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Article:	Future of Video Streaming Platforms and Mainstream Cinema: A Case Study of Fujian Province, China
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ABSTRACT

The pandemic has dramatically changed the current film-viewing landscape from cinema to streaming services. Video streaming platforms (VSPs) are hailed as the future of the Chinese Film & Entertainment industry. The COVID protocols, such as biometric surveillance and quarantine-driven isolation after a coronavirus scare, forced the cinema-goers to stay safe at home and enjoy the films, web series, and shows on mini-screen. In the time of streaming services, the cinema theatre is grappling with doing business. This study explores post-pandemic prospects, explaining why movie-lovers access and prefer to video streaming services and how these digital platforms are replacing big screens. The study reveals that most respondents use the VSPs on their smartphones and laptops to watch films. These platforms suspicion the cinema-goers to visit the cinema to watch the films even though they do not think that the future is only on video streaming platforms. Easy to access, various genres, cheaper, and user-friendly factors make VSPs popular among the audience.

Keywords: China; Mainstream cinema; Pandemic; Viewership; Mini screen

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has brought an unprecedented situation for the film and entertainment industry, heavily impacting the operation, shutting down cinema, causing delays in production, cancelling film shootings, and disrupting new releases in the cinema. The COVID-19 pandemic through 2020 and beyond stuck the people at home and completely shifted the way the world works and others unemployed, brought on high demand for remote working and accelerated the moving towards digital platforms. Quarantine and work-from-home mandates amid the coronavirus pandemic acts as a catalyst for streaming services. During and post-pandemic era, known as the 'new normal,' increased the skyrocketing of video consumption at home. It may be charming to the streaming services, but it creates a gap between moviegoers and cinema. As a result, over one and half years into the new standard enhanced the use of technology and digital media in people's personal, professional and public lives. With the ubiquity of video streaming services, watching movies has become a much more personal experience. The streaming services also started revealing their viewership for their original films, web series, shows, and specials across the year. COVID-19 persists longer than a year showing up how the cinema industry was unprepared for it. Video streaming services users have grown dramatically over the last year and are one of the Chinese cinema industry's most prominent economic challenges (Shah et al., 2020, 2021). China's film industry has rebounded spectacularly after a year that was unparalleled in its difficulties. According to Gower Street, an industry analytics company headquartered in the United Kingdom, China was the first nation in the biosphere to accomplish milestone "complete box office recovery" in August 2020. In China, most theatres were open, while U.S. cinema-goers were still staying home because of the pandemic (Palmeri & Zhao, 2021). When it comes to China's box office numbers as of mid-June 2021, they are 1,175% ahead of the same period in time in 2020 when the outbreak was in high gear, and they are just 1 percent below the normal box office of the three years before to the pandemic (2017-2019), which is remarkable. China accomplished this even though theatres were only running at 75 percent capacity and Hollywood content was scarce. COVID-19 extremely disrupts worldwide film industry (especially Hollywood) blockbusters. Concerns no other industry has even come close to approaching the scale that existed pre-pandemic. The United States was still 85 percent behind before the outbreak (Gower Street, 2021).

Militaristic patriotic films such as 'My People, My Homeland,' 'The Sacrifice,' and 'The Eight Hundred,' which became the highest-earning film in the world last year due to its \$460 million domestic box office — will help to propel the Chinese market forward in 2020. As China continues its impressive recovery after setting a New Year's Day record on January 1 and a new benchmark throughout the Lunar New Year in February, Chinese films have entirely dominated the box office in the second half of the last year (Shah et al., 2021). In the first half of this year, box office successes such as "Detective Chinatown 3," "Hi, Mom," "Sister," and "Cliff Walkers" have fuelled the country's box office recovery. Last year's Lunar New Year brought in \$1.22 billion (7.82 billion yuan) in seven days, representing a 33% increase over the previous year. The largest ever April festival weekend raked in \$128 million, while the most competitive Labor Day weekend in history drew \$265 million in revenue (Davis, 2021b).

In China, there are more than a billion users of the Internet. The rising emergence of home cinema and filmdom displays may have boosted the growth of video streaming services. Due to the closure of cinemas and the difficulties of linear television studios creating regular series, individuals seek other entertainment options during quarantine. Has the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a new race between the video streaming services and the cinema industry? The clear indication is that the answer to this question is yes. However, some facts have been revealed. The rise of streaming video services has caused significant disruption in the film industry. As a result, viewing films is now easier, more accessible, and cheaper for a more significant section of the population than ever before. Anyone with an internet connection using their mobile phone may catch up with a movie from anywhere in the globe while. From the perspective of total video streaming platforms revenue, China is currently the world's second-largest market after the United States. After the issuance of the 5G commercial license, Video streaming services will further benefit from technologies and related services such as 4K, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT), and is expected to reach approximately US\$16.1 billion in revenue by 2024 (PWC Hong Kong, 2020).

As a consequence of the Internet, China's entertainment sector is quickly changing. With the introduction of 4G and 5G networks and millions of users, the scale and impact of future digital content consumption for the country's mobile phone user base are enormous. On mobile smartphone devices, audiences watch films, TV programs, documentaries, and web series in various ways. Netflix, Youku, Bilibili, Tencent Video, iQIYI, Disney Plus, and Amazon Prime are just a handful of the websites/apps that stream movies and other video material. It has become a challenge for the movie theatre business.

