



Streaming Video Content in the Time of COVID-19

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Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic led to quarantine, isolation, and distancing protocols in the U.S., audiences turned to Subscription Video On Demand (SVOD) platforms to cope. While the use of SVOD platforms increased during the pandemic, the pandemic also challenged the entertainment industry's ability to satisfy increased demand for content. A literature review was used to understand the development of the SVOD industry, its role within the entertainment industry as a whole and its influence in everyday life prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. A secondary literature review was conducted on media uses and audience motivations. A genre analysis was used to understand the content types and platforms most popular with pandemic audiences. Pre-existing SVOD companies were uniquely advantaged at the start of the pandemic period when theatrical release and broadcast television production schedules were disrupted by pandemic related shutdowns. Overall, the effects of the pandemic catalyzed the entertainment industry's transition from traditional release formats to digital based subscription and streaming models. The widespread use of SVOD platforms during the pandemic is indicative of the value of media in modern life as well as the uses of new technologies and distribution models.

Introduction

- Video streaming technology transformed the ways in which audiences consumed and engaged with media in their free time.
- The COVID-19 mitigation measures forced millions of people into lockdown, who in turn used streaming services to cope with the additional free time.

Objective

- *This study seeks to compare audience uses of streaming media during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Methods

- Literature review relevant to the understanding of the streaming industry and theoretical implications of streaming media, followed by a genre analysis breaking down the genres of popular content available on SVOD services in 2020.
- Lists of popular titles available on streaming media services were aggregated from published online articles (Clark, 2021), (Hulu Advertising, 2020), (Warner Media Pressroom, 2021), (Palmer, 2020).

