

Covid-19 and Movie Theaters

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ABSTRACT

The Entertainment Industry underwent a drastic change during the Covid-19 pandemic. The movie theater industry was especially hard hit, as it temporarily lost most of its customer base to general panic and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic. This study aims to determine what long-term effect the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Movie Theater Industry. To assess any change in the public's view of Movie Theaters, an online survey was distributed among 11th and 12th graders in a West Texas High School, which asked participants to respond to a set of questions inquiring about past and present entertainment habits and expectations. Analysis of the responses demonstrated that the opinion and future likelihood of visiting movie theaters for entertainment had decreased notably, over the course of the pandemic, potentially giving rise to more convenient entertainment alternatives, and implying that the movie theater industry will likely need to adapt and alter the experience they provide in order to retain their audience. Further research is needed to look closer into the economic and social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

In March of 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak was officially declared a pandemic by the WHO (World Health Organization), subsequently bringing the entire world to a halt. Almost all countries had suffered, and every sector of the world economy was affected. One of the most affected markets worldwide was that of recreation, arts, and entertainment, which due to lockdowns, social-distancing, and general panic and uncertainty practically lost its entire customer base. Movie theaters, comprising a significant part of the entertainment industry, were hit especially hard, as their business model became an impossibility to sustain during the pandemic, resulting in countless cinemas being forced to close down (Bloomberg). The demand for entertainment, through movies and TV shows, however only increased during the frequent lockdowns and quarantines across the country. This demand was quickly filled by the rising, Video-on-demand streaming service industry, which quickly became a major source of entertainment during the pandemic. Covid-19 has not yet passed, but it is receding, slowly but surely the world is recovering. However, it would seem that such a unique, world-stopping event, would have left a lasting impression on society. While the short-term, immediate effects of the pandemic on society and the economy are pretty clear, its long-term implications are difficult to predict. I am interested in finding and determining the long-term effects that a global pandemic such as this has had on society. Specifically, whether the movie theater industry, weakened by a year-long shutdown, has suffered an irreversible fall, forcing it to adapt, or be replaced by more convenient forms of entertainment, or whether this is just a bump in the road from which the industry could make a complete recovery in the coming years. Much of this question comes down to whether the year-long absence of movie theaters, has left an impression in the minds of the consumers, and whether the lockdowns have heightened the audience's need for the greater convenience offered by streaming services as opposed to the arguably better, yet more time and effort consuming experience of the movie theater. While the Covid-19 pandemic has posed a significant problem for the movie theater industry, the lack of relevant literature and research in the field, primarily as a result of the problem still being relatively new, makes it difficult for businesses and people to understand or adapt to how the pandemic has changed society. I intend to study how the Covid-19 pandemic has

affected the popularity of movie theaters in the United States among high school students aged 16 to 18. This study aims to fill a gap in the understanding of the long-term effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on society, which is an important step to understanding how industries and society as a whole will have to change to adapt to the new circumstances created by the pandemic.

Based on the ongoing trends in the entertainment industry, it can be hypothesized, that movie theaters, as they were before the pandemic, will have lost much of their popularity and audience as a result of the effects associated with the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the growth of alternative methods of entertainment, and that therefore the industry will need to adapt and improve the experience that it offers in order to retain its audience.

Literature Review

As the events associated with the pandemic are still recent and the topics of study related to it are relatively new, there is only a limited amount of available literature, however, a significant portion of the existing body of literature emphasizes the tremendous loss in revenue and closure of theaters that the movie theater industry has suffered but also how quickly the entertainment market, as a whole has so far managed to recover. Current literature also looks at and compares the gratifications and motivations behind the uses of various forms of entertainment, such as between the movie theater industry and on-demand streaming services. Therefore, the question remains, whether movie theaters are going to be replaced with streaming services and other forms of online cinema or whether the industry is going to recover to its pre-pandemic level.

