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Collecting and sharing movies' in the digital era: Audiences:practices and the sociocultural implications in the case of Taiwan

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‘Collecting and Sharing Movies’ in the Digital Era: Audiences’ Practices and the Sociocultural Implications in the Case of Taiwan

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Abstract

With the coming of ‘multi-platform film-viewing’ era, contemporary viewers can enjoy movies not only at the cinema, but also at home via innovative media technology, such as DVDs and Internet. Therefore, movies can be played and stored in different formats, from celluloid films, video tapes, to DVD discs and digital files. For many viewers, movie-collecting, along with film-viewing become of the essential parts of domestic movie-related leisure activities. However, not many existing literatures are focusing on viewers’ movie-collecting activity, especially in today’s digital media-rich environment, with the exception of some research about viewers’ practices of video movie collecting, related activities and the meanings behind their collecting practices (Tashiro, 1996; Dinsmore, 1998; and Bjarkman, 2004).

Owing to some specific characteristics of digital media like DVD discs or potable hard drives, sharing collected movies with other people becomes a popular activity for contemporary viewers to conduct. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to examine how modern viewer appropriate available information and communication technologies (ICT) to facilitate their practices of movie-collecting and sharing by adopting qualitative audience research method with respondents recruited from different age cohorts. After analyzing collected data, it is argued that DVD discs and downloaded movie files are used as a kind of social tool for audiences’ to build up interaction with their family, friends, classmates or colleagues. Furthermore, sharing collected movies with other people is more significant than actually viewing those collected movies for many respondents participating in this research.

Keywords: film audiences, DVD movies, movie-downloading, movie-collecting and sharing, domestic film-viewing culture

Introduction: Movies as Collectable Items from Celluloid Film to Digital Files

When the first movie was showing publicly in Paris, none of the attendance could have imagined that, one day, viewers could watch movies through TV set or computer monitors, not to mention treating movies or films as collectable items for viewers to conduct repeated viewing practice or to share them with other people. However, the collecting and sharing of movies did not become a legitimate activity for common audiences until the invention and prevailing of video cassette recorder/player (VCR). If we turn back time to half a century ago, when cinemas were the only places to watch movies, and both big white screens and projectors are much needed equipments for playing films, movies, printed on films and stored in heavy metallic cans, were certainly not usual items for common viewers to acquire and collect at home. With the emergence of VCR and the availability of video movies for purchasing or renting, not only 'watching movies at home' became a feasible practice, but movie-collecting and sharing also started to be implemented as an important part of domestic film culture. Therefore, scholars started to pay attention to the 'by-product' of audiences' domestic film-viewing practices and to examine audiences' practices of video movie collecting, related activities and the meanings behind their collecting practices (Tashiro, 1996; Dinsmore, 1998; and Bjarkman, 2004).

However, since DVD players became popular in the early 2000s, DVD players had replace VCR as the major platforms for many viewers to enjoy movies at home, and DVD discs took the place of videotapes as main collecting targets for movies. With a little help from DVD burners and adequate software, even rented DVD movies can be copied and reproduced as private-owned, collected items. In addition, DVD discs are the only collectable items for movie collectors. Through Internet, movies can be downloaded legally or illegally as digital movie files for viewing, collecting, copying and sharing. Collected movies have been transformed from actual films, tapes r discs into virtual, digital files. Unfortunately, there are not many existing researches concentrating on the issues of contemporary audiences' collecting and sharing of DVD discs or digital files. Hence, one of the most essential objectives of this paper is to analyze how modern audiences adopt and appropriate available information and communication technologies (ICT) to facilitate their practices of movie-collecting and sharing? And how domestic film-viewing culture can be influence by these practices? Furthermore, as one local film distributor, Patrick Huang, once expressed his concern about the box office loss caused by common audiences' movie-sharing activities (Lin, 2005). Consequently, this paper endeavours to explore how contemporary audiences' movie-collecting and sharing could have

impacts on local film industry. Most importantly, this paper tries to offer a detailed examination of how DVD movies and digital movie files are used as a kind of social tool for audiences' to build up interaction with their family, friends, classmates or colleagues.

The project employs various qualitative research techniques to collect data of the respondents' movie-collecting and sharing practices and their various employment of ICT from different age groups in Taipei. This paper will first introduce current status of DVD industry and the use of Internet as a source of film-viewing in Taiwan to offer some basic information, followed by brief delineation of research method applied. The subsequent sections will be dedicated to the analysis of these respondents' movie-collecting and sharing practices and the comparisons between data collected from different age cohorts. Hopefully, this paper could contribute to not only the sociocultural significance of contemporary audiences' collecting and sharing practices of movies, but it could also give a more clearer picture of how common audiences' everyday activities could affect local film industry economically.

Brief Description of DVD Movie Industry and Internet Film-Viewing and Downloading in Taiwan

Since DVD players became popular in Taiwan in the early 2000s, watching movies through rented or purchased DVDs have become common practices for many Taiwanese viewers. As one of them confesses in local newspaper in 2005:

> Movie tickets are too expensive. One ticket could cost me two hundred NTDs, but it only costs me 60 NTDs at most to rent the latest DVD release. Besides, watching a DVD at home is very cosy and relaxing, I can hit pause or replay something whenever I want.[1]

DVD rental shops - including Blockbuster Taiwan, Asia 1, and other independent rental shops - are like grocery stores located in virtually every neighbourhood in Taipei, making it easy for audiences to get access to movies on DVD. Blockbuster Taiwan and Asia 1 are two major DVD rental chains currently in Taiwan. Blockbuster Taiwan, founded in 1997, as a part of the global DVD rental chains, owned 132 rental shops in Taiwan in 2009. In 2009, Blockbuster Taiwan started its online rental service. With this service, consumers can pick movie titles via Internet, and then collect and

