

Tomoko Nyunoya
 Professor Paul Messaris
 COMM 240
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The Effect of the Release Date on Romantic Comedy Movies' Opening Weekend Success

Topic:

The objective of my study is to answer the following question: Does the release date of a romantic comedy movie affect its opening weekend box office success? Many factors influence the opening weekend box office success such as marketing¹, star power, budgets, and critical reviews². The release date of a romantic comedy movie appears to be an important factor to its opening weekend success, because I believe that a particular season and some holidays stimulate one's interest in watching a romantic comedy movie.

Hypothesis:

I hypothesized that romantic comedy movies released (1) in the winter season, (2) in December and February, and (3) during Christmas and Valentine's Day lead to their opening weekend box office success. Since both Christmas and Valentine's Day occur during the winter season, romantic comedy movies released in this season are likely to have a successful opening weekend. A similar theory was employed to predict that romantic comedy movies released in December and February would have a profitable opening weekend. Christmas and Valentine's Day are favorite holidays among females and couples who are likely to be the target audience of romantic comedy films. I predict that romantic comedy movies released around Valentine's Day would have the most successful opening weekend since it is known as "a day of romance"³.

Method/Data:

Data was retrieved from Box Office Mojo's top 200 romantic comedy movies released between 1978 and today based on their opening weekend gross⁴. The release date was organized by season, month, and relevant holidays, namely Valentine's Day and Christmas. Each of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter was categorized in the following way, respectively: March to May, June to August, September to November, and December to February. Movies released after November 1st and before Christmas were assumed to be targeting Christmas. For the specific data I retrieved, the earliest release date of such movies was November 5th and the latest was December 25th. Movies released within a month before Valentine's Day, February 14th, were assumed to be targeting Valentine's Day. On the list of Box Office Mojo's top 200 romantic comedy movies by their opening weekend gross, the earliest date of such movies was January 16th and the latest included was February 18th since February 18th could still be the weekend of Valentine's Day.

¹ Henning-Thurau, T., Houston, M.B., Sridhar, S. (2006). "Can good marketing carry a bad product? Evidence from the motion picture industry." *Marketing Letters*. Vol.17, No.3, pp.205-219.

² Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee, S. Abraham Ravid (2003). "How Critical Are Critical Reviews? The Box Office Effects of Film Critics, Star Power, and Budgets." *Journal of Marketing*: October 2003, Vol. 67, No.4, pp.103-117.

³ <http://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day>

⁴ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?view=openings&id=romanticcomedy.htm&p=.htm>

Findings and Analysis:

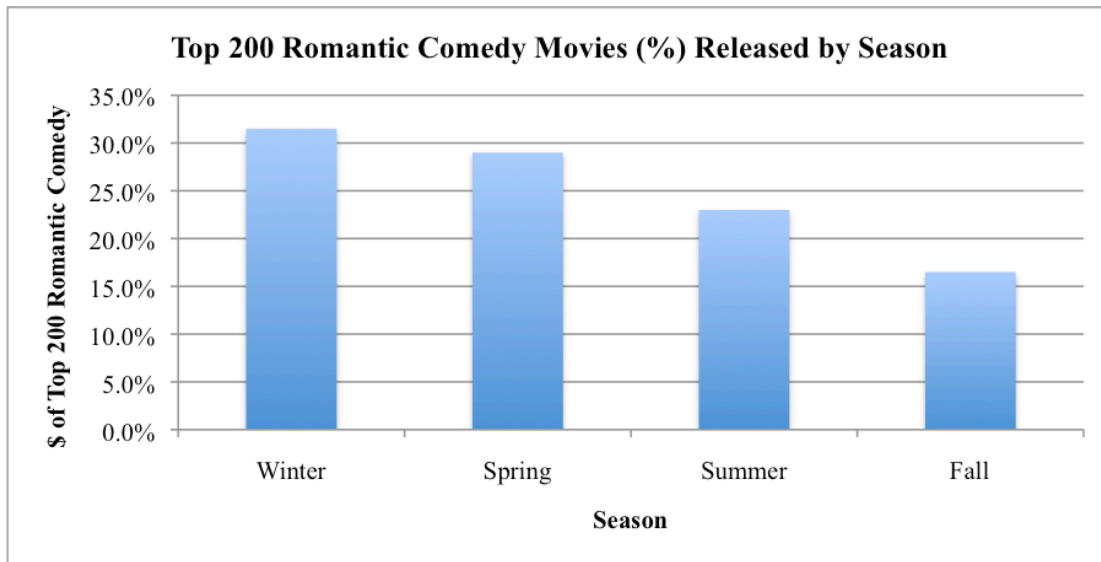
The sample of this study was 200 highest grossing opening weekends romantic comedy movies released between 1978 and today. The independent variable of this study was the release date, which was categorized into (1) season, (2) month, and (3) relevant holidays. The dependent variable was the opening weekend box-office gross. About one-third or 31.5% of the top 200 romantic comedy movies based on their opening weekend gross were released in the season winter.