The Economic Impact of COVID-19

The Covid-19 virus was officially detected in late 2019 and rapidly spread across the world so that by March of 2020 the World Health Organization had to declare the outbreak a pandemic (CDC). The virus's alarming spread and lethality led to a worldwide shutdown of countries and their economies. According to the US Bureau of economic analysis, over the course of 2020, around 9.4 million jobs were lost, in the US alone and the nation's GDP decreased by 3.5 percent, the lowest growth rate since 1946 (Bureau of Economic Analysis). Particularly hard hit was the Entertainment sector, in 2019 the market size of the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry was estimated at around \$340 billion, just before the Covid pandemic and its subsequent plummet to roughly \$220 billion (IBIS World). A similar trend can be observed in the number of businesses in the arts and entertainment industry which peaked in 2019 at 1.7 million and then abruptly fell to less than 1.5 million in 2020. As part of this abrupt fall in business and revenue, AMC an American movie theater chain, which runs over 1000 cinemas worldwide, lost more than \$4.6 billion with the onset of the pandemic in 2020 (*The Economist*), forcing countless movie theaters to be shut down, of which, as of December of 2021, 630 theaters remain closed in the United States (Bloomberg). This drastic plummet in the market size of the entertainment industry goes hand in hand with the drastic fall in the Real Personal Consumption Expenditure (RPCE) in 2020. The RPCE is the primary measure of consumer spending on goods and services in the United States, and its fall from roughly \$13,300 billion in February of 2020 down to \$10,900 billion in April of that same year (FRED), was very damaging to the entertainment industry, as consumers were less willing to spend money on non-essential goods and services such as those that the entertainment industry provided. A similar impact was felt across the world, especially in urban areas, a study that looked at the impact of the Covid pandemic on the South Korean movie theater industry, showed that "40 percent fewer people went to a cinema during the Lunar New Year in 2020 than in 2019" (Kyung). This significant decline can be attributed to the lockdown and social distancing measures put in place globally, as they made most business models on which entertainment-based businesses relied virtually unfeasible. But it is also important to note that this economic decline was not permanent as by 2021 the number of businesses in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector climbed back to around 1.6 million and the entertainment market had also risen again by \$50 billion (IBIS World). This shows that despite the steep plummet

seen in 2020, the entertainment industry has been quick to recover and seems to be getting back on its feet. However, it is yet unclear whether the entertainment industry that will come out of the pandemic will be the same as it had been in 2019.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

In order to study and understand how popular opinion and consumer motivation affect the future of an industry, it is important to first examine this situation through the Uses and Gratification (UG) Theory. The UG theory is based on the idea that “media cannot influence an individual unless that person has some use for that media or its messages” (Makindu). It explains how people use media for their own needs and get satisfied when their needs are fulfilled (Communication Theory), contrasting the idea that the audience is passive and has little say in what media they consume. The UG theory can be applied to the entertainment industry to examine the strengths and weaknesses of movie theaters, through the expected view of the audience. The gratifications that the consumer of a media seeks according to the UG theory are often separated into several main categories: Social, Process, and Content gratifications (Bakar et al.). Social gratification refers to the gratification an individual acquires from social interaction. This can come in the form of direct conversation or through the feeling of being part of a group due to exposure to similar content and media. Process gratification is the gratification received from being involved in the process of behavior rather than the message or content. This form of gratification is based on “convenience and ease of use” (Bakar et al.). Finally, the gratification stemming from the core need of each media user is that which is received through the content of the media itself. Content gratification is “the gratification the user gets from interacting with the content of the media” (Bakar et al.). These categories encompass the values and needs of the people along which they chose and interact with media and other forms of entertainment. This would mean that if the user’s expectancy and needs from a certain media are fulfilled, it is likely that they will continue to use that media and would avoid it if their needs and expectations are not fulfilled (Mondi et al.). When comparing Movie theaters to other forms of entertainment, they stand out in how effectively they present their content. Movie theaters manage to monopolize the viewer’s attention “with large screens, powerful sound systems and a darkened environment that increases the emotional impact of their content” (Tefertiller, A.). Theaters manage to provide a more content gratifying and emotionally impactful experience, compared to other forms of entertainment, such as on-demand streaming services. This enhanced fulfillment of the consumers’ process gratification alone has, so far, been enough to attract large audiences, however, it seems to be the only gratification at which movie theaters excel. On-demand streaming services, on the other hand, offer an open environment for audiences “to have a video service that fulfills content, social and process gratification” (Bakar et al.). A 2018 study that looked at audience motivations behind movie theater attendance, found that audiences tend to watch “films that already have a large fan base established”, where they “know the plot well” and can “remain part of the conversation” (Flynn). On one hand, this points out the content and social gratification that movie theaters provide, yet on the other hand, this points out the lack of process gratification from the movie theater experience, as the high ticket prices and the fact that you have to schedule a visit and leave the house, can be very inconvenient. This is important as consumers are often less willing to “see a movie at the theater” and will instead “pay to watch the film on their home television” (Tefertiller). This means that new and less famous movies will for the most part be watched at home and only remakes of old franchises will see large audiences inside the theaters.

