

# **The Impact of COVID-19 on the Cinema Industry**

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## **Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the filmmaking and cinema industry since the beginning of 2020. The closure of cinemas and the halting of production caused major production companies to suffer huge material losses. Filmmakers have had to adapt to new practices, including an increasing trend towards digital viewing platforms, social networks, and virtual festivals, which have been the best solution in light of the pandemic. The use of online media, including SVOD's visual viewing platforms, has also increased as a result of the pandemic. The current world of cinematography is contingent on filmmakers trying to adapt to these new practices imposed by the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Cinema, Film, Cinema Industry, COVID-19

**ملخص:** أثرت جائحة كوفيد-19 على صناعة السينما والأفلام على المستوى العالمي، حيث تم إغلاق دور السينما وتوقف الإنتاج مما أدى إلى تكبد الشركات الكبرى في هذا المجال خسائر مادية كبيرة. ولقد اضطر المخرجون إلى التكيف مع ممارسات جديدة بسبب الجائحة، مثل الإقبال على منصات العرض الرقمية، وشبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، والمهرجانات الافتراضية، والتي كانت الحل الأمثل في ظل الجائحة. كما ازداد استخدام وسائل الإعلام عبر الإنترنت، بما في ذلك منصات العرض المرئي SVOD، نتيجة للجائحة. وأصبح العالم الحالي للسينما يعتمد على قدرة المخرجين على التكيف مع هذه الممارسات الجديدة التي فرضتها الجائحة.

**كلمات دالة:** السينما، الفيلم، الصناعة السينمائية، كوفيد-19

## **1. Introduction**

The global media landscape and audience behavior have undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main transformations has been the surge in online media consumption. With the shutdown of public spaces such as cinemas and sports arenas, people have been confined to their homes and have relied on online media for their entertainment and information needs. Consequently, the consumption of online media has increased dramatically across different platforms such as social media, streaming services, and news websites.

Moreover, there has been a noticeable shift in advertising revenue as a consequence of the pandemic. The economic uncertainty triggered by the crisis has forced numerous businesses to cut back on their advertising budgets. This has dealt a heavy blow to media companies that rely heavily on advertising revenue to sustain their operations. As a result, many media companies have had to explore alternative revenue streams and adopt digital advertising models. Furthermore, the pandemic has caused disruptions in media content production and distribution. Due to the implementation of social distancing measures, film and television productions have been compelled to introduce new safety protocols, leading to delays and higher production costs. Additionally, the closure of movie theaters and other venues has compelled media companies to either release their content on streaming platforms or defer their releases.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning the surge of citizen journalism as a consequence of the pandemic. Traditional news outlets have encountered challenges in covering the pandemic owing to limited access and resources. This has led to citizen journalism emerging as a crucial source of information. Social media platforms have provided citizen journalists with a crucial avenue to share news and information, thereby fueling the growth of user-generated content and citizen journalism.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the film industry worldwide, particularly concerning fiction films, has been profound. The disease's spread has resulted in the suspension of content production and filmmaking and the cancellation of movie premieres in numerous regions. In response to mandatory quarantine policies, most cinemas have been compelled to shut down, prompting filmmakers to work from home instead of filming projects or producing films.

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the film industry in a distinctive way, causing significant economic losses to producers that cannot be easily rectified. Nevertheless, it has also led to a transformation in the features and dynamics of the film industry, as filmmakers, directors, and producers were faced with a crisis that, if not addressed, would have resulted in the downfall of the film industry. Therefore, alternatives had to be considered to rescue the economic viability of this art form. This article aims to address the following questions:

- What are the implications of COVID-19 on the film industry?
- What are the key dynamics of the film industry post the COVID-19 pandemic?

Since its inception, this article has been attempting to track changes in the nature of the global film industry by observing and documenting these changes. Therefore, it can be described as an exploratory study

## **2. Cinema as an industry:**

The cinema industry, also known as the film industry, is a global and multi-billion dollar industry involved in the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. It includes a wide range of professionals, from screenwriters, producers, directors, and actors to editors, cinematographers, sound technicians, and visual effects artists. The industry is also supported by various companies and organizations involved in financing, marketing, and promoting films, as well as by various institutions, such as film schools and festivals, that support and promote the art and craft of cinema. The cinema industry has a significant impact on global culture and has the ability to both entertain and educate audiences around the world. (Gooptu, 2005)

The film industry is one of the most prominent and economically significant media industries. Despite its artistic nature, the majority of film producers prioritize profitability and consider it a business investment. Cinema is labeled as an industry to highlight the industrial conditions that govern this art form. As researcher Jonathan Bignell noted, it is "a cultural and economic institution in which films are made and seen in a commercial context." This concept echoes the famous quote from André Malraux's book "Esquisse d'une Psychologie du cinéma," which states that "cinema is an industry." It was a scientific invention developed by chemists and created by mechanics.

