Carlos Aude and Bennett Bookstein

caa2185, bb2924

Project 3 - Peer Review

For our peer review, we will be looking at Vivian Liu's and Kate Marsh's project, which looks at IMDb and NYT movie review data to see if the shift in movie viewing location (at home on laptops vs. on the big screen in theaters) due to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on movie reviewer sentiment. The NYT data came from an API and the IMDb data came from downloadable TSV files.

Right away, a major positive to their project is their subject matter and question. It is very relevant as the movie and theater industries are going through a rapid and dramatic change. Via data mining techniques, such as Lasso regression, they were able to recover several notable patterns. Among these, we thought that their finding that horror movies became popular among critics during the pandemic (which could be potentially explained by corroborating evidence from the UChicago paper) was the most interesting. With more and more major movie releases going directly to streaming services, such as DC superhero blockbusters going to HBO Max on the same day as the theater release date, their paper's significance stretches far into the future after the pandemic concludes.

One critique is that the conclusions drawn might not take into account the whole picture. Just because the NYT movie review section or IMDb gave higher or similar ratings to a certain genre pre- and post-pandemic does not necessarily indicate a shift or no shift in viewer preferences as a direct result of pandemic conditions. In other words, shifts in top genre reviews illustrated in their results table may be a result of poorer quality movies being

released in a certain genre. Westerns for NYT was the top rated genre pre-pandemic but did not show up as a top four genre post-pandemic. This does not necessarily mean that the viewing experience and viewer sentiment shifted because they do not like watching westerns at home. Maybe the western genre simply released terribly produced movies instead. This same argument can be applied to genres that stayed on top of the lists of each reviewer. This shift can also be attributed to natural variances over time. It would have been useful to see how consistent the top categories were year-to-year in the past, and not just immediately pre and post pandemic.

A question regarding their data is that they might have wanted to consider choosing another data set over the NYT movies reviews. The NYT, while highly reputable, is considered rather elitist. Such an attitude might have an implicit impact on their reviews as they are reviewing movies for a certain audience. Using a data set from Rotten Tomatoes that incorporates public sentiment, for example, might be a solution to this possible problem and would lead to more generalizable results.