Entertainment Industry

The Entertainment industry has been significantly affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, however, not all parts of the industry were hit as hard as the cinemas. Video on Demand (VOD) streaming refers to an interactive system, from which viewers can select and watch a movie or video, instantly and anywhere, on their television or personal computer (Anderson). Due to the situation created by the pandemic, many people would stay at home, for long periods of time, an environment almost perfect for VOD streaming services. In the United States, television use went up by 18 percent

and overall internet usage rose by 28 percent, over the course of March 2020, alone (Daily Chart). The VOD streaming industry was further helped by the closing of movie theaters, forcing film producers to release new movies directly through streaming services. This brought to an end the movie exclusivity that movie theaters had enjoyed before. Previously, to attract audiences and increase box office revenues, new movies would only be available to watch in theaters for the first 90 days after release. However, as movie theaters shut down or operated at minimum capacity in 2020, movie producers such as Warner Bros had moved all their new releases to a “day and date release format” (Fuster), meaning all new movies will be released in theaters and online simultaneously. Similarly, Disney has halved the exclusivity of cinemas from 90, to 45 days (Newbould). While not necessarily permanent, these changes could seriously affect future audiences in movie theaters as now the same content is available at home as in a theater, at the same time. To understand how the pandemic will have affected movie theaters, it might be helpful to observe how other industries have been faring. The shopping industry has also been dramatically affected by the pandemic as many businesses were forced online and shoppers have relied more on online retailers for their goods and services during the pandemic. This year-long period of heightened online activity has influenced consumer shopping behaviors. A study that surveyed one thousand individuals on what retailer they planned to shop at in the future, found that while at the start of the pandemic shoppers had specific preferences on how and where they shopped, later, a significant number indicated that “they no longer have a preference” (McQuilkin). This increase in no-preference shopping gives more control to the consumer over where they shop, as the customer’s choices move from habit to convenience. It is likely that this trend is also occurring in the entertainment industry. Spurred by the pandemic, people might be more inclined to watch movies and shows through more convenient streaming services rather than going to an actual theater. Especially since the average monthly cost of a basic streaming service subscription is about eight dollars in return for access to an entire video database, a price per movie which is significantly lower than that of watching it in a theater, where the average ticket price in 2019 was around 9 dollars (Statista). This development can be clearly seen in the attendance data of national sports. The average NFL attendance has been on a steady decline since 2008 (ESPN), as fans are often unwilling to pay the high ticket prices, where viewing the game from home is more comfortable and cheaper (Grant). Already before the pandemic, television and online attendance accounted for most of the NBA’s revenue, estimated at around \$24 billion (McFarlane). But in 2021, the NFL was reported to have had 17 million viewers on TV, which is a 17 percent jump from the previous year and a total, three percent increase compared to before the pandemic (*Associated Press*). With the rise in online customers and the fall, in in-person attendance across all major types of entertainment, it seems that the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated an already ongoing trend across much of the entertainment industry, that of moving online and away from in-person events.

The current body of literature outlines the change in consumer behavior brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting, short-term effects that economies worldwide have suffered. It also effectively employs the Uses and Gratifications theory to weigh the pros and cons of the movie theater industry and its alternatives, thereby discussing the various audience motivations that would play a significant role in any change in the entertainment industry. Existing literature places heavy emphasis on how the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have shaken the market and provides a relatively balanced view of the gratifications that the audience seeks in theatrical and online entertainment. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic being still in progress at this time and the fact that this issue still, is relatively new, there is only a limited amount of literature available in this area of study, specifically regarding the expected long-term impacts of the pandemic. Current literature is, for the most part, composed of economic and market data, and various surveys and estimates of audience motivation. This is of course very useful, however as most of the literature was written before the pandemic, such pre-pandemic literature is likely to have lost relevance as the economic and social environment is likely to have changed significantly since then. Future research in this field of study should look into the long-term economic and societal impacts of the COVID pandemic; heavier emphasis should also be placed on quantitative studies, to detect any change in values and expectations of the population. This could shed more light on the future of many old and new markets and industries.

