

## **Distribution revolution? The circulation of film and cultural capital**

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### **Abstract:**

Online methods of film distribution, both legal and illegal, have been positioned as a disruptive force, altering the dynamics of the film industry and patterns of viewing behaviour. Consideration of the relationship between these new methods and power relations between the socio-demographic groups using them has been somewhat limited though. This article focuses centrally upon these power relations via an examination of the relationship between patterns of film consumption in New Zealand and the circulation of cultural capital. Using quantitative analysis of survey data, the article considers the extent to which Bourdieusian social/cultural hierarchies can be mapped onto the use of particular methods of film consumption and the viewing of particular types of film (by genre and nationality). It also considers what these patterns reveal about the circulation of more pluralised notions of cultural capital, and whether the power of particular groups may reside in their omnivorousness. The article ultimately finds that the potential contribution of online methods of film distribution to the disruption of social/cultural hierarchies is fairly minimal. This is due to the extent to which their use is, in part, structured by these hierarchies and the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital.

**Keywords:** Cultural Capital; Online Film Distribution; Bourdieu; Film Audiences; Film Exhibition; New Zealand.

### **Introduction**

Online methods of film distribution, both legal and illegal, have been positioned as a disruptive force, altering the dynamics of the film industry and patterns of viewing behaviour (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012; Lobato, 2012; Cunningham & Silver, 2013; Tryon, 2013; Holt & Sanson, 2014; Crisp, 2015). Consideration of the relationship between these new methods & power relations between the socio-demographic groups using them has been somewhat limited though. Academic research into audiences for online film

distribution has tended to focus on micro relations rather than macro forces, with minimal consideration of the role of socio-demographic variables in potentially structuring audiences' use of these methods (Evans & McDonald, 2014; Tryon & Dawson, 2014; Crisp, 2015). Research that has explored the role of socio-demographic variables in structuring online film consumption has privileged questions surrounding cultural access at the expense of more detailed consideration of how this behaviour may connect to wider social/cultural power (Huffer, 2017). This article thus focuses centrally upon these power relations via an examination of the relationship between patterns of film consumption in New Zealand and the circulation of cultural capital. In doing so, it consequently provides an insight into the way in which film distribution may reflect *and* inscribe social, cultural and economic difference (Lobato, 2012, p.16). Moreover, it allows us to gauge the extent to which online methods of film distribution are shifting the terms of this inscription relative to other methods, and the degree to which this represents a challenge to existing social/cultural hierarchies.

In its consideration of the relationship between film viewing and cultural capital this research draws upon, and interrogates, Bourdieu's positioning of cultural consumption as part of the reproduction of social inequality in society. For Bourdieu, society is structured around a class system that is the product of unequally distributed forms of capital that are mutually reinforcing. These are economic capital, as realised in monetary wealth, social capital, as realised in valuable social connections and networks, and cultural capital, which exists in three forms, 'in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods...and in the *institutionalized* state [e.g.]...educational qualifications' (Bourdieu, 2011, p.84). The odds of acquiring cultural capital that might be converted into economic capital (via qualifications or social connections) are stacked against those with the least economic capital in the first place due to the habitus, which describes a set of dispositions resulting from the material conditions of existence (Bourdieu, 1984, p.170). Educational qualifications, for example, are seen to institutionalize cultural capital as a particular set of dispositions and cultural goods marked by an emphasis on form over content, with this negation of 'immediate sensation' being a product of the 'distance from necessity' that characterizes the lives of the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1984, pp.5, 34, 486). The relationship between these forms of capital varies, however, so that those richest in economic capital, such as wealthy industrialists, may lack such a distanced aesthetic disposition. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon excess evident in their tastes is still seen to be formed out of a distance from necessity (Bourdieu, 1984, p.176). More importantly, such taste is exercised through exclusive practices and goods that are highly expensive, such as auction rooms and luxury hotels (Bourdieu, 1984, p.283). Within this context, the cultural practices and objects that might best constitute cultural capital could be seen to be those that are culturally *and* materially exclusive to higher social classes.

However, the idea that film distribution might be implicated in the production of cultural capital, and that this might have some bearing upon social hierarchy, is complicated

by a number of factors. For Bennett et al. (2009, p.151) the relative accessibility of much media, and the rapid transformation and fragmentation of media distribution, minimises its ability to produce cultural knowledge and behaviour sufficiently exclusive *and* institutionalised to qualify as cultural capital. On a wider note, Bennett, Emmison and Frow argue that cultural value today can be seen to be much more pluralised than originally theorised by Bourdieu (1984), and contingent upon a range of identity formations (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 1999, p.269). As such, they state that social and economic capital play a greater role in the reproduction of social inequality (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 1999, p.268). Nevertheless, Bennett, Emmison and Frow still acknowledge the role that culture plays in 'the formation and differentiation of social classes' (1999, p.268). For example, work on the promotion, programming, design and/or audiences of contemporary art-house cinemas has shown how these venues continue to establish relatively exclusive middle-class spaces (Jones, 2001; Jancovich, Faire with Stubbings, 2003; Hollinshead, 2011; Evans, 2011; Huffer, 2013). Furthermore, such exclusive spaces could potentially facilitate social networks of differing value. In order to gauge the relevance of these varying positions, this study starts from the assumption that if the use of particular methods of film consumption and the viewing of particular types of film content are the product of an unequal distribution of cultural capital according to social hierarchy, or form exclusive spaces that potentially facilitate the acquisition of social capital, then we would expect to see traces of this in the patterns of film consumption for particular groups. Thus as a first step this study examines the relationship between methods of film consumption, types of film (by genre and nationality), and the demographic variables of income, education, age, ethnicity, and gender. To what extent do higher income and more educated respondents show evidence of distinct tastes and practices, how is this complemented or complicated by other markers of privilege, such as being older<sup>1</sup>, NZ European and male, and how are online methods situated in relation to this?

In response to a more pluralised conception of cultural value, this study also considers the degree to which these patterns of consumption bear a relationship to more refined notions of cultural capital that may be converted into differing social and economic benefits. These include IT capital, minority-ethnic capital, and national capital. Emmison and Frow (1998) position IT knowledge and expertise as a form of cultural capital, which those with greater money and time are able to gain more readily and that can be exchanged for work opportunities. Furthermore, Bennett et al. (2009, p.22) speculate that in an era of information proliferation, the technical ability to access and manipulate this information may be a more important marker of distinction than familiarity with high culture. The concept of minority-ethnic cultural capital was coined by Sandra Trienekens (2002), drawing upon the work of Stuart Hall. It describes the cultural knowledge and practices that has currency within particular ethnic groups, establishing status in ways that are not reducible to class (Trienekens, 2002, p.283). Work on the distribution networks connecting diasporic groups to films from overseas suggests (albeit not explicitly) the role that these networks may play in cultivating knowledge and practices that could contribute to minority-ethnic

capital (Gillespie, 1995; Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001; Verhoeven, 2011; Miller, 2012). At the same time, this research highlights the tensions and/or opportunities that emerge from the hybrid identities of these audiences, pivoting upon their possession, or lack, of a degree of national capital. As defined by Bennett et al. (2009), national capital ‘operates on the assumption of the existence of traditions...which generate and justify a sense of belonging and an occupancy of a governing national position’, adding that, while its relative abundance limits its exchange value, ‘to lack it acts as a handicap’ (p.258). Lack of this national capital may produce dislocation (Verhoeven, 2011, p.250) and may lead to a rejection of ethnic identity in its pursuit (Zalipour & Athique, 2016, p.435), but acquisition alongside minority-ethnic capital may also signal a flexible and adaptive cosmopolitanism that accrues greater currency as migration increases and global communication intensifies (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2001, p.33; Bennett et al., 2009, p.258). Through mapping the relationship between different socio-demographic groups, distinct methods of distribution requiring differing degrees of technological competence, and a range of international content, this study consequently asks how the use of film distribution methods and viewing of content may be shaped by, and facilitate, the possession of IT capital, minority-ethnic capital, and national capital, and for whom?

