

Report

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'Making Every Seat for Everyone': Audience Development Research Report for New Independent Cinema FilmLab

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Abstract: The British independent film industry has experienced a consistent decline in revenues over the past decades, resulting in heightened competition among independent cinemas. FilmLab, a newly established independent cinema affiliated with ArtsLab - a highly regarded arts organisation in Edinburgh - has commissioned this report in response to its client brief. The aim is to help FilmLab attract wider audiences using limited financial resources. We adopted audience development as the approach to address these concerns because of its two characteristics: first, its social objective of making the arts widely accessible, and second, its equal attention to the needs of existing and potential audiences. Existing research emphasises the significance of reducing barriers to participation in the audience development process. However, much of the previous work in this field has primarily focused on mainstream cinema attendance. As a result, the applicability of these findings for niche, less economically productive independent cinemas remains unclear. Therefore, this report mainly examines the barriers that prevent Edinburgh residents from independent cinemas and explores how FilmLab can increase participation among different groups by creating more opportunities for participation. Through a questionnaire and eight follow-up interviews with Edinburgh residents, along with semi-structured interviews with five industry experts, we identified barriers and potential incentives in four crucial aspects: visibility, attractiveness, affordability, and sustainability. Meanwhile, we developed corresponding recommendations. We propose that independent cinemas could serve as open and accessible spaces for all audiences by reducing the common barriers to audience participation. The findings of this report may offer references for the identification of barriers to independent cinema attendance, while our strategies could inspire audience development strategies for independent cinemas.

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1. Introduction

The British independent film industry has confronted significant challenges over the past decades, as evidenced by decreased income and dramatic changes in viewing behaviour driven by the rise of streaming platforms [1]. Similar challenges also arise in Edinburgh. Considering that independent cinemas rely heavily on audiences for sustenance [2], it is crucial to optimise audience development. FilmLab, a newly established independent cinema affiliated with ArtsLab - a highly regarded arts organisation in Edinburgh - seeks to attract a diverse range of audiences despite limited financial resources and to distinguish itself in the competitive market.

This report is a response to FilmLab's client brief by adopting an audience development approach, which can help the cinema diversify its programming and implemented targeted marketing to attract wider audiences. This approach not only alleviates FilmLab's financial pressures but also underscores FilmLab's commitment to cultural inclusivity and social diversity. Existing research has highlighted the importance of existing and potential audiences, showing how reducing participation barriers fosters effective audience development strategies [3,4]. However, much of this research has focused on mainstream cinema attendance, leaving the applicability of these findings to niche independent cinemas unclear.

In response, this report conducted primary research on the barriers to Edinburgh residents' participation in independent cinemas. The barriers faced by existing audiences and non-goers, as well as related potential incentives, were first identified. Based on these findings, this report made corresponding recommendations and proposed a new conceptual framework for audience development in independent cinemas. Based on FilmLab's client brief, this report offers practical strategies for start-up independent cinemas while addressing the lack of attention given to independent cinemas in existing research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition and Practicality of Audience Development

Since its introduction to the arts and culture industry in the 1980s [5], audience development has been used by arts organisations to manage their relationship with audiences in light of the rapidly changing social, economic and political environments [6]. It mainly involves the cultivation and expansion of audiences by understanding their needs and creating engagement strategies [7]. Precisely, audience development focuses on how to retain existing audiences and attract new ones [3].

Audience development has both economic and social dimensions. In the UK, arts organisations typically use it as a method of cultural marketing [8]. As the UK increasingly emphasises cultural democracy and the role of cultural marketing in broader public appreciation and emotional connection to culture and art [7], how to enhance audience diversity and promote social inclusion have become the central theme of audience development and the demonstration of social responsibility. In the meantime, access to broader audiences can also serve the purpose of increasing revenue [7]. Overall, audience development helps organisations achieve their artistic, social, and economic objectives and ensure their public value and cultural vitality through a continually managed process [9]. Therefore, the dual attributes of audience development make it well-suited to fulfill FilmLab's needs for a wider audience and economic income.