[1] Xiang, Yi-Fei (項貽斐). 2005. The Average Frequency of Taiwanese People Going to Cinema is Less than Once Per Year (台灣人平均一年進不到戲院一次). *udn.com: 2005/04/11* (聯合新聞網), Taipei. (accessed April 12, 2005)

return their rented DVDs through 4,500 24-hour convenient stores nationwide.[2] Asia 1, founded in 1997, without any foreign support or financial aids, is a part of the CMC Group.[3] Currently, Asia 1 owns 101 shops nationwide in Taiwan. Similar to Blockbuster Taiwan, Asia 1 also extends its service to online rental with which consumers can take the advantage of widespread chains of convenient stores, including FamilyMart, OK, and Hi-Life, to collect and return DVDs they want to rent, without having to go to Asia 1 stores.[4] In addition to traditional DVD rental stores, there exist book/comic book rental stores offering DVD rental service in Taiwan and online DVD rental shops, such as CatchPlay[5] and iVideo,[6] which offer online DVD rental service, allowing Taiwanese viewers to rent DVDs through the Internet and to collect and return via convenient stores. All these different DVD rental services provide Taiwanese viewers more convenient ways to watch DVD movies than ever. For cinehilia and movie buffs, they can easily expand their personal movie libraries by purchasing DVDs directly through physical retailing stores or virtual Internet service. They can even use DVD burners to copy movies rented from these different DVD rental channels.

Not only can Taiwanese viewers use the Internet to rent or buy DVD movies, or search for film-related information, but they can also use the Internet to watch streaming online movies or to download movie files. According to a survey published about Internet broadband usage in Taiwan (TWNIC 2010), the percentage of Internet users of age 12 and above who have experiences using broadband in Taiwan is 67.21% (13.59 million people). 68.91% of households (5.25 million) in Taiwan have broadband service subscribed. This percentage reaches 83.62% in Taipei City. Among broadband users, in every 100 people, 52.70% of them use broadband service for

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[2] http://www.blockbuster.com.tw/about.jsp, accessed April 29, 2011.

[3] CMC Entertainment is arguably the leading company in Taiwan film industry producing Chinese-language films with bigger budgets, without having to resort to foreign financial support or government funding. Films, such as *Silk* (*詭絲*，Su, Chao-Bin, 2006) and *Red Cliff* (*赤壁*，John Woo, 2008), are produced by CMC Entertainment. CMC Entertainment is part of the CMC Group, which includes CMC Magnetics – one of the biggest DVD disc providers in the world. CMC Group enjoys the advantage of vertical integration in Taiwanese film industry, from blank DVD disk production (CMC Magnetics), to film production (CMC entertainment), to film distribution (CMC Movie Corporation), to film exhibition (Vie Show Cinemas). CMC Group is also the main investor of DVD movie distributor, Deltamac (Taiwan) Co., Ltd., and the local DVD rental chain, Asia 1. Please refer to the company website of CMC Magnetics Corporation: http://www.cmcnet.com.tw/, accessed April 29, 2011.

[4] http://www.asia1.com.tw/content/index.asp?type=about, accessed April 29, 2011.

[5] Please refer to http://www.catchplay.com/about/tc for details on CatchPlay. (accessed April 30, 2011)

[6] Please refer to http://www.ivideo.com.tw/ for details on iVideo. (accessed April 30, 2011)

information searching; 31.39% for news and weather broadcast; and only 10.05% for watching video online. Although broadband usage on 'watching video online' is relatively low with 10.05%, compared to the same figure of 1.42% in 2007, broadband users' usage on 'watching video online' shows the increasing tendency and great potential in the future. In addition, broadband users' percentage of 'movie-downloading' via Internet is not demonstrated in this survey, perhaps, due to the legal issue of piracy, 'movie-downloading' is still a critical issue in need of further examination, especially while discussing movie collecting and sharing behaviours.

Research Design: Collecting Movies and Sharing Collected Movies as a Part of Film Audiences' Multi-Platform Viewing Practices

The research data used in this paper were originally collected for the researcher's research project designed to examine contemporary film audiences' multi-platform film-viewing and movie-related practices, of which audiences' movie collecting and sharing activities were a part. Therefore, research design of this paper is based on recruited respondents' own accounts of their multi-platform film-viewing practices. However, as the focus of this paper is on audiences' movie-collecting and movie-sharing activities, the data selected for analyzing are limited in serving the purposes of inspecting their movie-collecting and sharing practices under the trend of digitalization in audiovisual technology.

Due to the reason that audiences from different generations have been exposed to different films and audiovisual technologies since their childhood, the respondents of this project were grouped more by their age than by other demographic characteristics. However, this does not mean that other demographic factors have not been considered in this project. For example, watching DVD movies are discovered to be a more frequently adopted viewing platform for adult respondents, such as the parent respondents, than the younger respondents of university students, so are the collecting and sharing of DVD movies. In addition, although both male and female university student respondents view downloaded movies frequently, the heavy movie-downloaders and movie-file collectors and sharers are predominantly male. Thus, gender difference within each age cohort also requires careful attention. For this reason, while generational difference in film-viewing became the main research aim of the project, other influential demographic factors, such as gender, are important secondary focuses.

The main reason for adopting qualitative audience research methods in this paper is because they offer detailed accounts of the movie-collecting and sharing practices of the respondents in their own words. As Barrie Gunter states the characteristic of

qualitative audience research is that, it allows ‘respondents to converse freely about their media experiences, choosing their own answers, their own language and terminology, and even their own questions’ (2000: 42). This serves the main focus of the project, which seeks to probe and articulate at first hand Taiwanese audiences’ current movie-collecting and sharing experiences, and not simply generalise the analysis to Taiwanese film audiences as a whole or try to forecast through a statistical approach based on the collection of data from large-scale samples.

Besides the ‘age’ factor, the related, but different factor of ‘life stage’ has to be taken into consideration. The total of 59 respondents in this research were divided into the following groups: Group A: 9 teenagers from 12 to 17 years old; Group B: 10 college or university students from 18 to 24 years old; Group C: 25 viewers from 23 to 39 years old who are employed full-time or part-time and unmarried or married without children; Group D: 8 viewers from 30 to 49 years old who are married and have children; and Group E: 7 viewers over 50 years old.