The concept of subcultural capital, as first defined by Sarah Thornton (1995), is another variation of Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital and shares similarities with minority-ethnic capital in that particular cultural knowledge and behaviour may be mobilised to establish hierarchies within the bounds of a marginal culture. This has been shown to have relevance to film consumption, particularly through fans of ‘cult cinema’ and East Asian Cinema (Jancovich, 2002; Hollows, 2003; Hills, 2005, 2015; Denison, 2011; Crisp 2015<sup>2</sup>). Such work reveals the way in which the participants within such filmic subcultures position themselves in opposition to the ‘mainstream’ and shows how online distribution methods, despite seemingly eroding these oppositional claims through increased accessibility of content, may introduce new forms of distinction (Hills, 2015). They also show how the capital produced through these distinctions may be classed (Jancovich, 2002) or gendered (Hollows, 2003), reproducing dominant social hierarchies under the guise of marginality. Consideration of the relationship between the distinctions that occur within online film viewing communities and wider social hierarchies are more limited, however, due to a lack of consideration of the socio-demographic characteristics of case-study participants, such as the East Asian film file-sharing communities looked at by Crisp (2015). This study can aid such discussions through its delineation of the demographic constitution of audiences for cult cinema<sup>3</sup>, East Asian cinema, and particular distribution methods, but further qualitative research is crucial in order to gauge how wider structural inequalities shape, or are challenged, through the micro interactions that take place within the fan communities surrounding these films.

The relative value of these various forms of cultural capital is even harder to gauge. As Matt Hills asks, rhetorically, ‘Does the “cultural capital” of an IT specialist have the same “value” as the “cultural capital” of a scholar of Latin?’ (2002, p.48). However, consideration

of the way in which particular forms of capital may be located in particular constellations of distribution methods, content and socio-demographic groups, may be able to provide an indication of the degree to which certain tastes and behaviour are associated with wider social advantage. Another possible way to understand culture's function as capital in the context of a more pluralised conception of cultural value is through consideration of the *breadth* of engagement of particular groups. For Bennett et al. (2009), following Peterson (1992) cultural capital is seen to reside in the omnivorous approach to culture of the middle-classes, providing them with diverse and flexible cultural competence that contrasts with the "fixed" or "static" tastes' of the working class (Bennett et al., 2009, p.254). To what extent, then, do participants from more privileged groups, specifically higher income, more educated, older, NZ European and male respondents, show evidence of a greater breadth of methods used and content viewed?

## Method

The answers to these questions are based upon data collected in 2015 through an online survey that generated 816 responses. The survey was only accessible to people with a New Zealand IP address aged 16 years or older. The former restriction was built into the survey's availability online, but the latter restriction was contingent upon self-reporting. The results derive from the participants' responses to questions on the methods of film consumption that they use (based upon 14 different methods and seven frequencies ranging from 'never' to 'a few times a week'), what types of film they view (based upon a selection of genre categories and a selection of countries/regions from around the world), and their personal income, education, age, ethnicity and gender. Each method was described as fully as possible and supported with an example to clarify its distinctiveness. The descriptions of these methods have been shortened in the charts that follow for ease of presentation. The fact that respondents were asked to self-report semi-legal or illegal activities raised the possibility of under-reporting of this behaviour. In order to reduce this possibility, respondents were assured in the survey information sheet that their responses were anonymous and that the ability of the survey software to collect IP addresses had been disabled.

Correlations were performed in the statistical software SPSS to identify significant relationships between the use of different methods of consumption and personal income, education, age, ethnicity and gender. The statistical test Spearman's rho was used in these correlations to indicate the extent to which these relationships were not due to other random variables. Only correlations over 0.1 and under -0.1 were considered meaningful as correlations less than this mean that the variables had only a very weak or no relationship. All correlations over 0.1 and under -0.1 can also be considered statistically significant ( $\alpha < .05$ ), meaning that there is a less than 5% probability that there is no relationship between the variables. Correlations could only be performed on variables that permit the comparison of linear relationships. Crosstabulations were thus used to show the relationship between personal income, education, age, ethnicity and gender and the viewing of films from

different genres and countries. Crosstabulations compare the results of one variable against another, revealing, for example, the percentage of participants from a socio-demographic group who have ticked that they have watched films from a particular country.

Such quantitative analysis is valuable in identifying statistically significant relationships between particular socio-demographic groups, particular methods of film distribution, and particular content, providing a platform for our understanding of how wider social/cultural divisions and hierarchies may be constituted through film consumption. However, while this includes consideration of cultural capital in its objectified form, it cannot reveal the qualitative characteristics of audiences' engagement with film. Questions thus remain regarding the embodied dispositions of respondents that would be best investigated through interviews. Such descriptive statistics are also only able to gauge the degree to which the participants' film viewing behaviour is symptomatic of status rather than conferring it. In order to fully understand how culture may function as capital convertible into social and economic advantage it would be ideal to conduct interviews and perform a longitudinal study, as suggested by Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet, & Miles (2015, p.7). The connections drawn between the data and debates in this study are thus exploratory. Nevertheless, the insights provided still develop our understanding of these debates in ways that purely qualitative research is unable to. Indeed, whilst cultural sociology has placed increasing importance on utilising qualitative methods to explore questions of social/cultural distinction, this research still recognises the necessity of using quantitative data to understand the bigger picture of these relations (Warde et al, 2007, p.144). The consumption of film has been a relatively minor element of cultural sociology, though, whilst work within media studies exploring social/cultural distinction and audiences' use of methods of film distribution and exhibition has tended to utilise qualitative methods (Evans, 2011; Hollinshead, 2011; Crisp, 2015). This study is an attempt to rectify this imbalance even if, in reality, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are necessary, as they are to the study of media audiences more generally (Barker, 2018; Michelle, Davis, Hardy & Hight, 2018).

### **Survey Sample**

The responses to the survey were self-selecting, with participants alerted to the study through a range of means, including, for example, university email lists, the Facebook sites of cinema chains and video-on-demand sites, and newspapers and websites catering to particular ethnic groups in New Zealand. When compared to national population averages (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), the sample was roughly the same age but with a higher median income and a much higher percentage with higher education (**Table 1**). The sample was also proportionally more female, consisting of 65% female and 34.7% male, in contrast to the national average of 51.3% female and 48.7% male (Statistics New Zealand 2013). In addition, it was slightly more NZ European, slightly less Māori and Pacific, and quite a bit less Asian (**Table 2**).

The following analysis focuses upon the five largest ethnic groups within the sample as the remaining ethnic groups were too small and disparate to be able to facilitate findings. Respondents could tick any number of categories from the 8 provided (New Zealand European, Māori, Pacific Islander, Asian, European, African, Latin American, Arab) and were asked to provide more specific details in a comments box. Ethnic prioritisation was performed on the survey data for analysis, meaning that the categories of Māori, Pacific, Asian, NZ European and European were privileged in descending order when more than one of these categories was ticked. These groupings consequently include individuals with multiple ethnicities but are mutually exclusive for the purpose of analysis. Looking in more detail at these five ethnic groups, **Table 3** shows that the Māori sample in the survey had a relatively higher age and income than average and Asian groups were relatively younger and lower income than average. It is important to bear such distinctions in mind when attempting to generalize on the basis of this data, and any potential impact of these differences on the findings will be discussed.

