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What digital revolution? Cinema-going as practice

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Abstract:
This empirical study investigated how the social nature of cinema is affected by the technological developments that have led to the converging of different media. The article is based on the data collected through 21 qualitative interviews with Finnish cinema-goers and focuses on the open-ended variety of what people say and do in relation to film-viewing. Analysed within the framework of practice theory, this article hopes to offer some useful tools for understanding how cinema-going fits into people's lives within the media manifold that involves a complex web of delivery platforms. The findings presented offer hope for the survival of cinema-going as a popular way of watching films based on two key arguments. Firstly, the inherent social functions of cinema-going render it less vulnerable to technological innovation than depicted by those arguing for its expiry. Technological developments, such as the increasing use of social media, are reshaping the social aspects of cinema-going and prompting new ways of engaging with its sociality. Secondly, due to the instantaneity of living in a digitally networked setting, the space of cinema theatre is used for *going offline*. Consequently, the popularity of cinema-going seems to be indirectly reinvented through some of the same technological changes that are challenging it.

Keywords: cinema audience, cinema-going, digital era, sociality, practice theory, socially oriented media theory

Introduction

In April 2016 *New York Times* published an article in their 'movies' section, where two of their chief film critics discussed cinema-going in an era of omnipresent screens. This article was titled 'In an era of streaming, cinema is under attack' (Scott & Dargis 2016). Popular reports, similar to the article in the *New York Times*, have recently focused on the topic of cinema-going being replaced by accessing films through the wide variety of non-theatrical

distribution platforms. News stories from Cannes International Film Festival in spring 2017 followed the debate that revolved around the issue of the exclusivity of the theatrical release window. The impacts of digitalisation on film distribution and viewing seem to be considered as much of a worry as they are an almost organic part of our lives. What these popular accounts seem to be sidestepping is that cinema-going is about much more than the simple act of watching a film (Meers & Biltereyst 2012, 124-125).

In scholarly debates, cinema has so far been declared dead for many reasons, some concerning its aesthetic quality or the implications of digitalisation (Belton 2014, 460-461; Verhoeven 2013, 35-37). The notion regarding the death of cinema has always been closely linked with the technological developments that have changed it (Belton 2014, 460-462). As Belton (2014, 460) outlined, 'along one axis of its development, the cinema threatened to destroy itself through inner technological change; along another, it was the potential victim of other media'. As a result of this, cinema-going has been labelled as an outdated mode of viewing films (Allen 2011, 58-59). Or as Van De Vijver (2017) explains,

> … 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. Cinemas are presented as cultural institutions sitting out a nostalgic term of office. (p.130)

For some time, it has been the convergence of different media viewed from a technologically deterministic point of view that seems to be the origin for the predictions of cinema becoming replaced by other modes of viewing (Corbett 2001, 28-32; Van de Vijver 2017, 130). Arguing for convergence culture, Jenkins (2006, 26-27) pointed out that 'old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies'. Looking back, substitution effect doesn't seem plausible. According to Corbett (2001, 32), as long as people have the need to go out and be around other people it is unlikely that cinema could become replaced by other technologies. Indeed, as argued by Aveyard (2016, 147), 'cinema clearly remains dynamic and expanding, hugely culturally popular and economically relevant'. However, there seems to be a gap in the discussion regarding substitution and digitalisation that needs to be addressed by researching contemporary cinema-going with a wider focus which considers how digitalisation is shifting the status of cinema and in what direction these shifts are taking cinema-going.

Aveyard (2016) suggests the applicability of social practice theory and more specifically socially oriented media theory in theorising about contemporary film consumption (Couldry 2012). Practice theory is a branch of social theory focused on practices, rather than structures, systems, individuals or interactions (Postill 2010, 1). By applying practice theory in this context, the focus is on audience practices that are either directly or indirectly related to film viewing. The term 'practice theory' should not be confused with the combination of practice and theory, often encountered within the

disciplines of arts and design. Although practice theory can also be applied to studying media production, in this article the focus will be on the question of cinema in everyday life (Postill 2010, 15). The research presented in this article will be situated within the framework of socially oriented media theory with the intention of providing some useful tools and preliminary empirical data for understanding how cinema-going is shaped by digitalisation and whether cinema is threatened by other (digital) media. The data explored in this empirical study consists of 21 qualitative interviews with Finnish cinemagoers.