Nevertheless, for most of the teenage respondents participating in this research, because their parents control their domestic media use, especially the usage of computer and Internet, most of them do not have the luxury to spend too much of their after-school time to conduct movie-downloading practice. Thus, collecting downloaded movies is not an easily feasible operation for those teenagers. On the other hand, without financial independence from their parents, to spend their pocket money on their favorite DVD movies for collecting or repeated viewing is not a common practice for these teenage respondents, either. On the contrary, the most mature group of viewers over 50, similar to their youngest counterpart, do not use Internet to download movies, not to mention collecting and sharing downloaded movie files. The use of movie-downloading requires a broadband internet connection, computer equipment and knowledge of the process of Internet-downloading. None of the respondents in the mature group had any motivation to download movies, as they do not feel the need to watch movies playing on the small-sized computer monitor with poorer image quality and to follow every newly-released movie. Furthermore, most of them do not actively use DVD players to watch movies. So buying DVD movies is certainly not one of their common everyday activities. Hence, the analysis of movie-collecting and sharing of this paper will be discussed more from data collected through Group B, C & D.

The process of collecting audience data was broken down into the following phases with different research techniques applied from 2006 to 2007:

Phase 1: The Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was distributed at the Vie Show Cinema Taipei Xinyi in East Taipei and the SPOT Taipei Film House in Central Taipei, and also through

‘snowball sampling’ those pilot study respondents who had shown an interest in participating in the further survey, in order to reach as wide a range of people as possible and to collect general film audience information. This included demographic data, the employment of the different audiovisual technologies they used as film viewing platforms, their film genre and film origin preferences, their everyday involvement with movies, and their willingness to participate in the follow-up phases of this project. At the same time, an advertisement was also posted on several Internet movie discussion boards to recruit respondents. One thing worthy noting here is that by using snowball sampling the researcher can gain access to respondents’ social networks, such as their family members, friends, classmates, colleagues, roommates or any other people with whom one specific respondent goes to the cinema, talks about movies, or shares downloaded movie files and DVDs. By doing this, the movie-related networks of respondents could be constructed and analysed.

Phase 2: In-depth interviews

One 45 minutes-to-an-hour in-depth interview was arranged, for respondents willing to take part in the further survey. Most respondents were interviewed alone. If respondents were related to each other (family members, colleagues, classmates, or flatmates), then the interview was conducted in pairs or as a group. To observe the respondents’ home environments, they were asked if the interview could take place in their homes. If the respondents did not feel comfortable having an ‘intruder’ entering their personal space, the interview was conducted at another venue of the respondent’s choice. As the target respondents were all from Taipei, the language used was predominantly Mandarin. All interview sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed into Word files. After the coding and analysis process, all of the respondents’ interview transcriptions were translated into English by the researcher for the purpose of report and analysis presentation in the thesis.

Phase 3: The film consumption diary

After the in-depth interview, respondents were asked to keep a film consumption diary for two weeks. In this diary, they were asked to record any film-related activities they did as part of their everyday routines, such as going to the cinema, renting DVDs, chatting with others about movies, downloading films from the Internet, watching movie trailers on television, or checking movie news and movie information. All of the respondents’ diaries recovered were typed as Word files for later coding and analysing procedures. As with the interview data, these were translated into English by the researcher.

Phase 4: The follow-up interview

After an initial analysis of the respondents’ data from the previous phases, in order to gather more explanations or clarifications and further interrogate certain

issues several short interviews were conducted via email, Internet chat programmes, or the telephone.

Questionnaire respondents, who were living in the Greater Taipei Area including Taipei City and Taipei County when the survey was conducted, were counted as qualified questionnaire respondents for further research. There were a total of 372 qualified questionnaires received. 59 questionnaire respondents were willing to participate in and successfully finished their in-depth interview sessions, which is a high success rate considering how demanding the in-depth interviews were. Among the 59 interview respondents, 48 of them returned their film consumption diaries afterwards.

A final point to be noted about the respondents is that all of the names appearing in this thesis are false, in order to protect their anonymity. If the respondent actually uses an English name as his/her nickname, then a false English name is adopted for him/her. Otherwise, a false Chinese name was assigned.

University Students' Social Use of Downloaded Movies

According to the questionnaire results from the respondents of university students, 7 out of 10 have downloaded a movie before, and for 4 out of 10 respondents, Internet downloading is one of their current major ways to watch movies. If we look at their diaries, the 4 respondents downloading movies more frequently than the others did download or try to download movies during their 2 weeks of diary-keeping. It will be argued that movie downloading is not only the most economical means for this group of respondents to watch first run movies, by copying and sharing downloaded movie files, but also that movie downloading has become another social tool for these university students.

> I don't know how to download movies. I watch whatever my brother has downloaded, but only those movies I haven't seen before. (Sara, 20, Female, University Student)

> I don't download movies myself because I'm worried about computer viruses. Besides, I have friends with faster broadband. They download lots of movies. I could give them a list of movies that I want to see, they will download them for me, and then I will go to their places to watch them. Anyway, they have paid lots of money for their faster broadband. Those movies are all free to download. (A-Ru, 20, Female, University Student)

> My ex-roommate and one of my seniors are regular movie-downloaders. Sometimes, I will ask them what new movies they have downloaded, and then I

> will copy their downloaded movie files directly to my portable media player. I personally think that downloading is not an easy task. In order to save those troubles, I just ask them for the movie files. (Tommy, 21, Male, University Student)

Other than lacking the know-how to download movies, the most obvious reasons they have in common is that they all have friends or family members around who can fulfil this task for them. They do not really need to learn or feel the need to learn how to download movies themselves. For those who do downloading, although they can either watch the movies with friends or copy the files from their friends and watch them alone. One distinguishing feature of digital movie files is that the reproduction of those files is low-cost, easy and fast. Unlike before, when someone else wanted to borrow one of your favourite books or CDs, you had to think twice and worry about possible damage to them, before they are returned, not only as these downloaded movie files virtually free of charge (if the broadband service fees and electronic fees are not counted), but the reproduction of digital files does not deteriorate the quality of the original files either. With the constantly dropping prices of blank discs and hard disks, copying files to DVD discs or a hard disk does not cost much, even for some poorer students. As a result, sharing downloaded movie files is a common practice among friends and classmates for these students, with both cinematic and social meanings. For instance, Eileen talks about his major source of downloaded movies, one of his good friends, Wei-Han, another respondent from this group.

