

Blockbusters, Sleepers, or Flops: How Film Content and Film Characteristics Influence Cinemagoer Choice of Cinema

Chibueze Emmanuel Ogbunankwor

Department of Marketing, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The Nigerian Cinema industry faces several challenges related to film content and film characteristics. Nevertheless, studies are lacking that empirically established whether film content and film characteristics influence cinemagoer choice of cinema in the Nigerian context. To achieve these unexplored particular objectives and establish a schema of the determinants of cinemagoer choice of cinema, a convenience sample of 323 cinemagoers was pooled in Awka metropolis, South-East, Nigeria. Moreover, the study employed multiple regression analysis to test the formulated hypotheses with the aid of SPSS Version 20.0 software at 5% level of significance. Findings indicate that the two stimuli examined, namely film content and film characteristics influence cinemagoer choice of cinema. More importantly, film characteristics have more influence than film content. Finally, the study concludes that for cinema operators to succeed in the present day Nigeria, there is the need for them to understand how and why cinema audience purchase cinema services, improve on the collaborations and connections with cinema distributors, and also understand the gradual process leading to what the audience likes in cinema settings. Recommendations for global and particularly Nigerian cinema industry stakeholders were made.*

Keywords: Film content, film characteristics, cinemagoer, choice, cinema

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 International Union of Cinemas (UNIC) congress which held in Barcelona, Spain in conjunction with CinemaCon with a key theme “The Celebration of the Movie Theatre Industry and its People” focused on key seminal topics (International Union of Cinemas, 2024). Of course, these topics include discussions on audience behaviour, data sharing between distribution and exhibition, and evolving audience tastes (International Union of Cinemas, 2024). Certainly, these seminal topics were chosen for some obvious reasons. First, to enable cinema practitioners and professionals understand how and why cinema audience purchase cinema services. Second, to improve on the collaborations and connections between cinema distributors and exhibitors. Third,

to understand the gradual process leading to what the audience likes or prefers in cinema settings. That is to say, these aforementioned reasons are geared towards ensuring audience satisfaction and the concomitant boosting of ticket sales and box office revenue. Accordingly, the cinema sector has continued to enjoy good business especially in recent years.

Interestingly, statistics indicate that the total global box office gross in 2023 was \$527,876,195 and more than 50 million movie tickets were sold (Pzaz, 2024). As a result, the global box office revenues grew by more than 29 percent in 2023, up from 21 percent in 2022 and independent features accounted for one fifth of the market (Pzaz, 2024).

Moreover, the Nigerian box office demonstrated substantial growth, with revenues increasing from ₦4.74 billion (\$2.9 million) in 2021 to ₦6.94 billion (\$4.3 million) in 2022, and further to ₦7.24 billion (\$4.5 million) in 2023 (Nairametrics, 2024). As a result, this marked a 46.4 percent rise from 2021 to 2022, followed by a more modest 4.3 percent increase in 2023 and a 52.74 percent increase in the last 2 years and projections suggested the box office could hit ₦10 billion (\$6.2 million) by the end of 2024, reflecting a 38.1 percent year-on-year growth (Nairametrics, 2024). More importantly, despite a 16.6 percent dip in total admissions in 2023, average ticket prices rose significantly by 27 percent, reaching ₦2,759 (\$1.74) (Nairametrics, 2024). In consequence, the aforementioned statistics at the global and Nigerian contexts suggest a very rosy future for the cinema industry.

Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, the Nigerian film industry faces several challenges related to its content, including objectionable content, storytelling, and technology. To begin with, some films depict excessive violence, suggestive sex scenes, the objectification of women, cultural misrepresentation, immorality, and other harmful behaviours, which can desensitize viewers and normalize such actions, especially among young people (see Onyekaba, 2012; Uwom, Chioma & Sodeinde, 2013; Udofia & Tom, 2013; Omoera, Edemode & Aihevba, 2017; Thomas, 2020; Endong & Emike, 2023; Teniola, Msughter, Aondover & Omolara, 2025). At the same time, the industry faces several challenges related to storytelling, including a lack of originality and depth in narratives, over-reliance on certain themes, and insufficient research and development (see What Kept Me Up, 2020; Anyagu, 2024). Finally, the technology in use in the Nigerian cinema industry is largely obsolete with the attendant poor screening quality and negatively impacts box office performance. On the other hand, Nollywood also faces serious challenges related to film characteristics. Firstly, Nollywood is overly focused on certain genres, like urban movies (African Arguments, 2022). Secondly, the problems of film directing in Nigeria are based on policy formulation, artistic problem, technical problem, market structure, skill and education, religion and cultural barriers, and colonial influence (Akinola, 2023). Thirdly, limited distribution channels restrict the reach and influence of Nollywood films (qiyuebin, 2025). Finally, there are also allegations of unfair practices by cinema owners regarding film scheduling in the form of changing of viewing time of films, giving more viewing time to some films, and scheduling films in halls with faulty air conditioners (Ekechukwu, 2025). Despite, it is not empirically established if film content and film

characteristics influence cinemagoer choice of cinema in the Nigerian context whether the films are blockbusters, sleepers, or flops.