Towards studying contemporary film audiences

Understanding audiences' film viewing experiences in social context has tended to develop along two main branches of inquiry (Aveyard 2016, 144). Reception studies of contemporary audiences have employed ethnographic and anthropological methods, but maintained a 'one film-one audience' approach (Meers & Biltereyst 2012, 131-132; Aveyard 2016, 144-145). While these studies have taken into account the sociocultural situations of the viewer, the research has been limited to studying the relationships between the viewers and the text with limited capacity to explain 'what else the viewing encounter might be about' (Aveyard 2016, 144-145). Dealing with the wider social aspects of cinema-going is the field of new cinema history. New cinema history directs the attention to distribution and exhibition companies and social factors that seem to have had an impact on cinema attendance. As Meers and Biltereyst (2012, 129) explain, 'this broad scholarly examination of film reception has gone hand in hand with an empirical, historical and spatial turn in film studies'. However, as argued by Aveyard (2016, 145), if we want to make sense out of the diverse ways in which films are viewed today, we should look beyond the limitations of place and space, and concentrate on finding new ways of how to understand the non-linear and fluctuating ways audiences move between different viewing options. As suggested by Aveyard (2016) and further explored in this article, one way to gain insight on contemporary film consumption is to redirect the focus to the underlying social functions and practices of cinema-going. Studying contemporary audiences as social practice is not a new development as pointed out in an overview by Meers and Biltereyst (2012, 133). However, these studies haven't been conducted using the theoretical framework of social practice theory.

Aveyard (2016, 145-146) argues that socially oriented media theory offers a kind of an umbrella for analysing film-viewing in its various forms across the range of non-theatrical distribution platforms. The argument Aveyard (2016, 146-147) puts forward is that previous film audience ethnographies by Corbett (1998-1999) and Jones (2011, 2013) which have studied film viewing in both theatrical and non-theatrical settings, provide evidence that watching films is part of wider social practice. In Corbett's (1998-1999) study, American middle-class couples were interviewed about their film viewing practices. Whereas, Jones' (2011, 2013) work is based on student essays from young adults of Generation Y or as Jones has named it, 'the VHS generation' (Jones 2013, 389). These studies bring forward the finding that watching films, either at home or at the cinema, is an important way of

spending time with one's partner or family. Situating this in the context of social practice theory, Aveyard (2016, 146) points out that watching films answers to a specific need of devoting time for family and is therefore a part of a wider social practice of 'making time'. Indeed, there are more social practices such as this to be found in these ethnographies. For example, in Jones' (2011, 101) article, another practice of 'making connections' is brought forward. Interestingly Jones (2011, 102) also suggest that film viewing in all its forms could be better understood using the term of 'movie habitus', because this term emphasises geography and place-based practices.

While social practice theory has been used elsewhere to study the use of other (digital) media, it hasn't been applied to studying contemporary film consumption. Aveyard's (2016) call for the use of social practice theory in film audience research is focused on expanding the study of non-theatrical cinema. The research presented in this article follows this call but shifts the focus and an empirical exercise is conducted by applying this approach to studying cinema-going. In order to do this, the focus is on the wider context of what people say and do in relation to cinema-going (Couldry, 2012; Heikkilä & Ahva 2015). Furthermore, film consumption is related to the vast array of other media technologies that we engage with on daily basis and practice theory as interpreted by Couldry (2011, 2012) can provide an access point to exploring this (Aveyard 2016, 147). Therefore, in an attempt to make sense of cinema-going practices in the increasingly complicated setting of media manifold, this article tests the applicability of social practice theory for studying contemporary film viewing practices.

Theorising film-viewing as practice

The approach applied in this empirical analysis of cinema-going originates from sociology. In sociology, there have been two recognisable waves of practice theorists that should be noted. The first wave happened around the 70s and 80s with sociologists such as Bourdieu and Giddens. The second wave was situated around the end of the 90s and the beginning of the new millennium, when Theodor Schatzki picked up the debate. This was then followed by scholars such as Reckwitz and Warde. This essay won't go into much detail about the history of practice within social theory as others have done so sufficiently elsewhere (see for Postill 2010, 1-32; Couldry 2012, 33-58). What should be noted however is that practice theory is not one unified theory, rather it should be seen more as '"trading zone", where scholars exchange ideas on how to theorize practice to help organize empirical research and thus our understanding of the world in which we live in' (Ahva 2016, 1525).

