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Harnessing Hollywood Hype: Film Marketing Meets the Challenges and Opportunities of the 21st Century

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Abstract
Marketing is a vital commercial activity and source of competitive advantage within the Hollywood film industry, serving to create, circulate and translate symbolic meaning around a film and its ancillary products, construct and target key audience segments, guide audience expectations and viewing choices, and mitigate financial risk. Marketers thus play an increasingly central role in all stages of the filmmaking process. To examine the often overlooked structures and practices of Hollywood's marketing arm, this study adopts a media industry studies approach, employing interviews, fieldwork, and textual analysis to explore the social, technological, organizational, economic, and spatial forces that shape the contemporary context of Hollywood marketing materials' creation. In the early 21st century, Hollywood studios face profound challenges and opportunities wrought by the dual forces of globalization and digitization. In response, marketers have developed a novel view of their audience: as increasingly global and empowered. Globalization and digitization are thus treated as centrifugal forces, diffusing production and meaning-making capabilities across geographic space and media platforms, and threatening the centralized control traditionally held by Hollywood studios. Marketers are incentivized to embrace these decentralizing forces and the cultural labor now provided by third party marketing agencies, international distributors, and audiences. However, Hollywood studios' institutional inertia, risk aversion, and inclination to maintain firm control of their marketing messages and intellectual property preclude a whole-hearted embrace of these changes. Studio marketers thus act with deep ambivalence toward these outside players, attempting to capitalize on their cultural labor while simultaneously acting to circumscribe their power.

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through it all. Finally, to Melanie, thank you for providing balance and perspective in my life, and for making my world such a brilliant place.

ABSTRACT

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Marketing is a vital commercial activity and source of competitive advantage within the Hollywood film industry, serving to create, circulate and translate symbolic meaning around a film and its ancillary products, construct and target key audience segments, guide audience expectations and viewing choices, and mitigate financial risk. Marketers thus play an increasingly central role in all stages of the filmmaking process. To examine the often overlooked structures and practices of Hollywood's marketing arm, this study adopts a media industry studies approach, employing interviews, fieldwork, and textual analysis to explore the social, technological, organizational, economic, and spatial forces that shape the contemporary context of Hollywood marketing materials' creation. In the early 21st century, Hollywood studios face profound challenges and opportunities wrought by the dual forces of globalization and digitization. In response, marketers have developed a novel view of their audience: as increasingly global and empowered. Globalization and digitization are thus treated as centrifugal forces, diffusing production and meaning-making capabilities across geographic space and media platforms, and threatening the centralized control traditionally held by Hollywood

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the holiday season of 2006, posters for the film *United We Stand* began appearing on walls, billboards, and bus shelters in New York, Berlin, Barcelona, Bangalore, Vienna, and Bologna. Anticipation for the release of this political sci-fi thriller starring Penelope Cruz and Ewen McGregor grew with the subsequent appearance of a website and internet banner advertisements. But would-be audiences were soon disappointed to find that the film existed *only* in advertising. In an elaborate effort to bolster EU solidarity and promote political dialogue, the campaign was designed without any intention to actually film the movie. But, as *New York Times* reporter Holland Cotter (2006) observes, "Thanks to an extensive poster campaign, the nonexistent film may lodge in our consciousness all the same." This campaign aptly demonstrates the power of film marketing as a cultural force independent from the films these efforts promote.

Marketing is a vital commercial activity and source of competitive advantage within the Hollywood film industry, serving to create and circulate symbolic meaning around a film, identify and target key audience segments, guide audience expectations and viewing choices, and mitigate financial risk in a high-stakes environment. Given the vast amount of resources dedicated to film marketing activities, and their economic and cultural significance, these processes and texts warrant critical examination. Thus far, however, film marketing as a field has received little academic attention (Gray, 2010; Meir, 2009). While whole areas of study are dedicated to the examination of films and television shows, these studies often treat these subjects as isolated media texts unhinged

from the marketing materials and peripheral texts that support them. As such, Jonathan Gray calls for a field of "'off-screen studies' to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television" (2010, p. 4).[1] Only with such a focus can we begin to understand the media landscape as an increasingly complex, multifaceted, transmedia environment.

Gray thus centers his study on film paratexts, defined as productions that surround and extend the main body of a text. This category includes marketing materials. He explains that, "If we imagine the triumverate of Text, Audience, and Industry as the Big Three of media practice, then paratexts fill the space between them, conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape, and variously negotiating or determining interactions among the three" (2010, p. 23). His study focuses on the relationship between the Text and Audience, exploring the ways in which marketing materials and other paratexts guide audience interactions with films and story worlds. By focusing on the relationship between Text and Audience, he only briefly addresses the role of *Industry* in the production and circulation of the paratexts he discusses.[2] Recognizing this limitation, Gray calls for further research on the production cultures of paratexts. This dissertation is designed to answer this call and explore the industrial context in which Hollywood marketing materials are produced.

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[1] Wasko (1994) identifies a similar need for research on the processes of international distribution and marketing of films.
[2] Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009) note that focusing on the two nodes of Text and Audience at the expense of the industrial node is common within the critical media studies tradition and should be corrected.

Cultural products are not created in a vacuum, but are produced by complex

organizational systems. These organizations are characterized by unique histories, complex

social dynamics (including struggles for power, internal conflicts, and alliances), distinctive

corporate cultures, and situated physical geographies. In order to understand the products

they create, why they appear as they do, and how they function culturally, an understanding

of these organizations, the individuals that constitute them, and the pressures they face is

imperative (Deuze, 2007; Ettema & Whitney, 1982). While Hollywood is often perceived

as a monolithic industry wherein filmmakers and production personnel are the sole

creators of cinematic content, marketing exists as a unique and powerful field within this

industry, playing a vital role in shaping films' content, informing distribution decisions,

and translating films' meaning to audiences. To explore the often overlooked structures

and processes of Hollywood marketing departments and their partners, this study adopts a

media industry studies approach aimed at revealing the mid-level social and industrial

context of marketing materials' creation.[3]

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[3] This study is limited to examining the practices of major Hollywood studios (Fox, Warner Bros., Paramount, Sony, Universal, and Disney) and their distribution partners and vendors. The marketing activities of independent filmmakers and distributors falls outside the scope of this dissertation. "Marketing" is also a fluid concept, and one that is in flux in the current era (where platforms like social media exist as contested terrain between publicity and marketing departments). "Marketing" is thus treated as an emic category. While this study focuses on Hollywood film marketing, important work has been done examining film marketing practices outside the United States. For instance, Finola Kerrigan (2010) provides a systematic description of the film marketing field in Europe.

While Chapter 2 explores the history of Hollywood marketing, the focus of this study is the contemporary moment of the early 21st century. Media institutions as a whole, and Hollywood in particular, face profound changes in this era, wrought by the dual forces of globalization and digitization. Marketers play a key role in determining Hollywood's reaction to these changes. Marketers are charged with the vital tasks of constructing and targeting audiences, and with managing and mitigating risk in an industry characterized by its profound risk aversion. In response to globalization and digitization, they have developed new notions of an increasingly international and empowered audience, consequently exacerbating fears that studios' messaging won't translate or resonate across cultural borders and media platforms. Due to this perception of heightened risk, marketers have assumed an increasingly powerful role in all stages of film production, distribution, and marketing, and are instrumental in determining how Hollywood studios manage the challenges and opportunities facing them in the 21st century.

Historically, Hollywood has approached technological, economic, and social changes with ambivalence, reluctantly adopting select new strategies while simultaneously holding firm to other traditional practices. As an industry that once again stands at the crossroads of deeply entrenched and novel modes of operation, Hollywood in the early 21st century serves as an apt object of study. This research thus examines the ways in which marketers, as key players in Hollywood, negotiate the profound tensions and challenges that are impacting media industries today more broadly.

Conceptualizing Film Marketing

Various scholars have recognized and conceptualized the power of film marketing materials to create and circulate meaning, and to support films in the competitive marketplace and in the public imagination. Heath (1976) characterizes these materials as "epiphenomena" that surround and prolong film products and serve as crucial mediators that influence the reception and overall experience of cinema (p. 28). Barbara Klinger (1989) explores this idea further, seeing promotional materials and the "digressions" from the film they encourage as central determinants of the relationship between commodified texts and spectators. While theorists such as John Fiske (1985, 1989) and Dick Hebdige (1982) emphasize the possibility of individual and oppositional readings and uses of texts, Klinger treats promotional materials as industrially-produced intertexts designed to elicit a range of different, but not oppositional, readings of a film. As she explains, "The goal of promotion is to produce multiple avenues of access to the text that will make the film resonate as extensively as possible in the social sphere in order to maximize its audience" (1989, p. 10).[4] Marketing materials thus encourage a range of industry-approved readings of the film and open various avenues for personal identification and engagement, but "within ideological parameters" set by the industry that creates them (Klinger, 1989, p. 16). These materials are therefore crucial in defining and circulating cinematic meaning and fostering particular forms of approved audience engagement.

