



# Pandemic Themed-Film as a Sub-genre of Disaster Film.

1<sup>st</sup> Rasmuna Shafiee 2<sup>nd</sup> Vimala Perumal 3<sup>rd</sup> Wong Chee Onn

1<sup>st</sup> Lecturer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Senior Lecturer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Professor

Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries

TAR University of Management and Technology, Penang Branch, Malaysia

**Abstract :** The pandemic themed- film has a look of the disaster genre which presents a looming threat that can be deadly. The film additionally portrays the use of a vaccine and frightening speculation about the dangerous virus that spread wildly in a short time which might claim a person or more lives. A deadly virus rises from the pollution that destroys the ecosystem and the contemporary system which these films speculate the possibility of events that might happen in the future. The pandemic- themed films contain aspects of political, economic, and societal effects in their narrative which are misaligned with disaster components in their film representations. The skewing can lead to labelling problem where the audience perceives a film genre differently in its direction and expectation. In this work, we used two approaches combined; semantic and syntactic, and social mediation. This research analysed the four pandemic-themed films and the elements that constitute these films. This study intends to propose an additional sub-set of a disaster film. The finding found that all four films share similar patterns in their narrative with other disaster films which suggests that the pandemic-themed film is a subgenre of a disaster film.

**Keywords:** Keywords: Pandemic Film, Disaster Film, Variety of Terror, and Sub-genre.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Films with virus themes are presented in various forms, either portraying a person who suffers a known sickness like AIDS or cancer, or an unknown sickness usually portrayed in zombie films. A pandemic-themed film, on the other hand, portrays our possible fates, frightening speculation about a dangerous virus that can jump and spread wildly in a short period of time which might claim human lives (Wortman, 2020). The film also portrays the emerging infectious disease as the interconnectedness between animals, the environment, and humans (Katz, 2020). A pandemic-themed film in comparison to other virus films is unique as it frames pollution and deforestation that are caused by human activities with a serious tone. A pandemic-themed film portrays different ways of disaster images from other disaster films. Disastrous images that are associated with disaster elements that dominate the pandemic-themed film give suspenseful and alarming feelings to the audience, especially the science communities who see the film as a warning for public healthcare in particular and the government in general for preparing for future pandemics. On the other hand, film critics and film institutions like IMDb and studios who see such films invoke thrilling elements that are associated with audience interest when choosing a film to watch. The different labels for the genre of this film between these groups have intrigued us to find out how the film should be labelled and what the main issues that become the ideology of the pandemic-themed film.

A film genre can be defined as “those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations” (Grant, 2003); 'a category which mediates between industry and audience' (Tolson 1996, 92), emotional pleasures (Knight, 1994), the mediating framework between text, makers, and interpretive (Fowler, 1989) a kind of text that derives its form from the structure of a (frequently repeated) social occasion, with its characteristic participants and their purposes' (Kress 1988) and a moral and social world (Tudor, 1974).

Meanwhile, a sub-genre is identified by narratives such as character, plot, and context (Bonnet, 2017) and has more specific variations on a larger genre tradition (Blakely, 2020) and contemporary films are hybrids of old and new genres (Todorov, 1990). Film scholars have defined a disaster genre that has vast topical as a combination of melodramatic and action (Beaver, 2009) narrative elements (Sanders, 2009) and Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic (Mitchell, 2001).

The primary goal of this study is to establish a genre for the pandemic-themed film. Two research questions were developed to find out what makes a genre recognisable and how film fans, film critics, and film reviewers label the pandemic-themed film.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Jonathan Culler, in his writing, clarifies that genre is formed by two properties. First, is the convention, which is fundamental to genre formation, and second, the genre is connected to the real world. This association between the genre and the real world gives expectations to the production and reception as well as conventions being assumed to be possessed by a particular genre. For example, when an audience consumes certain texts, they presume to be of a particular genre, and they expect the text should follow the conventions of the genre that is known for. The film industry acts upon this assumption to make a film have a successful reception by employing more than just classification exercises but delving into film commercial features.

Major studios are aware of activities the public taste in disaster films but the virus is another disaster that most audiences especially American society are not familiar with. The American healthcare system is among the greatest in the world, therefore unknown, unrecognized, and untreated viruses seem foreign to them. When major studios produce heavy topics like a pandemic disease is such a brave move to break new ground for the Hollywood tradition of disaster that is known for the enormous use of CGI to exhibit mass destruction. On the contrary, the disaster in the Pandemic-themed film portrays the process of disease outbreak in a conventionally uncomplicated manner populates them with heroes and villains (the viruses), and ends with a solution to the pandemic issue. The film with the pandemic-themed might give similar nerve-wrecking emotion but the narrative presented has more excruciating pacing which does not employ the fastest cut. Moreover, the pandemic film shows the process from the virus's origin and how the virus levels up to disease, infects people and spreads violently to become a pandemic.

