The Influence of Self-Media Film Reviews on Willingness to Pay for Movies: A Theory of Planned Behavior Approach

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Abstract:

The Chinese film industry is showing signs of recovery in the post-epidemic era, but with the explosion of short videos and short dramas, the film market has been squeezed rapidly. Exploring the factors that affect consumers' willingness to pay for movie watching has an important impact on the recovery of the film industry. Among the many factors that affect consumers' willingness to pay for movie watching, exposure to self-media film reviews has become increasingly important. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, this study uses a questionnaire survey to conduct a statistical analysis, intending to explore how exposure to self-media film reviews affects consumers' willingness to pay for movie watching. The study found that the influence of self-media film reviews on users' movie choices is multifaceted. Users' perceptions of value and emotional experiences with paid movie viewing significantly affect their attitudes toward accepting movie reviews and recommendations. These findings provide theoretical support for film marketing and audience decision-making.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior; Paid Movie Viewing; Movie Consumption Intention; Self-Media Film Reviews.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Question

In recent years, there has been no shortage of popular commercial films with high box office, high ratings, and frequent awards in the Chinese film industry. However, in the increasingly popular self-media film reviews on social media platforms, these films are often criticized. This also stops consumers who have not yet entered the cinema from watching movies. The aesthetics and consumption choices of consumers in the Chinese film industry are gradually showing a professional trend. Film reviews conduct all-round evaluations from the scope of professional film criticism such as storyline, narrative structure, and audio-visual language. They are popular among consumers because of their professionalism. The first-hand feedback and evaluation of films by film critics are gradually becoming an important factor in consumers' decision whether to pay to watch a movie.

In today's information age, popular film reviews, online comments, Douban scores, etc. have become important factors affecting consumers' consumption choices by influencing movie reputation. However, based on observations, the influence of self-media film reviews on consumers seems to be rekindled. Therefore, this paper intends to study the impact of self-media film review exposure on audiences' movie consumption behavior and its influence mechanism.

1.2 Literature Review

In previous studies, many scholars have conducted multi-factor analyses on the factors affecting the willingness to pay for movie watching. Based on the research of various scholars, it can be concluded that the factors affecting consumers' movie consumption behavior can be divided into external factors and internal factors [1-7]. External factors include film production factors (film content, film type, film technology, etc.), film brand factors (main creative team, sequel or IP adaptation, etc.), and film marketing factors (film ratings, audience word of mouth, advertising, movie box office, etc.) [1-7]. Internal factors are consumer psychological factors, which are affected by consumers' education, income level, aesthetic orientation, and many external factors [1-7]. However, in existing studies, there is no specific research on the single factor of film reviews. As a product of the information age, exposure to self-media film reviews has gradually become an important factor affecting consumers' willingness to pay to watch movies. Therefore, this study intends to use the exposure to self-media film reviews as an in-

dependent variable to explore its impact on consumers' willingness to pay for watching movies and its influencing mechanism.

1.3 Definition of Concepts

1.3.1 The concept of movie consumption behavior

In the research of scholars at home and abroad, there are many different definitions of the concept of film consumption behavior. At present, the film market consumption in mainland my country is still dominated by traditional film products. Therefore, this study combines previous research and defines film consumption behavior as the behavior of consumers going to the cinema to buy movie tickets and pay to watch movies under the influence of multiple factors.

1.3.2 The concept of self-media film review

The 52nd "Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China" released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) shows that as of June 2023, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.079 billion, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 76.4% [8]. The increasingly large Internet user group makes online film reviews inevitably user-oriented. Today's online film reviews are based on Internet users as the main body of criticism. On the whole, current film reviews can be roughly divided into popular film reviews, new media film reviews and academic film reviews [9]. Each form of review has different participants and audiences, and each has its own focus and advantages. The three are intertwined and complementary and together constitute the field ecology of film reviews. From the perspective of film and television criticism groups, China is currently dominated by film and television practitioners, professional theorists, amphibious scholars, self-media film critics and ordinary audiences, forming five major modern film and television criticism groups. This study will focus on the film reviews written by "self-media film critics" in the category of "new media film reviews". It should be emphasized that the film reviews written by self-media film critics here refer to the film reviews written by professional film critics and published on new media platforms such as WeChat public accounts, Weibo, and Douban groups. They are different from film reviews that explain the content of the film, such as "Poisonous Tongue Movies".

