Research Article

Desiring audiences: We will go to the cinema if…?

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1990s, Bangladeshi cinema began to lose its audiences significantly. This leads to the continual closure of cinema halls, one after another. Popular perception is that Bangladeshi audiences watch foreign films, Indian popular films in particular, and television programs using home-viewing facilities. Mainstream filmmakers and producers in Bangladesh argue that when audiences can almost effortlessly access similar contents at home and so they do not go to the theatres. This study, therefore, explores how the audiences decide about a film (irrespective of the origin of production) to watch, what satisfies their viewing, and their disinclination to watch cinema at the theatre in Bangladesh. A total of 100 regular movie-viewers participated in the survey interviews. The findings confirm that for most of the viewers, the trailer of a film, known or favorite actors and/or actresses, and cinema viewers or cinema-goers' feedback are the three key sources based on which they decide whether to watch a film or not. Relying on these sources, they want confirmation that the film(s) they will watch must have all the necessary components contributing to their viewing satisfaction. The story itself, the craft of storytelling, performance, and dialogues through which characters of the story reach the audience, good making that creates reality, known (star) actors and actresses, and visual spectacle are found to be the primary elements that produce audiences viewing satisfaction. Though most respondents conditionally agreed that they prefer to watch films at theatres, films screened there are found unworthy of watching. Their leisureless lifestyle considerably contributed to this disinclination toward cinema-going.

Keywords: Cinema-going, cinema-viewing, desiring audience, storytelling, viewers' satisfaction.

Introduction

The Bangladesh film industry made its institutional debut in April 1957, more than 14 years before the country achieved its independence. The then government set up the East Pakistan Film Development Corporation (EPFDC). In 1959, with the establishment of a film studio under EPFDC in Dhaka, locally produced films began to be released (Hayat, 1987). Before that period, the audiences of this region relied on imported films, particularly Indian Hindi and Bengali films, to fulfill their cinematic experiences.

In the beginning years, from 1959 to 1965, of studio establishment, the industry produced an average of 6 films a year, which increased to 27 in the late 1960s (Qader, 1993). Bangladesh, one of two major producers of Bangla movies, produced on average 50 films a year in the 1970s, while in the 1990s, it produced around 80 feature films a year, and regularly, more than a million people viewed movies in more than 1 thousand cinema halls throughout the country (Hayat, 2012). But beginning in the late 1990s, the Bangladesh film industry walked in the opposite direction. The viewership has started declining gradually since then, which was reflected in the sudden closing of cinema halls. Roy (2016), referring to the reports of the Bangladesh Motion Pictures Exhibitors Association, stated that more than 900 cinema halls have been closed down in the last 15 years. By the end of December 2013, the number of cinema halls had reduced to nearly 500, with a very low rate of audience presence in those halls (Hasan, 2013). By the end of the first quarter of 2016, the number had come down to 321 (Jhuma, 2014; Roy, 2016). During the end of the late 2010s, less than 200 theatres were functional (Ali, 2019).

According to the film professionals, especially directors and producers, of Bangladesh, the permission for importing video players and the invasion of satellite television channels together with video channels (put up in the cable-connected local network by the suburban private satellite television service providers) in the 1990s facilitated the decline of the Bangladesh film industry (Raju, 2011). Since then, Raju mentioned that the audience presence in theatres has kept going down due to the influence of the film's home-viewing facilities. In this digital age, the availability of multi-platform cinema viewing facilities has put the last nail in the coffin of cinema-going practices. This group now argues that middle-class audiences (popular perception is that during the golden age of Bangladeshi cinema, viewership was comprised mainly of people of this class) stopped going to the cinema because they could watch foreign, in particular Indian, films and television programs at home using multi-platform viewing facilities. Nasreen and Haq (2008) contended against this view. They argued that the truth is not what the industry people think about Bangladeshi audiences' disinterest in cinema-going for local cinema (newly released local films can only be seen in theatres); the truth is that the local films fail to satisfy their audiences. According to them, home-viewing facilities have some impact on cinema-going, but it is not true that they don't want to go to the theatres; in the past, they have gone to the cinema, and they still want to go to the cinema to watch the films that they want to watch, not what the Bangladeshi film industry has been offering them since some decades ago.

A similar notion is seen in Badiuzzaman's (2019) depiction of Bangladeshi audience's cinema-going. Referring to a very recent event, he writes in his op-ed column with surprise, "I couldn't believe what I have seen on a video clip posted on Facebook… People rush to Bashundhara City Shopping Mall to collect tickets for the movie Avengers: Endgame (April 26, 2019)." He goes on

to state, "What a ridiculous thing this is! On the one hand, the cinema halls here are closing down one after another due to the steady absences of cinema attendees. On the other hand, the capital has observed such a scenario'. Zaman depicts this event as a new beginning of cinema viewership in Bangladesh and interprets that the Bangladeshi audiences, in reality, want to watch cinema at the theaters. However, the unavailability of quality films demotivates them to go to the cinema.