The transmissible disease or communicable disease is an addition to real-world issues and by allying a film, perhaps the audience will be interested to experience this big issue in a different genre. As Altman (1999:14) points out, at certain times, the audience recognises the genre because of semantics and at other times because of syntactic or both approaches are inter-connected (Film/Genre 89). Virus, disease, and a pandemic are contemporary world issues. Film critic, Brian Lowry from CNN viewed films with pandemic themes such as *Contagion* and others which predicted future outbreaks like the coronavirus. In the National Geographic series produced in 2020, the program shows a fact-based approach to the Ebola outbreak in (1989), a virus that originated in Africa that has the potential to spread to sub-urban Washington through imported monkeys. It was reported that the contagious virus has killed thousands of people in Africa, and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sent an army of scientists to the infected zone. Preventive measures like a lockdown on social and economic activities help to slow down the virus from spreading. Similar views were shared by a scientist like Alice Huang, a virologist at Caltech; Dr. Peter Katona, an infectious disease expert at UCLA who did a two-year study in the CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service; and Dr. Arthur Kellermann, an emergency medicine physician, and director of Rand Health in Santa Monica agree with the possibility of a pandemic and the collapsing of the system in the future after watching the dramatisation of a pandemic in *Contagion* (Los Angeles, 2011). The issue of climate change and other man-made issues are core features of the disaster genre. Although the disease is one of the natural disasters, the topic of disease narrative was not widely researched within the context of disaster except for previous research on the purpose and appeal of apocalyptic disease narratives (Schut, 2013). The virus narrative is gaining in popularity after millennia which suggests that filmmakers are interested in such films. Despite its popularity, the film with the pandemic theme is not widely researched. Previous articles on archetypes in pandemic-themed film manifest the characters of doctor and scientist as heroic medicine figures who find a cure and save lives such as the character of Dr Martin Arrowsmith in *Arrowsmith* (Lowy, 2010) and Dr Read in *Panic in the Street* (Stern and Markel, 2003). The archetype presents the living reality of people. It is important to present real archetypes and real locations that can be used for sharing human experience, as people use movie plot analogies and metaphors in their life.

Meanwhile, Caldwell (2010) stated that the setting in films usually provides an authentic or realistic look. He explains that the film that is shot at the actual place where the action occurs usually takes place outdoors. The word 'infected' according to Katie L. Burke (2013) in Wayne and Bolker, referred to a pathogen that was brought into contact with a substance that causes illness. She explained that SARS and Ebola were brought by bats that can infect humans. The area where pathogens become outbreaks is called

the infected area. This area occurs in all pandemic films. This study will investigate archetypes, locations, and other elements to define a genre or a sub-genre for Pandemic-themed films.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we refer to Altman's theoretical framework, for genre analysis. His theory of genre formation through semantic and syntactic approaches has gained stability and since then, has been adopted by many researchers. Among them are Greenfield, (2010) law films, Brown, (2013) family film, Saleh, (2014) structures for concept segmentation and labelling, and Swanson, (2019) rhetorical genrefication in cinema. Altman's theory also has been recognised by producers, film institutions, fans, film critics, and film scholars (Neale, 2000; Geraghty and Janconvich, 2009) and extended to make it more inclusive. In the case of the pandemic-themed film, the trouble is about labelling as it presents a clear contradiction between a popular and scholarly interpretation of the genre for this film. This research argues that the pandemic-themed film can be seen as a sub-genre of a disaster because of the familiarity in semantic elements such as common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like and "certain constitutive relationship between undesigned and variables placeholders" the ritual, cultural and ideological meaning that make up the genre's fundamental syntax" (Semantic Approach, 31-32).

In the formulaic process of a genre or sub-genre, collective agreement among fans, authors, film industry institutions, and film critics is important as they are the genre practitioners because of their role in making and remaking the genre (Cawelti, 1976; Altman, 1999 and Janconvich, 2000) and the production of a genre also depends on the events at that time. The social mediation theory that combines views from these groups will be linked to Semantic and Syntactic approaches as the theory is also based on genre rules. Altman's semantic and syntactic genre theory and Mark Joconvich's theory of genre were used to supplementing and synthesise a sub-genre. Mark's theory was used in social mediations such as fan magazines, film reviewers, or social media to express their opinion or taste in the film genre.

