

# Global Tides

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## The Dawn of a New Era in Entertainment History

Allissa Williams

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## The Dawn of a New Era in Entertainment History

When I first started looking into different avenues of where the film world could be going next, a quote from Jeffrey Katzenberg, co-founder of DreamWorks Animation and Quibi streaming service, caught my eye. In this quote, Katzenberg stated, “What Quibi [his upcoming streaming service for mobile] is trying to do is get to the next generation of film narrative. The first generation was movies, and they were principally two-hour stories that were designed to be watched in a single sitting in a movie theater. The next generation of film narrative was television, principally designed to be watched in one-hour chapters in front of a television set. I believe the third generation of film narrative will be a merging of those two ideas, which is to tell two-hour stories in chapters that are seven to ten minutes in length. We are actually doing long-form in bite-size” (Buchanan). This quote got my mind running. I believe Katzenberg is on the right track in terms of where the next generation of film narrative is going; however, after brainstorming extensively, I realized I was looking into two distinctly different categories: where the film industry is going creatively, or in terms of narrative, and where it is going in terms of distribution. I believe shorter length content controlled by creators themselves, as opposed to large studios or corporations, and distribution methods that are beneficial to creators are on the horizon for the film and media industry. I will explore this in reference to the rise and decline of the first and second generations of film narrative, movies and television, and conclude with why I believe this is the direction the film industry is going in.

If we look at Hollywood's Golden Age (1930-1945) Hollywood was booming with profit as well as with popular stars and brilliant filmmakers. More than 7,500 features were released, and the number of Americans who watched at least one movie in a theater per week was more than 80 million. Part of this had to do with the studio system. Since studios were so profitable, they could afford to take a chance on creative writing and direction; however, due to their iron grip on movie distribution, as soon as they did figure out what was going to keep seats filled, they continued to replicate and remake what did well, whether it be certain genres, actors, actresses, or even directors. This is where we start seeing the birth of the American Film Industry, an industry that expertly created a hunger or desire for this type of entertainment and then met that demand (Blakemore).

However, as the film industry grew, movies developed a potentially disastrous rival: television. By the 1930s, the advancements in technology coupled with the success of experimental broadcasts made it clear that one-day television would be broadcast directly into people's homes. Though a few stations began broadcasting baseball games and early news programs in New York in 1939, televisions were expensive and most programming was limited. When World War II began, materials shortages stopped the expansion of TV in the United States. When the war ended, consumers were ready for television. Americans had been forced to be frugal since the Great Depression, and when men returned home from war, many families were ready to start spending. A large percentage of people bought homes in the suburbs away from downtowns, city centers, and movie theaters. Because of the lack of public transportation, people began to seek entertainment inside their homes. Once television sets were purchased, broadcast television was free, and it was hard for studios to convince people to look away from a cheap medium that was already in their own

homes (Blakemore). By the 1960s, more than half of all American homes had television sets. This led movie studios to take fewer creative risks and invested less money in quality films because they had less money to lose (Blakemore). Fortunately, the rise of television did not mean the death of popular entertainment, just a migration to a smaller screen and enjoyment of a different type of film narrative. This is key because I believe this can give us insight into where the film industry is headed next.

While both the film and television industries have remained huge drivers of the entertainment industry today, things have been changing. As of January 2014, American adults went to about five movies on average per year. In addition, a majority of respondents of all ages reported preferring to watch movies at home rather than in the theater. Notably, about two-thirds of respondents agreed they are going to the movies less often than they did a few years ago (see table 1). In comparison, as of June 2019, fourteen percent of adults reported going to the movies once a month or more, forty percent reported going less than once a month, and the majority reported going once a year or less (see table 2). This shows a drastic decline in movie theater attendance in just five years. Statistics regarding the television industry show a similar decline. The top two shows of 2015 ranked by the total number of viewers were *The Big Bang Theory* with 21 million viewers and *NCIS* with 20.9 viewers; however, these numbers dropped drastically and by 2018 *The Big Bang Theory* only accumulated 17.4 million, and *NCIS* dropped to 15.9 (see table 3). Similarly, the overall viewership of public TV has reduced drastically. While there has been some fluctuation, overall the viewership from 1999 to 2013 dropped approximately 23% (see table 4).

