Consumption Habits and Cinema Attendance Of Media communication University Students

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Cinema habits *Cinema consumption* *Leisure* *University student* *Enjoyment* *Video games* *Streaming*	*The objective of this study is to determine the consumption habits and cinema attendance of Audiovisual Communication university students. An online survey was carried out with the participation of 92 students belonging to the Degree at the University of Salamanca. The results indicated that students continue to go to the cinema, especially in higher grades, for the social factor and the added value. The price or the streaming platforms did not affect their attendance. However, a more significant relationship was found with regard to video games. This preliminary study shows interesting characteristics about leisure, cinema attendance, and cinema tastes.*

1. Introduction

I n the contemporary film industry, the development of OTT (over-the-top) platforms, the economic consequences of Covid-19 and new audiovisual consumption habits have led to a series of changes, such as the decline in cinema attendance. Although watching films or series is one of the leading leisure activities among Spanish citizens (77.7%) according to the latest report from the Survey of Cultural Habits and Practices in Spain (March 2021-February 2022), only 27.7% went to the cinema in the year surveyed due to the health crisis (Ministry of Culture and Sport, 2022b).

Given this situation, different alternatives are being proposed, such as that of the Spanish cinema company Cinesa: a subscription plan they have called the Netflix of cinemas (El País, 2023), which aims to increase cinema attendance by offering a monthly cinema pass that, starting at €15.90, allows holders to attend all new film releases; or the Fiesta del Cine, where you can go to the cinema for several days at a reduced price. These proposals seek to adapt to changes in the sector and encourage the consumption of films in cinemas by using the spectacular nature of the big screen as the main attraction.

In addition to the size of the screen, special effects, surround sound, 3D images and optical illusions (Pérez González & de Iracheta Martín, 2020) are some of the features that encourage cinema attendance. With the development of digital cinema and improvements in the cinematographic quality of stereoscopic images, distributors and exhibitors chose to refurbish cinemas to host premieres such as *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), *Monsters vs Aliens* (Letterman and Lernon, 2009) and *Up 3D (*Docter and Peterson, 2009) (Armenteros, 2011). The box office success of these projects showed that viewers were not abandoning theatres and were also willing to pay a higher price for this type of viewing experience. Despite this, many experts believed that, after the reception this technology received with such iconic releases as those mentioned above, 3D cinema had stagnated or failed to take off (Oleaga, 2020). Given the importance of promoting the cinema experience, Tony Chambers, head of film distribution at Disney, stated that "at a time when people are used to staying at home watching content, anything that encourages them to go to the cinema has to be positive [...]. It's all about the experience. The message will not be to watch Avatar 2 in 3D, but to watch it for the experience" (López, 2022).

The main objective of this research, the preliminary study of which is presented in this article, is to find out about the cinema-going habits of students on the Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Audiovisual Creation at the University of Salamanca, Spain. They have been selected, in addition to their availability, because they are a particularly relevant subject of study due to their flexible schedules and leisure time, together with their autonomy and independence in pursuing leisure and cultural activities (Hernández-Pérez & Martínez-Díaz, 2017). Furthermore, the audiovisual profile of the students presupposes a greater interest in film content, both from a leisure and educational perspective, which justifies the selection of the sample.

In this group of students, belonging to Generation Z, the use of the Internet and social networks predominates over other media (Combi, 2015). Thus, young people tend to access information through digital media (Navarro-Robles & Vázquez-Barrio, 2020). The 40dB survey for El País and SER reinforces this idea by indicating that "leisure has become digitalised and diversified", especially among young people, as only 29% watch linear television on a daily basis, highlighting the use of social media and *streaming* among their leisure routines (Llaneras, 2024). However, following the health crisis, according to the latest Cultural Statistics Yearbook for 2022 produced by the Spanish Government, in 2022 the people who went to the cinema most were aged between 15 and 20 and between 25 and 30 (Ministry of Culture and Sport, 2022b).

Several authors have previously examined the film consumption habits of young university students in the Spanish-speaking community (Marta-Lazo & Gabelas-Barroso, 2013; Matei, 2020; Ríos et al., 2014; Urcola-Eceiza et al., 2022). Our work contributes to this line of research with a contribution on the habits and motives of consumption and the uses and relationships with audiovisual media by young university students in an industry whose evolution requires constant academic attention.

In the contemporary audiovisual landscape, cinema consumption is characterised by a notable reduction in attendance rates due to the increase in online viewing (Arana Arrieta et al., 2020). This scenario was further accentuated by the period of confinement resulting from the Covid-19 health crisis (Vlassis, 2021). The reconfiguration of the audiovisual industry sector involves a series of changes in the relationships between the agents—producer, distributor and audiences—and also in the consumption habits of viewers (Mejia Wille, 2018), which respond to an isolated, fragmented and

individualistic experience (Moguillansky, 2016). This is expressed by Matei (2020, p. 15) in his work on audiovisual consumption among young university students, which indicates that "the trend in film consumption is isolated and on-demand, accessible through various screens and, most of the time, using the Internet as the preferred medium". The practices and forms of interaction carried out by the younger sector of the population allow us to talk about new film buffs, who abandon cinemas to surf the Internet in search of content that interests them, and socialise through the web by commenting and sharing opinions within a virtual community (Abril Valdez, 2019).

