

The Impact of Streaming Services on the Cinema Box Office (Netflix as a Model)

Amjed Bashir Altabbal ^{1*}, *Wassim Korbi* ²

¹ Tripoli University (Libya), amjedattabbal@yahoo.com

² Carthage University (Tunisia), wassimkorbi@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study explores the impact of Netflix on cinema box office performance, highlighting the transformation of audience consumption patterns in the digital age. Drawing on a rigorous analysis of scholarly literature and empirical data, it demonstrates that streaming platforms, particularly Netflix, have contributed to a measurable decline in theatrical attendance by offering convenient and low-cost alternatives. The extent of this disruption varies across genres, release models, and budget levels, with independent and limited-release films being the most vulnerable. Exclusive digital premieres often undermine box office revenues, whereas hybrid distribution strategies yield mixed outcomes. The research underscores Netflix's role in reshaping film distribution and viewer engagement. It advocates for continued academic investigation into these evolving dynamics and emphasizes the strategic necessity of collaboration between streaming services and cinemas. Understanding these shifts is vital for stakeholders seeking to navigate and adapt to the rapidly evolving media and entertainment landscape.

Keywords: Netflix; Box Office; Streaming Services.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the advent of streaming platforms has revolutionized the way people consume movies and TV shows. Netflix, in particular, has emerged as a dominant player, offering a vast library of content

* Corresponding author

that can be accessed conveniently and affordably from the comfort of one's home. This shift in viewing habits has raised questions about its impact on cinema box office revenues. The evolution from cinema theaters to streaming platforms like Netflix has been marked by a shift in how, where, and when we consume content. While traditional theaters continue to exist and offer a unique cinematic experience, streaming services have democratized access to a vast library of content, allowing viewers to watch on their own terms. This evolution reflects the changing landscape of the entertainment industry and the evolving preferences of consumers (de Souza, Nishijima, & Rodrigues, 2024).

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Streaming services like Netflix provide viewers with a wide range of options, catering to diverse tastes and preferences. The convenience of streaming on-demand content has led to changes in audience behavior, with some individuals opting to wait for films to be available on streaming platforms rather than going to the theater. This change in consumer preference has raised concerns about the future of cinema attendance and its financial implications for the industry.

Furthermore, the availability of streaming services has increased competition for viewers' attention. With Netflix investing heavily in producing original content and acquiring distribution rights for films, it has become a direct competitor to traditional cinemas. The battle for viewership has intensified, potentially impacting cinema box office revenues. The release strategies employed by Netflix also play a crucial role in understanding its impact on the cinema box office. The platform has experimented with exclusive streaming releases, bypassing the traditional theatrical window. This approach allows films to reach a wider audience

through streaming but can potentially reduce box office revenues for those films that skip theatrical release altogether (Karakulath, 2023).

The decreasing demand for movies to be shown in theaters is due to many preferring the more cost-effective and comfortable choice of watching movies at home. One of the key factors is price: the average price of a ticket to see one movie at the theater is \$11, while the price for a basic monthly Netflix subscription is \$9.99. In addition to the price factor, the convenience of streaming platforms like Netflix also plays a significant role in the declining demand for theater screenings. With just a few clicks, viewers can access a vast library of movies and watch them at their own pace, eliminating the need to travel to a theater and adhere to showtimes.

More and more people are subscribing to streaming services, allowing them to become a dominant force in the entertainment industry. In 2015, 52% of U.S. consumers had subscriptions to one or more streaming services; this increased to 78% by late 2021, highlighting the rising demand. The largest premium video-on-demand service is Netflix, with approximately 220 million memberships globally.

The popularity and convenience of online entertainment platforms have contributed to the rise in streaming service subscriptions. A 2022 study found that over 70% of respondents currently have at least one subscription (Corkery, 2022). With the growth of streaming over the last few years, 88% of American adults now subscribe to at least one streaming platform. This shift in consumer behavior is driven by several factors, including the abundance of content options, the ability to stream across multiple devices, and the convenience of watching TV shows and movies at any time. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, as people spent more time at home seeking entertainment (Corkery, 2022).

By examining the extent to which Netflix impacts the cinema box office, this study will focus on how viewer preferences are evolving, how streaming services and traditional movie theaters are competing, and what this means for industry stakeholders. The goal of this research is to enhance understanding of the relationship between Netflix and box office performance through a thorough analysis of previous studies, empirical data, and industry trends. Additionally, the study will explore strategies that movie

theaters can adopt to remain competitive in the streaming era. Furthermore, it will examine how original productions and exclusive content attract audiences to both platforms.