On aired different seasons of the web series are the most-watched on the video streaming platforms. From hugging flowers and whirlpools to showing sex scenes, global media has undoubtedly come a long way through changes, and much of the credit goes to video streaming platforms. These platforms have given producers the opportunity and space to play openly. New web series and movies are presented to viewers every week on platforms like iQIYI, Tencent Video, Youku, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney plus, making the industry environment more challenging and presenting real-life stories. The real stories that the traditional media has been avoiding for a long time. Nandini Ramnath, a film editor with the news website 'Scroll.in', says that Corona has also led many filmmakers to move to the streaming space and that the pandemic has given rise to the fact of Create content that is instantly accessible to viewers.

VSPs produce both long series and short films, which is good regarding the options available to the viewers. Many streaming series are better written, performed, and produced than traditional network television shows or movies. Some of them have made good use of the long format and adapted the characters and stories in a way that was not possible on (traditional) movies or television with frequent commercial breaks. In order to adapt to the changing environment, theatres will need to develop a compelling pitch for the big-screen experience. Perhaps a cohabitation of streaming sites and cinemas would be a win-win situation, with owners benefiting from both arrangements and customers having the flexibility to watch anything they want, whenever and wherever they want.

The film business is significantly influenced by box office revenue, as well as the returns of movie projects over the course of its entire distribution cycle. The worldwide loss in box office proceeds in mid-March 2020 was roughly USD 5 billion, owing in part to China's 70 000 theatre closures (Roxborough et al., 2020; Whiting, 2020). That figure climbed as the COVID spread around the globe, reaching USD 17 billion by the end of May. Data from the box office in the United States in August, 2020 shows a 75.9% drop in revenue from the previous year (Box Office Mojo, 2021). The industry's production and distribution have both been impacted by the due to lockdown. Movie shooting and production rely on strict programming, which is often arranged months or even years in advance. The lockdowns have also stifled movie distribution, and even after a partial resumption of commercial activity, social distancing restrictions reduce audience capacity significantly. Other kinds of distribution, including as internet and TV broadcasts, are unaffected (or even favored) by the pandemic, but without the first release in movie theatres, a significant part of the economic model was lost and cannot be readily restored in the short or medium term. It allows the filmmakers to think about the other safe platforms (Travkina & Sacco, 2020).

Generate Revenue

The crucial thing to note here is that they spend a significant amount of money acquiring rights to films and programs not created in-house. As a result, they are unable to declare cash gains or even returns on investment. They can only profit if they bring in a certain number of user subscriptions; in other words, they operate on a cash-flow deficit. This has resulted in a growing tendency among lesser-known platforms to create their content, such as original web series and stand-up specials, rather than purchasing the rights to other programs and movies. The source of income for these sites is a frequent topic of discussion. The answer is straightforward. User subscriptions account for a large portion of their revenue, but they also earn money through advertisements (Adhikari, 2020).

VSPs are essential for a variety of reasons. They work with a variety of devices, including mobile phones, personal computers, and televisions. VSPs are also much more affordable than movie tickets in a theatre and are available at much lower prices. Last but not least, they are extraordinarily creative and unique.

Definitions

Consumption patterns have changed due to the rapid growth of communication systems and digital devices, which has enabled the emergence of a range of video streaming services. VSPs or online video distributors (OVD) are interties made accessible video content over the online platform or another Internet Protocol-based medium (Horan, 2015). In the digital world, VSPs are websites or applications that provide video content to their users in short or lengthy videos, including movies, web series, serials, shows, soap operas, and documentaries (Yaqoub et al., 2022). VSPs are also known as over-the-top (OTT) services, video streaming services, video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, online video distributors, streaming video services, and video websites. There are different types of VSPs available, i.e., some services require

subscriptions to access the video content (film, seasons, shows, web series, and all the rest), ad-supported video streaming services, and free ad-supported streaming video services.

Objectives of the study

According to the perspective of core plan, overall main objectives comprise the following elements in general; -

- To find both male and female viewers' patterns to use the video streaming platforms.
- To investigate the viewers' watching the habit of film on VSPs.
- To explore which devices are used to watch these platforms.
- To examine the film-watching habits of the students in both VSPs and cinema.

Research Questions

- Video streaming platforms will take over the cinema experience, or they tranquillity coexist?
- What are the reasons for the popularity of video streaming platforms among the audience?

Methodology/Data collections

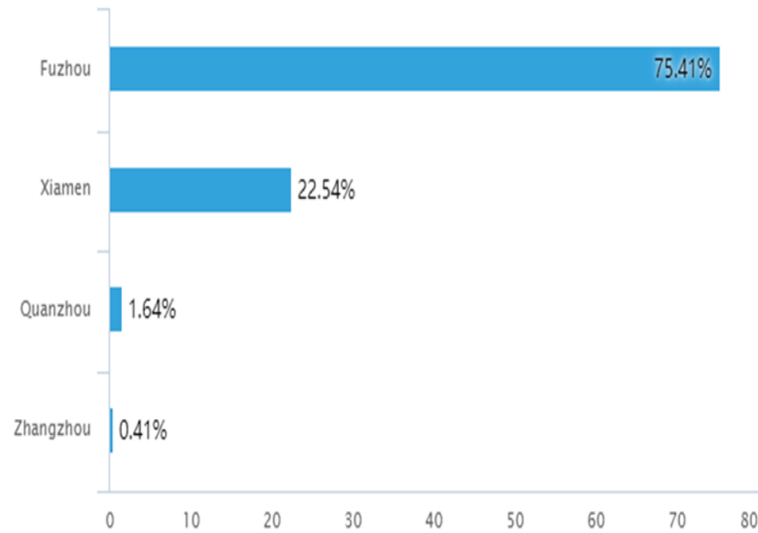
Subjects. A survey of movie-lovers from the cities Fuzhou, Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Zhangzhou of Fujian Province, China, (fig. 1, fig. 2) was implemented using convenient and snowball sampling to access and determine the demographical characteristics of the population, movie-watching patterns, time spent, perception, and reasons of using streaming services. A 244 sample of university and colleges students who like movies filled an online survey.

