How the coronavirus outbreak is roiling the film and entertainment industries

Most recently, Disney delayed films including *Black Widow*, Regal and AMC shut down movie theaters across the country, and the 2020 Eurovision Song Contest was canceled.

By Alissa Wilkinson | @alissamarie | alissa@vox.com | Updated Mar 19, 2020, 11:40am EDT

*Black Widow* has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. | Marvel Studios

The *Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic*, which was first identified in China in December, has had sweeping effects in the public health, business, and *travel sectors*, among others. And while the repercussions for the entertainment industry may seem to pale in comparison to the clear threat the virus poses to human life, the ripple effects do have implications for the people around the world who make a living producing and distributing movies, music, and more.

The immense and lucrative Chinese film industry *was hit almost immediately* as movie theaters across the country were closed and major releases were delayed. *Hollywood soon began to feel the effects*, too, and as time passes, the impact of the coronavirus on the global film and entertainment industries will certainly grow.
Consequences of the pandemic on these industries could range from lowered attendance at film festivals and disruptions in film distribution to delayed or canceled movie releases and concert dates to curtailed on-location film shoots. Financial ramifications will likely be felt by studios, filmmakers, theater owners, and more for months or even years.

RELATED

11 questions about the Covid-19 coronavirus outbreak, answered

Here are the biggest and most significant developments in the entertainment industry in response to the pandemic. Most recently, the Eurovision Song Contest was canceled and cultural institutions including the Metropolitan Opera and the Metropolitan Museum of Art began laying off their employees. Meanwhile, as movie theaters began shutting down across the US (including major chains Regal and AMC), Disney announced that it would delay many of its tentpole films for the year, including *Black Widow*.

**Major entertainment festival cancellations and postponements**

**K-pop concerts canceled, including BTS shows:** On February 28, the hugely popular K-pop group **BTS canceled a series of planned concerts** in Seoul. The shows were scheduled for April 11 and 12 and April 18 and 19 at Seoul’s Olympic Stadium. The group’s management agency said the decision was made due to the impossibility of predicting the scale of the outbreak in South Korea come April and cited the health and safety of the musicians themselves, workers, and concertgoers. Two hundred thousand fans were expected to attend.

Days earlier, BTS had asked fans to **avoid a series of TV appearances** scheduled to promote their newest album, *Map Of The Soul: 7*, which had originally been planned to include studio audiences. The group also appealed to fans via a streamed press conference. “Health is always on our minds these days, and our messages of facing your inner self and loving yourself are ultimately only possible when you’re healthy, especially since it is very risky outside these days,” one of the singers, Jimin, said. “I hope you take care of yourself.”

The entire Korean entertainment sector has been affected by the outbreak, and **K-pop has been hit particularly hard**, with groups including GOT7, Winner, Sechs Kies, (G) I-DLE, and others canceling scheduled tour dates. Variety **reported** that box office revenue in South Korea was down 30 to 40 percent in January 2020 compared to previous years.
**SXSW canceled:** On March 6, the city of Austin, Texas, declared a state of disaster, requiring the cancellation of public gatherings and events for the near future. The most notable of those is the cancellation of South by Southwest, the annual music, film, TV, and technology festival that serves as a significant financial powerhouse for the city.

The announcement came after a week full of major companies — including Netflix, Apple, Amazon, WarnerMedia, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Mashable, Intel, and more — dropping out of the well-attended event, canceling panels, premieres, and other appearances. Days later, SXSW organizers announced that they had laid off one-third of the festival's employees in what they called “a necessary, but heartbreaking, step.”

**Emerald City Comic Con delayed:** The organizing body behind Emerald City Comic Con, the largest convention of its kind in Seattle, Washington, announced on March 6 that it will postpone the event until sometime this summer. The event was scheduled to run from March 12 to 16.

“We did everything that we could to run the event as planned, but ultimately, we are following the guidance of the local public health officials indicating that conventions should now be postponed,” convention organizers Reedpop said in a statement published on the Emerald City Comic Con website.

**Cannes Film Festival remains in question:** The 2020 edition of the Cannes Film Festival, arguably the most prestigious film festival in the world, is still in question following the French government’s ban on gatherings of more than 1,000 people through at least the end of May. (The festival is slated to take place May 12 to 23 and draws thousands of industries and press from around the globe each year.) The festival issued a statement on February 28 after the first case of coronavirus in nearby Nice, France, was confirmed by the city’s mayor, saying that organizers were monitoring the situation but planned for the festival to go forward. (Cannes is a seaside resort town located on the French Riviera, about 30 km from Nice.)