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[4] See Austin (1999) and Wyatt (1994) for similar arguments.

Jonathan Gray (2010) similarly addresses the power of marketing materials and related texts in establishing relationships between films and audiences, guiding reception, and circulating meaning. His study draws upon Julia Kristeva's (1980) theory of intertextuality and Gérard Genette's (1997) theory of paratextuality. Both of these theories highlight the relations that various texts have with one another and with the reader, noting the importance of these intertextual relations in infusing the primary text (in this case, the film) with meaning. Succinctly summarizing these theories, Graham Allen explains, "Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations" (Allen, 2000, p. 1). In this framework, film cannot be studied in isolation, but must be studied in relation to all other related entities (such as trailers, spin-offs, teasers, user-generated content, critical reviews, and sequels). Each of these iterations has the power to change audience readings and the cultural meaning of the film.

Genette (1997) introduces the concept of the "paratext" as a production that surrounds and extends the main body of the text. In the case of books (to which Genette originally refers), paratexts include titles, forewords, marginalia, epigraphs, illustrations, dust jackets, and reviews. Applied to films, paratexts include trailers, DVD extras, spoilers, parodies, merchandise, sequels, posters, and websites. (Gray, 2010). In Genette's formulation, paratexts are inherently *functional* texts designed to *present* the text and to *make it present* in the world. As he explains, paratexts act to turn *text* into a

book. Likewise, film paratexts such as marketing materials serve to turn *film* into a *movie*. These materials create a brand and identity for the film, and present it to the world as a consumable entity.

Paratexts thus build a *transitional* and *transactional* space, wherein audiences make the decision to either enter the text fully and invest their time and attention, or turn their focus elsewhere (Genette, 1997). Noting marketing materials' particularly poignant role in this process, Gray characterizes these materials as "entryway paratexts" that guide the audience's *entrance* to a text and serve as a filter through which we consume the film and interpret it (2010, p. 35). This formulation, however, suggests that the text exists prior to and separate from the audience in order for them to "enter" it. By focusing on the industrial node of cultural production, we see that the audience (or, more accurately, industrial players' perception of their audience) plays a powerful role in shaping these media texts. This study therefore reconceptualizes marketing materials as *translatory texts*, placing marketers in the vital role of translator. As translators, marketers (along with market researchers) convey the perceived desires of various audiences to filmmakers and executives, thus shaping the films that are created. Subsequently, marketers work to simplify and translate the meaning of a film into the cultural language of various target audiences via the marketing materials they create. This reconceptualization focuses attention on the relationship between industrial players and perceived audiences, rather than the previously elaborated relationship between various texts in a narrative universe or between texts and audiences. It also highlights the centrality of marketers as powerful

players in the arena of cultural production, as translators possess significant power to create and alter the meaning and function of texts in the social world. In this way, translatory texts and their creators are conceived as integral to defining the film, identifying intended audiences, and guiding the interaction that ensues between the two.

The Role and Significance of Film Marketing

Film marketing materials, as translatory texts, are unique artifacts that play an important cultural and economic role. While the field of film marketing has ties to traditional advertising, it stands as a distinctive arena due to the nature of the filmic product and the characteristics of the marketplace in which it operates. First, film is an experiential product (Cooper-Martin, 1992; De Vany & Walls, 1999; Staiger, 1990). As such, viewers must be convinced of the value of the experience without wholly testing the product. They can only fully know what they are purchasing *after* they have consumed the film in its entirety. Thomas Elsaesser (2001) therefore characterizes contemporary moviegoing as an act of faith wherein we exchange money for the mere chance of a positive and transcendent experience.[5] Marketing materials play a key role in establishing this faith in the product's quality. By ostensibly offering a sampling of the film (or at least its look and feel), would-be audiences are encouraged to make this leap of faith. By communicating the film's genre, star attachments, mood, and setting,

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[5] Similarly, Austin describes marketing and promotion as "a contractual process, inviting audience members to invest in a film, in exchange for anticipated pleasures and uses" (2002, p. 27).

marketing materials serve to set viewers' expectations and guide their subsequent

engagement (or lack of engagement) with the film (Gray, 2010; Kernan, 2004).

Films and their marketing materials are also unique because they exist as cultural

products imbued with ideology. Media culture is produced within a particular ideological

context, and produces building blocks through which audience identities are forged and

world views are constructed and maintained (Kellner, 2009). President Obama

acknowledged this ideological force in a 2013 address to employees at Dreamworks

SKG, stating:

> Entertainment is part of our American diplomacy. It's part of what makes us exceptional, part of what makes us such a world power… Hundreds of millions of people may never set foot in the United States, but thanks to you, they've experienced a small part of what makes our country special. They've learned something about our values. We have shaped a world culture through you. And the stories that we tell transmit values and ideals (Obama, 2013).

As writer Tom Brook (2014) expounds, "They peddle American concepts of success,

romance and heroism through stories of individual triumph in the face of adversity, tales

of redemption and fantastic battles of good versus evil." Films and their marketing

materials thus serve as culturally significant artifacts that both reflect and affect the

culture of their production and circulation. As one writer from the 1930s aptly states, film

advertising "not merely announces our wares, it not merely wins us patrons, but it voices

and interprets our ideals" (Franklin, 1930, p. 259).

For those who choose not to see a movie that is being released, promotional

materials become a stand-in for the film and its overall brand, for this is the only

exposure they will receive (Gray, 2010). Film marketing materials may therefore be more

prominent in the public imaginary and more powerful in communicating ideology than the film itself, due to their potential to reach a broader audience than those willing to pay for a movie ticket. As Rhodes notes in his historical study of film posters, "Poster designs have become indelibly linked with the movies they advertise, often to the degree that their images act as embodiments of their films for collective memory. Long after their initial marketing responsibilities conclude, the posters remain iconic images in film history and culture at large" (2007, p. 228). By reducing the film's complexity and creating a streamlined message, marketers aim to maximize audiences' recall of the film and ease its integration into the public culture, consciousness, and conversation.

If this task is accomplished well, film marketing materials can take on cultural significance beyond that of traditional product advertising. While consumers are prone to skip advertisements on television or express outrage at product advertisements on movie theater screens, Kernan (2004) observes that the same audiences rush to be in their seats before the theatrical trailers begin. Likewise, movie trailers are some of the most frequently viewed and shared online videos, and movie posters are common wall decorations in dorm rooms, living rooms, and offices alike. While all ads enter the public culture to a certain extent, film marketing materials hold a place of special cultural significance that sets them apart from the plethora of corporate messages that envelope popular culture.

Beyond this cultural import, film marketing is viewed as an economic imperative in the notoriously risky and competitive film marketplace. With an average of three major

film releases each weekend, studios face fierce competition. Only about 30 to 40 percent of Hollywood films break even, and only 10 percent make a profit (Valenti, 2004; Vogel, 2001). In this context, elaborate and expensive marketing campaigns are often perceived as necessary to mitigate these high risks and help potential viewers make decisions about their media consumption and their investment of time and attention (Adams & Lubbers, 2000). As Screen Gems President Clint Culpepper explains, "You can have the most terrific movie in the world, and if you can't convey that fact in fifteen- and thirty-second TV ads it's like having bad speakers on a great stereo" (Friend, 2009). Marketing activities are thus conceived as risk management maneuvers designed to maximize chances that studios will recoup the massive investments they pour into films.

Most films have a short theatrical shelf life, making a third of their box office revenue during their opening week (Acland, 2003). As former studio marketing and research executive Perry Katz explains, "By the time Monday comes around, if you haven't established your flag in the sand, then you're forgotten in a week" (Felipe-Barkin, 2011). While most products build brand awareness and loyalty over time, movies must therefore garner interest very quickly. Theatrical runs serve as a strong predictor of the film's lifetime revenue, and also act as an advertisement for a myriad of film-related products and for the Hollywood film industry as a whole (Acland, 2003; Craig et al., 2005; Grainge, 2008; Haralovich, 1984; Elberse and Eliashberg, 2003; Scott, 2004). Studios therefore invest heavily in theatrical marketing campaigns, as they serve to reduce risk by supporting the film during a vital release window, by promoting its brand

(and the range of products that adopt this brand), by reinforcing the status of Hollywood

as an institution, and by upholding the practice of moviegoing as a social tradition.

