Far Removed From the Multiplex

With an array of devices at their fingertips, youths don't always think of theaters as the place to see a flick.

By John Horn, Times Staff Writer
August 8, 2006

The scores of footprints in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre chronicle Hollywood's history. What David Gale witnessed inside the auditorium on a recent evening may help predict the industry's future.

As the head of MTV Films, Gale was at the theater for a research screening of his "Jackass: Number Two," a crude teen comedy coming out next month. The film had just started when a teenager seated next to Gale began pecking away on his Blackberry.

"It was an amazing experience. My first instinct was to slap him," Gale said. "But then I realized he was just enjoying the movie."

In fact, the teenager was e-mailing a friend, recounting the movie's best jokes.

"The kid was just doing what kids do," Gale said. "This is how they watch movies. This is how they consume entertainment. And when they like something, they let people know."

For decades, the movie business has followed an inflexible formula: Produce features, show them first in theaters, release them on video, then broadcast them on television. But what Gale observed — and what a new Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll of teens and young adults has found — is that Hollywood's rickety model is poised to be torn apart.

With an array of devices competing to fill their leisure time, today's teens and young adults show diminishing interest in adhering to Hollywood tradition. They're willing to watch brand-new movies at home rather than in theaters, are starting to use their PCs as their entertainment gateway and are slowly turning to their iPods and cellphones for video programming.

They still crave to be entertained, but not necessarily inside a movie theater.

Poll respondent Kim Boyko, an 18-year-old student in Colonia, N.J., said in a follow-up interview that she found herself watching more movies at home on a computer, on TV or on DVD. "I'd much rather have the comfort of my own couch," Boyko said.

For years, theater owners and movie studios have argued about the timing of home video releases. The people running the multiplexes want to keep the wait period between theatrical debut and the DVD's first day on sale — known in the industry as a window — as long as possible. The studios have been pushing to shrink that gap (it now averages about 20 weeks) to minimize the need for two separate advertising campaigns.

The poll found that many teens and young adults would be happy if that window were eliminated altogether. Asked where they'd prefer to watch a new movie if it were simultaneously available at home and in theaters, about a third said they would choose to stay at home, and another third said it depended on the movie. Going to movies at theaters still has appeal, particularly for younger teens, but among respondents ages 21 to 24, 56% said they wanted to see the new movie at home, and only 9% said they would rather travel to a theater.

Readers weigh in:

Hollywood failed Nintendo. In all seriousness, though, it's just getting so much easier to have entertainment sent straight to the home. I don't think that's going to change, so it's up to the industry to adapt itself rather than try to win back the youths to the "old school."

Submitted by: Pete Collins
1:05 AM PDT, Aug 8, 2006

It's a combination of oversaturation and disinterest. Films are over 100 years old, it's just not fun to watch a film in a room surrounded by a few hundred people you would never invite to your house with stars you would never want to know. Submitted by: quality not quantity
10:44 PM PDT, Aug 7, 2006

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Offensive or Not? Breakdown by Age, Gender
Based on the box-office popularity of many critically savaged films, it should come as no surprise that teens and young adults care little about what reviewers think. In deciding what to see, their friends' judgments are the ones that matter. Those opinions are sometimes spread instantly, with almost a quarter of teenagers and young adults sharing their opinions during or right after the movie.

"It used to be that we could get people to see movies that weren't worth it because they didn't have so many other things to do," said Laura Ziskin, producer of the "Spider-Man" movies, whose latest installment is slated for next summer. "Now, you have to be a hit even before you open."

Younger audiences, Hollywood's most enthusiastic consumers of pop culture, are seeking out new types of programming and technology, though they're not ready yet to watch short films on their cellphones or video iPods.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents ages 12 to 17 say they would watch a movie on a PC, well above the interest in doing so on a cellphone (11%) or video iPod and similar devices (18%). A similar share of those 21 to 24 said they would watch movies on a computer, although they are much less willing to do so on a cellphone (6%) or video iPod (7%).

As for the movies themselves, some complained about the selection. "I'm going to fewer movies that I actually enjoy," said Maria McGinley, a Ventura County 16-year-old. "One of my friends wanted to go see 'Little Man,' and I said, 'No way!'"

No matter the device employed, entertaining the nation's teens will be tough. Although the youngest kids polled (12 to 14) say they are seeing either as many or more movies than a year ago, 3 in 10 teens ages 15 to 17 are seeing fewer. The distaste for the multiplex accelerates as children become young adults; 44% of those ages 21 to 24 are seeing fewer films. The Times/Bloomberg poll findings mirror a recent study by the Motion Picture Assn. of America, which found an even sharper drop-off over a five-year span.

Chandra Johnson, a 15-year-old in Port Angeles, Wash., is exactly the kind of customer Hollywood wishes it could snare. Intelligent, active and culturally literate, Chandra generally consults reviews (she's among only 10% of her age group who do) before she'll buy a movie ticket.

But Chandra has has seen just one movie this summer — the critically praised "The Devil Wears Prada." Although she maintains a MySpace.com page and an instant-messaging account, she'd rather go for a long hike in Olympic National Park than go to the cinema. "Hands down," she said, "I have a really busy life. And I'm really, really into the outdoors."

Jennifer Given, a 24-year-old student in Sierra Vista, Ariz., says she's seeing fewer movies too. Part of the issue is child care; even though Given took her son, Dylan, to "The Grudge" at 3 months, she says there aren't enough movies for kids. "For one movie, we drop about $20, if not more, and that's without going to the concession stand," Given said.