Measure. A structured online questionnaire was administered. The question items were closed-ended about the streaming services and cinema industry. The questionnaire was distributed via WeChat using an online questionnaire form. A total of 244 fill forms were sorted out after receiving the filled questionnaire.



primary source: authors N=244

Fig. 1: The terrain of the respondents (Fujian, China)



primary source: authors N=244

Fig. 2: The conurbation of the sampling

The gender, age, pocket money, and education level of each participant were examined initially (see table 1). The individual was then asked to fill out video streaming services and cinema-related knowledge, experience, willingness, and behavior survey. The survey was created based on the literature review.

Table 1

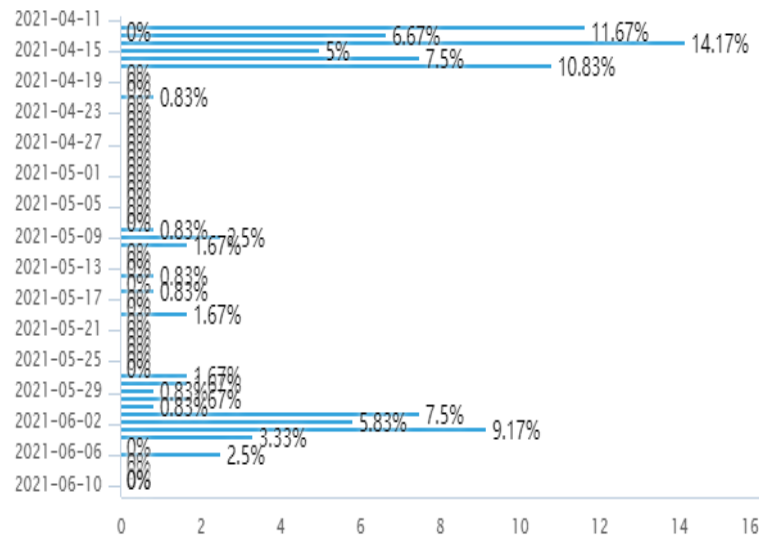
Demographic statistics of the respondents.

	# Of respondents	Component ration (%)
Total	244	100.00
Gender		
Male	122	50.00
Female	122	50.00
Age		
Less than 20 years	75	30.74%

21-25 year	132	54.10%
26-30 year	29	11.89%
31-35 year	7	2.87%
Above than 36	1	0.41%
Pocket money (Per month) *		
600-1000元	23	9.47%
1100-1500元	87	35.80%
1600-2000元	86	35.39%
2100 or more than 2100 元	47	19.34%
Education level		
Bachelor	129	52.87%
Master	51	20.90%
Ph.D.	19	7.79%
Any other	45	18.44%

* 1 \$ U.S. Dollar is equal to 6.43 Chinese Yuan (RMB) as of May 15, 2021

About two months of VSPs and the cinema-related survey were conducted on WeChat (Weixin) public platform in 2021 (April 11 –10 June) (see fig. 3). This survey's link address or QR code was posted in different groups, individually shared with the WeChat friends, and request the movie lovers to fill it. Some of them posted on their moments and also shared in different groups.



primary source: authors

N=244

Fig. 3: Timeframe of the data collection

The number of active WeChat accounts on Tencent's platform has increased. In the 3rd quarter of 2021, WeChat will be the only Chinese app with 1.26 billion monthly active users across all ages. WeChat, which was launched in 2011, is a Chinese firm Tencent's mobile messaging application. Weixin was marketed in China and renamed WeChat in 2012 for foreigners (Iqbal, 2021; Thomala, 2021). All the respondents of the present study filled online e-questionnaire via WeChat (see fig. 4).

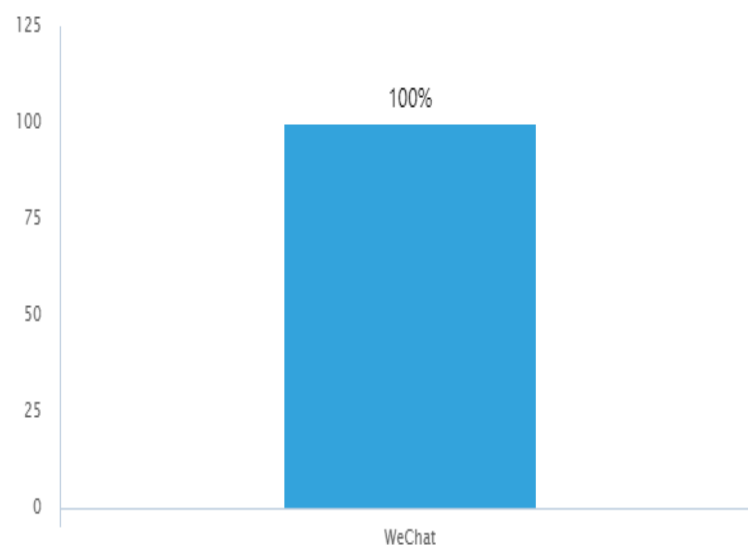
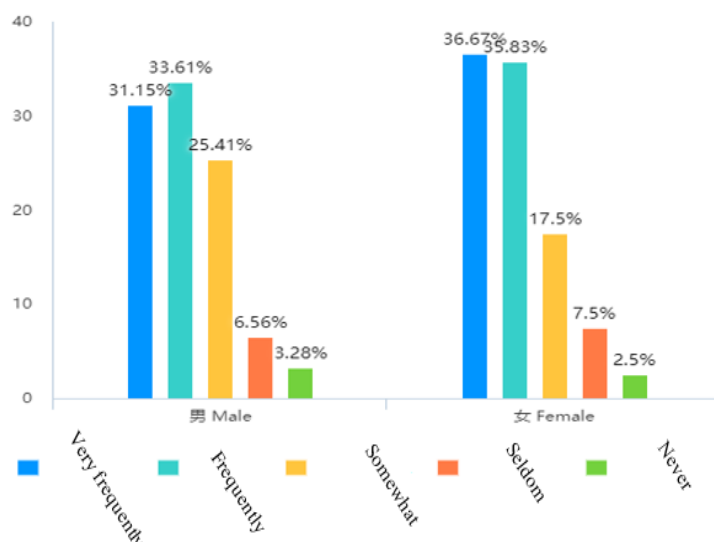