Since its inception, it has always been an industry, and when we refer to it as such, we naturally imply that it is a commercial enterprise (BOUZIFI, 2021, pp. 144- 165).

The film industry can be considered a distinct industrial sector due to its use of advanced technology, tools, and equipment. It has become a significant contributor to the economies of countries that prioritize it as a source of national income. It supports job creation, foreign investment, tax revenue, and other economic activities. In countries like the United States of America, China, India, and Japan, the cinema market represents a crucial economic. According to statistics from the Motion Picture Association of America, the film industry generates significant revenue from global box office sales. In 2015, global box office revenue was estimated at \$38.3 billion, with \$11.1 billion coming from the United States and Canada. The following year, global box office revenue increased to \$38.6 billion, with \$11.4 billion generated in the United States and Canada. By 2018, global box office revenue had risen to \$41.1 billion, with \$11.9 billion coming from both the United States and Canada. In 2019, the film industry's revenue from global box office sales exceeded \$42 billion. The United States and Canada remained at the top of the box office revenue list in 2019, generating \$11.4 billion, followed by China at \$9.3 billion. Other countries that contributed significant revenue to the film industry included Japan with \$2.4 billion, and South Korea, the United Kingdom, France, and India, each with \$1.6 billion (BOUZIFI, 2021)

is the post-production industry, which includes editing, visual effects, and sound design, among others. These sub-industries also create employment opportunities and generate revenue for the economy. Moreover, the film industry contributes to tourism, as movies often showcase famous landmarks and tourist destinations, attracting visitors to those places. For instance, after the release of the movie "Crazy Rich Asians," tourism to Singapore increased by 20 percent. Overall, the film industry plays a vital role in the economy, generating revenue, creating jobs, and supporting other industries. (BOUZIFI, 2021):

- Film factories.
- Chemical factories that prepare chemicals for film processing. –
- Acidification and film processing coefficients
- Cameras and cameras factories. –

- Film processing laboratories for installation, blending, and dubbing purposes
- Accessories & Decoration Factory
- -Sewing labs, garment processing, and fashion

The film production process involves various specialized professions and production techniques, from the initial idea of the screenplay to the final release of the film version. These professions are the economic engine that drives the film industry, which is closely tied to its institutional and human material potential. While production techniques differ in objectives, practice, and organizational methods, they share common elements such as capital, land, order, and work. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a rethinking of production techniques, including the regulation of production stages and financial dues during the production and screening of the film. In his book "Managing Film Production," published in 2007, John J. Lee Jr. emphasizes the importance of planning and preparatory programs for each operation in the production process. (GUETTAF, 2021, pp. 282- 294)

The pandemic has added an extra layer of costs and challenges to an already complex and expensive process. Productions have had to adapt to new regulations and protocols, which can add costs and slow down the production timeline. This has also led to a shift in the distribution of films, with more emphasis on streaming platforms as opposed to traditional theatrical releases. However, despite these challenges, the film industry has continued to thrive and adapt to changing circumstances, demonstrating its resilience and economic importance..

Despite the challenges faced by the film industry, it continues to adapt and innovate in response to changing consumer behavior and technological advancements. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend towards digital distribution and viewing, with more and more audiences turning to streaming services for their entertainment needs. This shift may lead to further changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of films in the future.

The success and growth of the film industry's economy are contingent on a complex network of stakeholders, including producers, distributors, exhibitors, talent agencies, and more. Each of these stakeholders plays a critical role in ensuring that films are produced, distributed, and exhibited to audiences worldwide. As the industry continues to evolve, it will be crucial

for all stakeholders to remain flexible and adapt to new technologies and consumer preferences in order to remain competitive and sustain growth.

