

Analysis of the Influencing Factors of Audience Viewing Motivation in Chinese Animation Market

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Abstract: *Chinese animation industry is developing rapidly with great market potential, and the animation movie market is an important part of it. How excellent animated movies can be publicized through effective channels to increase audience's motivation to watch movies, so as to obtain higher commercial returns, is a topic that needs to be discussed. In this context, it is necessary to further understand the factors influencing the audience's motivation to watch movies, to provide suggestions for the production and publicity of Chinese animation movies, and to promote the good and orderly development of the animation market. Industry data show that the main audience of Chinese animation industry is the youth group, and this study adopts a qualitative research method and conducts the study by interviews with the youth group. The data obtained from the interviews were coded at three levels to summarize the influencing factors that affect the audience's motivation to watch movies in the Chinese animation market. Combined with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), two Central Route and two Peripheral Route were analyzed from the data, and these information chains are effective ways to influence the audience in the Chinese market, which provide reference paths for the system of the company's product strategy and the cultivation of the audience in the Chinese animation market.*

Keywords: Audience factor, Chinese animation market, Elaboration Likelihood Model, External factor, Viewing motivation

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of media convergence and Internet economy, Chinese animation industry, as an important part of the cultural industry, has entered a stage of rapid growth. According to the Beijing Evening News reported that the total output value of Chinese animation industry will exceed 300 billion yuan in 2023. The total output value of Chinese animation industry reached 221.2 billion yuan in 2024. Among them, animation is an indispensable part of the animation industry.

With the diversification of animation film content and styles in the Chinese market, the 2024 China Animation Industry Research Report points out that teenagers and young adults (especially those aged 15-30) have also become an important audience group. This segment of the audience has a great appetite for high-quality, creative animated films. With the rise of "Generation Z" and the development of cross-dimensional economy, ACGN (Animation, Comic, Game & Novel) groups with the post-90s and post-00s as the core continue to expand,

and the scale of Pan-2D Culture users continues to expand. These groups are the main audience groups of Chinese animation industry.

With the popularity of streaming platforms (such as Tencent Video, iQiyi, Youku, etc.), more and more viewers choose to watch animated movies at home. These platforms offer a wealth of animated content that meets the needs of audiences of different ages and interests. Despite the growing popularity of streaming platforms, the use of immersive media allows audiences to engage with films on multiple sensory levels, providing a more profound viewing experience (Pett, 2021), so theaters remain an important place for many audiences to watch newly released animated films, especially those who expect visual effects and a large-screen experience.

According to Chinese mainstream media, the number of movies and TVs in Chinese animated movie market with box office total exceeding 100 million yuan in 2023 is 14, while this figure is 8 in 2022 and 11 in 2021. In 2022, for example, a total of 27 animated movies with box office exceeding 10 million yuan, with a combined total box office of 3.49 billion yuan, the market scale is huge. In such a context, it seems necessary to form a benign interaction between the government, the industry, the market, and the creators and the audience (Wang, & Xin, 2024). The cumulative box office of Chinese-produced animated films in 2024 was RMB 2.875 billion, a decrease of 43% compared with 2023; 29 imported animated films were released, a year-on-year increase of 31%. Against this background, it seems necessary to further understand the factors influencing the audience's motivation to watch movies, and to provide suggestions for the good and orderly development of Chinese animated movies.

2. Literature Review

Hassan et al. (2016) used Multiple binary logistic (MBL) regression in their study. From the best model, encouragement category (interest, friends, boredom and box office), source of information category (newspaper/magazine), attraction-watching category (director and movie review) and overview category (location) were found to be significant. Suvattanadilok (2021) examined the social media activities of film promoters and the factors that have an impact on public decision-making and to watch film in the cinema. The statistical tool used is ANOVA, which is concerned only with the disparity of results used in the comparative analysis. The findings of this study show that social networks affect audiences to watch movies. Battle-Beltrán and Mateo (2022) used structural equation modelling (SEM) to carry out an empirical analysis on the results of a questionnaire with a focus on the factors influencing the preference for watching films at a cinema. Collins and Hand (2005) detailed microeconomic analysis of the factors that increase or lower the probability that an individual will go to a movie theater. These researchers have used quantitative research methods to analyze the factors influencing the motivation to watch movies through data.