In choosing films with pandemic themes, a few sources were referred to. A literature review of disasters was studied to see the similarities and differences between them in order to identify how different the genre is from the pandemic-themed films that this study intends to establish. Four films were selected for this research. The samples were selected on the basis of information about these films, taken from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Volume Film and TV site. This research used textual analysis to identify the pattern of narrative conventions by analysing, the film text of these films (*Contagion*, *The Craziest*, *Carriers*, and *The Happening*)

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study applies semantic domains in *Contagion*, *The Craziest*, *Carriers* and *The Happening*. analysis to answer question one, on how can a genre be recognisable. The semantic terms for the pandemic-themed films are based on key features such as the public healthcare system, archetypal behaviour during a pandemic, location of the pandemic, pollution and deforestation that initiates the birth of the pandemic and the government being idle in solving virus issues. First, Altman's semantic domain is used to analyse characters' archetypes, research the choice of setting or location, and then follow by the syntactic domain which not only contributes to the building blocks of the narrative but also sets the look of the pandemic-themed film.

### 3.1 Analysis of Archetypes in Pandemic- themed film.

Archetypes in pandemic theme films are similar to the disaster genre, which surrounds the social behaviours of survivors and their interaction with rules. The opening credits in these films establish ordinary people as characters. These characters serve as 'seekers' to find the cause of a pandemic, as 'escapees' trying to escape from the pandemic zone or as 'sufferers' disease victims that cause the pandemic. In *Contagion* (2011), Beth (Gwyneth Paltrow) is the host of the lethal disease (MEV-1). She was seen coughing at the airport waiting for her flight home. She looks sick in the scene and the camera cuts to show she reaches home and is welcomed home by her husband Mitch (Matt Damon) and son (Rodolfo Barrieos). Beth represents the character of a sufferer because the scene in her kitchen showed she had a seizure and later the foam came out from her mouth, which indicates that the pandemic started from her and spread globally. Here, the editor uses the Mozart technique to show hundreds of people were infected with the virus from all over the world. In the operation theater (OT) scene, two medical morticians who are doing an autopsy on Beth were

bewildered when they opened her skull and found something strange in her brain. One of them said ‘Should I take a sample?’ which suggested that the disease was bizarre and that both of the medical morticians had never seen the like before. Mitch, Beth’s husband is seen as a very loving father and husband because he pesters the doctor about what actually happened to Beth and he was also seen caring about his children too. Mitch is a character of the sufferer type too as he lost his wife and son to the virulent disease. *Contagion* has many Seeker characters. Among the main cast is Dr. Cheever (Laurence Fishburne), the head of the CDC who is in charge of finding the disease’s origin and the vaccine to cure it. He was assisted by a bacteriologist, Dr. Haxhall (Jeniffer Ehle) who was portrayed as a dedicated scientist who worked endlessly to develop a vaccine. Similarly, Dr. Mears (Kate Winslet) was portrayed as a hardworking doctor who gives treatment to the victims but fifteen minutes before the film ends, she dies after becoming infected with the virus. Her theory of the virus was reliable because, in the meeting scene, it shows she explained to the health committee that the disease can be contaminated everywhere, such as the doorknobs and surfaces, and she also explained that it is important to inform the public about the importance to have social distancing because the disease can infect others in a very short time. Another medical hero is Dr. Leonora, a staff from World Health Organisation (WHO) who was investigating the trail of the virus. In the film, she was seen travelling from Europe to Hong Kong to search for the virus’s origin. Throughout the film, the audience is able to see the sufferers are helpless because the virus is strong and can’t be treated. Meanwhile, the seekers (bacteriologists) were intense in trying to find a cure for the virus as the cases reached more than 267,000 in eight days. Although the runaway scene is not paramount, in a state of emergency like a pandemic, audiences are able to see the characters during the pandemic. A few scenes show people panicking and trying to escape the pandemic zone. However, the military has blocked the road and imposed home isolation for those non-infected and quarantined those infected. Another scene shows the destruction of human civilisation where the film shows empty streets, buildings, and cities. A scene of a mass grave suggested that in a crucial situation, the dead were put in translucent plastic bags to avoid contagiously. In the film, the survivors are portrayed as having a strong immune system and they are the group of people who follow the rules that were imposed during the pandemic situation.

In *The Craziest* (2009), the opening credit shows the profession of the Sheriff and his wife, Jody (Radha Mitchell) a community doctor. As the film progresses, a few scenes show the character of sufferers who behaved strangely, which leads (David Timothy Olyphant), the sheriff to investigate. He and his deputy, Russell (Joe Anderson) found a military plane that brought chemicals, crashed into the river, and contaminated the water supply for the townspeople. David and Russell are the characters of The Seeker because they are searching for the cause of the strange behaviour among the townspeople. Soon after, the military came to the town to quarantine the residents in the high school compound where they isolated the infected and shot anyone in sight. The rules have made the residents, especially those infected panic and turn violent. When the military checked each resident, David passed the test, while his wife did not which caused them to be separated. With the help of their assistants, David and Jody they managed to escape the town but were hunted down by the soldiers. They became an escapee and during their running, they met people who had been infected, and unfortunately, their assistants were infected too. The couple continued running until they reached a city where the background scene showed, the military had destroyed Ogden Marsh by using a nuclear weapon. A few scenes in the film indicate that in a crucial situation like a pandemic, the military takes charge to prevent the disease from spreading. In addition, imposing strict rules was seen in the film where quarantine and isolation are the best methods to prevent the disease from spreading. The archetypes in this film are seen as an escapee because, after thirty minutes into the film, David and his wife are shown running from the pandemic zone.