Methods

Participants

The population of this study consisted of high school students, specifically Seniors and Juniors, attending a public high school in West Texas with a student body of 1800 students. The student body of this school is ethnically and academically diverse, and the population is diverse in income with over half (56%) of the student body qualifying for the free or reduced lunch program. These diverse characteristics will allow the population sample of this study to be a good representation of the local area's population, including that of several other high schools in the area. A Purposive sample was used in participant selection. A total of n= 42 students, made up of Juniors and Seniors, between the ages of 16 and 18, chose to participate in the study. This study specifically focuses on high school students because when studying the long-term, future impacts of Covid-19 on the entertainment industry, it is important to also look at the future customers and potential audience of movie theaters and the entertainment industry, which would be young adults who are currently in high school and are beginning to and will be the future customers of the entertainment industry.

Measures

The participants' attitudes towards movie theaters (before and after the pandemic) were measured using a survey with a mix of quantitative and open-ended, qualitative questions. The survey inquired about the participants' entertainment preferences and compared their current attitudes about movie theaters to those before 2020, before the Covid pandemic. Quantitative questions made up the majority of the survey and were scored on a 3, 4, or 5-point scale while open-ended questions were scored based on common themes found across answers. The findings of the survey were processed and analyzed using Google Sheets, to construct histograms and conduct data calculations.

Below is a copy of the questions included in the survey:

Quantitative Questions	Scoring Method	Purpose
<p>Question 1 Approximate how often you would watch a movie at a movie theater before the Covid-19 Pandemic (Prior to 2020) per year?</p> <p>Question 2 How often do you expect to watch a movie at a Movie Theater in the future (After the Pandemic)?</p>	<p>4-point Scale 1- Rarely (1 time or less per year) 2- From time to time (2-4 times per year) 3- Occasionally (5-8 times per year) 4- Regularly (8 or more times per year)</p>	<p>Compare participants' previous Movie theater attendance habits to expected future attendance.</p>
<p>Question 3 Did you feel safe watching a movie at a movie theater during Covid, last year (2021)?</p>	<p>3-point scale -1 - No 0 - Neutral 1 - Yes</p>	<p>Measure if Participant's attitude towards Movie theaters was affected due to a fear of infection during the Covid Pandemic</p>

Quantitative Questions	Scoring Method	Purpose
<p>Question 5 How frequently would you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) before the pandemic (prior to 2020)?</p> <p>Question 6 How frequently do you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) now?</p>	<p>4-point scale 1- Never 2- A few days per month 3- A few days per week 4- Every Day</p>	<p>Compare Participant's Streaming Service use before the pandemic to now.</p>
<p>Question 7 Which method of entertainment do you believe is more convenient?</p> <p>Question 8 Which method of entertainment makes its content more enjoyable?</p> <p>Question 9 What method of entertainment would you choose if you were to watch a movie with friends?</p> <p>Question 10 Overall, which method of entertainment do you prefer?</p>	<p>3-point scale -1 - Movie theaters 0 - None 1 - Streaming Services</p>	<p>Assessing the pros and cons of Movie theaters and Streaming services, determined using the Uses and Gratifications Theory and understanding the motivations behind participant's attitudes.</p>
<p>Open-Ended Questions</p>		
<p>Question 4 How has the Covid pandemic affected your perspective on Movie theaters?</p> <p>Question 11 Why do you prefer this method of entertainment? (Based on Question 10)</p>	<p>Scored based on common themes across answers</p>	<p>Letting the participant explain their attitude towards Movie theaters/ Streaming Services in their own words.</p>

Procedures

The data was collected using a Purposive sample, several teachers were asked to share the survey with their classes. Of those, a total of three teachers complied and were sent the survey and its consent form, which they then offered students in their classes to fill out. Additionally, random students who fell within the study's population were approached and asked to participate in the study. Participation was completely voluntary, and students did not receive any incentive or compensation for their involvement. The survey was taken electronically, using google forms and the results of all participants were therefore automatically recorded and sent back to the researcher. The survey was collected at a school, with participants taking the survey by themselves. Every participant completed the survey on their own time, which is estimated to have taken roughly 10 minutes. Because a significant number of participating students

