



Getting younger

Ormax Media's report *Sizing The Cinema: 2023* estimates that Indian cinema has become a 'younger' medium now, compared to pre-pandemic. Here's why

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Summary

- Median age of a theatre-goer in India is 24.1 years, which is a significant drop vis-à-vis 27.5 years pre-pandemic, highlighting how cinema has become a 'younger' medium post-pandemic
 - Indian theatrical audience base saw an attrition of 23.7 Million theatrical audience as a result of the pandemic, almost all of which came from the 31+ yrs. Age group
 - The authors identify and analyse potential reasons for this age trend
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In February 2023, Ormax Media’s annual theatrical sizing report, titled Sizing The Cinema: 2023, was released. The report (know more [here](#)) highlights that India’s theatrical universe has shrunk by 16.3% compared to pre-pandemic, i.e., from 145.7 Million to 122.0 Million.

Which audience segments account for this attrition of 23.7 Million people? A closer look at the data by age segments tells a story about the impact of the pandemic on theatrical-viewing habits of the Indian audience. The table below captures the pre and post-pandemic theatrical audience base across different age segments.

Age Segment	Theatrical Audience (Mn): Pre-pandemic	Theatrical Audience (Mn): Current	% Change
<14 yrs.	14.5	16.6	+14
15-21 yrs.	35.0	34.5	-2
22-30 yrs.	32.1	29.5	-8
31-40 yrs.	26.2	18.2	-31
41+ yrs.	38.0	23.2	-39

The median age of India’s theatrical audience has dropped from 27.5 years pre-pandemic, to 24.1 years currently. The primary reason for this drop is the significant attrition in theatre-going among the 31+ yrs. age group. While the age segments below 30 years witnessed single digit reduction (with <14 yrs. actually witnessing a growth of 14%), the 31+ yrs. age segments witnessed 30%+ reduction. As a result, India’s theatrical audience universe is now 3.4 years younger than it was before the pandemic.

Here are some possible reasons for this sharp reduction in theatre-goers in the 31+ yrs. segment, compared to only marginal reduction among the younger theatre-goers (<31 yrs.):

Pandemic-induced change in habit, affecting the older audiences more

During the pandemic, many people got accustomed to staying home, and streaming movies and shows on their own devices. However, this change in behaviour would have a more lasting effect more on the older audiences vs. the younger ones. The older we human beings get, the more prone we are to 'inertia', due to neurological changes. As people age, the brain goes through various changes, including decreased plasticity and reduced functioning of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making, planning, and impulse control. These neurological changes can make it harder for older adults to break old habits and form new ones. With older audiences becoming comfortable with watching movies at home during the pandemic for a period of almost two years, the habit would be difficult to break, making them less interested in going to theatres.

In comparison, for the younger audiences, 'socialization' is a lifestage-driven need. Going to the movies with friends is a popular way for younger people to socialize and connect with others. For these reasons, the rise of streaming content has impacted younger audience's decision to visit theatres a lot lesser, despite them being more technology-friendly.

Significant impact on household incomes because of the pandemic

As per data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India had 40.35 Crore jobs before the pandemic, of which 8.5 Crore were salaried jobs. The salaried jobs dropped to

7.3 Crore in 2021. Additionally, tough economic conditions caused by the pandemic have led to austerity being exercised by many households, as opposed to a more carefree attitude towards consumption. A premium, non-essential offering like cinema, expectedly, had to bear some of this brunt.

With lowering of family incomes and depletion of savings during the pandemic period, older members in a theatre-going family would be less willing, or even able, to spend money on outdoor entertainment activities. For many older audience, movie-going is an extraneous activity, and hence, one that can be let go. For younger audience, the social expression makes theatre-going a lot more intrinsic to their lives, and not seen as a 'luxury' alone.

Revenge consumption among the youth

The younger audience, in particular, felt caged during the pandemic, due to the various lockdowns, which severely curtailed their social footprint in the real world. Now that the opportunity to regain their lost social time has presented itself, younger audience are on some kind of a mission to go out and seek entertainment in various forms, including theatre visits. It is human nature, whereby being deprived of something for a considerable amount of time, results in an over-compensatory reaction, also referred to sometimes as 'revenge consumption'.

While this change in the profile of theatre-going audience in India comes with its share of scepticism regarding the future of the medium, it also provides content creators, marketers, distributors and exhibitors of theatrical content with an opportunity, to create more targeted and effective content, targeting the youth.

The full version of Sizing The Cinema; 2023 report is available by paid subscription. You can email us at reports@ormaxworld.com for details.