

Financial aspects of experimental film development (INDIE) versus mainstream film

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Abstract.

This study examines the financial dynamics underlying the development of experimental (INDIE) films as compared to mainstream cinematic productions, within the conceptual framework of the “Technology–Entrepreneurship–Art” triad. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review, case studies, and qualitative analysis of industry data, the research elucidates the divergent funding models, production practices, and economic constraints that characterize these two paradigms. The findings demonstrate that experimental films operate predominantly within micro-budget regimes, leveraging alternative financing mechanisms such as grants, crowdfunding, and private investors, while prioritizing artistic autonomy and narrative innovation. Conversely, mainstream productions mobilize significant financial resources through institutional credit lines, international pre-sales, and risk-managed portfolios, in order to achieve large-scale distribution and maximize commercial returns. The study further highlights the transformative role of digital technologies in democratizing access to production and distribution, thereby lowering entry barriers for independent filmmakers while intensifying market competition. By juxtaposing the creative and economic logics of experimental and mainstream cinema, this research underscores their complementary roles in fostering both cultural diversity and industrial sustainability within contemporary film industries. Limitations of the present analysis and avenues for further research, including the implications of emerging technologies and expanding global markets, are also discussed.

Keywords: analog cinematography, experimental film, visual effects, film aesthetics, avant-garde cinema.

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Introduction

The contemporary film industry is characterized by a pronounced polarization between independent experimental (INDIE) productions and mainstream films, each representing a distinct model of economic, aesthetic, and cultural organization. On the one hand, independent cinema is defined by marked artistic autonomy, innovative narrative approaches, and a predominantly austere financial regime, while on the other hand, mainstream productions are associated with substantial budgets, sophisticated marketing strategies and global distribution, as well as rigorous control of investment risk. This dichotomy raises essential questions about the sustainability, diversity, and future of the film industry in a context dominated by accelerated technologization and transformations in consumer markets.

This article aims to comparatively analyze the financial aspects that influence the development of independent experimental and mainstream films, based on the conceptual model of the “Technology - Entrepreneurship - Film Art” triad [1]. This triad highlights the interdependencies between technological progress, entrepreneurial initiative, and artistic expression - factors that together determine the economic and creative dynamics of film production. The study seeks to elucidate how differences in budget, funding sources and strategies, distribution practices, and aesthetic orientations shape the trajectory of each type of production and condition their positioning on the global market.

This theoretical perspective enables not only a deeper understanding of the opposition between auteur cinema and industrial cinema, but also a reevaluation of how these forms influence each other. In a system dominated by the logic of profit, independent films can be seen as zones of artistic resistance and spaces for formal experimentation. At the same time, the mainstream - although often criticized for its conformism - increasingly adopts aesthetic and narrative elements originating from the alternative sphere, which demonstrates growing permeability between the two paradigms.

To achieve this objective, the research combines a critical review of the specialized literature with a qualitative analysis of financial data from the European and American film industries, complemented by relevant case studies illustrating the transition of certain filmmakers from independent experimentation to mainstream recognition. Through

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this approach, the article seeks not only to identify the structural differences between the two paradigms but also to highlight points of convergence that lend them a complementary character.

Indeed, moments of cinematic innovation - such as the emergence of the *New American Cinema*, *Dogme 95*, or the *French New Wave* - often arose in contexts of economic crisis or as a reaction to a saturated market filled with conventional formulas. Films produced outside the traditional studio system rejected the “polished” aesthetics of the mainstream, opting instead for authenticity, improvisation, non-professional actors, and a “raw” aesthetic adapted to budget constraints. These forms of guerrilla cinema became possible precisely because new technologies significantly reduced costs without entirely compromising the artistic quality of the final product.

The results show that these paradigms coexist in a relationship of interdependence, contributing to the maintenance of cultural diversity, the renewal of cinematic language, and the assurance of economic sustainability within the global film industry. In this sense, the article makes a relevant contribution to understanding the complexity of the financial and creative mechanisms that govern contemporary cinema, while also offering perspectives for adapting future strategies to the new realities of the market.