Methodology:

This study adopts an analytical research design to examine the impact of streaming services—particularly Netflix—on cinema box office performance. By analyzing relevant data, the research seeks to identify trends, patterns, and correlations between the rise in streaming consumption and changes in cinema attendance. The analytical approach enables a deeper understanding of how digital streaming platforms may be influencing traditional film-viewing behaviors.

Research Questions:

- How has Netflix affected traditional cinema attendance?
- What trends exist in viewer preferences between streaming and theater experiences?

2. General Concepts:

2.1 Netflix?

Netflix is an American subscription video on-demand over-the-top streaming service owned and managed by Netflix, Inc. The service primarily distributes films and television programs from many genres created by the same name media firm, and it is available globally in multiple languages.

Netflix made its debut as "NetFlix.com, Inc." in April of 1998. Thirty workers were employed by the little Scotts Valley business when it originally opened, which housed an inventory of all 925 films released on the new DVD format. The company offered a unique service that allowed customers to create a profile, order DVD titles to be delivered right to their homes and register for an online movie database. In less than a day, its servers collapsed due to an increase in demand. Netflix distributed almost 20,000 DVDs in its first four months of business without investing a single dollar in advertising. This is a fantastic beginning for a business that is providing content through an infant in a new and unproven format—the DVD through the infancy of an interface—the World Wide Web.

A decade later, Netflix transitioned into the online streaming business, launching its streaming service in 2007. This move marked a significant shift in the entertainment industry, as it allowed subscribers to instantly stream a wide range of movies and TV shows on various devices connected to the internet with 238.39 million subscriptions in over 190 countries. “There’s clearly a strong demand for watching movies,” said Brian Pitz, an analyst with Banc of America Securities. By 2022, original productions accounted for 50% of Netflix's library in the United States, and the firm had expanded into other areas, such as video game publishing through the Netflix service (Parrot Analytics, 2024).

2.2 Box Office:

The term "cinema box office" is synonymous with box office revenue generated by movies shown in theaters. It plays a crucial role in assessing the commercial success of films and is a key metric used by the film industry to gauge the popularity and financial performance of movies.

2.3 Streaming services:

A streaming service is an online platform that allows users to access, watch, or listen to a variety of multimedia content. Since their inception, these services have grown significantly. Netflix began its DVD rental business by mail before moving to streaming in 2007. Many additional streaming services such as Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ have expanded since then. These platforms have large user bases, Netflix alone has more than 208 million users worldwide and has grown in popularity in recent years, revolutionizing the way people consume entertainment, information, and music. The rise of streaming services has changed the way we consume entertainment and made it more accessible than ever (World Economic Forum, 2021).

2.4 Overview of the Streaming Landscape:

The rapid expansion of streaming services has garnered considerable scholarly attention, particularly regarding their global reach and the shifting viewing habits of audiences. Studies reveal that the convenience of streaming platforms has significantly altered consumer behavior, leading to the prevalence of binge-watching and a decline in traditional television viewership. Additionally, the vast array of content available on streaming

platforms has shaped viewer preferences, encouraging exploration across diverse genres and specialized offerings, further influencing audience preferences and expectations

The introduction of on-demand streaming has also transformed theater attendance patterns, as audiences increasingly opt for the flexibility of at-home viewing over traditional cinematic experiences. Scholars have paid particular attention to Netflix's release strategies and distribution mechanisms, examining the impact of exclusive and simultaneous releases on both streaming services and theater attendance. Research by Cunningham and Silver (2019) indicates that exclusive streaming releases can negatively impact box office revenue, as these releases bypass traditional theatrical schedules. Simultaneous releases, while offering potential for broader publicity and cross-promotion, yield mixed results; some films benefit from enhanced visibility, while others experience financial shortfalls due to reduced ticket sales (Miedziak & Wójcik, 2022).

This evolving landscape underscores the complex dynamics between streaming platforms and traditional film distribution, highlighting ongoing shifts in consumer behavior and industry practices.

The literature review focuses on the disruptive effects of streaming services, particularly Netflix, on movie theater attendance, revenue, distribution strategies, and film genres. While earlier research has provided some illumination on these issues, more study has the opportunity to fill in knowledge gaps and provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between Netflix and the box office.

