Technicity and Class Divisions:
From Historical Film Audiences to Digital Streaming

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Abstract

Cinema provides a critical framework to explore the intersections of technology, power, and class stratification. This paper investigates how technological and industrial developments—from mid-20th-century cinematic segmentation to contemporary streaming platforms—have reinforced societal divisions and shaped film production and consumption. Practices in the exhibition industry, such as the construction of single-screen theaters, established consumption patterns that distinguished audiences based on origin, education, and income, creating enduring class markers. Innovations in cinema technology, from subtitled films to IMAX screens, further solidified these divisions. In the streaming platforms era, historical patterns persist even with fragmented audiences. Media consumption behaviors highlight enduring societal and political tensions, with audience segments embracing opposing narratives such as nationalism versus globalism. National film industries, particularly outside Hollywood's dominance, have mirrored local audience segmentation, better reflecting social divisions in preferences and ideological values. This study employs a quantitative analysis of film consumption in Mexico City, the largest city in the country and the fourth-largest film market globally, from 1940 onward, accounting for socioeconomic and geographical variables of theaters and qualitative attributes of films. The dynamics of foreign and domestic content consumption, alongside the evolution of local film production, reveal how segmentation continues to shape media consumption. These findings illuminate the persistence of societal divides in both traditional and digital contexts, offering new insights into the relationship between media, technology, and class. This study's methodological design is adaptable and can be applied to analyze film consumption patterns in any urban context.

Keywords: Cinema segmentation, Media consumption patterns, Mixed methodology, Social stratification, Technological innovation.