As Ahva (2016, 1525) summarises, 'where practice theory has been applied beyond sociology and anthropology, practice has been lifted up as the primary organizing concept, whereas it used to be mostly a supporting one. The benefit this implies is that when focusing on practice it helps to avoid the overemphasis on the role of institutions or norms, texts or representations, beliefs or individual mental processes as the primary explainers of the social and cultural' (see also Bueger & Gadinger 2014, 5).

To adapt practice theory to the analysis of film-viewing practice, we need to look at how practice theory made its way to media studies. It seems that even though the notion of practice is in no way new to media studies, it has failed to gain a central position in the past. That is why it has stayed relatively under-theorized. Only recently it has been picked up in for example journalism studies in order to fill the gap for a more open-ended approach to theorising about the role of journalism in everyday life (Heikkilä & Ahva 2015; Ahva 2016). However, it was over a decade ago that Couldry first called for this shift for a new research paradigm within media studies (Couldry 2004).

Despite the lack of a unified practice theory, in order to conduct analysis within this framework we need to define some initial boundaries for what is meant by 'practice'. A useful definition for this I borrow from Reckwitz (2002, 250): 'a practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.' And as outlined by Heikkilä & Ahva (2014, 52), by studying practices it is possible to understand how people's lives become orderly and meaningful. In order to bring this closer to studying media, or in this case film-viewing and cinema-going, as practice, the focus of the enquiry should be the open-ended variety of things that people say and do in relation to film-viewing/cinema-going (Couldry 2012).

To further unpack this definition and its applicability to studying any media-related questions at hand, we need to distinguish some central features of practice. First of all, practice is *social* (Couldry 2012, 33) and *socially recognised* (Ahva 2016, 1526). Meaning that practice is a form of action that can be performed and is socially recognizable to more than separate individuals (Ahva 2016, 1526). It is a type of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds (Reckwitz 2002, 250). Secondly, practice is defined by the *regularity* of actions (Couldry 2012, 33). Hence why practices are *routinized* and repeatable, which is what makes them collective and shared. Thirdly, practices are *embodied* (Ahva 2016, 1526). According to Ahva, this refers to the idea that practices are enacted by humans or as Reckwitz (2002, 250) describes this distinguishable feature of practice:

> The single individual – as a bodily and mental agent – then acts as the 'carrier' of a practice – and, in fact, of many different practices which need not be coordinated with one another. Thus, she or he is not only a carrier of patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring.

Furthermore, according to Couldry (2012, 34) practice points to *need-related* things that we do. This is not a fixed set of human needs as understood in psychology, but in this context, we focus on investigating what type of specific social and cultural needs certain types of media outputs might meet and therefore contribute to the activities that they induce, and to what kind of practices these activities further contribute. Finally, all of the above can further be reduced to the definition that practice can be understood as a nexus of doings,

objects and sayings (Couldry 2004). Or, as unpacked by Ahva (2016, 1526), doings refer to activity such as moving and handling. Objects refer to materiality such as things and bodies. And sayings refer to discursive reflexivity such as describing and understanding.

The case of the audience: method, data and analysis

In this article, I will present the findings of a two-part qualitative study conducted in the Greater Helsinki region in Finland in April-May 2017. The first part of the study was conducted as an online questionnaire with open-ended questions about the participants' film-viewing habits. The aim of this online part of the study was to gather participants for the second phase of the study, which was conducted as semi-structured interviews. There are two main features that need to be unpacked in relation to the sampling method that was applied in this study. Following in the footsteps of cultural audience research, the focus of this study was on what the audiences do, rather than on who the audiences are (Heikkilä & Ahva 2012; Ridell 2006; Couldry 2012).

Therefore, in the first phase of the study people were only asked questions relating to the ways in which they choose to watch films rather than demographic dimensions. Having said that, even though the area for the survey was initially not restricted in any way, only five respondents out of the initial fifty-seven were from outside the Greater Helsinki area. The invitation to participate in the survey was distributed through several different online channels, such as mailing lists of different universities of applied sciences, Twitter, the research project's webpage and through the mailing lists of a number of cinemas.

Out of the initial fifty-seven respondents forty-eight indicated that they were willing to participate in the interview phase. The respondents were divided into two groups based loosely on the preference they indicated for their ways of watching films. The first group were people who, in their answers, indicated that they engage in film-viewing through more traditional ways, such as watching films in a cinema, borrowing DVDs from the library or just waiting until they were aired on television. The second group were respondents who indicated that they go to the cinema and also watch films at home and other locations through more contemporary ways such as using streaming services. The first group also included respondents who stated a clear preference for watching films in a cinema. This division into two groups was eventually discarded, as it seemed inappropriate to impose such a prejudice for studying the open-ended variety of things people say and do in relation to film viewing. From these forty-eight respondents, half were invited for interviews and twenty-one out of the twenty-four invitees participated in the final stage.

