

“More Gen Z guests are choosing to return to their local theatre to see more movies — what do you believe is driving this trend?”

Right when my young-adult life was starting the world got locked down due to Covid.. All these formative moments I was looking forward to were now gone and this was the case for many people my age. How we went to school, consumed media and performed social interactions were forever changed, and at that moment, restricted to only personal screens. This became the new normal and would begin a new age of the digital, instant-feed, algorithm.

Gen-Z is very much aware of this and recognizes the effects the pandemic had on their lives. There is a drive to move beyond the past and unplug from the current day of streaming services, short-form videos, and endless digital entertainment. Once seen as a struggling industry during the early years of the pandemic, theatres would later become a “refuge” for all those who wanted to escape the algorithm and return to experiencing shared events.

Most members of this generation grew up with social media. While social media provides connection, it lacks genuine human interaction. Going to a movie theatre provides a shared experience where the audience reacts together. I vividly remember the time my friends and I watched *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*. At the end there is this big reveal that a very popular character from the game would be in the next movie. The audience, full of all ages, excitedly cheered for a solid minute. Watching a movie in a sold out cinema creates a sense of community that streaming cannot replicate.

This has led major film releases to become social events instead of plain entertainment. Studios now market their films as cultural moments that viewers must be a part of. Gen Z, a generation influenced by the internet, wants to participate in these moments. There was a clear shift once studios witnessed the success of the “Barbenheimer” phenomenon. Participating in a viral trend created by a movie allows for more discussion to be had.

On another level, theatres provide some sort of personal escapism. A person can disconnect from the world for a set period of time. Members of Gen-z are constantly bombarded on social media about global issues, economic uncertainty, and daily pressures. It grows tiring. As Gen-z grows older they are looking for new ways to go “analog”. Going to the movies provides that experience. Besides the screen in front of them, there are no other distractions.

In a day dominated by artificial intelligence, Gen-z are looking for more substance-something only movie theatres can provide. A return to theatres reflects a deeper desire for social connection, meaningful experiences, and much needed escapism. The return of Gen-z shows that cinema still has its place in culture and will continue to stay as such.