In addition, when it comes to viewing alternative or independent films, the discourse revolves mostly around the tastelessness of our audience. Unfortunately, our film production professionals, mainstream and/or independent, are reluctant to delve into the major issue—the desire of audiences—the motivations of watching films. They forget that ultimately, the audiences are the key stakeholders who, in the end, fill the vacant seats in the single theatres or multiplexes. This study, hence, aspires to explore how audiences decide what films to watch, what ultimately satisfies their viewing, and their disinclination to watch cinema at the theatre.

Literature review

In the research process, the literature review is a section that conceptualizes and reviews previous literature pertinent to the subject under research to establish a framework for the study. The literature reviewed here is divided into two sections: cinema-going cinema-viewing and related literature: the context of Bangladesh.

Cinema-going cinema-viewing

In the past 123 years of film history, one of the most significant changes the cinema world experienced was the pattern of film consumption, from the collective to the individual experience of film viewing. The first cinematographic show at the Grand Café of Boulevard des Capucines in Paris on December 28, 1895, by the Lumière brothers signaled that cinema would be a medium for collective viewership. However, the development of individualized and mobile technologies—TV, VCR, VHS, and later digital and internet technologies—and their widespread acceptance at home have brought a new dimension to film distribution and viewing practices. Due to the emergence of multi-platformed digital home viewing facilities, scholars who believe in technological determinism assert that cinema-going will be replaced by non-theatrical, individualized distribution platforms (Van de Vijver, 2017; Grundström, 2018). Douglas Gomery (1992) delineates the speculation about the demise of the old projection method of cinema due to the foray of new technologies (cable television, cable movie channels, VCR, etc.):

> Critics claimed fans would go out on occasion to watch their favorites, but the burgeoning set of television channels that showed movies at home would kill the theatrical movie show. The image of the movie fan would shift from the darkened theater to the home equipped with cable television, a video cassette recorder, a satellite dish, and a giant fifty-inch screen. (P. 103)

In this age of convergence culture, watching a film on a theatrical platform is considered an old-fashioned way of film consumption, especially for the digital generation, as there are many ways for audiences to access the film. Van de Vijver (2017) writes,

> It is argued that audiences no longer need the cinema. Watching a film in premiere on the big screen is not their only choice. It is merely an option among others.

Therefore, from a technologically deterministic standpoint, many see the imminent death of cinema-going.

News media from different corners of the world likewise echoes this view with headlines such as "In the era of streaming, cinema is under attack" (Scott & Dargis, 2016), "How older viewers are rescuing cinema" (Cox, 2012), "Cinema has no future in the cinema hall" (*Ananda Alo*, 2018), etc. The major concern that these news media reports raise is that along with all alternative platforms of cinema-viewing, from television to Netflix, social networking sites and gaming have a significant contribution to make in distracting young film-goers.

Over the last decades, the cinema industry has faced several threats: the advent of sound in film in the late 1920s, television in the late 1940s, and later VCRs, DVDs, widescreen digital televisions, and the internet with multiplatform viewing facilities. Every intervention of the technologies enormously posed a new challenge to the film industry. *Photoplay*, an influential magazine of the 1920s, highlights the advent of sound in a film with two terrifying taglines: "The Microphone: The Terror of the Studios and You Can't Get Away with It in Hollywood" (as cited in Doyle, 2010) on its cover page of the December 1929 issue. The second tagline explains that 'the days of "image only" appeal for Hollywood's big stars were over' (Doyle, 2010). Myrna Loy, an actress who played minor roles in silent films, depicts the turmoil to *The New York Times* writer Guy Flatley on September 25, 1977:

> It was a dreadful time, believe me... There was panic everywhere, and a lot of people said, 'This is ridiculous! Who wants to hear people talk?' They were people who loved the silent film, the great art of pantomime perfected by the comedians and by Griffith...

In the late 1940s, when television started gaining popularity in American homes, cinema received another blow. Gomery (1998) states that in his encyclopedic Movies and Society (1970), I. C. Jarvie of Canada's York University writes, "Until the advent of television in the late forties, Hollywood was peerless. Then television began to eat into film audiences, cinemas began to close in America, and the production figures fell seriously." p. 148

While movie-going was at its peak in 1946, attendance at the theatre came down to half in the early 1960s. In Gomery's terms, many pundits predicted the death of moviegoing as post-television technologies, such as cable movie channels, VCRs, satellite dishes, etc., began to infuse the movie market in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Cinema has continually been facing threats from advanced technologies and very recent multiplatform online movie-viewing facilities, as though they 'promise to replace and eliminate theatrical film-going' (Corbett, 2001, p. 18).