Due to the cultural and economic import of these materials, the competitive nature

of the film marketplace, and the pressure to elicit a strong first week opening, Mark

Litwak suggests that film marketing campaigns are "tackled with the same zeal and

methodical planning as a general preparing for an invasion" (1997, p. ix).[6] This invasion

is costly, with Hollywood marketing budgets soaring to nearly twice the size of those for

consumer packaged goods (Miller et al., 2005). In 2007, Hollywood studios spent an

average of $36 million to market a film. While the MPAA stopped reporting these figures

after 2007, it is estimated that this figure now stands at over $40 million (Eller, 2009;

McClintock, 2014). These numbers reflect the average expenditure for a film, but it is not

unusual for large blockbusters to boast marketing budgets of $70 to $80 million (Eller,

2009).[7]

Wielding this financial clout, marketers are typically involved in the very early

stages of decision-making, script development and film planning. If these players express

reservations about the marketability of a film, the project is often abandoned or

drastically altered (Finney, 2010; Litwak, 1997). As will be discussed in detail in

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[6] Former president of worldwide marketing and distribution at MGM, Bob Levin (2001),
uses a similar military analogy to describe the job of film marketers.
[7] In an extreme case, *Avatar* (2009) accrued marketing expenditures of $150 million
(Keegan, 2009). As this film became the highest-grossing film in history to that point,
these exorbitant costs may be considered justified. For smaller companies such as
Lionsgate, it is not uncommon for them to spend two-thirds of their budget on marketing
(Gray, 2010; "Lionsgate Spending $45 million," 2012).

Chapters 4 and 5, the power and centrality of film marketers within all phases of production and distribution has become increasingly pronounced in recent years due to the changes and uncertainty caused by globalization and digitization. As Hollywood grapples with shifting perceptions of their audience, marketers assume a vital role by defining these audiences and their desires, and guiding filmmaking, distribution, and marketing processes accordingly. Marketing is no longer an afterthought or addendum, therefore, but is an integral part of the moviemaking process that can shape the content and form of films and their cultural impact (Grainge, 2008; Johnston, 2009; Wyatt, 1994).

Prior Studies of Film Marketing

While there is a limited body of literature on the subject, several authors and scholars have adopted film marketing as their object of study. Targeting an industry and aspirant readership, a series of industry exposés and how-to books provide useful terminology, procedural information, and marketing case studies, but rarely address the film marketing industry or its products in a theoretical or critical light (Durie et al., 2000; Epstein, 2005, 2012; Finney, 2010; Lukk, 1997; Marich, 2009; Weise, 1989). Similarly, a series of popular visual histories present large collections of movie posters and key art that reproduce valuable archival materials and map the evolution of aesthetic styles, but provide little analysis of the industrial context of their production (Allen & Rebello, 1989; Edwards & Osborne, 2003; King, 2003; Nourmand & Marsh, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; Resnick, 2010). Supplementing these materials, several

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scholars from across academic fields have adopted film marketing as the subject of deeper analysis and investigation. These scholars have approached the field with a focus on marketing and media effects, textual analysis, and historical research. The following sections provide an overview of this growing body of literature.

      Marketing and effects literature. The most prolific body of literature surrounding issues of film marketing stems from an economic and marketing perspective. The aim of these studies is to advise studios of methods to reduce risk and maximize audience awareness and return on investment. Many studies attempt to measure the impact of marketing on box office revenue (Basuroy, Desai, & Talukdar, 2006; Prag & Casavant, 1994; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Zufryden, 1996, 2000), expected lifetime revenue (Elberse & Anand, 2007), and studio stock prices (Joshi & Hanssens, 2009). Others explore the specific process of "word of mouth" marketing, charting information diffusion and attempting to assess its impact on box office returns (Burzynski & Baker, 1977; Holbrook, 2005; Liu, 2006; Mahajan et al., 1984; Moul, 2006). Still others focus on the impact of online "word of mouth" marketing (also known as "word of mouse," "viral" or "buzz" marketing) on the success of films (Chakravarty et al., 2010; Duan et al., 2008; Mabry & Porter, 2010; Mohr, 2007; Westland, 2012).

      Rather than take traditional marketing and peer influence as the point of departure, some scholars attempt to measure the effect of critics' reviews on movie selection and success (Desai & Basuroy, 2005; Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005), while others explore the marketing value of movie stars (Albert, 1998,

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1999; Desai & Basuroy, 2005; De Vany & Lee, 2001; De Vany & Walls, 1999; Levin, Levin & Heath, 1997; Wallace, Siegerman, & Holbrook, 1993). Still other studies attempt to determine the optimal timing of movie releases and marketing campaigns, and propose models for effective campaign strategies (Jockel & Dobler, 2006; Krider & Weinberg, 1998). Turning their focus to the consumer, several studies in this tradition address the psychological and social aspects of movie selection, exploring the ways that different types of marketing and information sources inform viewing decisions and expectations (Austin, 1981; Cooper-Martin, 1992; Eastman, Bradbury & Nemes, 1985; Faber & O'Guinn, 1984). Hadida (2009) and Simonton (2009) provide useful meta-analyses of these variables (including marketing, star power, critics' views, and word of mouth) and how they impact film performance.

This body of literature suggests several mechanisms through which marketing materials function and effectively support a film through its release. These studies also provide insight into the concerns of the industry and the strategies put forth to alleviate these anxieties and reduce risk when entering the perpetually precarious film marketplace. While the marketing and effects-oriented literature comprises the bulk of research on film marketing, it treats marketing practices as mechanistic—as merely a process of combining campaign elements like a recipe in order to maximize profit. It ignores the social and cultural factors involved in the production of marketing materials, and fails to examine the forces that shape this dynamic context.

Textual approaches. A separate group of scholars focus on the textual properties of film marketing materials, utilizing these texts to examine marketing strategies and explore the contexts of film production and consumption. Geer (2007), for instance, studies the ways in which marketers repositioned the drama *Finding Neverland* (2004) as a "family film" through careful editing and insertion of intertextual messages into marketing materials and DVD extras. Similarly, James Trammell (2010) examines the marketing strategy for *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) in order to unpack how evangelical Christians were successfully targeted as a key audience for the potentially contentious film. Maiorani (2007), a linguist, attempts a semiotic analysis of film posters in order to assess the changing context of reception for *The Matrix* trilogy. While she conducts a thorough semiotic analysis of the films' posters and aptly focuses on the context of consumption as an important variable in their meaning creation, she makes inferences about the intentions of the posters' creators without fully interrogating their positionality and power in the meaning-creation process.

These textual approaches to film marketing result in thoughtful arguments, but to infer producers' intentions purely from the textual properties of the products they create is problematic. To fully understand these textual artifacts, researchers must consider the positions, imperatives, voices and views of their creators. Marketing campaigns result from a complex process of negotiation between various players faced with competing institutional and social pressures. To assume that campaigns follow a single,

straightforward strategic trajectory ignores the web of interactions and processes that shape these materials.

Historical approaches. A key body of literature surrounding issues of film marketing approaches this topic from an historical perspective, charting the evolution of the industry and the marketing materials it creates. This literature lays important groundwork and informs Chapter 2 of this dissertation. This body of literature makes important strides in treating marketing materials as culturally and industrially embedded artifacts that are not created or consumed in a vacuum, and can serve as evidence of larger cultural and industrial shifts.[8] These materials are products strategically designed to respond to contemporary social, economic, and technological concerns. As such, they should be examined in relation to these overlapping and dynamic contexts.

Examining the origin of film marketing, Rhodes (2007) charts the early history of movie posters through 1915. He documents the form's evolution from circus posters, discusses the practices of early printing and lithographic companies in the trade, explores display practices by exhibitors, and addresses controversies and censorship attempts surrounding the display of early movie posters. Similarly, Hamel (2012) charts the early development of the film trailer through the 1940s. In doing so, he describes major

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[8] While this study focuses on the industrial history of film marketing as a field, some scholars have utilized film marketing materials as archival evidence to shed light on larger social or cultural trends. For instance, Haralovich (1982) uses film posters to explore the public image of courtship during the 1930s and 1940s. Likewise, Baumann (2002) offers an historical content analysis of newspaper advertisements for films in order to map the shifting cultural status of film as a medium and art form.

innovations, roles of key institutional players, and shifts in production strategies. Focusing on the classical studio system, Sennett (1998) discusses the role of advertising and promotional gimmicks in supporting this mode of production and creating Hollywood's ongoing mystique. Looking at the period from 1940 to 1960, Street (2009) uses film posters and trailers (as well as personal accounts from a prominent trailer producer) to examine common institutional practices in marketing British and American films for their domestic markets and for export during this period. Illuminating industrial film marketing trends over a longer timeframe, Staiger (1990) analyzes the unique challenges and contextual variables that shaped the processes and products of film marketers from early cinema through the 1980s.

While these studies adopt a macro-level historical approach, other scholars marry textual analyses with industrial histories in order to examine the ways in which marketing materials reflect and inform the larger historical dynamics of the time. For example, a dissertation by Mary Beth Haralovich (1984) examines Hollywood's marketing practices during the classical period (1930-1948). By combining a textual analysis of film posters from the period with a contextual approach focusing on internal industrial factors and external social and regulatory pressures, Haralovich presents a rich explanation for the changing representation of women in film advertisements during the period. Likewise, Edwards (2011) examines B-movie marketing in the classical era. Through his analysis of trade publications and marketing materials from B-movie production companies, he

illuminates the unique institutional challenges faced by these companies, and the strategies used to overcome them.

