

Changes in Film Business in the Post-pandemic Era

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Abstract:

This paper examines the current status and changes in China's film industry in the post-pandemic era, focusing on the impact of the pandemic on the film industry and the adaptation and reconstruction of the industry in the new environment. The study finds that the pandemic has accelerated shifts in audience viewing habits, with the rise of streaming platforms continuing to reduce the dominance of traditional cinemas. Additionally, the pandemic has influenced film content creation, with a greater emphasis on resonating with real-life emotional experiences of the audience. Through case studies, the paper proposes marketing strategies and development suggestions for the film industry in the post-pandemic era to address potential future challenges. The research aims to provide references for film producers and policymakers to promote the sustainable development of China's film industry.

Keywords: Post-pandemic era; Film industry; Streaming platforms; Viewing habits; Content creation; Marketing strategies; Sustainable development.

1. Introduction

In 2020, COVID-19 has swept the globe and made several huge impacts on different fields such as economy and society and so on. As a cultural industry highly dependent on offline consumption, film industry was facing unprecedented challenges. For example, in China, because of the continuous escalation of prevention and control, a lot of cinemas closed and nearly all film-making programs were stopped. Therefore, all aspects of the entire film industry chain have been greatly affected. However, the pandemic was also driving changes in the film industry at the meantime, which gave the birth to the trend of new movie-watching forms and content creation.

In a word, this passage will study the status quo and change of the film industry in the post-pandemic era through taking Chinese domestic film as an example [1].

This passage concentrates on the current situation and transformation of Chinese domestic film industry in the post-pandemic era. By analyzing the impact of the pandemic on the film industry, the article will discuss the adaptation and reconstruction of the industry in the new environment. In particular, the article will discuss the audience's viewing habits, film content creation and communication channels change.

The purpose of the study is to derive the specific impact of the pandemic on China's film industry and analyze the self-adjustment and transformation ways of

the industry. Meanwhile, the future development direction of Chinese film industry is discussed. The significance of this study is to provide references for film producers and policy makers, so as to better cope with similar challenge in the future and promote the sustainable development of China's film industry [2].

This paper adopts the method of case study and combines relevant literature and data to analyze the theme and study the change and status quo of China's film industry in the post-pandemic era. The article is divided into four parts to illustrate the main topic, which are the impact of COVID-19 on the film industry, changes in the film industry in the post-pandemic era, case studies, and suggestions on marketing strategies for film development under the post-epidemic situation.

2. The Impact of COVID-19

2.1 Production Volume Adjustment and Decline

During the outbreak in China, the country adopted a lock-down policy, restricting the movement of people at many venues. As a result, the Chinese film industry has taken a big hit on the shooting grounds. A large number of films were suspended, and the filming of planned films was delayed. Film and television projects across the industry have been suspended or postponed [3]. According to the statistics, in 2020, the total production of films across the Chinese mainland will drop by more than 30 percent from the previous year. Many of these film and television productions have been permanently suspended because of the break in the funding chain. This phenomenon affects the supply of films and has a far-reaching chain reaction on all aspects of the entire film industry chain. For example, the film which is called 'Detective Chinatown' has been severely affected by the pandemic. The third episode of the film was supposed to be released in 2020, but due to the impact of the pandemic, it had to be delayed by a year to release in 2021. Also, the fourth episode of the film was filmed overseas, but has not been filmed so far due to the impact of the epidemic. As a result, the film is already three years behind schedule.

2.2 Box Office and Cinema Attendance are Down

As a consequence, cinemas, which serve as gathering places for movie enthusiasts, are subject to stringent regulations. The prolonged closure and limited reopening of theaters have resulted in a significant downturn in box office revenue and attendance [4]. According to the State Film Administration, China's film market is projected to

generate only 20.417 billion yuan in box office earnings in 2020, representing a staggering year-on-year decline of 69.2%. This sharp decrease in cinemagoers has further contributed to reduced income for cinema operators, who now face immense survival pressures with many small and medium-sized cinemas even at risk of closure [5].