The analysis of the tension between art and industry, between autonomy and conformism, is not merely a theoretical matter but an essential instrument for understanding how cinema functions and evolves as both a cultural form and an economic branch. Where the economy imposes limits, technology creates opportunities, and artistic vision shapes the cultural identity of an era. Thus, the balance between these forces not only determines the individual trajectories of filmmakers but also influences the very direction in which film develops as an expressive medium.

Literature Review

The specialized literature on cinema has highlighted, since the early decades of the 20th century, the structural tension between cinema as an industry and cinema as a form of artistic expression. George Sadoul noted in *Histoire générale du cinéma* that “cinematic art is directly conditioned by economy, industry, society, and technology”, thus underlining the structural dependence of film creation on the financial and technological context of its time [2]. Within this paradigm, experimental and independent films emerge as a critical reaction to the hegemony of Hollywood studios, offering an alternative focused on the author, on narrative innovation, and on exploring the limits of cinematic language [3] [4].

A substantial body of literature explores the genealogy of independent cinema, highlighting defining movements in different cultural and historical contexts. In France, the *Nouvelle Vague* redefined the relationship between the author and the industry, promoting a minimalist aesthetic, small crews, natural locations, and non-professional actors - which allowed for low-budget productions with significant artistic impact [5] [6]. In the UK, the *Free Cinema* movement, initiated by Lindsay Anderson and his colleagues in the 1950s, introduced a social-realist aesthetic, tackling working-class themes and challenging the commercial conventions of British studios [7]. Similarly, the Danish *Dogme 95* manifesto proposed, in the mid-1990s, a “vow of chastity” meant to liberate cinema from the constraints of sophisticated technology and commercial excess, advocating for a purified and authentic cinematic language [8].

Extending these movements, the literature emphasizes the role of film festivals in legitimizing experimental cinema. The Sundance Film Festival, founded in 1978 by Robert Redford, has become one of the most influential platforms for promoting independent films in the United States, transforming into a true incubator for emerging directors who later transitioned into the mainstream [9]. Notable contributions also appear within the *New American Cinema* movement, particularly through the initiatives of John Cassavetes, Jonas Mekas, and the magazine *Film Culture*, which played a key role in promoting alternative American cinema in the 1950s and '60s [10].

On the financial level, the literature reveals fundamental differences between the economic models of independent and mainstream films. John W. Cones classifies the funding sources of independent productions into five major categories: grants and subsidies, active or passive private investments, loans guaranteed by distribution contracts, intra-industry financing (e.g., talent agencies or smaller studios), and international co-productions [11]. By contrast, mainstream studios have access to stable credit lines, diversified portfolios, and bargaining power in global markets, which enables them to manage risks more effectively and to mobilize considerably larger budgets [12].

Recent research also draws attention to the impact of the democratization of digital technology on film production. The emergence of digital cameras, crowdfunding platforms, and video-on-demand (VoD) distribution has lowered financial and logistical barriers for independent filmmakers, but has also increased competition for visibility in oversaturated content markets. In this regard, the literature emphasizes that the transition to digital has reshaped not only production costs but also consumption patterns and the perception of the cultural value of cinematic products [13].

Moreover, the microbudget aesthetic has itself become a subject of theoretical analysis, being associated not only with financial constraints but also with a deliberate artistic choice. Microbudget films (< \$50,000) are characterized by small crews, natural settings, non-professional actors, and minimalist filming techniques (long takes, handheld camera), contributing to the realism and authenticity of the narrative. This practice is well documented

particularly in the context of Southeastern Europe, where low budgets have led to an adaptive and innovative form of cinema, as evidenced by statistics on film funding in small markets [12].