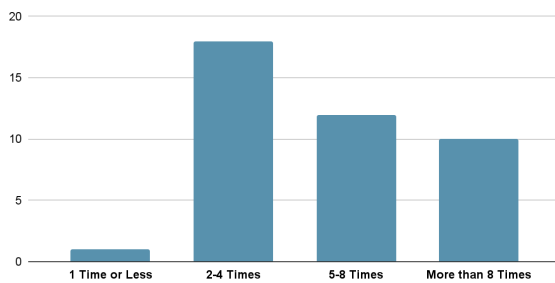
were below 18 years of age, proper consent was obtained by giving each cooperating teacher consent forms to distribute to students younger than 18 and to be reviewed, signed by their parents or guardians, and brought back to their teachers. Participants who were 18 years old and did not need parental consent were asked to confirm their consent at the beginning of the survey.

Results

Histograms and Correlation

Question 1

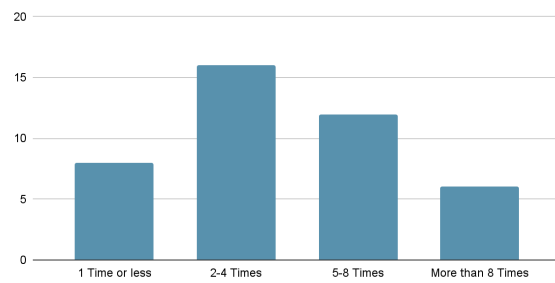
Approximate how often you would watch a movie at a movie theater before the Covid-19 Pandemic (Prior to 2020) per year?



Prior to 2020, the majority of participants would watch a movie at a movie theater at least 2 to 4 times per year if not more frequently.

Question 2

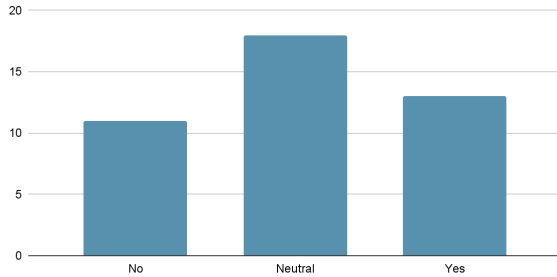
How often do you expect to watch a movie at a Movie Theater in the future (After the Pandemic)?



While the majority of participants still expect to watch movies at movie theaters at least a couple of times per year, after the pandemic, comparatively few think that they will do so as frequently as they had before.

Question 3

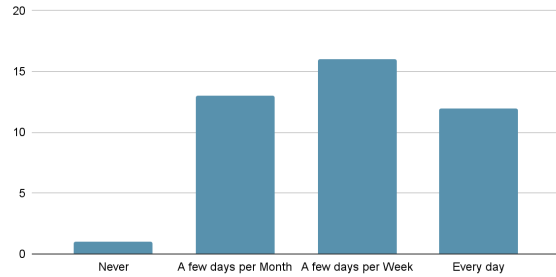
Did you feel safe watching a movie at a movie theater during Covid, last year (2021)?



Most participants felt unsure about their safety but did not specifically feel unsafe in movie theaters, during the Covid pandemic.

Question 5

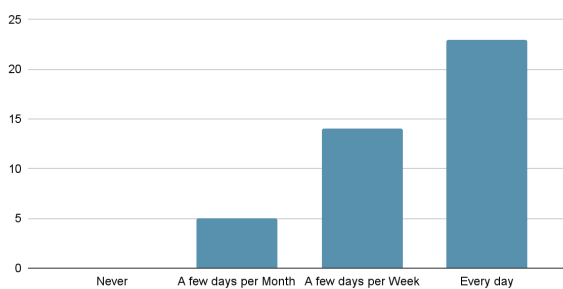
How frequently would you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) before the pandemic (prior to 2020)?



Prior to 2020, Streaming Services were already very popular, with many, using some kind of streaming service for several days if not every day of the week.

