

# The Role of Urban Memories in Citizens' Sense of Belonging and its Effect on Preserving Valuable Contemporary Architectural Monuments; Case Study: Neighboring Zones of Cinemas in Tehran

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## ABSTRACT

Cinema and theater halls are among the important cultural centers in Tehran, which not only influence on social, familial, and cultural relationships of citizens but also account for a major part of the cultural and social history and identity of the city. Variations in the economy of cinema and cultural consumption behavior change in citizens on the one hand, and deteriorated theater and cinemas on the other hand have led to the closure of some famous cinemas in Iran over recent years. Destruction of valuable buildings of cinemas in Tehran and converting them to profitable uses, such as business complex and passage cause a risk that threatens preservation of this contemporary architecture heritage of Iran. This study aims to discuss the potential of social media for mobilizing public opinion to protect these contemporary architectural works of Iran. The research results show that three variables of "place identity," "place attachment," and "network activity" interact with each other. Due to their presence in social networks and active groups in the field of cinema and architecture, even those individuals whose place attachment is low or do not have an accurate perception of place identity are willing to participate in cultural heritage protection campaigns. Being a member of the social networks that publish the news of Iran and world cinema, and interest in social networks that tend to preserve precious monuments of contemporary architectural heritage in Iran are the factors making people try to preserve existing cinema buildings in Tehran. The potential of social networks for coordinating the capacity of art and architecture enthusiasts is a factor that contributes to the preservation of these cultural and historical buildings.

**Keywords:** Cultural Development, Contemporary Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Consumption, Cinema Industry.

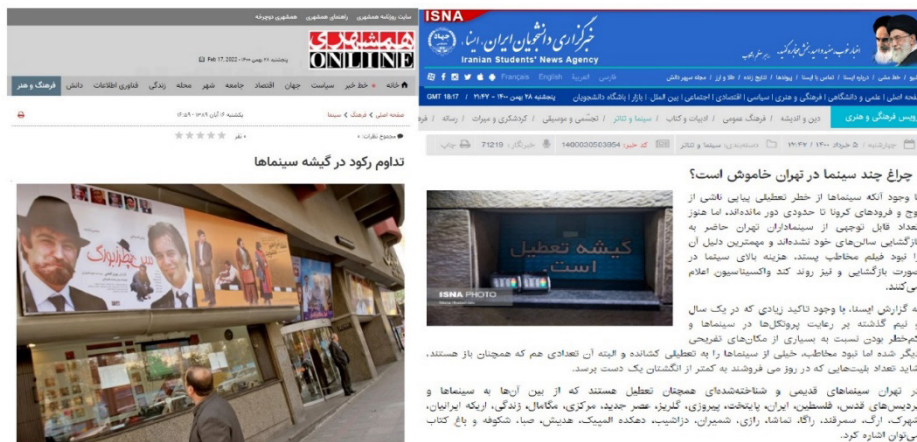
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A decrease in people's interest in attending the cinemas located in the central fabric of Tehran is one of the challenges to cultural and social life in Tehran City. Many cinemas located in the central fabric of Tehran have been devastated due to economic, political, social, and cultural changes in this city. The number of visits to these cinemas has been decreasing, and some of them have been closed. This concept mentioned in the interview of key individuals of the cinema industry and cinema owners indicates the reduced interest of people in attending cinemas located in the city center, and a serious recession (Gholam Ali and Sheikh Mahdi 2012). According to studies on the analysis of cinema economics policies made in government after the Islamic Republic, cinema economic movements towards recession have been serious during the 2000s (Sarbandi and Salehi Amiri 2020, 41-77). Many reasons and causes are introduced for explaining the reduced interest of people in attending cinemas located in the city center over recent years, but these causes can be summarized and explained that the main recession stream and lack of development in cinema occurred because Iran's cinema industry lagged behind the audience's taste (Mansouri 2021). In other words, COVID-19

accelerated the gap between Iranian audiences and cinema halls although it was not the main cause. Studies show that audiences had lost their interest in attending city center cinemas before the pandemic; even in the absence of COVID-19, this gap would happen just a little later.