But what do these numbers mean for the future of the entertainment industry? While researching, I thought it would be best to hear what those currently working in the industry think

about the impacts of these results. According to Jordan Horowitz, producer of *La La Land*, he does not, “feel particularly optimistic about the traditional theatrical experience, especially for independent films” (Buchanan). While it is not difficult to figure out that the future of movie theaters does not look great for anything except maybe blockbusters, why does theatrical release matter? Should creators not be equally satisfied with streaming releases as long as their content is being viewed? This is certainly not the opinion of many present-day creators. Jon M. Chu released a statement on why he wanted his film *In the Heights* released theatrically in which he said, “I knew we wanted to go theatrical because... we wanted people to experience it in the dark with a focus on the screen” (Buchanan). This quote unknowingly hints at an important fact about entertainment viewing in the present day and age: having media screened in a movie theater is just about the only way to get audiences to pay attention. Not watching in theaters leads to distraction, inattention, and not watching the entire feature-length movies (Buchanan). American film producer Jason Blum commented on youth viewership saying, “What I find striking is how much they’re watching pieces of things: ‘I saw some of that movie.’ They’re multitasking while watching the things that we’re making”.

While creators want audiences to pay attention to what they’re watching, and it seems that theaters are the solution to this problem, people, especially younger audiences, just are not going to the movies. This led me to question whether there is a connection: are audiences’ attention spans a reason why they are not viewing certain types of media? Because there had been a decline in both the viewership of full-length feature films and even a decline in watching hour-long television programming, researchers looked into current day viewers’ attention spans. According to Richard E. Cytowic, a professor of neurology at George Washington University, there is no dispute within the scientific community that “our attention spans have gone to hell”

(Cytowic). In one of his recent studies, Professor Cytowic studied the effect of digital devices on America's youth and concluded that it has affected the functioning of the brain and devastated the attention span of individuals (Cytowic). Due to the results of this study, I believe that the film world is going to have to move towards shorter form content which can fall within the average viewers' attention span.

As the numbers show, people are moving away from movie theaters as well as traditional television programming, but where are they going? If we look back, historically, people are drawn to cheap mediums already in their homes (Blakemore). I believe people are migrating towards smaller screens and a different type of film narrative designed specifically for those screens, as we saw in the transition from film narrative to television narrative. In regards to this topic, Kumail Nanjani, writer and star of *The Big Sick*, said:

I was at a bar with a friend who directs big movies, and while we were in line for the bathroom, he was saying that movie theaters were going to go away. He was like, "Kids don't watch movies, they watch YouTube." Which I thought was crazy. So he goes, "Watch this." There was a girl in front of us in line, and he said, "Hey, excuse me, what's your favorite movie?" And she said, "I don't watch movies." Just randomly, he picked someone — and she was like 25, she wasn't a child or anything. We were like, "Well, do any of your friends watch movies?" And she said, "Not really."

In this quote, Nanjani points out this migration of audiences to entertainment sites such as YouTube. I believe the film world is headed in a similar direction not only because of the short-form content structure but also because of the creator-friendly distribution.

Recent YouTube Statistics indicate YouTube's dominance in the entertainment industry today. Six out of ten people prefer online video platforms to live television. In 2015, 18-49 year-

olds spent 4% less time watching television while time on YouTube increased 74%. On mobile alone, YouTube reaches more 18-49 year-olds than any broadcast or cable television network. Audiences watch over one billion hours of YouTube videos a day, more than Netflix and Facebook video combined (Smith). These statistics clearly show that YouTube is the leader in video content, which is currently the most popular format for connecting with audiences.

What can the film industry learn from the site dominating online entertainment? A team from Pew Research conducted a study of some of the most popular YouTube channels to determine what they're posting, how they're posting it, and what content trends are emerging (Hutchinson). Videos "explicitly intended for children" under the age of 13 are by far the most popular and received nearly three times as many views as any other types of videos. The next generation of consumers is far more likely to know who a famous YouTuber is as opposed to a television cartoon character. Pew Research stated in the summary of their findings that if people want a measure of where the future of entertainment is headed, this is a key indicator (Hutchinson).

I believe YouTube is the site dominating online entertainment for two main reasons. Firstly, creators understand their audiences. The average video posted by the YouTube channels with at least 250,000 subscribers in the first week of 2019 was twelve minutes long (Hutchinson). Creators understand their audiences and, because they have complete creative control and a direct line of communication with their viewers, they have the ability to adjust their content to fit the needs of the consumers. I feel this connection to the consumer and ability to fulfill their specific entertainment desires is often lost when working within large studios or conglomerates. The second reason YouTube is so successful is because content creators want to use the site. According to Pew Research, the popular channels with 250,000 subscribers or more

posted nearly a quarter-million videos in the first seven days of 2019, totaling 48,486 hours of content (Hutchinson). Creators want to use YouTube to distribute their content because it is creator-friendly. YouTube uses an ad-supported model that allows content creators to earn money based on the number of views their content receives. While most YouTubers are not filmmakers, and this could be debated, I believe sites such as YouTube could offer emerging filmmakers a way to not follow the path of previous generations when it comes to forging a sustainable career (Follows).

In the past, the only route to financial success was to work your way up slowly within the existing structures. I believe this type of ad-supported model could offer a new way into the industry because it does not have a barrier to entry and allows content creators to earn money as they grow. While the most common route to success in the film industry has not changed in the last hundred years (Follows), I believe if ad-supported models such as YouTube continue to grow, the next generation of filmmakers and storytellers will emerge from ad-supported distribution sites such as YouTube.