Price might be one of the driving forces behind this change: the average price of a movie ticket at the theater is \$10.45, compared to \$6.99 for a typical Netflix subscription. Some view the rise in interest in streaming services as positive since it makes movies more widely available and accessible to everyone. On the other hand, streaming has had a significant impact on the entertainment culture and the viewing experience. The conventional experience of going to a theater, purchasing a ticket, and seeing a movie on a giant screen is becoming less popular as movies and television series can now be viewed online, which lessens the sense of community that watching a movie with others traditionally provides (Film Track, 2023).

3. Literature Review:

The rise of streaming services has significantly impacted the cinema landscape, leading to a notable decline in box office revenues. A key area of research highlights the changing audience preferences, with over 85% of U.S. households subscribing to at least one streaming service, as reported by the Motion Picture Association (MPA, 2020). This shift has particularly affected younger demographics who favor the convenience of home viewing, contributing to reduced theater attendance. Additionally, a Nielsen study (2021) notes that binge-watching culture has further altered viewing habits, pushing audiences away from traditional cinema experiences.

Financially, the consequences for theaters have been severe, with Wang and Zhang (2019) revealing a direct correlation between major streaming releases and declining box office revenues. The National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) (2020) reported 80% drop-in box-office revenues during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the trend of studios opting for direct-to-streaming releases, threatening the viability of cinemas. Moreover, research by Rubin, R. (2021) indicates that the oversaturation of content on streaming platforms has fragmented audience attention, making it increasingly difficult for individual films to capture interest. The evolution of release strategies, with studios frequently choosing simultaneous theater and streaming releases, has further diminished the exclusivity of cinema viewings, adversely impacting box office earnings. Overall, these dynamics underscore the challenges faced by traditional cinemas in an era increasingly dominated by streaming platforms.

The cultural shift toward at-home viewing represents a broader transformation in consumer behavior. The traditional family outing to the cinema is now often replaced by a more relaxed and personalized viewing experience at home, where consumers have the flexibility to choose from a vast array of films at their convenience. This change in behavior has not only affected individual film viewership but has also led to a fundamental reconfiguration of the entire entertainment sector.

Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in this transition, enabling streaming services to flourish while simultaneously reducing the financial constraints associated with theater attendance. As the profitability

of the movie theater market declines, the industry faces the challenge of adapting to a new reality where digital distribution becomes the primary channel for film consumption. This evolving landscape demands a reevaluation of traditional business models, marketing strategies, and audience engagement tactics to remain competitive in an increasingly digitized world.

3.1 What impact do streaming services have on the box office?

Streaming services have had a significant impact on the traditional box office, reshaping movie consumption habits and challenging the long-held dominance of theaters. In the past, watching a new film almost always meant going to a movie theater, which was the only place to see the latest releases. However, as television ownership increased, theater attendance began to dip, and later advancements like DVDs and home streaming services accelerated this shift.

The emergence of streaming platforms like Netflix, which began offering on-demand streaming in 2007, marked a turning point. This shift allowed audiences to watch films anytime, anywhere, which diminished the urgency of going to a theater. As *The New York Times* reported, “By 2022, original productions accounted for 50% of Netflix's library in the United States, and the firm had expanded into other areas, such as video game publishing through the Netflix service” (Helft, 2007). With the flexibility to view films on mobile devices or at home, audiences increasingly opted for streaming over theatrical releases, leading to a consistent decline in theater attendance. Notably, streaming services produce original content as well, which competes directly with films in theaters and further divides potential moviegoers.

The affordability and accessibility of streaming have made it easier for viewers to enjoy an extensive array of films, reducing the motivation to pay for a movie ticket. Carleen Hsu, a film professor at Michigan State University, reflects on the changing landscape with mixed feelings, emphasizing that cinema is traditionally meant to be a shared experience, crafted to be enjoyed collectively in a theater. In her view, streaming platforms remove this communal element, altering how films are experienced in ways that may go against filmmakers' original intentions. As Hsu points out, “Streaming

platforms remove the communal element that theaters provide, and this changes the way films are experienced—often in a way that filmmakers did not intend” (Song, 2025).