Certainly, several studies have been executed in different countries of the world and even across countries on the determinants of cinemagoer choice of cinema. For example, some of these studies established the relationship between demographic variables and cinemagoer choice of cinema (e.g., Austin, 1982; Basil, 2001; Kubrak, 2020). In contrast, many studies examined the relationship between film/movie attributes and filmgoer choice of cinema (e.g., Austin, 1982; Maxfield, 2003; Giyahi, 2012; Suwato, 2012; Jerrick, 2013; Lefevre & Vlangar, 2016; Miles, Garcia, Gerald, Goodnough, Mendez, Ogilvie et al, 2019; Sljivo, 2021; Shang & Nuangjamnong, 2022; Yaqoub, Jingwu & Ambekar, 2023). Also, extant literature reveals that quite a number of studies examined the relationship between cinema attributes and cinemagoer choice of cinema (e.g., Yanmin, 2011; Giyahi, 2012; Van de Vijver, 2017; Grundstrom, 2018; Styliari, Kefalidou & Koleva, 2018; Valentine, 2021). Of course, studies have also been conducted across countries that investigated the influence of film and/or cinema attributes on cinemagoer choice of cinema (e.g., Governo & Teixeira, 2014; Chiu, Chen, Wang, & Hsu, 2019; Van Belle, 2022). More importantly, an avalanche of studies have been conducted in the Nigerian context on films/movies and cinema (e.g., Madichie, 2010; Agba & Ineji, 2011; Olubomehin, 2012; Giwa, 2014; Onuzulike, 2016; Ebelebe, 2017; Nwachukwu, 2018; Ezepue, 2020; Agina, 2021; Iteji, Danjuma & Agir, 2021; Nworgu, 2022). Unfortunately, the gap in the literature is that the attributes influencing cinema selection is understudied in the Nigerian context. In addition, hospitality scholars in different countries of the world have employed different theories to study cinemagoer choice of cinema. For instance, the Expectancy Value Theory (e.g., Austin, 1982), the Purchase Decision Model (e.g., Suwato, 2012; Sljivo, 2021), the Theory of Planned Behavior (e.g., Zhang & Nuangjamnong, 2022), and the Uses and Gratification Theory (e.g., Jaqoub et al, 2023) have been employed by researchers to study cinema selection from the perspective of cinemagoers. Regrettably, there is a dearth of studies that have examined the attributes influencing cinemagoer choice of cinema by employing the Incentive Theory framework. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this theoretical gap in extant literature.

Objectives of the Study

The prime objective of this study is to establish a schema of the determinants of cinemagoer choice of cinema in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. As a result, this objective can be broken down into the following particular objectives:

- To examine the extent to which film content leads to cinemagoer choice of cinema.
- To find out whether film characteristics lead to cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Significance of the Study

This piece of research is considerable because it will provide an unbiased and independent account of what obtains in the cinema industry. The study is also significant because it will add to the stock

of existing knowledge and provide a base for further studies in cinema audience studies which is crucial to the cinema business. This is because there is still limited research on the preferences of Nigerian cinema audiences. Therefore, comprehending the essentials of what determines cinemagoer choice of cinema can help cinema stakeholders plan appropriate strategies. Certainly, each stakeholder has different needs, expectations, and interests. For instance, filmmakers will gain fascinating insights into what films/movies to produce, distribution companies and cinema operators will learn more about their income sources. Also, cinema operators will gain insights into the optimum number of screenings to hold, how long to keep a film in the cinema, and other valuable insights. In other words, the goal of filmmakers along with their production companies which is to have their products distributed and to generate revenue will be met. In addition, the study will enable audiences to make smarter choices from the competing cinema operators thereby enabling them derive satisfaction and save resources like money and time that were wasted on bad choices. Finally, the regulatory body in the cinema industry in Nigeria, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) will equally benefit from the result of this study; hence they will regulate better on films and video industry in Nigeria particularly the cinema industry.

Scope of the Study

The present piece of research can be traced to the area of knowledge known as consumer behaviour. On the other hand, in terms of geographical scope, the study is limited to Awka metropolis, an important city in Sought-Eastern Nigeria and the administrative hub of Anambra State. More importantly, the major entity that is being analyzed in this study is cinemagoers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework: Incentive Theory

The theoretical framework of the present study is developed based on the adaptation of the 'Incentive Theory', otherwise known as 'Incentive Theory of Motivation'. To begin with, Skinner (1938) first proposed the 'Incentive Theory' in his book on 'the behavior of organisms: an experimental analysis' domiciled within the domain of behavioral psychology. Originally, 'Incentive Theory' suggests that our behaviors are influence or reinforced by external factors or stimuli and not internal states (Skinner, 1938). To be more precise, people are driven or incentivized to act based primarily on three environmental events: deprivation, satiation, and aversive stimulation (Skinner, 1938). Nevertheless, the 'Incentive Theory' continued to be revised by behavioral psychologists. For instance, firstly, Hull (1943) contended that behavior is a function of biological deprivation, which is a psychological state that creates a need, and incentive, which is the positive or negative values of a particular situation. In other words, incentives can be positive or negative, they can be external, such as money, or internal, such as hunger or thirst (Hull, 1943). Later, Herzberg (1959) expanded this ideology in work settings even more, creating what is known as the two-factor incentive theory comprising of motivators and hygiene factors. Moreover, scholars while analyzing Hull (1943) state that the theory suggests that the magnitude and proximity of an incentive can influence behavior by increasing the perceived value of a particular action or outcome, which in turn increases the motivation to engage in that behavior (Bandhu,

Mohan, Nittalla, Jadhav, Bhaduarua, Saxena, 2024). More importantly, the American Psychological Association (2024) defined an incentive as “an external stimulus, such as a condition or an object, that enhances or serves as a motive for behavior”. Therefore, the Incentive Theory is a psychological theory that suggests that individuals engage in certain behaviors, tasks or activities because of the potential external incentives, stimuli, factors or pressures.

Interestingly, the ‘Incentive Theory of Motivation’ has been applied in different contexts by previous studies. These include in a participatory crowdsourcing project (Bosha, Cilliers & Flowerday, 2017), the human perspective (Ellingsen & Johannesson, 2008), and advertising context (Vi & Thuy, 2020). Unfortunately, the Incentive Theory has been criticized for oversimplifying the complexity of human motivation and that it can be reductionist in nature (Killeen, 1982; Ellingsen & Johannesson, 2008; Bosha et al, 2017; Vi & Thuy, 2020). Moreover, the theory is also criticized for being too general and all-encompassing; ignores internal motivators like human emotion, different cultural preferences, and each person’s personal values; and that there is not a single set of incentives that will appeal to every person (Chase, 2023).