## Table References

Table 1

On Average, American Adults Say They Went to 5 Movies Last Year.

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### American Adults' Movie-Going Trends

% of respondents aged 18+

**January 2014**

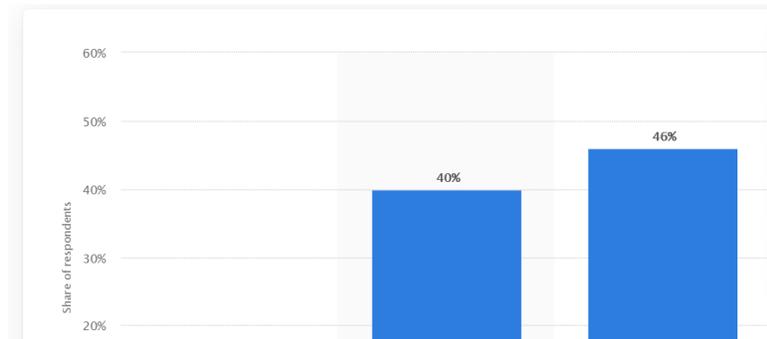
	All Adults	18-36	37-48	49-67	68+	Male	Female
<b>Went to any movie</b>	68%	83%	73%	59%	44%	70%	66%
<b>Went to 10+ movies</b>	17%	24%	21%	11%	9%	20%	14%
<b>Mean number attended</b>	4.8	6.3	5.3	3.6	3.2	5.5	4.1
<b>Prefer watching movies at home</b>	57%	52%	56%	60%	60%	53%	60%
<b>Agree: I am going to the movies less often now than a few years ago</b>	66%	67%	59%	66%	74%	61%	70%

Table 2

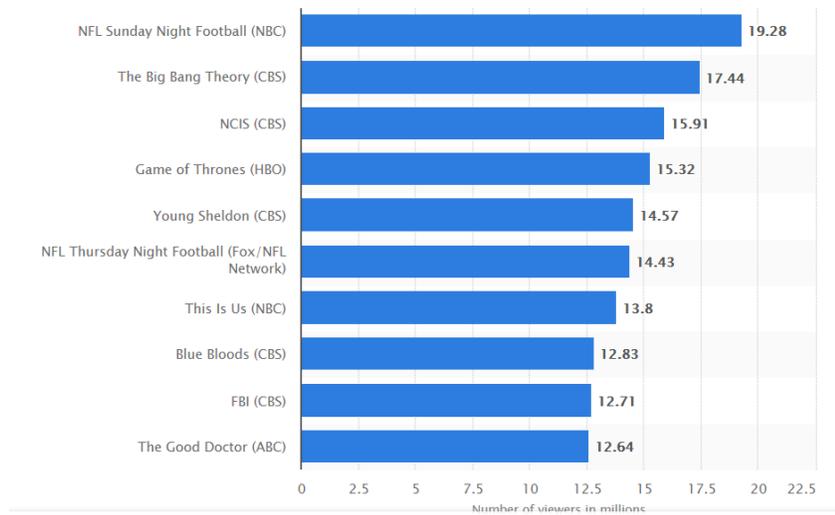
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Table 3

Most Shows in 2019. July



Watched TV the U.S. *Statista*, 3 2019,



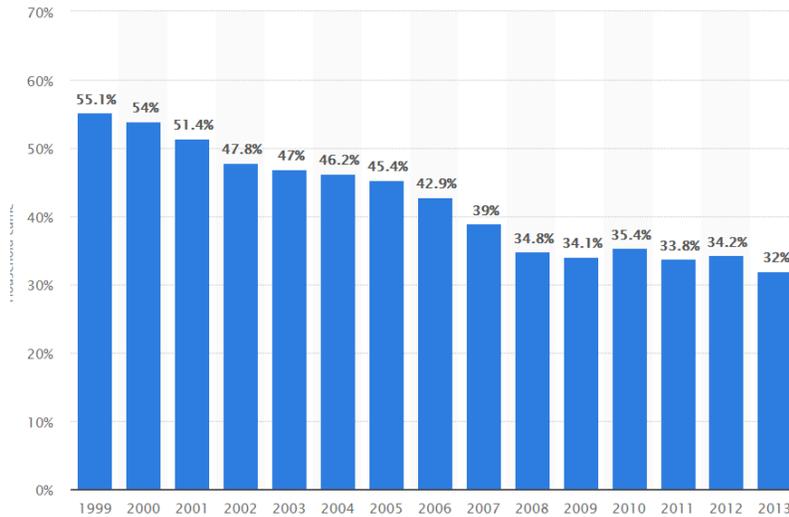
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