



Reasons and Factors Influencing Cinema Attendance: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Thai Moviegoers

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Received: 04 May 2026; Revised: 18 May 2026; Accepted: 17 June 2026

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Abstract

In the era of digital media, cinema remains a unique cultural and social venue despite the convenience of streaming platforms. This study investigates the factors influencing cinema-going behavior in Hangzhou, China, and Bangkok, Thailand, with a focus on price, location, facilities, service quality, film genres, and scheduling. Drawing on the 4P marketing framework, a mixed-method approach was adopted. Questionnaires were distributed to 200 respondents, equally divided between the two cities, and supported by secondary literature. The findings reveal both shared patterns and culturally specific differences in cinema-going behavior. Audiences in both cities value seat comfort, cinema facilities, and film variety, yet cultural dimensions shape preferences differently: Hangzhou audiences emphasize religion and language, while Bangkok audiences highlight cuisine and local identity. Gender and age also play distinct roles in cinema-going frequency. Post-pandemic evidence indicates a clear recovery in audience satisfaction, reaffirming cinema's resilience as a shared social and cultural space. This research contributes to comparative media consumption studies by highlighting cross-cultural variations and provides practical recommendations for cinema operators.

Keywords: Cinema Going Behavior; 4p Marketing; Audience Preference

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has profoundly reshaped patterns of media consumption. Audiences today can easily access films through streaming platforms at any time and place, often at low or no cost. This convenience has transformed viewing habits, but it has not eliminated the appeal of the cinema. The question of why audiences still choose to attend movie theaters remains significant, particularly in metropolitan contexts where digital alternatives are widely available.

Cinemas are no longer competing only with each other but also with digital media. Their ability to attract audiences depends not only on the quality of the films shown but also on factors such as price, location, facilities, environment, and service quality. These dimensions shape the overall consumer experience, which increasingly determines the survival and growth of theaters in highly competitive markets. Understanding the determinants of cinema-going behavior is therefore essential for developing effective market strategies.

This study focuses on two representative metropolitan areas: Hangzhou, China, and Bangkok, Thailand. Hangzhou is a rapidly modernizing city with a rising middle-class consumer base and a strong digital infrastructure, while Bangkok is an international tourism hub where leisure consumption is deeply embedded in urban culture. By comparing these two

cities, this research aims to reveal both universal and culture-specific determinants of cinema attendance.

The research has two objectives. First, it seeks to identify the key factors influencing audiences' decisions to attend cinemas. Second, it compares the similarities and differences in the decision-making processes of Chinese and Thai moviegoers. The study employs the 4P marketing framework—product, price, place, and promotion—to systematically analyze the interplay of economic, cultural, and experiential factors.

This investigation contributes to both theory and practice. Academically, it enriches comparative studies of consumer behavior in media and entertainment industries by integrating cross-cultural perspectives. Practically, it provides insights for cinema operators, policymakers, and marketers to refine strategies that address shifting audience expectations, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

2. Literature Review

The study of cinema-going behavior has attracted scholarly attention across disciplines such as media studies, marketing, and consumer psychology. Existing research highlights that audience decisions are shaped by a combination of functional, economic, and cultural factors. These determinants can be broadly categorized into cinema-related attributes, consumer decision-making theories, and cross-cultural perspectives.

First, cinema attributes play a central role in shaping audience choice. Previous studies indicate that the physical environment and technical facilities significantly influence satisfaction and loyalty. Comfortable seating, large screens, advanced sound systems, and modern projection technologies enhance immersive experiences, distinguishing cinemas from home viewing (Shoja'Nouri, 2011; Karimzadeh, 2006). Location and accessibility also matter; urban cinemas located in commercial centers with convenient transport links attract higher attendance (Finney, 2010; Lovell & Gianluca, 2009). Price remains a flexible yet decisive factor. Flexible pricing strategies, such as student discounts, memberships, and promotional campaigns, can attract different consumer groups (Armstrong & Kotler, 2000; Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Lamb, Hair, & McDaniel, 1998; Palmer, 2005).