For the purpose of the present study, the application of the ‘Incentive Theory’ is as follows: firstly, the ‘external incentives’ or ‘external stimuli’ are represented by the film content, and film characteristics variables. Secondly, the ‘behavior’ or ‘task’ or ‘activity’ is represented by choice of cinema.

Certainly, the Incentive Theory is one of the notable psychological theories used to understand the buying behavior of consumers. It provides specific suggestions on what motivates cinemagoers in cinema selection. Of course, this theoretical framework explores the complex inter-relationships and inter-connectedness of consumer behaviour, hospitality, mass and electronic media management at a homogenous group level.

Empirical Review

The focus of this section is to review conceptual and empirical studies conducted in the area of determinants of consumer choice of cinema. To begin with, a number of studies have been conducted in this domain in different countries of the world dominated by United States of American and Chinese studies, and even across countries. Accordingly, these studies are hereby reviewed according to the relationship between demographic variables, film/movie attributes, and cinema attributes, each following a temporal sequence. In the same way, studies across countries concerning the aforementioned attributes are also reviewed. Moreover, previous studies on films/movies and cinemas in Nigeria are also reviewed.

Studies on Determinants of Consumer Choice of Cinema

Firstly, a few academic studies have established the relationship between demographic variables and consumer choice of cinema. For instance, in one of the earliest studies in this domain carried out in the United States, Austin (1982) suggested that movie-going as a leisure activity diminished with age. A study conducted in the United States made use of lifestyles data to model movie and video consumption and found that specifically, people with higher incomes see more movies in

theatres whereas people from larger families see more videos (Basil, 2001). In the same way, in Russia, a study by Kubrak (2020) found that after watching the cinema film, postgraduate students' attitude towards elderly people changed in a positive way, while undergraduate students' negative assessments only worsened. According to Kubrak (2020) the revealed opposite trends can be explained by individual differences of respondents, which include age, educational status as an indicator of individual psychological characteristics, the experience of interaction with elderly people and, as a result, attitudes towards elderly people at the time before watching the movie.

Secondly, many studies have examined the relationship between film/movie attributes and filmgoers'/moviegoers' choice of cinema. One of the earliest studies in this category carried out in the United States by Austin (1982) assessed the importance of 28 variables that were broadly organized into eight categories: movie production, personnel, production elements, advertising, criticism and reviewing, interpersonal influence, perception of film content, financial costs to the patron, and miscellaneous. When data on the 28 variables were analyzed, subject matter of the film and interpersonal contact were the reasons cited most often for going to films whereas the data also demonstrated the low salience of "behind-the-screen" production personnel in attracting high school moviegoers. Nevertheless, the frequent moviegoers in the sample considered more of the 28 variables as being important in making their choices than did the occasional moviegoers (Austin, 1982). Another study executed in Florida, USA by Maxfield (2003) examined the following variables to determine why people go to the movies to see the films they see: movie stars, directors, trailers, general advertising, word of mouth, subject matter/genre, and reviews and found each criterion to be related to movie-viewing choice. The subject matter of a film and featured movie stars were reasons most often cited for going to a theater to see a motion picture (Maxfield, 2003). A third study in this category carried out in Iran by Giyahi (2012) showed that type of story, genre and artists, casts are considered as the most important factors in selection of film. Similarly, Suwanto (2012) identified key factors affecting consumer decision making behavior in cinema context in Indonesia using mixed method approach. The first step was a qualitative research method using focus group discussion to find 5 main factors that include marketing communications, neutral information source, film characteristics, content and ease. Using quantitative method (factor analysis), it was revealed that there were nine factors which include film synopsis and reviews, director and actors, genre, film adaptation, story, neutral information, schedule, visual effects and objectionable content that influence consumer behavior when choosing a movie in a cinema (Suwanto, 2012). In addition, Jerrick (2013) established that advertisements known as film trailers effectively encourage and influence college students to pay and see the advertised film in theaters in the United States of American context. Moreover, a Swedish study by Lefevre and Vlangar (2016) investigated the effect of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on moviegoers and concluded that positive eWOM can influence moviegoers to consider a specific movie and negative eWOM can either have no impact on filmgoers or make them disregard the movie. Likewise, a fourth United States study in this category by Rawal and Saavedra (2017) examined the role of word of mouth in the movie theater industry. The results suggest that word of mouth fully mediates the relationship between stars and box office revenue and partially mediates the relationship between production budgets on the one hand, and number of screens on

the other hand, with box office revenue. Another United States study by Miles et al (2019) revealed that three factors that influence moviegoers of the Black Panther movie include combination PR activities, traditional movie marketing ads and current and future movie preferences. The study also found that using the movie ad variables as endogenous variables, they were strong influences on moviegoer frequency. A Spanish study by Gavilan, Fernandez-Lores and Martinez-Navarro (2019) analyzed the influence of ratings on a moviegoer's choice and provided empirical evidence that the addition of ratings simplifies the decision making of films. The study found ratings to exert a significant influence in reducing risk perceptions. Another study in this category executed in Croatia by Sljivo (2021) highlighted that the most important factor that affect visitors while choosing a movie before going to the cinemas is content and its support factor is story; second place is held by film characteristics with its support factor genre; and the third place is source of neutral information with word-of-mouth being its support factor. Moreover, a South Korean study by Kim, Trimi and Lee (2021) investigated the key factors that contribute to the success of movies and compared the number of screening days, the primary measure of success of movies, between the groups. Screening days showed significant differences between the positive and neutral groups, negative and neutral groups; the density (positive-negative comments) of the positive and negative groups; drama and action, drama and comedy; domestic and foreign films; G-rated and R-rated, R-rated and X-rated films (Kim et al, 2021). The first Chinese study in this category by Zhang and Nuangjamnong (2022) found that perceived behavioral control, customer pleasure, and attitude toward watching movies are all significant factors influencing the intention to purchase movie tickets at the theaters in Chengdu, China. Finally, a second Chinese study in this category investigated the pandemic impacts on cinema industry and over-the-top platforms in China and highlighted the top five factors in increasing the over-the-top platforms to watch movies to include easy access, various genres, no time to visit a cinema, pandemic, and new films and suggested that the film industry should maintain the quality of the movies especially those released on the cinema screen (see Yaqoub et al., 2023).