Fig. 4: Completion via WeChat

Data Analysis and findings

Fig. 5 shows the percentage of watching the video streaming services. About 69% (166) of respondents during the online survey said they are frequent users of VSPs, and only around 3% (7) never used these video services. Overall female students more frequently used streaming services as compared to male students (see fig. 5).



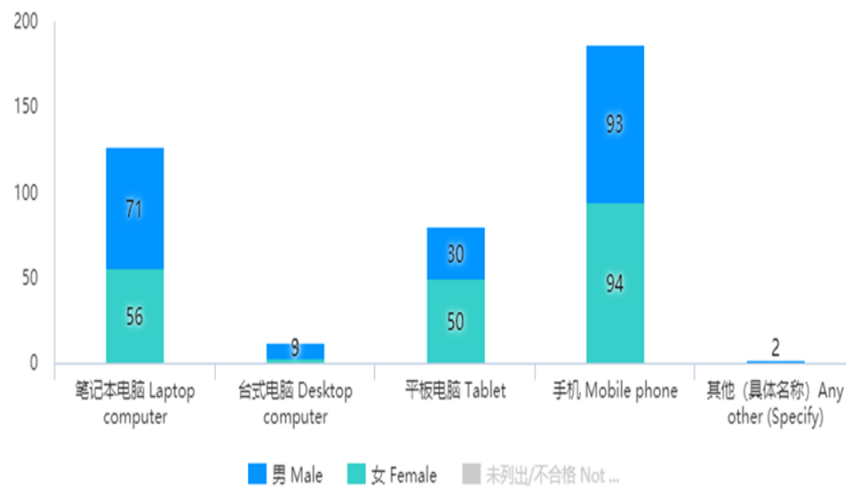
primary source: authors

Evaluated data: (%)

No. of valid entries in this question: 242

Fig. 5: Users of video streaming services

The increased usage of gadgets such as cell phones has been related in recent research to shorter attention spans. If this is accurate, it will have a significant impact on how we watch television. Our desire for continuous interaction is another by-product of our usage of intelligent gadgets. As a result, we often associate seeing with kinetic action, especially when it comes to our hands. Our brains are being hardwired to need movement when we accomplish things because of this kind of connection. These two trends will undoubtedly lead to our preferring shorter films over longer ones (Davies, 2020). Our digital and physical lives are becoming more entwined, with almost everything swirling around our linked gadgets (Abrol, 2020). The respondents were surveyed in multiple-choice questions about the devices they use to access the streaming video services in terms of frequency. The majority of the streaming video services users operated mobile phones 187 (49.73% male and 50.27% female), the second majority used the laptop 127 (55.91% male and 44.09% female). Tablet users are the third majority 80 (37.5% male, and 62.5% female), while still few males also use desktop computers and other devices. There is no significant difference between males and females regarding mobile phone use. For laptop computer usage, male users are higher than females. While Tablet users, female are higher than males. One respondent said he used Internet TV to watch streaming video services (fig. 6).

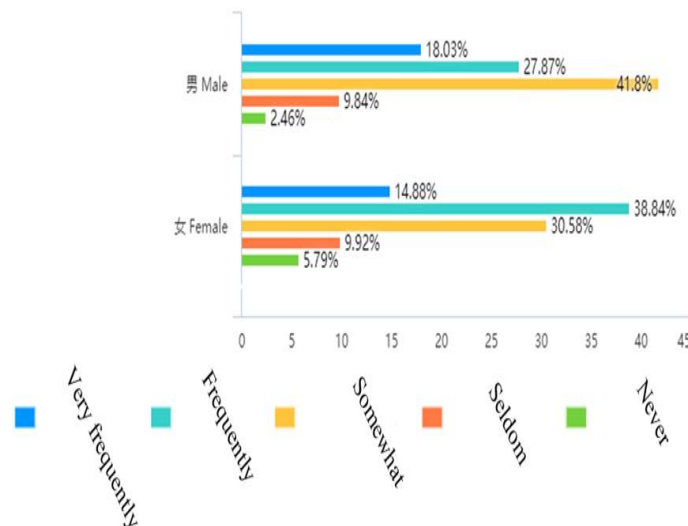


primary source: authors Evaluated data: (%)

No. of valid entries in this question: 244

Fig. 6: Users of the gadgets

In the single choice question, the figures show that the majority, 49.79% (56 male and 65 female), frequently watch the movies on VSPs. About 36% somewhat, and 4% never watched the films on these platforms. In a nutshell, 50% of users frequently watch movies on VSPs (see fig. 7).