Another key point in the literature is the entrepreneurial approach of independent filmmakers. They are often required to develop a solid business plan that includes marketing strategies, financial projections, sources of return on investment, and benchmarks against comparable productions. Alternative fundraising methods - such as crowdfunding, private investors, or pre-sales of distribution rights - are commonly used, and production is organized around legal entities (e.g., Limited Liability Company - LLC) to legally secure investments and profits [13].

In conclusion, the specialized literature outlines a complex theoretical framework that sheds light on the interactions between economic, technological, and aesthetic factors in defining the development strategies of experimental and mainstream films, underlining the importance of both paradigms for the diversity and sustainability of contemporary film culture. The integration of new technologies, the professionalization of independent filmmakers' entrepreneurial practices, and the expansion of alternative funding and distribution networks reflect a profound transformation of the global cinematic ecology.

Methodology

This study aims to comprehensively investigate the differences and convergences between the financial and aesthetic models characteristic of independent experimental cinema (INDIE) and mainstream feature film productions, through the lens of the conceptual triad *"Technology - Entrepreneurship - Film Art"*. The research starts from the premise that these two cinematic paradigms, although seemingly divergent, intersect and influence each other, and that understanding the financial, technological, and creative mechanisms that drive them is an essential step toward mapping the contemporary audiovisual landscape.

Given the complexity, dynamism, and context-dependence of the phenomenon under investigation, a predominantly qualitative methodology was chosen, complemented by quantitative elements, in the spirit of an integrative approach. In this regard, the adopted methodology is based on the principles of the *"triple S" approach - synthetic, systemic, and synergistic* [14], aiming also at triangulating data sources, combining theoretical perspectives with statistical analyses, and integrating illustrative case studies designed to provide depth and analytical relevance. This methodological choice reflects the intention to capture not only the divergent features of the two cinematic paradigms but also their complementary characteristics, as well as the impact that technology and entrepreneurship exert on artistic creation.

A rigorous conceptual framework was defined in advance, grounded in the specialized literature, which organizes the analysis around the dynamics of the *"Technology - Entrepreneurship - Film Art"* triad. Technology is thus analyzed both as a determinant of film aesthetics - through the democratization of production and stylistic innovation - and as a vector of transformation for distribution practices. Entrepreneurship is conceptualized as the set of economic, organizational, and managerial practices that condition the realization and dissemination of films. Finally, film art is examined as an individual creative expression, which continually mediates between technological and financial constraints.

Methodological stages

The research was structured into four complementary stages, designed to provide a stratified and balanced analysis of the phenomenon.

In the first stage, a critical review of the specialized literature was conducted, including classical theoretical works on the history and economics of cinema (Sadoul, Bazin, Cones), recent analyses of European production financing (Kanzler, European Audiovisual Observatory), as well as studies on the impact of digital technologies on production and distribution models (Pricop). This stage made it possible to outline the conceptual framework of the research, anchored in the *"Technology - Entrepreneurship - Film Art"* triad, as well as to identify operational concepts such as: microbudget, crowdfunding, pre-sales, risk portfolio, and event density.

The second stage focused on the collection and analysis of financial data. Quantitative data were analyzed, drawn from authorized public sources such as reports from the *European Audiovisual Observatory* and the statistical documentation of the *Sarajevo International Film Festival*, targeting the average budgets of fiction productions in Southeastern Europe and the structure of funding sources, segmented according to the size of the film markets (small, medium, and large, as per Kanzler's classification). In parallel, comparative data on the budgets of mainstream Hollywood productions were collected, in order to highlight the contrast between the economic models of the two paradigms (Table 1).

Table 1: Average budgets for fiction films in Southeastern Europe, by market size

Market size	Average budget (EUR)	Typical range (EUR)
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Small	300,000 – 700,000	200,000 – 1,000,000
Medium	1,000,000 – 2,500,000	800,000 – 4,000,000
Large	4,000,000 – 8,000,000	3,000,000 – 12,000,000

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory; Kanzler (2023), Sarajevo Film Festival report.