Variety reported on March 10 that the festival’s organizers had previously elected not to carry a buy-back option on its insurance, meaning that if the event is canceled, the festival will not be able to rely on an insurance claim to recoup its costs. Meanwhile, on March 10, the UK sales outfit GFM became the first film industry company to confirm that it would not be traveling to Cannes in May.

**Coachella delayed:** Goldenvoice, the organizers of Coachella, one of the largest annual music festivals in the US, announced on March 10 that the festival would be
postponed due to concerns about Covid-19. Another Goldenvoice festival, the country music-oriented Stagecoach, has also been postponed.

The Indio, California-based event was originally set to run for two weekends, April 10-12 and April 17-19, with the same talent lineups performing both weekends. It will now run from October 9-11 and October 16-18. Stagecoach 2020 has been pushed back from April to October 23-25.

**Electronics Entertainment Expo (E3) canceled:** The 2020 **Electronic Entertainment Expo** (E3) — the single biggest trade show in the video game industry — has been canceled. The Entertainment Software Association, which organizes the event, announced that it would not go forward with the annual event due to coronavirus fears in California, where E3 takes place. The event was scheduled for June 9 to 11.

The organization said it will contact exhibitors and attendees about receiving full refunds for passes, and that it is considering ways to “coordinate an online experience” in lieu of the in-person event. It also maintains that E3 will return next year as planned.

**The NBA suspended basketball games indefinitely:** A player on the Utah Jazz tested positive for coronavirus on March 11, leading NBA officials to call off that night’s Jazz game just before tip-off. As a further precautionary measure, the league issued a statement that it would suspend the basketball season “until further notice.”

Prior to putting an early pause on the rest of the season, the NBA made other efforts to protect players and fans. The league barred media from locker rooms, and publicly considered having teams play to empty arenas, before ultimately stopping play altogether.

**Major film release dates postponed or canceled**

**NBCUniversal to release major films digitally:** In an unprecedented move, NBCUniversal announced on March 16 that it would make some movies available digitally the same day they are released in movie theaters that remain open, including *Trolls World Tour*, which is set to hit theaters on April 10. Movies currently in theatrical release will also be available on-demand, including *The Hunt*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Emma*. According to the Hollywood Reporter, those films may become available on-demand as early as Friday, March 20. Movies will be available for a 48-hour rental period for $19.99 in the US and an equivalent price abroad.

**Disney postpones major releases:** On March 12, Disney confirmed that three of its biggest releases of the year — *Mulan* (scheduled for March 27), *The New Mutants*
(scheduled for April 3), and Antlers (scheduled for April 17) — would be postponed out of an abundance of caution. Disney did not set a new release date. The Chinese and European premieres of Mulan had previously been delayed as well.

On March 17, Disney announced the postponement of three more films: Black Widow (originally set for May 1), The Personal History of David Copperfield (May 8), and The Woman in the Window (May 15). The delays followed movie theater shutdowns in multiple states as well as country-wide shutdowns of Regal and AMC theaters.

RELATED

Marvel delays the upcoming Black Widow solo film

No Time to Die: On February 16, MGM announced that it would cancel the Chinese premiere and publicity tour planned for the new James Bond movie, No Time To Die, which was scheduled for April. On March 4, the studio announced that it had delayed the film’s release until late November, making the film the first major tentpole release to be delayed worldwide.

Sonic the Hedgehog: On February 24, Paramount Pictures announced that it would delay the release of Sonic the Hedgehog in China, with a new release date to be determined.

Peter Rabbit 2: On March 10, Sony announced that it would push the global release of Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway from late March/early April to August.

A Quiet Place Part II: On March 12, A Quiet Place Part II director John Krasinski announced via Twitter that the movie’s planned March 19 release date would be delayed. “One of the things I’m most proud of is that people have said our movie is one you have to see all together. Well due to the ever-changing circumstances of what’s going on in the world around us, now is clearly not the right time to do that,” he wrote. “As insanely excited as we are for all of you to see this movie ... I’m gonna wait to release the film till we CAN see it all together! So here’s to our group movie date! See you soon!”