Elliot (Mark Walberg) is a science teacher in *The Happening* (2008) in which the beginning of the film shows he is teaching science in his class. He has a wife Alma (Zooey Deschanel) who is portrayed as a devoted wife. The archetype in *The Happening* was varied and each of them was portrayed either as a sufferer or an escapee. The film begins to show the virus that started in New York City and later spread throughout the country. This has forced the government to implement a quarantine and isolation policy to stop the virus from spreading. The rules have made the citizens panic and flee the city in the hope that the place they are heading is a free zone. Elliot, Alma, his friend Julian (John Leguizamo), and his daughter were among the New Yorkers who escaped the city. Elliot was portrayed as an archetype that was both a Seeker that was trying to find the cause of the pandemic and the Escapee because throughout the film he and his family are running to the county they believe is a safer place from the pandemic zone. In the nursery scene, Elliot and a nurseryman whom he met at the prairie after leaving New York had a conversation about the plants that



can communicate and would be releasing toxins that infect a person's neurons causing them to self-killing. The film encapsulates the issue of the environment in a dramatic way by highlighting the Seeker archetype for Elliot who finally realised that plants contain a virus that can kill people. Similar to the other pandemic films, a few scenes showed how people react to the pandemic. The series of scenes showed mostly that they escape to a less populated area or isolate themselves in their houses. The scene also shows no activity reported at this time. These scenes suggested that at the peak of the pandemic, the survivors were usually following the rules by locking themselves in their homes and watching the latest news about the pandemic.

*Carriers*(2010) opening scene shows four young adults driving in a car toward a beach sanctuary. The film placed these characters in extraordinary circumstances and throughout the film, the scenes show that they suffer, face many challenges, and finally, survived the pandemic. These films have no protagonist or antagonist character which has made them operate under both the Escapee and the Seeker archetype because throughout the film's running time, they are searching for the beach that they thought was safe and most of the scenes show that they are in a car driving to find a safer beach.

Archetypes in pandemic-themed films are similar to the disaster genre, which surrounds the social behaviours of survivors and their interaction with rules. The opening credits in these films establish that the characters are ordinary people, which is similarly portrayed in other disaster films. These characters serve as 'seekers' to find the cause of a pandemic as 'escapees' for trying to escape from the pandemic zone, or as 'sufferers' disease victims that cause the pandemic. All four films shared similarities in archetypes of seekers and escapees. These films allow audiences to experience the terrors of situations and survival skills. The phenomenon of using stories from movies and applying them in daily life is a tradition. Bradshaw and Storm view that human beings have a tendency to perceive common meanings as the same (2013). This view was proven, during the recent pandemic, many film fans admitted that the pandemic film guided them in self-protection from the pandemic disease.

### 3.2 Setting analysis

Disaster films usually feature rescues, battles, escapes, and destruction with the aim of survival. Disaster films are designed for escapism from a close-in place (vessels, buildings, cities, or towns) that suffer from a catastrophe which can be a large, often sudden, disaster or ending (earthquake, tsunami, volcano, hurricane, explosion, disease, or any destruction that destroy properties and human lives).

In *Contagion* and *The Happening*, the scenes took place in different countries to display that the pandemic is not only appearing domestically but can spread to other countries or continents. Meanwhile, *The Crazies* and *Carriers* represented local settings, which is an element of the disaster genre. Although the locations used vary, all settings are likely focused on ground zero, the setting that shows the beginning of the outbreak.

In the pandemic-themed film, the outdoor setting was defined as ground zero where the place is contagious and life-threatening. Once a person was exposed to a pathogen it could possibly get infected and spread the virus to others. The outdoor settings of pandemic films can be anywhere outside buildings or houses such as streets, lawns, parks, woods, prairies, farms, and others.

Infected areas or zones in films often exhibit chaotic images. Insofar as the film intends to dramatise the horrifying threats posed by a lethal disease. Most scenes in pandemic films include infected areas as walled-in quarantine places. The settings usually exhibit horrific images of infected victims waiting for death. The victims' conditions vary depending on the image painted by the film directors. Some images are of victims looking frightful, and some just look plain sick. In this study, the infected area refers to the area of a circle to put infected victims that is already declared as the zone of infection.

