



Whitepaper:

Cinema:

**The financial rewards of creating
the fun factor in cinemas**

2025

This paper is prepared by  **saturn**

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Executive summary

Saturn Visual Solutions commissioned a piece of research with 2,000 UK-based, adult full-time and part-time workers. They were asked if they would be likely to spend more time and money than they'd originally planned if they were having a fun time in a leisure attraction like a cinema, and if so, by how much.

- On average, people said that they would be likely to spend an extra 49 minutes and an additional £18.83 (per visit) if they were in a fun place and enjoying themselves.
- Over half (53%) said they would return at least on a monthly basis to a place they thought of as being fun.
- The research also found differences in perceptions between people in different demographic groups.
- Men are more likely than women to spend more than planned when having fun, and are also likely to spend a larger amount than they'd originally planned.
- Those of retirement age are likely to spend the most when having a good time

The research also asked the survey respondents what they thought made somewhere feel boring and what made somewhere feel fun.

- More than half said that a fun place was somewhere visually interesting
- Just under half defined a fun place/experience as somewhere that encouraged them to feel specific emotions (e.g., anticipation, excitement, happiness).

Whilst having a cohesive and attractive interior design is important, this research has shown that the overall aesthetic of a cinema cannot overshadow the importance of creating a fun space. To maximise their profitability, cinemas must have foyers that captivate customers and makes them feel excitement and anticipation from the moment they enter, to the moment they leave.

Cinemas that adopt a 'fun first' approach to the customer experience, are likely to increase their profitability.

Introduction

The UK's cinema industry is, to a degree, stabilising after the COVID-19 pandemic, but cinema attendance has still not recovered to the level of admissions before the lockdowns.

Blockbuster releases, like A Minecraft Movie and Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy, have driven up demand for cinema admissions, which has been a welcome boost.

The trend for event cinema has also driven up admissions among cinema-goers that would normally be less likely to visit regularly to watch movies, with a range of music artists (e.g. Taylor Swift, Beyoncé) showing live performances, documentaries and one-off films.

However, streaming platforms like Disney+, Netflix and Amazon Prime continue to create tough competition for cinemas, allowing people to watch films on demand from their own homes. We are continuing to see a small number of new films not released in cinemas before being available to stream online, in order to give streaming platforms exclusivity and therefore a competitive edge.

Rising living costs have also resulted in cinema goers having less disposable cash and having to stay at home more often.

Fun foyer research

Cinema foyers have an incredibly important role. Their primary role is to sell concessions and tickets, but just as importantly, they must create a sense of occasion and excitement. They must also contribute to the clear division between watching films at home and the 'big screen experience'.

This is important not just to encourage people to return to the cinema, but to maximise the average spend per customer.

According to research by Saturn, people will spend more time and money in leisure spaces that feel fun, which suggests that many cinemas aren't maximising the opportunities to increase sales.

