

The latest Harry Potter film's \$43 million opening weekend is a franchise low

Article

The news: "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore," the latest film in the **Wizarding World** franchise, opened to a franchise low of **\$43 million** over the weekend, spelling trouble

for the scandal-ridden franchise that is one of the largest under the [newly merged Warner Bros. Discovery](#)'s umbrella, [per](#) Variety.

How we got here: Wizarding World has expanded beyond movies to television, Broadway, and video games, but scandals involving its creator and the cast of the “Fantastic Beasts” spin-off series show that not all major film franchises have equal staying power.

- “Fantastic Beasts” and the rest of the Wizarding World have had trouble escaping controversy. Creator **J.K. Rowling** has been criticized for her outspokenness against transgender rights; **Johnny Depp**'s major role in “Fantastic Beasts” was recast after his ex-wife, Amber Heard, accused him of sexual assault; and co-star **Ezra Miller** was recently arrested for allegedly harassing a couple in Hawaii.
- Rowling's anti-trans stances have affected the marketing of some Wizarding World projects: The upcoming video game **Hogwarts Legacy** [carefully distanced itself](#) from Rowling after discussion of boycotts swirled on social media.
- All these controversies have created a branding crisis for the Wizarding World not unlike the one [Disney](#) is facing in Florida over the “Don't Say Gay” bill. The franchise pitches itself as a family-friendly series, but the real-world issues surrounding it are often at odds with its messages and themes.

Box-office woes: The first two “Fantastic Beasts” films gained nearly 75% of their revenues from foreign sales, according to Variety. But the latest entry may have trouble recouping its low domestic opening abroad due to the shaky status of foreign box offices.

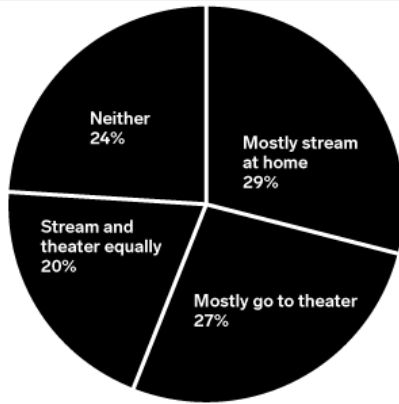
- “The Secrets of Dumbledore” has made **\$193 million** internationally so far, but theaters in key markets are struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In China, a market that American blockbuster films have increasingly relied on to drive revenues, 50% of movie theaters are closed due to a COVID outbreak.
- The film's two predecessors raked in **\$814 million** and **\$650 million** globally, respectively, but since Chinese theaters are struggling and access to the smaller (but not insignificant) Russian market is restricted in wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it seems unlikely that the third's final box office haul will compare.
- That means the future of the franchise is uncertain since Warner Bros. Discovery is reportedly watching box office figures for the new film before greenlighting two additional sequels. The comparison to Warner Bros. other major franchise currently in theaters, “**The Batman**,” is also unfavorable. The superhero film has grossed nearly **\$750 million** worldwide.

The big takeaway: Harry Potter’s struggle to stay relevant is a symptom of discord between its branding and key figures, and consumers are choosing to put their theater-going dollars toward other franchises.

- As the power of the foreign box office fades due to COVID, the domestic market is becoming a key indicator of a franchise’s longevity.

How US Adults Expect to Watch New Movies in the Next Year, June 2021

% of respondents



Note: ages 14-74; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Hub Research, "Predicting the Pandemic: Wave 4," Aug 5, 2021

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