2. Research Design

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Theory of Planned Behavior as the theoretical framework [10]. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is an important theoretical framework for explaining and predicting individual behavior, proposed and developed by Icek Ajzen [10]. The Theory of Planned Behavior contains three core elements: behavioral attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. As intermediate variables that affect other influencing factors on behavioral intention, they jointly affect behavioral intention. Specifically, the more proactive the attitude, the greater the support or pressure from people around, and the more sufficient the actual control conditions, the greater the intention to perform this behavior, and vice versa.

The application scenarios of the Theory of Planned Behavior cover many fields such as health, environmental protection, consumption, and education [11-14]. By analyzing individual behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, the theory provides strong theoretical support for predicting and intervening in individual behavior. However, there are still not many scholars in the academic community who use the Theory of Planned Behavior to analyze and study the willingness to pay for movie viewing.

2.2 Questionnaire

This study uses a questionnaire method. The questionnaire is mainly distributed through online channels such as social media and film forums. The collected data will be used for descriptive statistics, factor analysis, regression analysis, etc. using statistical software (such as SPSS) to analyze the impact of self-media film reviews on the willingness to pay for movie viewing.

This study uses self-media film review exposure as the independent variable, consumer willingness to pay for watching movies as the dependent variable, and behavioral attitude as the mediating variable for investigation and measurement. The questionnaire of this study is divided into four parts: the first part is about demographic variables. It is used for the statistics of the characteristics of the survey subjects, including movie consumers of different genders, age groups, education levels, and income levels, in order to increase the universality of the survey. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, the second to fourth parts include behavioral attitudes, self-media exposure, and movie consumption behavior [15]. Each question is measured using the Likert five-level scale, with five options from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", and each is assigned 1-5 points for measurement.

2.3 Hypotheses

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Exposure to self-media film reviews affects the willingness to pay for movie viewing by influencing behavioral attitudes (mediating variables).

H2: Exposure to self-media film reviews is positively correlated with willingness to pay for movie viewing.

H3: Exposure to self-media film reviews is positively cor-

related with behavioral attitudes.

H4: Behavioral attitude is positively correlated with willingness to pay for movie viewing.

3. Result

After the preliminary survey, this study further adjusted some items of the questionnaire and put it into the formal survey. In the survey practice, this study adopted the form of online questionnaire distribution on the Internet to collect convenient samples. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and 200 were effectively collected.

3.1 Reliability and Validity Test

According to Table 1, the reliability of each item in the survey questionnaire used to measure independent variables, mediating variables, and dependent variables is greater than 0.7, indicating good reliability and suitability for use as a questionnaire survey.

Table 1. Reliability Measurement

Variable		Total
Contact us for film reviews	901	
Behavior and attitude	702	914
Consumption willingness	761	

The results of the KMO ((Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) test show that the value of KMO is 0.898. At the same time, the results of the Bartlett sphericity test show that the significant P value is 0.000***, showing significance at the level, rejecting the null hypothesis, and there is a correlation between the variables. Factor analysis is valid and the degree is appropriate.

3.2 Description Analysis

The first part of the questionnaire is about basic personal information, which includes demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, and professional category. Among them, female respondents accounted for 74.5% of the total, and male respondents accounted for 25.5%. The majority of respondents were aged 15-25, accounting for more than half, while those aged 26-30, 31-40, 41-50, and 50 years old or above accounted for 4%, 6.5%, 14.5%, and 9% respectively. In terms of education, 83.5% had a bachelor's degree (including junior college), 8% had a high school (including technical secondary school), 6.5% had a postgraduate degree, and 2% had a high school degree or below. The majors of the respondents included medicine, sports, economics, science and engineering, literature, history, philosophy, art, management, education, law, and other majors. The majors covered were wide, but more concentrated in literature, history, philosophy, and art.

3.3 Correlation Analysis

As Table 2 shows, most of the correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), and a few are significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). These correlations provide an important basis for us to understand the relationship between variables.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	C4
A1[†]	434**	373**	271**	451**	325**	421**	439**
A2	497**	447**	243**	486**	271**	456**	468**
A3	434**	371**	279**	456**	286**	411**	453**
A4	432**	408**	227**	521**	315**	427**	345**
A5	650**	616**	0.053	625**	350**	532**	445**
A6	572**	570**	0.044	604**	387**	499**	402**
A7	379**	379**	348**	472**	271**	352**	308**
B1	1	876**	-0.085	667**	283**	551**	511**
B2	876**	1	-0.117	674**	267**	526**	468**
B3	-0.085	-0.117	1	0.044	339**	0.103	180*

Note: † Definitions of variables can be found in Appendix A.