There are few, but relevant, studies that analyse university students as cinema consumers, such as the work by Marta-Lazo and Gabelas-Barroso (2013), which focuses on the consumption habits of university students studying Journalism, Advertising and Audiovisual Communication at the University of Aragon, Spain, in relation to educational purposes and cinema attendance. Along these lines, Ríos et al. (2014) investigate the film consumption patterns of Hispanic American students, concluding that cinema is a prominent source of entertainment for university students. For their part, Urcola-Eceiza et al. (2022) examine how students from different areas of the University of the Basque Country (Spain) relate to audiovisual fiction, concluding that there is low cinema attendance due to online consumption and the prominence of technological devices.

In short, the transformations that digital culture and the era of convergence are bringing about in business relationships in the audiovisual sector and in audience consumption habits are evident, especially with regard to film premieres (Benito García, 2023). This is giving rise to other forms of socialisation and interaction, new cultural practices, and cinematic experiences marked by sensory fascination and digital spectacle (Bárcenas Curtis, 2017).

2. Methodology

Given this context, the main objective of this research project is to determine the film-viewing habits and consumption of young university students today. The following research questions are derived from this objective:

Q.1. How often do university students go to the cinema each month?

Q.2. What are the main reasons why they do or do not go to the cinema?

Q.2.1. Are there differences in terms of gender or year of study?

Q.2.2. Do the technical aspects offered by a cinema (such as the use of 3D technology, better sound quality, etc.) influence these reasons?

Q.3. What type of cinema do they like best?

P.3.1. Is there a relationship between how often they go to the cinema and the type of films they watch?

Q.4. Does consuming content on *streaming* platforms to which they subscribe have any impact on cinema attendance?

P.4.1. Could certain leisure alternatives, such as video games, lead to lower cinema attendance?

The data for this study were extracted from a survey conducted in February 2023 among a group of volunteer students enrolled in the Audiovisual Communication and Creation Degree programme at the University of Salamanca. The survey was a self-administered questionnaire using the *Qualtrix* application, which the students completed on their mobile phones. Among other objectives, the survey sought to investigate university students' cinema attendance habits.

2.1. Sample demographics

The students who participated in the research—students enrolled in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of the Audiovisual Communication and Creation Degree programme at the University of Salamanca in the 2022/2023 academic year (Table 1)—signed up voluntarily. They represent 38% of the total number of students enrolled in the degree programme, with a lower presence of students in their final year who were on academic placements. Although not large, the sample is representative.

Table 1. Distribution by year

Year	N cases	%
First	21	22.8
Second	25	27.2
Third	29	31.5
Fourth	17	18.5
Total	92	100

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

A total of 92 students completed the entire questionnaire, the majority of whom were women (n= 74; 80.4%), followed by men (n= 16; 17.4%), and two students who identified as non-binary/third gender (n=2; 2.2%). The fact that more women than men participated reflects the demographics of the degree programme, in which women make up around 70% of the student body. The average age of the group is 20, and the breakdown by age can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Age distribution

Value	N cases	%
18	18	19.6
19	15	16.3
20	31	33.7
21	18	19.6
22	5	5.4
23	2	2.2
25	2	2.2
28	1	1.1
Total	92	100

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

2.2. Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire they had to complete contained questions about their cinema-going habits, as well as asking about the reasons why they did or did not go to the cinema. Thus, in addition to a series of socio-demographic questions, they were asked 11 questions on this topic in order to find out about their relationship with this form of not only leisure, but also knowledge. After the socio-demographic questions, they had to complete a series of questions, including the following related to cinema attendance, which had different types of answers: multiple choice, open-ended, 7-point Likert scale, 10-point scale, etc.:

- How many times do you go to the cinema per month?
- How interested are you in cinema?
- Indicate the reasons why you go to the cinema
- Indicate the reasons why you do not go to the cinema
- How do these factors influence your decision to go to the cinema?
- What type of device do you usually use to watch films online?
- Are you subscribed to any audiovisual platforms?
- What do you think cinema should be?
- When you watch a film, what do you expect?
- Type of film you usually watch
- What was the last film you saw at the cinema?

In addition, a series of questions related to video games were included in order to measure whether they influenced cinema attendance and consumption. If they played video games, how many hours a week, if they had played with virtual reality and for how many hours, and, finally, where they thought it was best to play with virtual reality for greater enjoyment.
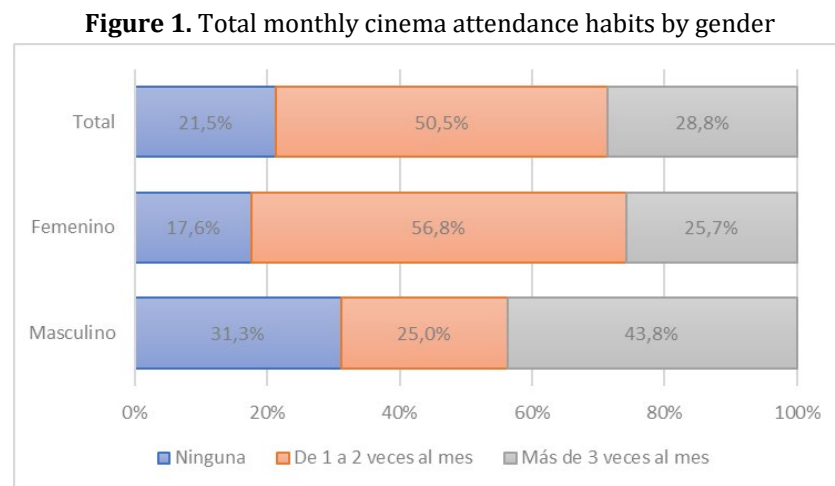
2.3. Data analysis

In an initial data analysis, significant differences were sought between cinema attendance habits, both in terms of proportions and averages, taking into account the reasons why people go or do not go to the cinema, aspects related to the experience, their preferences regarding films and other types of leisure alternatives, such as OTT platforms or video games. The statistical programme SPSS V.28 was used to process the data. Following the bivariate analysis of the results, all significant variables were taken into account and a network analysis was carried out in order to discover the patterns of concurrence for a series of scenarios (Escobar and Tejero, 2018). In this case, the scenarios were the monthly frequency of cinema attendance, divided into three categories. The result is a reticular graph (Figure 1) showing the association of the different characteristics of the students in relation to their cinema attendance habits[1].