Second, consumer behavior theories provide analytical tools for understanding the decision-making process. The Engel–Kollat–Blackwell and Howard–Sheth models emphasize rational steps such as problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives (Engel et al., 1978; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Lilien, Kotler, & Sridhar, 1992). However, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) stress the experiential dimension, arguing that consumers also seek pleasure, excitement, and emotional resonance, a perspective further developed in modern consumption experience studies (Chaney, Lunardo, & Mencarelli, 2018). This dual perspective suggests that cinema choice is not only a rational calculation but also an affective experience shaped by atmosphere and service.

Third, cross-cultural studies reveal that audience preferences vary across social contexts. De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) show that cultural dimensions such as collectivism versus individualism and high versus low power distance influence media consumption habits. Research on cinema audiences demonstrates that cultural values shape preferences for domestic versus foreign films, genre popularity, and service expectations (Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997). For instance, while religion and language may affect Chinese audiences' perceptions, Thai audiences may place more emphasis on cuisine, local narratives, or tourism-related experiences.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped cinema-going worldwide. Temporary closures, health risks, and the rapid growth of streaming platforms altered viewing habits and reduced attendance (Buccheri, 2022). Studies suggest that audience satisfaction declined during the pandemic but rebounded afterward, reflecting cinema's resilience as a site of social and

cultural interaction. These dynamics emphasize the need for adaptive strategies in pricing, scheduling, and service delivery to sustain recovery.

Taken together, the literature indicates that cinema attendance results from the interplay of economic variables, technical attributes, and cultural contexts. The application of the 4P framework provides a systematic way to analyze these determinants, while consumer behavior theories and cross-cultural perspectives highlight the complexity of motivations underlying audience decisions.

In addition, recent cross-cultural consumer behavior studies suggest that media consumption decisions are increasingly shaped by localized cultural meanings and post-pandemic lifestyle changes, particularly in urban Asian contexts. This perspective further supports the comparative focus of the present study.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative surveys with theoretical analysis grounded in the 4P marketing framework. The combination of methods ensures a more comprehensive understanding of cinema-going behavior across cultural contexts.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative element consisted of structured questionnaires distributed to cinema audiences, while the qualitative element used 4P theory—product, price, place, and promotion—as an analytical lens to interpret findings. This design allowed for triangulation between empirical data and theoretical insights.

3.2 Participants

The research targeted audiences in two metropolitan areas: Hangzhou, China, and Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 200 valid responses were collected, comprising 100 from each city. Respondents were between 18 and 45 years old, with no restrictions on occupation or city of origin, ensuring diversity of perspectives. The balanced sample enabled cross-cultural comparison of audience preferences and behaviors.

3.3 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire served as the main instrument. It included five sections: demographic background (gender, age, education, income, occupation, city), movie-going habits (frequency, satisfaction before, during, and after the pandemic, genre preference, willingness to revisit), cinema choice factors (ticket price, location, facilities, service quality, scheduling, and value-added services), cultural factors (language, religion, cuisine, festivals, etc.), and open-ended suggestions for cinema improvement. Items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important). The questionnaire was distributed online through Wenjuanxing in China and Google Forms in Thailand, ensuring accessibility for respondents in both contexts.

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through two channels: questionnaires and secondary literature. Questionnaires captured firsthand insights from cinema audiences in both cities, while relevant literature on 4P theory and consumer behavior was reviewed to contextualize and validate findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify audience demographics, preferences, and satisfaction trends. Comparative analysis between Hangzhou and Bangkok was conducted to highlight cross-cultural differences. The 4P framework was applied to categorize determinants of cinema-going behavior, while open-ended responses were

analyzed thematically to extract practical suggestions.