According to the reports by the relevant unions, some cinema halls in Tehran and Iran gradually become empty, and this substantial case occurs while a general view shows that people's interest in cinema celebrities and art society has increased (Moairian 2022). Hence, the decrease in public interest in attending city center cinemas and empty cinema halls, especially older halls can be considered a critical topic and challenge. Following the closure of cinemas, most cinema owners tend to destroy these valuable contemporary buildings and replace them with more profitable uses such as commercial complexes and passages. However, it seems that this issue causes many other harms to cultural and social fields, which include place attachment. Cinemas are precious buildings and account for a part of contemporary architectural heritage, so they cannot be ignored and their demolition indeed means destruction of a part of historical identity and background.



**Fig. 1. The Decrease in People's Interest in Attending City Center Cinemas and the Recession of Cinema Halls in Tehran over two Recent Decades have Led to Closure, Use Change, and Destruction.**

Researchers introduce Tehran cinemas as an important part of Tehran's modern history, which links citizens to the city as an identity document (Kazemi and Mahmoudi 2008, 110). These buildings serve as cultural signs that remind the political representation of the city and modern rationality. A literature review of the topic shows how the demolition of valuable buildings in the fabric of Tehran City threatens the social security and cultural identity of the city (Pirahmadi, Majdi, and Saeedeh-Zarabadi 2019). According to the literature review, the destruction of old cinemas to replace them with more profitable uses is an international challenge particularly in developing

countries (Amini et al. 2019, 164). Accordingly, contemporary experiences indicate that this problem is not only seen in Iran but also other developing countries. For instance, Emek was the oldest cinema hall in Istanbul that was destroyed in 2013 to construct a shopping center instead. This made people create a united network and showed persistent civil resistance (Diba and Dehbashi 2004). It seems although Emek Cinema had lost its customers the integrated resistance of people against its destruction implied a deep connection between people and cinema, which cannot be ignored. Resistance of Turkey people against the demolition of Emek Cinema can be

considered as the result of the association of people's historical memories in the interaction with this cinema and is a subject-like place attachment. The social movement for resisting against destruction of Emek made history in Turkey with its flexibility and continuity, so many international critics considered this movement a kind of resistance against the ruling dictatorship. The Emek Cinema story indicated that emotions triggered by memories would ensure the continuity of historical buildings. This important point plays a vital role in creating urban resistance and becomes a flourishing collective morale against the destruction of precious and historical buildings. Citizens' sense of belonging and place attachment would result in keeping activism in practice, relying on the feelings and sense of belonging among citizens. In particular, evidences imply a positive link between "place attachment" and "willingness to do social activity" (Mashhadi Abolghasem Shirazi et al. 2023, 70). Resistance of Turkey people against the destruction of Emek Cinema indicates that this compatibility of people the space, sense of belonging among citizens, and place attachment play a significant role in preserving valuable and historical buildings. Given the "sociology of urban spaces," the government's measure was interpreted as an action to forget the pre-Ataturk era; on the other hand, the resistance of Turkey people against the demolition of the Emek movie theater was a public action for "resist to forget." The demolition of Emek Cinema indicates people's defeat by government in the history, but a victory appeared in this defeat for a new generation of Turkey; a kind of triumph that interpreted the concept of "defeat" as "resistance" (Öz and Özkarcalar 2021). Reflection of this trend at the global level is seen as a national measure for the place attachment concept (Mahdavinejad and Hosseini 2019, 72-74). Place attachment, especially in the emotional-historical field plays a key role in preserving valuable and historical buildings.

The cinema hall is one of the important urban active spaces, which refers to modernism and modernist stream entry to Tehran on the one hand, and regenerates the modern history of Iran and modern Iran history. The literature review indicates that the focus on the historical memory of cities during the modern era reveals and introduces a complicated and interconnected space of cinema experience. "Cinema experience" and or "experience of going to the cinema" emphasizes the importance of social relationships in this specific context in the vicinity of theater halls in some spaces such as café, theaters, etc. particularly concerning the street.

The main research area is discussing the relationship between society's individuals with movie theaters as a part of the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran. The relationship between place attachment and audience satisfaction (Rastbod and Aflatounian 2018, 15-21) has been widely discussed in the subject

literature, but the extant study analyzes the interest and attachment of individuals who are more interested in the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran rather than interest in a specific movie theater or cinema hall. This interest and attachment make them want these buildings to remain standing and not be damaged. According to the mentioned foundations, it seems that the presence of cultural and social activists in social networks is a factor for virtual activity regarding the preservation of precious contemporary monuments, such as the movie theater in Tehran.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The cinema's arrival in Iran and its conversion to a modern urban space occurred with the introduction of cinematograph devices in the Qajar era for the first time. The fifth king of Qajar, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah brought the culture of Cinema to Iran after his first travel overseas in 1990 visiting Russia, Austria, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, and France. More than one century has passed since then; a century in which, cinema became a modern space in developing Iran. The modernist era in Iran began during the Pahlavi I era.