2.2. Ways to Implement Effective Audience Development Strategies

By comparing two studies on audience development strategies used by cultural and arts organisations [6,7], this report discovered two approaches to the implementation of effective strategies. The first one is *Knowing the Audience* [8], which parallels *Audience Segmentation* and *Audience Research* in reference [9]. As the foundation of other strategies, this approach emphasises the necessity of pre-market research to capture the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the audience and to understand their needs and concerns [8]. The second is *Audience Participation*, which highlights the involvement of the audience in the decision-making process [6,7]. Both ways underscore the role of organisational-audience interaction, emphasising their relationship as an organic entity in which both sides influence and evolve together.

2.3. Barriers to Arts Participation

Besides the two pathways, the elimination of economic, cultural, and psychological barriers to participation helps reach diverse audiences [6], making it crucial to identify specific deterrents. The RAND model divides arts participation into four sequential stages:

Background, Perceptual, Practical, and Experiential [10], indicating that arts organisations improve accessibility as they address perceived and practical barriers while enhancing the overall experience to retain current audiences. Nevertheless, its linear perspective ignores the interplay between various stages of participation. Recognising this limitation, Wiggins introduced the *Motivation, Ability, Opportunity* (MAO) model from customer research, which redefined the RAND model by incorporating personal and environmental factors [11]. In this model, *motivation* refers to the desire to participate in artistic activities, *ability* refers to the absence of personal barriers, and *opportunity* refers to the absence of situational barriers [11]. This model helps nuance practical obstacles by distinguishing personal ability challenges and external situational barriers. Opportunity has been shown to be positively correlated with both motivation and ability, indicating that the creation of additional opportunities can be an effective starting point for the reduction of participation barriers [4]. Three key factors related to opportunities expansion are: the product offering, its accessibility and audience awareness of it [4]. These studies guided the formulation of questionnaire items and informed the starting point of strategies - to address participation barriers by creating additional opportunities.

2.4. Audience Development in Cinemas

In the context of moviegoing, several scholars have identified challenges including social media visibility, higher time and financial costs, and preferences for certain genres or directors [12]. Their findings underscore the importance of removing perceived and practical obstacles to cinema participation. In terms of audience development, theatres and cinemas tend to prioritise engaging programmes and partnerships to attract audiences and promote broader public engagement [7]. These strategies aim to offer new perspectives that resonate with audiences' lives, thereby attracting broader audiences and public engagement.

2.5. Research Gap and Aim

Although current research has discussed film consumption patterns, viewing behaviour and possible strategies to develop cinema attendance, these studies have primarily focused on mainstream cinemas [7,12]. As a result, the unique circumstances of independent cinemas remain underexplored. Independent cinemas, because of their unique artistic value and niche audiences [13], are confronted with great challenges in how to attract broader audiences despite limited financial resources. This requires special attention. In response, this report aims to fill the research gap through a practical exploration of Edinburgh residents' perception of independent films and cinemas while addressing the client brief for FilmLab.

The research aims are as follows:

- 1) Identify the barriers that prevent Edinburgh residents from participating in independent cinemas, especially the distinctive barriers faced by existing and potential audiences.
- 2) Develop targeted audience development strategies to help FilmLab alleviate identified barriers and reach a larger and more diverse audience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research adopted a mixed methods research design that combines quantitative questionnaires and qualitative semi-structured interviews. This report started by distributing a questionnaire in high-traffic locations, such as The Meadows, Prince Street and places near large cinemas, over a two-week period. The questionnaire items were designed based on the subdivided categories of barriers identified in previous literature. The aim was to identify perceived and practical obstacles, potential motivations, and demographic factors influencing independent film audiences. Convenience sampling was used

in these designated areas, with QR codes for the questionnaire distributed to randomly selected pedestrians. To ensure diversity, we intentionally included participants from different ethnic backgrounds, genders and age groups. In total, 122 valid questionnaires were gathered, with a response rate of around 45%. The majority of respondents were females aged 18–34 age group. Moreover, a significant proportion of participants had higher education levels (see Fig. 1). Notably, 67% of respondents had not visited an independent cinema in the previous six months, thus being classified as “non-goers”. Meanwhile, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eight of the interviewees were survey respondents who volunteered to participate. They offer more comprehensive insights into their responses (see Table 1). The remaining five were industry experts who shared their views on the status quo of the independent cinema industry and audience development based on their extensive experience (see Table 2).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents.