Question 6

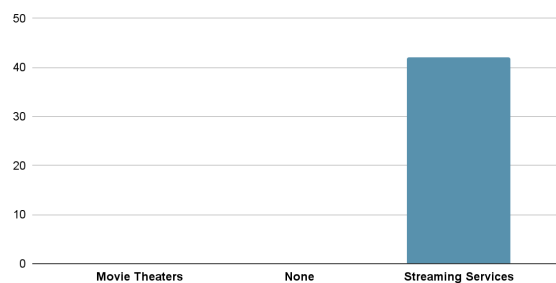
How frequently do you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) now?



Now, the use of streaming services for entertainment has significantly increased, with the majority of participants saying that they use some kind of streaming service every day.

Question 7

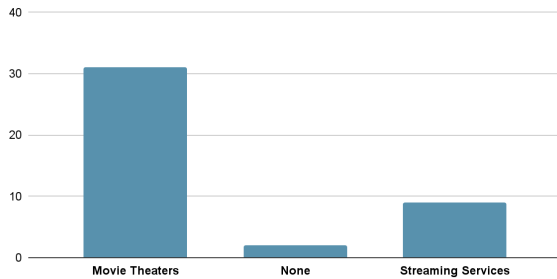
Which method of entertainment do you believe is more convenient?



All agreed that streaming services are generally a more convenient method of entertainment. This agrees with the U&G theory analysis, that Streaming Services feature a more gratifying and convenient process.

Question 8

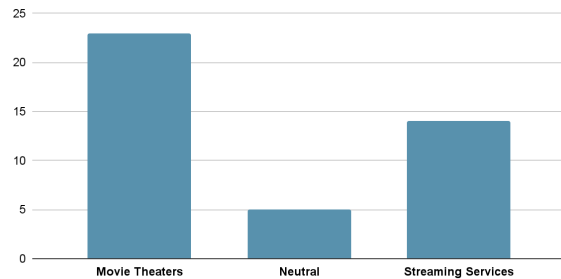
Which method of entertainment makes its content more enjoyable?



The majority felt that movie theaters made their content more enjoyable. This was expected due to cinemas' various tools and effects that amplify the content gratification of the audience.

Question 9

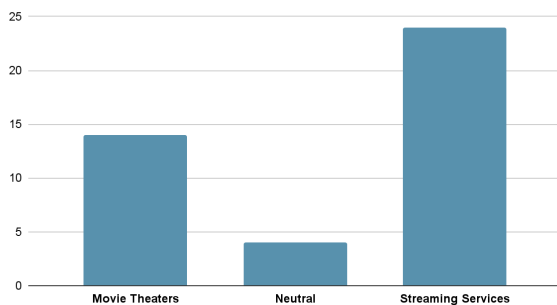
What method of entertainment would you choose if you were to watch a movie with friends?



While participants were split between Movie theaters and streaming services, more gravitated towards choosing Movie theaters if they were to watch a movie with friends. This can indicate that the audience receives a higher social gratification from watching movies in theaters compared to online.

Question 10

Overall, which method of entertainment do you prefer?



The majority seems to prefer streaming services as their preferred method of entertainment, compared to Movie theaters.

Data Summary Table

Quantitative Questions	Answer Score Mean	Point Scale
Question 1 Approximate how often you would watch a movie at a movie theater before the Covid-19 Pandemic (Prior to 2020) per year?	2.71	1- 1 time or less per year 2- 2-4 times per year 3- 5-8 times per year 4- 8 or more times per year
Question 2 How often do you expect to watch a movie at a Movie Theater in the future (After the Pandemic)?	2.38	
Question 3 Did you feel safe watching a movie at a movie theater during Covid, last year (2021)?	0.05	-1- No 0 Neutral 1- Yes
Question 5 How frequently would you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) before the pandemic (prior to 2020)?	2.93	1- Never 2- A few days per month 3- A few days per week 4- Every Day
Question 6 How frequently do you use any kind of streaming service (Netflix, Hulu, ...) now?	3.42	
Question 7 Which method of entertainment do you believe is more convenient?	1	-1- Movie theaters 0- None 1- Streaming Services
Question 8 Which method of entertainment makes its content more enjoyable?	-0.52	
Question 9 What method of entertainment would you choose if you were to watch a movie with friends?	-0.21	
Question 10 Overall, which method of entertainment do you prefer?	0.24	