	Median Age	Median Income	% UG Degree	% PG Degree
NZ Census 2013	39	\$28,500	13.6%	6.4%
My Survey	38	\$40,000	24.8%	36.8%

**Table 1:** Age, Income and Education of survey sample compared to New Zealand Census 2013

Ethnicity	Percentage of population in NZ Census 2013	Percentage of sample in survey
NZ European	68%	73.9%
European	6%	9.3%
Māori	14.9%	9.3%
Pacific	7.4%	4.1%
Asian	11.8%	4.1%
Other Ethnicities	2.9%	1.4%

**Table 2:** Relative size of ethnic groups within survey sample compared to New Zealand Census 2013

Ethnicity	Median Age in NZ Census 2013	Median Age in Survey	Median Income in NZ Census 2013	Median Income in Survey
NZ European	*	39	\$37,100	\$60,000-\$69,000
European	41	43	\$30,900	\$60,000-\$69,000
Māori	23.9	40	\$22,500	\$60,000-\$69,000
Pacific	22.1	27	\$19,700	\$30,000-\$39,999
Asian	30.6	23	\$20,100	\$10,000-\$19,999

\*Median Age of NZ European combined with European in the reporting of Census results

**Table 3:** Median Age and Income of ethnic groups within survey sample compared to New Zealand Census 2013

**Results and Discussion**

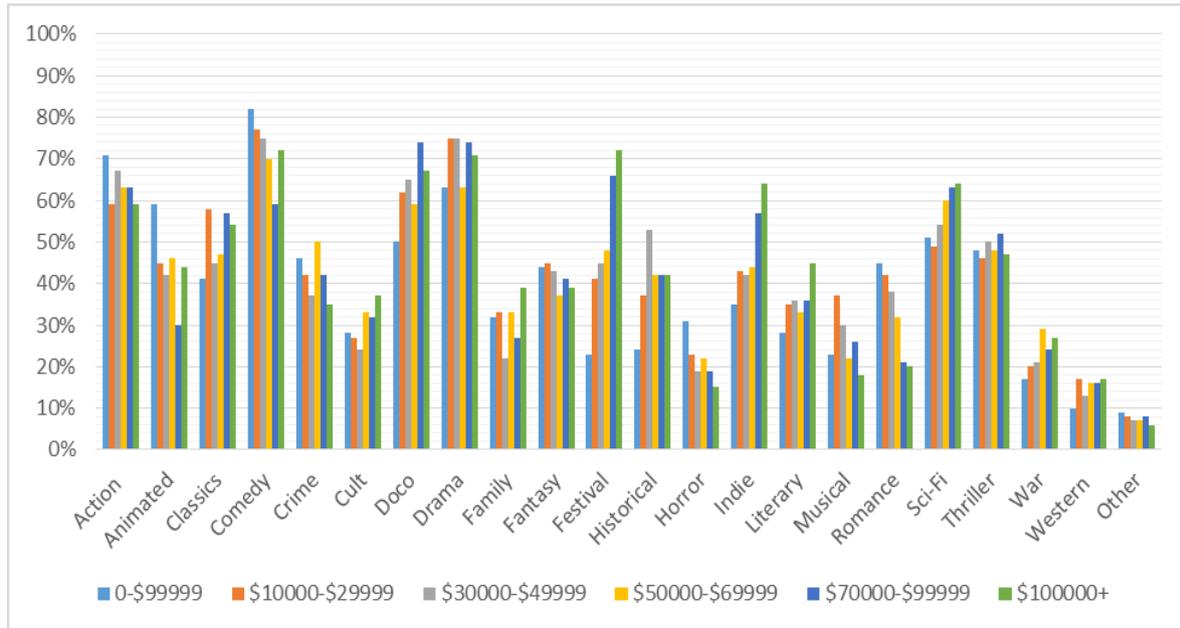
The results reveal clusters of behaviour among particular groups that suggest the way in which audiences' engagement with film content and distribution, including online methods, may be produced by the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital. For example, relatively lower income, less educated and younger audiences show relatively higher engagement with online methods marked by their economic accessibility. **Figure 1** shows that accessing films for free from friends' hard drives and via torrenting, along with the use of VPNs, is *negatively* correlated with a rise in income (-.218, -.187, -.105 respectively), education (-.143, -.187, -.106) and age (-.420, -.436, -.261).

	Income	Education	Age	Māori	Pacific	Asian	NZ Euro	Euro	Male	Female	Cinema	Rent DVD Store	Rent DVD Web	Buy DVD Store	Buy DVD Web	Free TV	Pay TV	Pay Stream	Free Stream	VPN	Torrent	Cyberlocker	Hard drive	O.Public Scrns	
Income	1.00																								
Education	.514*	1.00																							
Age	.494*	.400*	1.00																						
Māori	0.00	-0.07	-0.01	1.00																					
Pacific	-0.05	-0.02	-0.06	-0.05	1.00																				
Asian	-.101*	-0.01	-.134*	-0.07	-0.03	1.00																			
NZ Euro	0.05	-0.03	0.05	-.539**	-.238*	-.346*	1.00																		
Euro	0.03	.137*	.076*	-.103*	-0.05	-0.07	-.539**	1.00																	
Male	.152*	0.04	0.03	-0.03	-0.06	0.03	-0.01	0.06	1.00																
Female	-.152*	-0.04	-0.03	0.03	0.06	-0.03	0.01	-0.06	-1.000**	1.00															
Cinema	0.02	0.05	0.03	-.084*	-0.02	0.03	0.06	0.00	-0.03	0.03	1.00														
Rent DVD Store	0.02	0.00	0.03	.074*	0.02	-.073*	0.00	-0.03	-0.01	0.01	.071*	1.00													
Rent DVD Web	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.04	1.00												
Buy DVD Store	0.01	0.07	-.093*	-0.02	0.02	-.074*	0.07	-0.01	.103*	-.103*	.141**	.224**	0.06	1.00											
Buy DVD Web	.094*	.121*	0.02	-.110*	-0.07	-0.05	.127**	0.01	.139**	-.139**	.113**	.081*	.164**	.517**	1.00										
Free TV	-0.05	-0.07	0.03	.073*	0.00	-0.03	0.00	-0.03	-.140**	.140**	.078*	.130**	0.05	.075*	0.00	1.00									
Pay TV	0.02	-.085*	-.098*	.083	0.00	-.084*	0.01	-0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.06	.080*	0.04	.178*	1.00								
Pay Stream	0.01	0.00	-.194*	0.04	0.04	-0.04	-0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.01	-0.01	.170*	.086*	.156*	0.03	.094*	1.00							
Free Stream	-0.05	-0.01	-.082*	-0.01	.092*	0.04	-.103*	.100**	-0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.06	-0.05	0.01	0.04	0.03	1.00						
VPN	-.105*	-.106*	-.261*	0.04	0.01	0.03	-.074*	0.04	0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-.099*	0.05	-0.05	-0.04	-0.07	0.05	.327**	0.03	1.00					
Torrent	-.187**	-.187**	-.436**	0.04	-0.03	.085*	-0.05	-0.03	.165**	-.165**	-0.04	-.204**	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-.121**	0.05	.095**	-0.06	.313**	1.00				
Cyberlocker	-0.07	-0.03	-0.05	0.00	0.06	0.03	-.115**	.117**	-0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.05	-0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	.466**	-0.01	-0.03	1.00			
Hard drive	-.218*	-.143*	-.420*	0.06	-0.03	.079*	-0.05	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03	-.085*	0.02	0.07	0.05	0.03	.102*	.192**	0.03	.241**	.473**	0.01	1.00		
Other Public Screenings	0.07	.125*	.094	0.01	0.02	-0.03	-0.03	0.06	0.04	-0.04	.299*	0.06	.125**	.137**	.138*	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.02	-0.02	.077*	1.00	

(i) Key correlations in red (ii) Correlations between binarised ethnic groups are not perfect due to probability of being one or another or neither.