4. Results

The results are presented in five sections: demographic characteristics, cinema-going habits, satisfaction trends, key factors influencing cinema selection, and cross-cultural differences.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The survey gathered 200 valid responses, equally divided between Hangzhou and Bangkok. Gender distribution in Hangzhou was nearly balanced (51% male, 49% female), while Bangkok showed a higher proportion of female respondents (37%) compared to males (30%). Age composition differed: Hangzhou was dominated by the 18–25 age group (36%), whereas Bangkok had more respondents aged 26–35 (34%). Education levels were generally high in both cities, with 60% of Hangzhou respondents holding a bachelor's degree compared to 41% in Bangkok. In terms of income, Hangzhou participants mostly fell within the middle-income range (3,000–8,000 RMB, 38%), while Bangkok respondents clustered in lower-to-middle brackets (15,000–30,000 baht, 39%). Occupations reflected similar structures: company employees formed the largest group in both cities, though Bangkok had a higher proportion of freelancers. This aligns with findings that education and income levels significantly influence consumer differentiation in purchasing criteria.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis of Hangzhou data

Variable		Percentage
Gender	Male	51%
	Female	49%
Age Group	Under 18	12%
	18–25	36%
	26–35	32%
	36–45	13%
	46–60	7%
Education Level	High school & below	21%
	Bachelor's degree	60%
	Master's degree & above	19%
Income Range (RMB)	< 3,000	18%
	3,000–8,000	38%
	8,001–15,000	34%
	> 15,000	10%
Occupation	Company Employees	62%
	Students	19%
	Freelancers	14%
	Retirees	5%
City of Residence	Hangzhou	100%

Table 2 Descriptive analysis of Bangkok data

Variable		Percentage
Gender	Male	30%

	Female	37%
	Other	33%
Age Group	Under 18	4%
	18–25	22%
	26–35	34%
	36–45	28%
	46–60	12%
Education Level	High school & below	40%
	Bachelor's degree	41%
	Master's degree & above	19%
Income Range (Baht)	< 15,000	34%
	15,000–30,000	39%
	30,001–50,000	18%
	> 50,000	9%
Occupation	Company Employees	58%
	Freelancers	27%
	Students	10%
	Others	4%
City of Residence	Bangkok	100%

4.2 Cinema-Going Habits

Viewing frequency varied across the two samples. In Hangzhou, 33% attended cinemas two to three times per month, while 31% went rarely, showing a polarized pattern of high and low frequency. In contrast, Bangkok audiences showed a more moderate pattern, with 39% attending once a month and 30% only occasionally. Willingness to revisit was high in both samples, with 88% of Hangzhou respondents and 98% of Bangkok respondents indicating a positive intention.

Table 3 Cinema-Going Habits (Hangzhou)

	Variable	Percentage
Frequency Category	Once a month	24%
	More than once a week	4%
	2–3 times per month	33%
	Rarely (once every few months)	31%
	Never	8%
Willingness to revisit (Hangzhou)	Yes	88%
	No	12%

Table 4 Cinema-Going Habits (Bangkok)

	Variable	Percentage
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Frequency Category	Once a month	39%
	More than once a week	7%
	2–3 times per month	24%
	Rarely (once every few months)	30%
	Never	0%
Willingness to revisit (Bangkok)	Yes	98%
	No	2%

4.3 Satisfaction Trends across Pandemic Phases

Respondents assessed their cinema experiences before, during, and after the pandemic. In Hangzhou, average satisfaction declined from 3.46 to 3.18 (2020–2022) but rose to 3.65 post-2023. A similar rebound was observed in Bangkok, confirming that while the pandemic reduced audience satisfaction, recovery has been strong in the post-pandemic era.