Noticeably, hospital scenes exhibit people suffering from terminal illnesses and mainly focus on the main actors suffering. Portrayals of death are common in films with an illness theme. Most film scenes display professional interaction between patients and clinicians, however, this is not the case for the Pandemic film. In fact, most scenes in a hospital exhibited interrogation and interaction between victim and clinician. This could suggest that the mysterious illness needs to be investigated by the hospital team. Princeton University in its 'wordnetweb' defines patients as patients zero or victims in the population of an epidemiological investigation. In the middle of an outbreak with a raucous situation, hospitals were busy receiving an unexpected number of victims with strange viruses and ironically survivals were almost none.

These same types of settings are also used in pandemic-themed films except in *Contagion* and *The Happening* which have additional settings outside of America. The use of existing locations such as in cities or towns, as ground zero, is also designed to raise curiosity

and worries among the audience and the government, to let them think about the possibility of a future pandemic which usually takes place in a populated area and their preparedness to face such a challenge. As suggested by a John Hopkins expert in the article released on September 7, 2011, about the Hollywood movie *Contagion* in which a lethal airborne virus spreads quickly around the globe, the writer believes it is realistic and should serve as a reminder for the government to prepare for the serious national emergency posed by a deadly virus that spreads quickly. Gabor Kelen, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response, says the movie, “regardless of whatever dramatic license may have been taken with how a lethal virus might be spread or contained, spotlights the fact that hospitals, health care workers and public health agencies will be on the front lines of a major deadly disease outbreak. Thus, they should be well-trained and prepared to respond.

### 3.3. The syntactic domain in *Contagion*, *The Craziest*, *Carriers* and *The Happening*.

Films that endured a pandemic-themed usually portrayed the importance of showing the origin of viruses, where they come from, and where they spread. *Contagion* and *The Happening* used foreign countries as one of the locations to highlight the danger of viruses, the importance of cleanliness, and, how it is compulsory to observe standard operating procedures to avoid virus infection. The use of foreign locations such as Asia, Africa, and Paris suggests that a virus can travel to Europe and also it depicts that the pandemic is not only a global issue but it suggests the origin of most viruses are outside the United States, mainly Asia and Africa (Billings, 1997). The claim has a basis as the existing viruses including the latest COVID 19 are from Asia as well. Presenting both continents as the origin of a pandemic carries two meanings. First is that the modernity that has ravaged mother nature like forestry and uncontrolled development has destroyed the ecology and disturbed the animal habitat which causes the emergence of viruses. The second point is about the hygienic issue where in their unguarded moments, the standard of hygiene and cleanliness was not followed. For example, *Contagion*, shows the pandemic process in a flashback which symbolically shows uncleanness is the cause of the virus spreading. In the scene, it shows the chef, just wiping his bloody hand after chopping an infectious pork, and later, he handshakes Beth's hand. Beth later mingles with a few people from different nationalities in the casino after her work is finished, before returning home without realising she is infected with a virus. From a foreign land, the virus spreads through human mobility, and Beth as the host spreads the virus throughout the United States and worldwide as people who are in close contact with Beth are also infected with the disease and later infect others. This short scene explains that a small mistake like not washing hands can cause a disaster.

An interesting issue is raised here concerning the governments or health professionals who are not on the same page about whether to notify the media to avoid fear and panic in society. However, at the same time, they are concerned about the mortality and morbidity that the virus could do to public health if the public is not informed about the danger of the virulent virus. The approach taken by the films is contemporary to echo what happened during the pandemic.

In the geography of the pandemic-themed film, local and international locations are used as the background as it reflects the connection with the current disease outbreak. *Contagion* is more complex as the film takes place in different locations and times around the world. In contrast, *The Craziest* displayed the small numbers of the scene which indicates the less complex locations and time, which was set in a small town.

*The Craziest* and *The Happening* do have scenes where the authorities stonewalled, by hiding information about the virus outbreak. However, the biggest issue of these films is about the government's involvement with pollution and deforestation activities that contribute to disasters in the environment. These films reveal the impact of these activities on human health in particular and the government's failure in general. Insensitivity or the government being idle in these activities is depicted in the films. This issue should be set for a pandemic-themed film context, with an understanding of the history of the virus, its origin and ways of becoming a communicable virus, and how the virus can be a major calamity for the general public.

### 3.4 Analysis on how do film fans, film critics and film reviewers label the pandemic theme film?

The findings found there is consistency between them in labelling the pandemic-themed film. Film critic, Roger Ebert (2011) views that *Contagion* tells a story about key characters' live story and interaction with many others during a pandemic. The key

characters are all medical teams involved in finding out about a virus's life. They seek to know how it evolves to seek out new hosts, how long it survives, and how it transfers to humans. Consequently, he describes them as Seeker archetypes.