Open-Ended Questions

Question 4 How has the Covid pandemic affected your perspective on Movie theaters?	Percentage of Responses
Showing improved attitude towards Movie Theaters	10%
Showing worsened attitude towards Movie Theaters	43%
Showing likelihood of increased future Movie theater attendance	2%
Showing likelihood of decreased, future, Movie theater attendance.	33%
Worried about risk of infection	60%
Showed indifference	33%

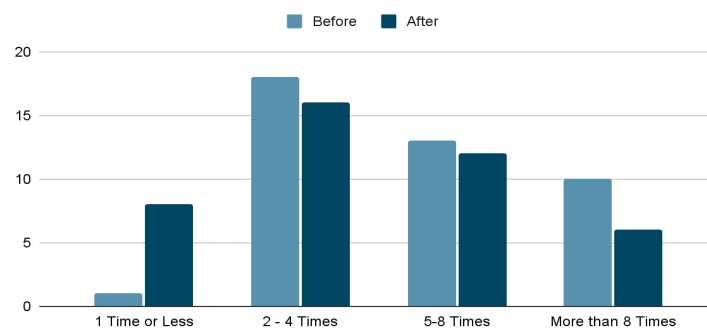
The majority of participants (60%) have said that they have been avoiding movie theaters due to the risk of infection, this does not mean that their attitude towards theaters has changed, but only indicates a temporary avoidance of movie theaters while the pandemic lasts. However, 43% of participants expressed some kind of worsened attitude towards Movie theaters with 33%, a third, specifically indicating to be less inclined to watch a movie at a theater in the future compared to before the pandemic. A common consensus among participants was that after getting used to doing many things from home and over the internet, and generally avoiding public places such as movie theaters, as many would do during the pandemic, going to a movie theater to watch a movie, now feels like “more of a hassle”, especially when the same movie could often be watched from home. It was also noted that a few participants expressed an increased appreciation for “movie theaters and the services they provided”, as a result of the pandemic. But the general consensus was that, whether the pandemic has made the movie theater experience better or worse, watching a movie at a theater has become more of an inconvenience than it was in the past.

	Question 11 Why do you prefer this method of entertainment? (Follow up to Question 10)	Percentage of Responses
Why participants preferred Streaming Services	Greater choice offered by Streaming services	43%
	Convenience of at-home viewing available with Streaming services	93%
	Relative low cost of streaming services	25%
Why participants preferred Movie Theaters	Better Content Experience at Movie Theaters	100%
	Better Social Experience at Movie Theaters	29%

In this open-ended question, 93% of participants who had said they prefer Streaming Services, agreed that they do so, because of the convenience of using streaming services. Many also pointed out, that the greater choice and relatively low cost of most streaming services also played a significant part in their choice. All Participants who indicated to prefer Movie Theaters said that the greater content experience, offered by movie theaters, makes them a better choice for entertainment, despite their lower convenience. Some even argued that the higher cost and inconvenience made the movie theater experience feel like more of an event, compared to the more casual streaming service experience and that because of this, an evening spent at a movie theater, often with friends and family, can create a much more memorable experience, that makes its greater cost in time and money, worth it.

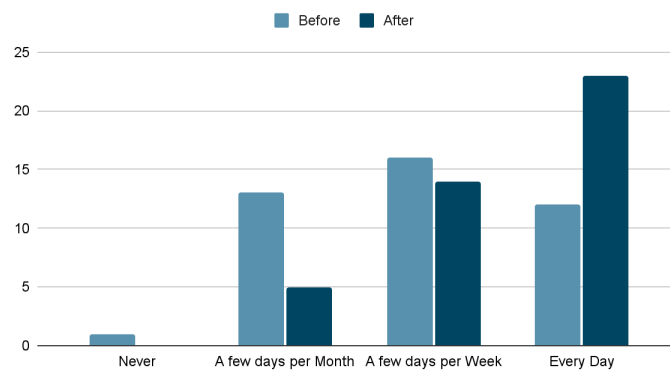
Discussion and Analysis

Change in Participants Attitudes towards Movie Theaters Comparison



The results of the survey clearly showed that a shift in attitudes towards movie theaters had indeed taken place among some participants. Particularly, a decline, with 40% of respondents indicating a lower expected attendance of movie theaters in the future compared to before the pandemic. This can imply that while most participants do still expect to go to a movie theater for entertainment, at least occasionally in the future, many expect to do so not as often as they had done prior to 2020 and the pandemic. This can be seen in the jump in the number of responses that indicated an expected movie theater attendance of one time or less, per year, from 2% before the pandemic to 20% after. This change in attitude towards movie theaters is supported by the moderately low P-value of .086, indicating moderate statistical significance.