There are also some researchers who use qualitative research methods. Walmsley (2011) employed comprise a combination of qualitative techniques, including responsive depth interviews and participant observation. The research finds that the key motivating factor for participants was the pursuit of emotional experiences and impact. DiFerdinando (2020) conducted surveys and interviews to gather data on the motivations of theatregoers and non-theatregoers and their effect on attendance. The study discovered that in the Greater Philadelphia area, the biggest motivations for attendance are familiarity with the source material and knowing someone in a show. Yening et al. (2023), whose study was guided by the PRISMA statement and based on the systematic review on Scopus and ScienceDirect, selected a total of 23 related articles, which were resulted in five main themes, namely content,

technology, social, environment, and emotional participation. They suggested that future research could be further developed using the interview method or mixed methods.

Fan and Feng (2021) suggested that the main problem of Chinese animation market is that there is no sustainable development model in the industry. Their study clarifies the key directions of industrial development from the aspects of production factors, demand conditions, industrial chain, enterprise strategies, cultural factors, and governmental policies, and puts forward a more comprehensive reference strategy to promote the formation of a sustainable development model for the animation industry. Jiang (2024) argues that there is not enough research on audience viewpoints in Chinese animation industry, which is an important research gap. In their study, they proposed to use a combination of Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP) and Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) to analyze and evaluate the key selection factors of Chinese animation industry from the perspective of Chinese audiences. Xie and Wang (2024)'s study took 281 imported animated films released in mainland China from 2000 to 2023 as samples and used multiple regression analysis to explore the key factors that affect their box office performance. These studies provide references to marketing strategies, policy evolution, and box office performance factors in the Chinese animated movie market, but there is no study that constructs the relationship between the factors that motivate the audience to watch movies from the perspective of communication.

From the literature analysis, it can be seen that the influencing factors of audience's motivation can be summarized through different research methods, but fewer studies focus on how these influencing factors interact with each other and ultimately have an impact on the viewing behavior. In the specific market scope of Chinese animation market, there is also a specific working path for how the movie-going factors influence each other. By analyzing the viewing behavior of the Chinese animation market from the perspective of communication studies, we can find the working model and path of the viewing factors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical basis

Social influence theory explores how individuals are influenced by the actions, opinions, and social circumstances of others. These effects can occur in a variety of ways, including direct social interactions, social norms, group pressures, and social networks. The Elaboration Likelihood Model proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) in the 1980s, is one of the most important theories in the field of persuasion and social influence research. The ELM provides a framework for understanding and explaining how people process persuasive information and how these processes affect attitude change. Elaboration Likelihood Model studies how two paths of information processing, namely the central route (based on detailed analysis) and the peripheral route (based on emotion and simplified cues), affect persuasion and attitude change. Central Route means that when individuals process information seriously and deeply, they process it along a central route. This usually occurs when an individual is highly interested in the topic, highly motivated, and competent enough to understand complex information. In this case, attitude changes are based on information logic and evidence, and are usually more persistent.

Peripheral Route means that when individuals have low attention to information or limited ability to process information, they process along the peripheral route. In this case, the attitude change is more dependent on the surface characteristics of the message (such as the

attractiveness, authority, emotional appeal of the persuader, etc.), and the change is usually short-lived and volatile.