Results

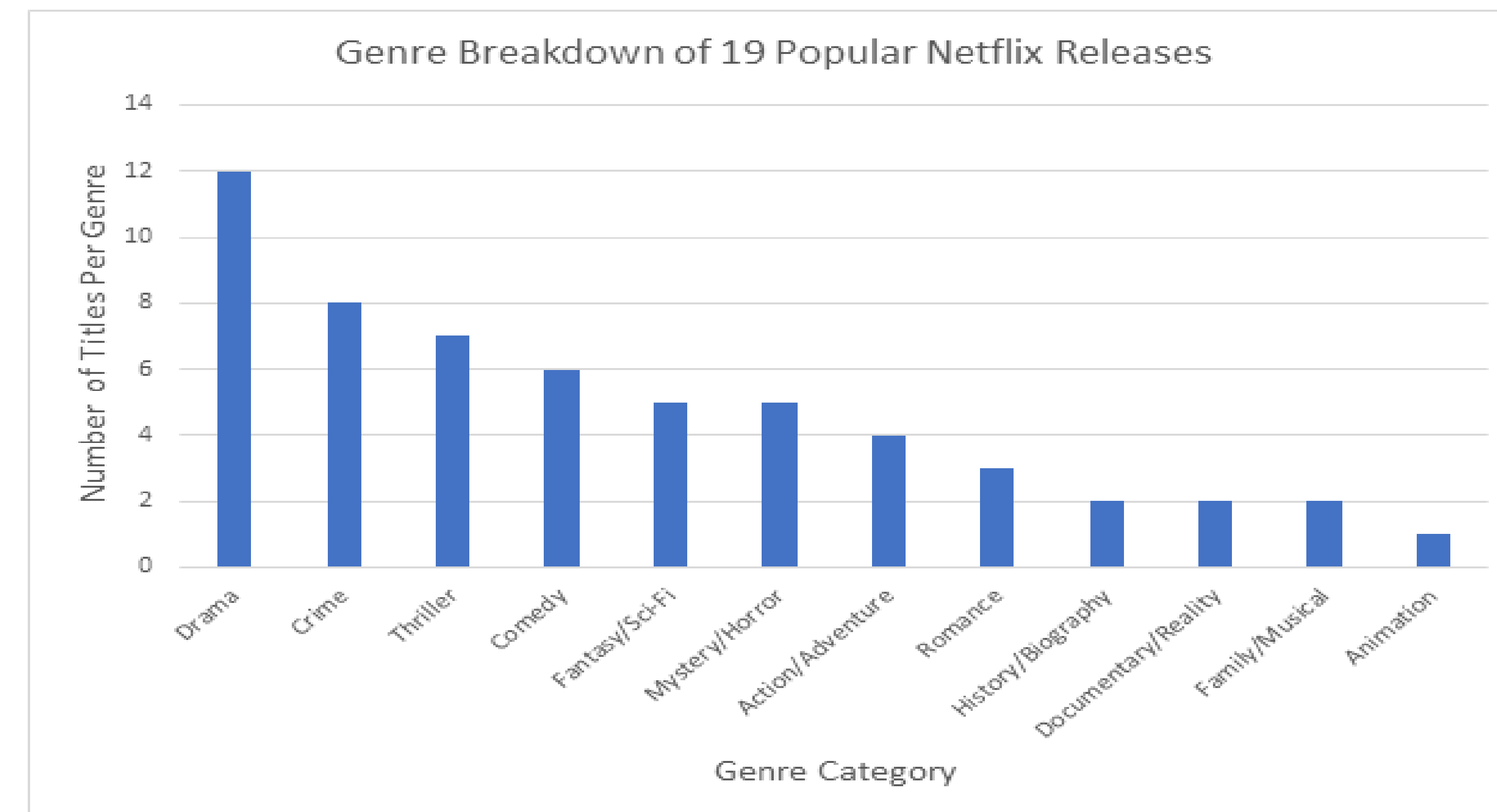


Figure 1. Genre Breakdown of Popular Netflix Releases. Of the 12 genre categories found in a sample of 19 titles on Netflix, the genre tag which appeared most often was Drama, which made up 21% of the titles measured, followed by Crime (14%) and Thriller (12%). Overlap can be seen among these categories and, in fact, five of the titles were tagged with all three of these genres. The next most prevalent genre was Comedy at 10% of the samples, followed by Fantasy/Science Fiction, Mystery/Horror, and Action/Adventure, which all fell between 7% and 8% of the titles measured.