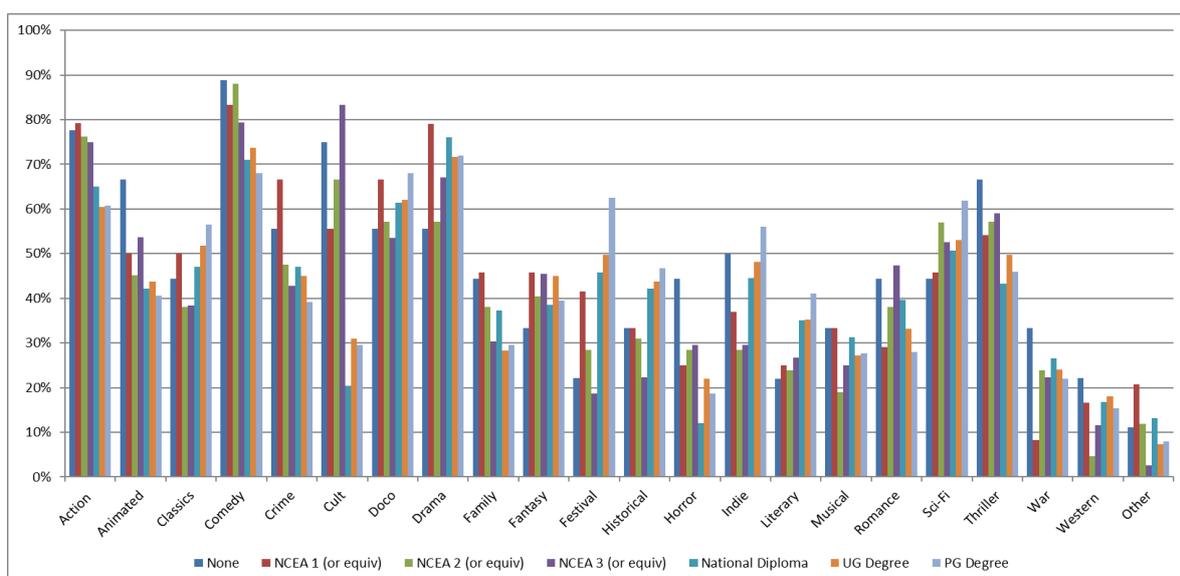
**Figure 1:** Correlations between income, education, age, ethnicity, gender and methods of film consumption.

Furthermore, **Figures 2, 3 and 4** show that genres associated with their appeal to immediate sensation, such as action/adventure, comedy, horror, romance and/or thrillers (Dyer 1985; Tasker 2004), have a relatively higher percentage of viewers from participants with lower incomes, less education, and a younger age. In contrast, **Figures 2, 3 and 4** reveal that genres with a relatively greater emphasis on the formal complexity associated with 'legitimate' culture, such as festival/arthouse and/or indie films (Galt & Schoonover 2010, p. 6; Newman 2011, p. 197), or a more middlebrow combination of 'immediate accessibility and the outward signs of cultural legitimacy' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.323), such as literary adaptations and/or documentaries, have a relatively higher percentage of viewers with higher incomes, higher education and an older age. These distinctions are not absolute as a percentage of each group watches films from each genre. There are also slight differences in the preferences of these groups. For example, the viewing of documentaries is less associated with education than income or age. This could be due to its relatively greater cultural accessibility as a form (Bennett et al., 2009, p.140; Jarness, 2015, p.74).



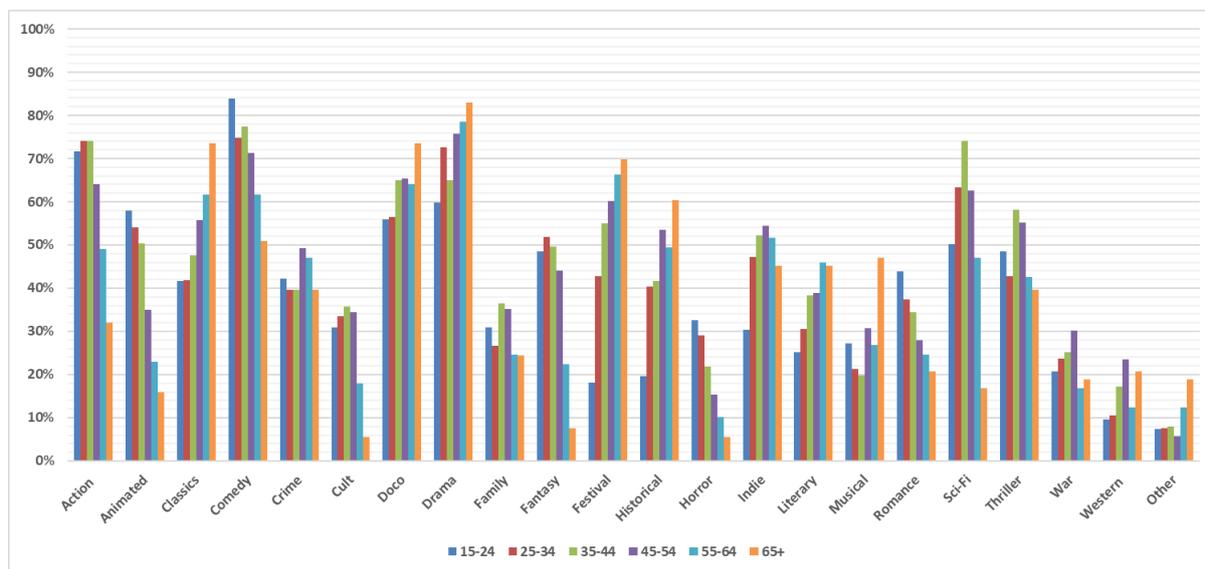
**Figure 2:** Percentage within income categories watching films from listed genres.

In addition, the viewing of science-fiction films rises with income and education but peaks with viewers aged 35-44. This indicates generational distinctions within more privileged groups. Moreover, these generational distinctions slightly complicate traditional cultural hierarchies as, whilst science-fiction’s combination of spectacle and scientific speculation could be understood, in part, through the terms of middlebrow culture, the extent of its immersiveness and self-reflexivity (Bould, 2012) may exceed the lower and upper limits of the middlebrow as a category. This age-based loosening of the relationship between social hierarchy and traditional cultural hierarchies alerts us to what might be understood as ‘emerging cultural capital’ (Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet & Miles, 2015, p.3).



