CINEMA AUDIENCE HABITS IN TRANSITION: MORE *NETFLIX*, LESS CINEMA?

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Abstract

The author investigates the evolving habits of Latvian cinema audiences amid increasing digitalization and the growing prominence of streaming platforms. The research addresses key questions about whether streaming services are drawing audiences away from cinemas or complementing the traditional cinematic experience. It aims to examine the interaction between digital and in-person film consumption, with a particular focus on how audience habits have adapted to hybrid viewing models. Using a quantitative survey method, the author analysed data from 650 respondents, gathered through face-to-face interviews in nine cinemas across Latvia. Grounded in theories of cultural consumption and audience mobility, the results indicate a dominant hybrid consumption model among cinema audiences. The findings reveal that heavy cinemagoers also frequently use streaming platforms, which expands their access to diverse genres and film experiences. This suggests that digital platforms serve as a complementary, rather than competing, medium for film audiences. The study concludes that, while digitalization has significantly impacted cinema attendance practices, cinemas retain a unique role by providing immersive, high-quality, and social experiences, particularly for Latvian films. Cinemas with a focus on local content continue to play a culturally significant role. These insights provide a new understanding of cinema audiences in Latvia, underscoring the need for cinemas to adapt to an increasingly hybrid consumption landscape to meet the evolving demands of an active and diverse audience.

Keywords: *Latvian contemporary cinema, streaming services, cinema audience, audience research*

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Introduction

In 2023, The Institute of Culture and Arts at the Latvian Academy of Culture conducted a study *Cinema Audiences in Latvia: Practices of In-Person and Digital Film Consumption* [Vinogradova 2025]. This research was carried out as part of the project "*Cultural and creative ecosystem of Latvia as a resource of resilience and sustainability" / CERS* (No. VPP-MM-LKRVA-2023/1-0001), funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia in the framework of the State Research Programme *Latvian Culture – a Resource for National Development (2023–2026).* An important focus of the *CERS* project concentrates thematically on the manifestations of digital technologies across various phases of the cultural and creative ecosystem's production cycle and their impact on cultural consumption habits. One of the key objectives of this thematic direction is to generate new knowledge about the influence of digital technologies on citizens' cultural consumption patterns, as well as on the processes of cultural content creation, distribution, and preservation. The film industry has been identified as a sector where the differentiated impact of digital technologies is being explored in greater depth.

Regarding film audiences, researchers began addressing questions about whether streaming services are drawing audiences away from cinemas or complementing the traditional cinematic experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a period when consumers were compelled to adapt to a reality in which newly available digital alternatives became the only option for film viewing outside of cinemas. This situation coincided with a pre-pandemic crisis in the cinema industry [Hanzlík 2024; Smits 2024; Vidackovic, Zigo & Naglic 2023]. Additionally, a key question for both researchers and the film industry is the future of cinephiles—those passionate, frequent cinemagoers [Taillibert 2024] — and whether they will continue their cinema attendance practices or replace them with new digital alternatives.

In the post-pandemic period, cinemas in Europe, including Latvia, experienced a significant decline in attendance and revenue, raising concerns about the sustainability of cinemas in the future. The data from the European Audiovisual Observatory [2024] indicate that cinemas across Europe have been able to recover from the post-pandemic effects, with an increase in cinema attendance observed both in Europe as a whole and in Latvia [National Film Centre of Latvia 2024]. It should be noted that, although this growth has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, it is still considered an achievement after the dramatic decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the rise of online streaming platforms [European Audiovisual Observatory 2024].

The digitalization of cultural consumption has become a defining feature of the post-pandemic landscape, significantly altering how, when, and where audiences engage with culture. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift from traditional offline consumption to online platforms, as restrictions on in-person events led to a surge in digital engagement. This change fostered a growing preference for streaming services, virtual events, and online platforms for accessing films, music, theatre, and other cultural experiences [UNESCO 2022; AudienceNet 2020; Budanceva & Svirina 2023; Bonel, Capestro & Maria 2023]. Researchers have also observed that the boundaries between online and offline experiences have increasingly blurred as people now embrace technology's convenience, integrating it seamlessly into their cultural consumption habits [Dey, Yen & Samuel 2019].

The data on film consumption habits in Latvia, gathered in the 2022 *Cultural Barometer* study, capture a transitional period as cultural institutions and society adjusted to post-pandemic habits. This data reflects both the lingering effects of the pandemic and the rise of new consumption patterns. Researchers have noted that Latvia's declining population suggests an inevitable reduction in cultural consumption overall [Cultural Barometer 2022]. It should be noted that at the beginning of 2024, Latvia had only 1 million 872 thousand inhabitants. Over the past 34 years, it has decreased by almost 30%. Moreover, the majority of the population (70%) lives in cities, with 32% of the total residing in the capital city of Riga [Centrālais statistikas birojs 2024].