The film industry operates on the principles of supply and demand, with producers creating films they believe will generate profits and distributors and exhibitors working to bring those films to the market and generate revenue. The success of a film depends on various factors, such as its quality, marketing efforts, and timing of release. However, the advent of digital technologies and streaming services has disrupted the traditional production and distribution process, resulting in new business models and revenue streams. Nevertheless, economic and technical factors still underpin the film industry's production process, and the industry's continuity hinges on its stakeholders' ability to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer behavior.

Once the production phase concludes, the film enters the distribution stage, where it is made available for mass screening. The production process involves significant financial and logistical investments for both substantive and technical components, with the producer responsible for budget execution and allocation through initial expenditure schemes. It is important to note that the production profession encompasses various tasks and responsibilities related to product management (or producers) and is often the first to bear the brunt of any issues that arise during production.. (GUETTAF, 2021, pp. 282-294)

### **3. Cinema Industry Before COVID-19:**

According to data from ComScore, a globally recognized market research firm, the global box office reached an all-time high of \$41.1 billion in 2018. Although this marked a 1.48% increase compared to the previous year, the growth rate has slowed down. However, the global box office has maintained a steady growth trend over the past decade, with a growth rate of 4.02% from 2008 to 2018. (Figure 1.1).

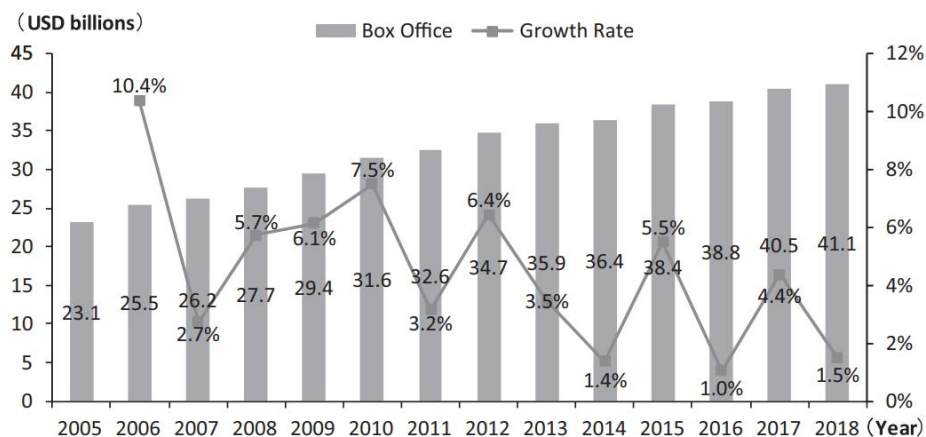


Figure 1.1 Global box office and growth rate, 2005–2018.

The figures indicate that the global box office saw a surge in 2018, reaching its highest-ever record due to the double increase in movie viewing numbers (1.3 billion). North America alone accounted for US\$11.9 billion in box office revenue in 2018, a record high in recent years (Figure 1.2). The Chinese film market also played a significant role in boosting the global box office in 2018, with Chinese National Film Bureau data revealing a total box office of 60.976 billion yuan for Chinese movies and a 9 percent increase in the number of moviegoers, reaching 1.72 billion (QIAO, 2021, p. 2).

As Africa (US\$10.3 billion) declined by 2 percent compared to 2017. Latin America also saw a decline in box office revenue, with a 4 percent decrease compared to the previous year. These regional variations in box office revenue reflect differences in market size, consumer behavior, and the popularity of domestic versus international films. However, overall, the global box office continues to be dominated by Hollywood productions, which accounted for over 70 percent of global box office revenue in 2018.

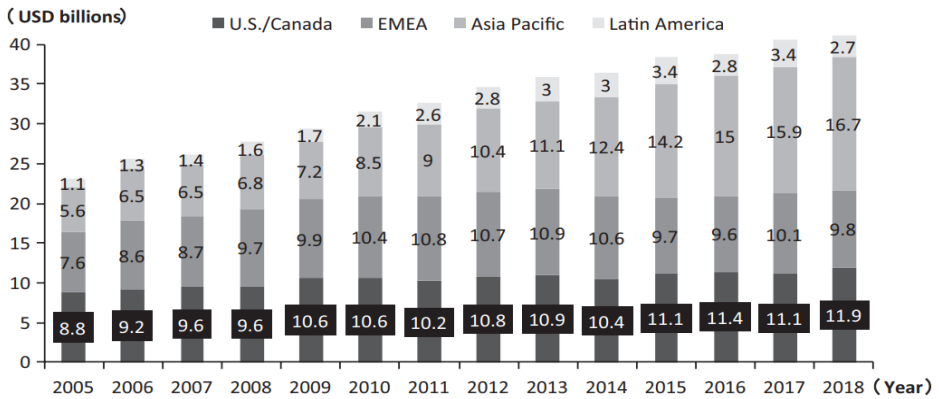


Figure 1.2 Regional structure of the global box office, 2005–2018.