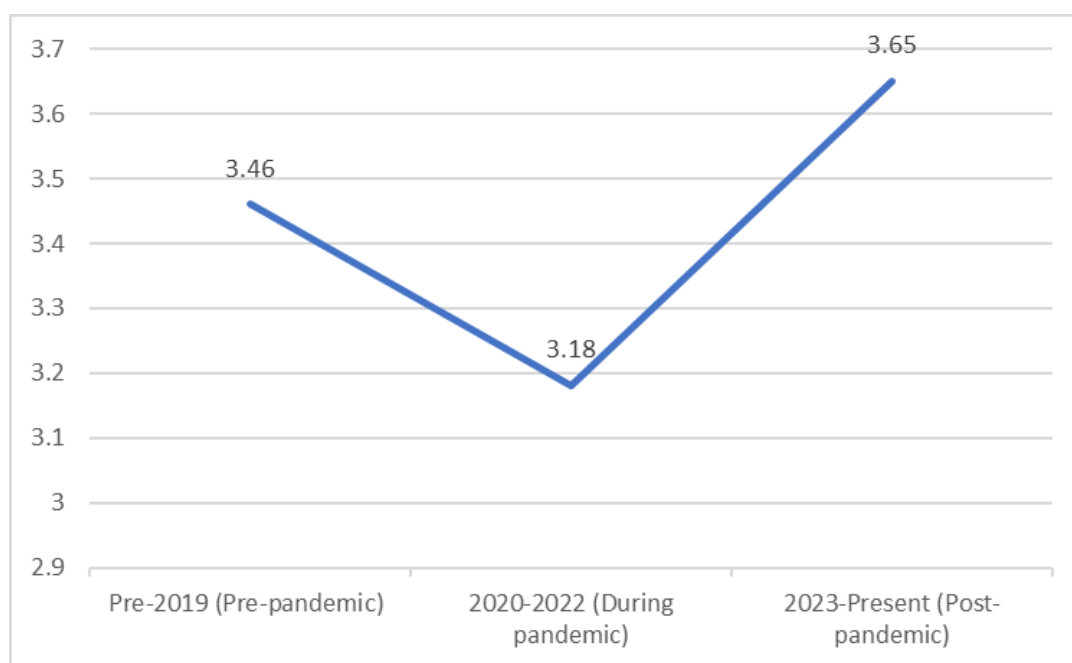


Figure 1 Audience satisfaction across pandemic phases (Hangzhou)

Compared with the pre-pandemic average satisfaction score of 3.46 in pre 2019, the score declined to 3.18 during the pandemic period (2020–2022), indicating a decrease in satisfaction under the impact of COVID-19. However, in the post-pandemic year of 2023, the satisfaction score rose to 3.65, showing a significant increase.

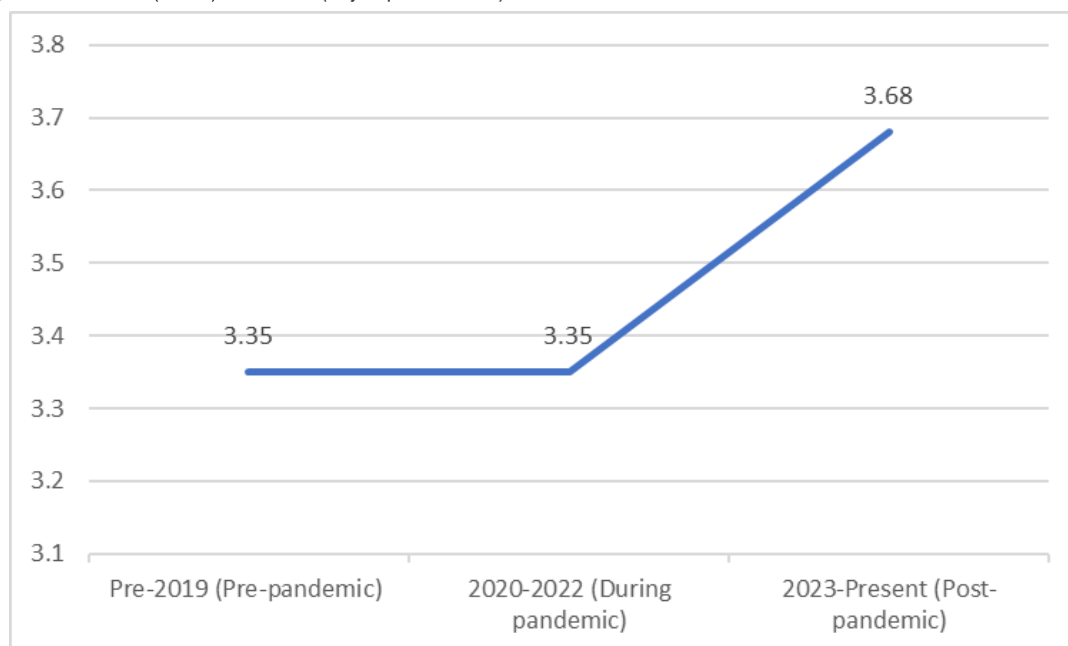


Figure 2 Audience satisfaction across pandemic phases (Bangkok)