Although cultural activities generally subsided after the pandemic, digital cultural consumption has notably increased since 2018, with residents showing a strong preference for digital over in-person activities – particularly impacting the film industry. Digital film-watching has surged in recent years, while cinema attendance has declined: viewing foreign films online rose from 34% in 2018 to 55% in 2022, and Latvian films – from 16% to 45% over the same period, whereas cinema attendance dropped from 29% to 18% [Cultural Barometer 2018, 2022].

Notably, a decline in cinema attendance is not solely attributable to the pandemic; a slight decrease was already observed in 2018, with 34% of residents visiting cinemas in 2016. Qualitative research links this post-pandemic decline to an established preference for streaming services and home-based viewing options [Cultural Barometer 2022]. The struggle of cinema attendance to fully recover has raised questions about the sustainability of cinemas, as consumer needs and habits increasingly align with digital options due to the integration of digital technologies and the prevalence of streaming platforms. Despite this shift, cinema audience habits in Latvia remain understudied, though the ongoing move from in-person to digital cultural consumption highlights the need for further research. A deeper understanding of current cinema audiences and their consumption patterns – including in digital spaces – would provide valuable insights into the interaction between in-person and digital film consumption and inform future scenarios for cinema development with a specific focus on the cinema-going audience.

The **aim** of the article is to explore how cinema attendance has evolved in the streaming era and how audience habits have shifted, as well as to investigate whether online streaming platforms are diverting audiences away from traditional cinemas. Several tasks were carried out to achieve the aim. Firstly, a comprehensive literature review was conducted on cinema audience behaviour in the post-pandemic era and in the rise of online streaming platforms. Secondly, quantitative data from cinema audience research in Latvia were collected and analysed, covering sociodemographic characteristics, cinema attendance patterns, and digital film consumption habits. Thirdly, the habits of heavy and light cinemagoers were compared to evaluate how streaming platforms have impacted different audience groups and to provide conclusions on the current state and future prospects of Latvian cinema in the streaming era.

The article includes a literature review on post-pandemic film audience consumption habits, examining why digital practices dominate and their advantages over in-person cinema experiences. It also provides an overview of the methodology, presents cinema survey results, and concludes with a discussion on contemporary cinema attendance patterns and their interaction with the digital environment.

Film audience habits in the post-pandemic era

Audience behaviour research in recent years, particularly under the influence of the pandemic and advancements in the digital environment, reveals several fundamental changes in film consumption that may reshape cinema attendance patterns. Streaming platforms have redefined traditional film distribution models, transforming how audiences access and engage with films. The digital environment provides on-demand access to a vast selection of films, far exceeding traditional options like cinemas or linear television. Unlike cinemas, which often rely on popular blockbusters, streaming platforms offer a broad range of content spanning diverse genres, countries, and niche productions [Coavoux & Aussant 2024; Vidackovic, Zigo & Naglic 2023; Smits 2024]. These platforms use varied release strategies to make films accessible across multiple devices, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, televisions, and gaming consoles, thereby shaping audience perceptions and experiences [Smits 2024; Capalbi, Fabbry & Ierverse 2021; Vidackovic, Zigo & Naglic 2023]. Personalised recommendations further enhance the viewing experience, guiding audiences toward new and diverse content [Coavoux & Aussant 2024].

This increased accessibility offers numerous benefits, enriching the cinematic experience and allowing viewers to explore a wider range of perspectives. Streaming platforms are designed with a strong focus on user satisfaction; for instance, *Netflix* promotes inclusivity and fosters loyalty, engagement, and satisfaction through its open infrastructure. Practical features, such as language options and on-demand subtitles, enable global audiences to access content instantly, while digital media has expanded access to niche productions worldwide. Additionally, streaming has influenced viewing habits, popularising practices such as binge-watching and at-home movie nights [Vidackovic, Zigo & Naglic 2023; Capalbi, Fabbry & Ierverse 2021].

Despite the growth of digital viewing, cinema attendance retains unique appeal. Cinemas offer a sense of anonymity, temporary community, and an escape from daily life – experiences that are challenging to replicate at home or on digital devices [Hanchard, Merrington & Wessels 2022]. Nevertheless, a significant segment of the audience that has expanded or altered its viewing practices has undergone a shift in viewing habits, reflecting broader transformations in viewer identity.