> I know how to download, but it takes time. It's easier to get downloaded movies from one of my good friends. He downloads movies almost everyday. He has all kinds of movies. All I have to do is go to his place and copy files to my hard disk or borrow his hard disk directly. (Eileen, 21, Female, University Student)

As for the downloaders, they seem to feel happy sharing movie files with other people.

> Many of my friends or classmates will directly come to my place, check my files by themselves, and then copy the files they want to their hard disc. (Wei-Han, 24, Male, University Student)

> After I finish watching my downloaded movies, I don't immediately delete them. I would ask other people whether they would like to see them as well. (A-Ming, 20, Male, University Student)

For these downloader's, they do not only download or copy films for their personal collection or interest, but they also download or copy films for their friends or family,

in order to share movies with them. Downloaded movies to them are not just something to watch for entertainment purposes, downloaded movies offer them a channel to socialise with other people. By doing so, these downloader's can form a bond with other people, especially their peers, or have something to talk about with other people later on, without having to watch the movies together. On the other hand, enjoying sharing is another feature of these downloaders. Even though these files are not something precious, they did make an effort to search for those files on the Internet and spend time completing the downloading process. It is a personal statement to let someone else to enjoy the files they have downloaded.

> I only download 7 or 8 films a day. But I only save those DVD quality movie files. I probably have hundreds of films stored on my hard disc. However, I still go to the cinema for movies premiering on the same day worldwide, if I don't want to wait for DVD quality files on the Internet. Because we have to wait until the DVD of that movie is released in China or the US, before we can have DVD quality files. (Wei-Han)

For many other audiences, watching 7 or 8 movies per month could be quite a task. However, for regular downloaders, such as Wei-Han, downloading 7 or 8 movies per day seems to be a regular routine. As a matter of fact, all they have to do is turn on their computers and downloading software. As long as there are movie files available on the Internet, given the speed of today's broadband service, downloaders could download many different movies at the same time. While downloading, they can let the computer finish the rest of the downloading jobs, as some other respondents mention, they could just go to sleep or do something else. The task of searching for available movie files actually requires more of downloaders' time than downloading itself. Whether they have time to finish watching all of their downloaded movies is another matter. Wei-Han's account also explains why local distributors try to get movies, especially Hollywood blockbusters, to premiere in Taipei as soon as possible after their world premiere. Generally speaking, the rule of thumb about the quality of downloadable movie files is: the longer after a movie has premiered, the more chance the downloaded file of that movie would have a better quality. Wei-Han also points out that many websites in China provide source files to download after the DVD release. Many movie file providers mark the quality of the movies for other downloader's to identify, as Wei-Han explains.

> There are 3 different types of movie files based on their image quality: DVD quality, VCD quality, and 'recorded at the cinema'.[7]

[7] 'Recorded at the cinema' versions (偷拍版) of movie files refer to those pirate

Image quality also acts as criterion for these movie downloaders to decide whether they want to keep the files after watching them.

> I only save those files that are good quality, and keep them in my shared file for other downloaders to use. As for those with bad image quality, I usually delete them after watching. (Xiao-Jie, 20, male, University Student)

> After finishing watching downloaded movies, I would usually delete those files, in order to save my hard disk space, with the exception of classic or excellent movies. But I have friends who have asked me to burn copies of downloaded movies before. My roommate doesn't burn extra copies for his movie files, either. He thinks it's easy to download movies nowadays, if you want to see a particular movie again later on, all you have to do is download it again. (Tommy)

For this generation of audiences, doing downloading and watching downloaded movies offer them with 'disposable pleasures'. They save good quality movie files, movies they really enjoy, and movies that are meaningful to them. Most of the downloaded movie files are deleted after being viewed. It appears that downloaded movies function as a kind of tabloid newspaper, which can offer these viewers free and quick access to popular hot topics and news. After watching them, they just delete the files, like throwing a paper away. The most important thing for them is keep up with popular information, news and movies at that moment. After all, there are always other new movies available to download tomorrow.

For some heavy movie downloaders, such as Wei-Han, according to his diary, he downloads 6 or 7 movies a day. However, over the two-week span, he only watched two movies. This statement shows the liberation of university students in their routines at home. He can turn on his computer and download movies day in day out, and watch a movie at 1AM if he chooses. Movie-downloading is an inseparable part of his everyday routine. With his 10MB super fast broadband, he can finish downloading a movie with a file size of less than 1G in a couple of hours. He seems to have a compulsion to download and collect as many movies as possible, especially new movies, even if he doesn't have time or tend to watch them all.

> Basically, I download all kinds of movies. I also watch all kinds of movies. Once I find out there are new sources available, I will start downloading them right away. (Wei-Han)

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movies originally made by using a video camera to record movies directly when they are playing at the cinema. That is why the image quality of these pirate versions is the poorest, but it is the fastest way to get pirate version of movies after they have been released.

With faster and faster Internet connections, the impact of movie downloading on audience film viewing practices can only get stronger. Movie-downloading, combined with the sharing of unauthorised non-profit copying of legal DVDs has already had a significant impact on local pirate DVDs markets. Since convenient film-downloading began, the quality of downloaded films has improved, and the cost of DVD burners has gone down, many audiences have lost interest in buying pirate copies of DVD films. Wei-Han explains the reason with humour, 'Earlier, when the downloading speed was not as fast today, I had experience of buying pirate DVDs from night markets, but there is no need to buy pirate DVDs anymore with faster downloading speeds. Besides, chances are the sources of pirate DVDs are the same as those used by Internet downloaders.'

We can find out that most of these university students engage in movie-downloading, yet it is the men in this group who download movies far more often than the women. However, whether this 'gender-downloading' relationship is just a coincidence within this smaller sample, or whether it has broader applicability needs to be further examined. Moreover, with cable movies offering these students an instant source of movies for repeat viewing, downloaded movie files offering free access to newly-released movies, and the availability of cheap second-run cinemas, it is not economical or necessary for these students to spend money on renting or buying DVD movies. Therefore, DVD players are a viewing-platform that respondents in this group do not employ very often, especially compared to the respondent group of employees and parents analysed in the next two chapters.