The third stage focused on the comparative analysis of financial, aesthetic, and managerial models. Based on the data collected, INDIE and mainstream productions were systematically compared using criteria such as budget level, source of funds (public vs. private), distribution strategies, risk-innovation ratio, and impact on the author's creativity. This stage made it possible to outline emerging convergences and structural differences between the two paradigms (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparative structure of funding sources for European independent films and mainstream Hollywood productions

Category	European independent films	Mainstream Hollywood productions
Public funds	50–70%	0–5%
Private investment	10–30%	70–90%
International co-productions	15–30%	5–10%
Own funds/self-financing	5–15%	<1%

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory; EAVE (European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs) 2023; CNC (National Film Centre) reports.

The fourth stage consisted of a detailed analysis of six case studies, selected for their illustrative value: three independent auteurs who transitioned to mainstream (Quentin Tarantino, Jim Jarmusch, Martin Scorsese) and three exemplary mainstream productions known for their logistical and aesthetic complexity (*Mad Max: Fury Road* - George Miller; *Dunkirk* - Christopher Nolan; *The Matrix Resurrections* - Lana Wachowski). Each case study was analyzed through the lens of the relationship between available economic resources and adopted creative strategies, contributing to a nuanced understanding of industry mechanisms (Table 3).

Table 3: Case study analysis – INDIE versus MAINSTREAM

Filmmaker / Film	Debut / Aesthetic	Initial funding	Evolution / Creative strategy	Mainstream budget	Technology used	Distribution
Quentin Tarantino	<i>Reservoir Dogs</i> (1992) – low-budget (~\$1.2M), auteur aesthetic, memorable dialogue	Friends + Miramax	Rapid transition to mainstream with <i>Pulp Fiction</i> (1994), maintaining auteur style	>\$8M (<i>Pulp Fiction</i>)	Classic, non-linear narrative, minimalist visual style	Global, festivals as springboard
Jim Jarmusch	<i>Permanent Vacation</i> (1980), <i>Stranger Than Paradise</i> (1984) – minimalist,	Grants + small-scale distribution	Remained faithful to INDIE paradigm, rejecting commercial conventions	N/A (remained INDIE)	Visual minimalism, non-professional actors	Limited, festivals and niche

	micro-budget					
Martin Scorsese	<i>Who's That Knocking at My Door</i> (1967) – independent	Own resources	Gradual integration into mainstream with <i>Taxi Driver</i> , <i>Goodfellas</i> , maintaining auteur voice	\$50–100M (<i>The Irishman</i>)	Expressive visual style, innovative techniques	Global, studio networks
George Miller	Mainstream – <i>Mad Max: Fury Road</i> (2015)	Studio funding (~\$150M)	Extreme visual spectacle, practical effects + CGI	~\$150M	Custom-built vehicles, CGI enhancements	Global, blockbuster
Christopher Nolan	Mainstream – <i>Dunkirk</i> (2017)	Studio + Warner Bros	Authentic immersive experience, preference for practical effects	~\$100–150M	IMAX, 65mm film, practical effects	Global, premium cinemas
Lana Wachowski	Mainstream – <i>The Matrix Resurrections</i> (2021)	Studio (~\$190M)	Visual and thematic complexity, sophisticated sci-fi universe	~\$190M	Advanced CGI, RED/ARRI Alexa cameras	Global, multiplexes and streaming

Source: Author's own research.

The data obtained were interpreted in a *synthetic, systemic, and synergistic* key, in the spirit of the *triple S* approach proposed in the doctoral research underpinning this article. This approach aimed not only to highlight quantitative financial differences but also to understand how economic resources influence creative strategies, production models, and audience relationships (Table 4).