This evolving identity is marked by film audiences increasingly becoming active participants in their viewing choices, deciding what, when, where, with whom, and how to watch [Capalbi, Fabbry & Ierverse 2021; Hanchard, Merrington & Wessels 2022]. This shift aligns with established theories in cultural audience studies [Fiske 1989] but has developed into a new form of engagement in the digital era. The concept of audience "mobility" has emerged with streaming, allowing viewers to fluidly transition between diverse viewing environments [Hanchard, Merrington & Wessels 2022]. Urry [2008] describes this mobility as multidimensional, encompassing physical travel to venues, social interactions where audiences share film experiences, and virtual interactions through digital technologies like shared logins, remote viewing, and online discussions. Integrative mobility also occurs as audiences watch films while performing other tasks, such as commuting. Hanchard, Merrington, and Wessels [2022] identify five "articulations" of film viewing: (1) in cinemas; (2) on home television; (3) on a laptop or tablet in bed; (4) on a smartphone while on the go; and (5) on in-flight entertainment systems. They argue that navigating these settings through diverse mobilities is essential to understanding modern film consumption.

This mobility in film consumption allows audiences to construct a personalised "cultural diet" through their choices of platforms, devices, or cinemas. Sociologists underscore the importance of "cultural capital" – the knowledge and skills required to make informed choices in this landscape [Mihelj, Leguina & Downey 2019]. Today's film audiences are considered more "skilled" than ever due to the broad array of films available across multiple formats [Capalbi, Fabbry & Ierverse 2021]. Yet, debate continues over whether digital access has genuinely diversified audiences and enhanced cultural equity [Van Deursen & Van Dijk 2014; Weingartner 2020; Mihelj, Leguina & Downey 2019]. Greater cultural diversity is anticipated to foster "cultural omnivores" – individuals who engage with both high and popular culture forms, reflecting versatility in cultural tastes [Coavoux & Aussant 2024; Weingartner 2020; Peterson & Kern 1996]. A more omnivorous audience signals broader tastes, illustrating the benefits of diverse cultural products and the flexibility of moving between sources. It should be noted that while digital platforms are often seen as beneficial for expanding cultural tastes, several weaknesses have also been identified in this area. Concerns have also emerged regarding the influence of digital technologies on audience preferences, with researchers identifying several ways algorithms may narrow or shape viewing tastes. Coavoux & Aussant [2024] introduce the concept of "filter bubbles", in which algorithmic recommendations limit audiences to personalised content based on viewing history. Similarly, Capalbi, Fabbry & Ierverse [2021] discuss "participation bubbles", where users primarily engage with like-minded individuals, reinforcing existing preferences, as well as "geographical bubbles", which restrict content access based on location, resulting in varied viewing experiences across regions.

Overall, digital film viewing has offered both benefits and unprecedented competition for cinemas, significantly enriching audience experiences. Viewers now have broader access to a diverse range of content, including niche, global, and local productions across multiple languages and devices. This mobility enables flexibility in film-watching that was previously unimaginable. Audiences can now be more active and "skilled" in their viewing choices – something impossible with the fixed offerings of linear television or traditional cinemas. However, these shifts in consumption have raised new questions about how consumers navigate the extensive offerings and cultivate their own tastes, particularly as researchers note the increasingly blurred boundaries between online and offline experiences [Dey, Yen & Samuel 2019], fostering a more hybrid approach to film consumption. In the ambiguous conditions of mobility created by the digital environment, it is essential to clarify the role of cinemas and the unique benefits they bring to the film consumption experience.

Methodology

Statistical data and analyses of Latvian residents' cultural consumption alone do not provide a comprehensive understanding of cinema attendance experiences, such as frequency, habits, motivations, preferences, and other influencing factors. Therefore, the study employed a quantitative methodology, specifically using a survey method through face-to-face interviews in cinemas. This approach was selected to gather deeper insights into the behaviours and preferences of cinemagoers that existing data could not fully capture. Additionally, this is the first large-scale cinema audience research conducted in Latvia, offering a unique and in-depth perspective on Latvian cinemagoers. The questionnaire focused on three main topics: cinema attendance habits, film consumption at home, and Latvian film consumption habits. These topics were chosen to measure the dynamics of film-watching practices both at home and in cinemas, as well as the role Latvian films play within this broader context. The study examined nine cinemas in Latvia, a selection based on the following criteria: 1) locations in Riga (four cinemas) and regional areas (five cinemas);

2) inclusion of both single-screen and multi-screen complexes; 3) a diverse range of film programmes offered. Additionally, a selection of film programmes was created for each cinema, with the exception of multi-screen cinemas. This selection included premieres, low-budget and niche films, animations, and documentaries, among others. Interviews were conducted at various times of the day and on different days, including weekends and public holidays. The fieldwork for the survey took place in November and December 2023, which coincided with the holiday season in Latvia, potentially influencing the results. 50 students from the Latvian Academy of Culture were involved in conducting the survey. Respondents were selected using a random sampling method. The final sample comprised 650 respondents (n = 650).