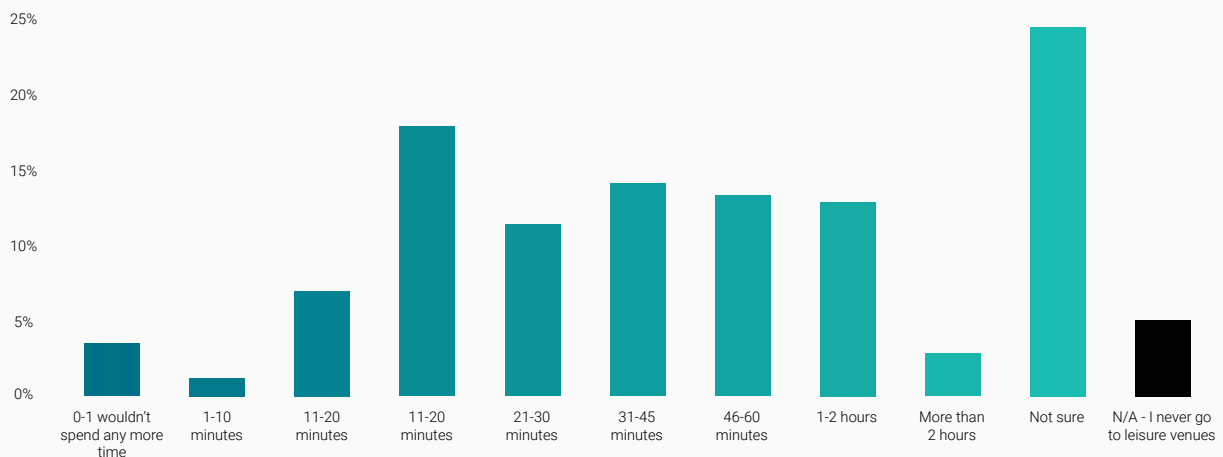


Time

41 per cent of people involved in the research said that they would be likely to spend between 30 minutes and two hours+ extra than originally planned in a leisure venue that they were having fun in.

This suggests that people will substantially prolong the length of their visit to a cinema to avoid a pleasant experience ending. In doing so, they are much more likely to make additional purchases.

If you were having a fun time at a leisure venue (e.g. cinema) how much more time would you be likely to spend there than you'd originally planned?



There were clear differences between the demographic groups though.

- 59% of men said they would stay longer if having fun in a cinema, but for less than an hour extra. Just 45% of women said the same.
- On average, more than a third (35%) of those aged 18-44 said they'd spend 30-45 minutes extra, as opposed to just over one in five (21%) of people aged over 45.
- Six per cent of people aged over 45 said they wouldn't spend any extra time, whereas just one per cent of those aged 18-44 said the same.

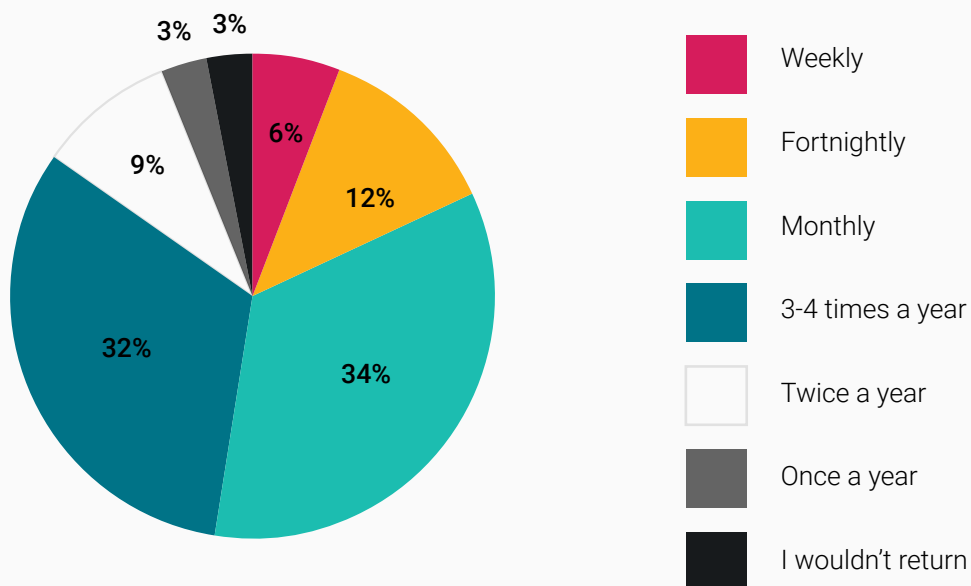
Revisits

Saturn's research found that nearly a third (31%) of the respondents said they would return to a specific cinema three or four times a year if they thought it was a fun place to be.

Although older people are less likely to stay longer than originally planned if having fun, they are more likely to return to the same place. 62 per cent of people aged over 65 said they would return to a fun cinema/leisure venue at least once a month. The only group that scored higher was 18-24 year olds where nearly two thirds (65%) said they would revisit at least monthly.