Employed Respondents' DVD-Sharing Practice

The employed respondents show a higher percentage who watched rented DVDs at home. Nineteen of twenty-five respondents from this group chose DVD-renting as their main platform for watching movies. In addition, sixteen of the twenty-five borrowed movies from other people. It seems that the image and sound quality of DVD movies, the easy reproduction of DVD copies, the convenient access to DVD-renting and DVD-retailing, and the cheaper cost of watching DVD movies make this the perfect viewing platform for these busy working respondents . However, the late charge mechanism designed by rental stores to increase turn-over rate of their DVD titles may cause a little bit trouble for some respondents.

> I used to go to DVD rental shops very often but I'd rather go to the second-run cinema now. Because the way those shops charge late fees doesn't seem fair, I've paid lots of late fees. Sometimes, I have to stay up late to finish watching those DVD movies to avoid the late return fees (Shin-Ru, 31, Female, Small

Business Owner).

Fortunately, for respondents who do not want to pay late fees or have to watch rented movies in a hurry, technology has come to the rescue.

> I don't download movies. I only burn rented movies on DVDs. Because I don't have time to watch those rented movies immediately before returning them, I decrypt and burn them for later viewing. Right now, I still have many burned DVD movies stocked for me to watch (Chi-Fu, 36, Male, Engineer).

Since DVD burners became reasonably priced, they have become a standard piece of equipment for computers in Taiwan. With suitable software and a bit of know-how, making a copy of a DVD movie is no more difficult than making copies of CDs. Copying DVD movies is far easier than copying VHS tapes. Most importantly, unlike when VHS tapes are copied, there is no degradation in quality when a DVD is copied. This is true even if one takes into account the issue of compression ratios for copying Double-Layered (DL) DVD disc onto common and popular Single-Layered DVD+R or DVD-R discs, where movie files of 6G or 7G have to be compressed to fit into the space of under 4.7G of blank DVD discs. Compared to its original DVD, the inferior quality of the copied version is hardly noticeable. Chi-Fu, for instance, used his DVD burner to save copies of rented movies for later viewing and to avoid late fees. This 'rent, rip, return' practice, as Dean calls it, (2007, 120-122) is a good example of the users' appropriation of technology and also allows them to facilitate their film-viewing free from institutional rules – in this case, the 2-day or 7-day time frame for keeping rented DVDs:

> I enjoy staying home and watching DVDs instead of going out at weekends. But I don't usually rent DVD movies, I just watch DVDs that I bought or burned or that are borrowed from friends. Besides, my sister brought back lots of DVD movies from China for me to watch (Mei-Ling, 30, Female, Teacher).

> Sometimes, I will discuss movies with friends or colleagues. We share DVD movies with each other as well. Some are official copies, some are burned copies (Li-Ning, Male, 29).

Movies have been stored in different formats since the medium was born, from celluloid film rolls, to magnetic tapes, to various digital formats, such as LD, VCD, DVD, and other kinds of digital video files. The features of current digital formats of being easy to reproduce and transport facilitate movie-sharing. Before the coming of VCR tapes, people could only share with other fans their opinions or critiques of the movie they had seen. Only after the reproduction of movies on to tapes or discs has it

been possible for them to share the movie itself with other people. As both of the above respondents mention, the sharing of movies with family, friends, and colleagues is a common practice for them. That is why one of the local distributors, Patrick Huang, expressed his worry about the box office loss caused by viewers' non-profitable movie-sharing practice: 'The majority of the pirate versions of movies are not sold through illegal businesses, rather they are reproduced by consumers and used as a kind of gift, which could make more serious box office damage than illegal pirate business' (Lin, 2005, 69).

There are several significant aspects of movie-sharing. First, it is the most economical way to watch movies. Not only are all these shared movies free of any fees, but also they can be watched at any time. Furthermore, the cost of purchasing DVDs is cheaper than ever, especially for pirate DVDs from China (as in Mei-Ling's example). Along with the low cost of digital reproduction of either DVD discs or downloaded files, this makes it easier to build up a movie collection than it was years ago. Besides, the quality of digital files will not quickly degrade after constant repeat viewings as magnetic tapes or film rolls did. Consequently, these collected DVD movies, whether they are official, copied, or pirated versions, are not as precious as earlier formats - celluloid film rolls, magnetic VHS tapes, or LD discs (Laser Disc). It is easier for people to share their own collected movies with others. Even if their films become damaged or go missing, it requires little effort and expense to make another copy or buy a new one.

Li-Ning points out that sharing movies with friends or colleagues is also a way to initiate conversation and interaction. Before lending movies, the lender can recommend the ones he possesses to his friends or colleagues. Later they can discuss their views about the movie together. In a way, this process functions like a book-reading club. Several friends or colleagues can watch the same movie separately and then discuss it together. Some respondents had indeed established a kind of movie-sharing club among their colleagues and friends. In the following example, Chun-Ho was the major movie-provider to some of his office colleagues and Fu-Ping and Ya-Li were among those to benefit from his generous movie-sharing:

> We have an unofficial DVD-sharing club in my office. One of my colleagues, Chun-Ho, will rent newly released DVD movies and make copies, in order to share those movies with us (Fu-Ping, 37, Male, Engineer).

> I can get DVD movies from Chun-Ho. He offers us one or two movies per week. Sometimes, he even designs covers for his copied DVD movies. He doesn't charge us a penny. He makes one copy for one movie, so we have to line up for certain popular movies (Ya-Li, 29, Male, Engineer).

> You won't hand me over to the police? (Chun-Ho asks jokingly.) I started to copy movies onto VCDs when I studied at university. After getting a DVD burner, I started to make copies of rented DVD movies. I only make copies of movies that I like. As for making covers for my copied DVDs, that's just my boring habit. My handwriting is not neat. Therefore, I use the computer to print out DVD labels so that my copied DVDs can be identified easily by other people. Actually, I'm not really collecting movies, because usually after lending my copied DVD movies to others, I don't even know whether those movies are returned or not. It's more like a volunteer service for my family, friends, or colleagues. I don't charge them any money. Since I have paid to rent those movies, I can make the most of my rental fees by sharing burned copies with other people (Chun-Ho, 26, Male, Engineer).