Data from Rottentomates, shows that fans view *Contagion* is a very accurate depiction of a pandemic event that we have experienced, including the vaccine (Mark, 2021) However, back then, before the COVID-19, pandemic, fans saw the film as an epidemic genre, a global deadly outbreak and deadly which is possible to happen (Kevin, 2015). The film exhibits destruction to the public healthcare, economy, and society all over the world that was seen as too ambitious (Sylvester, 2014) and the portrayal of virus victims in fragile conditions did not develop much empathy (Kevin, 2015). *Contagion* is considered as the highest standard of realism because fans found the film is able to translate the script to the viewing experience although after the film was released the audience found the disease message is useful and most fans, commented that *Contagion* was ahead of its time and a disturbing thriller film that we must take seriously.

Annie Alleman, a film reviewer and a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, reported that *Contagion* was filmed in various locations. Indoor locations used were Woodlawn Ave, Glencoe, the house of Beth and Mitch, the old Sherman Hospital, Illinois Science and Technology Park, double for Minnesota Centre for Disease Control, The Sara Lee Corporate Headquarters for all office scenes, schools and North Riverside Mall for quarantining infected people. For an outdoor scene, the locations used were the Henry Ford Memorial Bridge, which doubled as the Wisconsin border where Mitch has a confrontation with federal authorities, Hong Kong, Chicago suburbs, Atlanta, London, and San Francisco. These locations exist so that the audience associates these locations with familiar places.

Ebert (2010) views the key characters in the film as escapees after the Sheriff's wife, Judy (Radha Mitchell), a community doctor who treated her patients, finds the strange behaviour possessed by them and she suggests her husband and their assistants should escape the town. These characters are portrayed as Escapees archetypes.

For fans, *The Craziest* is seen as an epidemic film that has an element of a thriller (Maymay, 2015). Patrick, 2016 and Cameron, 2013) commented on the government accidentally releasing biological weapons that cause disease but they are not able to inform the public on the issue of why some of the town residents lose their minds. The film is suspenseful in a few parts but the film has less inspired acting which makes the film an aimless thriller. Madden (2020), a film reviewer, views the archetypes in *Carriers* are portraying a reality situation, an escapee, and a desire to survive by travelling to what we believe is a safer place. Desire to survive cautions not to do wrong that can jeopardise their life and a reluctance to end their love one's life, are key issues highlighted in the film. The key characters Bryan (Chris Pine), his girlfriend, Bobby (Piper Perabo), his little brother, Dany (Lou Taylor Pucci) and his girlfriend, Kate (Emily VanCamp)" behavior rarely challenges believability" which suggests that they believe that they are immune to the virus but still believe that they need to protect themselves by wearing a mask every time they meet people. However, these rules were broken by Bobby when she became contagious after helping a sick girl. Bobby later infects Brian and Danny and reluctantly has to abandon Brian to die in order to live.

Kinnewman, a film critic, reviews *Carriers*, as an apocalypse pandemic film because the film is about survival and the tough rules that key characters follow after surviving a plague that killed the majority of the population (2009). Luke Savage, another film critic, views the film as neither horror nor thriller because the film is in the middle ground between both genres. The fans see *Carriers* as in between a zombie and a thriller (Rotten Tomatoes, 2009) because the film did not show anybody rising from the dead, nor was the film suspenseful enough to be labelled as a thriller. Claudia Carvalho, a film critic, views that *Carriers* is a "virus genre because it has no zombies in it". Despite being debatable on the genre, *Carriers* highlights the issue of air pollution that causes viruses. The virus which is spread through airborne means when people with the infection cough, sneeze, or talk. The film shows how Bobby was infected with an unnamed disease after Jody, a sick girl suffers nasal congestion and cough where the bacteria jumps and infects Bobby. The film portrayed how a viral pandemic has spread around the world and the importance of rules to obey during the pandemic crisis.

For fans, the film is about a pandemic and the audience can associate with the contagious nature of the virus when a few scenes show the four key characters wearing a mask when they meet people. *The Happening*, was badly reviewed by fans as they criticise the film actors' performance as flat. The key characters are portrayed as escapees, who desire to escape Manhattan to a safer place far from the disease from nature (toxin from tresses). Only then they do realise that no place in the country is safe. Huge Hart, a