The transcripts from the interviews were qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis. This method was chosen due to its flexibility as it is an appropriate way to minimally organise the data set and therefore makes it possible to describe it in rich detail (Braun & Clarke 2006, 79). Thematic analysis is a process in which it is necessary to move constantly back and forward between the entire data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, 86). This process started already before the transcription as the data was collected, transcribed and analysed by one researcher. This was helpful for getting to know the entire data set from

the beginning and making notes on initial coding schemes. It should be made explicit that the data set was analysed with a rather theoretical approach. Meaning that relevant literature to the analysis was engaged at an early stage of the research process. Such an approach may be criticized for narrowing down the analytic focus. However, in this particular case it can be argued that it was helpful for finding more subtle features of the data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, 87).

Braun and Clarke (2006) have outlined six key steps for conducting thematic analysis: 1. Familiarising yourself with data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing your themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Producing the report (Flick 2014, 421-423; Braun & Clarke 2006, 87). The analysis for this research article followed these steps but in a flexible manner. Meaning that each of these steps was taken during the analysis, but the process was not as straightforward as these six steps indicate. As mentioned before, there is constant movement back and forward not only within the data set but also between these steps. In this analysis, initial coding was done manually, followed by entering the data set and codes into Atlas.ti. Using a data handling software made it easier to examine the whole data set. In the third phase of thematic analysis process, themes that represent patterned responses within the data set are searched for (Braun & Clarke 2006, 82). In thematic analysis, there is no clear guideline for what counts as a theme (Braun & Clarke 2006, 82-83). This means that a certain theme's importance can't be based solely on how frequently it comes up in the data set. Therefore, the researcher has an active role in deciding on what themes should be considered important based on how significant they are in terms of answering the overall research question. For the findings presented in this article this feature of thematic analysis was central. In order to highlight how contemporary cinema-going is shaped by the development of surrounding everyday technologies, it was important to pay careful attention to defining the themes that were central for answering the research question. Inevitably this also means discarding certain themes that are deemed less relevant for the overall research question even if they would have enough data to support them.

Acquiring information: Searching, selecting and following

For the interviewees, the experience of cinema-going starts already before they actually step into the theatre. Before the film people traditionally select the film, purchase the ticket and possibly some snacks. Tuning in for the cinema-going experience and selecting the film has modern-day aspects that technological advances have brought with them. Besides visiting the websites of the chosen theatres to read the synopsis, searching for additional information online beforehand is a central part of contemporary cinema-going.

> I do try to find out about them (films) and I have a clear vision about what it is that I want to see. But not necessarily when I want to see them or which showing I'm going to go to. (Male 28)

Kino Sheryl (local cinema) sends out this e-newsletter once a week. The content of the film is nicely explained there and you get the idea of what you are going to go and watch. Also, online then, I check Finnkino's (multiplex) website for the trailers and I try to understand from that what it is that I'm going to be seeing. (Female 61)

While all of the interviewees seemed to think that being selective about what one goes to see in the cinema is important, reasons why being selective is important varied from wanting to get an experience that is money's worth to the effort that a visit to the cinema takes. The ticket price was seen more important in the case of visiting the multiplex.

Somehow, I think that when I go to the cinema and I pay the ticket price and make the effort to go out, and it does take time. Somehow, I think I want to see a smarter film. Something like this is my thought process. (Female 58)

I think that when you are poor, well poor and poor, but a student at least. If you go somewhere like Finnkino which is more expensive, then I'm really precise about what I want to get. That I want it to be a wonderful experience and even if it then turns out to be a bad film I won't leave in the middle of it. (Female 26)

On top of searching online for information about the films before going to the cinema, the interviewees talked about a number of other ways they became aware of information about up and coming or current showings. The interviewees also spoke about being constantly exposed to this information without actually being able to separate where they had received the information from. This was especially the case for having picked up information about films via trailers circulated on social media sites either by friends or as part of targeted marketing campaigns.