Thirdly, extant literature reveals that quite a number of studies examined the relationship between cinema attributes and cinemagoer choice of cinema. The only 20th Century study in this category by Neelamegham and Jain (1991) developed and executed an econometric framework to model and analyze the consumer choice process for experience products in this case, cinema new movies, formally. The modeling framework incorporated psychological variables such as consumer expectations of choice set elements and latent product interest, and the influence of information sources, such as critic reviews and word-of-mouth, within a discrete choice formulation. At the same time, a study carried out in Iran by Giyahi (2012) identified quality of sound, seat comfort, ventilation of cinema hall as the most important factors in selection of cinema, whereas TV teasers and word-of-mouth advertisements are the most significant publicity tools for those individuals who intend to go to cinema halls. A study conducted in Belgium by Van de Vijver (2017) identified the notion of the embodied place as a key factor in cinematic experience whereas the social site of cinema-going is constructed through social activities (companionship and leisure), contacts (unique heterogeneity of the audience) and conformity (communal experience of consensual predictability). Later, a study carried out in Finland by Grundstrom (2018) investigated how the

social nature of cinema is affected by the technological developments that have led to the converging of different media and found that the inherent social functions of cinema-going render it less vulnerable to technological innovation than depicted by those arguing for its expiry. Besides, due to the instantaneity of living in a digitally networked setting, the space of cinema theatre is used for going offline (Grundstrom, 2018). Also, a United Kingdom study conducted in Nottingham City by Styliari et al (2018) found that going to the movies constitutes a trajectory during which cinemagoers interact with multiple digital platforms. At the same time, depending on their choices, they construct unique digital identities that represent a set of online behaviors and rituals that cinemagoers adopt before, while and after cinema-going (Styliari et al, 2018). Another study by Yanmin (2011) executed in China found marketing communication, consumption experience, pricing strategy and convenience to have increasing influence in consumer satisfaction of college students to Movie Theater in ascending sequence. Furthermore, Cuong (2020) in a study on the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty at the cinema in Vietnam found that there was a significant positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. In addition, there was a positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, and there was a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Cuong, 2020). An eight study in this category by Valentine (2021) in the USA found that participants viewed watching movies, whether at the theater or at home, as a social experience that should primarily be done in groups. Additionally, action films part of big-budget franchises were reported to be the main type of film drawing participants to the movie theater, whereas smaller, indie films were seen as films to stream at home (Valentine, 2021). Furthermore, based on a unique dataset of high-frequency movie ticket sales in China at the movie-and-city-level during 2012-2014, He, Luo and Zhang (2022) found that one air pollution day mainly through ambient pollution exposure during transportation to the theater reduces the market share of a movie by 2.26%, other ratings being equal.

Fourthly, studies have been conducted across countries that investigated film and/or cinema attributes on consumer choice of cinema. For example, one of such studies by Governo and Teixeira (2014), built a database using 30 out of the 38 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and examined the extent to which the across country demand for two given types of films (arthouse films and mainstream films) is associated with individual, industrial, and cultural-social-structural factors. They found that cinema tastes diverge into different patterns across countries; larger marketing investments emerge as a strong predictor of the consumption of art-house films; and technological level plays a significant role in creating stratified consumption for arthouse films. A later study by Chiu et al, (2019) compared the impact of eWOM on consumer choices of new movies in China and the USA. Findings show that there are specific similarities and differences between the American and Chinese movie markets. First, eWOM variance in China is smaller than in the USA. Second, genres are useful variables as indicators of movie content; the genres of comedy and drama are not popular in the Chinese market. Furthermore, eWOM variance has a positive impact on box office in China, but eWOM variance has no impact on the US box office. Importantly, the one-star reviews have a negative impact on the Chinese box office, but it has no impact on the US box office, (Chiu et al, 2019).

More recently, as New Cinema History (NCH) focuses more radically on cinema as a social and cultural institution and its importance in everyday life, using the case of Swedish Film director Ingmar Bergman and the reception of his film in Sweden and Belgium, Van Belle (2022) re-integrated the text and auteur into historical reception studies. In contrast to many other studies within NCH, the text was here openly acknowledged by Van Belle (2022) to be central to the experience and the choice for that experience.