Respondents in Bangkok also reported varying levels of satisfaction across the three time periods. Before the pandemic, the average satisfaction score was 3.35, and it remained unchanged during the pandemic years (2020–2022). However, in the post-pandemic period (2023–present), satisfaction levels increased significantly, reaching 3.68. Satisfaction was measured on a five-point scale, where 1 indicated “very dissatisfied” and 5 indicated “very satisfied.”

4.4 Preferred Genres

Genre preferences displayed cultural differences. In Hangzhou, action (64%), comedy (60%), and science fiction (53%) were the top three. Bangkok respondents favored science fiction (26%) and animation (19%), followed by action (19%). The data suggest that Hangzhou audiences are more attracted to fast-paced entertainment, while Bangkok audiences prefer visually imaginative and family-oriented genres.

Table 5 Preferred genres (Hangzhou)

Variable		Percentage
Genre	Action	64%
	Comedy	60%
	Romance	38%
	Sci-Fi	53%
	Animation	25%
	Others	11%

Table 6 Preferred genres (Bangkok)

Variable		Percentage
Genre	Action	19%
	Comedy	20%
	Romance	11%
	Sci-Fi	26%

Animation	19%
Others	3%

4.5 Key Factors in Cinema Selection

Analysis of 12 determinants using a Likert scale revealed that both groups prioritized facilities, film variety, and seat comfort. In Hangzhou, these factors scored slightly higher than value-added services such as food or merchandise. In Bangkok, respondents similarly rated facilities and seat comfort as most important, with over half assigning scores of “important” or “very important.” Price was considered significant but not as decisive as comfort and technological quality, indicating that audience expectations are shifting toward experiential value rather than cost alone.

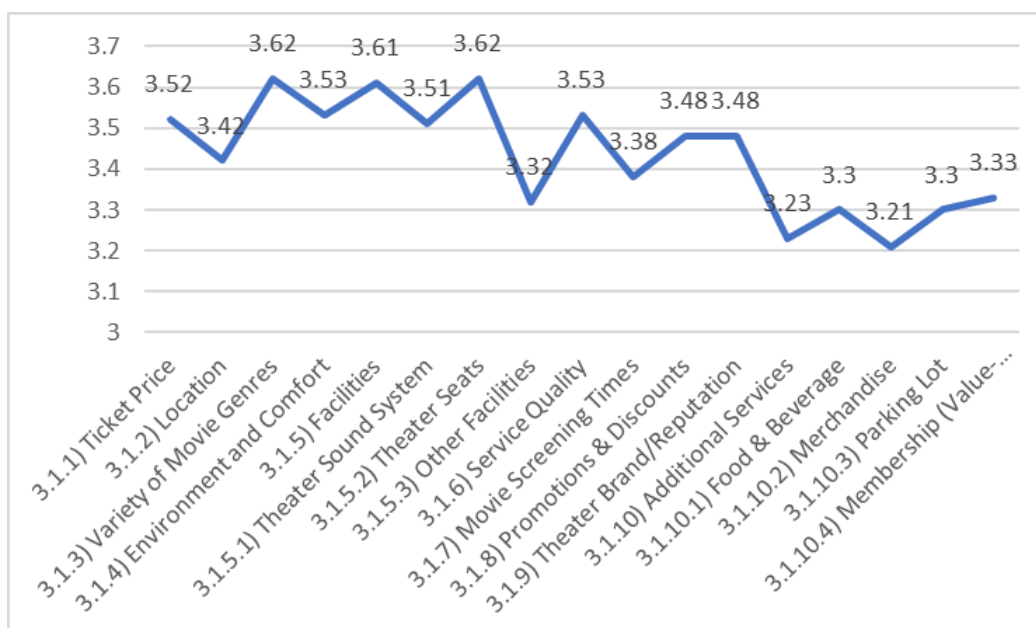


Figure 3 Importance of product-related factors (Hangzhou)

When choosing a cinema, audiences place the highest importance on the variety of film genres (3.62), seat comfort (3.62), and facilities (3.61). These factors received the highest average scores, with more than half of the respondents rating them as “important” or “very important.” In contrast, value-added services such as food and beverage (3.30), parking (3.30), merchandise (3.21), and membership programs (3.33) scored lower, suggesting that they have a relatively weaker impact on the decision-making process.