Keith Johnston (2009) and Lisa Kernan (2004) likewise utilize film trailers as primary historical artifacts in order to construct a textured history of film marketing approaches. As Johnston argues, "the film trailer is a distinctive source of historical and textual information that allows us to investigate how the Hollywood film industry (or any other national cinema) saw itself, imagined its products, and built up its public persona. Yet the film trailer remains an overlooked resource within both film history and film analysis" (2009, p. 1). Johnston thus attempts to place trailers in their social, cultural, political, economic, and industrial context and conduct situated textual analyses in order to examine producers' intent and possible audience reactions. In this study, Johnston focuses primarily on the impact of new technologies introduced since the 1950s (such as television, the internet, and cell phones) and how these changes to the media landscape altered the focus and form of film trailers (see also Johnston, 2008).

Lisa Kernan (2004) uses trailers to explore how studios' persuasive appeals (in the form of genre, stories, and stars) address an implied audience. Using close textual analysis of case study film trailers, she constructs a grand historical narrative characterized by a shift from the "classical era" (1927-1950) wherein a mythical "mass" audience was the implied target, to a "transitional period" (1950-1975) characterized by blockbuster marketing and niche targeting, and finally to the "contemporary era" (1975-

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2000) characterized by "high concept" (Wyatt, 1994) marketing targeting an increasingly global audience.

Wyatt (1994) identifies the rise of "high concept" filmmaking as the pivotal development in modern film history. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, this approach became dominant during the 1970s and 1980s, and is characterized by a central focus on marketability, wherein filmmakers aimed to make movies that were reducible to a single one-line concept or "pitch." This strategy is combined with marketing hooks (for instance, using well-known stories derived from popular books, or featuring a well-known star), and a marketing "look" that is memorably iconic, simple, and graphic. Together, these elements create a film property that is marketable and can support multiple product iterations. Situating the ascendancy of this form of filmmaking historically and economically, Wyatt identifies the dissolution of the studio system, the rise of television, and increased media conglomeration as the determining factors precipitating the rise of "high concept" filmmaking.

Picking up from Wyatt, Paul Grainge (2008) documents the ascendancy of branding logic in Hollywood from 1995 to 2003. While his study encompasses broad studio practices during this period of conglomeration and corporate synergy, he specifically addresses changing film marketing tactics as a key aspect of a wholesale shift towards branding as a central organizing force within the Hollywood film industry. Together, these scholars offer compelling macro-economic explanations for shifting aesthetic and strategic marketing practices through the early 2000s.

This dissertation extends these industrial studies to the contemporary moment. Haralovich (1984) asserts that the interactions between various players in the film business are most easily observable at times of major upheaval and change within the industry, as institutional players discuss these challenges in trade publications, debate best practices, and experiment with new systems and strategies. The current era marks a period of such upheaval for the film industry at large, and for marketers specifically, as they face the dual forces of globalization and digitization. In large part, these forces exert their influence by fundamentally altering marketers' perception of their target audience. This dissertation thus examines the changing nature of these audience constructions and how filmmaking and marketing processes are impacted.

Industry Mythologies and Audience Construction

According to the constructionist tradition, audiences are not fixed, external realities. Instead, they are socially and institutionally constructed through discourse and social practice. Conceptions of audiences can be broad and simplistic (thus glossing over diversity within groups), but they can also be extremely specific constructions of small market segments that they aim to "signal" through tailored appeals (Turow, 1997). While technological advances in market research practices have led to what marketers treat as "discovery" of new audience segments in an increasingly fragmented society, scholars note that marketers' actions actively construct these segments (Ang, 1991; Cronin, 2000; Davilá, 2001; Slater, 2002; Turow, 1997, 2006, 2011). Through repetition, widespread acceptance, and internalization of these labels and identities, these audience constructions

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become reified and perpetuated as real social categories. The ways that marketers

perceive, categorize, and signal particular audience groups can therefore have significant

consequences for social life more broadly.

Film marketers' primary task is to define a target audience and create a marketing

campaign that will attract this audience to the theater. Based on analyses of past box

office trends, market research, industry lore, personal experiences and intuition, and input

from cultural informants, Hollywood marketers make important decisions about who

their intended audiences are and how these groups can best be targeted. These audiences

are often defined along the lines of gender, age, race, ethnicity, class, geography or

interests. As Stokes and Maltby's (1999) edited volume documents, the means of

Hollywood's audience measurement have evolved over time. With these changes has

come more fine-grained audience segmentation as well as a changing notion of who

constitutes Hollywood's core audience and what attracts them to movies.

While several authors in Stokes and Maltby's (1999) volume raise concerns about

the nature of Hollywood's market research mechanisms and the questionable assumptions

about the audience it has spawned, these assumptions remain powerful norms in

Hollywood that shape decision-making both implicitly and explicitly.[9] In the risky and

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[9] Tad Friend (2009) summarizes these audience conceptions, explaining, "The collective wisdom is that young males like explosions, blood, cars flying through the air, pratfalls, poop jokes, 'you're so gay' banter, and sex—but not romance. Young women like friendship, pop music, fashion, sarcasm, sensitive boys who think with their hearts, and romance." Likewise, older women are thought to be discriminating and "like feel-good films and Nicholas Sparks-style weepies: they are the core audience for stories of

unpredictable movie business, the assurance that market research numbers provide and the industry mythologies they help to construct can offer a seductive illusion of certainty. But, as Litman and Ahn assert, most market research in the film industry is based on uncertainty which "necessitates the development of an often vague 'audience image' that governs much of the decision-making in the economic stages of the movie business" (1998, p. 193).

As Hollywood adopts technologically sophisticated means of market research and surveillance (such as "social listening" via social media platforms, discussed further in Chapter 5), marketers claim to "know" their audiences and understand niche groups more than ever. Despite these technological advances, however, the overall project of attempting to know the audience (or audiences) for a film is an inherently reductive one. This is especially true in today's global film marketplace where Hollywood movies are seen by hundreds of millions of diverse individuals from around the world. Any attempt to know this audience and their preferences must necessarily resort to broad generalizations and gloss over more nuanced characteristics of individuals and niche groups.

As Haralovich suggests, Hollywood "adjusts policies and practices based on its perception of how best to harmonize with its dominant audience" (1984, p. 14).

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doomed love and triumphs of the human spirit." Meanwhile, older men are considered easy to please, but difficult to lure to the theater. They are thought to "like darker films, classic genres such as Westerns and war movies, men protecting their homes, and men behaving like idiots."

Therefore, as perceptions of the "dominant audience" shift over time, the industry itself changes and alters its practices.[10] The dual forces of globalization and digitization are profoundly altering the contemporary business of filmmaking and marketing, and a key mechanism through which these forces exert their pressure is by challenging ingrained notions, constructions, and treatments of the audience.

Due to the rapid expansion of the international market, the primary target audience for big budget Hollywood films is no longer domestic. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, international audiences are now a primary consideration during all phases of filmmaking and marketing. Marketers' perception of— and signaling to— these audiences has become increasingly salient. As Wasser noted in 1995, "The global audience is too infinite to be knowable. Therefore, attempts to appeal to such an audience are bound to be crude and to be overly reductive" (1995, p. 435). In an effort to alleviate this problem, studios work with local distribution personnel or partners in key target markets. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, however, studio marketers often lack the willingness or institutional freedom to cede control to these cultural intermediaries and allow them to exert their cultural knowledge to the full extent. As a result, Hollywood studios continue to treat international audiences as fundamentally similar in taste and preference to the domestic U.S. audience and to other foreign audiences. Only under special circumstances are key markets treated with individualized attention and

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[10] See Puente (2001) for a discussion of Hollywood's changing valuation of the Latino market and Johnston (2009) for a discussion of early audience targeting techniques based on gender.

sensitivity to cultural nuance.

The introduction of new media technologies has also challenged dominant constructions of the audience for Hollywood films. The traditional idea of a passive, mass audience reachable via a one-way flow of marketing messages has been shattered in recent years. With increased audience participation via social media, marketers now view their audiences as empowered and in control of their own media experience. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, this perception has profound implications for Hollywood at every stage of filmmaking and marketing. While marketers recognize the possible benefits of user participation and free audience labor, they struggle to police fan activity and maintain control of their carefully crafted marketing messages and intellectual property.

This study does not attempt audience research, and does not assess the reception or effectiveness of marketing materials.[11] Instead, it maps the ways in which marketers are adapting their attitudes and strategies to account for the evolving media landscape. Here I follow the lead of Lisa Kernan, who aimed "to learn more not about who audiences *really* were, but about changing Hollywood studio *assumptions* about audiences" (2004, p. 36). As she and King (2003) note, movie trailers and posters are designed to appeal to viewers' assumed preferences, identities, and desires rather than convey any essential truths about the films they promote. As such, analyses of film marketing practices and materials enable us "to discern who the film industry *thinks* it is

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[11] See Stokes & Maltby (2004) for a collection of audience research studies exploring the reception of Hollywood films abroad.

addressing," shedding light on how Hollywood constructs, values, and targets particular

audiences (Kernan, 2004, p. 3). While Kernan relies solely on situated textual analyses to

examine these processes, I adopt an industry-focused approach in order to avoid the

pitfalls of inferring producer intentionality from the texts they create, and to paint a more

holistic picture of the industrial context of contemporary Hollywood film marketing.