The "newly emerged employee class" was the driving force for the modern space in Iran. In addition to the cafés such as Café Naderi at that time in Iran, cinema halls became a proper place for meetings among intellectual modernist groups and modernist classes (Talibinejad 1998). The fame of Lalezar Street and its cinema halls indicate the formation of modern interactions in Tehran. In other words, and a sociological view of urban spaces, the art of cinema is considered an underlying factor for cultural and social evolution in developing cities and communities (Riazi 2019, 32-34).

Like modern architecture, the modern art of Iran was shaped by the cultural interaction between Iran and Europe (Mahdavinejad 2014, 38-39). For example, two *Abi Va Rabi* (1930) and *Haji Agha Actor Cinema* (1933) films by Ovanes Ohanian are starting points of the cinema industry and professional cinema in Iran. Cinema progress and urban society's admission of this astonishing and modern phenomenon in Tehran could have considerable effects on the social behavior and cultural habits of people in this city (Behnava and Pourzargar 2021, 50-51). People started developing their social relationships by imitating the interactions between actors of the films, which indicated them at the same level as developed communities (Kamkar 2014). Many researchers have emphasized that Iran's cinema has a significant rank in the world cinema, and is an art trend with its specific style, so it requires more attention (Rasfijani, Karbalai, and Ghiathovand 2020, 21-26).

It is necessary to have a holistic view of the indicators for evaluating policies made on cinema economics to understand evolutions in Iran's cinema, achieve social

and cultural development of this cinema, and promote the position of these indicators in policies made on cinema economics based on such a comprehensive outlook. An accurate outlook of causes for the decline in people's interest in attending city center cinemas over recent years can be obtained by analyzing the

status of cultural and social indicators after the victory of the Islamic Revolution. This outlook explains why many movie theaters have been closed or their functions have been changed (Rostgar, Aghababai, and Raskhi 2018, 58-59). The main challenge is related to the lack of development of cinema economics in Iran.