3. Results

3.1. Cinema attendance habits

Students enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Audiovisual Creation are expected to have a particular preference for going to the cinema in their leisure time (Marta-Lazo and Gabelas-Barroso, 2013). The survey data show that, indeed, of the total number of students surveyed, half go to the cinema between 1 and 2 times a month, 28% go almost weekly, while 21% do not go monthly (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Total monthly cinema attendance habits by gender
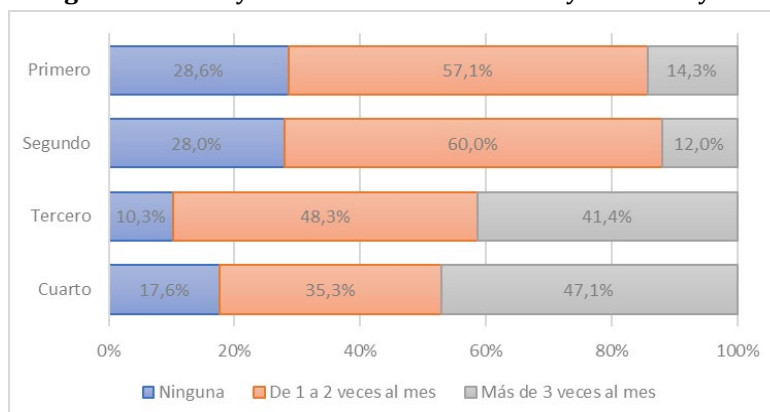

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

Statistically different patterns of behaviour are observed by gender. More than half of female students (56%) go to the cinema between 1 and 2 times, while male students have more extreme patterns, with 31% stating that they never or almost never go to the cinema and almost 44% stating that they go more than 3 times a month.

The differences by age are minimal, with those who go to the cinema more regularly being, on average, one year older than those who never go. The same is true when looking at the year of study, with those in higher years going more regularly than those who have just started their degree. For example, in the third and fourth years, 41.4% and 47.1%, respectively, go to the cinema more than three times a month, whereas in the first and second years, the students who go to the cinema more than three

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[1] The figures were created using the *Caring* application (http://caring.usal.es/).

times a month account for 14.3% and 12%, respectively. A significant correlation (R=0.28, P|z|<0.01) can be observed when considering the differences between the first and second cycles.

Figure 2. Monthly cinema attendance habits by academic year

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

3.2. What are the reasons for going or not going to the cinema?

The first research question aims to measure the reasons why they go or do not go to the cinema. When analysing the data by gender, in the case of males, a polarisation between 0 (27.8%) and more than 3 (26.9%) can be observed. In the case of females, the majority attend between 1 and 2 times a month (n=91.3%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Cinema attendance by gender

	Number of times you go to the cinema per month			
	0	1 to 2	More than 3	Total
Male	27.8%a	8.7%b	26.9%a	17.80
Female	72.2%a	91.3%b	73.1%a	82.20%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note: a and b show significant differences between proportions p>0.05

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

Based on these data, we analysed whether there were differences in attendance according to gender (P|z|>0.000). We found that there were differences, as the majority of female students (91.3%) attend regularly between 1 and 2 times a month. Male students, on the other hand, showed more extreme behaviour, with the majority indicating that they did not go to the cinema (27.8%) or stating that they went more than 3 times a month (26.9%). The distribution of cinema attendance by academic year was also measured (Table 4). We analysed whether there was any relationship between the academic year the students were in and the number of times they went to the cinema. After conducting the analysis, it was found that those in higher years go more regularly than those who have just started their degree, with a clear statistically significant effect observed considering the differences (a,b) between the first and second years (P|z|>0.05).
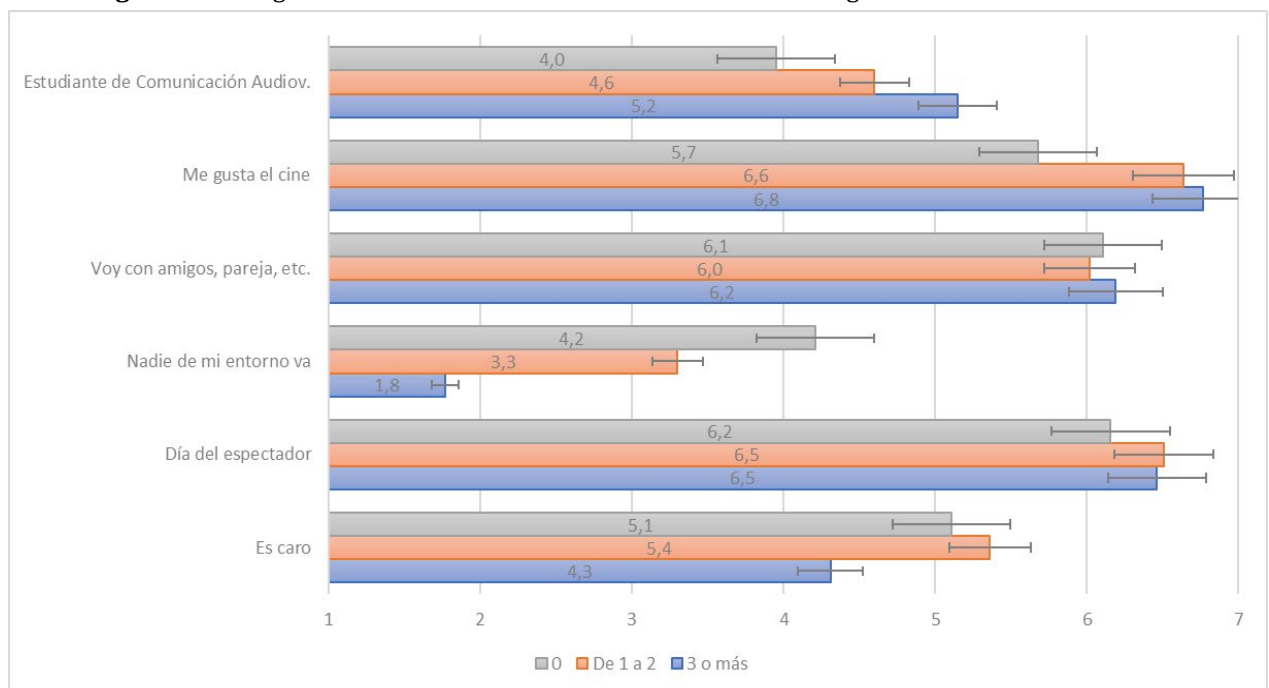
Table 4. Cinema attendance by course