A methodological limitation to note is the target group of the survey. The results reflect the experiences and opinions of cinemagoers, and therefore, conclusions drawn about digital film consumption patterns are applicable to cinema audiences rather than film consumers in a broader sense. Consequently, there is a lack of data on individuals who consume films exclusively in digital formats. Future research should focus on in-depth studies of consumers who prefer digital film viewing. Given the current limitations in data availability and scope regarding these viewers, a detailed investigation into Latvian residents' cultural and film consumption habits is recommended.

Results

The survey results provide a clear picture of how cinema attendance and film-watching habits have evolved among Latvian audiences in the streaming era. One of the key findings is that regular cinemagoers are also active consumers of films on streaming platforms, suggesting that these two forms of film consumption are not mutually exclusive. Among the respondents, those who frequently attend cinemas tend to engage more heavily with streaming services as well, indicating that regular cinemagoers are expanding their film consumption beyond traditional theatres. This finding challenges the assumption that streaming platforms are solely responsible for the decline in cinema attendance, as it shows that dedicated film audiences are capable of consuming content across multiple platforms. The following analysis explores changes in cinema attendance frequency and its correlation with film-watching habits, the demographic profiles of different types of audience members, the platforms where films are watched, and the factors influencing cinema attendance.

Frequency of cinema attendance

Survey data indicate that cinemagoers watch films, either at home or in a cinema, nearly once a week on average (see Figure 1). Most respondents reported going to the cinema one to three times per month (30%) or three to five times every six

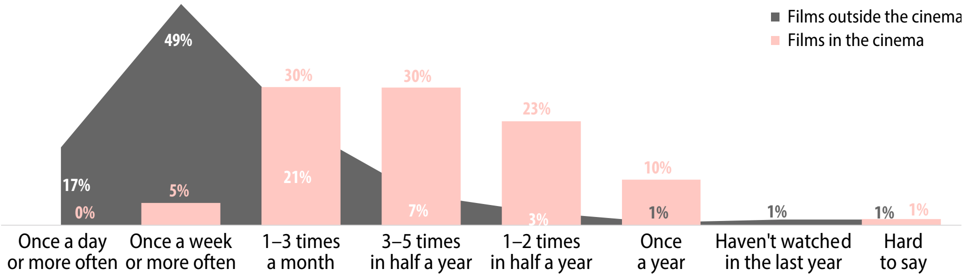

Figure 1. How often have you watched in the past year films outside the cinema and in the cinema? (n = 650).

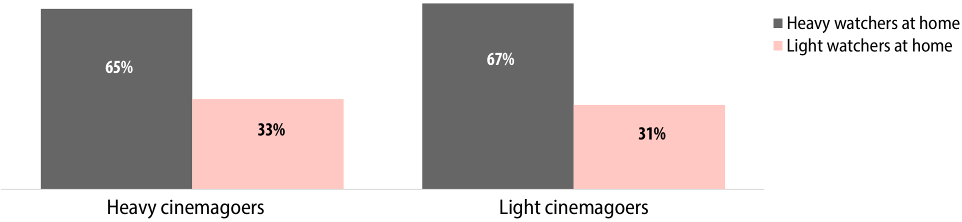

Figure 2. How many heavy and light cinemagoers have watched films at home? (n = 650).

months (30%), with smaller percentages attending once a week (5%) or only once a year (10%). Outside the cinema, nearly half of the respondents (49%) watch films at home at least once a week or more, while a third (30%) watch one to three times per month, and a smaller portion (17%) watch films daily or more frequently. This indicates that watching films is a regular activity for cinemagoers, though their habits vary, revealing distinct patterns in both cinema attendance and home viewing. Based on these findings, two types of cinemagoers were identified: heavy cinemagoers (66% of respondents), who attend the cinema at least three times in six months, and light cinemagoers (33%), who visit between one and four times a year. Despite the overall decline in cinema attendance, a core group of dedicated moviegoers continues to frequent cinemas regularly. Interestingly, the same proportion (66%) of heavy cinemagoers are also heavy home viewers, suggesting that frequent cinemagoers are also active on streaming platforms or TV, reflecting a hybrid consumption model where dedicated film fans enjoy content both in theatres and at home. Light home-viewers comprise a smaller group (32%), with a notable overlap from the midst of light cinemagoers, reinforcing the idea that those who visit cinemas less frequently also tend to watch fewer films at home. However, there is minimal difference in home viewing frequency between heavy and light cinemagoers: 65% of heavy cinemagoers and 67% of light cinemagoers report watching films at home regularly (see Figure 2).