film reviewer views *The Happening* raises the question of the possibility of toxin tresses. David Hart, professor of biological science, commented that there is the possibility of tresses toxicities that occurs years ago during a red tide; when marine plant life releases toxins “in response to changing environment condition” (Hart, 2008). For fans, *The Happening* failed to engage the audience with any issue. However, very few people view the film as related to climate change where pollution is the factor that makes tresses release toxins (Cheryl, Ron and Tanapat 2021). The film teaches us to care about nature. As Elliot(Wahlberg) talks to an indoor plant when he apologises for being a human until he realises it is a plastic plant. The dialogue may be viewed as a joke, by some, but implicitly, it suggests, that the virus is caused by pollution created by a human. Honeycutt (2008) a film reviewer from the Hollywood Reporter, views that *The Happening* is about people’s paranoia of toxin tresses that can kill people in a large group. The toxin works when the wind blows, which can be seen in the beginning of the film where the director shows the situation in Central Park, New York, when suddenly people act strangely and commit suicide. However, in the scene, the director fails to show the logic of the toxicities of tresses and the connection to the wind. Since the film surrounds the issue of disease from nature, the use of locations is mainly outdoor and a few places around the country. The analysis shows each group has different views when labelling the pandemic-themed film.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This research produced a few findings. The popularity of such films coincides with the current social phenomena such as the disease outbreak situation which has initiated filmmakers to produce such films. In the case of the pandemic-themed film, within four years, four films were produced (*The Happening*, *Carriers*, *The Craziest* and *Contagion*) each year. This finding shows that, socio-political events such as waste technology depicted in *The Craziest*, society’s anxieties on the preparedness for possible disease outbreaks in *Contagion*. and popular desires such as in *Carriers*, which depicted an asymptomatic disease that can wipe out the world population which Tmes states that films produced after the year 2000 portrayed as popular disease culture. The findings were supported by (Klein, 2014) who listed commercial success, popular desires, and social anxieties as elements that drive such films to be produced. The findings found that the pandemic-themed film was produced based on social anxieties in understanding how the virus started, what are the symptoms, how dangerous the diseases are, and what to do to avoid them. Without a doubt, these arguments suggest that the centre of the issue in these films is not only about human survival but also about a sovereign state in a state of collapse. Environmental issues are real-life issues involving transnational companies that obstruct ecology through social development in distant lands as well as their homeland. The destruction of the ecology causes a loss of biodiversity that births pathogens and later turns to viruses and when viruses infect people it spreads widely and becomes a pandemic. The pandemic-themed is associated with disaster content and this type of film is going through a new cycle as such films demonstrate features similar to the genre of disaster with additional content highlighting contemporary social issues faced by the current global society. The research found that the period of the year 2000 and beyond is a disease disaster as the world has and is experiencing global diseases and these diseases are seen as an international event because it requires not only a government involvement but many parties including the world health body to interfere.

The first research question asks what are the indicators to make a genre recognisable. Based on the findings, a genre of a film is recognisable through similar patterns of semantics, syntactic (Altman’s, 1999). All four films share similar patterns in both approaches. The pandemic theme film depicts characters that can relate to our daily life which make us believe that we can trust them. The characters such as medical heroes (doctors, scientists, bacteriologists and virologists) are the one who sacrifices themselves to save others. These medical heroes are archetypes in the pandemic films of the past. In addition to that, the characters of sufferers are more prevalent in the contemporary pandemic theme film. The main characters who are non- medical persons are depicted as sufferers, such as Brian in *Carriers* after being infected with a virulent disease, or as escapees, who are running away from the pandemic zone. The other sufferer characters are also shown when they are losing their families and friends to the pandemic. Images of a person infected by viruses that show symptoms like coughing, seizure, hemorrhage, fever, nausea, and confusion represent the real symptoms that can be found in SARS, MERS, Rabies, and Coronavirus. Unlike thrillers, the characters depict people in real life (ordinary people) suffering basic facts in life such as sickness, loss of family members to pandemic diseases,



isolation, agony grief, terror, anxiety, fear, and wariness about the dangers of a pandemic to their health and livelihood. These characters of escapees and sufferers are similar to characters found in the disaster films.

Keane (2006) and Norman (2008) identified that locations used in disaster films are mainly set at a local setting or inside a container like vessels or flights. The use of a single location is perhaps to emphasise a model scenario of destruction such as the collapse of buildings, planes crashing into busy cities or seas, and the functions of the authorities in dealing with the disaster. The pandemic-themed film shows otherwise. The destruction that occurs in these films portrayed the destruction of livelihoods and how the pandemic destroys the necessity of lives such as in the social, political, and economic realms. *The Happening*, *Carriers*, *The Craziest* and *Contagion* instill the feeling of fear and terror of the possibility of life during the pandemic. Disaster films usually portrayed urbanism as a centre of disaster, but the pandemic theme film shows that the origin of diseases or ground zero can both appear anywhere. Urbanism and ruralism (villages and small towns in the urbanising world) can be a centre for the disaster. Moreover, locations in pandemic-themed films also involves exotic places, such as outside of America to suggest that viruses can be contagious and spawn pandemics which go worldwide and infects global citizens. Therefore, the geography of the pandemic theme film is set in multiple places (urban and rural) around the world. These pluralistic locations state that these films provide us with the importance of public healthcare and a sense of unity as global citizens to work together in treating the virus victims and protecting ourselves from the virulent viruses.