Male and female respondents said they were equally likely to return to a fun leisure venue at least three times a year (85%), but men said they were more likely to return more often, with 59% of men saying they would return on a monthly basis whereas less than half of women (48%) said the same.

Approximately, how often would you be likely to return to a specific cinema if you thought it was a fun place to be?



Spending

Two thirds of all the respondents said they would spend more than they'd planned to on food, drinks and merchandise in a cinema/leisure venue if they were having fun.

Over half (52%) of the respondents said they would spend more than £10 extra than planned if having fun. Nearly one in five (18%) said they would spend more than £20 extra.

Men are more likely to spend more than planned, and to spend a greater amount than women, with 58 per cent saying they would spend more than £10 extra. Less than half of women (47%) said the same.

People over the age of 65 were likely to spend the most, with a quarter of respondents in this category saying they would spend over £30 more than they'd originally planned if having fun.

Young adults are likely to spend the least, with more than half (53%) of 18-24-year-olds saying they would spend less than £15 extra, whereas (on average) only 38 per cent of people in all other groups said the same.



What is the fun factor

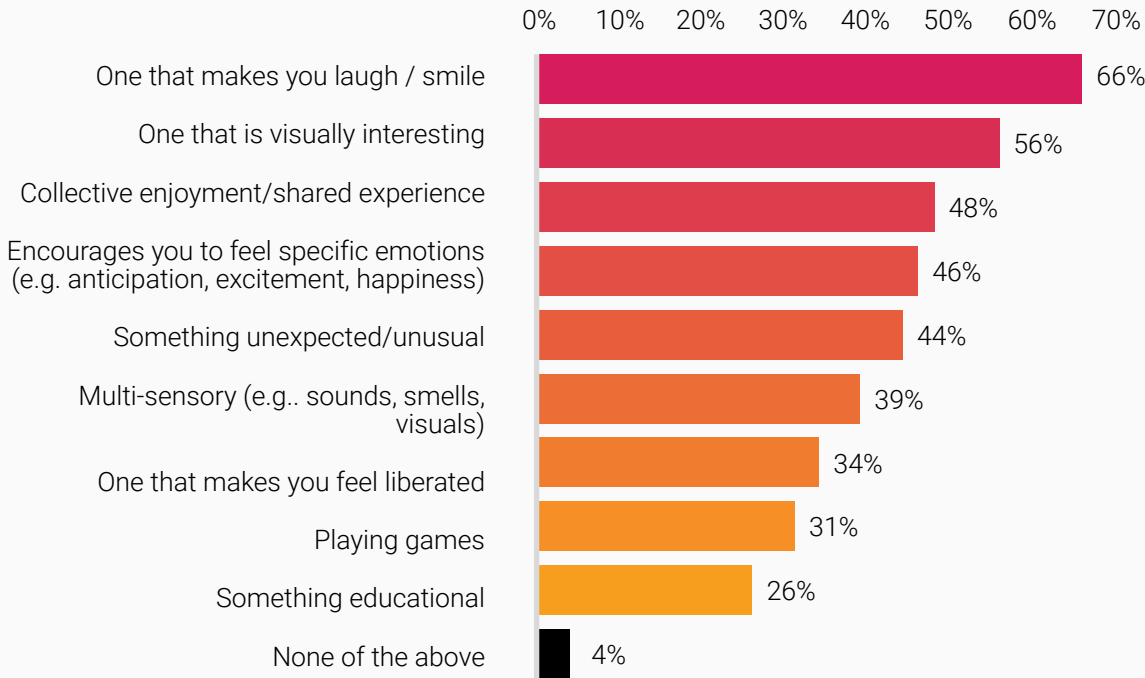
Although the concept of 'fun' is subjective, given the potential financial rewards, it is important to explore the distinction between what most people believe a fun experience is and what they think it isn't.

Saturn's research explored the difference between people's perceptions of what made somewhere feel like a fun and, conversely, a boring experience, and how they would be likely to respond in a place that felt boring.