Similarly, David Sterritt, a film professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art, suggests that going to the movies may one day become a rare, special event—much like attending the opera. This trend is largely driven by the convenience of streaming, which allows audiences to enjoy new releases from the comfort of their homes shortly after their theatrical debut. As a result, theaters may increasingly shift toward occasional, event-style screenings rather than serving as the primary venue for film consumption.

Streaming has profoundly reshaped the film industry, affecting audience behavior, content delivery, and revenue generation. According to Tian (2024), this transformation extends beyond a temporary adjustment to global events like the pandemic; it represents a deeper, structural shift in how films are distributed and consumed. As streaming platforms become increasingly dominant, traditional theaters face growing pressure to adapt to new audience expectations and technological models.

3.1.1 Reduced Theatrical Releases and Decline in Revenue:

The shift away from theatrical releases has significantly disrupted traditional revenue models in the entertainment industry, as production companies and studios face lower earnings. Limited theater access and closures during recent years have forced many films to rely on streaming as their primary distribution platform. While streaming allows for broader access, it generally yields lower revenue compared to box office returns, where ticket sales alone account for over 60% of industry income in the U.S. Additionally, the absence of the communal cinematic experience has reduced audience anticipation and engagement, further impacting revenue. According to a 2018 Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) survey, box office receipts in the U.S. and Canada fell by 5% due to the rise of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms, which have become a popular alternative for audiences (MPAA, 2018) and underscores a change in consumer behavior, with the convenience and affordability of streaming now driving audience preferences, which has prompted studios to shift focus toward online platforms.

3.1.2 Changes in Film Distribution:

Streaming services have fundamentally transformed film distribution, broadening the scope for niche and diverse content that often bypasses the conventional structures of Hollywood. Unlike the significant financial barriers associated with theatrical releases, streaming platforms exhibit a greater openness to unconventional filmmakers and innovative projects that may struggle to gain traction through traditional channels. This democratization of distribution has enabled a broader spectrum of voices and storytelling styles, while simultaneously diminishing the role of traditional outlets like theaters and broadcast television. As audiences increasingly gravitate toward streaming, box office sales and TV viewership have declined, reducing their traditional revenue streams. However, this shift has also opened up new sources of income, such as subscription fees and streaming-based advertising (Helft, 2007). Furthermore, streaming services support the profitability of niche content by catering to smaller yet dedicated audiences, thus establishing a sustainable model for production beyond traditional frameworks (Film Track, 2023).

3.1.3 Evolving Strategies:

Streaming platforms have further disrupted the traditional theatrical release model by embracing direct-to-streaming distribution. For instance, Netflix frequently bypasses theaters entirely, opting to deliver new content directly to its subscribers, thereby foregoing traditional box office revenues. Even when Netflix allows for limited theatrical screenings, these are typically short-lived and primarily serve the purpose of meeting awards eligibility criteria rather than driving ticket sales. This shift in strategy not only reduces box office earnings for such films but also challenges the notion of the “cinematic event.” The instant accessibility of new releases on streaming platforms has redefined audience expectations, making home viewing the norm and potentially diminishing the incentive to visit theaters in the future.

3.2 Impact on Independent Cinema:

Independent filmmakers and smaller studios, traditionally reliant on box office revenue for financial stability and visibility, are facing unprecedented challenges in the age of streaming platforms. The reduced focus on theatrical releases limits opportunities for indie films to attract wider audiences and

secure essential funding. As film producer Mark Duplass aptly noted, “*The theatrical experience is really tough for independent films now because people are choosing convenience over the cinema*” (Duplass, 2019). This trend has narrowed the traditional paths to visibility and success that indie filmmakers once relied on.

While streaming services appear to offer an accessible avenue for distribution, the reality is far more complex. The digital marketplace is saturated with content, making it exceedingly difficult for independent films to stand out. As film critic Owen Gleiberman highlights, “*In the age of streaming, there’s always something else to watch... indie films are in danger of becoming lost in the shuffle*” (Gleiberman, 2020). This intensified competition, compounded by algorithms that prioritize mainstream or high-profile content, limits the reach of independent cinema and reduces its visibility among audiences.

