



*Sara Cureton - School of Psychology, Media*

*Elizabeth Murphy - School of Psychology, Media*

*Special Thanks to:*

*Faculty Advisor: Dr. Pam Rutledge - School of Psychology, Media*



## ABSTRACT

*Due to advancements in technology such as Video-On-Demand and streaming services, movie theater attendance is declining, yet smaller niche arthouse theaters are not just surviving but thriving. What gets someone off the couch and into a seat to see a movie? Patrons of FilmBar, an arthouse theater in Phoenix, Arizona, were surveyed about their theater-going preferences, habits, film interests, and personality factors. The goal of this research was to better understand the theater patrons' behaviors, motives, and preferences through the lens of social psychological theories and shared-experience. Several findings surfaced which include a correlation between openness and agreeableness with the genres of horror and thriller/suspense, and infrequent moviegoers expressing a preference for Action/Adventure films in the theater.*

# Introduction

- *In an era of streaming movie options, one wonders why people would leave the comfort of their homes, pay admission and elevated prices for snacks, share communal bathrooms, and sit in the dark with strangers in order to view a movie. Especially a movie they can see at home for free, or less than the cost of admission at a theater. According to recent 2018 data, movie theater attendance is at a 25-year low, and it is speculated that streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon have presented options that disincentivize theatergoers to leave their homes and go out to the movies (Plaugic, 2018). Rising ticket prices can deter audiences and it is not yet known the impact of inexpensive streaming options. What is the primary motivator to move someone from sofa to theater chair?*

# Research Questions

- *The aim of this research was to decipher consumer motivations that prompt moviegoers to view a movie away from home and at their local independent arthouse theater. The authors theorized that shared experience would be a primary motivator for an individual when choosing to view a movie outside of their home versus staying in with numerous streaming options. It was also theorized that the local art house theater would add to a sense of shared community. The researchers sought to determine if shared experience is a primary motivator for going to a movie theater and if local independent theaters are associated with a sense of community and shared experience.*

# Background

- *Movie audiences have changed over time and are now in another period of transformation. In the 1930's due to the Depression and the advent of sound, there was a major shift (Butsch, 2001). Entertainment audiences used to be rowdy and participate in the showing. The movie house was a lively social venue that had a sense of class consciousness. The advent of talking movies made crowds quieter and the depression had a definitive impact on small independent theaters (Butsch, 2001).*
- *Originally, theaters were close to neighborhoods and inexpensive. They were casual, fun, social places where one could pop in without ostentation and see familiar community members (Butsch, 2001). The introduction of sound changed audience behavior. Previously, it was normative to talk during a silent film but talking during a movie with sound was distracting. Silence was often self-enforced and the audience became more engaged.*
- *The Depression also changed movie-going. Featured experiences shifted from an upscale outing to comfort, price and escapism (Butsch, 2001). Many small independent theaters closed and major studios built local theaters with self-seating and refreshments. Decision making was centralized and the theaters become less intertwined and responsive to the community (Butsch, 2001). There was a need to appeal to a broad market and a segmented audience was too small to sustain. Thus many independent theaters did not survive. Major studios strived to brand themselves and build audience commitment to their shows and actors, not the local theater.*
- *Currently, theater chains are dominant and the top ten chains own 62% of all screens (National Association of Theatre Owners, 2018). Theater attendance is declining in mainstream theaters (Statt, 2017). Despite what the general industry is experiencing, arthouse and independent theaters are not seeing a decline in movie attendance. Since 2013, there has been an increase in number of movies per year among their patrons (Avenue ISR, 2017).*

# Background

- Previously, marketing researchers have looked at what motivates people to choose a movie such as reviews, word of mouth and influence from friends. Current research, such as Art House Convergence data, is skewed towards consumer and marketing insight. Few researchers have focused on the social and experiential motivations that inspire people to leave home to go to the theater. Arthouse Convergence data indicates that Arthouse Theaters are an important part of the community and patrons view the experience as being interesting, captivating and uplifting but these terms are vaguely defined and subjective in their interpretation (Avenue ISR, 2017). A psychological lens is needed for added insight. People enjoy a shared experience and there are emotional benefits to shared entertainment. This is a preliminary study to provide insight into the more salient consumer motivations of arthouse theatergoers. Based upon the literature we hypothesis that community engagement and interpersonal relationships will be an important factor to the patron base.