This information can subsequently be used by cinemas to alter their customer experience to make it more fun and therefore profitable.

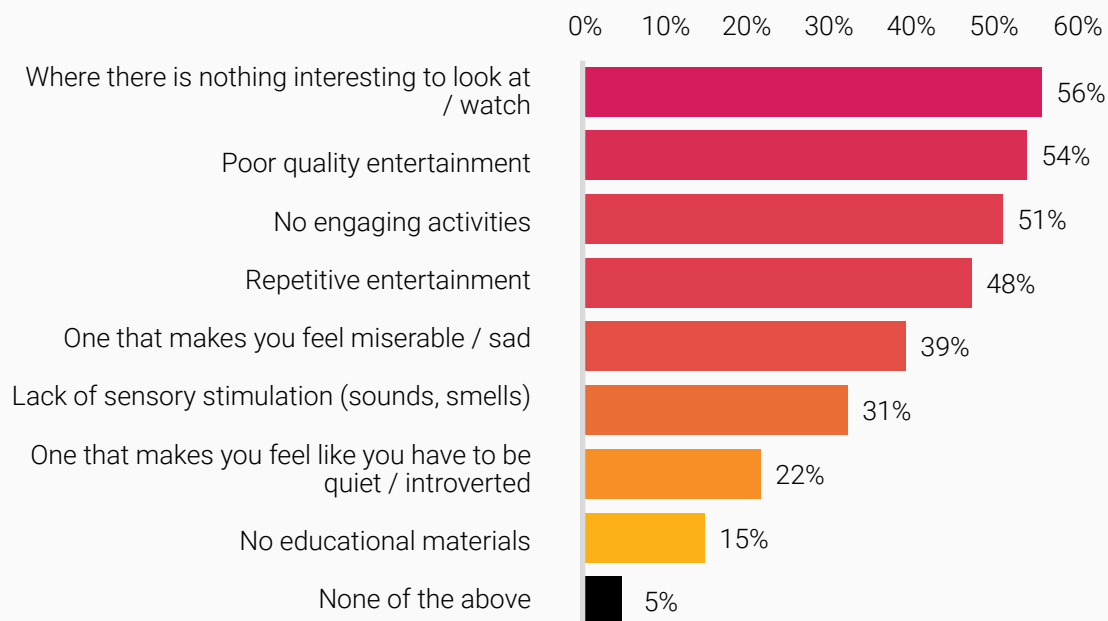
Fun

The respondents were asked what made something feel like a fun experience



Boring

The respondents were asked what made something feel like a boring experience



Response to boring places

Respondents were asked if they avoided spending time in boring spaces when outside of the home. More than half (53%) said yes - this figure rose to 66% for those aged 18-24, and to 61% for the over 65s. Furthermore, a quarter said they were 'not sure' (as opposed to saying they would not), suggesting that **more than three quarters of people may avoid places they perceive to be boring.**

Respondents were also asked how long it took them to start feeling bored to the point where they felt they had to entertain themselves (e.g. using a mobile phone).

- 25% said 60 seconds or less
- 15% said 1-2 minutes
- 13% said 3-5 minutes
- 19% said longer than five minutes

NB: 11% said they wouldn't entertain themselves, and 17% said they weren't sure

These results suggest that more than half of people (53%) are likely to lose interest in a cinema foyer and think of it as being boring within 5 minutes, if it's not actively stimulating or entertaining them.

