EXPLORING ATTENDANCE INHIBITORS AS A VARIABLE FOR SEGMENTING CINEMA VIEWERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Going to the movies is a favourite leisure activity for people in developed economies, especially in early adolescence (De Bruyn & Cillessen, 2008). However, movie theatres have been losing viewers in recent years due to the emergence of new ways of seeing and enjoying movies. According to data collected by the European Audiovisual Observatory, many European Union countries have experienced a decline in movie theatre attendance in recent years, with an average -4.9% variation between 2004 and 2010. In this context, Spain is the EU country with the biggest drop in the number of viewers (-29.4%), more than 5 times the average decrease in EU27 in the same period.

In view of these figures, the authors wonder about the reasons for these negative trends and what motivates or discourages viewers, specifically young people, from attending movie theatres. Do they not like movies anymore? Do they prefer alternative ways of watching movies? Does technology influence this trend? Is price or lack of time a barrier for movie theatre attendance? In short, information is needed on the negative motivational aspects of movie theatre attendance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature has provided scant attention to inhibitors of cultural consumption in general and of cinema attendance in particular. However, study of the reasons for attending cultural leisure activities has been addressed by many authors since the late 1980s, with separate or joint consideration of the causes or triggers for attending a show and the benefits consumers seek. This line of research is important because attendance is based on behavioral factors according to Bouder-Pailler (1999), and the studies also assist those responsible for cultural management to adapt their products.

In the area of audiovisual arts and cinema, some studies suggested possible triggers for consumption and other benefits sought in attending movie theatres. According to Verdaasdonk (2005) cinema admissions increased in the 1990s as the result of the strategies of distributors and movie theatres, an overall increase in the population's educational level and the extent of their cultural practices. Additional research has focused on analyzing the impact of reviews on film success, and therefore on attendance at movie theatres. In this vein, D'Astous and Colbert (2002) described how viewer confidence in a critic's opinion varies according to his/her levels of self-esteem, susceptibility to social pressures and his/her degree of cinema knowledge.

As for the benefits sought in movie theatre attendance, Cuadrado and Frasquet (1999) identified the following main components: having a good time, feeling emotions and having fun, thereby highlighting the importance of the fun aspect. Some reasons, however, were valued differently depending on the group or segment: social viewers, apathetic and filmgoers.
Other studies have focused on describing the evolution of cinema attendance in the aggregate. Thus, dramatic drops in attendance at movie theatres are found especially from the 90s in the major developed economies (Kirchberg, 1999; Lee & Waterman, 2007; Bunting et al., 2008; García Santamaría, 2009). The explanation for the drop in the number of visits to movie theatres has been justified by these authors with statistics from secondary sources, which led them to identify the following as major reasons for non-attendance at the cinema: competition with other arts and events, demographic changes affecting audience size and the economic situation (e.g. increased unemployment and drop in income), thereby confirming the categorization of movie theatre attendance as a luxury good that absorbs a proportion of income spent for leisure consumption.

Studies focused on identifying the causes of low public attendance at U.S. cinemas include the emergence of new ways to enjoy films in direct competition with cinemas (The Big Picture, 2005; Silver & McDonnell, 2007). Specifically, the popularity of home cinema, which tries to recreate the conditions of image and especially sound, of a film projection room in the viewer's home; digital television system and video on demand (pay-per-view TV); video-on-demand system; and discounts in the sale of DVDs by the large commercial distributors. In addition to this, De Vany and Walls (2007) provide empirical evidence in the sense that Internet downloads diminished the box-office revenues of a widely released motion picture. Other cinema substitutes, such as video games and the Internet, have also been identified as a form of entertainment, especially among young people (Silver & McDonnell, 2007).

3. RESEARCH: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at analysing cinema non-attendance reasons. In other words, we looked for identifying inhibitors influencing cinema attendance and find differences among segments. All in all, we attempted to know: types of films they prefer, media used to watch films, other leisure activities they do, frequency of cinema attendance, motivations of cinema attendance, barriers to cinema attendance, availability of electronic devices, Sociodemographic and economic profile of cinema attendees, and differences according to age, gender, level of studies on habits and opinions.

We conducted a descriptive study using personal survey as the information gathering technique. The structured questionnaire used was previously tested on some individuals. It contained three parts: habits, attitudes and classification variables. Cinema attendance inhibitors were measured through a five-point Likert scale referred to the importance of twenty-two proposed reasons for non attending cinema. The sample comprised 1032 individuals. They were selected based on quota sampling (gender and age). Respondents were interviewed in November 2011. Information was analysed statistically with SPSS 17.0.

4. RESULTS

According to the average values obtained for each item, the main reason for not attending movie theaters is "ticket price is expensive" (3.84), followed by the existence of "cheaper ways to watch films" (3.78), and "prefer doing other leisure activities" (3.41). On the other hand, the least relevant reasons for non attending cinema are: "difficulty to understand films" (1.62), "difficulty to get tickets" (1.71) and "nobody to go with" (1.72).

In order to further explore the importance of cinema attendance inhibitors, we analyze the existence of differences across gender, age and level of studies. Average values and F-test ANOVA are calculated in order to test the existence of significant differences across groups. First, regarding gender, differences are significant only for two items (Table 7): preference for playing with videogames and not having the possibility to talk in the cinema. Second, there are significant differences across age groups for several items: preference for social networking and videogames, as well as cost; lack of time, and difficulties to go to the cinema and to understand films. Differences across level of studies are based on the existence of better alternative means to watch films, preference for social networking and videogames, cost, not being possible to talk and distance to the movie theater from home, and lack of time and difficulties to go out.

A CHAID algorithm, which finds the best variables explaining differences among groups, was implemented. Frequency of attendance and cinema attendance inhibitors were considered as dependent and independent variables respectively. Thus, we obtained four segments of cinema viewers with not only different frequency of attendance but also different perception of the inconvenients of this leisure activity. These segments can be characterized according to other variables such as sought benefits, assessment of the different aspects of a movie theatre and personal and family situations.

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