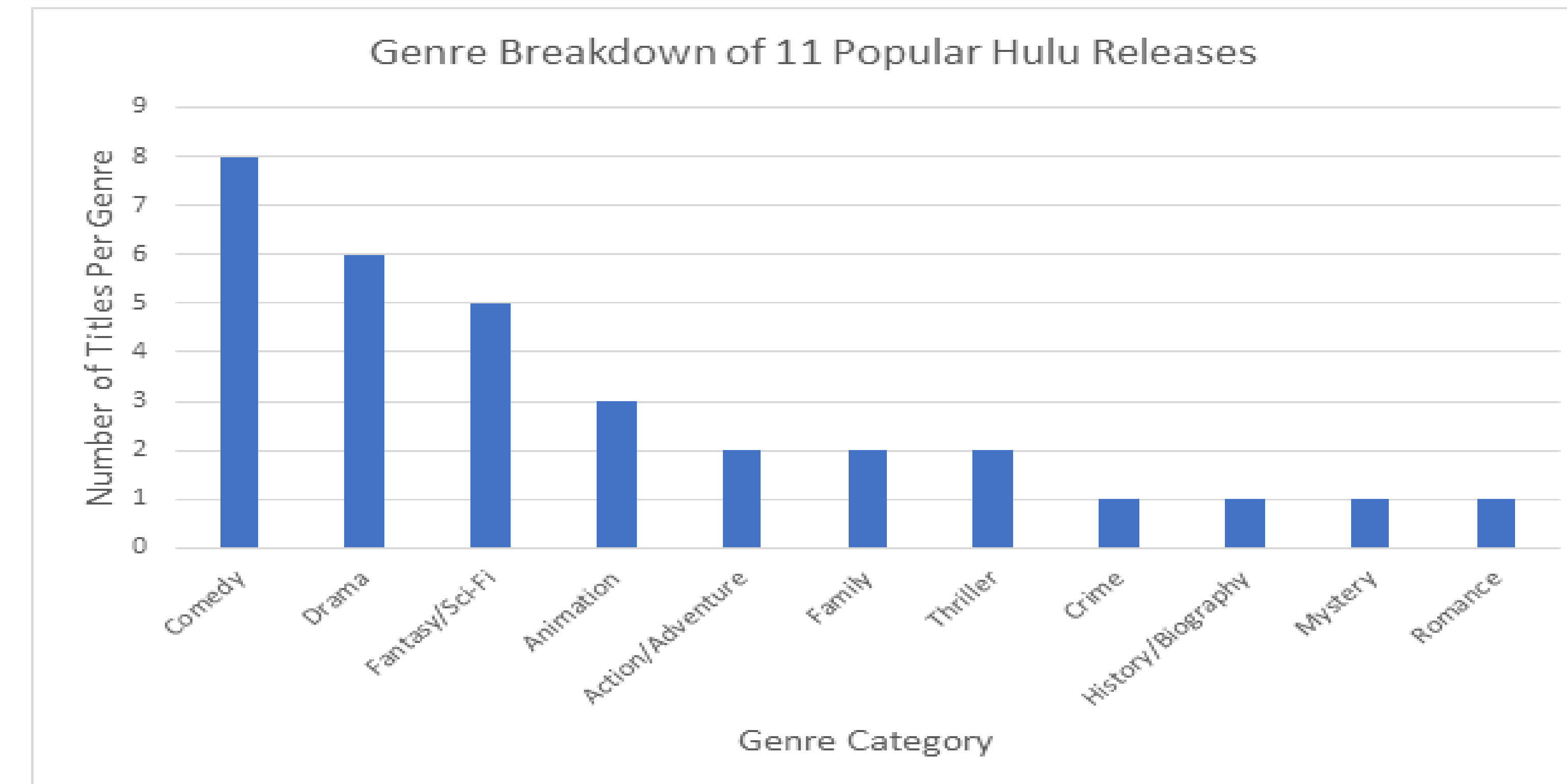


Figure 2. Genre Breakdown of Popular Hulu Releases. Out of 11 of Hulu's self-reported most watched titles available on the platform in 2020, the titles fell under 11 genre categories. The most prevalent of these was Comedy, making up 25% of the most watched titles, followed by Drama (18%), Fantasy/Science Fiction (15%), and Animation (9%). This sample included both films and series.

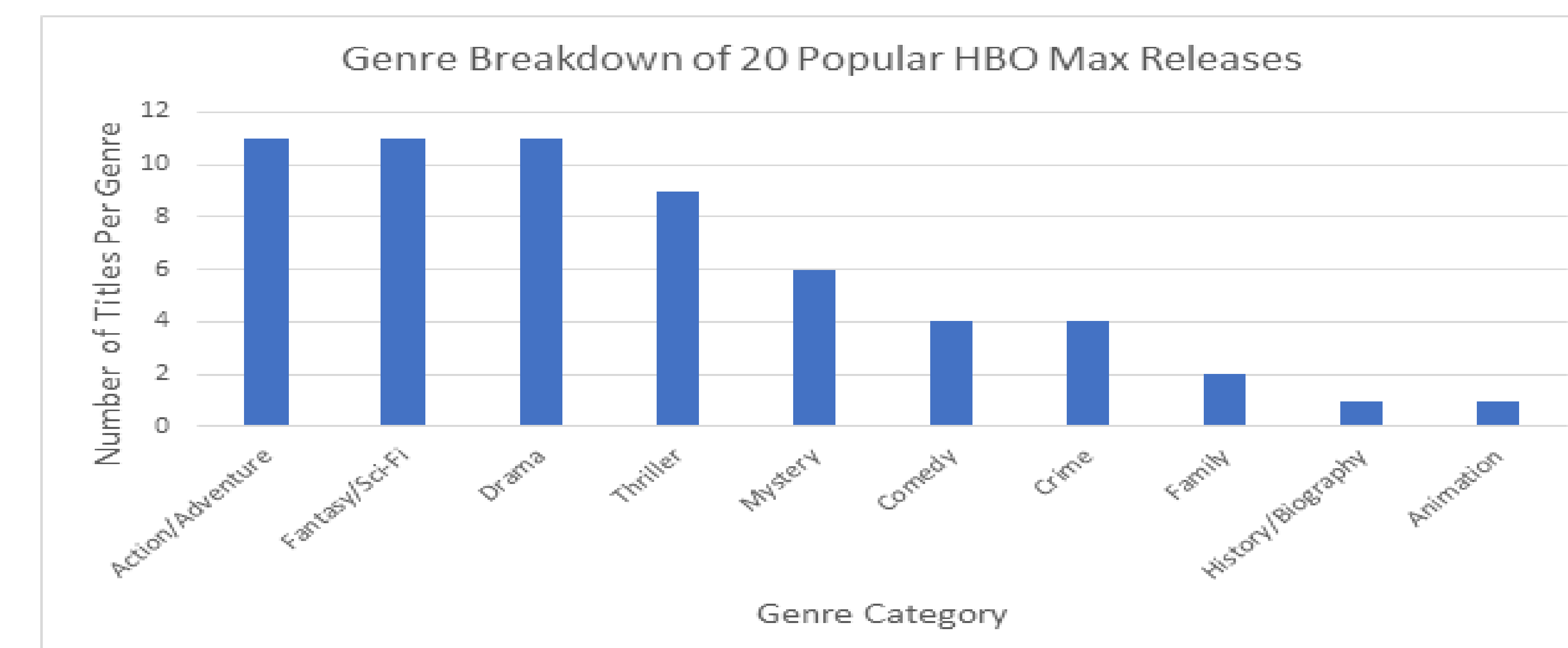


Figure 3. Genre Breakdown of Popular HBO Max Releases. Out of 20 films and series popular on HBO Max between May 2020 and May 2021, 11 genre categories were measured. The most prevalent genres, each making up 18% of the sample, were Action/Adventure, Fantasy/Sci-Fi, and Drama. Thriller came in at 15%, followed by Mystery (10%), Comedy (6%) and Crime (6%).