This suggests that, regardless of their cinema attendance frequency, audiences are equally inclined to watch films at home, indicating that streaming has become a widespread practice. This trend highlights a complementary relationship between cinema-going and home viewing rather than one practice simply replacing the other.

Demographic profile of the audience

The study successfully captured a diverse range of cinemagoers aged 15 to 90, with an average age of 48. Women made up 69% of respondents, and 52% had higher education, suggesting a link between education and cinema attendance. The most common occupations were public sector employees (26%), private sector workers (29%), and students (22%). Additionally, 37% of respondents had children under 18. The survey was conducted in Latvian, with limited participation from non-Latvian speakers, with 87% speaking Latvian at home, 9% Russian, and 1% English. Household income was divided into five levels for analysis. The typical cinemagoer is a woman aged 25–34, with higher education, working in the private sector, without children under 18, speaking Latvian at home, and with a household income of € 801–1000 per person. The sociodemographic profile of cinemagoers reveals several notable trends. The data suggests no significant correlation between cinema attendance and variables such as gender, employment status, or the number of children. However, the need for more in-depth analysis remains.

Heavy cinemagoers are more likely to be from Riga and belong to the age group 15–19, typically school-aged individuals. This suggests that younger audiences in urban areas, particularly the capital, engage more frequently with cinema. Conversely, **light cinemagoers** are more likely to reside in regions outside Riga and tend to have lower levels of education, indicating a possible divide in cinema access or interest based on geographic and educational factors. When analysing home viewing habits, heavy home watchers are predominantly women aged 45 and older, commonly employed in state or municipal institutions. This demographic may prioritize home viewing due to lifestyle factors such as work schedules and household responsibilities. On the other hand, light home watchers (those watching films three times a month or less) are more likely to be school-aged individuals (15–19 years old) and residents of Riga, suggesting that younger audiences may prefer the cinema experience over home viewing or engage with films less frequently overall.

Platforms and places for watching films

The survey data provide valuable insights into the preferences of cinema audiences regarding their choice of film-watching platforms, allowing for several important conclusions (see Figure 3).

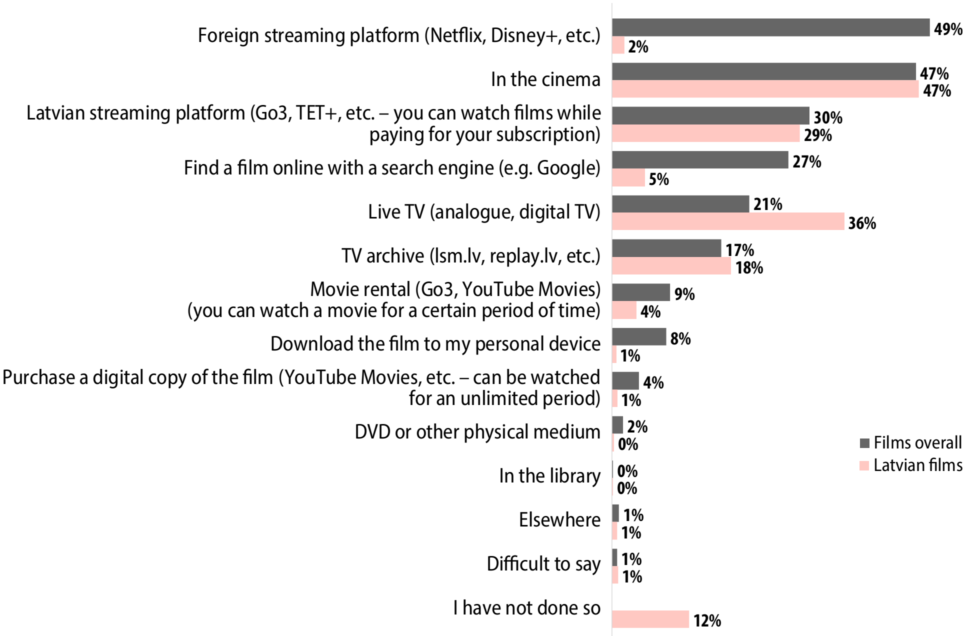

Figure 3. Where did audiences most often buy or watch films in the last year? (n = 650).

