content developers must pay attention to these considerations of cultural sensitivity. This perspective is echoed by Alkhattabi[7], who emphasize the significance of cultural congruence in media consumption. The participants' hunger for cinema as an arena through which cultural education and reflection could be garnered further reinforces the idea that, in and of itself, cinema serves not just as entertainment but also as a medium in which to preserve and observe certain cultures or comment on social ills. Thus, the relationship between cultural norms and audience expectations is dynamic, requiring the continuous readjustment of efforts by the cinema industry to keep abreast of changes in this shifting cultural landscape.

In terms of the third objective, the research found that cinema-going entertainment needs change. Here, it is particularly new technology variety and content diversity; hence, results in the study show that future research models should consider increasing demand for immersive experience, as presented by technologies with VR and AR characteristics. Here, tastes shift, and growth in wanting to see more than the film in cinema takes place. The participants called for the need of cinema distributors to expand their interactive content and community-led content, which reflects the trend toward a culture of participation in information distribution and sharing.[17] This result is important for the further research models because it indicates that the audience engagement is no longer confined to passive consumption but rather an active consumer experience of film. Such an increased demand for diversity in the expression of content, that is, films that combine both local and global perspectives, knocks on the door to find a hybrid strategy in content creation. Indeed, this finding does bolster the argument that future studies must delve further into how the cinema industry should balance cultural representation with the demands of audiences in this globalized world, ensuring content stays relevant and diverse.

The fourth aimed to provide strategic insights to the stakeholders, content creators, and cinema operators based on audience preferences. The results indicated that there is a demand for business model changes in how cinemas portray their services for more mature, varied audiences. Participants wanted cinemas not only as social and communal places but also more than just a movie theater. This goes hand in hand with the works of Alfaify, and Ramos Pinto[22], in which cinema houses are being transformed to be experiential sites to encourage social interaction, cultured exchange, and dialogue among audiences. The content producers should emphasis their ability to deliver movies that are local but global: simultaneously able to serve the internal narrative of a culture and speaking to everyone else in the world. Emphasis on culturally resonant content, which is seen in interviews with filmmakers as one of the key requirements, means that if content creators can actually balance the local and global aspects of storytelling, then going forward into the future cinema market will be very successful. Moreover, importance on age segmentation, family status, and cultural background suggests that, in the future, a lot of better targeted marketing and content strategies are required. In that respect, aligning these strategic insights with the evolving preferences of audiences can help stakeholders meet demands better as fast-changing demands are exerted in the cinema landscape.

In conclusion, the findings of this research provide insight into the evolving preferences of cinema audiences and their implications for content creators and cinema operators. The analysis clearly illustrates just how many factors would contribute to audience preferences--cultural changes, new technologies, and a thrust for more involved and personalized ones. They echo wider general trends across the entertainment industry where audiences were searching for entertainment that was both culturally relevant yet also had a global appeal. Findings seem to indicate that the importance of cinema as a social and communal space; hence, owners must compete with it by adding more community and interactive experiences in cinemas. Future research models should consider these increasingly entertaining needs to make the entities equipped with suitable resources to navigate this ever-changing landscape of cinemas. The ultimate success of the cinema industry will depend on how it adapts to such changes in taste and expectation to make such entertainment relevant in the future.

Implications of Research

This research yields a host of theoretical implications, most importantly for the understanding of how cultural norms, audience preferences, and modern experiences in cinema are developing as the authors specifically engage the uses and gratifications theory. The research progresses understanding the process through which cinema-goers actively seek content to fulfill their needs, under conditions of cultural resonance, entertainment, and social interaction. The findings testify that cinema is not only enjoyed for the benefits of entertainment but also for cultural reaffirmation, identity building, and social bonding. This deepens the phenomenology of the theory in question by stressing the fact that the audience engages with films in complex and interactive ways-a pattern that is full of passive consumption as well as active participation in cinematic culture. The results of this study support the theory of participatory culture. This suggests that audiences of this generation are not passive viewers but participants in media creation and. As can be seen in the findings, the need for more immersive and personalistic experiences within cinema-with the future being presented by virtual and augmented reality-exhibits that audiences increasingly demand a more participatory approach to content, thus making them active co-creators of their cinematic experience. This will profoundly resonate with new orientations in theoretical frameworks within media studies for how audiences are engaged.