All three respondents here are engineers in the IT industry. Their knowledge of computer hardware and software means it is easy and trouble-free for them to decrypt rental DVD movies and make burned copies. Nevertheless, Chun-Ho still has concerns about legality, even though he does not make any profit out of this practice. For Chun-Ho, making copies of rental DVDs and covers for the burned copies is an everyday habit. This kind of *bricolage* leisure activity is similar to other domestic handcrafting activities, such as making miniature models or D.I.Y. furniture from whatever resources are at hand. It is a labour intensive activity at home after work, which not only kills time and relaxes him, but also serves a social purpose. By sharing copied movies, Chun-Ho establishes a cinephilic bond with his friends or colleagues. The feedback and thanks he gets from his colleagues for his generous movie-sharing motivates Chun-Ho to keep making copies of newly released movies.

> We haven't gone to the cinema for five or six years. We watch almost every movie at home these days. Especially after the unofficial DVD-sharing club among my colleagues, one to two weeks after the release of new DVD movies, I can get burned copies of those movies from my colleague. There's no need to waste money and time going to the cinema (Feng, 36, Male, Officer).

Unfortunately for the film industry, the loss of profit that results from this practice is difficult to estimate. Not only do DVD rental shops and distributors suffer from loss of revenue but local exhibitors and distributors also lose significant audience numbers as people would rather stay at home and watch free movies, rather than go to the cinema. As Feng reveals, with so many copied DVD movies available, watching shared DVD movies at home has completely replaced the activity of cinema-going for him and his wife.

Collecting DVD Movies as an End in Itself

> I rarely watch those DVD movies that I bought again and again. I bought them mainly for the purpose of collecting (Chi-Ya, 30, Female, Reseacher).
>
> Most of the movies that I collect I haven't watched again. I don't have much time to watch them. I would rather watch HBO when I come home from work (Nicole, 32, Female, Project Manager).

These respondents confess that they seldom watch their collected movies. They buy or copy DVD movies for the purpose of collecting them, not for watching them. Nicole mentions in her diary that all of her repeat viewings were via cable movie channels, and no respondent recorded watching their own collected DVD movies repeatedly. Some did watch their newly bought DVDs movies for the first time. One of the main reasons for not watching the movies they have collected again is the attraction of new movies, as Feng points out:

> I've collected more than 600 movies, I guess. Not all of them are burned, I buy movies that I like to watch, or movies that I have seen and enjoyed very much. As a matter of fact, I seldom watch those movies that I have collected again and again. There might be once or twice when I have thought about watching those old movies again. Yet, there are always newly burned movies waiting for me to watch (Feng).

As there are various platforms available for film-viewing, it is very easy and convenient to get access to unseen movies. With limited leisure time after work or over weekends, it requires a spur of the moment decision for them to bring out their collected movies and insert them into their DVD players to watch:

> It takes an impulse to watch my own DVDs sometimes. I might watch a particular movie after I have seen a review or heard something about that movie. Normally, I think that since I already have the DVD, there's no hurry to watch it immediately (Pearl, 23, Female, Marketing Assistant).

According to the respondents' film diaries, the pressure they feel about paying the late return fees when renting DVDs did force them to watch their rented movies immediately. When they collect DVDs on the other hand, with the exception of some rare movies that are hard to access via other platforms, it is mainly for collection purposes, rather than for repeat viewing. This is similar to Walter Benjamin's examination of his book-collecting habit, as elaborated by Barbara Klinger: 'In Benjamin's meditation on his own fascination with book collecting, he admits that

amassing a library has very little to do with actually reading the purchased texts' (2000, 137). One thing different might be that Benjamin's collected books also function as a part of the domestic decor and as a way to demonstrate the owners' identity and personal interests. However, not many of the respondents who collect different kinds of DVDs use their DVD collection as a part of their domestic decor. Most of them say that they just put their DVDs in the corner of their bedrooms or in the closet, without organizing them. This may partly be because of the easy access to any kinds of DVD movies and the low cost. It appears that the reason these respondents collect DVDs is different from the increasing trend of Americans who, according to the research of Peter Nicoles, (as mentioned in Klinger, 2000, 134), purchase videos for the purpose of viewing them repeatedly. Thus, with easier and more economical access to movies than before and also very limited time available for film-viewing, watching already-possessed movies repeatedly becomes a rarely-conducted practice for many respondents of this group.

Yet, compared to the university student group, only 5 of the 25 respondents in this group currently use Internet downloading as a primary channel for watching movies. The reasons they give for not doing so are because of the inferior image quality of downloaded movies in comparison to DVDs, and the time needed for downloading movie files. As DVDs are easily available, movie-downloading is not a necessary practice for the majority of respondents in this group. The few respondents who constantly download movies are all single and work in IT-related industries. Those who do download do so in a very similar way to those in the university student group. The only difference is that they do not have as much free time as their younger counterparts to engage in this practice. Also, they would rather spend money on the original DVD versions instead of downloaded files for collecting.

DVDs as Parent's Main Collecting Items for Movies and Major Film-Viewing Platform

> Except for some very popular movies, I would rather wait till the DVD release. Since the whole family can all watch one rented movie for the price of one rental fee, it's very expensive for the whole family to go to the cinema (Yong-Mao, 47, Male, Filmmaker).

> Actually, I don't like to go to the cinema. All the trouble of commuting is one thing, with the noise and interference caused by other viewers in the auditorium being another. There's no such interference at home. Besides, it's easier now to

> get DVD movies. I used to go to the Guanghua Bazaar to buy DVD movies.[8] Right now, it's convenient to buy DVD movies from the Internet from websites, such as www.hivideos.com.[9] Sometimes, buying a DVD movie is even cheaper than the price of one ticket for first-run movies (Tony).