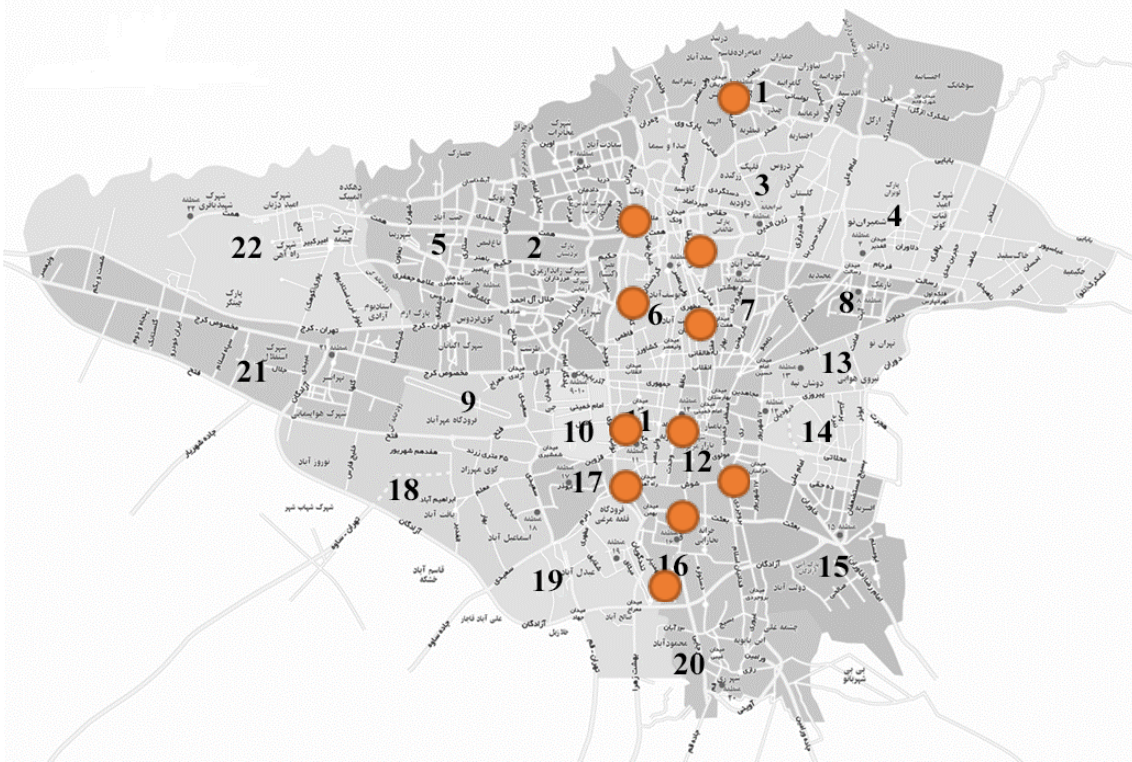


Fig. 2. Tehran City and Location of Important Cinema Halls

Some areas of Tehran, such as Lalezar Street are famous for their cinema halls. Khorshid No Cinema in front of Nasr Theater built in 1937 or Crystal Cinema in 1945 are samples of buildings that narrate the modern history of Tehran and the history of modern Tehran. Sepideh Cinema (or Diana) was established on Enghelab Street in 1943 and is one of the most valuable contemporary architectural buildings in Iran. Atlantic Cinema located on Vali Asr Street built in 1964, and other examples represent only a minor part of cinema landmarks in Tehran (Diba 2012). There are many buildings like the mentioned samples in Tehran and other cities in Iran, and which preservation of contemporary architectural heritage in Iran should be a priority (Mahdavinejad 2017, 130). The mentioned buildings are some samples indicating a transition from the modern Bauhaus to the European pos-modern style.

The most substantial challenge that threatens this part of the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran is its demolition due to inattention, which seemed inevitable until recently. However, the activation of social networks and the dynamism of the young generation created some opportunities for preserving

precious cinema buildings in Tehran and its trajectory passes through the networking potentials of those who are interested in cinema art and contemporary architecture heritage works.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

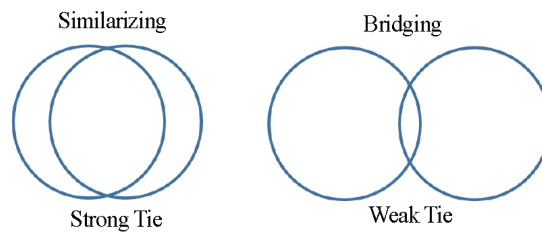
The “weak social network theory” is one of the newest theories for the analysis of human-environment interaction that can explain place attachment and human will for the preservation of architectural heritage monuments. The famous paper by Richmond (2014) titled “In Social Networking, the Weak Connection May Be the Strongest: thinks to Facebook, Sociologists Are Changing Some Models of Humans’ Interactions” (Richmond 2014) opened a new way for the importance of weak ties in social networks; the ties that have a weak topic apparently but perform in the strongest form. In other words, individuals may do few activities but can influence public opinion like a roaring flood.

In terms of theory, the production of a written document that may be studied by social scientists is one of the positive points of online social interaction. Therefore,

all social interaction models may be revised based on the information publication technique via social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, etc. For instance, new methods have been obtained based on the ICT<sup>1</sup> to answer the common cultural and social questions, such as how many times you visit a place per week? How long do you spend in traffic? How much do you make relationships or interact with your friends? Which store do you buy from? Now, these questions can be answered via social networks; of course, social networks have made them distinguished.

Strong relationships exist between close members with frequent interactions, such as family and close friends. In contrast, weak relationships are determined by remote social connections and rate interactions that are usually observed among acquaintances or strangers. This concept is rooted in the theories by Granovetter (1973). Granovetter believed that in a

network with strong ties, there are individuals with weak ties outside the network who are bridges for other networks. These bridges have access to new and unique information compared to other members of the network with strong ties. Further studies showed that individuals tied within a network perform stronger than the case in which, they act individually. The strong tie is associated with the concept of “often” and refers to sending messages at least once a week; a weak tie is related to the term “sometimes” and refers to more than once a year but less than twice a week. Without tie or with less tie are expressed by “rarely” in practice, and refers to “once a year or fewer.” Most of these ties, especially weak tie exists in social networks, but it is asked how a weak tie can result in the preservation of a precious building, such as valuable cinema halls in Tehran.