Change in Frequency of Use of Streaming Services Comparison



The frequency of use of streaming services, on the other hand, saw the opposite change, before, compared to after the pandemic. While streaming services were already quite popular prior to 2020, now a majority of 55% of participants responded that they use some kind of Streaming-Service every day. This is a strong increase from the 28% that said so previously. In total, about 48% showed an increase in their frequency of use of streaming services over the course of the pandemic. This data implies a strong growth of the streaming service industry especially important is that now, for the majority, using some kind of streaming service as a form of entertainment has become part of daily life, something which was not at all the case prior before the pandemic. This change in the frequency of use of streaming services is supported by the relatively low P-value of .053, indicating a not perfect, yet still high statistical significance.

Furthermore, the results of the survey agree with the speculations previously made using the Uses and Gratifications theory. Questions 7, 8, and 9 have participants choose between Movie theaters and streaming services, based on specific criteria, that reflect the social, process, and content gratifications, which are the three types of gratifications into which the UG theory is commonly structured (Bakar et al.). The results reflected many points that were made when discussing differences in consumer appeal and gratification from watching movies in theaters or online, using the Uses and Gratifications Theory. In question 7, participants of this study unanimously agreed that streaming services are a more convenient method of entertainment, compared to movie theaters, backing up the findings of the previously mentioned Tefertiller's study, that many consumers, will usually prefer the more convenient streaming services for everyday entertainment, demonstrating the importance of the convenience factor when comparing movie theaters to online alternatives. The results of question 8, showed that the majority of respondents also agreed with Tefertiller's assessment about the greater appeal of movie theaters, saying that movie theaters make the content they present feel more enjoyable compared to streaming services. Such results can be expected primarily due to the various accessories and tools used by movie theaters that have been mentioned earlier, such as loud sounds and the darkened environment that provides the audience with a more emotionally impactful experience. Moreover, respondents' answers to the open-ended, qualitative questions four and eleven shed more light on the audience motivations behind watching movies at theaters. Specifically, some participants said that the higher cost and "inconvenience" of going to a theater is something that actually makes the event more enjoyable and the time that is usually spent with friends or family, during and after this event makes it significantly more memorable. This is again backed up by the results of question 9, which show that the majority would choose a movie theater as their preferred method of entertainment if they were to watch a movie with friends, exemplifying the importance of social gratification in the popularity of a method of entertainment.

Conclusion

The limitations of this research study were predominantly related to its, rather limited sample size. This study's data and results would have greatly benefited from, not just a higher number of participants in general, but also more participants across multiple schools. It should also be noted that, due to the varying levels of impact and public response towards the Covid-19 pandemic, depending on the state and location within the United States, shifts in attitudes, and therefore these results, are likely to vary based on where in the United States this study is performed.

To conclude, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically on the entertainment industry. Altogether, this study found that the temporary shutdown of most movie theaters in the United States over the course of 2020 and 2021, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, correlates with a strong increase in the popularity and use of Streaming services as an alternative method of entertainment. This goes with the not as drastic, yet still significant decrease in the popularity of and willingness to go to a movie theater among high school Seniors and Juniors.

This, notable, but not too severe shift in attitude, that high school students have shown towards movie theaters, could imply that the movie theater industry is likely to recover much of the ground that they had lost during the pandemic, but the increased preference for the use of streaming services shown by the participants could imply that,

in the long term, the movie theater industry will still be forced to adapt and improve the experience that it provides, in order to maintain their audience amidst the strengthened competition of alternative methods of entertainment.

Future Research should look closer into the long-term economic and societal impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, with heavier emphasis placed on quantitative studies, in order to detect any change in values and expectations among consumers. This could shed more light on the future of not just the entertainment industry but also many other, old and new, industries and products.

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