To MPAA President Dan Glickman, the findings of the Times/Bloomberg poll is an indication of the problems facing the movie business. "You can't have a thriving movie industry without having a thriving theatrical business," Glickman said.

If teens and young adults are steering clear of movie theaters, where are they going? If you're reading this story online, you're staring at the answer: a personal computer.

"For a while, I was on YouTube every day," Christopher Hobert, an 18-year-old in Frenchburg, Ky., said of the popular short video website. Hobert, who is about to join the Navy, said he would spend an average of five hours on a computer at school. Because he'd generally finish his schoolwork quickly, he would spend the balance of his computer time browsing through online videos. It was more pleasant — and a lot cheaper — than buying movie tickets. "I hate going to a movie theater," Hobert said, "and people commenting all through the movie."

Sensing a growing demand for movies delivered online, an increasing number of companies are shifting their business plans to address the opportunity. BitTorrent, a website whose focus has been expediting Web file transfers, recently moved toward providing licensed content.

"A lot of people want to watch movies on their PC, and part of the attraction is portability: You can take the movie with you," said Ashwin Navin, BitTorrent's president. "And a computer is private, in a [kid's] own space. They don't have to contend for the remote control. It doesn't replace the experience of theatergoing, but the selection is much broader."

Although some theater owners are banking on an increasingly lopsided slate of big-budget sequels, remakes and TV show knockoffs to drive attendance, more chains are
taking matters into their own hands. National Amusements, a Massachusetts chain with 1,056 U.S. screens, is building high-end complexes that include in-theater table service — with cocktails — sprawling video-game zones and auditoriums dedicated to stand-up comedy and live music.

"We can't do a lot about the quality of the movies," said Bill Towey, National Amusements' senior vice president for operations, "but we can do something about the quality of the venue."

If some are changing theater design, others are changing jobs.

After 11 years of running MTV Films, Gale is now MTV Networks' executive vice president for new media and specialty film, where he will oversee the creation and distribution of online, wireless and video-on-demand content for all MTV divisions.

"Everything is changing out there," he said. "We have to adapt."

*(INFOBOX BELOW)*

Home viewing

As consumers get older, home becomes the preferred venue for viewing movies.

Q: If a new movie came out in theaters and was available for home viewing on the same day, would you generally prefer to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 12-14</td>
<td>Watch movie in theater 32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch movie at home 35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depends on movie 33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 15-17</td>
<td>Watch movie in theater 24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch movie at home 41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depends on movie 35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-20</td>
<td>Watch movie in theater 13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch movie at home 38%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depends on movie 49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 21-24</td>
<td>Watch movie in theater 8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch movie at home 59%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depends on movie 33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: What do you like most about going to a movie in a theater?

(> Two answers allowed, selected responses shown.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Get to see it</th>
<th>The large screen</th>
<th>Can go with a group of friends</th>
<th>Like the whole theater experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 12-14</td>
<td>Male 12%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 13%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 15-17</td>
<td>Male 13%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-20</td>
<td>Male 23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 21-24</td>
<td>Male 17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 11%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: What do you like least about going to a movie in a theater?

(Two answers allowed, selected responses shown.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teens 12-17</th>
<th>Adults 18-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expensive concessions</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(popcorn, candy, soda)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket prices are too high</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude moviegoers/people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who talk during the movie</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many advertisements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before the movies</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad movies</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theaters are less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comfortable than my home</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: How soon after you have seen a movie in a theater do you usually let your friends know about the movie? (One answer.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teens 12-17</th>
<th>Adults 18-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the movie</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right after the movie</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometime that day/night</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I go to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or place of work</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next time I see them</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t talk to friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about movies</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How the poll was conducted

The Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll was conducted from June 23 to July 3 using the Knowledge Networks’ Web-enabled panel, which provides a representative nationwide sample of U.S. households. Of the 4,466 minors and young adults invited to participate in the survey, 1,904 (43%) responded to the survey, with 1,650 qualifying. The 1,650 qualified respondents included 839 minors (ages 12 to 17) and 811 young adults (ages 18 to 24). The margin of sampling error for both groups is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In order to provide as representative a sample as possible, the survey results were weighted to U.S. census figures for 12- to 24-year-olds in the United States in terms of age, race or ethnicity, gender and region, and for urban or rural residence and Internet access.

Source: Times/Bloomberg poll

* (INFOBOX BELOW)

THE ENTERTAINMENT POLL

Monday

A new Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll finds that a large majority of 12- to 24-year-olds are bored with their entertainment choices. Their solution? Even more options. Plus: Busting myths about teens and young adults.

Today

The old Hollywood movie model doesn’t interest younger audiences. They want to see films as soon as they come out at home — whether on TV, computer or the next new gadget.

Wednesday

Within the music industry, copied CDs are considered a greater threat than illegal peer-to-peer downloading. But young people are confused about where sharing ends and piracy begins in the era of iTunes.
Thursday

Is new technology the answer for TV and video? Teens and young adults — the generation most likely to be the early adopters of this new technology — have yet to fully embrace it.

Friday

A day in the life of a typical plugged-in tween. Plus: Does multi-tasking hurt homework?

On the Web

Readers weigh in: How has the entertainment industry failed today's young people? Plus, read previous installments of this series. All at latimes.com/entertainmentpoll.

MOST E-MAILED
- "Baby, Give Me a Kiss"
- Underwhelmed by It All
- Twice as Strong

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