Cinema in the Indian subcontinent has faced similar antagonism from television and post-television technologies. Dasgupta, Sinha, and Chakravarti (2012, p. 96) explain that "there was a time when television and the VCR detained people indoors and the footfall in the single film cinema houses decreased so much that many cinema halls had to shut down or lost their erstwhile charisma".

However, many believe that cinema-going will never be stopped; people will continue to go to the cinema, and alternative viewing platforms can never be substitutes for movie theaters and/or

multiplexes (Grundström, 2018). Believers of this thought think cinema-going is more than the act of watching films (Morley, 1992; Meers & Biltereyst, 2012; Moran & Aveyard, 2013; Ravazzoli, 2016). They counter, Van de Vijver (2017) states, against people who forecast cinemas' death by saying that 'the pleasure audiences take in the particular spatiotemporal framing of the cinema, is taken less and less into account by scholars intent on arguing for the digital transformations of multi-platformed, brand-extended, techno-participatory film experiences' (p. 130). Corbett asserts that 'as long as people want to or need to be around other people or simply to "get out of the house," people will continue to go to movie theaters (2001, p. 32), because going to the movies was or is a symbolic social act (Corbett, 2001; Van de Vijver, 2017; Grundström, 2018). Research statistics vindicate this claim. Cox (2012) reports in *The Guardian* that older people are moving back to the big screen since the concerns these older people had about the movies have been addressed by the film industry. He writes that the number of elderly Americans (over 50) who regularly visit theaters between 1995 and 2010 increased by 68%. In Britain, the number of regular filmgoers over 45 years of age reached 30% in 2008 from 14% in 1997, i.e., for 11 years, the number increased by 114.29%. Carter (2018) claims that cinema attendance in 2018 was the highest since 1970. Van de Vijver's (2017) study also supports a higher preference for cinema-going. Respondents to her study preferred cinema-going over watching films on DVD and computers or laptops, though they watched movies more often on those alternative platforms than theaters. Corbett (2001) asserts that competing technologies didn't harm the cinema and/or cinema-going but revivified interest in movie-going in America, which ensured higher profit by the mid-1980s than in the mid-1940s. The same trend has been seen in India. Dasgupta et al. (2012, p. 96) state:

> Despite the readily affordable DVDs and VCDs, the relatively recent Inox multi-movie theatres brought viewers back and single screen halls too stepped up their infrastructure, leading to a revival of Indian cinema and the emergence of the imaginary space— Bollywood, the Bombay film industry in Mumbai.

Asserting the longevity of cinema, Carter (2018, para. 17) articulates:

> Access is now the key advantage for streaming platforms – but this will also be in a constant state of flux as technology develops even further. These new production houses will need to respond to the new problems and opportunities that will soon be there to deal with. They will soon realize that cinema never really dies, it just changes.

Corbett (2001) also hopes that cinema will never die and home viewing facilities will never be substitutes for movie theaters; rather, these technologies will interact with and transform each other.

Whatever the debate, whether people watch films at home using home viewing technologies or go to the cinema as part of social or leisurely activities and experiences, cinema viewership hasn't faded away; people watched cinema before, they watch cinema now, and they will continue watching in the future.

Now, a point may be raised: do they watch every film they have access to? Van de Vijver's study respondents complain that though they prefer watching cinema at theatres or multiplexes', they can't afford it more often due to the cost. Another point that comes up for discussion is: if the

cost is low, will they go to the theatres for every film? Therefore, this study in the context of Bangladesh explores how audiences decide what films to watch, what ultimately satisfy their viewing, and their disinclination to watch cinema at the theatre.

Related literature: The context of Bangladesh

Only three studies were found that were partially relevant to this study. 'Bangladesher chalochhitra shilpo: Sangkote janosangskriti [The film industry of Bangladesh: Popular culture in crisis]' is one of the studies administered by Nasreen and Haq (2008) that examined the issues and problems that prevail in the Bangladesh film industry. To understand why people are not coming to the cinema, they conducted a survey among the people who watch cinema in theatres. Both investigators watched films with the audiences, observed viewers' activities, and completed their survey among the moviegoers who attended the shows. In response to one of their survey questions, "Why are people not coming to the cinema?" among the participants who belong to mostly lower economic classes, the majority (59%) replied that people don't come to the cinema because films are full of bad scenes, obscenity, rape scenes, cut-pieces, and indecent clothing. Besides, according to their opinions, a lack of films with good stories (14.91%), a lack of films that can be viewed with family (9.93%), an absence of social films (8.79%), and a bad environment in the theatres (7.45%) are other reasons for which people are not coming to theatres. The major debatable part of their study was that they wanted to know from moviegoers why people—who do not come to the theatres to watch Bangladeshi cinema—are not coming to the theatres. It is difficult for a moviegoer to explain the reasons behind the reluctance of other people's cinema-going. Nonetheless, in response to another question, these participants claim that people will come to the cinema if the films are social films or films that can be watched together with family if the films have a good story, and if the films are free of obscenity. The researchers also surveyed 70 female respondents living in Dhaka separately to know why they were not going to the cinema. In response, female survey participants revealed that insecurity in the cinema halls, low-quality infrastructural facilities, eve teasing, the presence of drug-addicted people, an unhygienic environment, and a lack of good-quality film are the reasons for their absence in the theatres.

