

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Movie Theaters Fight Streaming by Assaulting the Senses

Source: Claire Atkinson, NBCNews.com, December 3, 2017

Forget cushy recliners and meals delivered to your seat. As moviegoers defect in large numbers to streaming services and big-screen TVs, theater owners are desperately trying to stem a box office decline by souping up the movie-going experience.

In some theaters in California, families at the Disney movie “Coco” can feel the wind, smell a scent or shake in their chair. At another Disney release, “Beauty and the Beast,” the audience experienced something like snow falling from the ceiling, though it was actually bubbles.

During a fight scene in “The Fate of the Furious,” a Universal release (owned by NBCUniversal, the company that owns NBC News), “you might feel a punch in the back,” said Annelise Holyoak, national marketing manager at Cinépolis USA, a big theater owner, referring to the vibrating chair. “It’s a very special experience.”

In March Cinépolis opened a theater with auditoriums dedicated to children, with beanbag seating, play areas and colorful décor. The Mexican-owned company is also trying to beef up its offerings in the lobby. It recently partnered with Tribeca Film Enterprises to develop a pre-theater virtual reality experience in a roped-off area of the lobby at its theater in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood where guests can put on glasses and immerse themselves in a world where they can battle cyber viruses.

The iPic theater chain now has seats that resemble beds in private pods, complete with pillows and blankets. It is also booking mentalists, and is considering adding comedy and music acts to movie screenings.

The summer of 2017 was Hollywood's worst in a decade, a blow to theater chains that split the box office with the studios. When movies don’t perform, it's up to theaters to come up with other ways to draw crowds and bring in revenue.

“The whole industry has really upped its game in the last several years to be more innovative with the whole set-up and amenities offered,” said Eric Handler, managing director of the equity research firm MKM Partners, who covers the entertainment industry. He pointed to new ideas in pricing, too.

Regal Entertainment Group, a major theater chain, told analysts in October that it is experimenting with dynamic pricing, a system used by the concert and airlines industries that could mean lower prices for less-appealing movies and premium prices for blockbusters.

“Changes to the historical pricing structure have often been discussed but rarely tested in our industry, and we’re excited to learn even more about how pricing changes impact customer behavior,” Amy Miles, Regal’s chief executive, said on an analyst call.

The chair-shaking gimmicks — similar to the “smell-o-vision” and “sensurround” tricks used by theaters in previous decades to pry viewers away from their TV sets — are an attempt to

counter the twin threats of video streaming from services like Netflix and Amazon, and on-demand services from cable companies.

Amazon, Netflix and other streaming services have traditionally been the final destination for movies after they appear on premium cable channels like HBO. Now, though, such services are spending more, competing for the same directors and writers as the movie studios, and putting movies online immediately. That frustrates the theater operators, who believe these trends are a threat to their business.

At the Cannes film festival in May, French theater owners protested the screening of Netflix movies, leading the festival to ban Netflix entries in the future unless they are screened at movie theaters first.

Theater companies have been battling a long-discussed plan by the studios to launch what's known as "premium video on demand," which would make movies available at the same time as their release in theaters, or soon after, for a high price: as much as \$30-40. Currently, video-on-demand systems often have to wait more than three months after a blockbuster movie debuts in theaters to make them available at home. (Less successful movies might hit the video-on-demand window sooner.)

The 3-D craze that requires moviegoers to wear plastic glasses is on the wane, according to the chief executive of Imax, Richard Gelfond, who predicts that a more immersive technology will supplant it.

"It's likely to be a technology of the past and used sporadically and not ubiquitous in every movie," Gelfond said. "The great revolution will be in virtual reality and augmented reality. Perhaps there's a dinosaur in a movie and you see them sitting next to you."

Virtual reality puts the consumer in a completely different computer-generated world, while augmented reality is still connected to a person's location but it enhances what is seen, rather like the Pokemon Go game.

The next step in big-screen technology, Gelfond said, is a laser projection system, allowing Imax to offer movies on much bigger screens, 150 feet wide instead of 100 feet.

"We don't think the gimmicks — the water in the face, the moving seats — are going to dominate," Gelfond said. "It's a nice product for kids, but I don't see directors are going to see that."

He said the director James Cameron's new *Avatar* sequels will feature new underwater filming technology that he predicted would amaze viewers in the way Cameron's first *Avatar* movie did in 2009.

Possible Response Questions:

- What will going to the movies be like in the future? Predict.
- Will the decline in movie ticket sales continue? Explain
- Pick a passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.