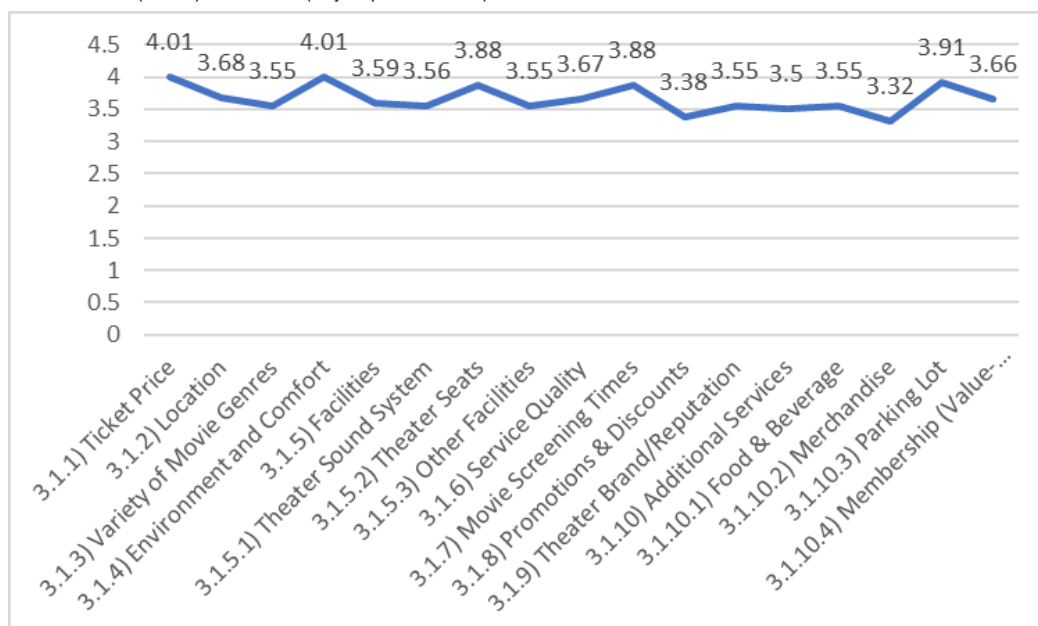


Figure 4 Importance of product-related factors (Bangkok)

In the Bangkok sample, audiences attached the greatest importance to ticket price (4.01), environment and comfort (4.01), and parking facilities (3.91). Screening times (3.88) and seat comfort (3.88) were also rated highly, showing that core product quality and convenience strongly influence cinema choice. These factors received average scores close to or above 4.0, indicating that the majority of respondents considered them “important” or “very important.”

4.6 Cross-Cultural Differences and Suggestions

The most influential cultural dimensions identified by Hangzhou respondents include religion (59%), language (55%), cuisine or food (39%), handicrafts or traditional products (38%), festivals (33%), costumes or attire (30%), tourism and scenic spots (20%), and others (26%). Some participants elaborated that “culture” and “value systems” influence their choices