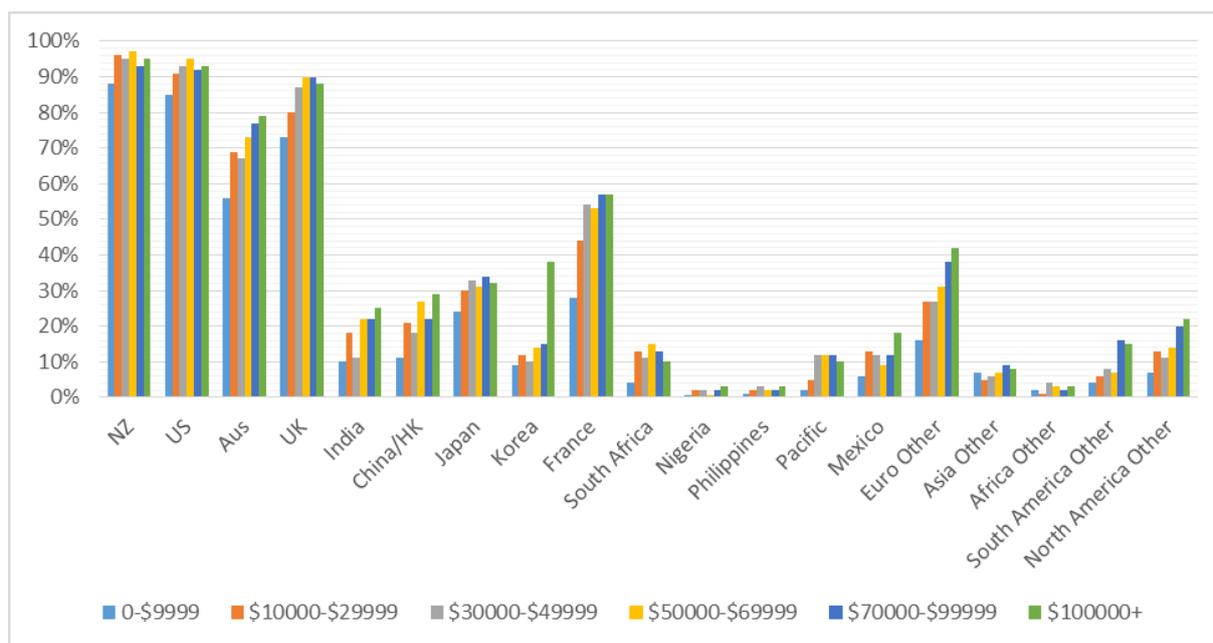
**Figure 3:** Percentage watching films from listed genres based upon highest educational qualification.

However, we should not overstate these generational differences either. Ultimately, the patterns of genre preferences revealed here do as a whole show that more privileged groups across different ages are more likely to view films characterised by signs of cultural legitimacy.

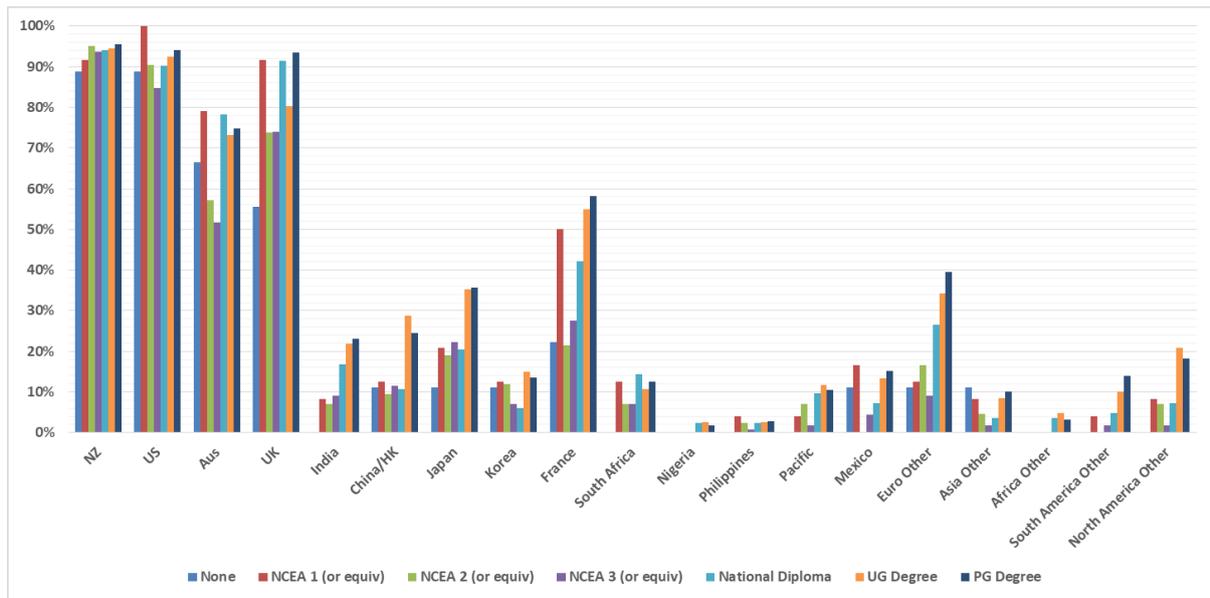


**Figure 4:** Percentage within age categories watching films from listed genres.

In addition, **Figures 5, 6 and 7** show that the likelihood of viewing films from countries beyond New Zealand and the US rises with income (Australia, Korea, France, other European nations, other South American nations and other North American nations), education (India, China/Hong Kong, Japan, other European nations, other South American

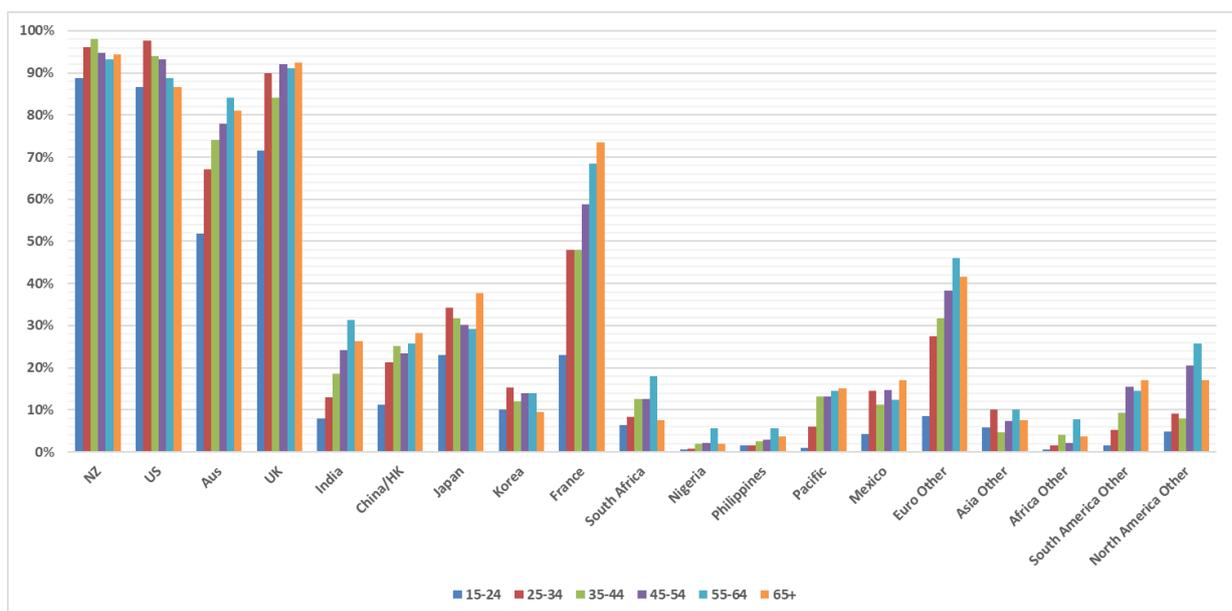


**Figure 5:** Percentage within income categories watching films from listed countries.



**Figure 6:** Percentage watching films from listed countries based upon highest educational qualification.

nations, other North American nations, and, in part, France) and age (Australia, India, France, other European nations and other South American nations). The tastes of higher income, more educated and older audiences are thus characterised by content which is relatively more culturally inaccessible. However, despite these similarities in the content consumed by participants with a relatively higher income, education and age, and the fact that an increase in age, income and education are strongly correlated with each other (**Figure 1**), the methods most associated with the circulation of this content, such as film societies and festivals, were only significantly correlated with a rise in education (.125 –