In her study, "Bangladesh prekkhagriho: Otit, bartoman o bhobishyot [Cinema halls of Bangladesh: Past, Present, and Future]," Jhuma (2014), with a mixed-methods approach (in-depth interview, participatory observation, and survey), investigated principally the comprehensive scenario of cinema theatres in Bangladesh. She also tried to find out the reasons behind the reduction of cinema halls with a survey questionnaire consisting four questions. The researcher surveyed movie viewers who were present during the show. Her study shows that except for a few, the overall conditions (infrastructural, lack of viewers' friendly environment, and other required facilities) of Bangladeshi cinema halls are very miserable. The study finds that an unhygienic environment, lack of security, exhibition of cut-piece scenes, the presence of addicted people, a lack of films with good stories, obscenity, and excessive violence in the films are some demotivational factors for which people are reluctant to come to theatres to watch cinema.

Sultana and Atikuzzaman (2016), in 'Bangla cinemar bazar zachai: Darshok probonata o sontushtir matra bishleshon' [Examining the Bengali cinema market: Analysis of audience trends and satisfaction levels]' published in their book *Darshoker Mukh*, surveyed film audiences with regard to their preferred and favorite films, favorite heroes and heroines, place of film-viewing, viewing

status of programs based on films, companions of film-viewing, viewing satisfaction, and their preference to watch Indian films over local films. Audiences are reluctant to watch films in theatres. Lack of time was marked as a constraint for going to the movies by the highest percentage of survey respondents (42.6 percent), followed by insecurity (21.71 percent), an unsanitary environment (19.42 percent), and a lack of quality films (16.57 percent). The findings also show that Bangladeshi audiences still have a great preference for social films.

These studies have some methodological deficiencies, especially in terms of the generation of data collection instruments. None of the studies reviewed here explained how they constructed the survey questionnaire or how they got the options for each question in the questionnaire.

Method

The researcher uses quantitative, exploratory, and descriptive research approaches and employs survey questionnaire as a data collection method. A total of 100 regular film viewers have participated in the surveys. The process of questionnaire preparation, the way survey interviews were conducted, and the respondents' selection methods (stated below) allowed the researcher to limit the sample size to 100. The criteria for selecting survey respondents were: a) the respondents should be selected proportionally from the two most populated cities of Bangladesh, and b) the respondents must be regular viewers of movies (for this study, the regular viewers are those viewers who view at least a film fortnightly using home viewing facilities and also those who watch a film monthly at theaters or multiplexes).

Data collection has been conducted in Dhaka and Chattogram, as these are Bangladesh's two most populated cities and represent every part of the country. To conduct the survey, the researcher and his research assistant visited crowded places (supermarkets, theaters/multiplexes, parks, and lakeshores) in Dhaka and Chattogram.

To construct survey questions, the researchers adopted a distinctive and systematic approach. The researcher first interviewed two regular viewers. Depending on the responses of the two in-depth interview respondents, the researcher then generated options for the survey questions. Other than the predetermined options, the respondents were allowed to add their own. Accordingly, after responding to every question, the respondents were asked to add additional thoughts about the question. During the survey, to select a respondent, the researcher and/or his assistant stopped a pedestrian randomly and requested their time. After the person agreed to talk, three questions were asked: Does s/he watch movies? How frequently? And on what platform(s)? These questions helped confirm their movie viewership (regular or irregular). When the viewership criteria set for this study were fulfilled, the person was asked to participate in the survey. In the Dhaka phase of the data collection, a total of 623 people were questioned about their viewership status; of them, 305 watch cinema regularly. Among the regular cinema viewers, 74 agreed to attend the survey. In the Chattogram phase of the data collection, a total of 236 people were questioned, of whom 101 watch cinema regularly. Among the regular viewers, 26 agreed to attend the survey.

Among the survey respondents, 58% were between 18 and 25 years of age, 22% aged between 26 and 30 years, 8% aged between 31 and 35 years, 8% aged between 36 and 40 years, 2% aged between 41 and 45 years, and 2% aged between 46 and 50 years. Among the respondents, 82%

were male and 18% female. Respondents' profiles in terms of the profession were diversified (students, journalists, medical practitioners, politicians, rickshaw-pullers, housewives, businesspersons, workers, teachers, bankers, marketing professionals, and unemployed), though a majority (53%) of them were students.