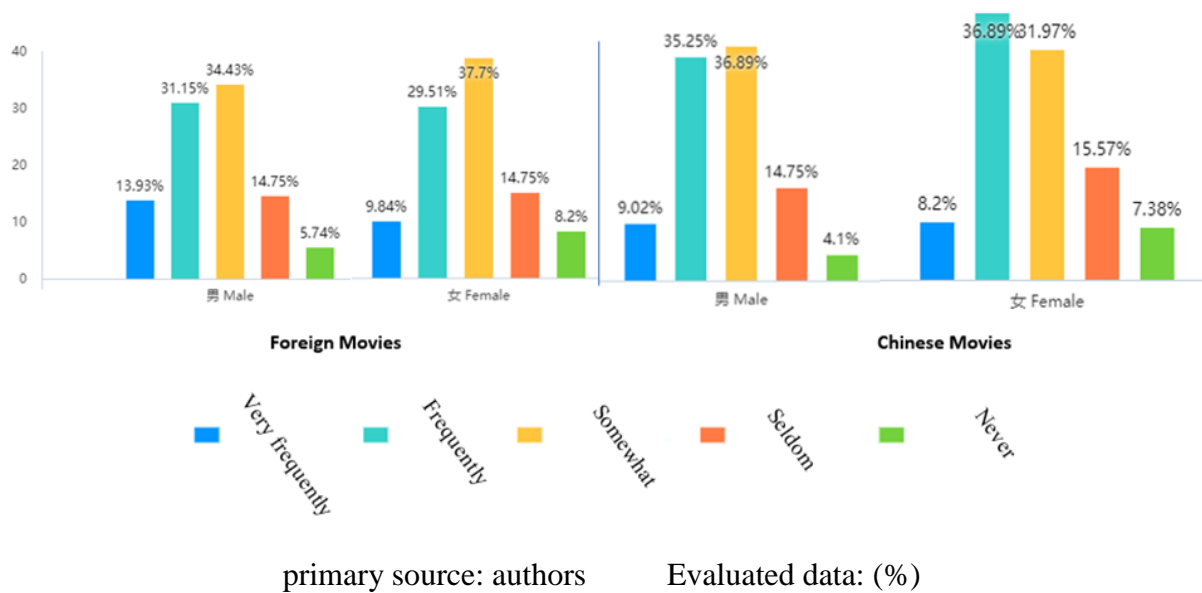


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No. of valid entries in this question: 243

Fig. 7: Viewing habits of film on video streaming services

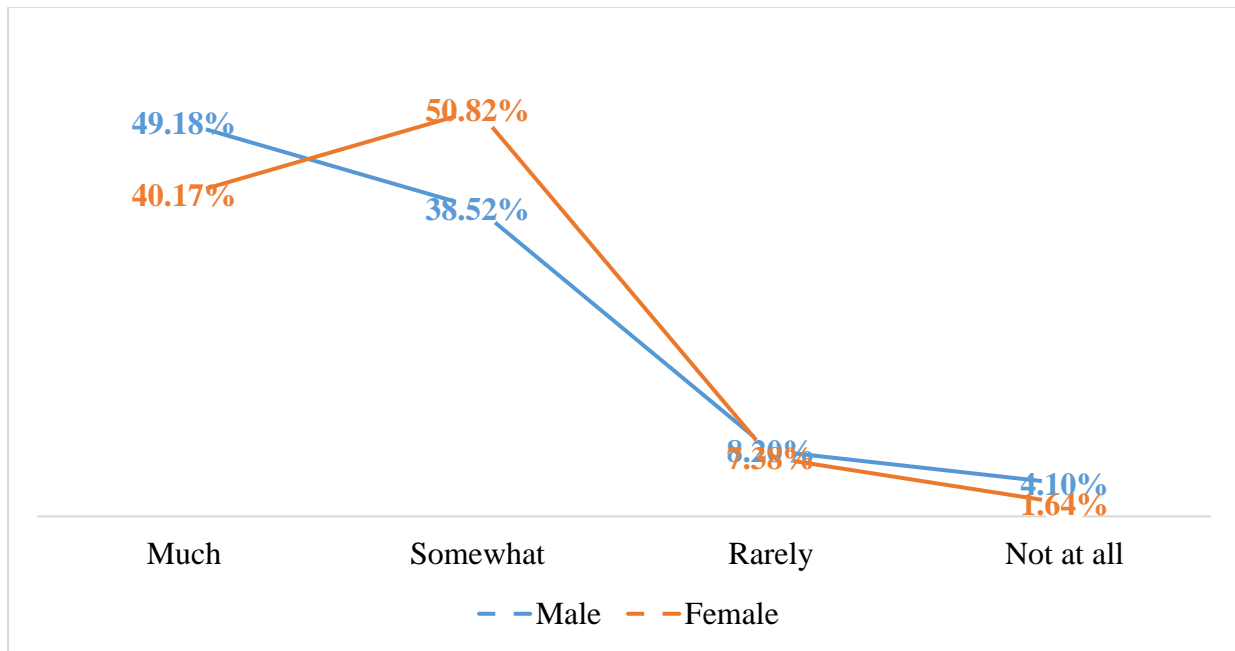
About 45% male and 39% female frequently watch foreign movies while about 6% male and 8% female never watch foreign films. On average, 35% of males and females somewhat watch foreign movies. Nearby 44% male and 45% female frequently watch the local movies on VSPs. Furthermore, 4% male and 7% female never watch any film on the VSPs. Male viewers are more interested in foreign movies as compared to females. There is no significant difference between male and female viewers of domestic movies (see fig. 8).



No. of valid entries in this question: 244

Fig. 8: Viewers of the foreign and Chinese movies

The rise of the VSPs in the confront that the cinema industry needs to address for its flourishing. These services have disrupted the cinema industry (Chhajer, 2020). About 49% male and 40% female agreed that VSPs impact the cinema industry and attract moviegoers to watch the film on the digital platforms if they do not have enough time to visit the cinema or any other reason. Most females somewhat agreed, while the male majority 'much' agreed that digital video platforms confront the cinema industry. Only about 4% male and 2% females do not think that streaming services are a challenge for the cinema (see fig. 9).