I just notice that a lot of people were talking about it and it randomly came up on my social media news feed, the trailer of the new *Blade Runner*. It's that kind of situation, when I remember that some trailers show up and then they stick in my mind. (Female 26)

Nowadays it's pretty much just that they (adverts) come up on social media. On Facebook there's regularly Finnkino's trailers. Same on YouTube, it's trailers … I rarely go on Finnkino's website to find out what's coming, it's more that I find a film because it's directly advertised to me. (Female 27)

There's also a fine line between receiving useful information through this constant exposure to, for example, trailers and actively selecting out in order to avoid spoilers.

If it's a certain film I know I want to watch, like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, then I turn it right off and block any additional adverts. But if it's a film that I have no clue about, then I find out pretty fast if I haven't decided yet. I watch the trailer a bit and then I move on. Then when I've made the decision that I want to watch it, I won't watch anymore trailers for it. (Female 27)

Choosing cinema: special feeling, shared experience and going offline

All interviewees were unified in their views that technical properties, the big screen and superior sound systems, are a vital part of making cinema an attractive option to view films. This was then deemed more important in the case of certain types of films, and on the types of films the respondents had varying tastes. For example, one of the interviewees outlined that slow-paced art-house films are best viewed in the cinema, because one mightn't ever sit through an entire film at home or that art-house films have certain colour tones that require the technical qualities of the cinema. Others were more inclined to watch films with special effects in the cinema. The technical qualities therefore mean a number of things depending on the taste of the interviewee, but they were mostly deemed secondary for the overall experience of cinema-going. One of the interviewees described this,

> some films benefit from the big screen experience. Some slow-paced films, where the story is small and there are a lot of nuances, it is easier to concentrate in the cinema. Sometimes I've thought that certain films have been really good in the cinema. But when I've come out of the theatre I've thought to myself that if I had tried to watch that from a television screen, I would have probably interrupted at some point. If the story moves on pretty slow and there isn't much happening, it's easier to watch in the cinema than at home where there are so many distracting things. (Female 50)

More essential for the interviewees was 'a special feeling' only provided by the cinema. This feeling, while the dark room, big screen and the sound system all contribute to it, more importantly requires a personalised, recognisable feeling exclusive to the cinema. A combination of a collective feeling and familiarity of the event. Special feeling came up in number of the interviews,

> it's that special feeling of watching in the dark. I could watch films in a dark room at home with a big screen, but it wouldn't be the same. In a cinema, you are together with other people, but you are still there alone. (Male 62)

> It is an experience. It's different than sitting at home on the couch or garage or whatever. It's a shared experience. It's almost like a sing-along. Watching something together. Although, you don't need to do much else than receive it. It has a special feeling to it. (Male 46)

> It has a certain excitement and thrill, but also a kind of a familiar feeling. Everything is always the same there. There's a comfortable feeling, the lights dim, curtains open slightly and you just know there's going to be couple of hours of probably quite fun. It's that. Maybe it's a recognizable feeling. (Female 26)

Based on the interviews, the social nature of contemporary cinema-going is a complex issue. Although all of the interviewees said to watch films with friends or family, a preference for watching films alone in the cinema was a central part of many interviews. Reasons for preferring to watch films alone were not having to talk about selecting the films beforehand and scheduling. Getting to concentrate solely on viewing the films without having to socialise before, during or after the film.

> I don't need company per se, it's enough that there are others there breathing. (Female 62)

> If it's a new film I like to go and watch it by myself. So that I can take it all in in peace and process it. And then if I like it and I know that my friends would too, then I can watch it again together with them and enjoy it collectively. (Male 32)

> I like it somehow that I get to turn my brain off, that I don't have to talk about the film with anyone straightaway if I don't want to. I can be truly impressed or disappointed or whatever, I don't know. It's never been a problem for me to go alone. Maybe it's also that I don't have to discuss what to go and see and when does it suit. I can make the schedule right on that minute. Like I said … if I get the feeling that I want to for example laugh, then I don't have to start thinking that the other person mightn't like it or have they already seen it. It's that I get to dictate for myself what I watch and when, and with whom and therefore I choose to watch them alone. (Female 52)

To many of the interviewees, going to the cinema alone was a part of visiting smaller one- to two-screen cinemas. Especially if they lived nearby it, then there was a distinct aspect of spontaneity and this spontaneity was linked to going to the cinema alone, even if cinema had previously been a social event. One of the interviewees described this spontaneity as 'jumping' to the cinema,

> all of a sudden, I just jump. I'm like: keys, money and out the door. There and back. I mean that the decision of going to the cinema can happen in an instant. It's not anymore about whether someone comes along or not or that I couldn't be bothered going alone. (Female 67)

Distractions (häiriötekijät) were an overarching theme of the interviews. This concept of distractions was something that every interviewee brought up in one way or the other when discussing the topic of cinema-going. Interestingly when the interviewees were asked to describe their cinema-going habits, the replies also included a description of why watching films in a cinema is preferred over watching films at home. In most cases 'distractions' was the exact term used. Some of the distractions have been around for a longer period, such as living with other people or personal traits of restlessness.