The ELM predicts that the degree of thought used in a persuasion context determines how consequential the resultant attitude becomes. Attitudes formed via high-thought, central-route processes will tend to persist over time, resist persuasion, and be influential in guiding other judgments and behaviors to a greater extent than attitudes formed through low-thought, peripheral-route processes. Attitudes formed via high-thought, central-route processes will tend to persist over time, easier to resist persuasion, and be influential in guiding other judgments and behaviors to a greater extent than attitudes formed through low-thought, peripheral-route processes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

According to the ELM model, the content ranges of Central Route and Peripheral Route of Chinese animation industry audiences can be analyzed, so as to better provide constructive strategies for the dissemination and promotion of animation film works and effective strategic support for the long-term and stable development of Chinese animation market.

The development of Chinese animation industry is shifting from the audience group of children to the audience group of all ages (Xin, 2021), and the age group of 15-30 years old is the main audience group of Chinese animation market. This group is the main consumer group of Chinese animation industry at present, and it is also an important group that will consume in this field for a long time in the future. This study adopts a qualitative research method and selects 20-25 years old college students who have studied professional courses on animation films and are interested in animation films as qualified interviewees. This is because professional knowledge enables respondents to think and answer relevant questions better. The number of interviewees is planned to be 20-30 people (Charmaz, 2006), each respondent is numbered D01, D02 in sequence, and the interview will be stopped when the information is saturated.

In this study, a semi-structured interview was adopted, and three main questions were designed in the interview outline: How did you become interested in animated films; What makes you choose to watch an animated film? Why do you like to watch animated movies? The collected interview audio data were transcribed and imported into MAXQDA software for coding and analysis.

3.2 Coding analysis

3.2.1 Open coding Settings

The answers to the question "How did you become interested in animated films?" are coded as unconscious and conscious, Behavior of public institutions and Patterns of production.

The answer to the question "What makes you choose to watch an animated movie?" is coded in an open way, and the answer is classified as Low dissemination impact and high dissemination impact.

For the text analysis of "Why do you like to watch animated movies", there are level one codes, which are namely social factors, personal interests, and movie-watching experience, among which there are two options under social factors, namely social factors have influence and social factors have no influence.

After analyzing and coding the interview text, a total of 132 encoded fragments were obtained.

The extraction of these first-level coding concepts is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: One-level coding concept

Concept	Original event record
Unconscious attention to animation	Not very dedicated to following up on animated movies (D15)
Conscious attention to animation	Since junior high and high school, I have been exposed to art, and then I would watch more anime and draw on my own, and then I would discuss the composition of the images and the colors (D17) I take the initiative to watch anime I want to watch through the Internet. When I started to have a cell phone and computer in junior high school, I started to watch anime movies on demand that I was interested in (D14)
Public Institution Behavior	Watching normal animation shown on TV channels in elementary school, and then tapping into an app to choose when I was 11 or 12 (D09)
Corporate Behavior	Anime nowadays can be a bit similar to an assembly line. (D18)
Low dissemination impact	I don't follow the popular animations, they are not very good, but the publicity is very good (D19)
High dissemination Impact	Some American and Chinese movies are popular and people go to the cinema to watch them (D10) I go to see popular animated movies when they are released (D08)
Effect of socialization factors	Best friends, will go to share what they see good anime, to put forward their own kind of insights and opinions, will communicate, feel a sense of personal hobbies have a sense of privacy, only with your trusted good friends to talk about this topic (D21)
No effect of socialization factors	There is a roommate who likes to watch Japanese anime, both sides do not discuss, do not chat, like different points (D06) less and friends talk about these (animation) (D16) usually talk with friends about this animation topic, occasionally once or twice, is not very deliberate and individual friends to talk about this content, talk about animation will not affect my intention to go to look for animation to see (D14)
Personal Interests	Since I was a child, I have really enjoyed watching cartoons (D04)
Movie-going experience	Watching movies makes me feel happy (D04)

3.2.2 Analysis of coded data

3.2.2.1 Respondents' Attention to Animated Movie Situations

The coding of respondents' attention to animated movies situation acquired 51 original event records, of which 16 unconscious original event records and 35 conscious original event records.