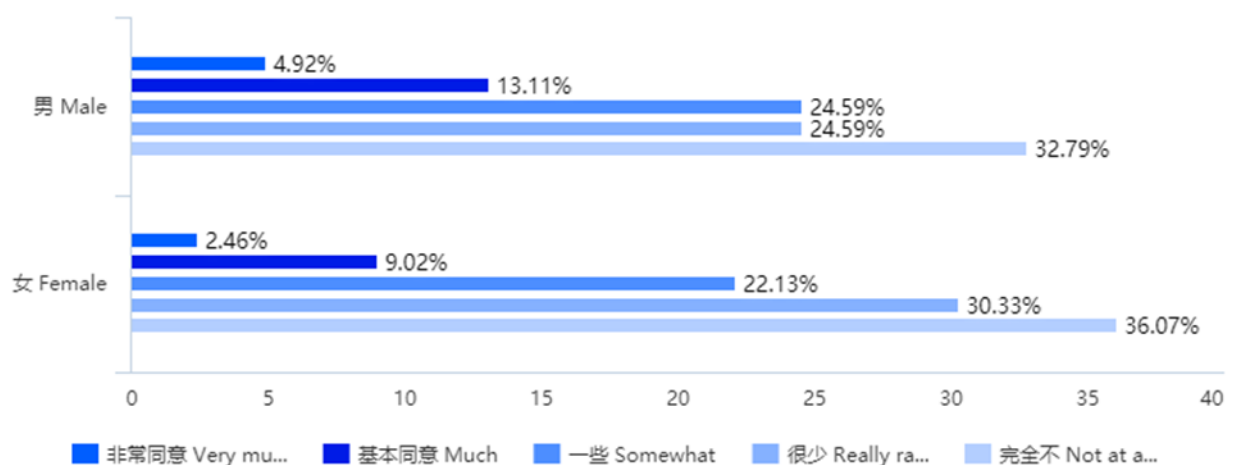


primary source: authors Evaluated data: (%)

No. of valid entries in this question: 244

Fig. 9: Video streaming services are disrupting the cinema industry

There is a slight difference between males and females, but most of both do not think that VSPs will completely overtake the place of cinema. More than 20% of respondents think that somewhat and about 18% of males and 11% of females think that cinema's future maybe only is on video streaming platforms (see fig. 10).

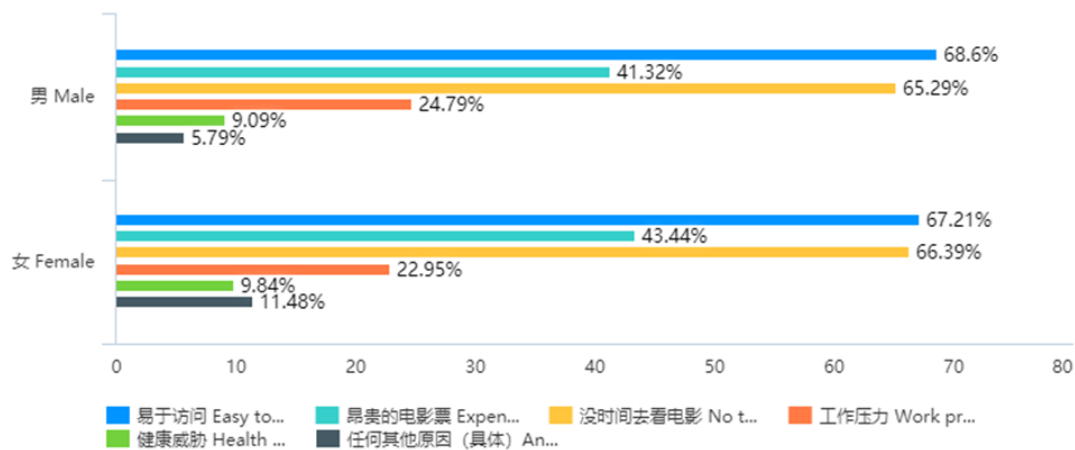


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No. of valid entries in this question: 244

Fig. 10: Prospective of cinema in the post-pandemic era

According to the findings of earlier research, there was an upsurge in Video streaming platforms during the lockdown. People's satisfaction levels have risen due to the quality of content, free time, convenience, free content, and the absence of advertising. During the lockdown, those who work from home spend more time on video streaming platforms (Madnani et al., 2020; Rono & Mugeni, 2019; Varghese & Chinnaiah, 2021). The majority of the respondents, about 69%, 65% male and 67%, 66% female, subsequently considered easy to access, lack of time is the reason for watching the movie on video streaming services. About 41% male and 43% considered that cinema tickets are expensive. Approximately 9% male and 10% female are also still considered health threats are reasons (this study was conducted during the post-pandemic era). In comparison, 6% male and 11% female also consider other reasons, like "convenient," "The use of mobile phones and other terminals affects habits," "Comfortable relax," "Social fear," "More choices of videos to choose from anytime, anywhere unlimited," "Do not like to go out to watch movies alone." Overall, the majority of both males and females consider video streaming services are easy to access and have no time to visit the cinema (see fig. 11).