Firstly, the nearly equal preference for foreign streaming platforms (49%) and cinema attendance (47%) suggests that both mediums play a significant role in film consumption among Latvian audiences. While streaming platforms and television offer the convenience of low-cost, on-demand viewing from any location, cinemas continue to attract audiences, likely due to the immersive experience they provide. Secondly, the use of Latvian streaming platforms remains limited, with only 30% of respondents using them, indicating they are less popular compared to foreign platforms. This could be attributed to the broader variety of content available on global streaming services, which may offer a more diverse selection than local platforms. Thirdly, reliance on search engines (27%) and live TV broadcasts (18%) as primary sources for watching films is low, suggesting that audiences are shifting away from traditional or indirect methods of accessing content. This reflects a broader movement toward direct, on-demand viewing via dedicated streaming platforms. Fourth, the use of physical media (2%), digital copies (4%), online rentals (9%), and unidentified downloads (8%) is relatively uncommon. This indicates that physical and transactional forms of film consumption have largely been replaced by streaming services, where films are easily accessible without the need for purchasing or storing content.

Regarding Latvian films (see Figure 3), the majority of viewers prefer watching them in cinemas (47%), live TV broadcasts (36%), or on Latvian streaming platforms (29%). This suggests that Latvian films remain closely tied to traditional media and local platforms, as they are not widely available on foreign streaming services (only 2%). The relatively high percentage of Latvian film viewership in cinemas implies that these films may be perceived as cultural events or special experiences, encouraging greater attendance in cinemas compared to international films. However, the survey data on viewing Latvian films are not entirely conclusive. The general impression of the audience is that films produced in Latvia over the past five years are more commonly watched outside of cinemas through different channels. This implies that a portion of the audience waits for opportunities to watch new films for free on TV or at a more affordable price on streaming platforms. The most typical frequency for watching Latvian films in cinemas is once a year (27%) or one to two times every six months (22%). Overall, the dominance of streaming platforms in both film and series consumption reflects a broader global trend where audiences prefer on-demand content for convenience and variety. Despite this, cinemas still play a vital role in film-watching, particularly for Latvian films, which suggests that local content has a distinct place in the cultural landscape. These trends underscore the evolving nature of film consumption in Latvia, where streaming is becoming the preferred method for accessing both local and international content; however, the cinema experience remains a strong competitor, especially for national productions.

The difference between the habits of heavy and light cinemagoers regarding the use of cinema as their primary source of film viewing is substantial: 60% of heavy cinemagoers, compared to only 21% of light cinemagoers, report using cinemas as their main means of watching films. Both groups profoundly rely on foreign streaming platforms, but heavy cinemagoers (52%) use them slightly more than light cinemagoers (44%). Light cinemagoers (34%) rely more on Latvian streaming platforms compared to heavy cinemagoers (29%). To sum up, heavy cinemagoers prefer the immersive experience of cinemas but also supplement their film-watching with foreign streaming services. Light cinemagoers are more inclined to use streaming services, especially local Latvian platforms, indicating a preference for convenience and regional content over the cinematic experience. Both groups show similar usage patterns when it comes to finding films through search engines or watching films on TV broadcasts, demonstrating that these are common secondary methods for accessing content.

Finally, we observe an interesting trend in the number of streaming platforms used by cinema audiences (see Figure 5). Many cinemagoers use multiple platforms for film consumption, with nearly half (48%) having used three or more platforms in the past year, while only 7% do not use any platforms. Heavy cinemagoers tend to use more platforms, with 32% using four or more, compared to just 19% of light cinemagoers. In contrast, light cinemagoers typically use fewer platforms, with 32% relying on two platforms and 20% using just one. This indicates that heavy cinemagoers engage

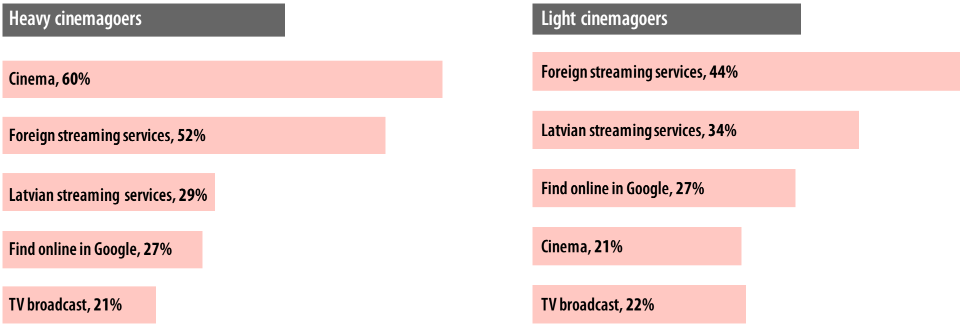

Figure 4. Where have cinema audience watched films in the past year? (n = 650).