Audiences	Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Cinemagoer/ non-goer
Audience 1	Female	25-34	Master	Cinemagoer
Audience 2	Female	18-24	Master	Cinemagoer
Audience 3	Female	18-24	University	Cinemagoer
Audience 4	Female	25-34	Master	Cinemagoer
Audience 5	Female	25-34	Master	Cinemagoer
Audience 6	Male	45-54	University	Cinemagoer
Audience 7	Male	18-24	University	Non - goer
Audience 8	Male	25-34	Master	Non - goer

Table 2. Industry Expert Profiles.

Experts	Identity
Expert A	Scholar of Film Exhibition and Curation
Expert B	Scholar of Film Exhibition and Curation
Expert C	Programmer Leader of FilmLab
Expert D	Programmer Designer of FilmLab
Expert E	Curator from a London-based Independent Cinema

3.2. Limitations

We acknowledged several limitations existing regarding the data’s representativeness. First, the diversity of the sample may have been influenced by temporal and spatial constraints. Additionally, inherent biases in the sampling techniques may result in some groups being either over- or under-represented. The detected disparities in response rates also showed self-selection bias, indicating that certain demographic groups were more motivated to participate in the survey than others. This may explain demographic similarities between the sample and FilmLab’s existing audience. Nevertheless, 67% of participants being identified as ‘non-goers’ implies a significant potential for audience expansion in this category. Self-selection bias was also found in the interview sampling, as individuals who previously watched independent films were more inclined to participate. This could result in an unbalanced sample and ultimately influence the perceptions of those who do not attend such films.

3.3. Data Analysis

Multiple analysis methods were employed to validate the findings. First, the Top-2-Box method was utilised to analyse the quantitative data, followed by a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts based on the method outlined by Braun and Clarke [14]. This process concluded with a synthesis under the approach suggested by Creswell and Plano

Clark[15]. Collectively, these methods contribute to the translation of digital data into qualitative themes related to barriers, motivations and other valuable observations. They facilitate a more advanced categorisation of themes. Consequently, each key theme covers broad patterns and specific observations.

4. Findings

The findings revealed unexpected similarities between existing and potential independent cinema audiences, challenging traditional binary classifications. Whilst non-goers predictably cited a lack of interest in independent films as a barrier, both groups shared similar barriers and motivational factors. Given the significant overlap, it has been decided to abandon the assumption of separate treatment. Instead, all barriers and incentives were reclassified into four key areas: **visibility, attraction, affordability and sustainability**.

4.1. Visibility

4.1.1. Barrier 1: Information Access Difficulty

Audiences must be aware of an event's existence before making decisions. Therefore, brand visibility is associated with the audience's access to information. Previous research has confirmed that the unavailability of information is one of the key barriers to arts participation [16]. This research reaffirms this finding, with 57.9% of participants reporting difficulties in obtaining information about independent films. Interviewees further elaborated on this issue. Audiences 1 and 3 pointed out that they hardly receive information about indie films through formal marketing channels. Audience 5 highlighted the exclusivity of independent film information distribution:

'If it's like, for example, queer, you have to be in a circle with like queer organisations and activists to know about the film ... For the general audiences, they don't have a specific channel for them to know the screening.' (Audience 5)

This feature may unintentionally exclude potential viewers from particular social or interest groups. Furthermore, Audience 3 mentioned the limited information on the current cinema website makes it difficult for her to make decisions:

'The website only says I have this film, but nothing about it. So I don't know why I'm gonna watch this movie. But I need to know about it.' (Audience 3)

In summary, limited information could restrict FilmLab's access to a broader audience but also present an opportunity to improve visibility by expanding distribution channels and providing comprehensive and engaging messages.

4.1.2. Motivation 1: Communication Channels

Raising brand awareness entails the maximisation of the brand's exposure so that the audience not only remembers it but also readily identifies it [17]. The results regarding preferred communication channels for access to information about independent films offer valuable guidance.