and Africa were down 3 percent from 2017, mainly due to the decline in the box office in Germany and Russia. After a 21 percent increase in 2017, the box office in Latin America fell by 21 **percent in 2018, and in Brazil** fell by 22 percent every year, and the currency depreciation in Argentina (-41 percent) and Mexico (-2 percent) (QIAO, 2021, p. 3)

#### 4. Film industry during and after COVID-19 :

The film industry has unique industrial attributes that differentiate it from other material production industries, as it possesses economic, social, and cultural characteristics. The film product has an exchange value and meets market demand, thus possessing economic properties. The film production process is also distinctive, starting from abstract discussions and ending with actual implementation, involving various types of enterprises and economic activities. Additionally, films can be mechanically reproduced in large quantities, resulting in low marginal costs. Therefore, the "content" production of film products is vital for competitiveness within the industry. Films are not only an art form but also carry significant social and cultural

implications. They convey information and tell stories through flowing images, with narration forming the foundation of the film's ideology. The narration process involves the transmission of cultural and social values, making it an essential component of the film's impact on society. (Wang, 2020).

However, the global process of film production is not only influenced by cultural factors and societal changes but is also closely connected to major transformations happening in societies at different stages of their life cycle. This is particularly evident during periods of crisis, such as health crises, where the nature of life and human activities are disrupted and many industries face downturns. (Kim, 2021).

The 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused an unprecedented health crisis. It was designated a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020, and one month later the worldwide number of confirmed cases reached 1.7 million, with 100,000 deaths. The outbreak of COVID-19 also hit the economy severely, not only causing higher unemployment rates and lower income but also causing people to practice social distancing, that is, avoiding close contact with other people, which may have far-ranging implications for various industries. Voluntary social distancing has been gradually accepted as the new normal around the world. For instance, recent research has shown that voluntary demobilization is crucial for reducing virus propagation (Kim, 2021).

Unlike any other industry, the entertainment industry has reportedly been found to be more vulnerable, and at a higher risk factor during this pandemic. This is due to a multitude of reasons, which include the closure of cinema houses, which are the entering doors of the revenue collection of the released films, stoppage of the production of films, which are expected to be on the floor, and the sets, and even the release of the films that are ready to be displayed, as the operations are suspended because of the government initiatives of social distancing. Even though people, while staying at home, had a high watch time due to the added exposure to more media and entertainment content during the period of lockdown, such increased watch time only resulted in the financial generation of activities that are already being performed. Hence, by putting the newer projects on a halt, there has been an increase in the level of unemployment, leading to adverse effects in terms of the circulation of money. Moreover, negative effects have also been

experienced in terms of the economic activity generation, and eventually have negative repercussions on the investor sentiments, and the stock markets and returns of the film and drama industry. In short, for obvious reasons, investment in FDI becomes a futile exercise. (Hu, 2022, pp. 2254-2272).

Despite the closure of physical entertainment activities such as cinemas, there has been a global shift towards online entertainment platforms, providing people with easy access to entertainment content through the internet. Despite this, many people still prefer the traditional cinema experience and physically visit them. The emergence of online platforms has not only improved convenience for end-users, but also reduced costs associated with content distribution, screening, and consumption. During the Covid-19 pandemic, online platforms have become the saviors of foreign direct investment (FDI). However, this does not fully justify the untapped potential that remains untapped or interrupted. (Hu, 2022, pp. 2256- 2257).

The film and series production studios worldwide have halted their operations, and Hollywood companies have postponed the release dates of major movies, including the highly anticipated James Bond film "No Time to Die," featuring the renowned actor Daniel Craig in his fifth Bond film. Moreover, the annual Cannes Film Festival, a crucial promotional platform for the film industry, has also been postponed due to the pandemic. As a result, the losses in the film industry are mounting, while new investments are dwindling. According to Amber, the American company, the film industry is expected to incur losses of around \$24.4 billion this year. The entertainment industry, comprising cinema, theatre, concerts, and other forms of entertainment, is projected to suffer losses of about \$160 billion during the year due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, these estimates may be subject to change if the industry returns to normalcy in the second half of the year.