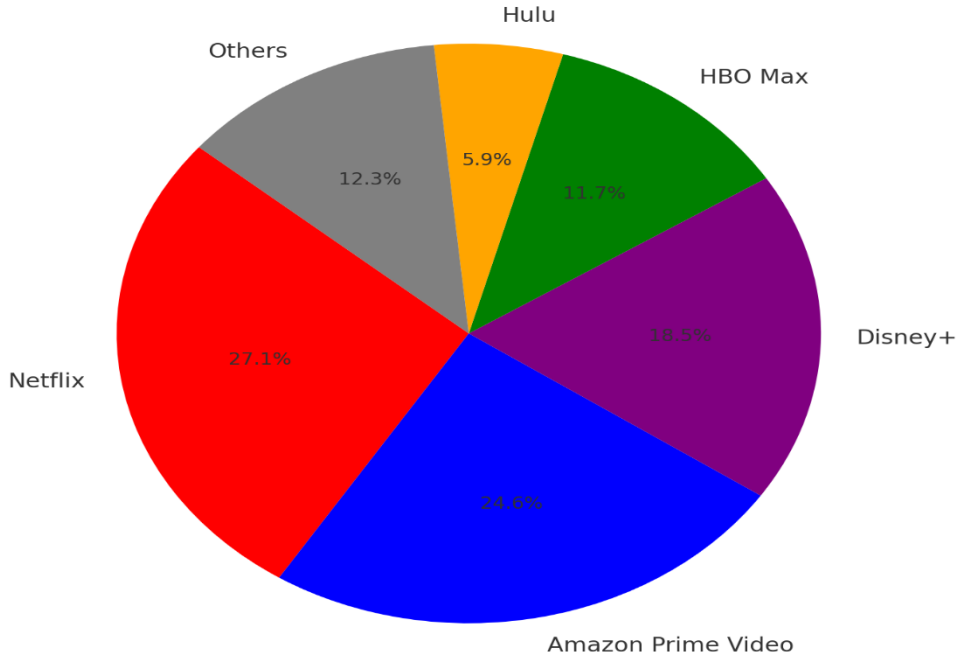
Moreover, the shift to streaming has fundamentally changed the metrics of success. As film director Ava DuVernay points out, “*Success on a streaming service is defined by engagement metrics like watch time, not by box office numbers or critical acclaim*” (DuVernay, 2021). This shift often runs counter to the goals of indie filmmakers, who traditionally measured success through critical recognition and a loyal audience base. Thus, despite the apparent accessibility provided by digital platforms, many independent films struggle to achieve the visibility and financial returns once possible through theatrical releases, ultimately curbing their potential to thrive in an increasingly crowded digital landscape.

4. Discussion

The rapid adoption of streaming services has significantly transformed the entertainment industry over the past decade. In the United States, the percentage of consumers subscribing to at least one streaming service rose from 52% in 2015 to 83% in 2023, underscoring the growing demand for on-demand content. Globally, Netflix leads the market with approximately 270 million subscribers, followed by Amazon Prime Video with over 200 million subscribers. Disney+ has also seen substantial growth, amassing around 157 million subscribers. Other notable platforms include HBO Max, with 79

million subscribers, and Hulu, serving 48 million subscribers. This surge in streaming service subscriptions reflects a significant shift in consumer preferences toward flexible, on-demand entertainment options.

Global Streaming Service Subscriptions (in millions)



One of the central themes in the literature is the changing consumer preference for at-home viewing over traditional theatrical experiences. The Motion Picture Association (2020) and studies by Nielsen (2021) emphasize how the convenience and flexibility of streaming platforms have particularly attracted younger demographics. This was further supported by findings in this study, which revealed that direct-to-streaming releases from Netflix have significantly contributed to a decline in theater attendance. Respondents in the study frequently cited the convenience, cost savings, and immediate access to a wide range of films as reasons for opting to watch new releases at home instead of going to the cinema.

The literature review reveals a comprehensive understanding of how streaming services, particularly platforms like Netflix, have disrupted the traditional cinema landscape and contributed to a decline in box office revenues. The findings from the current study align with much of the existing

research, illustrating the profound impact of streaming on audience behavior, theater attendance, and the financial stability of the movie industry. Additionally, research by de Souza, Nishijima, and Rodrigues (2023) and the National Association of Theatre Owners (2020) highlighted how major streaming releases directly correlate with decreased box office revenues. This trend was confirmed by the data collected in this study, where it was observed that high-profile Netflix releases, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a noticeable drop-in box-office sale for corresponding theatrical releases. For instance, the simultaneous release of films in theaters and on Netflix significantly reduced ticket sales, as audiences preferred the convenience of streaming.