Interpersonal recommendation is the most popular channel to receive information about independent films, with more than 70% of the participants considering that they trust recommendations from friends or family members. Audiences 4 and 6 further emphasised the persuasive power of recommendations from those with similar interests and preferences. Collectively, these findings suggest the effectiveness of word-of-mouth in information dissemination. This indicates the potential for FilmLab to boost its popularity by fostering organic recommendations from viewers.

Online promotion channels rank as the second preferred option. According to the survey, 24% of participants chose online promotion as their primary sources of information about independent films, while 49% considered it a secondary source. The public dependence on online advertising indicates that a well-developed online marketing strategy can promote the availability of information.

4.2. Attraction

4.2.1. Barrier 2: Lack of Interest in Independent Films

The primary distinction between non-goers and goers lies in the lack of interest in independent films: 44.4% of non-goers cited this as their main deterrent, compared to only 5% of goers. The reasons behind this difference were further explored in the interviews. Two non-goers identified the esotericism and didacticism of the content as the primary barrier:

‘I’ve seen indie films twice before, but indie film storylines are so obscure that I always can’t understand them, and don’t feel them relevant to my life.’ (Audience 7)

‘Movies are my go-to entertainment, but independent films I’ve heard about are often too serious and seem focused on educating. This doesn’t let me relax and enjoy the film as I’d like.’ (Audience 8)

One cinemagoer echoed that the current independent cinemas alienate potential audiences by catering too narrowly to indie film enthusiasts (Audience 6). The niche content and artistic focus of independent films can create a perception of being ‘boring,’ which dampens non-goers’ willingness to participate and perpetuates limited audience growth. To overcome this barrier, independent cinemas need to reconsider their film selection and promotional strategies to attract a wider audience.

4.2.2. Motivation 2: Special Events as Exclusive Experiences

The majority of respondents (69.4%) agreed that special events can motivate them to visit independent cinemas. This finding aligns with previous studies that special events can generate interest and foster engagement [18]. Three interviewees expressed enthusiasm for the unique, creative activities and irreplaceable offline movie-going experiences offered by independent cinemas (Audiences 1,4 &6). Overall, special events can offer a distinctive experience while fostering greater interest and understanding of independent cinema, thereby promoting cinema attendance.

4.3. Affordability

4.3.1. Barrier 3: Economic Pressure

Affordability pertains to the ability of the general audience to pay for ticket prices and the associated costs of cinemas accessible to a broader population. Presently, many families cut cultural consumption due to decreased disposable income. Consequently, numerous independent cinemas are facing the threat of closure due to the decreased attendance and financial risks (expert B).

4.3.2. Barrier 4: High Ticket Prices

High ticket prices represent the greatest obstacle in this study, with 66.4% of respondents believing that they deter attendance. This finding is consistent with results revealed by Regional Screen Scotland and the Social Value Lab [19]. Therefore, independent cinemas should set reasonable prices, as lower ticket prices can significantly boost attendance, especially in times of financial hardship [12].

4.3.3. Motivation 3: Sales Promotions

Sales promotion appeared as a strong incentive that addressed the barrier posed by high ticket prices. A significant 75.2% of respondents indicated promotions could increase their intention to visit independent cinemas. Audience 6 particularly stressed the motivational role of promotions:

‘If a promotional event offers affordable tickets, I’m even willing to go at less convenient times, like weekend mornings.’ (Audience 6)

These findings show that promotional activities can eliminate economic barriers and sparking interest, thus stimulating cinema attendance rates.

4.4. Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the long-term growth of independent cinema brands, including the audience experience [20]. Sustainable branding strategies can contribute to robust relationships with audiences and thus foster a strong and trustworthy brand image.

4.4.1. Motivations 4&5: Good Reputation and Solid Brand Image

Expert A emphasised that the sustainability of independent cinemas is closely tied to positive word-of-mouth and a loyal audience base. Our survey validates this statement, with a good reputation identified as the strongest motivator, selected by 76.9% of respondents. Many interviewees mentioned that electronic word-of-mouth - online reviews - serve as a key reference in their decision-making. Besides, audiences trust independent cinemas with strong brand images, which encourages them to explore new film genres:

‘Sometimes audiences may be willing to try to watch new genres of films at a cinema because they trust that cinema. Establishing a trusted curatorial brand that allows for more diverse programming once audience trust is established.’ (Expert A)

In conclusion, long-term brand strategies should focus on audience trust, word-of-mouth, and a strong brand image to boost audience loyalty and re-purchase intention.