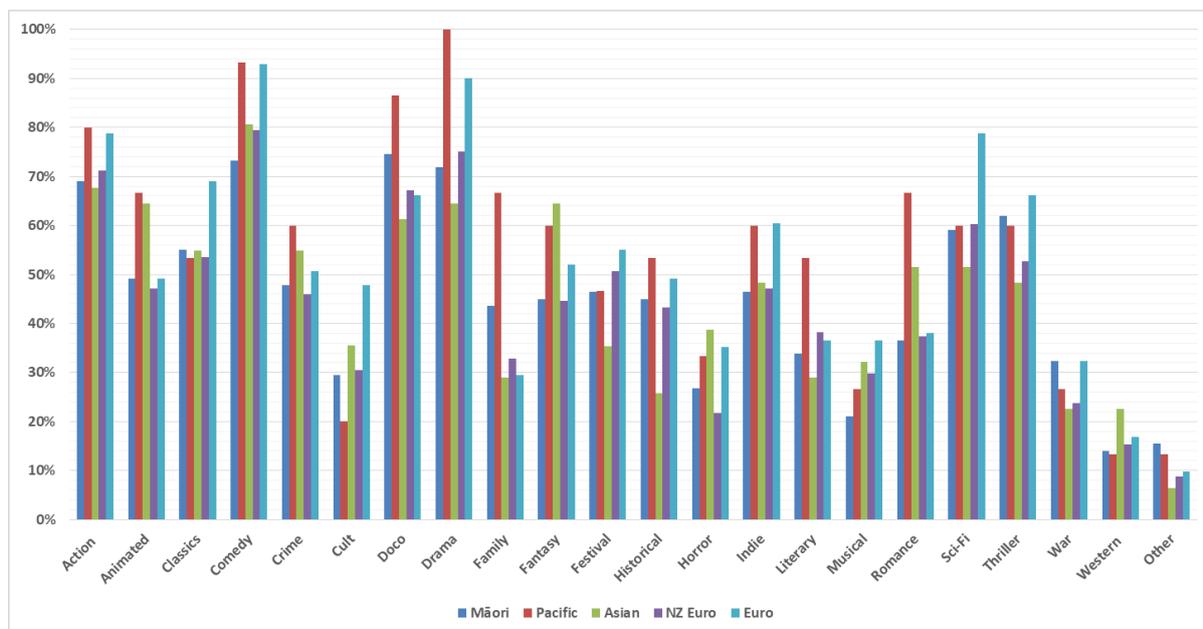


**Figure 7:** Percentage within age categories watching films from listed countries.

**Figure 1).** This suggests that the barriers to attending such screenings are cultural to a greater extent than they are material, complementing existing research (Bennett et al., 2009, p.140). It also suggests that the contribution of education to such distinctions is not solely confined to older audiences. Indeed, the ongoing role played by education is evident in the increased likelihood of watching Japanese films among those respondents with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees (**Figure 6**), to a much clearer extent than a rise in age or income (**Figures 5 and 7**). The possession of institutionalized cultural capital thus still appears to play an important role in shaping film tastes and viewing practices.

While torrenting, VPNs and friends' hard drives are marked out as the methods most associated with a relatively lower income, education and age, streaming or downloading films for a cost is negatively correlated with a rise in age (-.194 **Figure 1**) but not a rise in income or education. This method thus appears to be a norm of consumption for younger audiences, but is not clearly associated with the absence or presence of economic or cultural capital. Furthermore, streaming for free and using cyberlockers are not meaningfully correlated with income, education or age (**Figure 1**). The relationship between these methods and social/cultural distinction is thus somewhat limited.

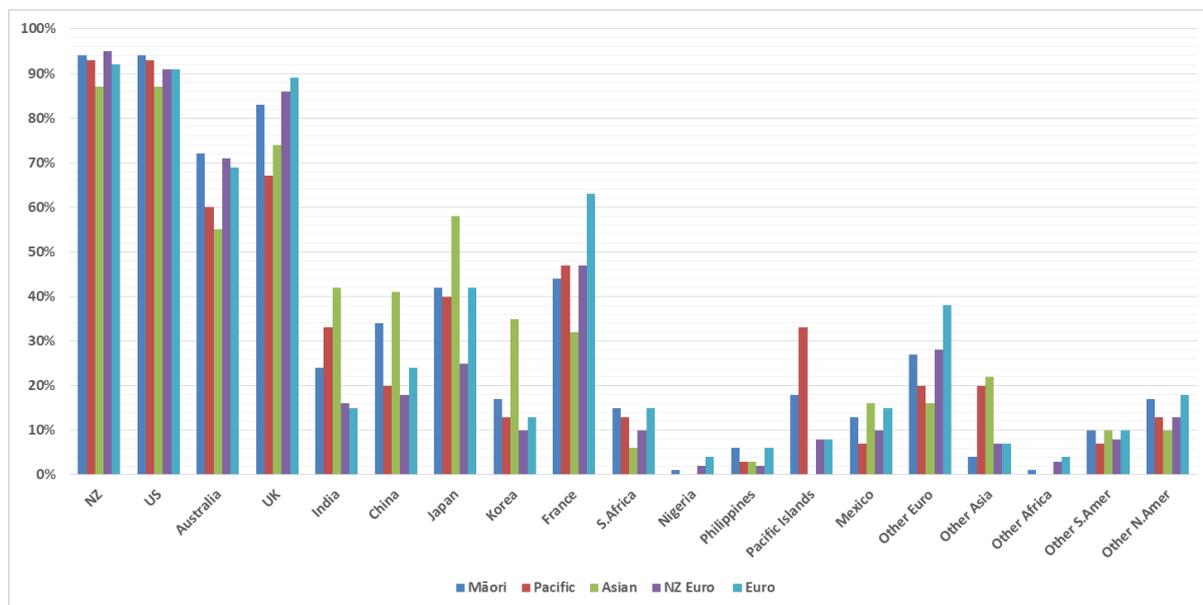
The tastes of ethnic groups can in part be understood through the way in which they intersect with income and age. For example, Asian and Pacific respondents, who are relatively younger and lower income on average, show preferences for genres in keeping with younger and/or lower income respondents in general: animation and fantasy for the former, action/adventure, animation, comedy, and fantasy for the latter (**Figure 8**).