**, and * represent the significance levels of 5%, and 10% respectively.

The correlation coefficient between A2 and B1 is 0.497, which shows that the forwarding of social media movie reviews has a greater impact on users' perception of the value of paying to watch movies.

At the same time, the correlation coefficients of A3 with C1 and C2 are 0.456 and 0.286 respectively, indicating that users who follow film review public accounts are more inclined to make movie viewing decisions based on the recommendations of film critics.

The correlation between B1 and B2 and C1 and C3 is also significant, indicating that users' perception of the value and pleasant experience of paying to watch movies has an important impact on their movie-watching decisions and willingness to pay the cost.

3.4 Mediating Effect and Regression Analysis

Using A1 to A7 as independent variables and B1 to B3 as mediating variables, factor analysis extracted C1-C4 as dependent variable Y. The sample size was 200, and regression analysis and mediating effect analysis were performed (see Table 3).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

	Y	B1	B2	B3	Y
constant	4.29	1.526	1.697	1.263	5.927
A1	-0.166	0.018	-0.018	0.15	-0.121
A2	-0.052	0.076	0.069	0.052	0.02
A3	-0.173	0.043	0.008	0.16	-0.105
A4	-0.061	-0.033	-0.046	0.074	-0.07
A5	-0.372	0.587	0.453	-0.31	-0.041
A6	-0.246	-0.063	0.084	-0.144	-0.287
A7	-0.152	0.049	0.08	0.315	-0.011
B1					-0.448
B2					-0.347
B3					-0.289
Sample size	200	200	200	200	200
R^2	0.474	0.438	0.391	0.227	0.588
Adjusting R^2	0.455	0.414	0.366	0.195	0.564
F	$F_{(7, 192)}=24.741$ P=0.000***	$F_{(7, 192)}=21.371$ P=0.000***	$F_{(7, 192)}=17.642$ P=0.000***	$F_{(7, 192)}=8.052$ P=0.000***	$F_{(10, 189)}=26.992$ P=0.000***
Note: ***, **, and * represent the significance levels of 1%, 5%, and 10% respectively.					

The mediation effect analysis involves a total of three types of models, which are as follows:

Model 1 deals with the regression model between independent variable X and dependent variable Y. It can be seen from the coefficients of A1 to A7 that there are certain differences in the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable Y. Among them, the effects of A1 to A7 on Y are all negative, and the effects of A5 and A6 are significant, indicating that obtaining more movie quality information and conducting quality assessments have a significant negative impact on the willingness to watch movies recommended by film reviews. This may be because after obtaining more information, the audience's expectations for the movie have increased, but their willingness to watch has been reduced.

Model 2 introduces B1, B2 and B3 as mediating variables. The independent variable X and the mediating variable M are used to construct a regression model. As Table 3 shows, variable A1 will not significantly change the user's viewing value and enjoyment, but it may affect their evaluation of paid viewing behavior to a certain extent.

A2 has a positive impact on B1, B2 and B3, indicating that frequently seeing film reviews forwarded on social media will enhance users' perception that paying to watch

movies is worthwhile and enjoyable. The widespread dissemination of film reviews on social media can increase users' awareness of paying to watch movies.

The impact of A3 on B3 is 0.16, which is significant. Although following film review public accounts has little impact on the value and enjoyment of paid viewing, the perception of paid viewing behavior has a significant positive impact, indicating that users are more willing to accept movies recommended by film reviews.

For A4, it has a negative impact on both B1 and B2, indicating that reading movie reviews before consumption will weaken users' perception that paying to watch a movie is worthwhile and enjoyable. There is a smaller positive impact on B3, which may be because reading movie reviews before consumption will cause users to think too much and hesitate, reducing the expected value of their movie-watching experience.

A5 has a significant positive impact on both B1 and B2, indicating that obtaining more movie quality information through movie reviews can significantly enhance users' recognition and pleasant experience of paying to watch movies. It has a large negative impact on B3, which shows that detailed film review quality information can reduce users' perception that paying to watch movies is stupid, and enhance their confidence and sense of value.

A6 has a weak impact on B1, B2, and B3.

A7 has a slight positive impact on both B1 and B2 and a more significant positive impact on B3. This shows that users' spoiler-free film review experience has a significant positive impact on their acceptance of paid viewing.

In Model 3, the independent variable X and the mediating variable M are used together with the dependent variable Y to build a regression model. After introducing the intermediary variables B1, B2, and B3, the overall negative impact of A1 to A7 weakened, and the impact of A2 on Y turned positive. This shows that the spread of movie reviews on social media has a positive impact on users' willingness to watch recommended movies. Influence, the significant role of intermediary variables, is also further revealed. B1, B2, and B3 have a significant negative impact on Y, indicating that users' perception of the value and pleasure of paying to watch movies affects their acceptance of movies recommended by movie reviews to a certain extent.