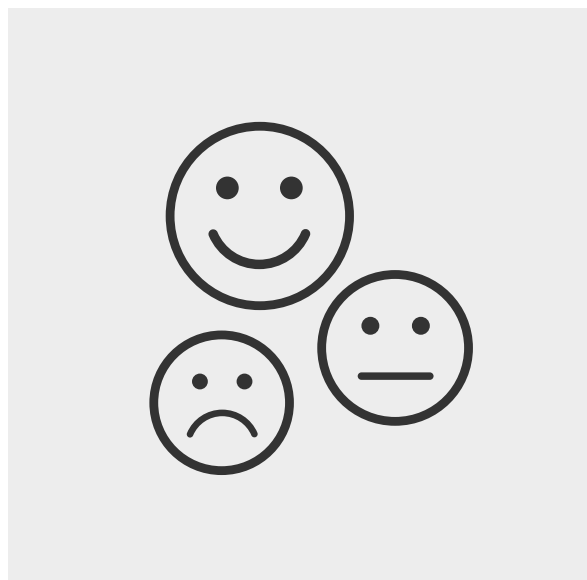
Solutions

The research indicates that there is a clear financial imperative to create a sense of fun and/or a fun atmosphere in cinemas to encourage customers to linger, spend more and return frequently.

Whilst cinema managers have no control over which films their customers will watch and how much they enjoy them, they can take steps to foster a sense of fun before and after film showings.

Key principles highlighted for cinema foyer improvement are:

- They should be visually interesting places.
- They should stimulate customers making them laugh/smile, feel excited, and/or anticipate a positive experience.
- They should feel like lively and playful spaces
- They should foster a shared notable, positive experience, this could be within an existing group, or bring strangers together
- They should be unpredictable



Whilst this is a long list, it is entirely possible to deliver all of these elements in a cost-effective and repeatable way if digital signage displays and a good content management system are used.

This is because digital displays are dynamic and create a vast amount of 'airtime' which can be used in a variety of ways alongside standard film promotion and concessions advertising.



Content to create the fun factor

Saturn has one of the only specialist cinema digital signage content services teams in the UK. They are responsible for some of the UK's most exciting and fun cinema foyer innovations.

Cinemas that already have digital displays and good content management software can adopt the following content ideas fairly quickly and inexpensively.

Segmented content

Cinema foyers can feel like they're buzzing or boring at different times of the day/week, depending on who else is around. Every customer should feel 'made a fuss of' no matter when they go to a cinema. This can be done by creating content specific to the time of day or week ("e.g. Tuesday morning film goers, you like your movies quiet and chilled - you're our kind of people").

Competitions

Using a little imagination and some clever content, you can bring competitions to life more and make them feel much more fun and inviting to join in with

Challenges

Use the escape room approach and encourage people sitting waiting for a film to solve puzzles or answer questions, and those that successfully solve one can be given a discount code that encourages them to buy more food/drink or tickets for a forthcoming release.

Instagram backdrops

If positioned appropriately, in addition to showing film trailers and promotional content, LED walls (with appropriate content) can be used as backdrops for photos for posting on Instagram. This is fun for people to use, and also creates positive user-generated content promoting the cinema. Examples of backdrops could be a premier-style red carpet, or platform 9¾ at Kings Cross, or a gladiatorial arena.

Community

Highlight opportunities for people to make friends, either through having a community corner or by promoting themed showings – e.g. single parent families, LGBTQI, film franchise fan day. These could be combined to encourage people with similar interests to meet one another and have a shared fun experience.



Social media feeds

Most good content management systems will give you the opportunity to show social media feeds on a digital display (posts can be filtered to avoid inappropriate material appearing). A display showing your cinema's social media feed (e.g. Instagram) gives customers something to look at that is unpredictable and encourages them to generate and post fun content to appear on the social media feed. This creates anticipation and excitement to see if their post appears on the feed. Ideally this should be on a dedicated display. Film goers can be encouraged to post content before or after seeing a film which can be turned into a competition. For example the best 10 word review for a specific film can win a concessions prize (which may be supported by partners) e.g. a month's supply of M&Ms.

Content Select

Saturn offers a software application which allows cinemas to load a suite of different content that (with the use of a smaller touchscreen device) allows customers to pick which piece of content they want to see. This could be a range of Instagram backdrops, trailers for forthcoming releases, conversation prompts for first dates and/or top five best popcorn topping ideas.