However, while the literature points to the oversaturation of content on streaming platforms as a challenge for filmmakers (Tariq, Safdar, & Khan, 2024), the findings from this study suggest that platforms like Netflix can actually benefit niche content and independent films. Although the digital marketplace is saturated, interviewees noted that Netflix provides an opportunity for films that would otherwise struggle to secure theatrical distribution. This has opened new avenues for independent filmmakers to reach global audiences, even if it comes at the expense of traditional box office performance.

The shift toward streaming has not only changed where people watch films but also how studios approach release strategies. The simultaneous release model, highlighted in the literature, was corroborated by study findings showing that films launched both in theaters and on platforms like Netflix experience diminished box office exclusivity, impacting their overall earnings potential. This evolving strategy challenges the traditional notion of the “cinematic event,” as consumers become accustomed to having new releases available instantly at their fingertips.

Overall, the study's findings support the literature's view that the rise of streaming platforms like Netflix has redefined the film industry's financial landscape. Theaters, once the dominant venue for film consumption, are now grappling with the need to adapt to a reality where streaming is becoming the primary mode of film distribution. However, while this trend poses significant challenges, it also presents opportunities for filmmakers to

innovate and reach audiences in new ways. This transition requires a reevaluation of business models and marketing strategies to balance the benefits of digital distribution with the enduring value of the theatrical experience.

5. Conclusion

The rise of streaming services has fundamentally reshaped the entertainment industry, redefining not only how audiences consume content but also how films are produced, distributed, and marketed. As explored in the discussion, platforms like Netflix have transformed consumer viewing habits, pushing the industry toward a digital-first model that increasingly prioritizes convenience and accessibility. This shift has directly contributed to the decline in box office revenues, challenging traditional theaters to rethink their value proposition.

The future of streaming appears promising, driven by continuous technological advancements and a growing emphasis on diverse voices and stories. Streaming services have opened up unprecedented opportunities for the creation of specialized content that can cater to niche audiences while remaining profitable. This democratization of content creation has allowed independent filmmakers to bypass the restrictive gatekeeping of traditional theatrical distribution, reaching a global audience through digital platforms. However, the oversaturation of content, as noted in the literature, also means that visibility remains a challenge for smaller productions. Therefore, streaming is a double-edged sword: while it broadens access, it also intensifies competition in an already crowded digital landscape.

The traditional movie-going experience, once defined by the communal act of watching a film on a big screen, is becoming less common. The immediate availability of films on streaming platforms has shifted audience expectations, making home viewing the preferred option for many. Yet, this does not necessarily spell the end of cinema. Instead, it underscores the need for theaters to adapt by finding new ways to enhance the movie-going experience. As the study findings indicate, traditional theaters could benefit from differentiating themselves through exclusive screenings, special events, or enhanced in-theater experiences that cannot be replicated at home.

The coexistence of streaming services and theaters presents opportunities for strategic collaboration. Rather than being in direct competition, there is potential for symbiotic relationships where both can thrive. For example, studios could explore hybrid release strategies that combine the reach of streaming platforms with the immersive experience of theaters. Theatrical windows might remain, but with greater flexibility, allowing films to be released on streaming platforms shortly after their theater debut. This dual approach could not only maximize revenue but also cater to evolving audience preferences, bridging the gap between convenience and tradition.

Furthermore, collaborations with streaming services can extend the reach of theaters beyond their physical limitations. By partnering with streaming platforms, cinemas could offer simultaneous online releases or exclusive streaming access for members, thereby creating additional revenue streams. This model could be particularly effective in attracting global audiences who may not have access to certain films locally. Additionally, theaters could leverage data analytics from streaming platforms to better understand audience preferences and tailor their offerings, ensuring that their content aligns with consumer demand.

Ultimately, the evolution of streaming services and their impact on the traditional film industry highlights a broader trend: the need for flexibility and innovation in a rapidly changing market. As the entertainment landscape continues to shift, traditional distribution channels must embrace change by integrating digital strategies, enhancing customer experiences, and exploring new forms of collaboration. The future of cinema may not solely rely on the large screen but rather on how well it can adapt to coexist with streaming, offering a hybrid model that benefits both traditional and digital platforms. The key to sustainability lies in leveraging the strengths of each medium to create a more dynamic and inclusive entertainment ecosystem.

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