In terms of model explanatory power, R^2 is 0.588, and the adjusted R^2 is 0.564. The model explanatory power is significantly improved. The F value is 26.992, and the P value is 0.000. The model is statistically significant. These changes indicate that intermediary variables play a significant role in users' movie-watching selection process. By affecting users' perceptions of the value and pleasure of paying to watch movies, they indirectly affect their acceptance of movies recommended by movie reviews.

4. Discussion

Through correlation analysis, intermediary, and regression analysis, the study found that self-media film reviews affect users' willingness to consume by influencing their behavioral attitudes toward paying to watch movies. Among them, the habits of paying attention to self-media film review public accounts, obtaining movie quality information through film reviews, and not being spoiled by self-media film reviews have a significant impact on users' perceptions that paying to watch movies is stupid, which in turn affects users' willingness to pay to watch movies. choose. According to the results, self-media film reviews have a certain positive effect in improving users' movie-watching experience and attitude towards paying to watch movies. In particular, obtaining detailed movie quality information through movie reviews significantly enhances users' recognition of paid movies. However, over-reliance on movie reviews before consumption may weaken the value and pleasant experience of watching movies. This suggests that film review self-media should pay attention to balancing the amount of information and movie-watching experience when creating content, and avoid excessive spoilers and negative information transmission, thereby improving the overall user experience. Movie viewing satisfaction.

Overall, the impact of self-media film reviews on users' movie choices is complex. The analysis results after adding the mediating variables show that users' value cognition and emotional experience of paid movie watching play an important role in their attitude towards accepting movie reviews and movie recommendations. Self-media film reviews should focus on improving users' cognition of the value and pleasant experience of paid movie watching to enhance the influence of their movie recommendations. At the same time, the dissemination of film reviews on social media also has a positive effect on users' movie choices, and this channel should be further used for effective dissemination. In summary, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are all established.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that self-media film reviews influence users' willingness to pay for movies by affecting their attitudes towards movie-watching. Paying attention to these reviews, gaining quality information, and avoiding spoilers positively impact perceptions of paid movie viewing. However, excessive reliance on reviews can diminish the movie-watching experience, suggesting a need for balanced content creation.

In terms of variable control, the study failed to fully con-

trol all external variables that may affect the willingness to watch movies, such as personal preferences, cultural background, etc. These factors may have a certain interference with the results. In addition, the study is mainly based on static data analysis and failed to deeply explore the dynamic relationship between exposure to film reviews and consumption willingness over time.

In the future, scholars can continue to deepen the following aspects in response to the limitations mentioned above. First, more control variables should be considered and more variables that may affect the willingness to watch movies in the model, such as personal preferences, cultural background, social psychology, etc., should be included to more comprehensively explain the impact mechanism of self-media film reviews on the willingness to watch movies. In addition, a longitudinal research method can be used to track the changes in the exposure to film reviews and the willingness to watch movies of the same group of respondents in different time periods and reveal their dynamic evolution laws. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparative studies should be conducted to explore the similarities and differences in the impact of self-media film reviews on the willingness to watch movies under different cultural backgrounds and provide more targeted suggestions for film and television marketing strategies in the context of globalization.

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Appendix A

Measurement Question Table

Question	variable	variable
I have the habit of reading film reviews written by self-media film critics (such as "The Ticket Inspector of Hall 3")	A1	X (Contact from self-media film review)
I often see self-media film reviews forwarded by others on social media	A2	
I follow some self-media film review public accounts	A3	
Before watching a movie, I will read the movie reviews on social media to confirm whether I want to buy a movie ticket.	A4	
By reading the reviews from the media, I can get more information about the quality of the movie	A5	
By reading self-media film reviews, I can evaluate the quality of the film	A6	
I read the reviews from the media before watching the movie, so I won't feel spoiled	A7	
I think it is worthwhile to go to the cinema and pay to watch a movie	B1	M (Behavior attitude)
I think it is enjoyable to go to the cinema and pay to watch a movie	B2	
I think paying to watch movies is stupid	B3	
I am willing to watch a movie recommended by a self-media film review	C1	Y (Consumption willingness)
I would rather choose not to watch a movie that is not recommended by a self-media film review	C2	
After learning about a certain film review self-media, I am willing to pay more for the movies it recommends (time, money, energy, etc.)	C3	
How often have I gone to the cinema to watch paid movies in the past year?	C4	