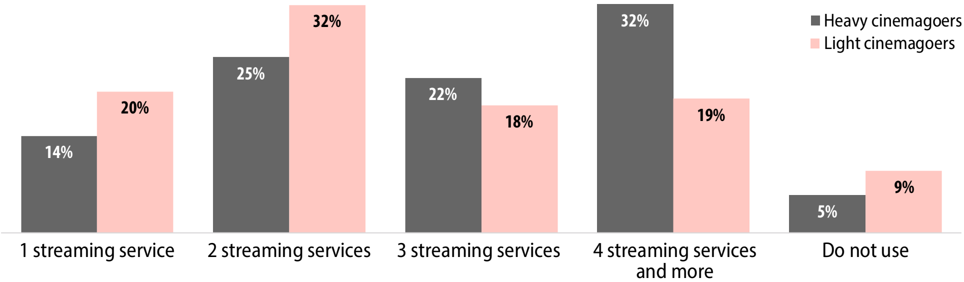

Figure 5. How many streaming platforms (foreign and Latvian) have respondents used in the past year? (n = 650).

with a wider range of content sources, while light cinemagoers stick to fewer options. When asked which digital platforms they had used the previous year, it became clear that *Netflix* was the most preferred platform among cinema audiences. Heavy cinemagoers tend to consume *Netflix* more (73%) than light cinemagoers (58%). Two local platforms, *Go3* (43%) and *Tet+* (29%), are also popular, and there is no significant difference in their usage between heavy and light cinemagoers. However, heavy cinemagoers show more interest in other foreign platforms, such as *Disney+*, while light cinemagoers slightly favour Latvian platforms. Overall, the data suggests a trend toward hybrid consumption, where frequent cinemagoers are also active on digital platforms. This shows that traditional cinema attendance and digital viewing complement each other rather than being mutually exclusive.

Cinema experience: Artistic value and social engagement

The study revealed two significant dimensions for audiences when attending the cinema: the artistic experience of films and the social aspect of leisure activities. For cinema audiences, the most important factors in their experience are film quality (average rating: 4.4 on a 5-point scale), diverse repertoire (4.4), and new releases (4.1). Additionally, the cinema experience is highly valued as a way to relax, enjoy time with others (4.4), and spend time with loved ones (4.1). Secondary factors include ticket prices and discounts, atmosphere (e.g., cinema size, seating comfort), and specific film offerings. The least important factors are proximity to public transportation, parking availability, snack and drink options, and additional educational elements like lectures or meetings with filmmakers. Differences emerged between heavy cinemagoers, who prioritize diversity of the film repertoire, educational elements, atmosphere, and quality and are more likely to attend the cinema alone, and light cinemagoers, who place greater emphasis on convenient parking. Those who prefer watching films at home tend to prioritize comfort, indicating this as a key reason they may avoid cinemas. Survey data also highlight the social nature of cinema visits, with most people attending with friends or acquaintances (52%), partners (32%), family members (27%), or children (20%). Only 14% visit the cinema alone, a choice more common among heavy cinemagoers, people over 65, retirees, those without children under 18, low-income individuals, and visitors to niche cinemas in Riga. The main reasons for not attending the cinema more often include a lack of interesting films (50%), particularly for light cinemagoers and those living in regional areas. Competing entertainment and lifestyle choices are also relevant, as 35% report not having enough time, and 34% prefer other cultural activities. Additionally, high ticket prices are a significant barrier, especially for audiences in regional areas. Film selection is influenced by several factors, including actors (58%), with directors also important for a third of respondents (35%), especially for audiences from Riga.