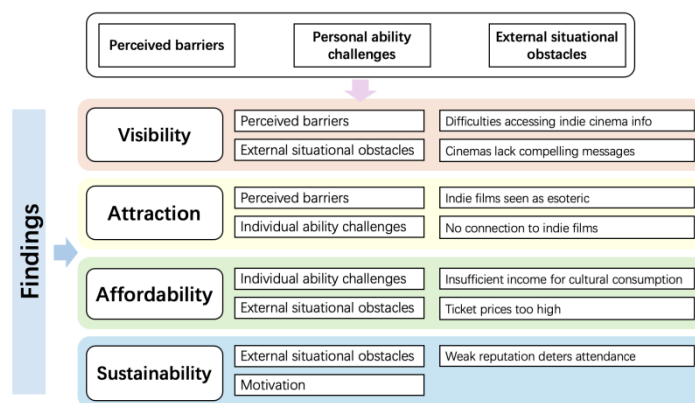


Figure 1. Summary of Findings.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Vision and Objectives

To help FilmLab establish a name in the competitive independent cinema market, we created the vision statement - **“Where Every Seat is for Everyone.”** This distinctive slogan continues ArtsLab’s commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. It underscores FilmLab’s determination to attract a diverse range of audiences beyond ArtsLab’s existing audience base. The ultimate goal is to create an inclusive, welcoming space where everyone feels valued and respected. Given the potentially positive impact of removing external situational barriers on individuals’ perceptions and their ability to engage in arts, our recommendation focuses on opportunity creation. To facilitate practical implementation, we have replaced the MAO with the See-Think-Do-Care (STDC) framework at this stage [21]. Based on this new business tool, we restructured our findings, set objectives across four phases and developed corresponding strategies (see Fig. 2).

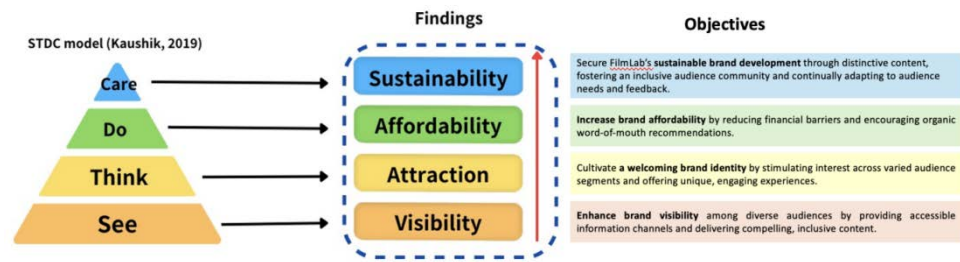


Figure 2. Objective structure based on the STDC model.

5.2. Phase I: Enhancing Visibility

The initial stage aims to enhance FilmLab's visibility by reducing barriers to information access. To achieve this objective, it is recommended that channel coverage be maximised through pop-up events and social media campaigns. Our respondents have observed that existing posters about indie films mainly attract film enthusiasts, with limited impact on the general audience. This highlights the need for more interactive marketing strategies. Hence, we suggest that FilmLab organise pop-up events in high-foot-traffic areas of Edinburgh. These events should comprise two major components: a projection area for curated trailers of upcoming films and a photo booth that encourages visitors to engage with FilmLab's brand and slogan. The display of film trailers in busy locations can effectively promote FilmLab as a brand to large audiences, while the interactive booth will strengthen the connection between the audience and the brand.

Furthermore, it is recommended that a social media campaign be launched across Instagram, Facebook, and X to foster audience engagement with pop-up events. This multi-platform campaign could leverage the unique demographic and engagement patterns of each platform, thus broadening FilmLab's audience reach. Additionally, incentives, such as promo codes, can spark public interest while also reducing financial barriers to cinema attendance. Moreover, this campaign could serve as an online communication channel for film enthusiasts, thereby fostering a sense of community and even turning them into brand advocates. Collectively, these two approaches have the potential to give an exponential boost to FilmLab's popularity.