Unconscious attention to animated movies was expressed as, “When I was in elementary school, I watched normal animation shown on TV channels, and by the age of 11-12 I would watch animation through an App, and when I was young, I watched animation on my own to pass the time” (D09), and “From the time I was in elementary school, my family would take me to the cinema to watch animated movies, more use the computer to watch on-demand on the Internet, when I was a child, I watched Pleasant Goat animation” (D20). Most of these unconscious movie-watching behaviors are natural recreational pastimes for small children, or parent-child or social activities arranged by adults for their children, and the children's exposure to animated movies belongs to the stage of ignorance and exploration.

Respondents live in an era when the Internet is widespread, so in the younger grades, parents usually do not let their children operate electronic devices, and most of the channels for movie watching are TV channels or Internet TV on demand; in the middle school stage, movie

watching becomes a spontaneous behavior of the children, and they have the autonomy of choosing their own animation programs. At the secondary school level, the main channels for viewing movies are network television, cell phones and movie theaters.

Conscious attention to animated films was expressed, with some respondents maintaining an interest that began in elementary school and continued through college, “Started in elementary school, watched the most in middle school, watched a lot of Japanese manga in college, and would watch those theatrical animated films in college” (D12); some respondents only paid attention to animated films as an art form in college, and “I only watched animated movies in college, I used to only watch this kind of serials” (D13); some respondents said that because of their interest in Japanese anime, they expanded their attention to Japanese animated movies, as well as a wider range of animated movies, ”I would talk about some animation-related ones with my friends, middle school, college. Our university actually has a club that also has what I consider to be more some excellent authors that I will follow up on” (D19), some respondents said that excellent animated movies from their childhood left a deep impression on them, allowing them to continue to pay attention to the art of animation, ”Fourth and fifth grade Internet access, there are foreign animation works, the impressive ones are God's Eaters, Ice Age, and Disney's Princess theme, and in recent years, they watch domestic animation works, such as 30,000 Leagues in Chang'an, Big Fish Begonia, and Nezha” (D02).

Analyzing the matrix of codes for unconscious and conscious attention to animation, it can be found that most of the respondents are consciously paying attention to animated films, and a larger number of respondents transformed from an unconscious state of animation viewing to a conscious state of animation attention. Only a few respondents indicated that they do not always pay attention to animated movies on purpose, and that movie watching activity may be a random behavior.



Figure 1: Distribution of code matrices for conscious and unconscious attention to animation.

3.2.2.2 Social factors

By analyzing the social factors, it can be found that the influence of social factors on is whether the respondents watch animated movies or not can be divided into two cases of influence and no influence.

The statement that social factors contribute to watching anime, “When I was small, it was a social entertainment behavior when I went to watch it with my partners, the content of the anime was not important” (D18), “I would talk to my housemates and friends about a topic like anime” (D17), “Influenced by my partners” (D01), “Friends around me would talk about it” (D05), “Friends with the same temperament like anime” (D08), “influenced a lot by my partner” (D01), “friends around me would talk about it, friends with the same temperament, all like anime” (D05).The interview sample in D08 provides an important personal experience event, “The main three core members of the alliance I formed in Nanping, my older sister, my younger sister and I , three people. I would also talk to my classmates about animation in college, and a few of my dormitory mates are relatively fond of animation, and Xiamen is such a big city, so the circle is relatively bigger” (D08), and the interviewees' families have a good atmosphere for animation hobby, “The family atmosphere for animation is strong, and my

second aunt, who is now relatively old, almost 60 years old, is very fond of Japanese animation. My sister she is also very fond of Japanese animation, there are three to four children of my generation who are fond of animation in my family-run” (D08). Respondents are experienced fans of Japanese anime and have formed a thematic Japanese anime alliance, which is a social platform for anime, and their family members are also fond of Japanese anime.