	0	1 to 2	3	Total
First	31.6%a	25.5%a	11.5%a	22.8%
Second	36.8%a	31.9%a, b	11.5%b	27.2
Third	15.8%a	29.8%b	46.2%b	31.5
Fourth	15.8%a	12.8%a	30.8%a	18.5
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note: a and b show significant differences between proportions p>0.05

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

To find out why they go to the cinema, they were asked to answer a question with different response options (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). For the group analysed, going to the cinema has an important social component (Figure 3). The majority (92%), regardless of how often they go to the cinema, acknowledge that they like cinema, but they do not particularly relate it to being audiovisual communication students, which is irrelevant for those who do not usually go, while those who go most often are more in favour of this statement.

The idea of going to the cinema is mainly conceived as a social activity where all students go accompanied, regardless of whether they go often or not. When asked if one reason for not going is that no one in their circle is going, the differences in means are statistically significant. The more often students go to the cinema each month, the less important it is that they are accompanied by someone they know, with a highly significant correlation (P|z|<0.001) between the two variables with a value of 0.52.
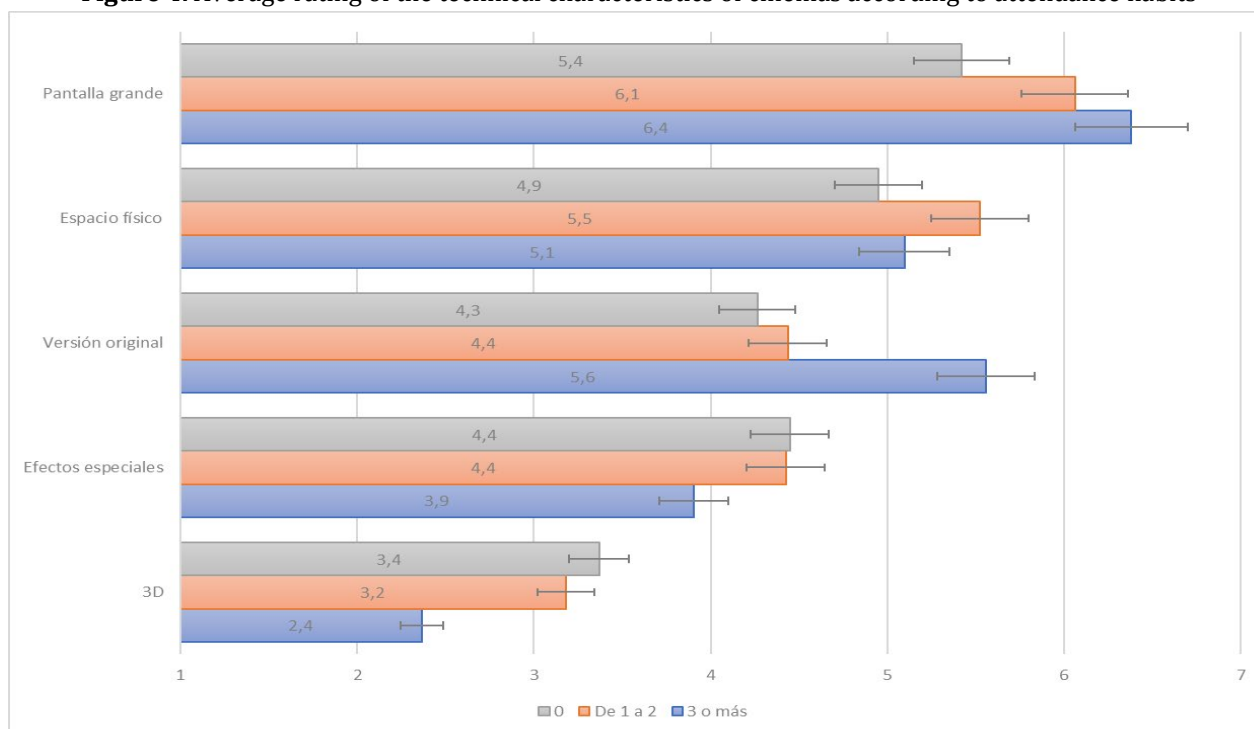
Figure 3. Average assessment of socio-economic reasons according to cinema attendance habits

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

The economic aspect is important, which is why "cinema day" turned out to be a very favourable element, with no significant differences according to cinema attendance. However, Figure 3 shows that when asked whether the fact that the cinema is expensive is an incentive not to go, those who attend more often have an average rating categorised as indifferent (4.3). Those who go to the cinema less often value the economic aspect more, both in terms of discount days (σ=6.5) and the price in general (σ=5.1).