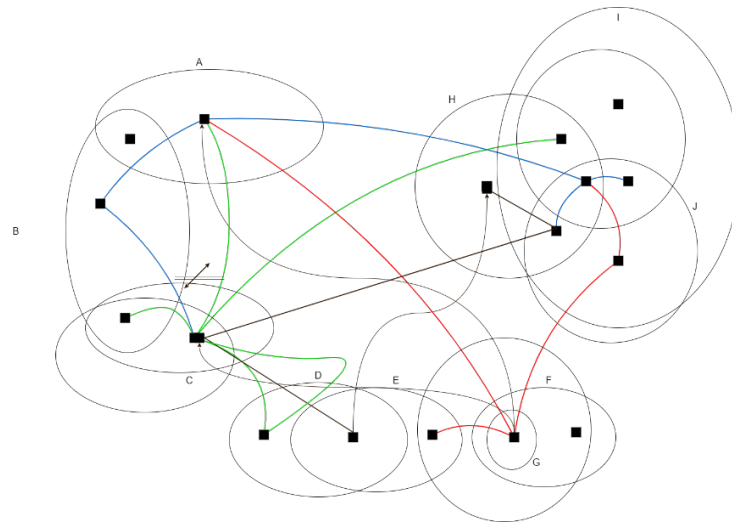
**Fig. 3. Model of Strong and Weak Ties between Individuals within a Relationship**

Therefore, “strong ties” exist between close friends, and become permanent and frequent ties. Social networks include individuals who are connected to one user and share the content obtained from them with many friends. “Weak ties” are those existing between members of various communities with less common connections. However, various individuals have more weak ties rather than strong ties. Everybody may have “strong ties” with a few individuals who are called celebrities but are in contact with many friends (Gharaati et al. 2023). Therefore, when we see social networks on a large scale, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, a highly severe contrast is seen between what social theories tell us and what we see in the real world. A kind of gap exists between theory and our observations. The common social theories underestimate “weak ties,” weak ties between two members who even do not know the name of each other, but this is a normal case in social networks; one person may forward content from somebody whom they do not know (Tian and Lin 2016). It seems that we will see social trends rooted in “weak ties” of social media since the third decade of the 21st

century. Theoretical background (Krämer et al. 2014) in this field emphasizes two specific subjects:

- “Social capital” and “tie strength” are well-known subjects in society (conventional conditions). The higher the social capital, the higher the strength of the tie between a person and society will be conventional.
- “Tie strength in social networks” (online) has a relationship with “social capital.” The more social capital the individuals have, the stronger ties via social networks they have.

Theoretical approaches and empirical results of social capital accumulation in social networks’ websites indicate that weak ties serve as a bridge for sending messages from one to another person; in contrast, strong ties emphasize similarizing and making opinions of two members similar. Hence, they should be distinguished. Unlike the social capital of a strong tie is associated with emotional support, social capital in a weak tie is bridging. Hence, the latter acts as a bridge in sharing information with another person; of course, others may accept their comments. This substantial case is a perfect potential for the preservation of precious cinema buildings in Tehran.



**Fig. 4. Graph of Connections in Social Networks that can contribute to Synergy or Formation of some Trends for Supporting the Contemporary Architectural Heritage of Iran Especially Valuable Cinema Halls in Tehran**

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The relationship of individuals with the city and architectural buildings is a complicated subject, which is called place attachment. Place attachment or place dependence is described in psychology as an emotional tie between self and place (Gross and Brown 2008). Identity is one of the important and underlying roots of Iranian culture (Radi-Azerakhshi et al. 2013). In the opinion of Morgan (2010), place attachment includes interaction between affection, cognition, and behavior when referring to the place. According to the topic literature on the spending of leisure time in active urban spaces, this construct comprises four conceptual dimensions: 1. Place identity, 2. Place attachment, 3. Emotional or affective attachment, and 4. Social tie (Morgan 2010). While affection plays a vital role in social connections with place, many studies exist about psychological dimensions of place experience under various subgroups, such as sense of place, place attachment, society's feelings, sense of community, identity of society, place identity (Ram et al. 2016).