**Figure 8:** Percentage within ethnic groups watching films listed genres.

Likewise, NZ European and European respondents, who are relatively older and higher income on average, display a preference for films in keeping with older and/or higher

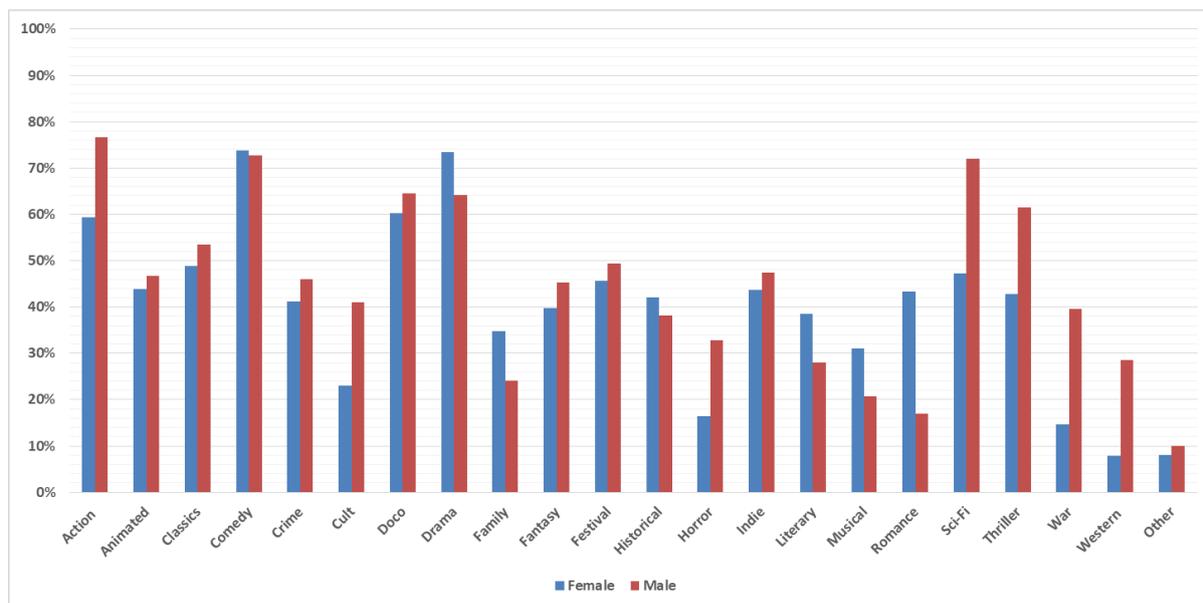
income respondents more widely: festival/arthouse and literary films for the former (**Figure 8**) and films from France and other European nations for the latter (**Figure 9**).



**Figure 9:** Percentage within ethnic groups watching films from listed countries.

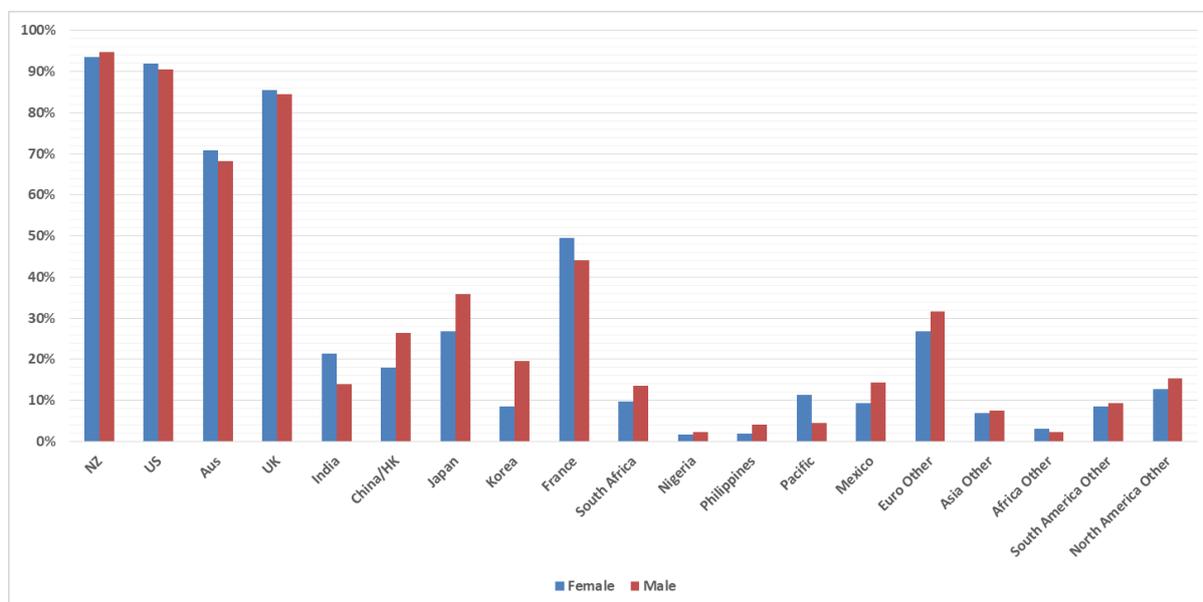
Such complementariness suggests the way in which tastes may be shaped, in part, by ‘ethclass’ hierarchies in New Zealand (Crothers, 2014, p.110). However, other preferences are not so easily understood in this way. For example, Asian groups display a higher likelihood of viewing films from filmmaking nations (India, China) that are otherwise associated with a rise in age and income (**Figure 9**). This suggests the importance of ethnicity as a factor in itself and the way in which film tastes may be shaped by the pursuit of minority-ethnic capital. Furthermore, ethnic groups’ engagement with film distribution methods do not map neatly onto other demographic factors. For example, despite being the ethnic group with the oldest median age, Europeans were positively correlated with streaming for free (.100 **Figure 1**) which, while not negatively correlated with a rise in age, shows a drift in this direction (-.082 **Figure 1**). When combined with their positive correlation with the use of cyberlockers (.117 **Figure 1**) and their taste for French and other European films noted above, this suggests the potential appeal of online methods in connecting European ethnicities to films from their countries of origin or heritage.

Although correlations highlight an association between men and an increase in income (.152 **Figure 1**), the tastes and practices of men and women cannot be easily mapped onto hierarchies otherwise present in film consumption behaviour, instead cutting across them. For example, they both display a higher likelihood of viewing films associated with younger and lower income and/or less educated participants (action/adventure and horror for men; romance and family for women – **Figure 10**) and older, higher income and/or more educated participants (sci-fi, China/Hong Kong, Japan and Korea for men; literary and India for women – **Figures 10 and 11**).



**Figure 10:** Percentage of male and female watching films from listed genres.

Furthermore, the method that is most associated with men, torrenting (.165 **Figure 1**), is also associated with relatively lower income, less educated and younger audiences. While these findings reveal that men are associated with the method most emblematic of a form of IT capital then, the extent to which this particular skill may carry wider value appears to be limited.



**Figure 11:** Percentage of male and female watching films from listed countries.

This greater likelihood of torrenting among men, when combined with the relatively higher ratio of men watching films from China, Hong Kong, Japan and, especially, Korea (**Figure 11**) also suggests that the hierarchies evident in Crisp’s analysis of East Asian film file-sharing

forums (2015) may replicate rather than challenge gendered hierarchies in wider society. In addition, the association between viewing East Asian films and a rise in income (**Figure 5**), and the association between viewing films from China/Hong Kong and Japan and a rise in education (**Figure 6**), suggests a link between the viewing of these films and the possession of greater economic and cultural capital. This reminds us of the way in which the distribution of subcultural capital may mirror the wider unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital in society.