A second group of reasons for going to the cinema are the advantages that cinemas offer over watching a film in other contexts. Students were asked about the importance of certain factors such as the big screen, the original version, special effects, watching films in 3D and, in general, the importance of the physical space of the cinema. Figure 3 clearly shows how screen size is one of the most valued elements, with significant differences in preferences. Among those who go to the cinema most often, screen size and the original version are the most highly valued technical aspects. Although they agree on these aspects with students who go to the cinema infrequently, it is interesting to see how other important reasons in this case are special effects or watching films in 3D, elements that are not very important for the most avid filmgoers. In statistical terms, there is a significant correlation, especially between the size of the screen (R=0.32, P|z|<0.01) and the possibility of watching the film in its original version (R=0.258, P|z|<0.05).

Figure 4. Average rating of the technical characteristics of cinemas according to attendance habits
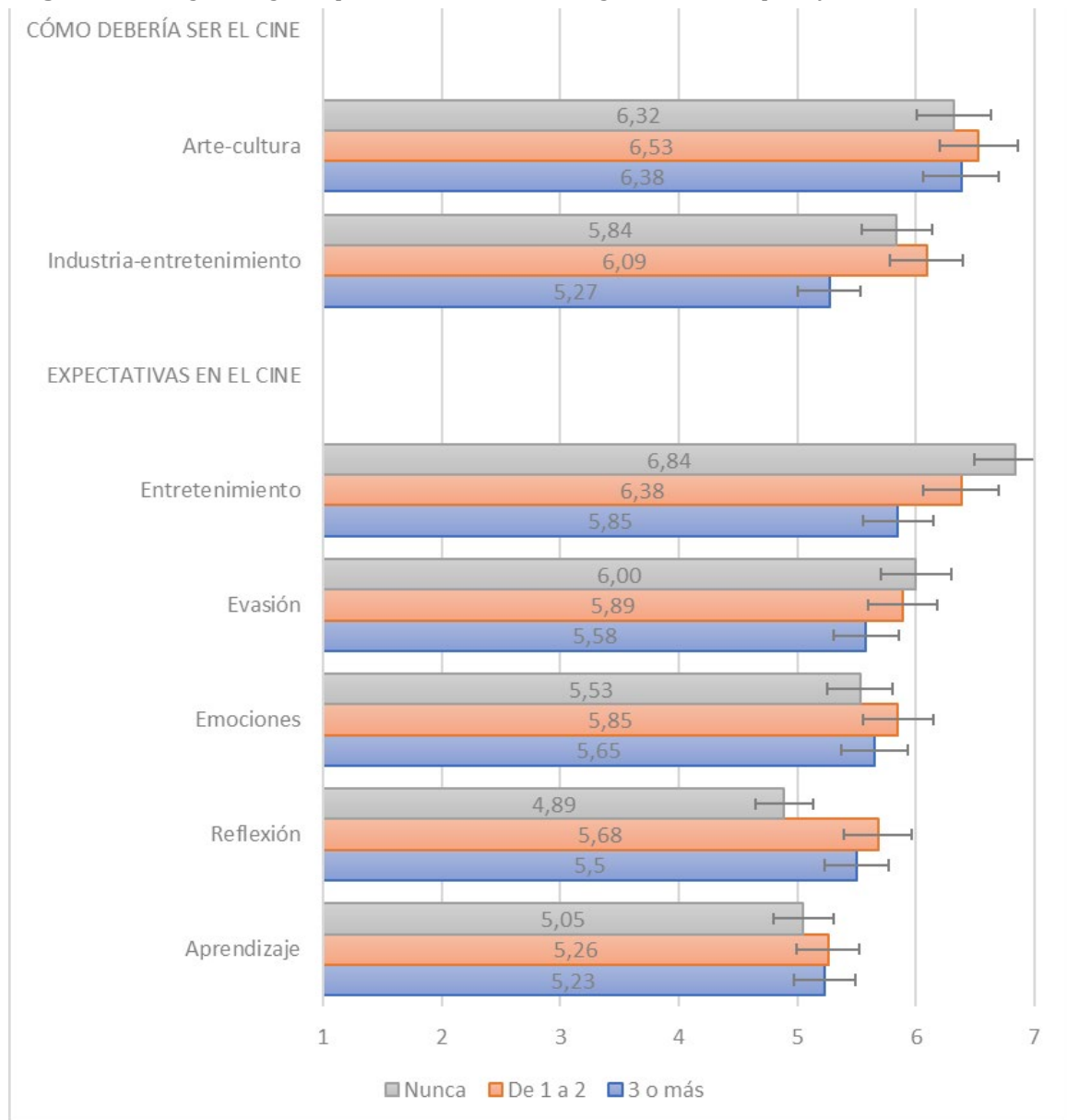

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

They were also asked where and on what type of device they usually watched films online. The response scale for the different items (computer; television; mobile phone; tablet; I do not watch films online; and other) ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). They were also instructed that if they did not watch films online, they should mark "Never" for all response items except the last one, where they should mark "Always". All students acknowledged watching films online, mainly on a computer (75%) or television (39.2%) and, to a lesser extent, on mobile phones (7.6%) or tablets (10.9%).