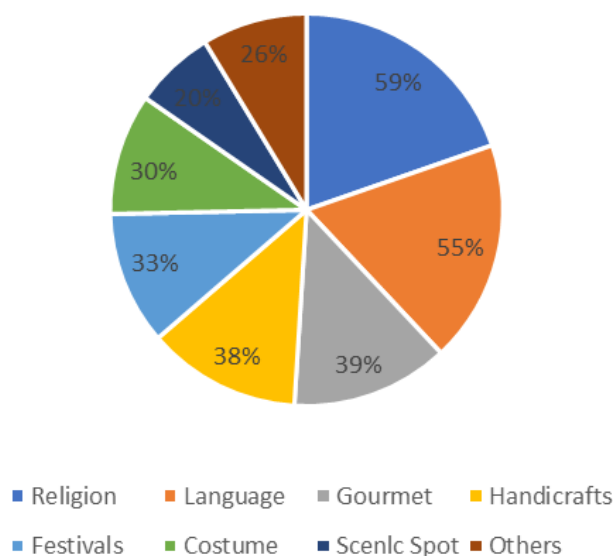


Figure 5 Key cultural elements impacting cinema choice (Hangzhou)

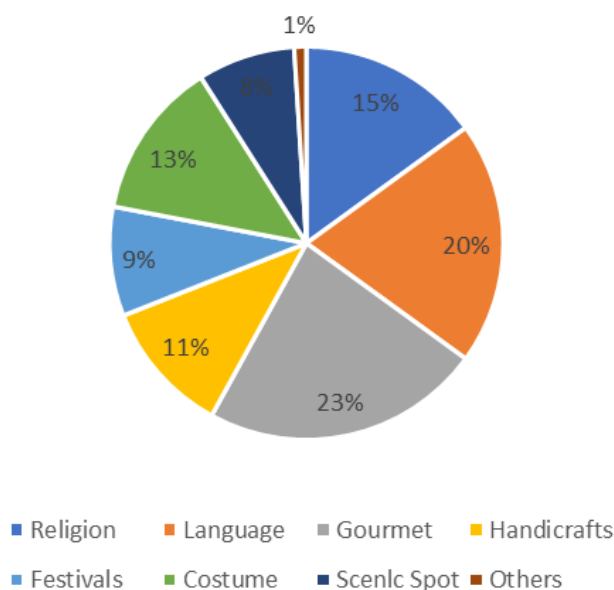


Figure 6 Key cultural elements impacting cinema choice (Bangkok)

Bangkok respondents highlighted cuisine or food (23%) as the most influential cultural factor in their cinema choices, followed by language (20%) and religion (15%). Costumes or attire (13%) and handicrafts or traditional products (11%) were considered moderately important, while festivals (9%) and tourism or scenic spots (8%) received relatively lower attention. Only 1% of respondents selected “others”

Compared with Hangzhou, where religion (59%) and language (55%) were reported as the most influential aspects, Bangkok audiences placed relatively greater emphasis on cuisine and practical cultural experiences such as food and daily lifestyle.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the determinants of cinema-going behavior in Hangzhou, China, and Bangkok, Thailand, through a comparative analysis grounded in the 4P marketing framework. The findings highlight both universal and context-specific factors shaping audience decisions.

First, the results confirm that cinema attendance is influenced by a combination of economic, experiential, and cultural factors. Facilities, seat comfort, and film variety emerged as the most decisive determinants, surpassing traditional concerns such as price or promotional campaigns. This suggests that audiences increasingly value immersive and high-quality experiences that distinguish cinemas from home viewing.

Second, demographic and cultural contexts significantly shape audience preferences. Hangzhou audiences, dominated by younger students and early-career professionals, displayed higher interest in action and comedy genres and valued religion and language in shaping film choices. Bangkok audiences, characterized by a slightly older age structure and broader income distribution, favored science fiction and animation, while emphasizing cultural aspects such as cuisine.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic had a measurable yet temporary impact on cinema-going. Satisfaction levels declined during the pandemic in both cities but recovered strongly afterward, reaffirming cinema’s resilience as a cultural and social institution. The willingness of audiences—particularly in Bangkok—to revisit cinemas underscores their enduring relevance in the post-pandemic media landscape.

In summary, this study achieved its objectives by identifying the key factors driving cinema attendance and by demonstrating how cultural differences produce variations in audience behavior. The results not only enrich comparative media consumption research but also provide practical guidance for cinema operators seeking to refine strategies in an era of changing consumer expectations.