Social promotion of animation viewing behavior, on the one hand, animation as a vehicle for social interaction, can enable viewers to jointly obtain the topic of discussion and exchange, or jointly have the behavior of viewing and thus promote the behavior of making friends. On the other hand, because of the love of animated films, and the need to have a social object to communicate and share, and then harvest the friendship, but also for self-expression. However, young people in modern society have more independent viewpoints and wider interests, and the influence of socialization on ordinary young animation viewers is not obvious, but senior young animation viewers have a greater need for socialization, and socialization and movie-viewing behaviors promote each other in a cyclical manner.

3.2.2.3 Personal Interests and Movie-going experience

Expressions of liking animated movies because of personal interests, “I have been more more like watching animated movies since junior high school” (D08), “There are more cases of personal active attention” (D02), “Partners read more cartoons that in turn, it affects that all like to watch animated movies” (D01). These statements indicate that some viewers have a personal interest in and love for such a visual art, while others, because they like to read manga, pay constant attention to manga IPs, and then pay attention to animated movies based on these manga IPs.

The expressions related to movie-going feelings mainly concern the sense of theater experience of movie-watching, “I like going to the cinema to watch it” (D01), and the feelings brought by movie-watching, “It seems to be very happy” (D04).

3.2.2.4 Influence of dissemination on viewing desire

Some interviewees mentioned that dissemination would prompt their viewing activities, some information dissemination would push people to watch animation movies, “I usually pay more attention to this topic, for example, the short video platform above swiped about the case of this movie, or there is a recommendation plot synopsis, then I become interested in it, I will go to watch it.” (D12); at the same time, there are also some respondents who think that “the more popular animation, these are the ones I won't follow in much to watch, its works are not very well done, just the publicity above is very well done” (D19).

Respondents' favorite animation movies, the animation works that have been mentioned many times, “Thousand and Thousand Searches”, “Nezha”, “What Kind of Life Do You Want to Live”, “Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf”, “Begonia with the Big Fish”, and “Your Name”, all of these works are better spread on the Internet, on the one hand, the works themselves are excellent, and on the other hand, through the good effects of Internet promotion, it also drives more people to follow the hotspots to produce the movie watching behavior.

3.2.2.5 Behavior and Production Patterns of Public Institutions

Respondents said that when they were young, most of their viewing was on TV channels, and when the Internet was not popular, children's animation programs were the main channel for children to watch. After junior high school, many interviewees have the opportunity to watch all kinds of programs freely on demand when they own cell phone tablets, and the viewing

behavior at this time is more free and the choices are more diverse. Some viewers were still impressed by the works they watched on TV program animation channels as children (D03, D14). At the same time, this favorable animation environment will cultivate a long-term audience, “We have exposure to these animations, and they just naturally may grow with us. In another 10, 20 years, it has become an adult, and it will still bring in animation viewing habits” (D14).

In addition, when mentioning the technical style of Chinese animation, some interviewees referred to the commercialized production mode of animation (D18). 2D animation in Japan has a set of mature industrialized production process, while 3D animation technology is currently commonly applied in China, and the styles of the works are very close to each other, which also presents the result of industrialized production. After the establishment of this kind of assembly line, on the one hand, it may improve the production efficiency, but on the other hand, it may solidify the style of works.

3.2.3 Influencing factors of viewers' motivation in Chinese animation market

Through the interview information combing, Low dissemination impact, High dissemination impact, Social factors have influence, and the Social factors have no influence; Behavior of public institutions and Patterns of production, a total of 6 first-level codes, they jointly reflect the comprehensive environment of Chinese animation market, and ultimately affect the respondents' movie-watching behavior. The behavior of public institutions includes the behavior of government institutions, such as the program selection of television stations, which are selective and guided in the output of content. In general, some relevant policy documents of the national government will be mainly considered. Relevant state departments will also issue some guiding policies, such as the protection and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, and tax incentives for some animation game enterprises. Therefore, the behavior of public institutions is summarized and summarized as the second-level code "Policy-Oriented". The company's technological advantages, production mode and cost control are all part of the company's production behavior, which affect the final output of the animation product; some of the company's personnel decisions will also affect the final presentation of the work, for example, the director's personal style will also affect the style of the company's animation productions. Therefore, the mode of production is summarized in the secondary code “Corporate Behavior”.