# Methods

- *FilmBar, an independent arthouse theater in Phoenix, Arizona, sent an introductory email and posted through social media via Facebook a link to a Google Form-based survey in May 2018 and submissions were accepted through June 2018. During this time period, eighty six people responded.*
- *A twenty-eight question survey was used which was comprised of movie viewing decision-making, movie going behavior, reasons for going to the movies, personality questions utilizing the TIPI test, specific questions about FilmBar, and demographic questions. SPSS was used to conduct statistical analysis.*

# Results

- *Eighty-six people responded to the survey. Over 61% of the respondents were women and 66% of all respondents were 30 or older. Three quarters were Caucasian, 63% were married or in a relationship, 60% have a household income over \$50,000, and all but one respondent had at least some college experience or greater. Only 18% of the respondents had a MoviePass and the current state of the company does not warrant much focus on the MoviePass consumer for this study.*
- *A majority of the respondents, (65.5%) go to the movies about once a month or more. Movie Theater Fans (MTF), defined as consistently going to the theater more than once a month, comprised 46% of the sample. Interestingly, over half (51.1%) visited the FilmBar infrequently, defined as less than six times a year, so many of the respondents visit different theaters.*
- *Good news for theater owners is that 59.8% consider going to the theater first when considering a movie but only 30.7% consider a specific theater. Movie choice outweighs destination but when FilmBar and competing theaters are showing the same movie, 68.1% agree or strongly agree that they would rather see it at the FilmBar. When streaming or home video is an option, 61.4% would rather see the movie at FilmBar instead of at home.*
- *The most compelling reasons to go to the movies revolve around the larger screen and sound system (83%), and the atmosphere and culture (78.4%). Ranked third was seeing movies when they first come out (47.4%). Twenty six percent go to the theater because they are more enjoyable with others. This is in stark contrast to going solely to not be alone which was reported by only 3 respondents.*

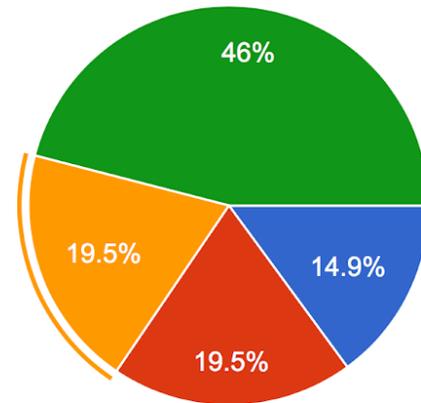
# Results

- Most (60.9%) of the respondents indicated that if the same movie was available through streaming or home video, they would still go to FilmBar. About one-in-four (26.4%) of the respondents indicated that they like going out because “movies are more enjoyable with others.”
- When asked specifically about FilmBar, 86% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that FilmBar was a place “to share the experience and reactions with the audience.”
- Significant correlations included:
  - Moviegoers that sought out shared experience were significantly correlated with enjoying talking with others ( $r=.266$ ,  $n=81$ ,  $p=.05$ ), and enjoyment of meeting others ( $r=.396$ ,  $n=81$ ,  $p=.01$ ).
  - Frequent moviegoers score higher in agreeableness.  $r = -.302$ ,  $n = 81$ ,  $p = .006$ .
  - A personality trait of openness was positively correlated to thriller/suspense (.228  $p<.01$ )
  - Infrequent viewers were significantly correlated with a preference for action/adventure films at .247 at  $p<.05$ .

# Most FilmBar Patrons Surveyed are Movie Theater Fans, or Uber-viewers

How often do you see a movie in a theater?

87 responses



- Infrequent: Less than six time a year
- Occasional: Less than once a month
- Frequently: About once a month
- Movie Theater Fan: Consistently more than once a month

# Tables/Figures

**Correlations**

		SharedEx	MovieFreq	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extroversion	Agreeableness	EmotionalStability
SharedEx	Pearson Correlation	1	.048	.023	.062	.145	-.193	.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.660	.835	.583	.190	.084	.625
	N	86	86	83	82	83	81	83
MovieFreq	Pearson Correlation	.048	1	.093	.214	-.004	-.302**	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.660		.401	.054	.975	.006	.634
	N	86	86	83	82	83	81	83
Openness	Pearson Correlation	.023	.093	1	.155	.341**	-.266*	-.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.835	.401		.165	.002	.016	.900
	N	83	83	83	82	83	81	83
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.062	.214	.155	1	.060	-.007	-.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.583	.054	.165		.592	.952	.749
	N	82	82	82	82	82	80	82
Extroversion	Pearson Correlation	.145	-.004	.341**	.060	1	-.137	.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.190	.975	.002	.592		.222	.405
	N	83	83	83	82	83	81	83
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-.193	-.302**	-.266*	-.007	-.137	1	.236*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.084	.006	.016	.952	.222		.034
	N	81	81	81	80	81	81	81
EmotionalStability	Pearson Correlation	.054	-.053	-.014	-.036	.093	.236*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.625	.634	.900	.749	.405	.034	
	N	83	83	83	82	83	81	83