Fast and Furious 9: On March 12, Universal Pictures announced that it would delay the release date of the ninth installment in the Fast and Furious franchise by 11 months, from May 22 to April 2, 2021.

Chinese movies scrapped theatrical release and premiere online: The biggest films of China’s year are usually scheduled to release during the Lunar New Year holiday, near
the end of January, but mounting fears of the coronavirus and public reticence to be in crowded spaces caused distributors to voluntarily cancel or postpone several film releases. Huanxi, distributor of the Chinese blockbuster Lost in Russia, announced on January 22 that the film would premiere online for free. Promotional materials encouraged audiences to “stay safely at home and watch Lost in Russia with your mom.” On January 31, Enter the Fat Dragon became the second major Chinese film to premiere online, as theaters are closed by order of the government.

Film and TV productions halted, altered, or shut down

Eurovision canceled: On March 18, the organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest announced via Twitter that the 2020 edition of the event was canceled. The event had been planned for May.

TV shows suspend production: Hundreds of shows have delayed or suspended production, including Apple’s The Morning Show and Little America; Netflix shows including Russian Doll; the CW’s Riverdale; NBC shows including the Chicago dramas and The Kelly Clarkson Show; CBS shows including the NCIS dramas, The Amazing Race, and Survivor; and many more.

Saturday Night Live also announced on March 16 that it would suspend its next three shows, the first of which was scheduled for March 28, with John Krasinski hosting. (Krasinski’s film A Quiet Place Part II, originally scheduled for release on March 19, was also delayed.)

Late-night shows suspend production or tape without a studio audience: Originally, on March 11, producers of shows including NBC’s The Tonight Show (hosted by Jimmy Fallon) and Late Night With Seth Meyers, CBS’s Late Show With Stephen Colbert, TBS’s Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, and Comedy Central’s Daily Show (hosted by Trevor Noah) all announced they would begin taping without a live studio audience on March 16.

A day later, NBC announced that The Tonight Show and Late Night would suspend production beginning the week of March 16; Stephen Colbert also announced that the Late Show would suspend production. All three shows were already scheduled to go into hiatus on March 23. On March 13, Jimmy Kimmel Live also suspended production.

Disney suspends live-action production: On March 13, Disney announced that production on its live-action movies would suspend production. Affected films include The Little Mermaid, a Home Alone reboot, and Peter Pan. Earlier in the day, production on Marvel’s Shang-Chi and the Legend of Ten Rings had been suspended.
due to director Destin Daniel Cretton’s decision to self-isolate upon advice of a doctor. (Marvel is owned by Disney.)

**Jia Zhangke project delayed:** At the Berlin Film Festival in February, famed Chinese director Jia Zhangke (*Ash Is Purest White, A Touch of Sin*) told *Indiewire* that production on his new film, which was slated to begin in April, was delayed indefinitely. Jia spoke with Indiewire at the Berlin Film Festival, where his documentary *Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue* premiered. But he said that before he left, he’d feared his flight to Berlin would be canceled, and that some of his collaborators chose not to make the trip. Regarding his next film, he said:

> For some film companies and studios involved in pre-production, a lot of costs are going down the drain, and those that already started production have to be somehow cut short or suspended. Some of them are already in the process of distributing films and they’ve paid for a lot of promotion and PR costs. The economy is now taking a huge hit, and I think the investment side will be hugely impacted as well.

**Mission: Impossible production paused:** On February 26, Paramount Pictures announced that it had halted a planned three-week shoot in Venice for the seventh installment in the *Mission: Impossible* franchise. “Out of an abundance of caution for the safety and well-being of our cast and crew, and efforts of the local Venetian government to halt public gatherings in response to the threat of coronavirus, we are altering the production plan for our three-week shoot in Venice, the scheduled first leg of an extensive production for *Mission: Impossible 7,*" a Paramount spokesperson told the *Hollywood Reporter*. “During this hiatus we want to be mindful of the concerns of the crew and are allowing them to return home until production starts. We will continue to monitor this situation, and work alongside health and government officials as it evolves.”

**Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune tape without a studio audience:** Though Sony declined to comment, sources told the *Hollywood Reporter* on March 9 that scheduled tapings of the shows would go forward without a live studio audience. The measure was taken partly as a precaution for the health of *Jeopardy* host Alex Trebek, who has stage 4 pancreatic cancer.

**Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson announce they’ve contracted the virus:** One of Hollywood’s biggest stars, Tom Hanks, announced that he and his wife Rita Wilson had contracted the coronavirus while shooting Baz Luhrmann’s untitled Elvis Presley film in Australia:
In a message posted publicly on March 11, Hanks was his typical upbeat self:

Well, now. What to do next? The Medical Officials have protocols that must be followed. We Hanks’ will be tested, observed, and isolated for as long as public health and safety requires. Not much more to it than a one-day-at-a-time approach, no?

We’ll keep the world posted and updated.

Take care of yourselves!

Entertainment venues and attractions shut down

All Disney parks shut down: On January 25, Disney shut down its Shanghai Disneyland park over fears of the coronavirus. The park is a major revenue generator, with 11.8 million guests in 2018, 50 percent from outside the Shanghai region, and an estimated $1 billion in annual revenue and $50 million in operating profit. A day after Shanghai Disneyland’s closure, Hong Kong Disneyland shut down. Both Disney parks
in Japan closed on February 29 and Disney announced on March 11 that they will remain closed through at least the end of April.

Late in the day on March 12, Disneyland in California announced it would close the following day; by that evening, the company announced that all of its parks would close, including those in Florida and Disneyland Paris (where three staff had previously tested positive for coronavirus).

RELATED
Disneyland is closing amid Covid-19 fears

North American movie theaters shut down or begin “social distancing” measures:
On March 13, a number of theaters and theater chains, including AMC Theatres, and the Canadian chain Cineplex, announced that they would be reducing the number of tickets sold to screenings by as much as 50 percent in order to enable patrons to sit further apart as part of “social distancing” measures.

RELATED
AMC will practice "social distance" by capping movie theater attendance at 50 percent

On March 15, theaters in New York and Los Angeles were shut down by order of their respective mayors. On March 16, Regal announced it would shut down all of its 543 US theaters indefinitely; later in the day, AMC followed suit.

New York City cultural sites closed: On March 12, major cultural sites in New York City began to close, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Other institutions canceled programming for the month of March, such as the New York Public Library and Carnegie Hall.

Within days, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced that it anticipated staying closed through July and laying off much of its staff. On March 19, the Metropolitan Opera laid off all of its union employees, including musicians and chorus.

Broadway shows closed: On March 12, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that beginning at 5:00 pm, Broadway would be closed, part of a ban on gatherings of more than 500 people.

West End closes: On March 16, London’s West End shut down, following Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s speech urging Britons to avoid public spaces. The theaters, including the Royal Opera House, will stay closed indefinitely.
Italian cultural sites closed: In February, a number of major museums in Venice, Milan, Turin, and other northern Italian cities were closed as part of the government’s aggressive attempt to contain the virus, and annual Carnivale celebrations stopped early. By early March, with the country under complete lockdown, cultural sites across Italy were closed, including the Colosseum and Pompeii.

Chinese movie theaters shut down: Hoping to contain the coronavirus outbreak, on January 23 the Chinese government temporarily shut down movie theaters throughout the country until further notice. A total film production shutdown soon followed. Loss of revenue over the Lunar New Year holiday in late January, during which movie theaters typically see an uptick in ticket sales, amounted to a staggering $1 billion, according to analysts.

Chinese cultural attractions closed: Other cultural attractions and institutions in China that have been closed to the public include Tiananmen Square’s National Museum of China, the Forbidden City, and a section of the Great Wall of China located near Beijing.

We will continue to update this article as the story develops.

The Vox guide to Covid-19 coronavirus

Key things to know about Covid-19

How to prepare and protect yourself

What to know about traveling

Where coronavirus cases have been reported

Treating and fighting the virus

The economic impact

The causes of the likely looming recession are different, but the cure is the same

Could the coronavirus spark drug shortages in the US?

The coronavirus will cause a child care crisis in America
How coronavirus could force the work-from-home movement
Will coronavirus cause a global recession? We still don’t know.
The Fed is bringing interest rates to 2008 crisis levels to fight a coronavirus downturn
What we know about Congress’s potential $1 trillion coronavirus stimulus package

The race for presidential delegates is well underway. Track them here.