Media Industry Studies

This dissertation is situated within the burgeoning field of media industry studies.

This is a multi-disciplinary field of media research drawing from anthropology,

sociology, cultural studies, film and television studies, and political economy. While this

approach is still coalescing as a unified field of study, current frameworks that fall under

this umbrella include "critical media industry studies" (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009),

"critical production studies" (Caldwell, 2008), "creative industry studies"[12] (Hartley,

2005; Deuze, 2007), "cultural economy" (du Gay & Pryke, 2002), "the circuit of cultural

production" (du Gay et al., 1997), and middle-range theory (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996).

Scholars from a variety of fields have adopted these perspectives to explore the

institutional structures, organizational dynamics, and social conditions of an array of

media institutions (most notably Caldwell, 2008; Curtin, 2007; Deuze, 2007; Dornfield,

1998; du Gay, 1997; Ettema & Whitney, 1982; Florida, 2005; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1983;

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[12] This approach has been critiqued by some for its vagueness and its depoliticized and overly celebratory perspective on media industries. Rather than critiquing the workings of power and industries, it is viewed as portraying media industries as emancipatory workplaces where workers are free to pursue their creative agendas (Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Kellner, 2009; Miller, 2009).

Hartley, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Hirsch, 1972; Mayer, 2011; Mayer, Banks & Caldwell, 2009; McRobbie, 2005; Miller et al., 2005; Newcomb & Alley, 1983; Ross, 2003; Tuchman, 1978; Tunstall, 1993, 2001).

Media industry studies adopt a mid-level focus, examining everyday production practices and cultures. Havens, Lotz, & Tinic (2009) aptly describe this position as a "helicopter"-level view of media industries rather than the "jet plane" perspective of political economy (focusing on macro-level factors) or the bottom-up perspective of audience research. While focusing on mid-level dynamics, media industry researchers readily acknowledge the power and significance of macro-level structural factors in production, and also recognize the role of audiences in actively co-constructing meaning. Newcomb and Lotz (2002) introduce a hierarchical model of media analyses, placing "national and international political economy" studies at the top, followed by "specific industrial contexts," "particular organizations," "individual productions," and finally "individual agents." "Specific industrial contexts" represents the level of analysis most pertinent for this study.

Research conducted at this level of analysis examines everyday industrial routines and practices, while placing them within a broader socio-political and economic context. Media workers are affected by macro-level economic, technological, and institutional pressures, but they are also members of unique, local, social work cultures that are formed and maintained via micro-level, everyday social practices (Caldwell, 2008; Deuze, 2007). Studies that take a mid-level approach are therefore poised to examine

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media production cultures as "inhabited institutions" (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006) or "production ecologies" (Cottle, 2003) embedded within larger historical, economic, and political contexts. By adopting this approach, researchers can focus on how professional networks and communities are established and maintained, how shared language, cultural understandings, routines, world views, and perceptions of audiences shape professional practices and texts, and how political, economic, technological, spatial, and social factors shape roles, identities, and work worlds.

This approach treats media texts that emerge from these institutional settings as part of these cultural systems. As Havens, Lotz, and Tinic explain, research in this field focuses on "how knowledge about texts, audiences, and the industry form, circulate, and change; and how they influence textual and industrial practices," also examining "how particular media texts arise from and reshape midlevel industrial practices" (2009, p. 237). In this study, particular attention is thus paid to marketing materials themselves, as they serve as vital components of this professional ecosystem that both reflect and affect its culture.

By focusing on mid-level industrial processes in the marketing arm of studios, I aim to avoid the common pitfall of treating media industries (and Hollywood in particular) as a monolithic entity. This tendency stems from Frankfurt School characterizations of the "culture industry" as a singular, dominant force producing and disseminating messages that lull a mass audience into passivity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944). With the ascent of cultural studies, scholars came to recognize and highlight the

diversity of media audiences and their capacity for varied and oppositional readings of media texts. A similar appreciation for diversity within and across media industries, however, has been slower to take root. By examining individual contexts of media production, media industry scholars work toward illuminating this diversity and undermining notions of monolithic, disembodied, bounded media industries.

As several scholars note, Hollywood is not a geographic place nor a singular industry, but rather a flexible agglomeration of related industries and ancillary branches (Caldwell, 2008; Christopherson & Storper, 1989; Scott, 2005). Bilton (2007) thus characterizes media industries such as Hollywood as a collection of informal networks. As he describes, "These networks extend in two dimensions, horizontally, through peer-to-peer relationships with organizations and individuals, and vertically, through supply chain relationships which contribute to different phases of cultural production and distribution" (p. 46). Given this loose structure, Hartley (2009) advocates the replacement of the term "industry" with that of "social network markets," thus eschewing the idea of a monolithic, corporate institution and embracing the idea of a socially embodied, sprawling network. While this study retains the term "industry" as an organizing framework, I attempt to avoid a monolithic notion of Hollywood and view the field of film marketing as a unique, socially embodied node within a wider field of cultural production.

By viewing production cultures as inhabited institutions, issues of power are of central concern. As Holt & Perren describe, the media industries approach "perceives

culture and cultural production as sites of struggle, contestation, and negotiation between a broad range of stakeholders" (2009, p. 5). Despite pervasive talk of corporate synergy and collaboration, there is often a great deal of infighting, conflicting imperatives, and lack of communication and cohesion within media industries, firms, and working groups (Deuze, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). These dynamics shape workplace processes, impact conceptions and treatment of audiences, and are manifest in the texts these institutions produce. Examining the ways in which power is leveraged and conflict is managed within the field is thus imperative to gain an understanding of production processes and cultures. In this study, therefore, special attention is paid to the relationship between various players within the film marketing field (such as studio marketers, third party marketing agencies, international distribution partners, filmmakers, stars, legal departments, and audiences).

The media industry studies approach offers a valuable perspective on how large-scale cultural, technological, and economic shifts are impacting the day-to-day practices and processes of media producers and the institutions of which they are a part. As Klinenberg argues, "The internal dynamics of any given field always absorb and refract exogenous forces that enter and alter it, and fieldwork inside media organizations and the industry's social space helps to specify how change happens in this particular sphere" (2005, p. 61). Multi-modal engagement with the field of film marketing thus provides vital perspective on the ways in which Hollywood as a whole is slowly adapting to the evolving media landscape.

Method

As outlined by Holt and Perren (2009), the field of media industry studies embraces a diverse array of methodologies including, but not limited to, structural/organizational research, archival/historical research, economic analysis, policy research, surveys, interviews, ethnography, and textual analysis. While I look to secondary sources for necessary background information on the historical, economic, and political factors that shape the contemporary media landscape, field interactions (including interviews and interface ethnography) and textual analysis are the central means by which this research was conducted.

Field interactions. My academic interest in Hollywood marketing stems from previous experience as a member of this industry. As an undergraduate student, I served as a development and acquisitions intern at New Line Cinema and National Geographic Feature Films, and as an international marketing intern at Lionsgate. I later worked as a project manager at a digital marketing agency in Venice, California, serving as a liaison between in-house designers and developers, and studio clients such as Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures and 20th Century Fox. Through these experiences, I gained vital background knowledge, insider perspective, and personal connections that made this research possible. As Sherry Ortner (2010) describes, Hollywood tends to strictly police its boundaries and draw firm lines between insiders and outsider. By leveraging my quasi-insider status, I was able to effectively engage with industry players both interpersonally and at industry events.

To illuminate the day-to day operations and working dynamics of Hollywood's

marketing mechanism, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with

Hollywood film marketing professionals from a range of companies and positions. A

total of sixteen (16) interviews were conducted in-person or via telephone (see Appendix

A for a complete list of interviewees). These interviewees hailed from all sectors of the

film marketing field, and thus offered a range of perspectives and expertise.

To supplement information gleaned through personal interviews, fieldwork at key

industry events was also conducted. Due to strict barriers to entry imposed by Hollywood

studios, Caldwell (2008) and Ortner (2009, 2010) promote what Ortner terms "interface

ethnography" as a useful alternative to traditional imbedded ethnography. This method

involves participant observation along the fringes of the industry in what Caldwell (2008)

terms "half-way spaces" or "contact zones." These spaces exist where the public and

media industries interact—places like film festivals, writers' expos, film screenings and

Q&As, public pitch sessions, trade shows, and conferences. These spaces are open to the

public to varying degrees, and provide a forum for industry personnel to perform for

other industry professionals, fans, or aspirational workers. By conducting participant

observation in these spaces, one can acquire a unique perspective of how industry

professionals interact, view and talk about the state of their field, and wish to be

perceived by outsiders (Caldwell, 2008; Lotz, 2009; Ortner, 2009).