> Because we are a five people in the family there's usually always someone moving around the house. Going out or coming in. That always disrupts watching a film. (Female 50)

What is of interest here is how the interviewees pointed out that distractions are closely linked to modern technology i.e. the instantaneity of network time (Couldry 2012, 56). And this was one of the prominent underlying reasons why cinema was the preferred way of watching films. For the majority of the interviewees, the cinema theatre, the dark space where everyone is expected to turn off their phones, offers a cocoon of a naturally offline environment. It is a place where going offline is required. To many this means a couple of hours of 'me time', 'my time alone with the film' or 'an opportunity to be immersed in the film'.

> You get a far more comprehensive view and you actually concentrate on the film. And now I notice that watching a film at home has changed quite a lot after the introduction of smart devices. You easily react if you get a SMS or something. Interrupt the film and then you don't get the same enjoyment out of it anymore when you do that. I realise I should be able to concentrate the same way at home, but in reality, that just doesn't work. In cinemas, I like that when I go there that I really go there, that I concentrate fully on the film. (Female 50)

> In a film theatre, it is way easier to concentrate. There are no distractions. It's just the film there, on a big screen and it's easier to be immersed than at home. Where I feel, there's the phone, computer and everything imaginable as distractions so that I can't concentrate in the same way. That's something I notice, that has become like the biggest thing about it (cinema-going), that you have two to three hours of alone time with the film, nothing else. (Male 28)

> Even though I really like films, I'm often really restless, I get distracted easily and might start doing something while I watch the film. But when I go to the cinema it's a moment when I just sit there and watch the film and do nothing

else… Otherwise, I might start fiddling with my phone surf on IMDB and check out things from there, or knitting or checking how I've spent my money this week. (Female 25)

I might get lost there and forget that I'm even watching the film when I'm suddenly googling the director and actor … it really is different when watching at home, you know? With a phone in hand… You have to make a conscious choice to take it to another room or something. Otherwise it will be there the whole time. It's almost like a body part now, the damn phone. And it does disturb film-viewing and life in general. (Female 44)

In all of these cases going to the cinema helps to shut out, not only the surroundings in the immediate physical world, but also the continuous online presence that has become an organic part of our lives.

Sharing the experience: Tagging and commenting

Adding to the argument that cinema-going is inherently a social experience, whether the sociality of it being the collective experience of watching together with others in a theatre or going to the cinema together with a group of friends, sharing information about the experience is a vital part of it. Nowadays a large part of the sharing happens online on social media sites.

A commonly shared and popular practice related to cinema-going is tagging. This is seen as a subtle way of letting others know that you go to the cinema and in some cases what you think of the film. For those who described themselves as being more passionate about films than their immediate social circles the subtlety seems like a central issue. While some feel, they want to promote cinema-going and encourage others to watch certain films or recommend cinema-going as a nice thing to do, tagging was seen as a subtle way to do this and possibly after it leave a comment to express some thoughts about the film they had watched.

My friends already know I go to the cinema a lot. But I always give them that (location on fb). I don't push what I've seen. I don't need to discuss about the films I've seen if there isn't anyone who'd like to do that with me. My own experience is enough for me. If someone asks me if I've seen any good films lately I might say 'yes I liked this and that'. But no. I usually just tag myself… And a small part of me also wants to encourage others to go to the cinema, so that they would experience how great it is. (Female 52)

I don't want to create too much hype, because there's so much uncertainty involved in it… Just before the film I usually post that I'm watching such and such. (Male 32)

Often I post the location on Facebook and that I'm watching. I also post a short comment about it and if I liked it… If I post it before the film it might say with whom and what kind of expectations I have and then (after) in the comment section what it was like. Or if I post after the film I might just post a recommendation. It really depends whether I make the post before or after the film. (Female 32)

I write reviews on my blog… And when I go to the cinema I usually use Facebook's I'm watching such and such and such. I also write something like 'been waiting for this' or something like that. I also comment under the post after the film just a few lines of what I thought and maybe like 3/5 or something. Because all my friends already know I will post it on my blog. So, it's like a teaser for them about the review that follows. (Male 28)

The last time I posted that I'm visiting this cinema and then it automatically asked me. I added the location and it asked me what I'm watching. Then I wrote the name of the film and it shows up as a status. Nothing special about it. (Female 44)

An interesting aspect about commenting on films online was the conscious effort of refraining from commenting unless the commentary was going to be at least remotely positive. Many of the interviewees felt that posting negative comments about films is unnecessary, because film tastes vary so much.