Mid-March statistics from The Hollywood Reporter indicate that the global film industry suffered a loss of approximately \$7 billion due to the shutdown of cinemas in China. The industry estimates that the loss may climb up to \$17 billion by the end of May. In Canada, losses may reach \$1.8 billion by the end of June. Although some Hollywood studios were expected to resume operations in the middle of June, the popular protests against the killing of George Floyd have caused delays. US reports reveal that the coronavirus

pandemic has led to a loss of at least 120,000 jobs in Hollywood's film industry and resulted in the loss of reliable investments in film production. However, there is no concrete data available on the exact financial losses incurred by the industry. (NewArab, 2020).

A study conducted by Oxford Economics on behalf of cinema, theatre, radio, and television federations in the UK revealed that the film, photography, television, and radio industry may have suffered losses of approximately \$36 billion in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The most stringent lockdown measures, which restricted movement and required people to stay at home, were implemented worldwide in April and May. (NewArab, 2020).

by China, Japan, Britain, and France, according to global statistical site Statista. In 2019, cinemas in the United States and Canada earned \$11.4 billion, while in China, the income was \$9.3 billion, in Japan, it was \$2.4 billion, and in France, it was \$1.6 billion. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the film industry has suffered significant losses this year. While industry owners may look to digital film sales to make up for the losses, it may take longer for moviegoers to return to theaters.

The film industry, especially Hollywood, is not just a for-profit industry but also plays a crucial role in U.S. foreign policy, serving as a tool of "soft power" alongside the U.S. aid program. It is used to influence and win the favor of people without the need for military intervention. However, in recent years, the film industry's soft power has diminished due to the politics of war and violence that have characterized American politics, particularly under the current administration led by President Donald Trump, resulting in a decline in the U.S.'s popularity in the world. (NewArab, 2020).

Today, after nearly two years of halting gains, major theater chains are finally starting to see a box office recovery as the summer blockbuster season gets into full swing. But an accelerated recovery in grosses is happening amid concerns of a broader economic downturn, leading to questions on Wall Street about how quickly exhibitors can bounce back.

Ahead of the second-quarter earnings season, B. Riley Securities analyst Eric Wold has cut his 2022 and 2023 domestic box office revenue projections "to provide a more realistic recovery ramp and some additional conservatism built into our models." Wold cited "a domestic box office performance during the first half of the year that was lower than we

originally projected, with our estimates for the second quarter being reduced accordingly (SZALAI, 2022).

The B. Riley analyst contended that despite a challenging third-quarter film lineup, the film industry is poised for growth in the fourth quarter and beyond. The analyst cited favorable demand patterns for blockbuster films and a broadening demographic appeal as factors contributing to this optimistic outlook. Furthermore, the analyst believes that the industry is well-positioned to regain pre-pandemic valuation multiples as box office trends recover and surpass the \$10 billion mark in 2023.." (SZALAI, 2022).

### **5. The survival Strategies in the Post COVID-19 Era:**

Given the current state of uncertainty caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to make accurate predictions about the future of the film industry, both globally and regionally. The pandemic has caused significant losses and upheaval across various industries, including the film industry, which generates billions of dollars annually.

Furthermore, there have been concerns in recent years about the decline in film production and revenues for various reasons. The impact of the pandemic has only exacerbated these concerns, and the film industry worldwide has been severely impacted as a result.

These challenges will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the Arab film industry, despite its relatively small size in comparison to the global industry. The film industry in the Arab world will need to navigate these difficult conditions, which may require new strategies and approaches to ensure its survival and growth in the coming years. (Abdusalam, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the institutional marginality of the performing arts industry in Italy, as well as its long-standing issues regarding labor and social security policies. Despite the measures initially implemented by the Italian Ministry of Culture in response to the pandemic, a lack of long-term planning and overall vision became evident, particularly in the early stages.