One of the main reasons to watch movies at home instead of at the cinema is the 'cost'. For parents taking the whole family it is not just the cinema tickets. There will be other costs, such as meals, snacks, and parking fees. In addition, as Tony - a 42-year-old teacher and step-father of two twenty-something daughters - says, the fully self-controlled and interference-free environment of home provides him with a more comfortable atmosphere to watch films. With the proliferation of both DVD players and DVD burners, the lower costs of renting or purchasing DVD movies mean that these parents - without the need to catch up on popular first-run movies upon their theatrical releases, as many younger groups of respondents want to do - opt for DVDs as their primary platform to enjoy movies. What makes 'watching movies' on DVD even more easy and convenient is that they may be freely shared among family members, friends, or colleagues.

> *Lily*: We seldom rent DVD movies.
> *Jack*: One of her colleagues constantly shares his movies with us.
> *Lily*: He's got all kinds of movies. He knows that we have two kids; he will specially share cartoons or children's movies with us.
> *Jack*: He has burned lots of movies for us, probably two or three movies per month.
> *Lily*: I don't even have a big enough shelf to store those movies.

Despite the fact that Jack and Lily, parent with an 8-year-old daughter and a 7-year-old son, do not burn DVD movies themselves, they still have colleagues who are willing to offer them burned copies of DVD movies. In addition to burned DVD movie copies, cheap pirate movies bought from China are must-buy souvenirs for Taiwanese tourists and also popular items to share, as many of them are movies still showing at first-run cinemas in Taiwan. Kim Bjarkman argues that the pleasure of video collectors of television programmes is obtained through 'acquisition, ownership,

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[8] Guanghua Bazaar is the most famous market, or area, in Taipei for cheaper prices of all kinds on electronic products, computer-related equipment, and multi-media products, including illegal pirate computer software and pornography. Guanghua Bazaar, in a way, is similar to Tottenham Court Road in London, or Akihabara in Tokyo.

[9] www.hivideos.com is an Internet shopping site specialising in selling DVD movies, especially world cinema, art house cinema and classic movies. This site is the main source for cinephiles and movie buffs in Taiwan to buy non-mainstream movies.

guardianship, and membership' (2004, 240), whereas for many DVD movie collectors who took part in my research, I argue that the pleasure obtained from sharing their collection of DVD movies with other people might be the more significant:

> I have probably 50 or 60 DVD movies now. I don't buy movies that are easily found or borrowed from other people. I'd rather collect movies that are difficult to find and have been shown at international film festivals, such as some European movies or movies from other third-world countries. There's no need to buy DVDs of Hollywood movies. You can find them at the rental shop. Most of the DVDs that I buy I just leave for later viewing until I have more time available. As for DVDs I've seen, I just put them aside or share them with other friends. Actually, I don't even remember who I lend my DVDs to sometimes (Tony).

Tony, as an elementary school teacher and amateur documentary-filmmaker, sometimes needs to use movies as auxiliary teaching materials or as a reference in class. This is one reason for his collection of movies, especially movies that are not popular and are difficult to find. Buying DVD movies, for those respondents who collect DVD movies in this group, is very often the only way for them to see movies they like that are not popular enough to be shown at the cinema for a longer period of time or that are not easily found in rental shops. The rarity of non-popular movies, or art house movies, the uniqueness of special edition DVD movies and the bonus materials they include, and the quality of official DVDs enhances their collecting values. For these collectors, the popularity of mainstream commercial movies, the banality of copied DVDs, and the low-quality of pirate DVDs mean that they are not worth collecting, which echoes Jean Baudrillard's analysis that a unique or rare item is 'a symbol of the person who owns it' (1994, 13), and Bjarkman's claim that 'for television collectors, scarcity plays an important role in dictating which programmes are the most 'valuable' investments in the long term' (2004, 232). This kind of DVD-collecting is very different from that of the respondents who copy rented DVD movies for sharing and later viewing. The symbolic value of Tony's DVD collection of non-Hollywood movies does not depend upon the cost of these DVDs but is more a way to demonstrate that his movie taste is different from the popular Hollywood films, which can be manifested when he shares his collection with other people. Moreover, despite the fact that Lily is not as passionate a movie collector as Tony, both of them reveal that they handle their collected DVDs without much care.

Neither Lily nor Tony stores their DVDs for the purpose of displaying them. They just throw them in the corner or on shelves in their bedrooms. These burned or copied DVDs are identical in appearance, with some marks for labelling, along with

the easily identifiable covers of pirate movies from China. Therefore as objects they are not precious or special enough to be put into the spotlight. They are just like any other cheap collected items. When Tony's DVDs go missing after lending to other people, the cheap cost of building up his DVD collection and the easy acquisition of a replacement, either via the Internet or through other friends with similar interests, mean that this is not a big deal for him. This kind of attitude is very similar to how downloaders value their downloaded movie files. Modern digital technology not only lowers the cost of collecting, but because it is easy to copy digital files or DVDs, this also lowers their value as collectable objects:

> For the movies I really like, such as *Pink Floyd The Wall*, I've got all different versions of that movie, from VHS tape, to Laser Disc, to DVD. I'm thinking about throwing away that VHS tape. As for the Laser Disc, I think I will just save it for now, because it was very expensive when I bought it. But it is of no use now because my Laser Disc player has already broken (Yong-Mao).

As Yong-Mao points out, his collection of Laser Discs has become nothing more than objects that reflect his memory, since they have not being viewed after his LD player has malfunctioned. His example of constantly changing the format of his beloved collection of movie titles as media technology evolves proves to DVD movie collectors that their DVDs will probably be replaced by the next generation of standard audiovisual format of Blue-Ray Disc, just as VHS, VCD, and LD were overtaken by DVD a couple of years ago.

With the majority of their free time occupied by getting rest and fulfilling their parental duties, the respondents in this group hardly ever use Internet downloading to access movies, as compared with the university students and employees groups. They also have no desire to get more movies to watch from the Internet.

> I don't download movies. I've never done that and I have no time to do it. I've been taught once how to download movies but I think the whole downloading process takes time and seems troublesome (Fei-Fan, 36, Male, Architect).

> I've never downloaded a movie before because the image quality is poor and it is too slow. I expect good image quality from movies. I don't even watch pirate versions of movies. Their image quality and subtitle translations are very bad. The quality of VCD movies looks bad to me as well. For movies I want to watch, I'd rather go to the cinema or watch them on DVD (Yong-Mao).