Exploring the practices

According to Couldry (2012, 57), when theorising media as practice the focus of interest is actions that are directly oriented to media, actions that involve media without necessarily having media as their aim or object and actions whose possibility is conditioned by the prior existence, presence or functioning of the media. In an era of media manifold, where the converging of different media still causes great uncertainties, the most interesting findings can be found in relation to the latter two, that is, the things people say and do that are not directly oriented to media as for example watching a film or reading a newspaper would be. Instead, the interesting findings are practices indirectly related to the act of watching a film. These practices, as presented earlier, involve a variety of actions that are involved in the wider practices of contemporary cinema-going and thus play a part in shaping it. In the following, some of these practices are explored against the theoretical background offered by socially oriented media theory (Couldry 2012).

The interviewees were quite unified in their view that going to the cinema requires a certain amount of prior knowledge, because with the current price of cinema admission, one can't run the risk of going to see a film without any prior knowledge of it. This in turn

then leads to an act of balancing between how much information can be looked up online or in a trailer without it spoiling the excitement of going to see a new film. In order to acquire prior knowledge, the interviewees described practices of *searching* and *search-enabling* (Couldry 2012, 45-46). Searching points to the activity of surfing away from the websites of the chosen theatres in order to find additional information. Search-enabling then is the practice where this additional information is distributed to others via sharing links or collecting the information somewhere to help others to narrow down their searches. Practices of search-enabling can be detected in relation to both interviewees linking their recommendations to their peers and theatres collecting additional information into weekly e-newsletters.

Some form of delimiting is a rising practice in many aspects related to cinema-going and in most part this seems to be a consequence of the digitally networked environment. For example, the constant flood of information. But delimiting goes further than that as was pointed out in the case of the distractions. In modern life of constant availability through a variety of smart devices, cinema-going constitutes itself as a part of another practice of going offline. Analysing this practice within the framework of socially oriented media theory, it is close to what Couldry (2012, 55-57) has theorised as the practice of *screening out*, which is a practice that is the result of another practice of *keeping all channels open*. Couldry (2012, 56) mentions that the filtering of the information flood is often outsourced to a device such as the smart phone. This is in line with what the interviewees said about going to the cinema. Such outsourcing is also present in cinema-going, where the space of the cinema theatre is the filter. It is an offline environment by default. In a cinema, the respondents felt that they could really concentrate on the film without feeling the need to peek at their phones. In this case, technological developments (the multiplication of viewing options and the alleged threats they bring with them), and the parallel developments of living in a constantly networked environment emphasized the status of cinema-going.

Using Facebook for tagging oneself in the cinema (location) and what film they were watching was also a commonly shared practice and a natural part of cinema-going for many of the interviewees. This practice is also in line with what Couldry (2012, 50-51) calls *presencing*. Couldry (2012, 50) defines it as a distinctive practice, because it is 'oriented to a permanent site in public space that is distinctively marked by the producer for displaying *that* producer's self … it responds to an emerging requirement in everyday life to *have* a public presence beyond one's bodily presence, to construct an objectification of oneself.' Couldry (2012, 51) further discusses the relation of presencing to the need to being present to others. This is interesting for the idea of tagging oneself in the cinema and what they are watching. Within this framework of socially oriented media theory it could be interpreted that this is closely linked to attending the cinema alone, but then being present to others by posting it online.

Linked to tagging and the practice of presencing is the practice of *commenting*. Commentary is something Couldry (2012, 54-55) describes as a practice we engage in because we feel the need to point at something interesting that we have just come by, in

order to help others to select from the constant flood of information and things. The interviewees described to be using the original post where they had tagged themselves to the cinema, with a view to leave a comment about the film after they'd seen it. This in turn, is an example of how practices can be linked to one another, because commenting usually followed the practice of tagging. Commenting was used in order to point out to others any possible recommendations regarding films. It should be noted though that many of the interviews said that they only made positive comments. If a film disappointed them, they were careful about what they would comment about it on their online posts.