Table 4: Case study analysis through the lens of the triple S approach

Filmmaker / Film	Synthetic – aesthetic and economic essence	Systemic – integration into the industry ecosystem	Synergistic – contribution to the evolution of cinema
Quentin Tarantino	Combination of authorship and non-linear storytelling; low budget, maximum impact	Transformed festivals (Sundance) into validation and distribution platforms for INDIE	Opened the way for other INDIE auteurs to enter mainstream while retaining authenticity
Jim Jarmusch	Radical minimalism, microbudget, niche aesthetic	Consistently positioned outside the industrial flow, remaining a critical voice of the mainstream	Inspires creative independence and demonstrates the viability of an INDIE career
Martin Scorsese	Strong authorship, controlled transition from INDIE to mainstream	Example of gradual adaptation to industry constraints while preserving personal brand	Illustrates the synthesis between artistic quality and economic sustainability
George Miller	Grand visual spectacle, generous budget	Fully integrated into Hollywood blockbuster logic, example of complex production	Innovated the post-apocalyptic genre and redefined technical standards
Christopher Nolan	Authentic immersion, practical effects + IMAX, premium aesthetic	Revitalizes cinema as a collective experience, adapting the mainstream to aesthetic demands	Demonstrates synergy between advanced technology and classic storytelling
Lana Wachowski	Thematic and visual complexity, sophisticated	Leverages digital technologies and new distribution platforms	Expands the visual and thematic boundaries of

	sci-fi universe		mainstream cinema
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Source: Author's own research.

The analysis of the six case studies through the lens of the *triple S* approach demonstrates that the creative trajectories of filmmakers and the financial configurations of their productions can only be understood from an integrative perspective, which connects aesthetics, economics, and technology into a coherent whole.

From a *synthetic* perspective, each auteur has crystallized a distinct artistic identity, adapted to budgetary constraints and target audiences - whether it is Jim Jarmusch's radical minimalism, Tarantino's postmodern experiment, or the grand visual spectacle of Nolan and Miller.

From a *systemic* perspective, each case analyzed fits into a broader industrial ecosystem, leveraging festival networks, studios, distribution platforms, and cutting-edge technologies, enabling them to evolve and remain relevant over time.

Finally, from a *synergistic* perspective, the case studies illustrate how art, entrepreneurship, and technology can mutually enhance each other, generating innovation, diversity, and sustainability both in the INDIE and mainstream sectors.

This *triple S* reading confirms that the progress of contemporary cinema does not stem from a rigid opposition between paradigms but from their complementarity and interdependence, which create a permanent negotiation space between authenticity and spectacle, between experiment and institutionalization.

Analytical Tools

Various, complementary tools were used for data analysis and interpretation: conceptual synthesis of the specialist literature to define the theoretical framework; comparative tables to highlight the differences and similarities between financial and aesthetic models; descriptive grids for the case studies; as well as a systemic and synergistic interpretation of the results in the current context of the global film industry. The results were integrated into a synthetic vision, in the spirit of the "*triple S*" approach, which captures the essence, the interdependent systems, and the synergies between technology, economy, and artistic creation.

The analysis of the collected data was carried out using a set of methodological tools specific to interdisciplinary research, aimed at capturing both the quantitative dimension of the phenomenon and its qualitative and contextual nuances. The choice of these tools was based on the dual nature of the research object - at the intersection of economy, technology, and artistic creation - and on the need to integrate diverse perspectives into a coherent, unified framework.

Thus, for the *theoretical foundation*, the conceptual synthesis of the literature was employed through critical analysis of relevant contributions in the fields of film studies, cultural economics, and new audiovisual technologies. This stage sought not only to clarify key concepts but also to identify analytical models and comparative categories usable in empirical evaluation.

For the *quantitative dimension*, the analysis relied on descriptive statistical tools applied to financial data collected from public sources (European Audiovisual Observatory, reports from festivals and national film institutions). These data were organized into comparative tables, graphs, and synthetic indicators to facilitate the visualization of differences in average budgets, funding structures, and production strategies specific to each paradigm. Indicators such as the share of public funds in total budgets, the ratio between production and distribution investments, or the percentage allocated to technological innovation were calculated to provide an overall picture.

