

Chapter 14

Social Reactions to the Pandemic: Rising Interest in Pandemic Movies

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has become a global health and economic crisis and has had many impacts on daily life. This study investigates the effect of the pandemic on movie viewing preferences in Turkey. Using Google Trends data, it handles trends towards epidemic movies with a quantitative analysis method. Google Trends data is a valuable source of information for examining quarantine's psychological, sociological, and health effects. In this way, it can be determined which media preferences the society, which wants to get rid of the epidemic's concerns, is turning to. In this study, the search was made on IMDb with the keyword "contagion," and movies with an IMDb rating above 6.0 among the listed pandemic movies were examined as sampling. The interest in epidemic films determined three months before and after the epidemic's start was compared. This study suggests an increase in watching pandemic movies in Turkey in response to the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest crises humanity has faced in recent history. The Chinese city of Wuhan became the center of a virus-borne pandemic in December 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey that started in March 2020 has prompted governments worldwide to take unequalled measures to contain the virus's spread. Such as social distancing, hygiene practices, and quarantine to reduce the spread of the virus. COVID-19 outbreak continued in Turkey and brought about a variety of effects on daily life. Research shows that such action is met in the social field as watching films or TV series, especially in the early stages of the pandemic (Dixit, 2020; Reis Filho, 2020; Kar et al., 2020).

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COVID-19 caused restrictions in Turkey. To reduce the pace of the pandemic, many public events, including concerts, theaters, cinemas and sports competitions, schools, and universities, have been closed, and government working hours have been reduced in some provinces. While restrictions can help contain the virus's spread, significant psychological damage to population well-being are observed. Data generated through online internet searches provide a potential source of information about the media content, which concerned people resorted to alleviate fear and anxiety. Our use of Google Trends to evaluate quarantine's health, sociological, and psychological effects has important policy implications. Evidence that the media's information about the pandemic increased significantly in the search intensity of the content related to the pandemic shows that people's mental health was negatively affected during this period. Using different methods to assess the causal effects of fear in society, it is found a significant increase in anxiety and boredom observed by search intensity. It shows that the media preferences arising from the loneliness, anxiety, and sadness felt by the quarantine can be seriously affected by the health status. The limited social interaction of prolonged quarantine can negatively impact emotionally, psychologically, and sociologically.

Watching movies or series during the pandemic can turn into a situation where both the cinema industry and society benefit. The most important message of pandemic movies, series, and documentaries is to be hopeful and unity as a society. The loneliness felt during the pandemic creates the need for unity. This message helps us control our anxiety and fears. These productions impose on us both the responsibility of protecting our own life or our loved ones who are sensitive to the virus and hope that all humanity will be united with each other. According to Ketsuwan, the sense of learning and control that movies create, anxiety and fear may decrease (2021). Also, watching productions about the pandemic helps visualize the process. These movies or series become a source of ideas for viewers.

The development of medical science -and especially developments in the cure of infectious diseases- in a roughly analogous fashion to the art of cinema shows that the link between art and science shows meaning. This is particularly considerable today. As evidenced in part pending the recent anthrax pandemic, public senses -and reactions- are remarkably influenced by their views on scientific facts presented by the media (Pappas et al., 2003, p. 940). On the other hand, perhaps one of the more critical points concerns this pandemic process's post-effects. Researches show that (Brodeur et al., 2020; Gennaro Mazza et al., 2020; Hyland, 2020; Albay et al., 2020) "post-traumatic stress disorder" and "depression" are found in people after the pandemic. In the films about pandemics, generally, people's negative images and feelings after the disaster are not mentioned. Thus, people feed on the hope that everything will return to normal when this process is over. Such hope is the essential part that the mind needs for a disaster scenario. Therefore, people who turn to productions related to the pandemic are looking for hope. The frequency of searches, especially in the first stages of the pandemic, proves this case.

In Turkey, there is a lack of published research on factors affecting public interest in COVID-19. In order to eliminate this deficiency, this study investigates whether the interest in pandemic movies increased during the pandemic period. The interest in pandemic-themed movies was analyzed from Google Trends data from December 11, 2019, to June 11, 2020, centered on the first COVID-19 case in Turkey. The number of Google searches such as "pandemic movies" and selected films increased rapidly and changed throughout the world between December and June. This article aims to evaluate whether it is possible to correlate responses to COVID-19 with digital traces. In particular, it will determine the usefulness of looking at Google searches when examining social group responses to this outbreak.

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