6. Discussion

This study provides several key insights into cinema-going behavior, which can be discussed in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

6.1 Experiential Value versus Economic Considerations

The findings demonstrate that audiences prioritize facilities, comfort, and genre diversity over price. This is consistent with earlier research identifying core factors for attracting audiences in the broader performing arts sector (Alamdari, 2000). This supports Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) experiential consumption model, which emphasizes hedonic value and emotional engagement over rational cost – benefit calculations. While Armstrong and Kotler (2000) highlighted the importance of pricing strategies, the present study suggests that in urban settings such as Hangzhou and Bangkok, the perceived quality of the cinematic experience outweighs ticket price as a determinant of attendance.

6.2 Demographics and Audience Segmentation

The demographic variations observed in the two cities—youth-dominated audiences in Hangzhou versus slightly older audiences in Bangkok—shaped distinct consumption patterns. Younger respondents valued novelty and immersive experiences, while older groups emphasized comfort, accessibility, and the strategic importance of screening times (Pauli, 2002). These results resonate with Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's (1978) consumer decision model, which underscores how life stage and socio-economic conditions affect decision-making. Furthermore, education and income levels have been empirically shown to drive product differentiation in purchase criteria (Leon-Castro et al., 2015). For cinema operators, such segmentation underscores the need for differentiated strategies targeting students, professionals, and families.

6.3 Cross-Cultural Influences on Cinema Preferences

The study confirms the role of cultural dimensions in shaping audience behavior. Hangzhou respondents emphasized religion and language, while Bangkok respondents highlighted cuisine and lifestyle-related aspects. These findings align with Hofstede's cultural framework (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), which posits that collectivist cultures prioritize shared values and traditions, whereas more individualist or tourism-driven contexts emphasize lifestyle and leisure consumption. This suggests that cinema marketing strategies should integrate cultural symbols and narratives to better resonate with local audiences.

6.4 Pandemic Disruptions and Resilience

The decline in satisfaction during the COVID-19 period followed by recovery supports research by Buccheri (2022), who highlighted the pandemic's temporary but disruptive effect on cinema attendance. The resilience observed post-pandemic demonstrates that despite the rise of streaming platforms, cinemas retain their role as spaces of collective cultural experience. This underscores the need for adaptive strategies such as flexible scheduling, health-oriented services, and hybrid promotional approaches—including the leverage of electronic word-of-mouth platforms—to sustain audience loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Houston, & Walsh, 2007).

6.5 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, this study extends the application of the 4P framework by integrating cultural and experiential dimensions into the analysis of cinema consumption. It demonstrates that while price and place remain important, product (facilities and genres) and promotion (cultural alignment) increasingly determine consumer choices. Practically, the research provides actionable insights for cinema operators in cross-cultural urban contexts, showing that improving experiential quality and aligning with cultural expectations can enhance competitiveness.

7. Suggestions

7.1 Enhance Experiential Quality

Investments should prioritize core facilities such as seating comfort, sound systems, and screen quality. These elements were consistently rated as more influential than value-added services like food or merchandise. Modernizing projection technology and maintaining immersive environments can sustain audience loyalty.

7.2 Segment Services for Diverse Audiences

Audience demographics in Hangzhou and Bangkok revealed different needs. Younger audiences in Hangzhou responded positively to genre diversity and innovative promotions, while slightly older audiences in Bangkok valued comfort and schedule flexibility. Cinemas should design differentiated packages—for instance, student discounts, family-oriented bundles, and loyalty programs targeting frequent viewers.

7.3 Integrate Cultural Elements into Marketing

Cultural preferences strongly shaped cinema choices. In Hangzhou, religious and linguistic dimensions were salient, while in Bangkok, cuisine and lifestyle-related aspects were emphasized. Cinema operators should incorporate local cultural features into film promotion, lobby design, and special events to enhance cultural resonance.

7.4 Adapt Strategies in the Post-Pandemic Era

The pandemic highlighted vulnerabilities in cinema attendance but also confirmed resilience afterward. Cinemas should adopt adaptive measures such as flexible scheduling, online booking systems, and enhanced hygiene protocols. These adjustments can address lingering concerns and restore consumer confidence.

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