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AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...

The shrinking audience

The decline of the soon-to-be centenary Academy Awards ceremony has been building up really fast in the past years: from 43.7 million viewers in 2014; to 32.9 million in 2017; to 15.36 million in 2022, according to Statista.

We can speculate on important factors that led to such a steep and probably irreversible decline, such as:

- The YouTube boom, making generation Z completely oblivious to the awards ceremony.
- Netflix's and other streamers' growth, giving more power to viewers and less to the academy members on what, how and when to watch.
- The decline of movie theaters, accentuated by the pandemic.
- The increase of social media consumption, stealing viewing time from live TV (a current average of five hours online/day among teens).
- The long-lasting underrepresentation of everything, from nominees to voters, starting by the presenters.

Reality TV Awards

On the other hand, the traditional ceremony has been less rehearsed and shorter. Somehow looking almost improvised if you will, resembling more a reality TV Show than a stoic awards ceremony.

Last year's Oscars broadcasted a sonorous slap from Will Smith that echoed even in the households who were not tuned in. But even before that, in 2017, a wrong winner announcement made a dent in the reliability of the ceremony (which, let's be honest, happens to any live TV or event, no matter how well rehearsed). Back in 2015, #OscarsSoWhite made the Academy self-conscious of its own lack of diversity, forcing a dialogue with the spectators.

We could also ponder whether it is the dying genre (live ceremony awards) or the film industry itself that has been driving numbers down?

One interesting theory is that the traditional all-American cookie-cutter movie is no longer being produced. Therefore, it cannot be awarded. The New York Times has an interesting view on it.



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Is Time of The Essence?

Cookie-cutter or not, if we look at the ten nominees for 2023 best film, it looks like the traditional up-to-two-hour Oscar contender movie is rare (except for 'Women Talking' and 'The Banshees of Inisherin', all other contestants are between 2h11 and 3h12 of running time).

Is the length of the films increasing because of the concept of binge-watching (audiences are getting used to spending more time in front of the TV)? Or is it because directors and producers are no longer bound to a specific model called 'Oscar bait', and therefore have more creative freedom? (check out ignored Oscar bait movies this year in [The Guardian](#)).

The fact is that the last time a feature film longer than 2h20 won Best Picture was back in 2006 ('The Departed'). On this year's 95th Academy Awards, seven out of the ten films running in this category are longer than this. To sum it up, you will need more than 36 hours to watch all 2023 Best Picture nominees.

It's A Wrap

Also, the ceremony itself has been drastically reduced from its 2002 edition, when it ran for 4h16 minutes. This year, it is supposed to be around one hour shorter. But here is a detail few people know: the 1929 first Academy Awards only lasted for 15 minutes! Regardless of its length, or its films running time (and all the other variables), it seems that the Oscars profile status moved from "happily married" to "it's complicated" regarding its audience.

Let's hope for a fun, drama-free, entertaining edition on Sunday!

Laura

P.S.: If you are an Oscars aficionado, check out the [official link](#).

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