Covid-19’s Effect on the Movie Watching Experience

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Abstract:

This proposal is interested in examining how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the film industry and the movie-watching preferences of Americans. To analyze the effect of the pandemic on the film industry and the behaviors of movie watchers, I plan to study how the film industry has evolved to rely on streaming services to release content, as well as how the movie-watching behaviors of residences of different urban areas have changes as a response to the pandemic. By analyzing the financial side of streaming services (and their stock prices across time) and the change of behaviors of movie-watchers in Los Angeles, California, and Dallas, Texas, I will be able to explain how the effects of the pandemic changed people’s movie watching habits across the country. This will help me explain how the film industry is shifting towards digital platforms due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. All of this will allow readers know what movie watchers can expect for future movie-watching experiences.

Everyone knows the experience: walking into a movie theater, retrieving one’s ticket stubs, buying all-too-expensive popcorn, soda, and candy, and settling down into the seats to watch a movie on the big screen. But when Covid-19 unexpectedly hit the country in the beginning of 2020, this scene has shifted dramatically from the dimly lit local movie theater to the sofas of every American’s homes. Even as the pandemic settles down, there has been a large shift away from experiencing movies in the theaters to enjoying them from the comfort of one’s home. To observe this dramatic shift, one must look at the biggest players in the game: streaming services. The pandemic gave these streaming platforms an environment where they could evolve from a convenience to a necessity, both by consumers and movie producers (Johnson, 2021). The ability to subscribe to unlimited access to movies has allowed the American public to stray away from the movie theaters and enjoy countless forms of entertainment without moving more than 3 steps out of their own kitchen. But what does this mean for the film industry? And more importantly, what does this mean for the average movie watcher? Are movie theaters going to return to their previous glory post-pandemic, or is the American public adapting to a more hands-free movie watching experience?

Previous research has analyzed the initial shock of the pandemic, specifically on the financial side of the film industry and the not-shocking dramatic reliance on streaming services in the height of the pandemic; this was a time when social distancing and avoiding gatherings of any kind was largely on the public’s mind (Akser, 2020; Fang, 2021; Backman, 2022; Kim, 2021). I plan to use this research and analysis to see where the film industry is moving and explore movie watching conditions in a time where the pandemic has calmed down, that is, people are able to go to movie theaters again. I will analyze if the pandemic has changed the public’s preferences on the movie watching experience. This can help explain the role of streaming services, and how the film industry and public have built a dependence on these platforms, even long after the pandemic is no longer a concern.

I plan to study the effect of Covid-19 on the behavior of movie watchers across the country. Restrictions due to Covid-19 looked very different throughout the country, where places like Manhattan New York and Los Angeles, California experienced much stricter mask mandates and closures, and these lasted for a relatively long time, in comparison to cities like Dallas, Texas and Miami, Florida. (New York Times, 2021; USA Today, 2022). Because Covid-19 had such a large effect on cities like Los Angeles, I would expect that the populations in these areas experienced a large shift in their movie watching preferences before and after the initial shock of Covid-19, when compared to areas that had less severe outcomes with the hit of the Covid-19 pandemic. I expect to find the differences of viewing behaviors in this city to be very different than a comparable city in a southern region, where restrictions were far less severe and lasted for a far shorter timer period, such as in Dallas, Texas. To see if this prediction is valid, I will plan to compare the Covid-19 restrictions of specific areas (that is the severity and duration during the years 2020-2022) and the change in viewing habits of movie watchers in those areas (frequency of going to movie theaters before and after pandemic, changed in subscription to streaming services, and expectancy for future movie watching preferences) This will help me analyze how the pandemic affected certain areas around the country, and if these changes seem to be long-lasting or merely temporary. I will explore if the movie watchers who were affected by the pandemic for longer are behaving differently than those who were less effected by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