The extent of influence of communication is summarized as the secondary coded Dissemination Impact and the extent of influence of socialization is summarized as the secondary coded Social Influence. Dissemination and socialization factors are the result of a combination of individual behavior and environment. Companies can promote themselves through their own communication strategies, both online and in the physical environment. Diffusion is also done in socialization some times and both behaviors take place in the same time and space. The social factor includes multi-level and multi-platform interactive behaviors between individuals and their families, individuals and friends, and individuals and society, which are the emotional connection. This connection needs to be dependent on the flow of information and interactive behavior.

Attention to animated movies is divided into unconscious and conscious forms. The unconscious form is the individual's relatively passive acceptance of the environment's transmission of animated content, such as television programs, parental arrangements, or topics talked about socially, etc., and stays in the passive input of information about animated works, and is less able to make active information choices. Conscious attention to animated films is

the respondents' personal active and spontaneous attention behavior, which is active information acquisition. Unconscious attention is passively influenced by communication and socialization, and conscious attention is also carried out through communication and social behavior. Conscious attention is mostly transformed from unconscious attention.

Conscious and unconscious attention to animated films, Personal Interests, Movie-going experience, which were categorized as secondary coded Viewer Behavior. The coding process is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Three coding table.

Tertiary	Codes Secondary	Codes Open Codes
Audience factor	Audience Preferences	Personal Interest Movie Experience
	Audience Behavior	Concerns about animation Unconscious Attention Conscious attention
External factor	Dissemination Impact	Low dissemination impact High dissemination impact
		Policy-Oriented
	Corporate Behavior	Patterns of production
	Social influence	Social factors have influence Socialization factors have no effect

3.2.4 Influential factors model of audience viewing motivation in Chinese animation market

Through the comprehensive analysis of the influencing factors of audience viewing motivation in Chinese animation market, four secondary codes are finally obtained, which are communication influence, policy orientation, company behavior and social influence, and they are grouped into a tertiary code named External Factors. In contrast, Audience Behavior is an Individual Factor. External factors reflect the reality of Chinese animation cultural environment, which is macroscopic and comprehensive, and it ultimately and specifically affects the audience's viewing behavior of animation films. Taking animated film audiences as the central object, External Factors are peripheral factors that have an impact on the audience's viewing dynamics. The space in which animation movie audiences live is a complex synthesis of physical space, cyberspace and spiritual space, and individual thoughts, emotions and activities are all affected by the external space.

The model of the influencing factors of the audience's movie-going motivation in Chinese animation market is shown in Figure 2.

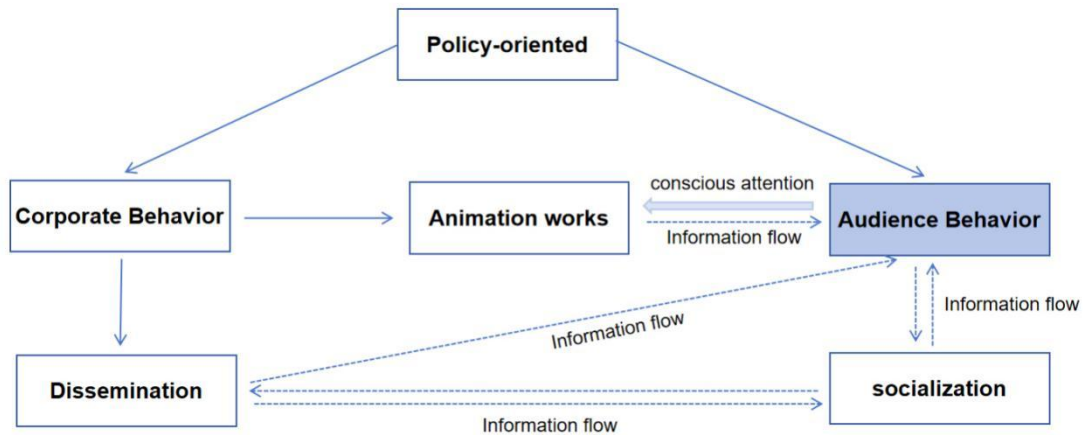


Figure 2: The model of the influencing factors of the audience's movie going motivation in Chinese animation market