3.3. What type of films do they like? Is there a relationship between the number of times they go to the cinema and the type of films they watch?

A second factor that was taken into account in cinema attendance habits was what type of films they are looking for when they go to the cinema. To this end, we first considered what students consider cinema to be, asking them to rate two response items on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): whether cinema is art/culture and whether cinema is industry/entertainment. Sixty-point-nine per cent of students totally agree with the idea that it is art-culture, 27.2 per cent agree, and only 3.3 per cent disagree. The consideration of cinema as industry-entertainment has greater variability, with 29.3% strongly agreeing, 2.2% agreeing, and 8.3% disagreeing with this statement. A correlation was measured to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between cinema attendance and their consideration of it. There is a virtually universal consensus that cinema is an element of art or culture and a means of entertainment, especially among those who go to the cinema
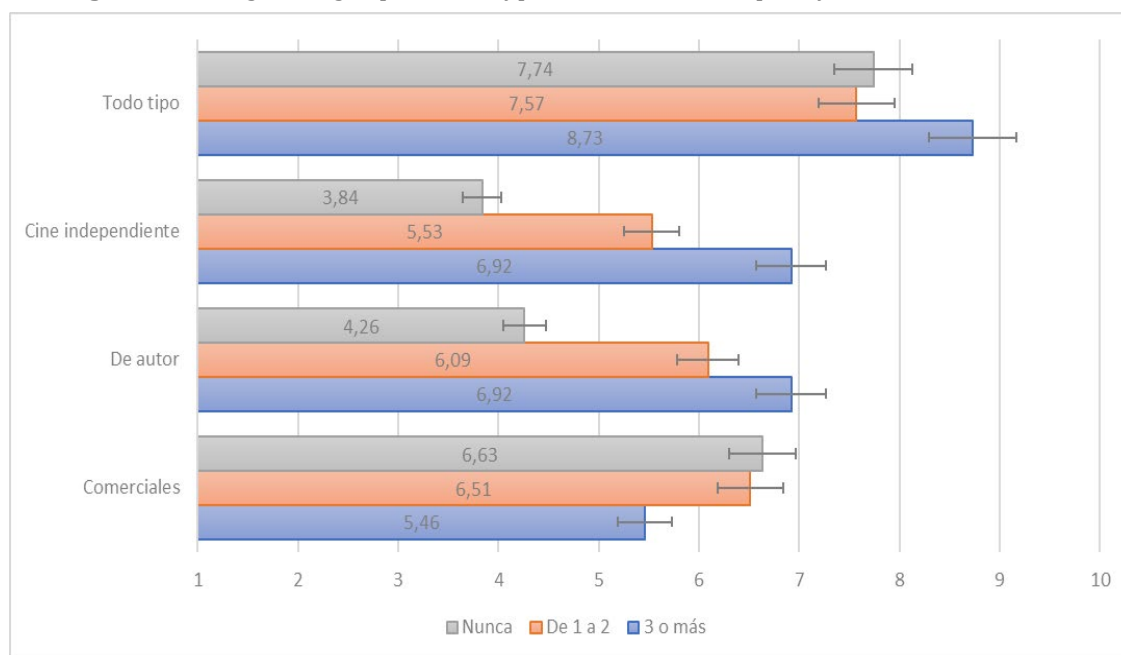
less often. This idea of considering cinema as a factor linked to industry and entertainment is more evident when asking what people expect when they go to see a film, finding a highly significant correlation of -0.25 (P|z|<0.05). In the other categories, there is a more reflective and learning-oriented tendency among those who go to the cinema more often, and a greater tendency towards escapism and entertainment among those who go occasionally, although statistically the differences between the means are not significant (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Average rating of expectations when watching a film and frequency of cinema attendance

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

Although most agree that they like all types of films, Figure 6 shows how those who go to the cinema more often have a preference for independent or arthouse films, while commercial films are more highly rated among those who go less than twice a week or almost never.

Figure 6. Average rating of preferred type of cinema and frequency of cinema attendance

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

We also measured what students expected when they went to the cinema using a multiple-choice question in which they had to select, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), the following options: escape, reflect and be moved. The average responses for each of these items can be seen in Table 5.

Another relevant question was to find out what type of films they usually watch, so they were asked to rate five response items (commercial, auteur, independent, all types, and finally, others) using a Likert response scale, with 1 being Never and 10 being Always. The results shown in Table 5 show that students expect, above all, to be entertained (47.8%) and escape (23.9%), followed by being moved (19.6%) and reflecting (14.1%). As in the previous questions, we measured whether there were differences based on the year they were in but found no significant differences ($P|z|>0.05$).

Table 5. When you watch a film, what do you expect?