From the foregoing, the literature suggests that film content and film characteristics are relevant to cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Previous Studies on Films/Movies and Cinemas in Nigeria

Of course, Nigerian scholars have conducted studies on films/movies and cinemas in Nigeria especially this 21st Century. The earliest of such studies by Ekpeyong (2007) assessed whether truly, documentary films do tell the truth, and if they do, to what degrees do they tell the truth. The findings show that the documentary film uses both dramatic and narrative modes of storytelling. Secondly, the study found that through the device of staging and appropriating of such aesthetic elements of fictive film like editing lights, costumes, script and so on, some documentaries have wittingly or unwittingly compromised their theoretical and ideological precept of dealing with truthful activities. Thirdly, the giant strides recorded in the development of digital technology and the unlimited spectacular possibilities it offers in near perfect visual effect generation, casts reasonable cloud of doubts on the documentary films' truth claims (Ekpeyong, 2007). Another study (Madichie, 2010) reported that African movies as epitomized by the case of Nollywood continue to lack box office appeal due to the poor marketing-mix strategies adopted notably weak marketing communications and poor product quality. A third study by Agba and Ineji (2011) found that inspite of Nollywood's perceived negative themes, poor plotting and poor sound quality, audience members of Nollywood do generally have positive perception of Nollywood. A fourth study, Olubomehin (2012) showcased the history of the rise and decline of cinema ventures in the city of Lagos, Nigeria and unraveled the factors that led to the decline of the business to include the establishment of more television stations, arrival of Home Video System (HVS), growing insecurity, economic challenges, harsh operating environment, capital intensive nature of cinema business, exorbitant tax paid by cinema operators amidst a dwindling revenue and economic downturn in the wake of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that wiped out the middle class. Furthermore, Giwa (2014) found that the focus of the rising film business, character portrayals, and the production process all play a significant role in the expansion and growing popularity of the Nigerian film industry. A sixth study, Onuzulike (2016) juxtaposed two audiences – Nigerians in Nigeria and Nigerians in South Africa in order to ascertain how they perceive favorite aspects and disliked aspects of Nigerian movie productions, popularly known as Nollywood. The result indicate that the two groups favor the depiction of Nigerian/African cultures over other themes; yet Nigerians in South Africa disfavor the reality of Nollywood movies and disliked aspects of these films include repetition, poor quality and the supernatural (Onuzulike, 2016). A seventh study, Ebelebe (2017) found that advances in digital technology enhances the aesthetic and narratives of screen content producers in Nigeria. Another

study (Nwachukwu, 2018) found that Nigerian multiplex audiences were either quite impressed or excellently impressed with regard to external appeal, internal appeal, security, customer service, box office, cinema hall technology, movie experience, audience conduct and post movie impression which constitute multiplex offerings. A ninth study by Ezepue (2020) concluded that Nollywood is currently gentrifying as well as professionalizing. Also, a Lagos study by Agina (2021) amongst other things found that cinema-goers showed more enthusiasm for local movies made by prominent filmmakers and featured celebrity actors. The study also revealed that audiences were attracted by huge marketing and publicity efforts and movie lovers crowded venues to see trailers with the hope of meeting the filmmaker and actors in person besides willing to pay higher ticket prices for the experience (Agina, 2021). In addition, cinema-goers in Lagos were interested in the technical and aesthetic values of the production and the quality of the acting and were largely drawn to romantic comedies as well as sometimes enjoyed thrillers with strong narratives (Agina, 2021). An eleventh study by Iteji, Danjuma and Agir (2021) assessed audience perception of Nollywood films in Benue State and found that respondents have particular aspects of Nollywood films like production aspect, costumes they use, the theme, location or setting in that order that interest them. The study found that the audience encounters some problems in the course of their viewership such as language barrier and portrayal of ritual and witchcraft (Iteji et al, 2021). Furthermore, Nworgu (2022) evaluated public relations strategies of cinema houses in PortHarcourt and Owerri and found that the public relations strategies employed influenced customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Finally, Vitalis, Amadi and Harcourt-Whyte (2024) showcased how Nollywood has emerged as the third biggest film industry in the world, after Hollywood and Bollywood, from its humble Nigerian beginnings and how the post national character has been acquired and sustained.

Moreover, the present study examines the relationship between film/movie attributes and filmgoers'/moviegoers' choice of cinema because it remains the most widely studied aspect in this area of cinema research globally. More importantly, the current literature suggests that film content and film characteristics are variables worth investigating. This is because they are two of the most highlighted factors influencing cinemagoer choice of cinema. Nevertheless, the gap in the literature is that the attributes influencing cinema selection are understudied in the Nigerian context.

Hypotheses Development

The two identified variables were reviewed in this study. Interestingly, the proposed hypotheses to be tested in this empirical study are explained hereafter.

Film Content

Previous studies indicate that film content (film story, objectionable content, or technology) can greatly influence cinemagoer choice of cinema (e.g., Suwanto, 2012; Slijivo, 2021). Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H₁: H₀₁: Film content does not significantly predict cinemagoer

choice of cinema.

H_{A1}: Film content significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Film Characteristics

The capability of film characteristics such as genre, film/movie director, country of origin of a film/movie, production house, or casts to deliver the qualities of intensity, intimacy and ubiquity is found to determine cinemagoer choice of cinema in different countries of the world (e.g., Suwanto, 2012; Sljivo, 2021). Likewise, several researchers found aspects of film characteristics to influence cinemagoer choice of cinema. For instance, Austin (1982) found subject matter of the film as an aspect of film characteristic to influence cinemagoer choice of cinema. Moreover, Maxfield (2003) revealed that dimensions of film characteristics like movie stars, directors, genre influence cinemagoer choice of cinema. Also, genre and artists and casts as film characteristics have been found to influence cinemagoer choice of cinema (Giyahi, 2012). Therefore we posit the following:

H₂: H₀₂: Film characteristics does not significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

H_{A2}: Film characteristics significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Conceptual Model

The research model is formulated based on these developed hypotheses (see Figure 1 below). To explain, cinemagoer choice of cinema is constructed as a function of film content and film characteristics. Accordingly, this model is ideally suited for helping us confirm whether these distilled factors are at work in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