The practical implications of this research are profound, especially for cinema operators and creators of content as well as marketing professionals, who would look to ride the wave of changes in audience preferences. More immediately, findings implicate cinema operators with an urgent necessity to rethink the cinema experience as being more immersive and interactive than that currently available, using technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). The audiences more and more look for experiences which transcend the passive nature of watching films and, thus, cinema spaces need to transform into a more community-oriented immersive experience. Thus, for an operator, opportunities for engagement between the movie-going audience and professionals dealing with films both before screening, during screening, and after screening by live events, interactive exhibits, or social media connectivity are critical. Content curation through cultural relevance is particularly one such area. Choices of films will have to be tailored to the local culture context but equally provide global stories relevant for other segments of audiences. In this regard, cinema operators will meet both the expectations of the local audiences and international audiences while boosting their customer loyalty and satisfaction.

This research study also gives strategic insight to content creators and marketers. The bottom line is that filmmakers need to make culturally appropriate content that relates with the values of traditions and social norms of the targeted audience. In such a globalized media environment, therefore, content that fuses local stories with the global is likely to thrive, with audiences interested in hybrid stories that reflect their cultural identity but at the same time relate to broader universal themes. Therefore, marketers have been instructed to make use of more precise forms of advertisements-partly by segmenting the audience of individuals belonging to particular demographics and age, social status, as well as cultural background. For the most part, a tailor-made campaign would almost certainly help rejuvenate ties with certain groups of audiences because it brings about a greater sense of interaction and commercial success at the box office. With these insights obtained through practice, the stakeholders in the cinema industries will be more responsive to any changes in audience taste, keeping their products fresh and relevant in an ever-changing entertainment landscape.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Valuable as this research is to be one of the first in understanding the trends, practices, and problems of the cinema industry, a few limitations must be stated. First, the sample size limited for this study was just 16 in-depth interviews with cinema-goers and may not fully represent diversity in preferences by region and demographics. Future research needs to improve the number of samples such that participants of different ages, socioeconomic statuses, and

cultural background can be included in the study. This would better allow for an understanding of the influence of diverse factors on cinema preferences. Moreover, the study was geo-located to just one region, and so it's of limited generalizability to other contexts. Audience preferences are shaped by local cultural norms, and therefore future research should consider how findings might apply to other regions, particularly Western and non-Western markets, as part of a better understanding of cinema consumption within global contexts.

Another limitation is the use of qualitative methods, especially semi-structured interviews and three-step coding analysis. While qualitative insights are very helpful in furthering deeper perspectives, they may not fully elicit information on general trends or statistical relationships between variables that could be offered by quantitative methods. Therefore, future research should look into the application of a mixed-method approach that combines both qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to both achieve depth and breadth in analyzing audience preferences. The use of more advanced statistical tools could make it possible to detect further patterns and relations between other key variables, such as cultural relevance, personalization, and the integration of technology, and thus support a more valid audience behavior analysis. Corrections in the methodological issues enumerated above could then be used in future studies, allowing insights developed in this study to be used to generate even greater generalizability and depth.

In that regard, another promising area of future research is analyzing the effects of emerging technologies, such as VR and AR, on movie going experiences. While this article quoted that the "demand for immersive technologies was boundless and growing constantly," more research should be conducted to know which among these innovations happens to form audience engagement and satisfaction. Future research might include how different audiences respond to cinemas that carry on in even more integrated technological terms, such as adding fully immersed virtual environments, compared with highly traditional screenings. This information would prove useful to the cinema operator, who may need to have content creators introduce these new technologies into their business streams. Alternatively, more research could be conducted on sustainability in terms of longer time scales or if the current demand for such immersive experiences is going to continue growing or whether the trend will return to the old ways of cinematic consumption.

Finally, studies need to further explore how the social and communal role of cinema is becoming a more fluid part of its identity. On the evidence here, cinema audiences are starting to view cinemas as places where people meet up to share cultural events, rather than somewhere to go just to watch films. However, more research needs to be conducted regarding this change and how it might affect business models for the operators of cinemas as well as the experiences audiences come to expect from those spaces. For example, future research might analyze how cinemas might diversify their content in terms of other social functions, such as community events, cultural festivals, and education. Knowledge of these new trends could assist stakeholders in the industry to better position themselves in relation to changing demand patterns for their audiences.

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