3. Changes in the Film Industry in the Post-pandemic Era

3.1 The Dispute Between Offline Cinema and Online Streaming Media

Due to the impact of the pandemic, a large number of cinemas have been closed, and the viewing habits of audiences have also changed dramatically [6]. People began to pay attention to streaming media, such as iQiyi, Netflix, Youku, Tencent, Disney Plus [7]. With recent advancements in technology, the lines between the entertainment industry, technology, and media have begun to blur. Entertainment is increasingly merging with mobile technologies and digital devices. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this convergence, making it essential to further integrate technology with platforms during the pandemic, where various entertainment activities were instantly streamed to viewers. Looking ahead, it's evident that people will likely prefer on-demand content platforms like Netflix over traditional cinema experiences [8]. The movie "Lost in Russia" is a good example. At the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, all films were forced to stop showing. So, director Xu Zheng sold the movie "Lost Mother" to Byte dance for 630 million yuan, making it available for streaming on January 25 [9].

3.2 Changes in Audience Viewing Habits and Preferences

The global film industry has been deeply impacted by the pandemic. As countries focus on revitalizing their local film sectors in the post-pandemic era, they are likely to prioritize domestic film projects. Amid this trend of film nationalism, the challenge for films will be how to win the support of governments and appeal to national audiences. Because of the impact of the epidemic, people have begun to prefer movies that focus on real life problems and changes in relationships between people. As a result, some films with delicate feelings begin to gain people's favor. Although the summer hits of 2022 - Moon Man, Lighting Up the Stars, the End of the Sea Is the Prairie and the Journey Home in the National Day - are different in subject matter, aesthetic intent and cultural orientation,

they all typically reflect the challenges and dilemmas existing in domestic film narration in the post-epidemic era. Whether it is relying on the postmodern “grafting” of comedy types, or the “patchwork” emotional appeals completed by certain narratives such as “warm reality adventures”, “the growing sufferings of the Republic”, “the evacuation of overseas Chinese from international crisis”, or trying to reproduce the minority “marginal aesthetic” and difficult to adapt to the cultural changes of The Times, the film faces challenges in the expression of artistic aesthetic and the analysis of narrative ecology. To sum up, the current domestic film genre expression lack of systematic and normative narrative dilemma and future development direction need to be deeply discussed.

3.3 The Change of the Theme of the Film

With the outbreak of the epidemic, people are suffering from the related sufferings, so there is a great interest in disaster and war movies. Film producers also maximize the combination of films with the “theme of The Times”, aiming to create films that combine China’s national conditions, people’s livelihood and a relaxed and humorous atmosphere. So, when we watch these movies, even on very serious and grand subjects, there’s a lot of comedy in them. For example, in the past two years, “The Wandering Earth”, “Thousands of Miles Home”, “Chosin Reservoir”, “Send you a little red flower”, they are different in aesthetic intent and theme selection, but they are in line with the characteristics of the post-epidemic era of film, that is, “suffering in the founding period”, “international crisis evacuation”, “imagine the future development of the earth”, “warm real life” and a series of “platters” style films. These films capture the psychological state of the audience after the experience of the epidemic and have been very effective in the initial stage. However, these types of movies will face great challenges in the future, because the audience has watched too many of these kinds of movies, and they do not feel the novelty and sincerity of these movies, and as a result, they are not willing to pay a lot of money to buy tickets to the theater. People will be more willing to wait to watch it on streaming media, so movie producers will face a big box office challenge.

4. Cases Study

The movies “Chosin Reservoir” and “Hi, mom” will be applied as the representative of the film genre in the post-epidemic era. In the midst of the epidemic, the national crisis of the Chinese nation has come again, and the epidemic is stable after a long period of anti-epidemic. However, the situation of the epidemic is long-term and