5.3. Phase 2: Inspire Willingness

The primary goal of this phase is to build a cinema 'where everyone can understand,' with the objective of attracting those who are aware of FilmLab but may lack interest in indie films. Most existing independent cinemas classify indie films by directors, regional cultures, film types and generations. This classification requires the viewers to have certain knowledge about independent films, thus establishing a threshold for those with the genre to gain understanding. The extent of individuals perception of cultural participation as essential to their lives and identities significantly influences their engagement [22]. Therefore, the first recommendation at this stage is to organise thematic curation based on more relatable classifications, such as youth, relationships, seasons, weather, etc. Thematic series can enhance viewers' understanding and appreciation of the content through focused and multi-perspectives narratives. Additionally, drawing on keywords that resonate with everyday experiences can strengthen audiences' connection to independent films and reduce cognitive challenges, thus elevating their willingness to participate. Moreover, this unique classification could also demonstrate FilmLab's distinctive operational style and reinforce its welcoming brand image within the broader ArtsLab framework.

It is further recommended to showcase mystery screenings that align with the life-oriented thematic curation. More than 90% of our respondents considered "Having Fun" to be an important motivational factor, indicating the potential of mystery screenings to stimulate public curiosity and interest, as in the case of the special mystery screening

launched by the Warwick Arts Centre on Valentine's Day in 2024 [23]. Since there are no prior examples in Edinburgh, this initiative could provide FilmLab with a significant competitive advantage.

Additionally, given the strong interest in special events, the third recommendation is to organise theme-related events, such as small-scale photography exhibitions or thematic music parties. The Independent Cinema Office suggests that relevant activities hosted in the venue can strengthen audience connections and encourage attendance [24]. These events could not only maximise venue utilisation, but also contribute to generate additional revenue, facilitate interactions among diverse customer groups and enrich the overall cinema experience.

5.4. Phase 3: Purchase Intention

The third stage seeks to convert audience awareness into actual purchasing behaviour and generate revenue for FilmLab. Since financial barriers, such as high-ticket prices and low disposable income, pose the most significant obstacles to attendance, the goal here is to build a cinema 'Where everyone can afford', which incentivises purchase in budget-friendly manner. Two special screenings, 'Pay What you Can' and 'Friends', are recommended during this phase.

In the 'Pay What you Can' model, different price tiers are set for a film screening so that all audience members can choose a price they wish to pay according to their preferences and financial capacity. The core idea is that independent film enthusiasts with higher financial capacity can help subsidise those with lower income or less interest in indie films. By providing local communities access to independent films at a self-determined price, this approach lowers the financial barriers to attendance. Additionally, the potential for increased occupancy rate due to these lower price options can expand audience reach while ensuring baseline revenue for FilmLab. This strategy also contributes to FilmLab's reputation as an 'accessible' brand image and helps build initial trust with audiences.

Since recommendations from friends are the most motivating and persuasive information channel in this research, we propose 'Friends' special screenings. Precisely, the audience will receive a discounted ticket when they purchase two tickets for the same session. This strategy aims to create sessions with lower price promotions and socialisation properties, so that FilmLab can reach new target audiences through the organic combination of promotion and recommendation. The discount encourages audiences to invite others, boosting brand awareness while reducing publicity costs.

5.5. Phase 4: Sustainable Growth

The first three phases mainly focus on the elicitation of new audiences through enhanced information accessibility, improved operation patterns, lower economic costs and enriched entertainment experience. In contrast, the final phase serves to convert new audiences into long-term, stable community members by building an exclusive community. The approach will help FilmLab achieve a virtuous circle of audience development. Consequently, we propose the following three recommendations to cultivate a long-term audience community and sustain the brand.

The tiered membership system alongside a member-exclusive marketplace for sharing old objects will create exclusive experiences for loyal members that differentiate them from first-time visitors, thereby increasing retention rates. The tiered membership system will offer subscription plans for varying durations, each with corresponding prices and benefits. The old objects-sharing market will invite members to bring an item related to the screening theme for exchange in the ArtsLab courtyard. It will create opportunities for members to build mutual connections and deepen ties between members and FilmLab.