Conclusion

The research presented in this article introduced some of the ways in which the social nature of cinema meets the technological developments that have led to the converging of different media. One of the aims of this research was to find out to what extent technological developments might have an impact on cinema-going in the sense that whether there was any basis for the arguments that cinema-going is an outdated way of watching films. Or whether cinema could indeed become the victim of other media (Belton 2014, 460-462). The preliminary findings point to something quite contrary. The social nature of cinema-going was a starting point rather than a discovery in this article. Many aspects of the findings argue on behalf of the inherent social nature of cinema-going. Another aim of this article was to find out whether socially oriented media theory could offer some insight on contemporary cinema-going practices. Studying the open set of practices relating to or oriented around film viewing in cinemas provides an entry point to understanding how cinema-going still maintains its popularity. Even in the case that films can be accessed through a variety of distribution platforms in a progressively simple manner from practically anywhere one chooses to do so. This is in theory at least, because as pointed out earlier in this article cinema-going still meets a very distinct set of needs that can't be replaced by other modes of viewing.

Cinema's technical superiority seems to persist, but this is only secondary compared to the overall 'special feeling' of visiting the cinema. It should be pointed out, though, that the special feeling is made up of much more than just the technical properties or the atmosphere within a cinema theatre. The finding that cinema-going is seen as very much a social thing is hardly a new discovery. However, the social nature of cinema-going and film-viewing in general now has more layers than it possibly did before. On top of cinema-going being a social event, either due to going to the cinema in the company of friends, family or just because there are others in the same space. Followed by discussing the experience with one's immediate social circles such as workplace or hobbies. The discussion for many of the interviewees happened online. Either with friends, family or for some even with people that they don't actually know, in the traditional sense of knowing someone in person in the physical world. The place for discussion could be just as much based on a shared hashtag, commenting on other people's public posts, or belonging to a shared interest group for example on Facebook. As for visiting the cinema alone, the extended sociality of a visit to

the cinema could be reduced to announcing one's location on Facebook supplemented with the name of the film. Social media's impact on the sociality of cinema-going offers interesting ground for further exploration.

Interestingly cinema-going was also used for going offline. Aveyard (2016, 146) points out that the studies by Corbett (1998-1999) and Jones (2011, 2013) question 'the presumed distracted nature of the domestic viewer'. However, as pointed out in this article, distractions caused by living a life of constant availability was a significant distraction for the interviewees in non-theatrical modes of viewing. This raises further questions about the impacts of smart devices on film viewing in a domestic or other non-theatrical settings. Film theatres, on the other hand, have always involved some distractions. Traditionally these distractions have included noises and disturbing behaviour by other people. Nonetheless, for the interviewees in this study such distractions were secondary as long as they could engage in some offline time themselves. As Blake (2017, 537-538) discusses in a recent article regarding the use of second screens in cinemas, exhibitors seem to understand that many consider 'cinema as a sacred space for immersive personal experiences'. While special events might break this 'cinema etiquette', there has been significant criticism for the ideas to introduce the use of smart devices as part of the cinema experience (Blake 2017, 538). The practices related to cinema-going combined with the use of smart devices and social media are initial findings obtained through analysing the research against the theoretical background of social practice theory. These findings offer interesting opportunities for further research in both theatrical and non-theatrical settings.

Biographical note:

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Main themes/questions	Sub questions	Probes
Describe your film viewing habits (in general)	- Describe what film viewing means to you/what is the role of film viewing in your life? - How do you select what films to watch? - What are your thoughts on different viewing options? - How do you select mode of viewing films? - Who do you normally watch films with? - Describe how film viewing is situated in your (everyday) life. - Where do you watch films (other than cinemas)?	- Can you tell me more about this? - Can you tell me anything else? / Is there anything else that comes to mind? - Can you give me some examples?
Describe your cinema-going habits	- Describe what motivates you to go to the cinema. - Describe (your typical) visit to the cinema. - Who do you go to the cinema with? - How do you get/find information regarding cinemas and/or films? - Do you share information about cinemas and/or films with others? If so, describe how? - Do you discuss your film viewing experiences with others? If so, describe how?	
To start the interview: Please tell me a little bit about yourself (age, occupation, where do you live).	**To finish the interview:** Is there anything you'd like to add or anything that has come to mind during this interview?	