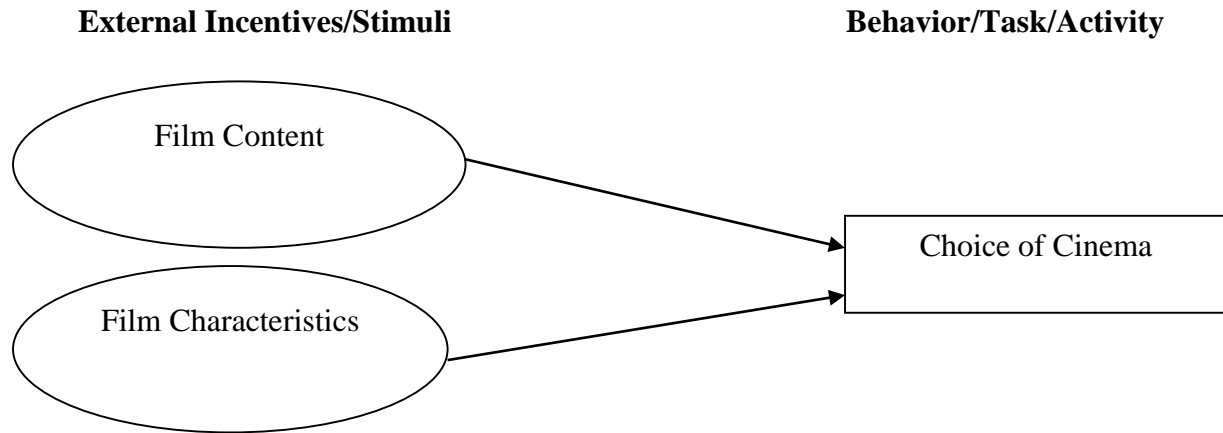


Fig. 1 Proposed Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Survey or descriptive research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data for this study. It typically involves the practice of gathering data for a study by asking people who have particular knowledge, insights or experiences questions related to the study.

Study Area

The specific location, neighborhood, community or city that is of interest in this study is Awka metropolis. Moreover, Awka metropolis is part of the capital city of Anambra State in the centre of the densely-populated Igbo heartland in South-East Nigeria. As a result, the different segments of the hospitality industry flourish there.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises cinemagoers who patronize cinemas in Awka metropolis, South-East, Nigeria. Since there is no accurate statistics on the number of cinemagoers who go to the cinemas in Awka metropolis at any given time, the population is not known.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

As the true or correct information about the population of the study could not be found out, the sample size was determined by estimating the sample based on a proportion. According to Rose, Spinks and Canhoto (2014), the sample size estimate can be obtained by the formular:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where n = sample size

d = degree of precision or the margin of error that is acceptable.

p = proportion of the population having the characteristic.

q = proportion of the population not having the characteristic.

However, because the population is not known, then for a degree of precision (d) of 5%, and a proportion of the population having the characteristic (p) of 70% and a proportion of the population not having characteristic (q) of 30%, the sample size required for the study is calculated as

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.70) (0.30)}{0.05^2} = 322.69 \text{ respondents}$$

The sample size here is 322.69, rounded up to 323 respondents since population is a discrete variable.

More importantly, cinemagoers at the only three cinemas in Awka metropolis namely, Mila Cinemas, Zara Cinemas and Annabel Cinemas were quota sampled to enable the researcher make a valid inference on the study population. Nevertheless, convenience sampling technique was employed to administer the survey instrument to cinemagoers who attended these neighborhood cinemas on weekends.

Instrument of Data Collection

Based on the research model proposed, a survey instrument was developed specifically for this study. The survey instrument consisted of a three-part questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to capture demographic characteristics of the respondents. In addition, the second part comprised the independent variables of interest in the study and used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1- extremely uninfluential to 5 – extremely influential, in addition to 3 - have no option/don't know. In contrast, the third part comprised the dependent variable of interest and employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree, in addition to 3 – have no option/don't know. The second and third parts consisted of 8 and 4 questions concerning cinemagoers' perceptions in cinema selection. More importantly, the second and third parts of the questionnaire contain the core subject-matter sections and were developed based on the proposed research model (see Figure 1). That is to say, these parts of the questionnaire contain questions to enable the researcher meet the objectives of the study, and also test the formulated hypotheses. See Table 1 for the constructs, their sources, and corresponding adapted survey questions.

Table 1. The Development of Survey Instrument

Construct	Source(s)	Adapted Item
Film Content	Sljivo (2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Film story which is composed of plot, setting, acting, music. (x₁). 2. Objectionable content in the form of severity and sexuality. (x₂). 3. Technology like animation, visual effects, 3D. (x₃).
Film Characteristics	Sljivo (2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Genre e.g., a specific type of film/movie (action, comedy, horror, etc). (x₄). 2.Film/movie director. (x₅). 3.Country of origin of a film/movie. (x₆). 4.Production house (major studio, independent distributor). (x₇). 5.Actors/ casts. (x₈).
Choice of Cinema	Clemes et al. (2009)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will choose a cinema if cinemagoers say positive things about the cinema to other people. (x₉). 2. I will choose a cinema if there is likelihood of coming back to the cinema again. (x₁₀) 3. I will choose a cinema if I consider the cinema as first one on the list when searching for entertainment and recreation. (x₁₁). 4. I will choose a cinema if I can recommend the cinema to other people. (x₁₂).

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The face validity of the instrument was evaluated by a panel involving three experts: two from the cinema industry and one from the academia. In other words, their expert opinion helped judge how well the constructs' measurable components represent the constructs.

To check the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach alpha on all the variables in the study was computed to ascertain the internal consistency of the research instrument. Accordingly, the computed Cronbach alpha coefficients are greater than the 0.7 benchmark recommended by Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins and Kuppelwieser (2014). To be more precise, as presented in Table 2, the Cronbachs coefficient alphas for film content, film characteristics, and choice of cinema are 0.991, 0.995 and 0.993 respectively. As a result, the Cronbach alpha values were considered high enough and it is believed that the instrument is reliable. Moreover, the results of this analysis done using SPSS are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Film Content	0.991
Film Characteristics	0.995
Choice of Cinema	0.993

Instrument Administration and Collection

The number of copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents reflects the already determined sample size of the study. Table 3 below depicts the distribution and collection statistics of the research instrument.