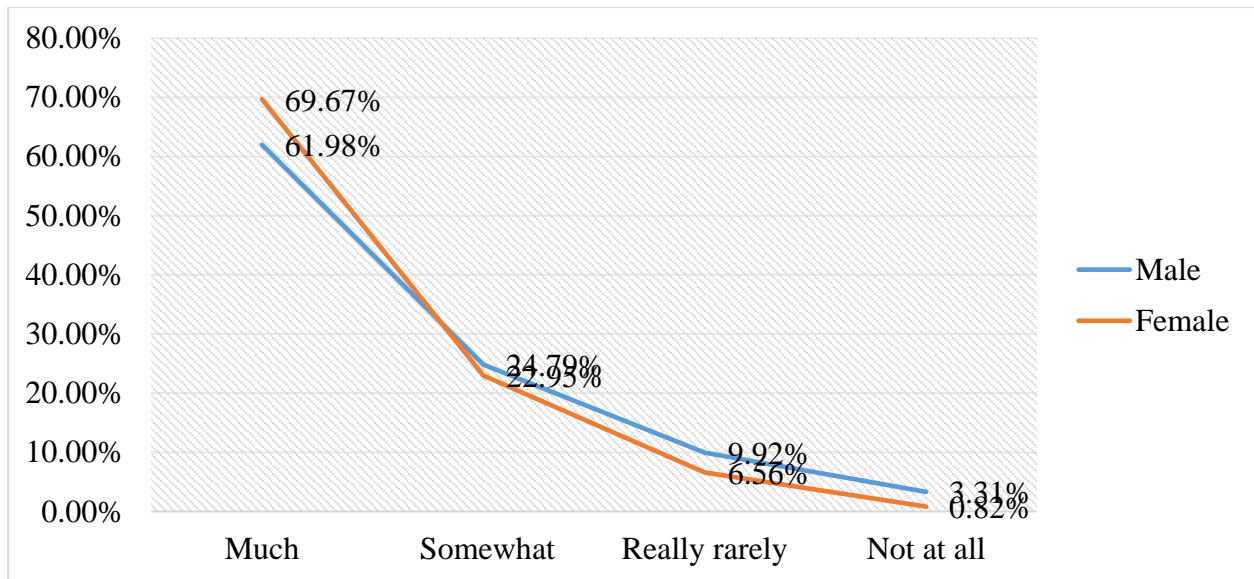


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No. of valid entries in this question: 243

Fig. 11: Reasons for watching a movie on video streaming platforms.

Video streaming services are significantly influencing the film and entertainment industry. The preponderance of female (70%) and males (62%) viewers consider that VSPs can open a new path for the Chinese film and entertainment industry. Only 3% male and 1% female do not think digital video platforms can open new paths (see fig. 12).

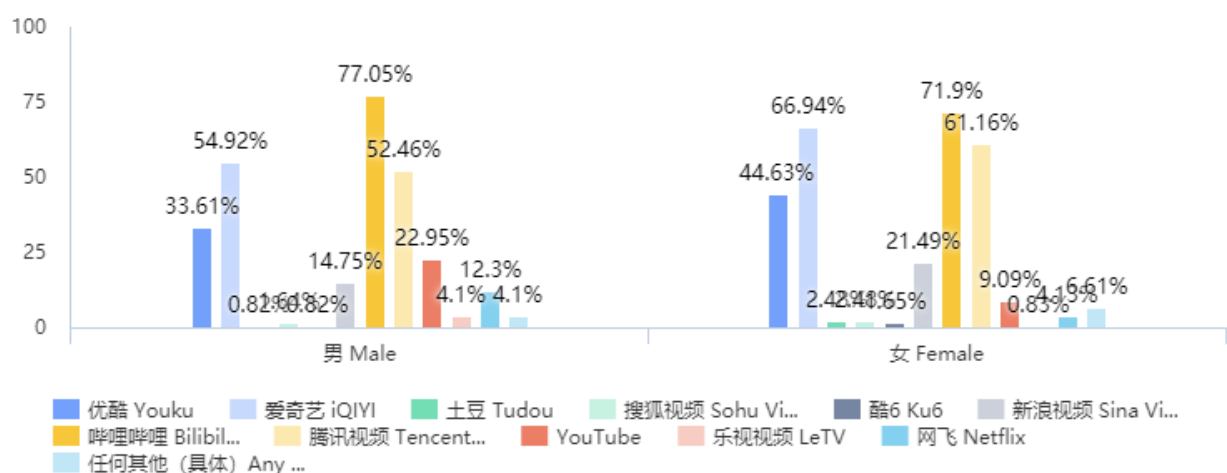


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Fig. 12: Video streaming platforms' new path.

Dominant viewership of the VSPs is the consumer of video content on Bilibili (77% male, 72% female). The second majority of males (55%) and females (67%) used iQIYI platforms. Tencent video platform users are the third majority among our respondents (male 61% and 52%). Youku services are used by 40% of respondents (34% male and 45% female). Most youngsters used domestic VSPs, particularly Bilibili, iQIYI, Tencent Video, and Youku. Even though Netflix and YouTube are banned and not operating in China, but still 8% of respondents (12% male and 4% female) and 16% of respondents (23% male and 9% female) orderly frequently used Netflix and YouTube platforms (see fig. 13) (Yaqoub et al., 2022).

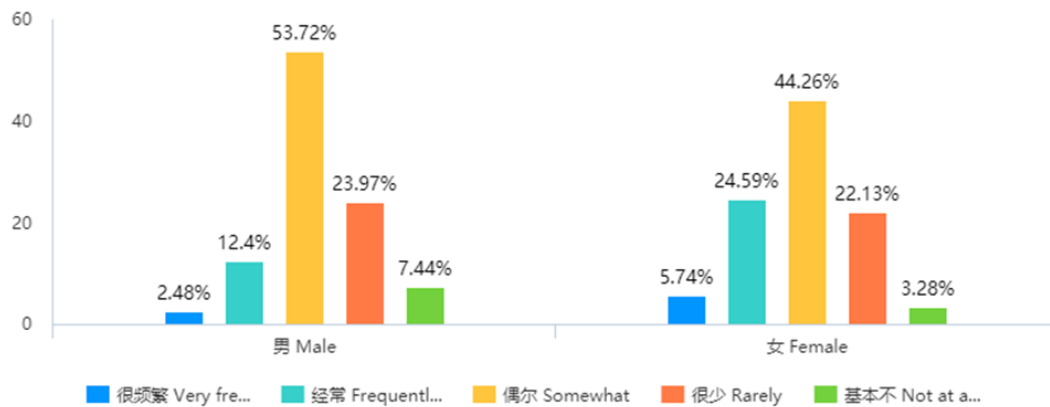


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Fig. 13: Video streaming platforms.