According to the principle of ELM model, the content scope of Central Route and Peripheral Route of Chinese animation industry audience can be analyzed. As shown in Figure 2, The Central Route occurs between the Dissemination to Audience Behavior information chain and the Socialization to Audience Behavior information chain. And Dissemination will use Socialization as an intermediate link to deliver content to Audience, thus influencing Audience Behavior. These two information chains are the Central Route that influences Chinese audience's motivation to watch animation.

Policy-Oriented in the external environment has a greater influence on the Chinese audience in terms of the Peripheral Route. when the audience lacks the ability to understand the message, they will prefer to process the message along this Peripheral Route. This Peripheral Route demonstrates the higher authority of the information transmitter, which has a greater influence on the audience. Policy-Oriented also influences the information to the audience by influencing the behavior of the company, which in turn influences the communication, which is a Peripheral Route.

The information dissemination of the Corporate Behavior to the audience is firstly the Peripheral Route, but the company transforms the information into the Central Route through the communication strategy, marketing method, and with the help of all kinds of media platforms, and finally completes the transmission of the information, which has an impact on the audience's movie-watching behavior. Scholars Wang & Li (2022) pointed out that marketing is indispensable to every aspect of the animation movie industry. But today's Chinese animated movies generally only focus on the production of the movie, they ignore the marketing, which is another important reason for the box office failure of Chinese animated movies. From the ELM model, it can be seen that it is very important to deliver information to the audience through the communication platform.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Viewing Behaviors of Young Generation Animation Audiences in the New Era

This study found that young animation audiences in the new era can be categorized into two groups: general audiences and core fans. These two groups exhibit significant differences in their viewing behaviors and experiences.

General audience viewing is characterized primarily by individualistic viewing with relatively low levels of engagement and serendipity. Their viewing choices are easily influenced by information disseminated on online platforms, such as social media and recommendation algorithms. Since animation is just one of their many interests, their viewing behavior lacks regularity, exhibiting a random pattern. Many of them have the ability to think independently and are full of curiosity, willing to explore, experiment and experience. Some of them also pursue innovation and individuality, and once they have formed their own personal opinions or preferences, it is often difficult to change them. This individualized viewing style leads to a more fragmented viewing experience, lacking a strong sense of group belonging.

The film-watching behaviors of experienced fans show strong concentration and depth. They have a strong interest in animated films and usually follow up closely on the release dates of animated works and keep a high level of attention. These viewers are more inclined to go to the cinema to watch animated films and are willing to pay for the animated works they are interested in. Veteran animated film fans have a high need for social interaction and are more likely to share, communicate and confide in like-minded partners. Senior animation movie fans strive to find groups with common interests, have a high demand for animation social platforms, and even take the initiative to build relevant platforms to establish animation social circles when no social platforms are available, forming a group phenomenon of “fan circles” that heavily rely on cultural links, emotional discipline, and consent to commercial interference (Mao et al., 2023). These social circles are often based on a particular theme and are particularly common among Japanese anime fans, hence the term “social fandom” (Katz et al. 2024). By establishing and maintaining these exclusive social circles, they not only deepen their love for specific animation works, but also promote the dissemination and development of related cultures.

4.2 Audience Cultivation

Many viewers' preferences for certain animation styles are shaped by the works they have watched or their work experiences. This reflects people's tendency to pay more attention to familiar things. Many respondents also indicated that their childhood viewing experiences have become lifelong memories, and they can still fondly recall the animated works, characters, and stories from their childhood. Many respondents mentioned that their parents were not interested in watching animated works and believed that animations were created solely for children. However, a large proportion of respondents stated that their current interest in animated films has led them to continue watching animations even in middle age or old age.