The findings found that the syntax in the pandemic theme film depicts the survival methods of characters from the viruses' infections by following policies or rules set by the authorities such as the government or world health organisations such as the WHO or CDC. These authorities are usually aided by the military or police in implementing stern actions to determine that society follows the policy set by the Health authorities. Despite the good intentions of their duty, these enforcements are portrayed by filmmakers as obstacles to the main characters running away from the pandemic zone. The horrific images of the virus victims, the failed government, and the collapse of the public healthcare system give the audience anxiety about the possibility of a pandemic that might happen in the future and question how prepared are we for such possibilities. The point of the pandemic-themed film is to use horrific disease scenarios to manipulate the audience's emotions to feel fear and terror for the possibility of a future pandemic and the lessons learned from the films regarding preparedness.

Research question number two asked about how the industry and audience labeled the pandemic film. For this research question, the Jancovich (2002) approach was used to study social mediation between the audience and the film industry in labelling a film category. Film critic, Roger Ebert in his analysis used archetypes to label a film genre. He posits that the film *Contagion* follows the protocols of techno-thrillers, with subtitles keeping count: Day 1, Day 3, the location stated on the screen like Minneapolis, Geneva, and then introducing the main characters such as Dr. Ellis Cheever of the CDC in Atlanta; Dr. Erin Mears of the Epidemic Intelligence Service, who tries to track the spread with on-the-spot visits; Dr. Leonora Orantes an investigator from the World Health Organization in Geneva and Dr. Ally Hextall, a virologist who is trying to perfect a vaccine before she can test it on humans. For *The Happening*, he described the film as a thriller too, based on the thrilling element in its narrative. In addition, Kinnewann, (2009) a film critic from Rottentomatoes, reviews *Carriers* as having realistic characters which are associated with characters in disaster films. Other film reviewers from journalistic reviews state that the pandemic theme films are thriller films about future viruses that need government attention for preparedness (Allermann, and Honeycutt, 2008). For film scholars and science communities, these films are accurate in informing the audience about viruses and their symptoms and issues on public healthcare and its preparedness without discussing its category. For film fans, the findings found that most of them view the film as a pandemic or virus film which tells a story about the future pandemic and what to do if it happens (Rottentomatoes.com.2008; 2009; 2010 and 2011).

Consequently, the findings found that there is no unity language to label the pandemic-themed film. Film critics and film reviewers as well as the film institution labelled the pandemic-themed film as a thriller for marketing purposes (Geraghty and Janconvich, 2009) and for the method used when introducing its archetypes that reflect the realistic characters (Ebert, 2011 and 2008) and Kinnewmann (2009) the turmoil of emotions during the pandemic situations. The finding also found that most fans and science communities view that pandemic-themed films as disease films without stating its genre about possible future pandemics. As stated by Sam Scarcello from New York, *Contagion* provides him with an idea of how to practice rules during the pandemic

(Washington Post, 2020) and preparedness for public healthcare (Moore and Sperling, 2020, Bradshaw, Zimmer and Ferris, 2011). Meanwhile, for film scholars, these films were seen as disaster due to the narratives about media nexus and communication on possible healthcare during the pandemic (Davis, 2017) and zoonotic diseases that became pandemic (Perkowitz, 2017). All groups have their own interpretation in categorising these films. Perhaps these films are rarely produced and its narratives are dissected from other disasters. Viruses do exist but when they become contagious and spread widely and cause death then they represent a scenario which the public never encountered before, and they expected something bizarre. Therefore, these films have been categorised according to their syntax, where the audience expected to see main characters running away from the viruses' zone in order to save lives, and they also expected to see that the virus has no cure and can kill people in a short amount of time. Escapism or running away from a problem is usually associated with the disaster genre. Moreover, intense storylines with elements of suspense and fast editing that gives the audience roller coaster emotions are common in many disaster films. Despite the thrilling elements that they expected, they had never thought that the pandemic-themed film offers information about communicable disease on how to stay alive and survive during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the pandemic theme genre shares a similar pattern that can be recognised through a combination of semantic (archetypes and locations), Syntactic (survival methods and horrific disease scenarios), and social mediation (film community). Therefore, from the results this research found that the pandemic-themed film can be considered as a sub-genre of disaster as pointed out by Grant (2009) that a film genre can be defined through repetition and variation, telling familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations" and Klein (2014) who listed commercial success, popular desires, social anxieties and the situation at that time.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, A. 2001. Macroeconomic variables as common pervasive risk factors and the empirical content of the Arbitrage Pricing Theory. *Journal of Empirical finance*, 5(3): 221–240.
- [2] Basu, S. 1997. The Investment Performance of Common Stocks in Relation to their Price to Earnings Ratio: A Test of the Efficient Markets Hypothesis. *Journal of Finance*, 33(3): 663–682.
- [3] Bhatti, U. and Hanif. M. 2010. Validity of Capital Assets Pricing Model. Evidence from KSE-Pakistan. *European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science*, 3 (20).