Figure 1

Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released by Season

Season	Number of Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released	Percent of Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released
Winter	63	31.5%
Spring	58	29.0%
Summer	46	23.0%
Fall	33	16.5%

Figure 2



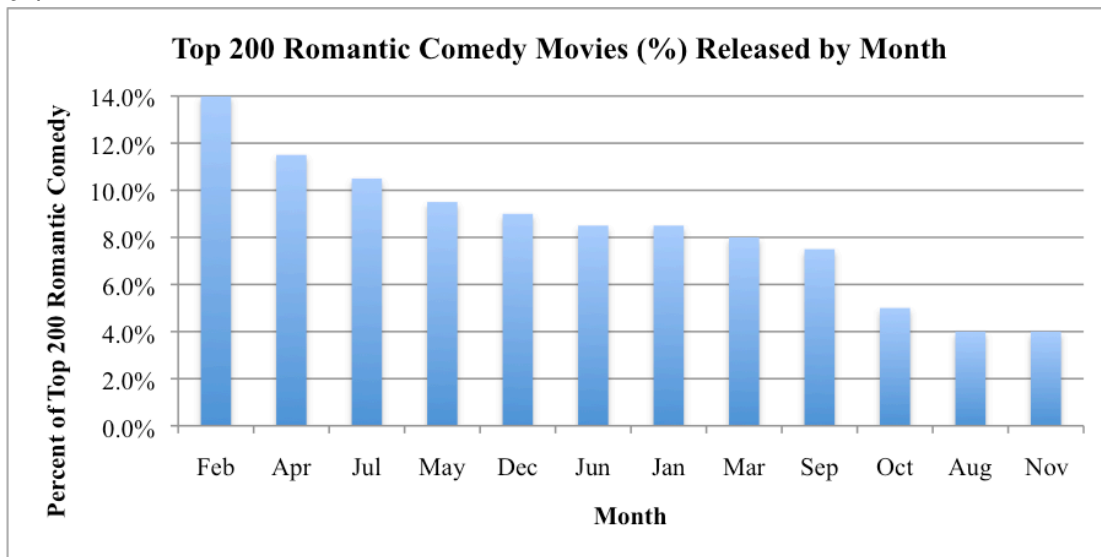
14.0% of the top 200 romantic comedy movies based on their opening weekend gross were released in February followed by 11.5% in April, and 10.5% in July. As expected, the most number of successful romantic comedy movies was released in February. However, the number of highest grossing romantic comedy films came out in December (9.0%) was negligible. 19% of top 200 romantic comedy movies were released around the time of Valentine's Day and only 13% were released around Christmas. Overall, approximately one-third or 32% of top 200 romantic comedy movies were released during romance-relevant holidays, Valentine's Day and Christmas. Since Christmas is more a family-oriented holiday than a romantic holiday, more romantic comedy films were released within few days of Valentine's Day than around Christmas (which is in December). Lastly, three of the five (60%) highest grossing opening weekends romantic comedy movies, *Valentine's Day*, *Hitch*, and *50 First Dates*, were released one to three days before Valentine's Day.

Figure 3

Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released by Month

Month	Number of Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released	Percent of Top 200 Romantic Comedy Movies Released
February	28	14.0%
April	23	11.5%
July	21	10.5%
May	19	9.5%
December	18	9.0%
June	17	8.5%
January	17	8.5%
March	16	8.0%
September	15	7.5%
October	10	5.0%
August	8	4.0%
November	8	4.0%

Figure 4



Conclusions:

According to my study, romantic comedy films released around Valentine’s Day, which is in February during the winter season, have positive and statistically significant effects on their opening weekend box office success. Therefore, my hypothesis was partially correct in stating that a romantic comedy movie released (1) in the winter season, (2) in February, and (3) during Valentine’s Day resulted in its opening weekend box office success. However, it was incorrect in theorizing that a romantic comedy movie released in December and during Christmas results in its opening weekend box office success. Although 13% of 200 highest grossing opening weekends romantic comedy movies came out in theater around Christmas, this statistic was not as significant as Valentine’s Day’s statistic. In order to improve this study, I could analyze other factors that contributed to these movies’ opening weekend success in addition to the release date.