Table 3: Distribution and Collection of Copies of Questionnaire

Returned and Usable Copies Analysis			Copies/Rate Usable to Total Copies Produced	
Copies produced and distributed	Copies returned and usable	Copies not returned, not collected and unusable	Copies usable to total copies produced	Percentage of copies usable to copies produced
323(100%)	315(97.5%)	8(2.5%)	315/323	97.5%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 above is divided into two major parts. The first part, *Returned and Usable Copies Analysis*, shows that the total copies of the questionnaire produced and distributed to the respondents in accordance with the sample size were 323, which is 100%. Out of this figure, 315 were returned and usable representing a 97.5% response rate. On the other hand, copies of the questionnaire not returned and unusable were 8, which represent 2.5% of the total copies produced and distributed. In consequence, following the 70% minimum return rate suggested by scholars like Kothari (2011), the 97.5% response rate in the study is considered sufficiently high.

Moreover, the second part of Table 3 which is the *Copies/Rate Usable to Total Copies Produced* compares the usable copies with the total copies produced. As depicted, the 315 returned usable copies represents 97.5% of the 323 total copies of the questionnaire produced and distributed. As has been said previously, this rate is considered sufficiently high to proceed with the study.

Data Presentation

In this section, the data is presented using a frequency table and simple percentages.

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Table 4 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample which is validly 315 cinemagoers. This is shown hereunder.

Table 4: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Items	Categories	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	105	33.3
	Female	210	66.7
Age	Below 18	42	13.3
	18-25	188	59.7
	26-33	58	18.4
	34-41	18	5.7
	Above 41	9	2.9
Marital Status	Single	273	86.7
	Married	40	12.7
	Widowed	0	0.0
	Divorced	2	0.6
Occupation	Civil/Public Servant	58	18.4
	Student	176	55.9
	Business/Trading	77	24.4
	Others	4	1.3
Income Per Month	Below ₦70,000	156	49.5
	₦70,000 – ₦100,000	68	21.6
	₦100,001 – ₦130,000	21	6.7
	₦130,001 and above	70	22.2
Educational Attainment	Non-Formal/Primary	18	5.7
	Secondary	63	20.0
	Tertiary	159	50.5
	Postgraduate	75	23.8
Number of Times Respondents Visited the Cinema	1-5 times	224	71.1
	6-10 times	68	21.6
	11-15 times	16	5.1
	16-20 times	4	1.3
	Above 20 times	3	0.9

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Method of Data Analysis

Multiple regressing analysis was used to test the formulated hypotheses with the aid of SPSS Version 20.0 software at 5% (0.05) level of significance. Interestingly, the decision rule for the tested hypotheses is to accept the alternative hypotheses if the p-value (the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis) of the test statistic is less or equal to the alpha (α) at 5% (0.05) and to reject

the alternative hypothesis if the p-value of the test statistic is greater than the significance level (α) at 5% (0.05) significance level. All the items in the dimension of each variable were used to test each hypothesis. That is to say, to test the significant effect and the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables, all the items that made up each of the variables were used.

Data Analysis

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
COC	5	8.00	184.00	81.0000	78.54935
FC	5	4.00	211.00	81.0000	92.05705
FCs	5	6.00	327.00	135.0000	135.00185

Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics in Table 5 revealed that the average choice of cinema (COC) is 81.00; the maximum value is 184.00 with a minimum value of 8.00; and a standard deviation of 78.55. The average film content (FC) from the sampled value is 81.00; standard deviation is 92.06; a maximum value of 211.00 with a minimum value of 4.00. The mean value of film characteristics (FCs) stood at 135.00; a standard deviation of 135.00, maximum value of 327.00 with a minimum value of 6.00.

Test of Hypotheses

In this section, the formulated hypotheses were tested one after the other. As a result, data from Table 5 were subjected to regression analysis using SPSS Version 20.0 software.

Table 6: Regression Analysis

Variable	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Coefficients	t	p-value
FC	0.983	0.978	0.992	13.220	0.001
FCs	0.987	0.982	0.993	14.860	0.001

Hypothesis One

H₁: H₀₁: Film content does not significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

H_{A1}: Film content significantly predicts cinemagoer choice of cinema.

In Table 6, a regression analysis was conducted to test the effect of film content on choice of cinema. Adjusted RSquare is coefficient of determination which provides the distinction in the

dependent variable due to changes in the independent variable. From the findings in Table 6, the value of Adjusted RSquare shows a value of 0.98 showing that there was variation of 98% on choice of cinema due to changes in film content. This implies that 98% changes in choice of cinema could be accounted for by film content. Moreover, Table 6 reveals that the p-value is 0.001 which shows that the hypothesis is statistically significant at level of significance (5%); hence p-value of the test statistic is less than alpha value ($0.001 < 0.05$). Additionally, in Table 6, the regressed result shows that an evaluation of film content as the explanatory variable shows positive statistically significant relationship, hence coefficient value = 0.992 and t-statistics is =13.220, showing that film content is positively statistically significant on choice of cinema at 5% level of significance.

Decision:

Since p-value of the test statistic is less or equal to alpha, we therefore, reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative hypothesis which states that film content significantly predicts cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Hypothesis Two

H₂: H₀₂: Film characteristics does not significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

H_{A2}: Film characteristics significantly predicts cinemagoer choice of cinema.

