

The Trends on Consumption of Film and Television During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ella Tristani

St. Norbert College

COME468

Abstract

The purpose of this research proposal is to analyze the effects that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on the trends on consumption of film and television. Living under stay-at-home orders was often difficult for people and caused them to feel lonely and isolated. Because of this longing for connectedness and belonging with friends and family, I predict that participants turned to connecting with each other through watching the same television shows and films. The method that will be used for conducting this study would be carried out through in depth interviews. These interviews would use open ended questions about the participants experiences during the covid pandemic in regards to what they were watching and how they were watching television and films. The expected results would show that during the pandemic, people tended to watch shows and films that made them feel connected to others and made it easier for them to keep in touch with their friends and peers.

The Trends on Consumption of Film and Television During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had substantial effects on people all around the world in terms of mental effects, physical effects, social effects, and many more. Not only is COVID-19 a life threatening disease that has affected millions of people physically and emotionally, the pandemic has also had numerous effects on the economy and businesses. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the consumption of film and television in terms of providing a medium for people to stay connected with one another.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, since many people were in quarantine and staying at home, one would assume that this would cause an increase in the consumption of at home viewing of film and television, and a decrease in the movie theatre and cinema viewing. My hypothesis is that because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of at-home viewing of movies and films on applications such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc, people chose to keep up with shows or spend their time binge watching films and shows to stay connected to friends, family, and the community who may be watching the same media. In this proposal, I will be drawing heavily from information found by Rubin (2002), Jason (2015), Shaw (2021), Sundar (2013), Farber (2020), Elliot (1974), Project HOPE (2021), Berman (2020), and Bender (2020).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The first traces of the COVID-19 pandemic date back to December of 2019, in Wuhan, China. The virus quickly spread throughout Wuhan, infecting tens of thousands of people in just weeks (Project Hope, 2021). China quickly pressed restrictions for travel and work within the country, but it was too late. In March of 2020, the World Health Organization recognized the

breakout as a global pandemic. Soon after the initial outbreak when the disease began to spread throughout the continents, world leaders told people to stay home, creating “stay at home” orders. Leaders also asked people to practice social distancing, and to avoid large gatherings and staying at least six feet away from others in public. Social distance and stay-at-home orders changed American life in means of interaction and communication, leaving people with a need for belonging and connectedness (Bender, 2020).

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic came to America in March 2020 and the stay at home orders were placed, the world around us has changed in many ways. One way that COVID-19 has affected us and the world around us is through our social interactions and relationships. According to Project Hope, although it is hard to know the exact number of people who have been infected by COVID-19 because of varying symptom experiences, it is estimated that at least 140 million cases have been confirmed, though the actual number is probably much higher (2021). Now, this number does not account for how many people have been affected by the disease in other ways, such as contract tracing, family members getting sick, long and prolonged quarantine, or even mental wellness.

Uses and Gratifications

Rubin explains the Uses and Gratifications theory as “a psychological communication perspective which focuses on how individuals use mass media and other forms of communication such as interpersonal communication to fulfill their needs and wants” (2002). In other words, the Uses and Gratifications theory implies that people have innate needs that can be satisfied by the media (Rubin, 2002). This theory is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when millions of people were stuck at home, with media as their only source of connectivity to their communities, friends, and family.

Trends in At-Home Television and Film Applications During the Pandemic

It doesn't come as a surprise that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people were watching more television than ever before. Since people could no longer leave their house for recreational reasons like any events that took place in stadiums, theatres, or auditoriums, people had no choice but to enjoy these events from home, using services such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc. The *New York Times* reported that the number of American households with at least one streaming subscription jumped by 2.5 million, to 74%, in the first few months of the pandemic (Berman, 2020). Netflix added 26 million customers in this same period, a record for new subscribers (Shaw, 2021). In addition to Netflix gaining new customers and subscribers, Warner Media LLC experimented with dropping TV episodes on its new HBO Max service. Walt Disney Co. announced plans for more TV shows based on its Marvel and Star Wars properties, bolstering its approach of spacing out major releases to maximize Disney+ subscriptions. Universal, Warner Bros., and Disney all canceled plans to release major movies in theaters and put them online instead. News and sports divisions everywhere tailored programming to streaming audiences (Shaw, 2021). The question that we are trying to investigate is whether this spike in the at home television and movie viewing applications was related to our society's need for social integration and connectedness among shared viewing experiences.

Social Integration of Uses and Gratifications

According to Elliot, uses and gratification research is concerned with “the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations from the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (1974). According to this logic and for the purpose of this study, the origin of needs during the

COVID-19 pandemic would be the need to communicate and connect with others. The sources of mass media exceptions would be Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc. The increase of use of these platforms during the pandemic would explain the differential patterns of media consumption and exposure, which then gave people more ways to stay connected by having the commonality of watching and experiencing the same shows and films.

In a study conducted by Farber and Mayopoulos back in 2020, a total of 186 psychotherapists completed a fifteen item self report survey on the movies and TV shows they had watched during quarantine and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the reasons for their choices of viewing. The results of this study show that the participants all chose to watch movies and television shows that were also being watched by their spouses, children, and friends. The study also explains that families of all types spent more time together watching television and movies during the pandemic as a way to fulfill their social integrative needs. This highlights the media such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc, being a means of connection within families that were not only communicating electronically due to quarantine and distance, but also to families who were quarantining together at home (Faber & Mayopoulos, 2020).