As Caldwell describes, trade shows and their associated rituals function "as

industrial consensus-forming gatherings; as group self-reflection activities; as cooperative

negotiations responding to new technology threats or economic changes; and as socio-professional networking rituals" (2008, p. 104). These spaces thus serve as rich sites to explore the current state of film marketing as a field in flux. To conduct fieldwork in these spaces, I attended the *Digital Hollywood* conference from April 29-May 2, 2013 and again from October 21-24, 2013 in Marina Del Rey, California. This conference brings together panels of media industry professionals to discuss current issues and innovations in the field. Panels addressed topics such as content monetization, ad targeting, social media marketing, mobile marketing, multi-platform branding, intellectual property protection, and gamification strategies, among other topics. I also attended a film marketing conference organized as part of the 2013 American Film Market in Santa Monica, CA. This conference focused on the issues of audience participation and crowd-funding. Together these three industry events provided rich forums in which to engage with the culture of Hollywood marketers, learn about the pressing challenges the field faces, and see how they address these challenges, construct their audiences, and envision the future of film marketing.

Textual analysis. While media industry research focuses on the ways in which social processes, rituals, and exchanges function within production cultures, media texts remain an important component of these analyses. Discussing the role of textual analysis in media industry studies, Hilmes notes that the "focus need not be the type of purely aesthetic textual exegesis inherited from literary studies, but rather can place the text within a productive context and analyze the forces—both immediate and distant—that

work upon it to produce its genesis, development, specifications, narrative structures and trajectories, audience formations and readings, etc." (2009, p. 25). Adopting this strategy, this dissertation employs textual analyses of marketing materials as embedded artifacts steeped in the context of their production and shaped by their producers' conception of the target audience and the media landscape. These textual analyses serve as illustrative case studies, illuminating the ways in which industry dynamics, practices, and beliefs translate into material forms that enter the marketplace and popular culture at large.

A secondary object of textual analysis conducted for this study was the online presence of entertainment marketing agencies (this method informs Chapter 3). While the online presentation of large companies (such as studios) tends to be highly formulaic and uninformative, the online presence of smaller, creative companies such as third party marketing agencies can be very rich, nuanced, and revealing. As such, the company websites, blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds of 21 key marketing agencies were examined (see Table 3.1). Online company information was treated not as a window to the true nature of these firms, but as carefully created "semi-embedded deep texts" (Caldwell, 2008). While publicly accessible, these materials are not intended for a general audience, but signal current and prospective clients and employees. These materials are therefore inherently performative and strategic, presenting a preferred company identity to these intended audiences. These texts thus serve as valuable artifacts to explore the relational dynamics between these companies and the studios that hire

them as vendors, as they illuminate the ways in which agencies sell themselves to studios and differentiate themselves as creative organizations.

A final source of data used in this research was film and marketing industry trade publications, specifically *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *The Wrap* and *Advertising Age*. Articles in these and other publications that address issues of film marketing were collected and examined in order to gain a more comprehensive view of the industry landscape and new developments therein. As Turow (1997) discusses, many industry reports and documents are considered proprietary information, and are therefore rarely released to researchers. Because of the positive press companies can garner from being quoted in trade papers, however, they may release some of this information for publication. Likewise, Amanda Lotz (2009) notes that trade publications are helpful in illuminating the opinions of industry executives with whom it is difficult to secure an interview. These publications often print interviews and quotations from key industry players, so engagement with these publications can serve as a work-around for issues of interpersonal access. Finally, trade publications enable "a continuing discussion across their industry about what is happening in society, how marketers ought to respond to it, and how they *are* responding to it" (Turow 1997, p. x). Analysis of these materials thus provides key insights into the business of film marketing, the challenges facing the field, and the industry attitudes and mythologies that prevail.

As Caldwell warns, "Because insider knowledge is *always* managed; because spin and narrative define and couch any industrial disclosure; and because researcher-

practitioner contacts are always marked by symbiotic tensions over authenticity and advantage, media studies must avoid limiting research to a clean menu of disconnected methods" (2008, p. 2-3). Instead, information and observations gleaned from a variety of sources must be examined in relation to one another in order to unpack the various dynamics at work. By integrating the above menu of approaches, this dissertation fuses together a broad array of insights, forming a narrative that illuminates the complex practices, identities, power dynamics, perceptions, and industry mythologies at play in the contemporary Hollywood marketing business.

Conclusion

Marketing is a vital component of the Hollywood film business, as these activities serve to create and circulate meaning and expectations around a film property, support an array of brand extensions and ancillary products, position the film within popular culture, construct and reify target audience groups, and promote moviegoing as a social practice. Despite the vast resources Hollywood invests in these activities, film marketing remains an understudied production arena within academic literature. While past studies have addressed this topic from economic, textual, and historical perspectives, this dissertation adopts a media industry studies approach in order to explore the institutional and social processes that serve as the context of production for contemporary marketing materials and shape campaign strategies and texts.

Hollywood studios face profound challenges as they struggle to adapt to a rapidly expanding global film marketplace and a continuously evolving technological landscape.

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Central to the changes wrought by these developments is a shifting view and treatment of the audience. Marketers play a key role in shaping and perpetuating these changing constructions, as they are tasked with identifying and targeting audiences for films. As these audiences ostensibly become more amorphous and difficult to reach and influence in the current media environment, the role of marketers has become increasingly important, and they have become integral players at every phase of film production and distribution. Acting as imperfect translators between studios and audiences, marketers relay the tastes and preferences of viewers to studio executives and filmmakers, thus informing production and distribution decisions. In turn, marketers strive to reduce films into manageable encapsulations of meaning, translating films' essences into the cultural language of various audience groupings—both domestic and international—via the translatory marketing texts they create.

In the contemporary environment, globalization and digitization represent profound centrifugal forces perceived as threatening to the centralized power of the studio system and its marketing machine. As international audiences overtake their domestic counterparts in buying power and creative influence, studios face pressure to incorporate the voices and ideas of international distribution partners, and localize both marketing and filmic content accordingly. In this global film marketplace, a centralized, controlled marketing message is thus increasingly difficult to sustain. Similarly, the proliferation of social media and user-generated content (and the concomitant perception

of a newly empowered audience) further threatens the viability of centrally-controlled, carefully orchestrated marketing campaigns.

Hollywood marketers struggle to counterbalance these centrifugal forces with their own centripetal drive. Throughout the history of Hollywood, studios have repeatedly reacted to new developments in technology and audience composition with ambivalence. Often, these reactions manifested as initial opposition, followed by gradual and halting acceptance. The contemporary era represents another key moment in this evolution, as studios (led by their marketing arms) struggle to embrace an audience they view as increasingly diverse and empowered, while simultaneously maintaining centralized control of their marketing messages and intellectual property. By examining the ways in which film marketers organize their work and navigate this shifting landscape, the following chapters illuminate the contextual factors that shape film marketing materials as important cultural texts, and examine the processes by which Hollywood industries are reluctantly adapting to their new environment.

To avoid the pitfalls of looking at the film marketing field in an historical vacuum, Chapter 2 briefly maps the history of film marketing from its early iterations in vaudeville through the year 2000. By exploring the evolution of industry practices and audience mythologies, this chapter situates the current study in its historical context and illuminates the precedents for Hollywood marketers' reactions to contemporary developments. Chapter 3 examines the organizational ecosystem of the Hollywood marketing machine. This chapter introduces the various players involved in designing and

implementing campaigns, and explores how they organize their work, define their roles

and professional identities, and manage the relationships and power dynamics at play in

the industry. Chapter 4 analyzes how an increasingly global film marketplace is

impacting Hollywood filmmaking and marketing practices. It interrogates how film

marketers value and perceive their international audiences, and how these perceptions

translate into standardized or localized marketing campaigns. Chapter 5 addresses how

new media technology is impacting Hollywood marketers' perception of their audiences

as participatory and empowered, and how this shifting view of the audience is affecting

filmmaking and marketing approaches. This chapter explores the forces driving

innovation and an embrace of audience participation, addresses the existing institutional

barriers to change, and examines how marketers navigate these competing imperatives.

Finally, the concluding chapter serves to summarize findings and describe their

significance for the broader field of media industry research and the Hollywood film

industry.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE FIELD

In order to explore the current film marketing landscape, we must first look to the past. Contemporary film marketing practices have evolved from earlier methods, styles, and tactics, and thus must be understood in this context. As Lisa Kernan suggests, film marketing materials serve as useful "metatexts where Hollywood history can fruitfully be interrogated— both in the sense of the history of Hollywood and Hollywood's view of history" (2004, p. 25). Looking to the historical evolution of marketing practices is thus useful in exploring how industrial roles and practices have formed, how industrial mythologies about audiences have evolved, and how the industry has responded to past challenges and upheavals. This chapter therefore briefly explores the history of film marketing from the first commercial films until the end of the 20th century. It maps shifts in the industrial organization of American film marketing practices, discusses key technological developments and their effects on marketing strategies and tactics, and outlines the American film industry's changing perception of its audience and the effect of these shifting perspectives on its products.