In Table 6, a regression analysis was conducted to test the influence of film characteristics on choice of cinema. Adjusted RSquare is coefficient of determination which provides the distinction in the dependent variable due to changes in the independent variable. From the findings in Table 6, the value of Adjusted RSquare shows a value of 0.98 showing that there was variation of 98% on choice of cinema due to changes in film characteristics. This implies that 98% changes in choice of cinema could be accounted for by film characteristics. More importantly, Table 6 reveals that the p-value is 0.001 showing that the hypothesis is statistically significant at level of significance (5%); hence p-value of the test statistic is less than alpha value ($0.001 < 0.05$). Interestingly, in Table 6, the regressed result shows that an evaluation of film characteristics as the explanatory variable shows positive statistically significant relationship, hence coefficient value = 0.993 and t-statistics is = 14.860, showing that film characteristics is positively statistically significant on choice of cinema at 5% level of significance.

Decision:

Since p-value of the test statistic is less or equal to alpha, we therefore, reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative hypothesis which states that film characteristics significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema.

Table 7: Results From Testing Influence of Independent Variables on Choice of Cinema

Hypotheses	Variables Involved	t-statistics	ANOVA p-value	Remark
H ₁	Film Content Vs Choice of Cinema	13.220	0.001	Significant Relationship
H ₂	Film Characteristics Vs Choice of Cinema	14.840	0.001	Significant Relationship

Table 7 shows the result of the analysis including the variables involved, the estimated parameters, their t-statistics, ANOVA p-values and a comment/remark concerning each hypothesis. More importantly, as shown in Table 7, the two hypothesized relationships (the relationship between choice of cinema and film content, choice of cinema and film characteristics) in the research model are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. Interestingly, the results indicate that film characteristics has more effect than film content regarding cinemagoer choice of cinema with t-values of approximately 14.8% and 13.2% respectively.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The Incentive Theory (Skinner, 1938) was the foundation of the study. According to the Incentive Theory of Motivation, we hypothesized that: film content and film characteristics predict cinemagoer choice of cinema. That is to say, the application of the Incentive Theory is that film content and film characteristics represent the stimuli whereas choice of cinema represents the behavior or task.

It is noted that film content was significant in predicting cinemagoer choice of cinema, which is consistent not only with Suwato's (2012) finding but also with Sljivo's (2021) finding. That is to say, Nigerian cinemagoers consider film content (film story, objectionable content, or technology) as an important reason for visiting the cinema. In other words, Nigerian cinemagoers are more likely to visit the cinema when the subject matter, story, themes, objectionable content and technology employed in a film help convey the underlying ideas, messages and interpretations to the audience. In this sense, Nigerian cinema operators will benefit greatly from screening films/movies with quality content.

This study hypothesized the relationship between film characteristics and cinemagoer choice of cinema. Our results revealed that film characteristics significantly predict cinemagoer choice of cinema, which supports previous research (e.g., Maxfield, 2003; Suwato, 2012; Giyahi, 2012; Sljivo, 2021). Therefore, cinemagoers are more likely to consider a specific type of film/movie (action, comedy, horror, drama, romance, etc), the film/movie director, country of origin of a film/movie, production house (studio, independent distributor) and actors/casts when patronizing a cinema to watch a film/movie. Cinema operators should pursue film characteristics strategies that suit cinemagoers to ensure patronage.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has demonstrated that for cinema operators to succeed in the present situation, there is the need for them to understand how and why cinema audience purchase cinema services; improve on the collaborations and connections between cinema distributors and exhibitors; and understand the gradual process leading to what the audience likes or prefers in cinema settings. Of course, cinema operators and production houses should take the issue of film content and film characteristics very seriously because they play significant roles in influencing cinemagoer choice of cinema. As a result, Nigerian cinema operators should constantly employ the right film content and film characteristics strategies to enable them boost ticket sales, maximize box office revenue, increase user penetration, increase number of viewers and also increase average revenue per viewer. For example, cinema operators should focus on establishing multiplexes that have several separate rooms/halls with screens to serve audiences that have preferences for certain movie genres like comedy, action, romance, drama, and the like.

Likewise, cinema operators should constantly liaise with filmmakers to improve on the storyline, acting, directing and overall production to delight cinemagoers. Besides, there is an urgent need for Nigerian cinema operators to employ state-of-the-art technology to improve the quality of the projection and sound systems, including 3D or IMAX options. Also, stakeholders in the cinema industry should at intervals hold tech summit and show a blueprint of how stakeholders can massively inculcate technology in their mode of operation. On the other hand, there should be a Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement with expatriate companies to teach stakeholders what they need to know in film production, distribution and exhibition. Similarly, there should be collaboration with international film producers for film festivals and film tourism.

Moreover, the Nigerian government should build film villages to energise the cinema industry. More importantly, there should be sufficient research and development by industry stakeholders to enable them understand audience behaviour and evolving audience tastes. Finally, the regulatory body in the industry, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should regulate via censorship to potentially suppress ideas or expression that can endanger communal peace, depict cultural misrepresentation, immorality and other harmful behaviours.

Suggestions for Future Research

To begin with, this study focused on a broad range of films in cinema context. In contrast, future research using the proposed research model should focus specifically on any of the genres like action, comedy, romance, drama, horror, etc. to gain more comprehensive insight. At the same time, the present study focused on the distinct effects of film content and film characteristics on choice of cinema. Future research should examine additional specific incentives such as source of neutral information, ease or facilitating aspect, pricing strategy, and convenience to further increase the predictability of the variables. In addition, the present study is restricted to Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria only. Future studies using the proposed research model can be replicated in other cities in Nigeria or cities outside the country to see what the result will look like. Finally, this study employed multiple regression analysis. In comparison, future studies

should employ the structural equation modeling approach to test the formulated hypotheses as encapsulated in the proposed research model.

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