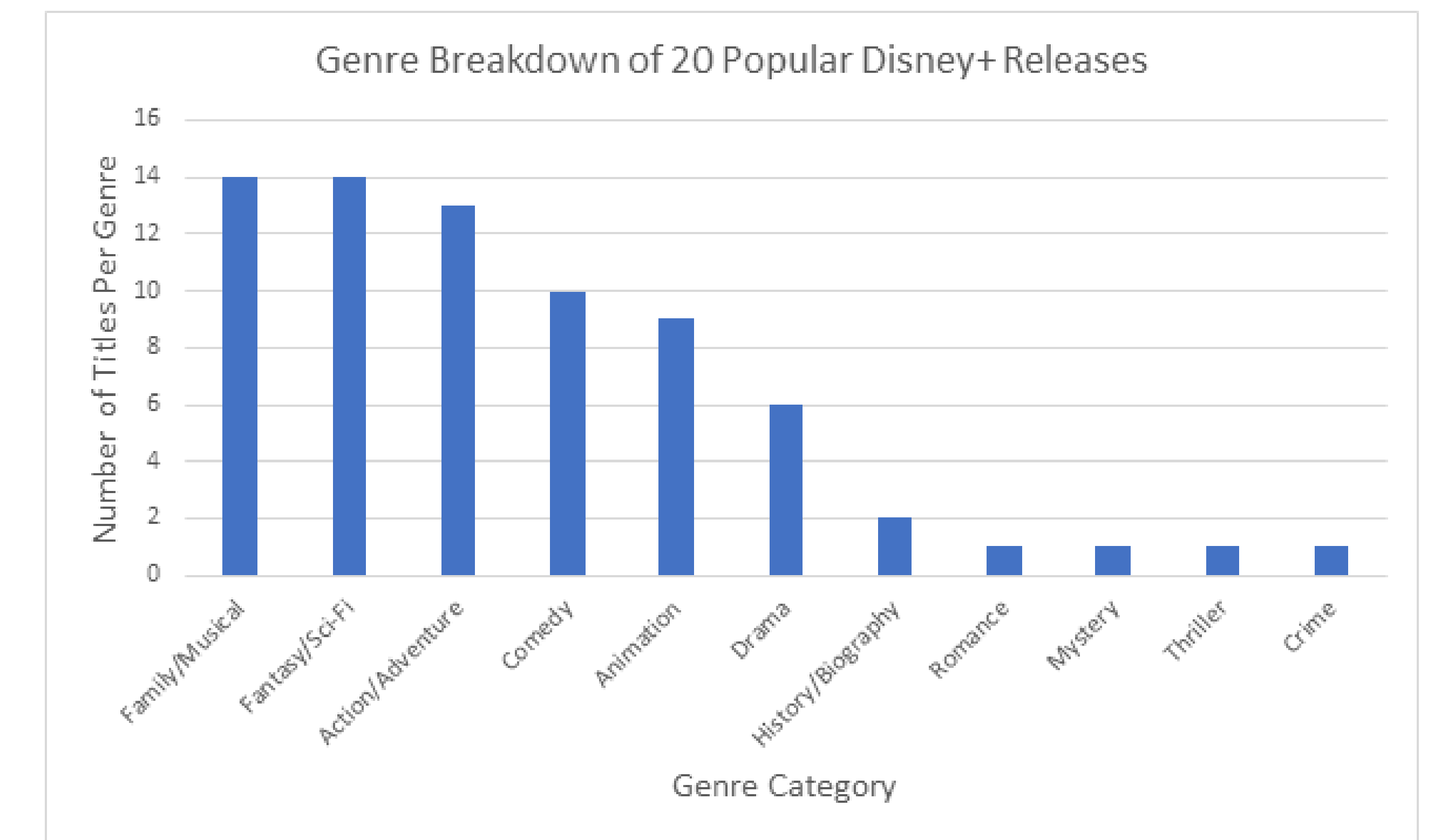


Figure 3. Genre Breakdown of Popular Disney+ Releases. Of 20 popular titles available on Disney Plus, 11 genre categories were determined. The two most prevalent categories, making up 19% of the titles sampled, were Family/Musical and Fantasy/Science Fiction. The next highest was Action/Adventure at 18% of the sample, followed by Comedy at 13% and Animation at 12%.

Summary

- Streaming services provided audiences with diverse libraries of quality content during the pandemic.
- Audiences engaged in narrative absorption and transportation in order to escape the anxieties of conditions during the pandemic.
- Many of the most popular series and movies streamed during the pandemic were either older properties or based on pre-existing IP, both of which have the capacity to serve as nostalgic tools to remember better times.

Conclusion

- *The entertainment industry's response to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic proved that streaming technology had been so thoroughly integrated into the entertainment market pre-pandemic that audiences were quick to rely on streaming during a time of crisis.*

Acknowledgements

- Thanks to Dr. Evan Lieberman and the CSU School of Film and Media Arts
- Thanks to Dr. Reyes-Rodriguez and the CSU McNair Scholars Program
- Thanks to the CSU Michael Schwartz Library

Funding: McNair Scholars Program