The potential replication of wider hierarchies within filmic subcultures is also evident in the data on audiences for cult films. These audiences are even more likely than audiences for East Asian films to be male (**Figure 10**), reinforcing Hollows' work on the masculinity of cult and subcultures in general (2003). However, while there is a slight relationship between a rise in income and the rise in likelihood of viewing cult films it is not as pronounced as that for festival/arthouse or indie films (**Figure 2**). When combined with the much lower percentage of viewers of cult films that have been through higher education, this prevents it from being easily understood as a classed taste culture (Jancovich, 2002). This may be due to the 'mainstreaming' effect of developments in distribution technologies discussed (if complicated) by Hills (2015), from VCRs to file sharing. The fact that the percentage of viewers of cult films is similar from ages 15 to 54 (**Figure 4**), and that a number of online methods of distribution are more associated with younger audiences, also suggests the relevance of this longer lineage of technological disruption, reminding us not to overstate the impact of online methods of film distribution.

Given this shifting and fragmenting context of film consumption, perhaps cultural capital might be best understood as residing in omnivorousness? **Table 4** shows that viewing films from a wide range of countries is positively correlated with a rise in income (.218), education (.261) and age (.313). This suggests that breadth, in this sense, is at least a symptom of privilege. However, engaging with a wide range of genres is not associated with a rise in income, age or education, and using a wide range of methods is not associated with income or education but negatively correlated with a rise in age (-.174 **Table 4**). These findings consequently problematise the equation of status with breadth per se when it comes to film consumption. Warde et al (2007) and Jarness (2015) have highlighted some of the weaknesses of using quantitatively derived accounts of omnivorousness as a sign of socio-cultural privilege or its decline. Returning to the importance of embodied cultural capital in Bourdieu's work, they argue that the *how* of engagement with culture, defined through different dispositions, is as important an indication of socio-cultural distinction and hierarchy as the *what*. Nevertheless, the *what* is still essential, as Warde et al acknowledge (2007, p.144), and the present study still points towards certain tendencies. For example, given the lack of significance of breadth per se, privileged groups' engagement with a wide range of international films appears as much due to it being emblematic of traditional cultural capital grounded in content that is culturally more inaccessible.

	Breadth of Methods	Breadth of Genres	Breadth of Countries
Income	-.054	.033	.218
Education	-.025	.029	.261
Age	-.174	.022	.313
Māori	-.007	.073	.049
Pacific	.003	.041	-.010
Asian	.014	.045	.023
NZ Euro	.012	-.103	-.074
Euro	-.014	.024	.061
Male	.007	.090	.008
Female	-.007	-.090	-.008

*Key correlations in red.*

**Table 4:** Correlations between income, education, age, ethnicity, gender and breadth of methods, genres and countries used/viewed

Omnivorousness is also relevant to understanding the behaviour of diasporic groups. For example, while Asian respondents' higher likelihood of having viewed Indian, Chinese, and Japanese films would seem to be connected to the fact that these were the three largest ethnic groups within this broader category in the survey sample, Japan's status as the most viewed country among Asian respondents is despite the fact that there were less Japanese respondents in the survey than Indian and Chinese (**Figure 9**). Furthermore, the possible facilitation of minority-ethnic capital through online viewing is not at the expense of national capital among the survey sample, given the likelihood of all the respondents within all ethnic groups of having viewed a New Zealand film (**Figure 9**). Relatively few of the respondents, at least, are 'outside' this national culture. These diasporic ethnicities could thus be seen to be in possession of diverse cultural competence, via a horizontal omnivorousness pivoting less on the crossing of hierarchical distinctions but moving instead across local, national and global boundaries. However, the lower income of Asian groups, in the survey and the most recent census, raises questions regarding the convertability of this cultural omnivorousness into economic capital (**Table 3**).

## Conclusion

In sum, these findings suggest that the potential contribution of online methods of film distribution to the disruption of social/cultural hierarchies is fairly minimal at present. This is due to the extent to which the use of these methods is, in part, structured by the unequal distribution of cultural and economic capital. Lower income, less educated and younger audiences' greater likelihood of watching popular genres from English-speaking countries via the illegal or semi-legal methods of torrenting and friends' hard drives can be understood as stemming in part from the cultural accessibility of this content and the economic accessibility of these methods. In contrast, the tastes and practices of higher income, more educated and older audiences echo more traditional cultural hierarchies that attach value to genres such as festival/arthouse and literary films, foreign language cinema

and, for the more educated at least, offline methods associated with the circulation of this content such as film societies and festivals.

There is some evidence of the way in which online methods of film distribution may contribute to a more pluralised landscape of cultural value contingent upon a range of identities. For example, the higher use of streaming for free by European ethnic groups is best understood through its relation to minority-ethnic capital. However, the data also suggests that wider social hierarchies may still permeate the subcultural formations facilitated through online distribution, such as the higher likelihood that the people torrenting East Asian films are male, have relatively higher incomes and are more educated.

Some online methods are less clearly associated with the presence or absence of privilege. Paying to stream films is most likely among younger audiences but not among those on lower incomes or with lower education, and there is no significant relationship between a rise or fall in income, education and age and streaming for free or using cyberlockers. In addition, the data shows that familiarity with a wide range of film consumption methods is less associated with privilege than familiarity with a diversity of international film. Such findings warn us from overstating the extent to which the use of methods of film distribution is *in itself* structured by cultural and economic inequalities. Nevertheless, social/cultural distinctions may still operate through the content that is consumed through these methods, as evident in the patterns identified in this study. Furthermore, whilst these patterns reveal that the relationship between social and cultural hierarchy may be shifting slightly, evident in slight generational differences in genre tastes among more privileged groups, the tastes of the privileged across ages still pivot on their relatively greater preference for relatively more culturally inaccessible content, such as East Asian films. These findings consequently serve to temper claims regarding the disruptiveness of online methods of film distribution, instead revealing the extent to which their use may be implicated within social/cultural hierarchies that are ongoing.

Whilst this study has revealed the extent to which current film viewing practices and tastes can be understood as a *symptom* of advantage, further qualitative and longitudinal research is necessary in order to ascertain the degree to which these film viewing practices and tastes *confer* advantage. For example how, if at all, are the viewing competencies and contexts of more privileged groups mobilised for their benefit and/or converted into other forms of capital? This study is also based on a particular sample of the New Zealand population at a particular historical moment in which Netflix had only just been introduced<sup>4</sup>. Replication of this study longitudinally in New Zealand, and in countries with more mature subscription video-on-demand markets, may thus produce different results. Nevertheless, through its use of quantitative data this study represents a starting point for thinking about how online methods of film distribution may fit into the bigger picture of social/cultural distinctions in film consumption.

### **Biographical Note:**

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The use of rising age as a sign of status is complicated by issues of ageism in employment and retirement from the workforce. However, its significance as a sign of increasing status is underlined by the fact that median income in New Zealand rises with age until 49, where it plateaus until 54, declines slightly to 59, and declines more in retirement, but not to a level below the income of 20-24 year olds (Statistics New Zealand 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Crisp's research does not actually employ subcultural capital as a concept, but the application of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power to the hierarchies formed through East Asian cinema file-sharing forum communities shares a number of similarities with research informed by this concept, and draws upon this research at points, citing Denison (2011).

<sup>3</sup> The genre category of cult cinema used in the survey obviously subsumes a diverse range of films under one heading. However, given that "'cult" is largely a matter of ways in which films are classified in consumption' (Jancovich et al, 2003, p.1) it seems fitting to let audiences decide if the films they view can be understood through this term.

<sup>4</sup> See Huffer 2016 & 2017 for a detailed delineation of the film distribution landscape in New Zealand at this historical moment.