This phenomenon is closely related to the development of internet television media in China. The current generation over 40 grew up in the era of satellite television, while college students born after 2000 grew up in an era of widespread internet television and the internet. Technological advancements have provided people with more opportunities to watch animated works, enriching their viewing experiences. The audience for animated works is also changing, with many animations now targeting adult audiences, and people's perceptions of the animation viewing audience are evolving. All of this indicates that the audience for animation is expanding. However, more importantly, people's interest and passion for animation can be cultivated. Cultivating audiences is an act of public institutions and enterprises. Enterprises and public institutions need to transmit relevant information to audiences through communication platforms and cultivate audiences' attention to animated films through the Central Route information chain.

Firstly, audiences have a deep emotional connection to their childhood viewing experiences. This emotional attachment fuels their anticipation for adaptations and keeps them engaged with related animated films even in adulthood. This emotional continuity is a significant factor driving box office success. Therefore, animation works should focus on the development and accumulation of IP from the beginning of creation, establish high-quality IP, save promotion costs (Pan et al., 2019), establish the audience's emotional connection to the animation IP, and provide possibilities for excellent animation works to continue to develop.

Secondly, the general audience is significantly influenced by information disseminated through online networks. With the prevalence of social media and various online platforms, information about animated films can spread rapidly. The reviews, recommendations, and word-of-mouth that audiences obtain online significantly influence their viewing decisions. The widespread dissemination through the internet not only increases the exposure of animated films but also enhances their recognition and discussion among audiences, thereby promoting box office growth.

5. Conclusions

With the help of ELM model, this study analyzes the influencing factors of viewers' motivation in Chinese animation market. 5 secondary codes of Audience Behavior, Dissemination Impact, Policy-Oriented, Corporate Behavior and Social Influence were obtained, and finally summarized into 2 tertiary codes of Individual Factors and External Factors, and constructs a model of the influencing factors of the audience's movie going motivation in Chinese animation market.

From the model, two Central Route and two Peripheral Route are analyzed. The Central Route occurs in the information chain from Dissemination to Audience Behavior, and Socialization to Audience Behavior; the Policy-Oriented Route in the external environment has a greater impact on Chinese audiences, especially when the audience lacks the ability to understand the information; the company transforms the information from the Peripheral Route to the Central Route through dissemination strategies and marketing methods, and finally completes the transmission of information to the audience. When the audience lacks the ability to understand the information, the company will transform the information from the Peripheral Route to the Central Route through the dissemination strategy, marketing method and various media platforms, and finally complete the transmission of the information, which will have an impact on the movie-viewing behavior of the audience. These chains of information are the effective ways to influence the audience in the Chinese market, and provide suggestions for the company's product strategy development and the direction of the macro market policy.

Through this study, it can be learned that the new era of young group of animation viewers general audience and senior fans of the two groups, they have significant differences in the viewing behavior and viewing experience. Secondly, the audience's animation hobbies and interests can be cultivated, and the animation environment in which the respondents lived in their early years had a greater impact on their viewing preferences in adulthood. These findings offer some strategic suggestions on how the animation industry can improve audience motivation to watch movies.

Chinese animation studios need to plan for the long term and effectively utilize communication media to attract and cultivate audience interest in animation. At the same time, they should utilize modern communication methods to expand their influence and enhance the audience's

emotional connection, and pay special attention to the maintenance of the children's animation audience. Through systematic production and promotion strategies, Chinese animation studios can cultivate fans of their own animation IPs, enhance the market performance of their works, and gain an advantage in the fierce market competition. The findings and the model constructed in this study are characteristic of the Chinese animation market as well as universal features, and are of reference value for animation market-making companies and market policies in different regions around the world.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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