> I don't download movies. Downloading is a waste of time and life. Actually, you can always find friends around who are downloading and you can just borrow their downloaded files or burned copies of movies (Tony).

From the testimonies of these three fathers, it is very clear that movie-downloading is not one of preferred ways to access films. All three agree that movie-downloading is a time-wasting process. Fei-Fan and Yong-Mao also point out the technical and image quality as major drawbacks with downloading movies which also concern some respondents in other groups. Even an architect like Fei-Fan, whose work involves a certain degree of computer use, still feels that the downloading process is not only a waste of time but is also difficult to do. Yong-Mao, a filmmaker himself, never spoke about the ethical issues of illegal movie-downloading violating intellectual property rights; he was concerned more about the image quality and finds them inferior to movies showing at the cinema and released on DVD. The advantages of downloaded movies, such as their being free of charge, having faster access to first-run movies, and a wide selection of popular Hollywood movies, is not very important to these parents. Moreover, due to the sharing of movies with other people, as Tony specifies, it is easier to borrow movie files from friends who engage in downloading than to do it by themselves:

> If the DVD movies that I bought are good movies, I burn extra copies and recommend them to friends (Yong-Mao).

> I've burned movies from rented DVDs just a couple of times. Because most of the DVDs that my daughters rent are those no-brainer movies, or whole series of Japanese idol dramas, I'm not interested in saving copies of those DVDs (Tony).

For movie collectors like Yong-Mao and Tony, burning extra copies of their own DVDs or saving copies of rented DVDs is much more meaningful and practical than movie-downloading. In contrast, purchasing DVD movies via the Internet is much more time-saving and convenient than going to DVD shops to buy movies. For Cindy, Fei-Fan's 34-year-old wife, who barely has time to find DVD movie rental shops or go to the Guanghua Bazaar, internet shopping saves time and energy. As revealed in her diary, she bought the DVD of the movie, *A River Runs Through It,* on the Internet. Her husband, Fei-Fan, had been looking for this DVD in many rental shops but had failed to find it. With the help of the Internet, she was able to find it and received it just a couple of days after ordering it. Moreover, for respondents who buy DVD movies in Taiwan, as in the discussion with Tony and Cindy, the Internet is the main source for difficult-to-find movies because local record shops only have the more popular DVD movies.

Nevertheless, other full-time mothers in this group like Chun-Yu and Cindy only use the Internet for sending and receiving emails and to find information about daily life and the education of their children. They seldom use the Internet for film-related activities, not even to find movie information or take part in movie discussions. The

use of the Internet and other media technology is not related to the film-consumption activities of these two mothers.

Summary: Collecting for Sharing

Based on the analysis presented above, it is the university student respondents who download most. They are familiar with this practice and are used to viewing video files on the computer. They also have a passion for watching as many newly-released movies as possible, which downloading facilitates. As they are logging onto Internet constantly while staying at home they can easily perform the downloading operation. While the teenage respondents have the know-how and equipment downloading they do not have the free time and the permission from their parents to do it. Similarly, movie-downloading for most of the respondents from the employed group and the parent group is too time-consuming. In addition, the audiovisual quality of downloaded movies is not acceptable, especially when compared to rented or purchased DVD movies. For movies they are interested in, they would rather spend a little more money at DVD rental shops, or go to the cinema. Additionally, for some of the respondents from these two groups, the technical issue is still an obstacle. The operation of downloading is thought to be difficult and troublesome for some respondents.

Some of those who do most movie-downloading among the university students group download as many as 7 or 8 movies per day. However, they do not actually watch all of them. After the downloading, they will check the image quality and only save those files with an acceptable image quality as parts of their huge downloaded movie collection for later viewing, and most importantly, for sharing with their peers. They will share movies and also ‘take orders’ from their friends to download for particular movies. The sharing of movie files is quick and easy. I argue that for these respondents downloading functions as a kind of communicative tool for them to socialise with their peers and also to express their knowledge of rare movies or of popular new-releases. If the downloaders have the movie files that their friends ask for, they can discuss the movie with their friends or suggest similar movies they have collected. That explains why most of them are very generous about sharing their files. The biggest pleasure does not come from watching the movies but from sharing the movie files with other people.

For the respondents from the employed or the parent group, most of their movie-sharing occurs through DVDs. They rip and copy rented DVD movies to form part of their DVD movie collection. They also share their purchased official version of DVDs or pirate versions. Of course, in order to rip DVDs the associated facility,

expertise, and cost is required. There exist some significant features of contemporary movie-collecting and movie-sharing. First, the cost of obtaining digital files, either in the format of DVD discs or video files, is relatively cheap. If the movie files or DVDs are lost or damaged, they can easily be replaced. Second, the image quality of digital files will not easily be degraded after constant replay. Therefore, digital movie files are not as precious or valuable for contemporary movie collectors as the analogue formats used by the last generation of movie collectors. Most collectors' movie collections are not as rare as out of print books or vinyl records. As a result, the sharing or exchange of collected movie files is a very common practice in today's digital-rich environment. Moreover, it is argued that for the respondents who collect downloaded movies or DVD movies, the social implications of sharing their collected movies with other people are more significant than repeated viewing.

Internet downloading is thought by some of the respondents as time-consuming. Also, the audiovisual quality of downloaded files is unpredictable. It cannot match the quality of other viewing platforms. However, with faster and faster broadband connections available, the time-consuming and image quality issues will improve. New generations with the expertise and equipment to conduct movie-downloading will no doubt lead to movie-downloading flourishing in the future. The question of how to incorporate this illegal activity into legal practice is critical for the film industry to think about. As for the movie-collectors, with the non-stop evolution of media and ICT technologies, their current collection of downloaded movie files or DVD discs will eventually be replaced by movie files with better audiovisual quality or by the newly-emerged format of Blue-ray DVDs. Despite the fact that currently available DVD movies can be played and last for a few decades, if stored and taken care of properly, the current DVD disc might not be able to retain its dominance as the major platform for 'home theatre' in the future.

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