Methods

The procedure for conducting this proposed study would be carried out through in depth interviews, with open ended questions about the participants experiences during the covid pandemic in regards to what they were watching and how they were watching television and films.

Sample

The ideal sample for this study would be rather large, with men and women ranging from a large variety of ages ranging from 15-50 years old. This would account for anyone who had to

stay home during the pandemic, working from home, or doing online school. This is because this is a group of people who most needed ways to communicate with and connect with their peers and family that they could not see in person anymore. To conduct this research, I will need 30 participants. To find them I will use the snowball method, which means that I will send out an email to my contact list asking them to share the procedure via email, social media, etc.

Procedure

To conduct this research, I will need 30 participants. To find them I will use the snowball method, which means that I will send out an email to my contact list asking them to share the procedure via email, social media, etc. These proposed interviews will be conducted over the phone to accommodate and ensure the participation of subjects from different regions of the country. Before the interview begins, verbal informed consent will be acquired from each individual participant.

Once the interview begins, the participants will be asked questions based on their experience of the Pandemic as well as their interests in film and television shows during the time of the lockdown of the Pandemic. We also will ask the participants how their choices in movies and tv series differed from before the pandemic, as well as how their sense of community and connectedness to their friends and family varied.

Measures

The main variable being measured is the sense of community. To measure the sense of community, I will be using a 1 to 5 point scale for the participants to respond to the following questions. Participants will respond to the following prompts using a 1 to 5 scale: 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly in agreement.

- My own interests are often influenced by what others are doing.

- I tend to watch tv, movies, or media that others recommend to me.
- During the pandemic, I typically watched tv, movies, or media alone.
- During the pandemic, I watched tv, movies, or media with my family.
- During the pandemic, I kept in touch with my friends and family.
- During the pandemic, I often wanted to know what my friends and family were watching on tv.
- I am likely to take advice from others.
- During the pandemic, I felt lonely and missed connecting with my friends and family.
- During the pandemic, watching the same shows as friends and family helped me feel more connected.

Next, the participants will be asked the following in depth interview questions:

- What were some of the shows you enjoyed watching during the lockdown?
- What were the influencing factors for you to choose these shows and movies?
- Do you tend to enjoy tv or movie recommendations from friends and family?
- What do you feel when you watch a show that a friend or family member recommended to you, or a show that you know they love?

Results

After all of the interviews are conducted and all of the data is collected, the researcher will then go back and listen to the phone call recordings and take note of any common themes found in the interviews. common themes and findings will be shown from each of the subject's answers to the interview questions and the survey. Also, the hypothesis will be analyzed using the findings from the study.

The hypothesis stating that the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of at-home viewing of movies and films on applications such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc, people chose to keep up with shows or spend their time binge watching films and shows to stay connected to friends, family, and the community who may be watching the same media will be addressed by comparing the results from the interview as well as the degree to which a television show is appealing to an individual and their sense of community.

Discussion

This study will look specifically at how people used at home television and film viewing applications such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc, as a means to stay connected and “in the loop” with trends and have a common ground to connect to their community on. In this case, in order for people to fulfill their social integration, they used shows and movies that others were watching to give them a sense of belonging and connectedness to experience and relate to their peers. The proposed research and measures for conducting this study imply a few limitations which I will list.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study would be that participants may not remember exactly how they felt during the time of the COVID-19 lockdown, so their answers to questions could be speculation. This could be because of a significant amount of time passed since the pandemic lockdown to the time the study is conducted, as well as there could be traumatic memories tied to the time period we are asking the participants to draw from because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another limitation with the interview process could be that the participants may answer the questions based on what they think the researchers want to hear, rather than their own

authentic experiences. Also, in depth interviews are very time consuming, so participants may not go into much detail on the questions or leave out key information to the research.

Implications

Although there are limitations to this study, there are also significant implications that support the research that would be conducted. Since the COVID-19 lockdown, there has been minimal research conducted on the social effects of people, their communities and their sense of belonging. Not only would it be beneficial for the community to gain more knowledge in this area, but it would also bring information to the media viewing programs such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Youtube, Amazon, etc.

Resources

Bender, M. (2020). *Living Apart, Together: American Life During COVID-19*. Checkerboard Library.

Berman, J. (2020). How the Virus Attacks Traditional TV. *TIME Magazine*, 195(20/21), 87–89.

Elliot, P. (1974). "Uses and gratification research: A critique and sociological alternative." In *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research* Edited by: Blumler, J.G. and Katz, E. 249–268.

Farber, B. A., Ort, D., & Mayopoulos, G. (2020). *Psychotherapists' preferences for television and movies during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 76(8), 1532–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23005>

Jason, Leonard A, et al. "Development of a Three-Factor Psychological Sense of Community Scale." *Journal of Community Psychology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Nov. 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5030068/>.

Project HOPE. (2021). *Covid-19 pandemic: What you need to know*.
https://www.projecthope.org/covid-19-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/03/2020/?campaignid=1590500333&adgroupid=95558604618&creative=428259207811&keyword=&gclid=EAIaIQobChMInP3K2czb8wIVPmxvBB0PCgxIEAAYASAAEgL94vD_BwE.

Rubin, A. (2002). "The Uses and Gratification perspectives of media effects." *Media effects: advances in theory and research*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Shaw, L., & Elkin, E. (2021). A Viewer's Guide to the Future of Entertainment. *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 4701, 42–45.

Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 57(4), 504–525.