On the *qualitative side*, comparative analysis was carried out using descriptive grids, developed based on criteria such as:

- origin of funds (public, private, mixed);
- level of risk/innovation accepted;
- impact of economic constraints on the author's creativity;
- logistical complexity of production;
- distribution and promotion strategies.

These grids were applied both to the synthesized data set and to the six selected case studies. The case studies themselves were subjected to detailed narrative analysis, complemented by comparative elements, to highlight the dynamics of the relationship between economic resources and artistic expression.

The interpretation of the results followed the principles of a *systemic and synergistic* approach, aiming to identify the interdependencies among the technological, entrepreneurial, and aesthetic dimensions of cinema. This stage involved integrating quantitative data into the broader qualitative context in order to formulate not only descriptive but also interpretive conclusions capable of revealing the underlying mechanisms of the contemporary film industry.

The use of this set of tools - conceptual synthesis, descriptive statistics, comparative grids, case studies, and systemic interpretation - ensures the methodological robustness of the research, allowing the articulation of a complex, nuanced, and rigorous perspective on the object of study.

Methodological Limitations

The proposed methodology is naturally subject to some objective limitations inherent to research of this type. Among these are the heterogeneity and, at times, incompleteness of available public financial data, the subjectivity of case study interpretation, and the dynamic, constantly evolving nature of the film industry, influenced by technological progress and changing audience behaviors. Nevertheless, triangulation of sources, the comparative approach, and the integration of a diverse range of analytical tools ensure the robustness and validity of the formulated conclusions.

The research methodology developed here stands out for its synthetic, systemic, and synergistic character, offering a suitable framework for exploring the complexity of the relationship between art, technology, and economy in cinema. This approach not only highlights the quantitative differences between the financial and aesthetic models analyzed but also delves into the mechanisms by which economic resources shape creative strategies, production models, and the author's relationship with the audience.

Results and Discussion

The research results confirm the existence of significant structural differences between the financial and aesthetic models of independent experimental (INDIE) films and mainstream productions.

These differences manifest not only in the size of allocated budgets but also in financing strategies, distribution models, attitudes toward risk, and creative approaches.

Financially, the analyzed data indicate that experimental films generally operate with budgets ranging from \$50,000 to €1,000,000, falling into the category of “microbudgets” or low budgets. In Southeastern Europe, for example, the average budget of a fiction film was estimated at approximately €731,000 in 2010, with variations depending on market size [10].

These films are mainly produced through alternative financing: public grants and subsidies, crowdfunding, private investments by “angel investors” and international co-productions. In some cases, directors contribute their own personal funds, and team members accept deferred payments or profit-sharing agreements. These mechanisms offer high flexibility and reduce dependence on major studios, but also imply greater risk for investors and creators.

In contrast, mainstream films mobilize financial resources on the order of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. Studios use institutional credit lines, diversified portfolios, international pre-sales, and revenues from ancillary rights (merchandising, TV broadcasting, VoD), managing risk through meticulous planning and the exploitation of established franchises. For example, productions such as *Dunkirk* (Christopher Nolan) or *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller) were made with budgets exceeding \$100 million, involving large teams, cutting-edge technologies, and global marketing campaigns.

From a distribution perspective, INDIE films find their audiences through specialized festivals (*Sundance*, *Berlinale*, *Cannes – Quinzaine des Réalisateurs*), digital platforms (*Netflix*, *Amazon Prime*, *MUBI*), and VoD, while mainstream productions are launched globally, aiming for massive box office revenues in the first weeks of release. This “event cinema” strategy involves a high density of visual and sound events, designed to maximize audience impact and justify financial investments.

Aesthetically, the financial constraints of experimental films often generate a distinctive creativity: directors lean toward minimalism, social realism, casts of non-professional actors, and natural locations, avoiding costly visual effects and elaborate sets. Movements such as *Dogma 95*, the *French New Wave*, or *British Free Cinema* turned these limitations into defining traits of artistic identity. Conversely, mainstream films are characterized by spectacle, technical complexity, and “event density”, employing CGI, special effects, elaborate soundtracks, and extensive advertising campaigns to ensure commercial appeal.