Timeline

Saturn can create a timeline that people can use to see when film releases are planned for. Customers could see which films are due for release when it's their birthday, enabling them to plan ahead and arrange a cinema visit with friends/family. The timeline could be filtered so families could see when all the age-appropriate releases are.

Motion Sensors

Motion sensors, when used in conjunction with digital signage, can be used to create unique and fun interactive experiences that give visitors something to tell their friends about. This can be through using gesture control to play games or navigate through information on displays.



Types of display appropriate for creating a foyer with the fun factor

Small displays

Small displays tend to be the most cost-effective digital signage hardware and can be used to make a foyer feel more dynamic. By showing a variety of content it can bring a lacklustre foyer to life.

Budget : £

Touchscreen

Touchscreen displays can be dual-purposed and used to show content like trailers in 'passive' mode, but can also be used to navigate through a menu of information. It can be used for things like 'order and collect' encouraging people to treat themselves by adding additional items to their order.

Budget : ££

Video walls

Video walls are a great, affordable way to create a large, wow-factor display. They are made up of at least three screens of the same size and model, positioned next to each other using special brackets and are used to create the illusion of a single large screen. There's an almost limitless number of different video wall options, depending on the budget and space you have available.

Budget : £££

LED walls

LED walls are the next generation of digital signage. They provide a vibrant, continuous display that appears sharp to people in relatively close proximity and are easy to see at long-distance. Unlike a screen, an LED wall doesn't have set dimensions so they can be made in any size or shape, flat or curved and can positioned almost anywhere (even on the ceiling!). They are more efficient than a traditional video wall, using significantly less energy, and have roughly double the overall lifespan.

Budget: ££££



Software

Many cinemas have digital signage but do not have software to change the content, relying instead on loading USBs with content, plugging it in and manually changing it when content needs changing. Whilst digital signage content management software can seem expensive, to get full value for money from digital displays, we would strongly recommend that cinemas use software with the following functionality:

Basic

- Scheduling by time/day/regular intervals
- Content expiry dates
- Hashtags
- Remote management

Advanced

- Split screens
- Screen synchronisation
- Screen grouping (for cinemas with more than one site/screen)
- Capable of integration with pricing systems
- Capable of integration with social media
- User permission controls (for cinemas with more than one site)

NB. SaturnVision is a digital signage software platform designed by Saturn specifically for use in cinemas and has all of the specified functionality.

Summary

Cinemas are facing a number of ongoing challenges.

Our research suggests that making cinemas more engaging and fun can significantly boost customer spending and result in repeat visits. Many cinemas are capitalising on the 'fun factor' but others are assuming wrongly that the interior design of a cinema foyer is what's most important to cinema-goers.

Clever use of digital signage technology and great content in foyers can help cinemas upgrade the 'big screen experience', making customers see the merit in lingering and returning more often.

Digital signage solutions can do this by fostering communities, providing interactive experiences and generally making cinema foyers and their integrated bars/cafes feel fun and far from the monotony of daily life.

The best way to get the right balance between costs and benefits is to work with a consultancy experienced in creating exciting digital touchpoints, and in working with different sized cinemas with varied budgets. This will ensure that your cinema gets the right hardware in the right place and with the right content.

Next steps

Saturn Visual Solutions is a digital signage consultancy and the UK's largest digital signage supplier to the UK cinema market.

We have 25+ years' experience in creating cinema foyers that transfix cinema goers, excite them, and encourage them to 'live a little' and treat themselves.

We have worked with cinema chains of varying sizes including large multiplex exhibitors (e.g. ODEON Cinemas, Cineworld Cinemas) and independents (e.g. Reel Cinemas, Scott Cinemas, S&B Cinemas).

We use this collective experience to create fun, interactive visitor experiences, and to look for ways to improve the financial standing of our clients – e.g. through increasing the volume and profitability of food and beverage sales, increasing merchandise sales.

We offer a range of end-to-end design, build, content and support services.

To learn more about how Saturn can help your cinema business, contact sales@saturnvisual.com or call **0161 222 0706**