In choosing certain films, personal recommendations remain crucial for 54% of the audience, while genre is a key factor for 51%. Audiences are also interested in new releases (50%) and societal interest in films (43%). Despite the large influence

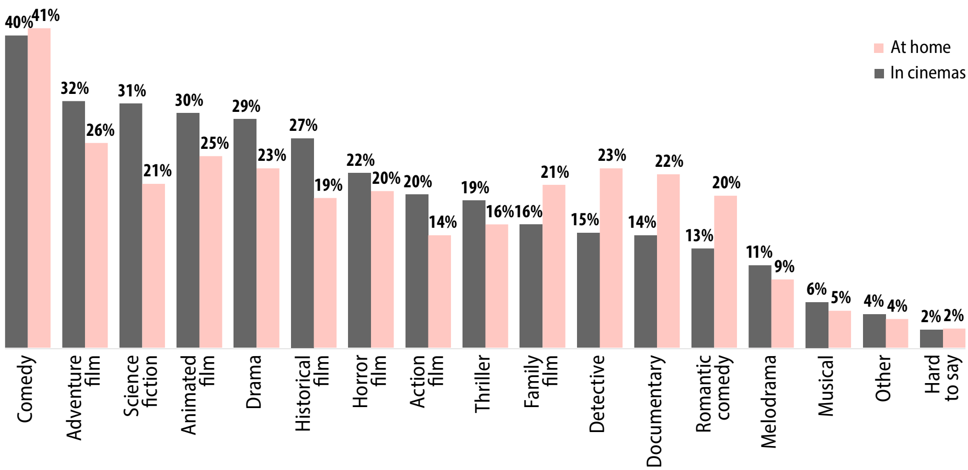

Figure 6. What types of films or genres cinema audiences most frequently choose to watch? (n = 650).

of streaming services, only a few rely on algorithmic recommendations (15%). There are notable differences in genre preferences between films watched in cinemas and at home (see Figure 6). Comedy stands out as equally popular in both settings. However, audiences prefer watching adventure, science fiction, animation, historical films, action, thrillers, and dramas in cinemas. In contrast, at home, they favour family films, documentaries, romantic comedies, and detective stories. Genres like melodramas and musicals are less popular in both settings.

Overall, cinema attendance is driven by both artistic factors and the socialization aspect. There are distinct differences between heavy cinemagoers, who seek diversity in film selection and atmosphere and often attend alone, and light cinemagoers, who value comfort and the social experience. Personal recommendations, genre, and new releases play a significant role in film choice. While the influence of streaming platforms on viewing habits is growing, cinemas continue to offer a unique experience, as evidenced by the differing genre preferences between films watched in theatres and at home.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that Latvian cinema audiences exhibit a hybrid film consumption model, where even regular and dedicated cinemagoers actively use streaming platforms and other digital film-viewing options. One of the most significant insights from the research is that heavy or regular cinemagoers actually consume more streaming content than light or irregular attendees. This suggests that digital viewing options broaden the audience's access to films and enhance their overall experience. This conclusion highlights that cinemas are unique places for frequent and dedicated visitors, offering distinct experiences, such as high-quality screenings, immersive viewings, and social interaction opportunities. Latvian cinema audiences appear interested in diversifying their film-viewing experiences, with digital platforms allowing access to genres not typically screened or watched in cinemas. This observation indicates that for active cinemagoers, streaming services like *Netflix* are not competing alternatives but complementary sources of film content. Another important aspect is that cinemas remain a key venue for viewing Latvian films, particularly for the significant portion of the audience that values early access to new releases and exploring the latest offerings. Here, linear TV poses more of a competitive challenge to cinemas than streaming platforms. Therefore, cinemas with a strong focus on Latvian film content serve a culturally significant and locally unique role. The analysed data also show that sociodemographic factors – especially education and location – are significant in determining cinema attendance. Interest in cinemas is partly based on educational and geographical factors, with a potential divide in attendance due to location: in regional areas, there is far less access to cinemas and film repertoires compared to the capital city. Active cinemagoers with a greater variety of film-viewing options tend to have higher levels of education. Additionally, lifestyle factors like household responsibilities can limit cinema attendance frequency. In today's busy world, cinemas and the film industry must also compete with other leisure and cultural consumption options.

In summary, while the influence of streaming platforms and digital options on cinema-going habits is substantial and will inevitably alter traditional attendance practices, cinema-going will remain a unique cultural experience as long as cinemas continue to offer exclusive experiences and adapt to the demands of an educated, active audience seeking a rich, diverse, and current repertoire. Overall, this study provides a singular and unprecedented perspective on Latvian cinema audiences as a whole. While cinemas vary in type and priorities, this was the first time the cinema audience was analysed as a unified entity and its habits examined at a national level rather than in the interests of individual cinemas. A more profound statistical analysis of the data would offer a more precise understanding of the sociodemographic characteristics of cinema audiences. Additionally, further in-depth research into lifestyle and other life course aspects would allow for an analysis of the broader set of habits influencing cinema attendance.

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