Place attachment is related to the concept of identity in architecture and urban planning. According to the conceptual interpretation of identity process theory, identity is a feeling through which, a person belongs to a place, and places are important sources of interconnected identity elements. Qazimi (2014) and Kyle et al. (2005) describe the relationship between identity and physical environment believing that places talk with symbolic meanings and keep identity at different levels and dimensions (Qazimi 2014; Kyle et al. 2005). Accordingly, although place attachment is distinguished from place identity, it is involved in place identity due to unclear definitions. One of the initial definitions by Stokols and Shumaker (1981) in the field of environmental psychology conceptualizes

place dependence as a person-place relationship that provides some opportunities for activity and target needs. In other words, place dependence provides need-based activities and instruments that a person wants to experience (Stokols 1981). The connection string that links these views is the admission of place identity and place dependence as the psychological outcome of place attachment. Moreover, Smith (2017) explains that the tie between people and one place is not discrete (Smith 2017), while is an integrated approach for understanding strengthened features between individuals and stronger place. According to the results of studies on tourism mentioned above, the two-factor structure of place attachment that has been confirmed in tourism literature (Woosnam et al. 2018) is considered properly.

Relevant literature explains two concepts of emotional solidarity and place attachment based on them. place attachment may create a tie when creating emotional ties of individuals between a place and a person, which is the development of the emotional solidarity model (Woosnam and Aleshinloye 2013). In this step, place attachment indicates an emotional tie between individuals and special places. Hence, the following hypotheses are designed based on the findings of reviewed literature on place attachment, prerequisite of behaviors, and attitudes of visitors within subjective research:

Hypothesis 1: there is a positive significant relationship between the "place identity" of individuals and their interests in preserving the buildings as a contemporary architectural heritage of Iran (in case studies located in neighboring zones of Iran's cinema halls)

Hypothesis 2: there is a positive significant relationship between "place attachment" and presence in social media supporting the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran and interest in their preservation.

In other words, because the rate of place attachment among individuals and visitors is determined based on the place or destination loyalty, it is concluded that those individuals of a society that do not have a close

connection with a precious monument but are active in the social media that share information about the importance of contemporary architecture heritage, attempt to preserve these buildings.

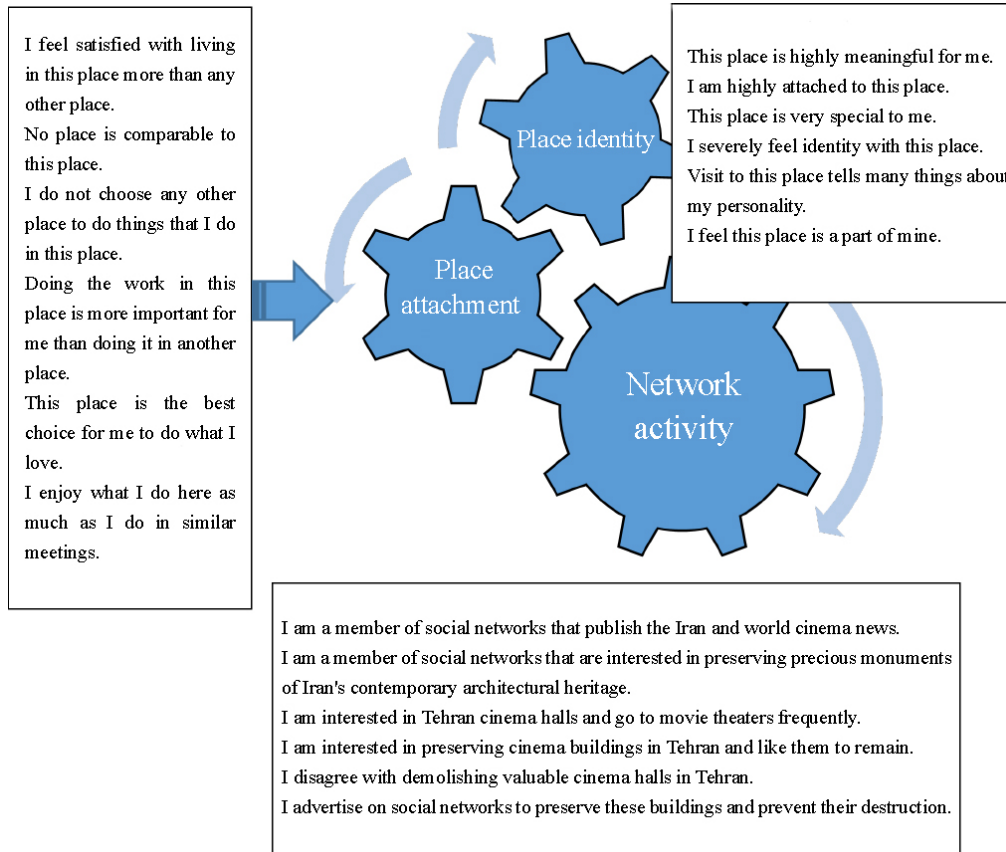


Fig. 5. Relationship between three Underlying Variables of Study within the Interaction with the Audience