As Lisa Gitelman (2006) and other media historians assert, studying the continuities as well as moments of disruption in the shifting technological landscape can be a fruitful exercise. In this way, we avoid the pitfalls of seeing the current era in an historical vacuum and treating contemporary issues as entirely new and unprecedented. The film marketing industry has faced problems related to market expansion, technological disruption, and industrial reorganization before. Understanding how these

issues were addressed in the past helps to shed light on current reactions to similar challenges.

Early Cinema (1890-1920s)

Film marketing practices were first adopted with the advent of commercial cinema in the 1890s. The first movie poster was created in 1890 by French painter and lithographer Jules Chéret to promote an 1890 short film program entitled *Projections Artistiques*. It featured a simple design of a young woman displaying a placard with show times. When the Lumière brothers toured the United States with their films, they introduced this simple film publicity technique to American audiences, displaying straightforward announcements outside their exhibition venues (Allen & Rebello, 1989). While Georges Méliès reportedly projected moving images clipped from his films on a screen above the entrance to the Théâtre Robert Houdin in Paris as early as 1898 (an early precursor to the film trailer), more basic forms of print-based marketing were the norm (Hamel, 2012). From 1896 until around 1907, film marketing and publicity generally consisted of posters, handbills, newspaper announcements, and perhaps a mechanical piano intended to lure passersby into the theater (Gaines, 1990; Rhodes, 2007).

In this early era of cinema, exhibitors (whether they be traveling showmen, shop owners, or early nickelodeon and theater managers) were responsible for marketing to potential audiences. Films were rented to exhibitors for a flat fee per foot of film, so producers of the films did not have a vested interest in maximizing ticket sales after a

film was rented. Instead, film producers concerned themselves with marketing their films to potential exhibitors. To reach this group, they peddled their films in trade journals, catalogues, and via door-to-door salesmen (Hamel, 2012). After renting the films, exhibitors took the lead in promoting them to audiences in an effort to maximize their returns.

Exhibitors faced serious challenges in creating marketing materials during this early period of cinema. Prior to 1908, ongoing patent struggles discouraged large-scale, predictable film production and distribution systems (Staiger, 1990). Instead, showmen sold each other films through local and informal networks (Bakker, 2003). Exhibitors therefore had little advanced knowledge of what films they would screen, what they were about, or how long they would be showing the film. Theaters usually rotated six to eight 15-minute films, sometimes with daily changes. These uncertainties and rapid changes made advertising a particular film difficult. Exhibitors could not plan or budget for the creation of these materials ahead of time, and they risked creating misleading marketing materials that advertised the wrong movie or misrepresented its content (Staiger, 1990).

To avoid these risks, exhibitors designed advertisements that did not advertise specific films, but merely announced that moving pictures were being screened at their venue. Posters and newspaper ads utilized general pitches such as "Marvelous Motion Pictures" or "Don't Fail to See the Great Moving Pictures" (Rhodes, 2007, p. 230). Sometimes these generic advertisements would tout the venue's projection technology, promoting the novelty of the medium rather than the content of the films being screened

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(Rhodes, 2007). Early film posters often showed scenes of the audience enjoying themselves and socializing in the theater (rather than showing scenes from the film itself), advertising the social practice of attending the cinema rather than touting the merits of a particular film (Allen & Rebello, 1989).

As the technical and social novelty of moving pictures waned, exhibitors looked for new ways to market their films more specifically. As early as 1903, some exhibitors began creating posters advertising a single film (Allen & Rebello, 1989).[13] This technique was still logistically challenging and expensive, however, so many exhibitors instead used "stock posters" based on common film genres and themes. For instance, the lithographic firm Hennegan & Co. offered posters entitled "Base Ball," "Fire Rescue," and "Prize Fight." These posters featured generic scenes of a baseball game, a fiery inferno, and a boxing match, respectively, and could be used repeatedly for any film addressing these topics (Rhodes, 2007, p. 231). Other posters offered generic scenes of "torrid embraces, moist-eyed dogs, wild animals, and hair's breadth escapes" upon which any title could be written and re-written (Allen & Rebello, 1989, p. 23). Recognizing the growing power of stars, still other exhibitors adopted star portraits that could be used multiple times for films featuring the same actor (Rhodes, 2007). In all of these cases recyclability was an important factor, as posters were expensive and film runs were brief.

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[13] One of the earliest examples of this practice is the 1903 poster for *The Great Train Robbery*.

Early motion picture exhibitors sometimes hired local artists to create custom-made marketing materials. Few could afford to maintain a staff of artists or pay for custom advertisements for each film, but they would hire freelance artists to make materials as needed. Quality control was difficult under these conditions, as these handmade materials ran the risk of misrepresenting the film (if the artist exercised too much creative license or hadn't seen the film) or including spelling errors (Rhodes, 2007). As time progressed, one-of-a-kind handmade posters fell from favor as exhibitors began to recognize the appeal of (what is known today as) saturation advertising. As one 1905 trade press article explained, it's better to have 500 identical posters than 100 unique ones. After casually seeing the same poster multiple times, the viewer was assumed to be tempted to stop and read it ("A Lesson in Advertising," 1905). Therefore, while handmade marketing materials were used through the 1910s, this practice became increasingly rare.

Instead of hiring local artists to create posters and handbills, exhibitors turned to lithographic companies who offered generic, genre-based, and film-specific materials. Film manufacturers contracted with these lithographic companies to develop posters for their films rather than create these materials in-house. Experienced in "show printing" for traditional theater, "wild west" shows, carnivals, circuses, and vaudeville, designs created by these lithographic companies resembled these existing poster types (Allen & Rebello, 1989; Rhodes, 2007). Early movie posters were visually striking and colorful, often emphasizing the larger-than-life stars, genre, realism, spectacle, or emotion of the film.

As a 1915 issue of *Moving Picture News* describes, "The first moving picture posters were obviously inspired by the old fashioned circus posters, and they were handled in much the same manner—they were striking and lurid, and had a color scheme consisting of about twenty-eight different shades of red" (Petigor, 1915). These early posters were thus marked by their flash, clutter, and hyperbole.[14]

As motion pictures became a viable business and cinemas became permanent fixtures rather than traveling shows, the American film industry began to solidify. Replacing earlier haphazard systems, formal distribution networks (called "film exchanges") took shape by 1909 to ensure a steady supply of film product to exhibitors (Bakker, 2003; Rhodes, 2007). While these exchanges were prominent only in big cities, they provided a central point where both films and their marketing materials could be purchased by exhibitors.

While some exhibitors continued to order marketing materials via catalog from lithographic companies, film production companies started providing their own materials

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[14] Movie marketing's roots in vaudeville and circus promotion carried over into later trailer production. As discussed by Lisa Kernan, even modern trailers still exhibit a "vaudeville" or "circus mode" (2004, p. 18). Trailers in the vaudeville tradition showcase a range of spectacles meant to demonstrate that the film has "something for everyone." Borrowing directly from the vaudeville tradition, early trailers often featured a star standing in front of a curtain directly addressing an audience, utilized introductory titles that acted like vaudeville placards, or provided a vaudeville-like sampling of the film's various features. Borrowing from the circus tradition (originated by P.T. Barnum), early trailers frequently adopted a "hyperbole discourse" characterized by blatant exaggeration, spectacle, and promises of event-status experiences (p. 20-21).

to exhibitors by the 1910s (Staiger, 1990). Because production companies still did not directly financially benefit from increased ticket sales, these materials were sold to exhibitors at an extra cost on top of the flat film rental fee. Production companies generally charged ten cents per poster, with a five-cent rebate when the poster was returned to the film exchange in good condition. In this way, distributors could reuse these materials in subsequent run theaters (Rhodes, 2007).

The largest and most powerful of the early distribution networks was the General Film Company (formed by the Motion Picture Patents Company to distribute member companies' films), which dominated film distribution from 1909 to 1912. During its monopolistic reign, the General Film Company (representing all the major film production companies) had little incentive to create innovative advertisements. Advertisements during this period thus adopted a fairly standard format. While each film company within the network had its own distinct style (featuring signature borders, studio logos, and slogans), the standard format became a title treatment over a black-and-white scene photograph or color lithograph, and sometimes a hyperbolic plot summary (Allen & Rebello, 1989). The establishment of industry trade publications helped to further standardize film marketing practices and styles. Epes W. Sargent's "Selling the Pictures to the Public" became a regular column in *Moving Picture World* beginning in 1911. He later published *Picture Theatre Advertising* (1915) and *Building Theatre Patronage* (1927), helping to further solidify early principles and standards for the burgeoning field of film marketing (Gaines, 1990).

By 1913, competition from independent film companies served to diminish the monopolistic power of the Motion Picture Patents Company. In this newly competitive marketplace, film advertising entered a profound "expansion period" marked by an increase in quantity and quality of film advertisements (Parsons, 1927). Fifteen-minute (1,000 foot) fictional films became standard during this period, allowing for more advanced planning and budgeting than had the previously dominant news, sports, and travelogue genres (Bakker, 2003). With more time to plan, film-specific posters became the norm, replacing earlier generic formats. A variety of designs and sizes for these film-specific posters became available during this period of innovation, giving exhibitors options for display around their theater and town.