may break out at any time, so the sense of pressure and crisis in people’s hearts is always there. Hence the need for inspiring works in the post-pandemic era. The movie “Chosin Lake” followed suit. The optimism and patriotism in the film inspired the Chinese people and struck a strong chord. So “Chosin Lake” can be called a great victory in the film and television industry [10]. In “Hi, Mom,” the temporary and dramatic separation of mother and daughter allows the daughter to explore a new understanding of family by becoming an emotional participant and mediator. While mother and daughter have their own beliefs and behaviors, they are deeply connected through warmth and love. As Jia Xiaoling delves into her mother’s memories and consciousness, she gains a deeper understanding of traditional family relationships and develops a new sense of social identity within the loving illusion created by her mother. The film portrays an idealized version of traditional kinship, reflecting a distinctly Chinese emotional model [11]. This kind of affection between mother and daughter is particularly valuable under the cruel epidemic. During the epidemic, many families could not get together due to various complicated reasons, but they placed their emotions through this film. This is the main reason why ‘Hi, mom’ was a big hit.

5. Suggestions on Marketing Strategies for Film Development Under the Post-epidemic Situation

5.1 Topic Marketing

Marketing advance, upload relevant information and introduction in advance on major movie and television ticketing apps, create relevant discussion topics, and promote marketing strategies. For example, if the film is about discussing social topics, it can be combined with recent social events to arouse public opinion and hot spots [12]. The famous Chinese director Yimou Zhang often uses such tactics. He uploads the lines spoken by each character on his movie page on major ticket apps. Therefore, fans of famous actors will be interested in the movie and upload similar information to the Internet to form a topic for the public to discuss. As the discussion of the topic increases, more people will be interested in the film and buy tickets to watch it in the cinema. This strategy greatly aroused the curiosity of the audience, making the audience more willing to find out what the film is like (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender proportion of “want to see” data of Mao Yan Professional suspense movies [12]

Movie	Release Date	Type	Proportion of female users	Proportion of male users
Lost in the stars	06-22-2023	Mystery/Thriller	76.5%	23.5%
Detective Chinatown 3	02-12-2021	Thriller/Crime	60.6%	39.4%
Be somebody	11-11-2021	Comedy/Mystery	68.4%	31.6%
Cliff Walkers	04-30-2021	Thriller	58%	42%
The White Storm 2: Drug Lords	07-05-2019	Action/Crime	46.1%	53.9%
Wrath of Silence	04-04-2018	Thriller/Crime	50.5%	49.1%
The Looming Storm	11-17-2017	Thriller/Crime	56.5%	43.5%
Battle of Memories	04-28-2017	Thriller/Crime	60.9%	39.1%
The Coffin in the Mountain	10-16-2015	Mystery/Thriller	48.9%	51.1%
The Dead End	08-26-2015	Crime/Thriller	51.2%	48.6%

5.2 Social Media Marketing

Film producers can promote their films through popular social media such as TikTok, Redbook and Weibo. Including but not limited to the release of trailers, audience reactions to the movie, behind-the-scenes features and other content. Trailers can tell the audience the highlights of the movie in advance, but they don't show the whole thing. After seeing these trailers, the audience will want to know the follow-up of the movie, so they will go to the theater to see the movie. The audience's reaction, such as laughter or tears, can show the brilliance of the movie, so the crowd will also empathize, and thus it is possible to explore the film.

5.3 Crossover Marketing

When doing publicity and marketing, the film can not only be limited to the marketing of the film itself or the film industry, but also try to make “linkage” with other industries across the border. Including the restaurant industry, mobile games, clothing brands. For example, the famous novel “Tomb Raiding” has made a “linkage” with the milk tea brand Guming in 2024, launching related drinks and joint brands. Also, if customer buy the milk tea from the store, they can get joint product about their favorite novel. At the same time, the hunger marketing used has promoted a large number of fans to buy these products, successfully achieving a “win-win” situation.

6. Conclusion

In the post-epidemic era, China's film industry has shown strong resilience and innovation after experiencing the impact of the epidemic. The audience's viewing habits, the distribution channels of films, and the subject matter of

creation have all undergone profound changes. Through the case analysis of Chinese domestic films, this paper reveals the adaptation and reform path of the film industry in the new environment and puts forward some suggestions for future development. Faced with the uncertainty of the future, the film industry needs to continue to innovate and change in order to remain invincible in the fierce market competition.

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