The urban community of Tehran is the studied society. Sample size has been measured based on the urban community of Tehran using the Cochran formula and online sample size measurement.

$$n = \frac{\frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left( \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2} - 1 \right)} \quad (1)$$

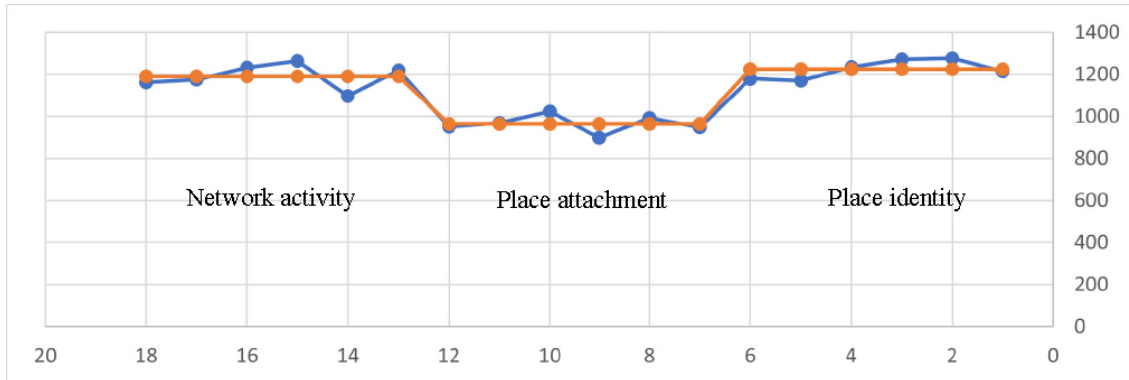
In Equation (1), the Cochran formula is shown to measure the statistical sample size where, n=statistical sample size, N=statistical society size, and d=allowed error (0.05).

The main area of study was limited to neighboring zones of precious cinema halls of Tehran for more accuracy, so the research hypothesis can be addressed and evaluated in these zones. In other words, samples are harvested from these zones. For comprehensiveness, however, the validity and reliability of the results of the urban society of Tehran are analyzed to measure the number of required questionnaires.

Accordingly, the number of 383.98 is achieved for the 8 million population of Tehran and suburbs if the d value equals 0.05. In this research, 400 questionnaires are filled out to achieve at least 385 accurate and usable questionnaires.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLES

The society of audiences was randomly selected among individuals passing by the areas where major cinema halls of the capital are located (Fig. 2). They were asked to fill out the questionnaire. Since the individuals are selected randomly from different age groups, the results well covered the individuals who are active in different groups of social networks and those who are not familiar with these networks. According to the statistical data, the selected sample has the necessary comprehensiveness and adequacy, so the results can be generalized.



**Fig. 6. Agreement Rate with Items among Respondents, which indicates a High Rate of Agreement among Respondents.**

Quantitative results of the study show that all three main variables and 18 designed items have a good average value. Moreover, a good dispersion is seen

in terms of the difference between generation and population diversity in Tehran.

**Table 2. Correlation between Main Variables of the Study**

	Place Identity	Place Attachment	Network Activity
Place Identity	1	-	-
Place Attachment	0.97**	1	-
Network Activity	0.93**	0.97**	1

Three main variables of the study, including “place identity,” “place attachment” and “network activity” have significant correlations in pairs. In Pearson correlation, an acceptable coordination is seen between them. The high correlation between these three variables confirms the research hypothesis about the role of place identity and place attachment in

doing network activity to preserve the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran, particularly the precious buildings of cinemas in Tehran. This high correlation confirms the role that social networks are expected to play during the contemporary era, strengthens the ties virtually, and creates a trend for the preservation of the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran.