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

# Tables/Figures

		Correlations									
		ActionAdventure	Classic	Comedy	Cult	Documentary	Drama	Horror	SciFi	ThrillerSuspense	InfrequentViewers
ActionAdventure	Pearson Correlation	1	.079	.148	-.086	.121	-.140	-.016	.251*	.136	-.247*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.469	.175	.429	.269	.199	.888	.024	.218	.022
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86
Classic	Pearson Correlation	.079	1	.105	.114	.139	.215*	.197	-.042	.264*	-.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.469		.334	.295	.204	.047	.075	.709	.015	.823
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86
Comedy	Pearson Correlation	.148	.105	1	.076	.037	.051	-.115	.119	.090	-.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.175	.334		.489	.737	.643	.299	.292	.418	.651
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86
Cult	Pearson Correlation	-.086	.114	.076	1	.240*	.000	.213	.193	.118	-.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.429	.295	.489		.027	1.000	.053	.084	.285	.415
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86
Documentary	Pearson Correlation	.121	.139	.037	.240*	1	.273*	-.038	.028	.157	.018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.269	.204	.737	.027		.012	.738	.804	.156	.873
	N	85	85	85	85	85	85	82	80	83	85
Drama	Pearson Correlation	-.140	.215*	.051	.000	.273*	1	-.084	.142	.158	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.199	.047	.643	1.000	.012		.451	.205	.151	.371
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86
Horror	Pearson Correlation	-.016	.197	-.115	.213	-.038	-.084	1	.180	.400**	-.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.888	.075	.299	.053	.738	.451		.114	.000	.699
	N	83	83	83	83	82	83	83	78	82	83
SciFi	Pearson Correlation	.251*	-.042	.119	.193	.028	.142	.180	1	.297**	.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.709	.292	.084	.804	.205	.114		.008	.660
	N	81	81	81	81	80	81	78	81	79	81
ThrillerSuspense	Pearson Correlation	.136	.264*	.090	.118	.157	.158	.400**	.297**	1	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.218	.015	.418	.285	.156	.151	.000	.008		.477
	N	84	84	84	84	83	84	82	79	84	84
InfrequentViewers	Pearson Correlation	-.247*	-.025	-.049	-.089	.018	.098	-.043	.050	-.079	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.823	.651	.415	.873	.371	.699	.660	.477	
	N	86	86	86	86	85	86	83	81	84	86

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
 \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

# Top Genres

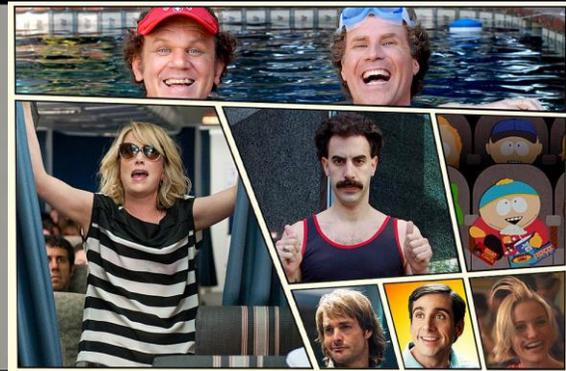
13



13

Cult 81%

14



14

Comedy 70%

15



15

Thriller/Suspense  
70%

16



16

# Discussion

- *Streaming options may be making inroads into movie viewing options but the majority of respondents when thinking about watching a movie, first consider going out to see a film at a theater. Home streaming cannot compete with the primary reason people go to a theater which is a larger screen, sound system and the atmosphere and culture of a movie going experience or an independent theater experience.*
- *While only 21.6% of the respondents stated they would go to FilmBar regardless of the movie offerings, over 60% of the respondents indicated that if the same movie was available through streaming or home video, they would still go to FilmBar. About a quarter (26.4%) of the respondents stated they like going out because movies are more enjoyable with others.*
- *Frequent moviegoers were correlated with agreeableness. This could be because MTF are up for seeing just about anything because they simply enjoy going to the movies and thus are not as discriminating.*
- *Blockbuster movies, such as action/adventure, are motivating for the infrequent movie goer and movies that speak to a shared experience such as cult movies with an audience participation factor and thriller/suspense with a safety in a crowd sense speak to shared experience.*

# Discussion

- *This shared engagement, although lower than expected, is still vital for the movie experience of some films. Even though half of the respondents visit FilmBar infrequently, FilmBar seems to fulfill a shared engagement need when 86% of the respondents agree that FilmBar is a place “to share the experience and reactions with the audience”. This may bode well for FilmBar and perhaps other independent theaters in a future of increased streaming and at-home options.*

# Conclusions

- *This study sought to understand the motivations of why people would still go out to the movies instead of staying home in their familiar and comfortable environment with a multitude of inexpensive streaming options. This is an important question to address because people are going to the movies less but niche theaters are thriving.*
- *It was hypothesized that shared social experience motivated people and as expected, highly agreeable and open people were more likely to go to the movies. The Movie Theater Fan, which comprised of 46% of the sample, is not as discriminating and is likely to view what they can.*
- *Rentfrow (2011) suggested that there is a preference between personality and entertainment preference, mainly that people seek out entertainment that reflects their personalities. This is seen in this study as well. The infrequent movie goers seek out and prefer those movies that are enhanced with others.*

# Limitations / Future Research

- *This study was limited to email patrons of FilmBar and thus, those most inclined to report positively towards the theater itself and their experiences at the theater. The sample size of 86 was limiting as well in an analysis of looking at associations with movie going behavior and genre preference or personality traits.*
- *Future research should focus on a broader range of respondents and filmgoers and those that do prefer to stay at home for movie viewing. In addition, the open ended questions offered some insight into shared experience and moviegoing behavior but in depth interviews could greatly add to the researcher's insight on behavior and attitudes.*

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