Results

What movie-going practices subsist in America, India, or other countries, the opposite scenario prevails in Bangladesh. People here hardly visit the theatres to watch local cinema. Not that they don't watch the cinema. The findings of the study justify that they watch cinema, but their viewing list is occupied by foreign titles. Multiplatform home-viewing facilities have brought this scope to them. They can choose the best option from many due to the technologies available around them. Nevertheless, they readily grab it when they have minimal opportunity to enjoy cinematic experiences at the theatres. The release of the Hollywood film *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) at the multiplexes in Dhaka vindicates this fact. People rushed to the multiplexes to confirm their tickets (Badiuzzaman, 2019). The very high price of a ticket couldn't even discourage them from watching the film. This proves the claim of industry professionals that Bangladeshi film audiences stop going to the cinema as they can watch the film at home using different home-viewing facilities, which is invalid. The findings of this study also don't support their claim. Undeniably, technologies facilitate home-viewing, but home-viewing practice shouldn't be considered the reason for the decrease in cinema attendance in Bangladesh or elsewhere. If so, the two major film industries in the world, Hollywood and Bollywood, would have died years ago. People, by nature, select the best option among all the options they have.

To fulfill the objectives of this study, the researcher analyzes, organizes, and summarizes the responses of the respondents under six identified themes: respondents' first film-watching experiences; respondents' viewing habits - from Dollywood to Hollywood; the first film to impress study respondents; respondents' most favored and disfavored films; how to decide which film(s) to watch - respondents' latest viewed films; and cinema at the theatre.

Respondents' first film-watching experiences

Justifiably, the film-viewing practice of most of the questionnaire respondents (78%) in this study began with the local film. The others (22%) opened the viewing list with foreign films. More than half of the respondents learned about their first film from friends and families. Many identify that multiple factors—story, acting, dialogue, cinematography, critic reviews, etc.—contributed to satisfying their first viewing (see Table 1). Most respondents (58%) were motivated to watch the film after hearing those positive things from their sources. A little more than two-thirds describe their first viewing experience as very good and/or excellent. Among the respondents (n = 96) who characterized their first film-viewing experience as good, very good, and/or excellent, the highest percentage (81.25%) of them gave credit to the film story and craft of storytelling and character performance, especially the lead character(s), and dialogues were mentioned by the second-highest number (77.08%).

Table 1. Factors contributing to the first film-viewing experience: good, very good, or excellent (n=96)

Factors that influence the first film-watching experience	No. of respondents	%
Story and the craft of storytelling	78	81.25
Performance and Dialogue	74	77.08
Performer's appearance	20	20.83
Cinematography/visualization	28	29.17
Visual	10	10.42
Song and/or Dance sequence	27	28.13
Costume	12	12.50
Making	12	12.50

Respondents' viewing habit – From Dhallywood to Hollywood

The statistics that the questionnaire respondents provided tell us that over three-fourths of them entered the film viewership through a local, i.e., Dhallywood film. But when they were asked to count the number of local and foreign films from their viewing list, it was found that among the respondents, most are heavy viewers of foreign films, especially Bollywood, Tollywood (West Bengal Film Industry), and Hollywood films, and very rarely do they watch their own industry's film(s). Nearly 75% note that the number of foreign films in their viewing list is higher than the local. Of all the respondents who participated in this study, 25% still watch local films more than foreign films.

It is observed that the viewership of most of the respondents began with local films, but they are now heavy viewers of foreign films. Two obvious questions validly come up here. What motivated (motivates) them to watch foreign films more? Moreover, what were (are) the deficiencies of the local films that demotivate(d) them? The respondents were accordingly asked these two questions.

Table 2. Factors motivating respondents to watch foreign films more than local films (n = 75)

Factors motivated (motivate) to watch foreign films	No. of respondents	%
Story that can hold audiences for hours	55	73.33
Films are brilliantly made	51	68.00
Films made by star director	12	16.00
Presence of star actors & actresses in the film	45	60.00
Realistic performance	25	33.33
Provide a clear message	33	44.00
Panoramic visual	45	60.00
New things to learn	31	41.33

The responses of the respondents show (see Tables 2 and 3) that 'story that can hold audiences for hours', 'films are brilliantly made', 'presence of star actors and actresses in the film', and 'panoramic visual' are four key determinants that play a vital role in watching foreign films more and more. On the contrary, 'weak stories that can't hold audiences', 'lack of novelty in the story and poor craft of storytelling', 'poor performance and dialogues lacking quality', 'poor making',

'films copied from foreign films' and 'poor graphic works' were (are) the major deficiencies of Bangladeshi films.