**Table 3. Correlation between Items of Network Activities**

	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18
Q13	1	-	-	-	-	-
Q14	0.76**	1	-	-	-	-
Q15	0.27	0.39	1	-	-	-
Q16	0.94**	0.94**	0.96**	1	-	-
Q17	0.88**	0.87**	0.99**	0.93**	1	-
Q18	0.84**	0.84*	0.97**	0.89**	0.85*	1

\*\*Confirmed with high confidence rate (Sig. 2-Tailed)

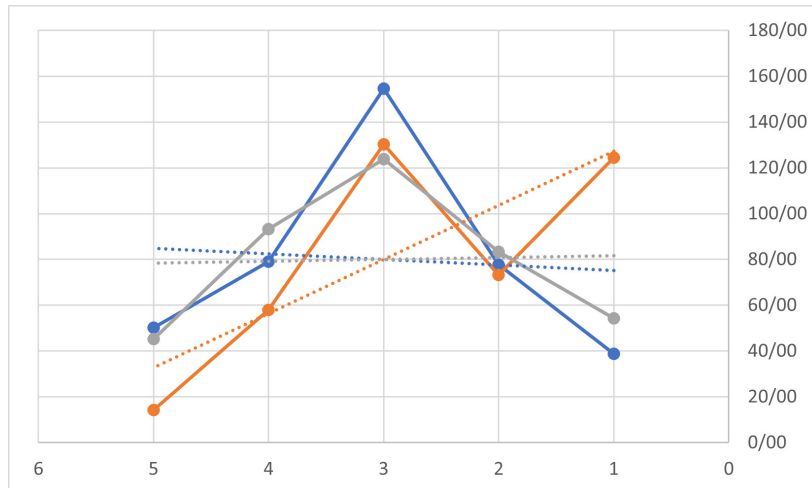


Fig. 7. Comparison between the Frequency of Responses in three Variables of Place Identity, Place Attachment, and Network Activity

According to quantitative results, distribution graphs of all three main variables are coordinated with a normal distribution curve, which indicates very good diversity in the studied sample. This important point confirms the validity and reliability of the study in terms of its structure. On the other hand, the state change graph of the variable indicates that this graph is moderate for the first and second variables but is ascending for the third variable. This case shows that individuals with relative awareness of the values of Iran's cinema halls and the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran support the preservation of these precious buildings.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The research results show the profound root of cinema in the contemporary culture of Iran. The influence of cinema halls on Tehran can be considered beyond the limited social influences, and these buildings can be classified as a part of cultural heritage in the field of architecture and urban planning. Mutual effects of architecture and cinema are not just limited to contemporary architecture styles and cinema styles, so deeper effects are expected during the contemporary era; the effects that are rooted in social networks and movements supporting the valuable buildings of cinema halls.

The results of the study emphasize the importance of "weak ties" in preserving architectural heritage monuments because even those people who do not go to the cinema regularly or even do not know specific buildings are willing to attempt to preserve

precious monuments due to their membership in social networks. Social networks at large scales, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have had a considerable influence on the cultural consumption of people, but the interest in the preservation of precious contemporary architectural heritage has remained. In practice, "strong ties" can be replaced with "weak ties" for preserving valuable buildings of cinema halls in Tehran. In other words, the role of "weak ties" should not be underestimated in future social theories for preserving the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran especially valuable buildings of cinema halls in Tehran.

This study confirmed the main hypothesis of the study. Individuals from various social groups and classes are present on social networks and follow the cinema news of Iran and the world for different reasons, and share this news with their relatives and friends. These individuals indirectly make audiences interested in such works, which provide the potential for preservation of the valuable buildings. In other words, being interested in the social networks that are interested in preserving valuable monuments of the contemporary architectural heritage of Iran is an important variable for "place attachment" and promoted "place identity." This attachment is a factor making individuals try to preserve the buildings of cinemas available in Tehran. Hence, it is recommended that cultural heritage practitioners and officials take the potential of social networks seriously in coordinating the groups interested in these cultural and historical buildings, and use it as an underlying variable for preserving the cultural heritage of Iran.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## MORAL APPROVAL

The author commit to observe all the ethical principles of the publication of the scientific work based on the ethical principles of COPE. In case of any violation of the ethical principles, even after the publication of the article, he gives the journal the right to delete the article and follow up on the matter.

## PARTICIPATION PERCENTAGE

Only the author of the paper has 100% right to publication of the paper.

## ENDNOTE

1. Information and Communication Technology

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