Interestingly, these two paradigms are not antagonistic but complementary. Case studies of directors like Quentin Tarantino, Jim Jarmusch, or Martin Scorsese show that debuting in the INDIE space can serve as a launchpad into the mainstream industry, where financial resources allow for more ambitious projects. At the same time, the technological democratization of the past two decades has lowered entry barriers for independent productions but intensified competition in a content-saturated digital market.

These findings confirm the study's central hypothesis: the financial and aesthetic models of experimental and mainstream films define each other, contributing to the diversity and resilience of the film industry. INDIE films fuel narrative innovation and talent discovery, while mainstream productions support economic sustainability and the expansion of global markets.

Limitations and Further Research

Like any scientific undertaking, this study presents certain limitations that deserve to be highlighted and discussed. First, the availability and reliability of financial data on independent experimental productions is limited, especially in the context of emerging film industries and projects with partial or total self-financing.

Unlike mainstream productions, whose budgets and financing strategies are generally publicly documented and visible in annual studio reports and databases, INDIE films often operate in a gray area, with opaque financial structures and no public reporting obligations. This lack of transparency forced the analysis to rely on estimates and secondary sources, which may limit the accuracy of quantitative comparisons.

Second, the research focused on European and North American film markets, largely omitting realities from other regions of the world, such as Asia, Latin America, or Africa, where production and financing models may have distinct cultural and economic particularities. Extending the analysis globally could provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between experimental and mainstream films in the context of geographical diversity.

Another limitation is the static nature of the data used, which mostly reflect situations and trends of the past two decades. Since the film industry is evolving rapidly, under the pressure of technological innovations (artificial intelligence, virtual reality, blockchain) as well as changing audience behaviors, continuous monitoring is necessary to capture the emerging dynamics of markets and production practices.

In light of these limitations, future research directions could include:

- a deeper study of the impact of new digital technologies and artificial intelligence on reducing production costs and democratizing access to resources;
- exploring film markets in Southeast Asia, India, or sub-Saharan Africa to understand the regional specificities of the relationship between independent and mainstream films;
- conducting longitudinal studies to analyze the career evolution of filmmakers transitioning from experimental productions to mainstream success, as well as the effects of this phenomenon on global cultural diversity.

These directions would contribute to strengthening knowledge of the financial and aesthetic mechanisms of the film industry and to formulating appropriate cultural policies to support both economic sustainability and artistic creativity.

Conclusion

Contemporary cinema reflects an essential polarity between independent experimental (INDIE) films and mainstream productions, each making a distinct but complementary contribution to the dynamics and sustainability of the industry.

The results of this study highlight that the financial, aesthetic, and organizational models of the two paradigms are grounded in different priorities but converge in terms of their impact on cultural diversity and narrative innovation.

Experimental films, characterized by low budgets, alternative financing sources, and a minimalist aesthetic, provide fertile ground for exploring marginal themes, developing new talent, and experimenting with cinematic forms and languages. At the same time, mainstream productions mobilize massive financial resources, implementing risk management strategies and global campaigns that maximize revenues and cultural visibility, contributing to the consolidation of a profitable industry.

The research demonstrates that the relationship between the two models is not one of irreconcilable opposition but of interdependence: INDIE films feed creativity and ideas into the mainstream, while the resources generated by the commercial success of studio productions indirectly help maintain a pluralistic cinematic ecosystem. This complementarity is facilitated by technological democratization, which lowers access barriers for independent creators but also poses challenges in the context of increasingly intense competition for audience attention.

In conclusion, the simultaneous promotion of both paradigms is essential to ensuring a film industry that meets both economic and cultural-artistic needs. Public policies and support strategies must recognize and foster this diversity, supporting innovation, accessibility, and sustainability across all market segments. Thus, the film industry can continue to function as a space for cultural dialogue and artistic progress, to the benefit of both creators and audiences alike.

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