The majority of the respondents somewhat watch the movie in the cinema (54% male and 44% female). About 1/3 of females and 1/7 of males visit the cinema frequently in the post-pandemic era. It shows that females more frequently watch movies in the cinema hall as compared to males. Approximately 7% male and 3% female did not visit the cinema during the study month (see fig 14).

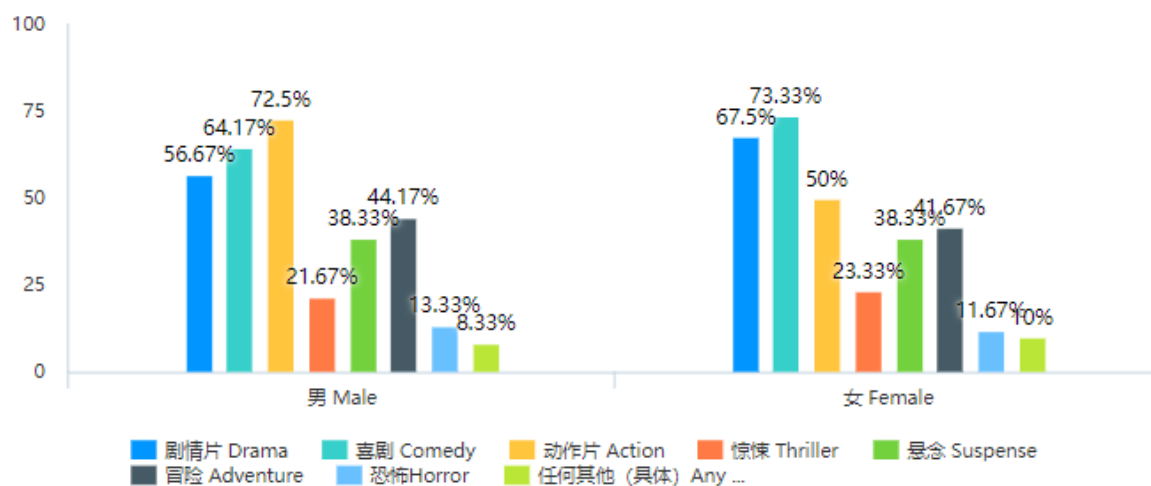


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Fig. 14: Cinema Visit.

The film audience enjoys the movies both on the cinema screen and at home/dormitory on the small screen. China currently has 75,581 screens in 13,000 complexes, up 5,794 screens from last year (Davis, 2021a). The major three genres i.e., comedy, drama and action orderly would preferably watch in cinema (67.62% (64.17% male, 73.33% female), 61.07% (56.67% male, 67.5% female), and 60.25% (72.5% male, 50% female)). Import animation, literature and art, fantasy, science fiction, sports inspiration, cartoon, and romantic are also genres preferred by the audience (see fig. 15). Action-based movies significantly preferred by the male.



primary source: authors Evaluated data: (%)

No. of valid entries in this question: 243

Fig. 15: Preference of genres.

Fig. 15: Word-cloud of big challenge face by cinema theatre.

Conclusion

With the innovation of entertainment, users' movie-watching behaviors have also changed, and smart-home screens have emerged. Video streaming platforms are altering internet usage patterns and increasing demand for high-speed internet access. This research examines the impact of video streaming services on consumers' willingness to watch the film on video streaming platforms during and post-pandemic era in China. A rising audience and varied material are expected to make digital platforms the new standard for cinema lovers. COVID-19 has accelerated the expansion of the entertainment industry that was already growing.

Nonetheless, the unusual scenario has resulted in a thorough reorganization of Chinese's ever-changing OTT industry dynamics. As we are in the first half of the year 2022, and Chinese film industry is leading the box office across the world consecutive three years. VSPs are gaining traction as a subset of digital media, and this phenomenon has begun with the growth of data-connected smartphone consumers. This research was conducted during and post-pandemic era in China to better understand youngster behavior and industry and examine a considerably significant adoption of video streaming platforms by youth audience during and post-lockdown time owing to remain at home. The study's finding shows that the majority of the participants use VSPs to watch the video content. They use different gadgets, particularly smartphones, to access the video streaming platforms (Yaqoub et al., 2022). In a nutshell, half of streaming video services users frequently watch movies on these platforms.

Moreover, the male is more interested in foreign films as compared to female. These platforms have disrupted the cinema industry. The audience is not ready to accept this realism that video

streaming services will completely overtake the place of cinema. Many factors have increased the acceptance of video streaming platforms, i.e., easy access, lack of time, pandemic, and expensive cinema tickets. Female and male viewership preponderance considers that video streaming services can open a new Chinese film industry path. Bilibili, iQIYI, Tencent Video, and Youku are the most popular video streaming platforms among the youngsters. One out of three females and one out of seven males frequently visit the cinema to watch a movie. These findings may have great potential to help determine the more effective cinema and streaming video services strategies. This data may help to address the issues being faced by both cinema and video streaming services. Further research can investigate how OTT platforms are becoming more popular due to minimum censors and bold content.

Acknowledgement

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