Table 3. Deficiencies of local films (n = 98)

Deficiencies of Bangladeshi films	No. of respondents	%
Weak story that can't hold audiences	66	67.35
Story doesn't progress relying on the logic	38	38.78
Lack of novelty in the story and in the craft of storytelling	69	70.41
Poor making	50	51.02
Lack of star director	23	23.47
Lack of actors and actresses with strong personalities or lack of star actors & actresses	29	29.59
Poor performance and dialogues lacking quality	56	57.14
Unwitting usage of comedy	34	34.69
No clear message	25	25.51
Visuals lacking quality	35	35.71
Lead character(s) doesn't have a definite goal, perform motiveless	12	12.24
Films copied from foreign films	49	50.00
Even song sequences are directly copied from foreign films	41	41.84
Poor graphic works	48	48.98

The first film to impress study respondents

Although the viewing list of questionnaire respondents is overflowing with foreign films, the films that impressed those audiences for the first time were not predominantly foreign ones. Almost half of the respondents (48%) note that the first film that enthralled them was a local. This viewing experience allows them to repeatedly (see Table 5) watch the films in which the same actor(s) and/or actress(es) played the lead role(s). The consecutive film viewing experiences of those actors and/or actresses build trust among viewers that their presence in the film guarantees a quality story and great performance and that their expectations will be fulfilled (see Tables 4 and 6).

Table 4. Contributing factors in the film that impressed the respondents for the first time (n =100)

Factors that impressed respondents	No. of respondents
Story was excellent	91
Great storytelling	42
Good making	35
Convincible presentation of a problem and its solution	33
Outstanding performance and dialogue	81
Excellent Visual	13
A clear message in the film	35

Table 5. No. of the films, the respondents watched later in which the same actor or actress from their first remembered film played the lead role(s) (n = 100)

No. of film watched	No. of respondents
None	7
1	-
2 - 4	20
5 – 9	38
10 – 14	18
15 – 19	2
20 – 24	4
25 – 29	1
30 and above	7
Many, but unspecified	3

Table 6. Factors motivating the respondents to watch the same actor or actress films repeatedly (n = 100)

Factors motivated to watch repeatedly	No. of respondents
Wonderful performance	86
Presence of the said actor(s)/actress(s) in the film(s) guaranteed quality story	66
Movies in which they performed have definite message	26
Honesty and humanistic attitude in their personal lives	15
People watch cinema with some definite expectations, and the actors/actresses didn't disappoint the audiences by keeping those expectations unfulfilled	34
Real-life Lifestyle of actor(s)/actress(s)	15
Others: No option other than watching their films	2

Respondents' most favored and disfavored film

Concerning the most favored and disfavored films, a large part of the questionnaire respondents showed their fondness for foreign films. Of all the respondents, only 27 mentioned Bangladeshi films as their favorites. In terms of the most disfavored films, Bangladeshi films have been mentioned more by the respondents than foreign ones. Of the 86 respondents who answered the question, 46.51% acknowledged that the film that they dislike most is a Bangladeshi film, while 26.74% named a foreign film as their most disfavored film. The story of the film and the craft of storytelling have been mentioned by most of the respondents as factors responsible for both the most favored and least favored films (see Tables 7 and 8). The performance through which a character reaches the audience is pointed out by the second-highest number of respondents as another factor determinant for selecting the most favored film.

Table 7. Factors that make a film the audience's most favored (n = 100)

Factors make films most favored film	No. of respondents
The story and craft of storytelling were outstanding	91
Performance, especially of the lead character(s), was unforgettable	61
Brilliantly made	36
Dazzling visuals	29
The film(s) had an excellent message	38
The story progressed in such a way that one cannot move one's eyes off the film diegesis	45
Melodious Song/lyrics and outstanding choreography	26
Others: animation, action, and comedy	3

Table 8. Factors responsible for making a film most disfavored (n = 63)

Factors that made a film most disfavored	No. of respondents	%
Weak story and poor storytelling	56	88.89
The story of the film(s) didn't progress logically	31	49.21
Logics used in the film(s) were unacceptable	15	23.81
Poor making	16	25.40
Poor performance and dialogue	25	39.68
No message in the film(s)	19	30.16
Inharmonious song/lyrics and poor choreography	18	28.57
Poor comic scenes that had been used to make audiences laugh forcibly	17	26.98

How to decide which film(s) to watch – respondents' latest viewed film

Technologies enable film audiences to choose the film for which they are looking. Before the inception of modern home-viewing technologies, the scenarios were different. Bangladeshi film audiences could only watch what their industry offered them. With a changed context, they are now more sensible when selecting a film to watch or not. The respondents to this study agree that, generally, several things come into play while they decide which film to watch. For many, movie trailers (65%), known actors and/or actresses (71%), and cinema-goers' feedback (66%) contribute largely to viewers' decision-making about what film(s) to watch or not watch (see Table 9).

Table 9. Basis for selection about which film to watch or not (n = 100)

Basis for film selection	No. of respondents
Movie Trailer	65
Known/favorite actor and/or actress	71
Known/favorite director	10
Critic Review	33

Rating	23
Cinema-viewers/goers' feedback	66
Favorite genre	36
Favorite series movie	27

When the respondents were asked, depending on which they decided to watch the film that they watched most recently, they said multiple factors (see Table 10) simultaneously worked behind their decision. In response to a supplementary question—what if the film they selected to watch fails to satisfy them?—they identified that they might not continue watching those actors or directors' films. Some of the respondents even gave up their favorite actors as those actors repeatedly failed to meet their desires.