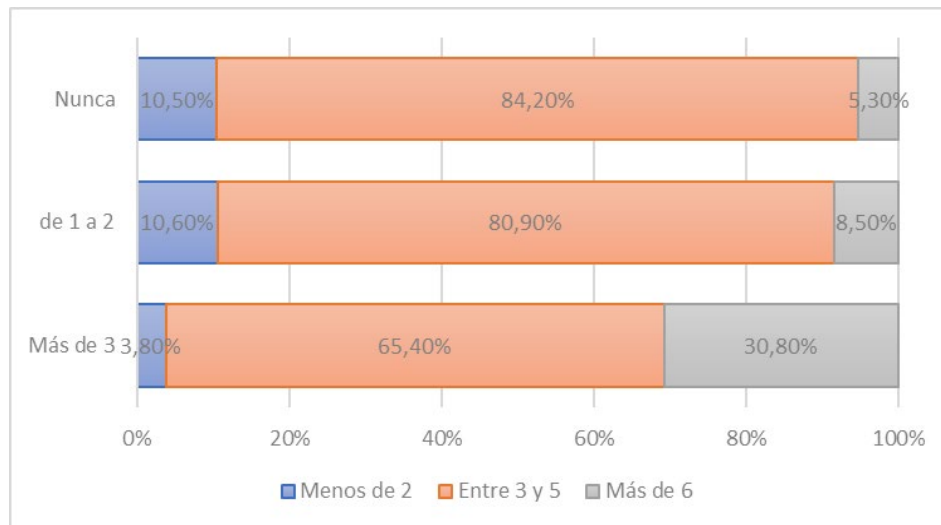|	Escape	Reflection	To get excited	To learn	Entertainment
Strongly disagree	0.00	1.10	0.00	2.20	0.00
Strongly disagree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Somewhat disagree	1.10	5.40	0.00	3.30	0.00
Neither agree nor disagree	6.50	7.60	10.90	16.30	2.20
Somewhat agree	25.00	30.40	25.00	37.00	10.90
Strongly agree	43.50	41.30	44.60	30.40	39.10
Strongly agree	23.90	14.10	19.60	10.90	47.80
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Average	5.8	5.5	5.7	5.2	6.3
Standard deviation	0.91	1.11	0.9	1.16	0.76

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

3.4. Is there a relationship between cinema attendance and the number of platforms to which they subscribe? What about video gaming?

Another objective of the study was to check whether there was any statistically significant relationship between cinema attendance, the number of platforms used and the use of video games.

With regard to platforms, respondents were asked how many they used. On average, they use 4.2 (SD=1.47) platforms simultaneously, among which Netflix (79.3%) and Amazon Prime (48.9%), Disney+ (41.3%), HBO (32.6%) and Movistar+ (13%) stand out. As monthly cinema attendance increases, so does the number of platforms used, with a significant correlation of 0.27 ($P|z|<0.05$). There are hardly any differences between those who hardly ever go to the cinema and those who go less than twice a month in terms of platform use. However, among those who go more than three times a month, more than 30% consume at least six different platforms on a regular basis (Figure 7).
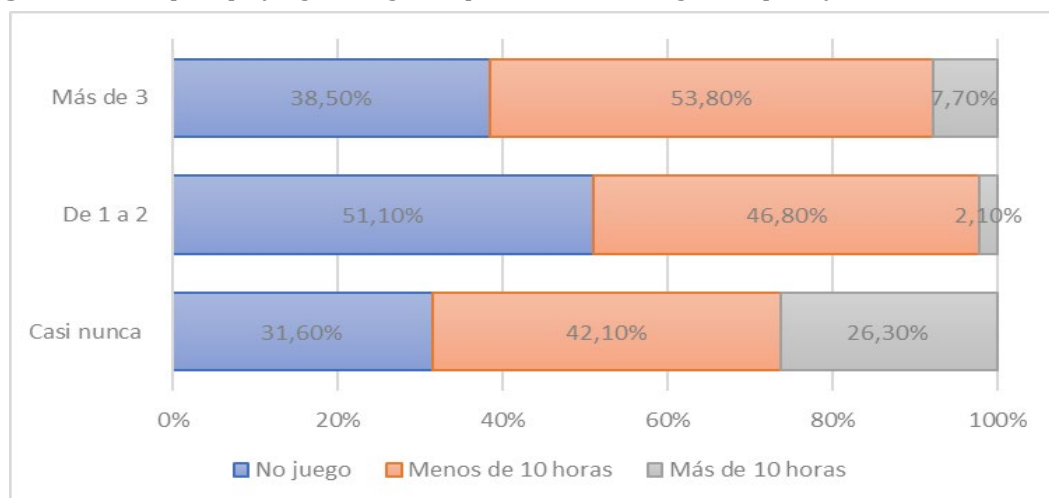
Figure 7. Simultaneous online cinema platforms used according to frequency of cinema attendance

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

Another alternative to cinema among young people is video games (Figure 8). In this regard, it is noteworthy that a significant percentage of students do not play video games regularly (43.5%), especially among those who go to the cinema moderately often (51.1%). Comparing the extreme groups, it is interesting to see how those who rarely go to the cinema are the ones who like cinema the least and who spend the most hours playing video games; 26% said they spend 10 hours a week playing these games.