To conduct this research, I will study two areas of interest: Los Angeles, and Dallas Texas. I am studying these areas, because given what I’ve seen and what I know from family and friends that live in both areas, Los Angeles was an area that was highly impacted by covid restrictions, while Dallas returned to relatively normal activity shortly after the initial hit of the pandemic, so the effect of Covid-19 restrictions were far less severe in this area (New York Times, 2021) Both of these areas are generally comparable in terms of demographics, given that both are large cities with populations exceeding 1 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). I will take a survey in both areas that measures the following: If the respondent considers themselves an avid-moderate movie watcher, how many times pre-pandemic they frequented a movie theater, how many times post-pandemic they frequented a movie theater, the number of streaming services they are subscribed to, the number of streaming services they were subscribed to before the pandemic, and if they expect their current movie watching habits to continue after the pandemic is no longer a problem. To conduct this research, I will use Google Surveys targeted to reach populations in my areas of study. The specific costs of these surveys are described below within the proposed budget.

I also plan to study the financial side of the film industry, mostly on the reliance on streaming services. To do this, I will look for and collect data on the revenue of streaming services before the pandemic hit in 2020 and after the pandemic hit, around mid-2020. I will also collect data from after the effects of the pandemic were far less severe, around 2022. By collecting this data from these three points, I hope to see if the reliance on streaming services was something that only happened during the height of the pandemic, or if this is a long-term shift for the film industry that we will continue to see after the effects of the pandemic have worn off. To get this information, I will compare the stock value of certain streaming services at these three different moments in time. The main streaming services I will be investigating are HBO Max, Hulu, Netflix, Disney +, Sling, Apple TV, Peacock, Fubo TV, Amazon Prime, and YouTube TV, since these are very common streaming services available to the public (Casey, 2022). Given this information and the information I find about the behaviors of movie watchers in different regions above, I hope to make some educated guesses about what this means for the future of movie theaters and the movie watching experience after 2022.

I expect to get results which show a large change in movie watching behaviors for residences of Los Angeles, California after the initial shock of Covid-19, compared to the change in movie watching behaviors of residences of Dallas, Texas. I also expect to find that the large companies of the film industry and movie watchers have developed a strong dependence on streaming services for distributing and watching movies. I will look for and analyze if there is an observable shift in consumers using streaming services instead of movie theaters, and I would expect this shift being more prominent in Los Angeles than in Dallas.

This analysis, in addition to the work already done, should help readers understand how the movie watching experience has changed, and will continue to look different as we enter a post-pandemic era. I will conduct research in behavioral changes of movie watchers in Los Angeles and Dallas and also analyze financial statistics from the film industry to accurately describe where the movie industry is going, and what this means for move watchers around the country.

**Budget: $11,600**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Budget Item | Cost of Item | Justification |
| Google Survey in Los Angeles | $5,000 | I will need $5,000 in order to get sufficient results to use for my data about the changes in behaviors for movie watchers in Los Angeles. This pricing evaluation is from support.google.com on their Overview of Pricing page on Google Surveys Help. |
| Google Survey in Dallas | $5,000 | I will need $5,000 in order to get sufficient results to use for my data about the changes in behaviors for movie watchers in Dallas. This pricing evaluation is from support.google.com on their Overview of Pricing page on Google Surveys Help. |
| Time Worked | $1,600 | This is based off of minimum wage in California ($16 an hour), with 100 total hours going into my research. (20 hours for outside data collection, 30 hours for conducting research, 20 hours for cleaning data, and 30 hours for analyzing results.) |
| **Total:** | **$11,600** |  |

Timeline:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Jan  1-7 | Jan  8-14 | Jan  15-21 | Jan  22-28 | Jan 29- Feb 4 | Feb  5-11 | Feb  12-18 | Fed  19-25 |
| Creating Google surveys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conducting Google surveys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Analysis of previous research |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Collect stock information of streaming services |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Analyze financial details of streaming services |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Analyze results of Google surveys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Finalize findings, results, and overall analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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