Table 10. The basis for selection of the last-viewed film (n = 99)

Basis for last-viewed film selection	No. of respondents	%
Movie trailer	56	56.57
Known/favorite actor and/or actress	52	52.53
Known/favorite director whose film they usually watch	6	6.06
The film received good reviews from reviewers	29	29.29
The film received a high rating	20	20.20
Feedback from the audiences who already have watched the film that it is a movie worth watching	38	38.38
Respondents' favorite genre film	29	29.29
Respondents' favorite series movie	28	28.28

Cinema at the Theatre

The total number of films that the study respondents watched until the date of data collection ranged from 50 to more than a thousand. Only 15 respondents recorded that they had watched less than 100 films until then.

Table 11. Number of films that the respondents have watched at the theatre (n = 100)

No. of films that respondents watched at the theatre	No. of respondents
None	17
1 - 3	19
4 - 6	15
7 – 9	5
10 – 12	21
13 – 15	-
16 – 18	1
19 – 21	4
22 – 24	3
25 – less than 100	10

More than 100	4
Difficult to count, unlimited	1

Table 11 highlights a very poor attendance rate at the theatre based on the total number of films each of the respondents has watched. Lack of free or leisure time is considered by 71.83% of the respondents as the most determinant factor that affects theatre attendance, followed by the uncongenial environment at the theatre, lack of quality films produced locally, and the absence of foreign films in theatres (see Table 12). Only one respondent agrees that the availability of alternative viewing platforms affects cinema attendance. When the respondents were asked whether they would go to the theatre if the films of their choice or films like their most favored film are shown regularly in the theatre, the majority confirmed that they must go to the cinema (see Table 13).

Table 12. Factors responsible for respondents' disinclination to watch cinema at the theatre (n = 71)

Factors responsible for respondents' disinclination	No. of respondents	%
Theatres here mostly show Bangladeshi cinema/ absence of foreign films	16	22.54
The uncongenial environment at the theatre	35	49.30
Un-affordability to reimburse the costs involves in cinema-viewing	6	8.45
Lack of free/leisure time	51	71.83
I love Bangla cinema, but the cinema projected in the theatre are hardly good	18	25.35
Others: availability of alternative viewing platforms and religiosity	2	2.82

Table 13. Respondents' preference for cinema-going if films like their favored films are shown (n = 100)

Answer	No. of respondents
Yes	60
No	4
May go to the theatre or may watch at home if have an access to the film from home	12
Will watch at home if have an access to the film from home	24

Discussion

It is not inappropriate to say that people prefer to consume those cultural artifacts that can satisfy their needs or expectations that have been developed internally before consumption (Bhowmick, 2021). This implies that pleasure is the outcome of the whole consumption process. Ang (1985, p. 9), in her Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination, correctly presumes that people watch *Dallas* 'clearly because they find it enjoyable or pleasurable. But this enjoyment

or pleasure didn't come from a vacuum. She then rightfully asks: what are Dallas's determining factors of enjoyment or pleasure? Similarly, certain factors in the film constitute pleasure or discontent for which an audience decides to watch or not to watch.

To understand what satisfy movie-viewers viewing experiences and the selection mechanism of what films to watch or not to watch, the researcher brings forth several states of respondents' viewing, such as their first film-watching experiences, the first film that impressed them, factors contributing to becoming respondents' most favored and disfavored films, respondents' preference for either local or foreign films, and so on. This approach that the researcher adopted has separated this study from the related previous studies (Jhuma, 2014; Nasreen & Haq, 2008; Sultana & Atikuzzaman, 2016) conducted in the context of Bangladesh.

However, most respondents marked their first film-viewing experience as good, very good, and/or excellent. When they were asked: What were the factors that facilitated such an experience? Among them whose first film-watching experiences were good, very good, and/or excellent, the highest percentage gave credit to 'story and the craft of storytelling' and the second-highest to 'performance of the character(s) and dialogue'. The other components that contributed to such an experience to some extent were song and/or dance sequence, cinematography, performer appearance, costume, etc.

Concerning the first film that impressed them, most respondents rated 'story' and 'performance and dialogue' as the most determinant factors for that experience. Once again, 'the film story and craft of storytelling for which a certain movie was placed in the respondents' most favored movie list topped the list of factors, while performance, especially of the lead character(s), through which an audience gets involved with the film story, came second. Together with these good or crafty makings, dazzling visuals, a moral message in the film, a logical progression of the story, melodious songs and lyrics, outstanding choreography of dance sequences, etc., the film was one's favorite.