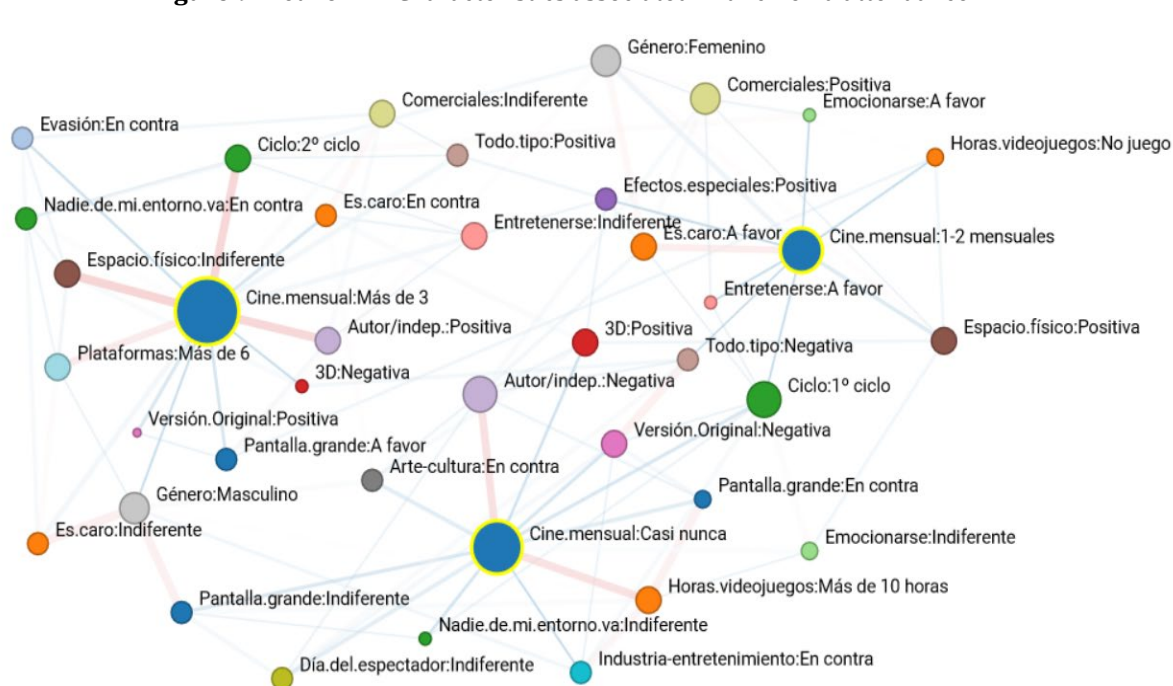**Figure 8.** Time spent playing video games per week according to frequency of cinema attendance

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

3.5. Multivariate analysis

Taking into account the results observed, it is possible to bring all these factors together and see how the different characteristics of the population analysed are distributed. Using reticular coincidence analysis (RCA), it is possible to delve into the structure of the data to discover how certain phenomena or characteristics tend to appear together (Escobar & Tejero 2018). A simple way to understand this data structure is through coincidence graphs [2] . The objective is to draw the events observed in a scenario and see how the nodes or vertices are linked to each other through statistically significant relationships. Each of the nodes represents the categories of variables included in the data matrix, considering "cinema attendance" as the dependent variable and observing relationships between the independent variables that help to understand the connections between the variables. To work with the numerical variables, the values were grouped from 1-3 as "against" and 5-7 as "in favour" and 4 as "indifferent". For a better understanding, Figure 9 (Network 1) is presented with three main nodes representing the frequency of cinema attendance, with greater thickness indicating a stronger coincidence between the two nodes. For the analysis, only those characteristics that have a statistically significant relationship with a P(z) < 0.10[3] were retained.

The graph shown in Figure 9 (Network 1) shows how the significant characteristics relate to cinema attendance and to each other. One of the most striking elements is that among the cinema attendance nodes, only one category is directly related; the others are significantly related only to one characteristic of going to the cinema. In the case of first-cycle students, there is a greater association with little or no cinema attendance, while second-cycle students are the ones who go to the cinema more than three times a month to a greater extent.

Figure 9. Network 1. Characteristics associated with cinema attendance

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2023.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The film industry has been facing various challenges for more than a decade, such as the rise of series and OTT platforms, changes in society's habits and cinema ticket prices. These are just some of the reasons why cinema attendance has not yet recovered after the pandemic and remains far below the average for the years prior to the Covid-19 crisis, with 40% fewer viewers than in the 2017-2019 period

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[2] The graphs were generated using the *Caring* application, which is part of the Netcoin project. https://modesto-escobar.github.io/netCoin-2.x/

[3] The sample size is small, so in order to see a greater number of significant matches, it was decided to increase the confidence level.

(Film Academy, 2023).

In this context, it is particularly interesting to analyse the cinema-going habits of university students to find out whether they go to the cinema, what types of film content they watch and on what devices. In this regard, the study found that among those surveyed, the frequency of monthly cinema attendance is high. This study also sought to understand the reasons why young university students go to the cinema at a time when they can access all kinds of content from anywhere and on any device. In this case, in addition to the social factor (going to see a film in the company of other people), it has been found that students go to the cinema mainly to be able to watch films on a big screen and to have the opportunity to see the content in its original version, with special effects and in 3D.

For their part, price does not seem to be one of the main obstacles for young students when it comes to going to the cinema, although it becomes more important among those who go less frequently. We also wanted to find out whether they went to the cinema as an extension of their education or whether they had other expectations. In this regard, the data collected showed that students were mainly looking for entertainment and escapism, although almost universally they consider cinema to be an element of art and culture.

Undoubtedly, another competitive factor of cinema that makes going to the cinema a unique experience is the fact that you can see exclusive content that cannot yet be seen in other contexts or on other devices. The consideration of cinema as an artistic and cultural factor could lead one to think that students prefer to see more independent content.

Along with preferences and types of consumption, one of the starting points of this research cannot be forgotten: finding out whether aspects such as the inclusion of OTTs are responsible for the change in cinema-going habits. Very revealing data was found on this point, as it shows that consuming on-demand content in this type of space would not be an impediment to going to the cinema. In fact, people who subscribe to more platforms (at least six) are the ones who go to the cinema most regularly, more than three times a month.

Finally, the evolution of film consumption is becoming a constant focus of academic attention in order to ascertain whether lost habits are recoverable or whether the current *streaming* crisis is promoting new patterns of cultural and entertainment consumption, including among younger people. The limitations of this study are due to the particular nature of the sample, with specific socio-demographic and academic characteristics, as well as the size of the sample. It should be noted that this is a preliminary study to validate the survey for replication in future research with a larger sample of respondents and a greater number of questions in order to strengthen and contrast the conclusions reached here.

5. Acknowledgements

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