One notable example of this is the creation of ItsArt, a state-owned digital platform for the distribution of cultural content. Announced in April 2020 with the unfortunate label of "the Netflix of Italian culture," ItsArt has been met with significant criticism due to its controversial nature and lack of

transparency. The platform's creation has highlighted the need for more thoughtful, long-term planning for the cultural sector in Italy, which should include input and collaboration from industry professionals and stakeholders (Stefano Brilli, 2022)

In response to the closure of theaters during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian Ministry of Culture implemented three lines of intervention. These included immediate relief actions, optimization of pre-existing resources, and emergency funds for specific interventions. While these measures provided support for a sector that experienced a significant decline in audience and consumer spending in 2020, they primarily benefited those with stable working relationships, such as organizational, managerial, and administrative staff. Those with intermittent employment relationships, including actors, technicians, musicians, and other workers in the performing arts industry, were largely penalized by these measures.

In addition to subsidy packages, other support measures emerged during the pandemic with various intermediate objectives. These measures ranged from funding the creation of digital performances to incentivizing technological innovation among theater companies and venues. These support measures aimed to alleviate the challenges faced by the performing arts sector during the pandemic, but it is evident that more targeted interventions are needed to address the systemic issues that affect the industry, especially regarding labor and social security policies. (Stefano Brilli, 2022).

It is common in other countries to have specialized financial institutions that support the cinema and cultural industries. These institutions aim to facilitate and finance independent production and creation by various means, such as introducing specific appropriations that may benefit from the state's counter-guarantee. In addition to these institutions, there are also financing credits that are granted to various players in the sector, especially independent producers, distributors, and exhibitors. These structures are needed to provide tailor-made loans and solutions adapted to the needs of clients while controlling risk factors.

In France, the government has established financial assistance to support businesses affected by the health crisis, including cultural companies and associations. While some types of aid are available to all sectors, specific support measures are in place for cultural enterprises and associations. The

Ministry of Economy regularly updates its website with information on business support measures. (GHARBI, 2021, pp. 332-344)

**5.1 The switch to streaming video-on-demand and the Netflix effect** The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the existing trend of declining interest in traditional movie theater experiences among consumers. Similarly, the demand for cable TV access has also been impacted, largely due to the rise of streaming services **SVOD**<sup>a</sup> such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, Disney+, YouTube TV, Peacock, and HBO Max. The widespread availability of broadband internet has further contributed to this shift in consumer behavior. Over the past decade, 25 million US households have cancelled their cable TV subscriptions, and an additional 25 million are expected to do so within the next 5 years. This represents a significant \$25 billion decrease in cable subscription revenue for major media corporations such as Disney, Comcast's NBCUniversal, AT&T's WarnerMedia, ViacomCBS, Fox, Discovery, Sinclair, and AMC Networks. These corporations have responded by consolidating divisions, laying off employees, and pivoting their focus towards streaming video, as demonstrated by the recent deployment of their respective services such as Disney+, Warner Media's HBO Max, and ViacomCBS's Discovery+. (JOHNSON, 2021).

Five years ago, Michael Strangelove had the foresight to predict that streaming television shows would become mainstream, as audiences were spending more time on the internet than in front of the television. With the widespread availability of internet-connected devices, such as phones and tablets, and the mandatory quarantine imposed on most Americans due to the pandemic, the use of these devices for entertainment has increased dramatically. Strangelove's prediction has become a reality, and television can no longer claim to offer a superior viewing experience. Additionally, many of the issues that were previously associated with streaming services, such as advertising, buffering, and poor video quality, have been addressed through improved bandwidth and the option for consumers to pay for ad-free content.. (JOHNSON, 2021).

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<sup>a</sup> SVOD stands for "Subscription Video On Demand." It refers to a type of streaming service that allows users to access a library of video content for a recurring fee, usually on a monthly or yearly basis. Examples of SVOD services include Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+.

## 6. CONCLUSION :

The cinema industry is a complex and dynamic field that encompasses all aspects of the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures. It involves a wide range of professionals, from screenwriters and directors to producers, actors, and crew members, as well as film studios, distributors, exhibitors, and other stakeholders. The industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, including the shift from traditional film production to digital technology, the rise of streaming services, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the cinema industry remains a powerful and influential form of art and entertainment, with the ability to captivate and inspire audiences around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global cinema industry. Cinemas were forced to close for extended periods, and production of new films was halted. This resulted in a dramatic decrease in revenue for the industry, with many cinemas and production companies facing financial struggles. The pandemic also accelerated the shift towards digital distribution, with more viewers turning to streaming services to watch movies at home. However, the pandemic has also spurred creativity and innovation, with filmmakers and studios finding new ways to produce and distribute films. As the world begins to recover from the pandemic, it will be interesting to see how the cinema industry evolves and adapts to the new normal.

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