According to the respondents' responses, the story and craft of storytelling are not only responsible for making a certain film one's favorite but also for making a film most disfavored. Mckee (1997, p. 15) rightly argues that audiences are 'thirsting for story'. Aristotle once observed, Mckee states, "When storytelling goes bad, the result is decadence" (p. 13). The majority of the respondents acknowledged this fact. The weak story of the film and poor storytelling were confirmed by many as the most likely factors for their dislike. This is, to some extent, consistent with Jhuma's (2014), Nasreen and Haq's (2008), and Sultana and Atikuzzaman's (2016) studies when it comes to the dispreference for local films. Illogical progression of the story, poor performance and dialogue, absence of any message in the film, inharmonious song and dance sequences, unwitting comic scenes, poor making, and illogical usages of logic jointly contributed to this disliking as well.

The study respondents' responses also justify the fact that the great preference for foreign films over the local by the viewers is likewise dominated by the film story and storytelling, though the making of the film, the presence of star actors and actresses in the film, and panoramic visuals have considerable contributions. On the other hand, story (weak story that can't hold audiences, lack of novelty in the story, and the craft of storytelling), along with poor performance and

dialogues lacking quality, poor making, films copied from foreign films, poor graphic works, etc., are mostly to blame for the lesser preference for local films by the viewers.

This reliability of respondents on 'story and craft of storytelling' for loyal viewership of films refers to the high degree of correlation. This reminds us why Tagore (1922/2004, p. 46) delineates Bangalis as *Galpo-poshya Jeeb* (the heart, soul, and mind of Bangalis can be conquered through the story). According to him, human life is nothing but a story; therefore, what they desire to experience, they experience through the story (pp. 45–47).

McKee (1997) echoes also similar:

> The world now consumes films, novels, theatre, and television in such quantities and with such ravenous hunger that the story arts have become humanity's prime source of inspiration, as it seeks to order chaos and gain insight into life. Our appetite for story is a reflection of the profound human need to grasp the patterns of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience. In the words of playwright Jean Anouilh, 'Fiction gives life its form' … Story isn't a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of the anarchy of existence. (p. 12)

It is thus rational to assert that the pleasure (enjoyment) or discontent for which people watch or don't watch popular cultural artifacts, for example, cinema or soap operas, is constituted through a complex mechanism where the story and the craft of storytelling perform the lead role—for Batty and Waldeback (2019), story functions as a central form of communication—with other major and minor factors that the respondents of this study identified.

For this study's respondents, a good story, the craft of telling that story, performance and dialogues through which characters of the story reach the audience, good making that creates reality, known (star) actors and actresses, and visual spectacle are found to be the primary conditions of viewing a film (see also Ang, 1985; Bhowmick & Sharief, 2020; MacCabe, 1974; McKee, 1997). However, when it comes to cinema-going, i.e., watching cinema at the theatres, the respondents brought forth some secondary conditions—unfriendly environment in the theatres, films (apart from a few foreign films) released in the theatres hardly found good, lack of leisure time—that affect their viewing at the theatres. These few apathetic factors of cinema-going are in line with Jhuma's (2014), Nasreen and Haq's (2008), and Sultana and Atikuzzaman's (2016) findings. Furthermore, the finding firmly asserts that the effect of the availability of home-viewing facilities on cinema-going is very minimal.

Conclusion: We will go to the cinema if...

Before the audience decides to go to the cinema, the first concern is which film(s) to watch. In the context of Bangladesh, the second concern is whether the film(s) that cinema-goers desire to watch are shown at the theatres. For most respondents, generally, the trailer of a film, known or favorite actors and/or actresses, and cinema-viewers' or cinema-goers' feedback are the three key sources based on which they decide whether to watch a film. Critic reviews, favorite genres, and favorite series movies influence this decision-making considerably. This implies that the

respondents, relying on those sources, want to be confirmed that the film(s) that they will watch must have all the necessary components: a good story that has been told brilliantly, outstanding and realistic performances with sharp and witty dialogue through which the film story is told, good making, the film having a clear message, quality visuals, melodious songs, and rhythmic dance sequences.

It is interesting to note that the presence of known or favorite actors and/or actresses in the film has a dominant influence on deciding which film(s) to watch. The respondents to this study are more likely to choose a film to watch if their known or favorite actors and/or actresses play the roles in the film. It means that the presence of their favorite actors and/or actresses guarantees that the film has everything they want to see in a film. This leads to the argument that cinema viewership relies on 'what the viewers want from cinema and what cinema can offer them'.

At this juncture, when the audiences decide about a cinema to watch, the question must emerge: where to watch—at the theatre or multiplex or home using technologically assisted home-viewing facilities? For cinema-goers in Bangladesh, the quality-price ratio (where price connotes the investment of money, time, hassles while going to the cinema, etc.) is likewise an undeniable concern, similar to cinema-goers elsewhere (see also Van de Vijver, 2017). The majority of the questionnaire respondents in this study conditionally opined that they prefer watching cinema at cinema halls or multiplexes, but there should be a guarantee that their investment will not go in vain.

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