In addition, the open film selection will be introduced, in which audiences can a single film or a specific theme they wish to watch on FilmLab's screen. This initiative will not

only satisfy audience preferences but also encourage active cultural engagement in film-going and increase the visibility of the socio-cultural groups they represent. With audiences granted a voice, FilmLab can help the audience develop a sense of ownership and enhance their connections with FilmLab. Meanwhile, with this feedback, FilmLab can accumulate information on the viewing preferences of its core audience community to enable its continuous improvement in programming based on updated suggestions.

5.6. Evaluation

During the operational process, the effectiveness of strategies can be evaluated through various metrics such as social media exposure, improved online conversion rates, growth in ticket sales, and higher repeat purchase rates. Meanwhile, to ensure that FilmLab's brand development stays on track, it would be benefit from the accumulation of reviews from the audience. For instance, posters displayed in the venues could feature QR codes that link to FilmLab's Google Maps review page. Small incentives, such as postcards or movie posters, could be offered to prompt reviews on niche platforms such as Letterbox. This cost-effective method will not only increase the possibility of attracting potential consumers searching for information online but also form a basic brand asset for further marketing efforts.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Audience Development for Independent Cinemas

The specific barriers identified in this research align with previous studies. However, the results have challenged the prior assumption that potential and existing audiences encounter distinct obstacles. In fact, although non-goers exhibit a sense of disinterest, both groups provided similar responses. Drawing upon previous demonstrations of the relationship between motivation, ability, and opportunity [4], a new conceptual approach was proposed for audience development in independent cinemas: independent cinemas could serve as open and accessible spaces for all audiences by reducing the common barriers to audience participation. The goal is to foster deeper engagement by enhancing public motivation and ability, whilst ensuring equal opportunities for all audience segments, regardless of their current engagement level with independent films.

This new approach considers both existing and potential audiences as a whole. While it is important to cater to both, the strategies need not be separate. Sometimes, strategies that target potential audiences may inadvertently diminish the interest of existing audiences and result in their departure. Instead of meeting specific audience needs through tailored strategies, the reduction of common barriers demonstrates an organisation's commitment to both groups while mitigating the risk of alienating existing audiences. Furthermore, rather than attract potential audiences by altering content, this approach seeks to lower thresholds for understanding and participation. As a result, it can attract diverse audiences while preserving the original artistic value.

6.2. From MAO to STDC

Although the RAND and MAO models provided a comprehensive framework to identify barriers to participation and serve as the foundation of our new conceptual approach, they struggle to facilitate our organisation of the connections among different strategies. On the contrary, the STDC model offers guidance for strategy design from the perspective of consumer demand. It enables us to structure our recommendations according to different stages in the customer journey. This model provides a structured approach with a clear timeline, contributing to the alignment of our recommendations with both the audience and the organisation's development process. [11]

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. First, the demographic sample for this research was limited to Edinburgh citizens, so there were geographical restrictions in data collection and research findings. Therefore, modifications are necessary for demographic data analysis when the findings are applied to other regions or countries. Secondly, despite a thorough examination of aspects such as budget and location to maximise the feasibility of our strategies, they have not been implemented due to the time constraints in this project. Hence, potential risks cannot be completely circumvented. Regarding future research, it is suggested to initially expand the sample size to determine the presence of outliers. Additionally, the effectiveness of these strategies can be evaluated through tracking changes in consumer behaviours.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this report focuses on the formulation of effective audience development strategies for start-up independent cinemas from the perspective of FilmLab, the new independent cinema under ArtsLab in Edinburgh. We have designed practical and feasible strategies in terms of visibility, attraction, affordability and sustainability, and we propose a new conceptual approach for audience development in independent cinemas. In terms of academic contribution, this research fills the gap in the literature concerning audience development strategies in the context of independent cinemas. From a practical standpoint, although this report is tailored to FilmLab's specific requirements, the research findings can serve as references for the identification of barriers to independent cinema attendance. Meanwhile, our strategies could provide insights for other independent cinemas through simultaneous implementation. Overall, this report presents a comprehensive overview of the audience strategy development process for an emerging cinema. It offers implications for other independent cinemas and the broader film industry.

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