With increased competition and the expansion of film exchanges, film posters and advertisements evolved from being an optional luxury to a perceived necessity. Exhibitors came to expect the middleman selling the film print to also sell the poster. This precipitated a vast proliferation of movie posters around 1910, sparking some instances of public outrage over the cheap, tawdry appearance of theaters plastered with sensationalistic film posters (Rhodes, 2007).[15] While movie notices and ads had appeared in newspapers from the earliest days of cinema, these print ads also became commonplace by the mid-1910s (Staiger, 1990).

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[15] As a result, some upscale theaters refrained from placing posters in their lobbies in order to avoid the association between garish, brightly-colored posters and cruder forms of entertainment like the circus (Hamel, 2012).

Advertising designs evolved dramatically during this period of rapid expansion, largely because film production companies (now producing their own marketing materials) had access to images from their films. In 1909 Edison announced that it would sell lithographed one-sheet posters that were "real pictorial posters made from actual photographs of scenes in the pictures they advertise" ("Advertising the Pictures," 1909). By 1911, some production companies began taking still photos on set specifically for use in subsequent marketing materials. Most companies, however, continued to use illustrations for years to come (Staiger, 1990).

The film trailer evolved from practices of early film exhibition. In order to lure customers, these early exhibitors created magic lantern slides announcing another film's title and featuring an image of a star or plot element. These slides, along with ads for local businesses, were sometimes projected between short films in a program (Kernan, 2004; Staiger, 1990). In 1910, Vitagraph released a "propaganda film" entitled *How Vitagraph Films are Made*. The film showcased stars, sets, and "behind-the-scenes" shots of the studio that sold an image of the glamorous film industry without focusing on any one film in particular (Hamel, 2012, p. 269-270).

In 1912, the first film-specific trailer was shown. Lou Harris (head of Paramount's trailer division in the 1960s) recounts this screening:

> The first trailer was shown in 1912 at Rye Beach, New York, which was an amusement zone like Coney Island. One of the concessions hung up a white sheet and showed the serial "The Adventures of Kathlyn." At the end of the reel Kathlyn was thrown in the lion's den. After this "trailed" a piece of film asking Does she escape the lion's pit? See next week's thrilling chapter! Hence, the word "trailer," an advertisement for an upcoming picture (Thomas, 1966, p. 10).

These early trailers were only crude assemblages of scenes cut from the film and fused by outside companies. Trailers had not yet assumed a place of import in studios' marketing strategies. As Jack Atlas (advertiser for MGM and Columbia from the 1950 to the 1970s) explains, the real purpose of these early trailers was "to get people bored enough to leave the theater and make room for someone else" (Hamel, 2012, p. 270).

After the company's founding in 1919, early trailers were largely the products of the National Screen Service (NSS). At first without the explicit permission of studios, NSS used discarded film stills to assemble crude 35mm ads to sell to exhibitors. Soon realizing the value of this marketing format, studios began supplying NSS with footage from their extra cameras and from edited outtakes in order to create more sophisticated ads that suited their marketing vision (Kernan, 2004; Staiger, 1990).

This move toward studio involvement in trailer production is symptomatic of a more general trend toward increased studio investment in and control over film marketing during this period. In 1914, Universal contracted with the Morgan Lithographic Company to "establish a separate art department for our special benefit" (Brandt, 1914). The arrangement allocated ten Morgan Lithographic Company artists to work exclusively on Universal posters. These artists were housed in a building adjacent to the studio, ensuring a great deal of studio oversight (Rhodes, 2007). While still relying on a third-party lithographic company rather than producing these materials in-house, Universal gained significant control over design elements through this restructuring and relocation.

Other studios adopted an even more hands-on approach to film marketing during this period. The 1910s and 1920s were times of increasing consolidation of the film industry, marked by a move toward a hierarchical, divided labor system with multiple specialized departments and routinized work procedures. Amidst this shift, several major film companies established advertising departments tasked specifically with preparing posters, ad campaigns, pictures, plot synopses, publicity releases, and gimmicks to exploit the studio's film slate. In 1914, Mutual Company announced the establishment of a special in-house poster department, and Metro made a similar move the following year. By 1915, the film company Kleine was creating "press books" for each of their films and making them available to exhibitors. These press books (precursors to "electronic press kits" used in studio public relations departments today) included samples of all the electrotypes available for the film, a list of characters and actors, pre-made advertisements, press announcements of various lengths, and suggestions for local stunts, giveaways, contests, and parades (Staiger, 1990).

Armed with newly formed in-house marketing departments, some production companies started experimenting with national direct-to-consumer campaigns during this period (Staiger, 1990). Rather than rely on local exhibitors to represent their products accurately and effectively, these studios directed their own marketing efforts. This shift occurred for two main reasons. First, changes to distribution deals during this period meant that theatrical box office revenue was increasingly shared with producers and distributors (Bakker, 2003). No longer renting their films to exhibitors for an up-front flat

rate, studios now had an incentive to draw more people to theaters by producing popular films and ensuring audience awareness. Secondly, studios and exhibitors faced harsh public criticism during this period for the immoral, shocking, violent, and sensationalistic nature of the films and advertisements they created. They were also criticized for displaying misleading advertisements. Theater owners often used exaggerated images, did not change their advertisements when the film changed, or deliberately advertised the wrong (more popular) film in order to lure audiences. In order to protect their public image, studios had a vested interest in controlling the ways in which their pictures were presented to the public (Rhodes, 2007).

In 1915, Paramount launched a nationwide campaign to promote the studio as a brand name and product line, and bolster their threatened public image. The company started a department of "exploitation" tasked with helping exhibitors advertise, creating lobby displays, organizing street stunts, initiating merchandise tie-ins, promoting newly minted stars, and financing national advertising campaigns (Gaines, 1990; Staiger, 1990). The department worked diligently to keep a pulse on audience opinions and bolster Paramount's public image. They hired an advertising agency to send questionnaires to exhibitors asking which family members chose films and which magazines they thought these individuals read (Bakker, 2003). With this second-hand market research in hand, Paramount placed ads in over 11 million copies of various publications. They focused primarily on fan magazines and women's weeklies, as women were determined to be the primary movie decision-makers at this time (Bakker, 2003; Staiger, 1990). These ads

highlighted the directors, stars, and films in the Paramount lineup, and promoted specific

theaters allied with Paramount as reliable venues that would provide consistent, quality

entertainment (Staiger, 1990). While Paramount was a pioneer in implementing

nationwide brand advertising campaigns based on rudimentary market research, other

majors would follow suit by the 1930s.

Early market research and audience constructions. Rudimentary market

research in the consumer packaged goods sector began at the turn of the century, but little

formal market research was conducted in the film industry during its formative years.

Studios did not begin to introduce formal market research techniques until the mid-1910s.

Prior to this, early marketing decisions were generally founded on the intuition and local

knowledge of theater owners and showmen. Likewise, producers made decisions about

what films to make via trial and error. Production costs were relatively low, the

technology was novel and exciting, and producers did not see returns based on the

number of tickets sold. In this context, filmmakers had little incentive to maximize the

popularity of their films by fulfilling audience desires and seeking new markets (Bakker,

2003).

What limited and informal forms of market research existed at this time took

place at the level of the individual theater. Future studio moguls Carl Laemmle and

Adolph Zukor were pioneers in this field. Laemmle started his career conducting

audience studies in Chicago for the nickelodeon operator Hale's Tours. He carefully

counted the number of people in attendance at various times of day in order to

recommend show scheduling changes. Likewise, Zukor often sat in his New York theater in order to watch audience reactions to the films he screened (Bakker, 2003; Ohmer, 1999).

Based on intuition and these informal methods of market research, the first theaters in the U.S. often courted women and children as key target markets. For instance, Tally's Electric Theater in Los Angeles was touted in 1902 as "For Up-to-Date High-Class Motion Picture Entertainment Especially for Ladies and Children." Other nickelodeons advertised their venues as "Moral and pleasing to Ladies" as well as "Thoroughly sanitary" and "fumigated hourly" (Allen & Rebello, 1989, p. 23). These pitches serve as early examples of targeted film advertising, but marketed the venue of film exhibition rather than the film itself. By touting the venue as a respectable arena for family entertainment, exhibitors sought to avoid negative associations of theaters with burlesque and vaudeville. This focus on female audiences continued well into the 1910s, as early market research indicated that female viewers were most likely to make viewing decisions for the family.

Setting the tone for much of Hollywood's history, early cinema was targeted to white audiences. In areas of the south, African American audiences were effectively barred from attending movie theaters altogether. In Durham, North Carolina, for instance, movies arrived for white audiences in 1907, while a theater for black audiences didn't open until 1913. In much of the country, theater segregation was the norm. African American audiences were often relegated to balcony seating or forced to attend

screenings at certain times of day (usually after the theater had closed for whites). In other areas, de facto segregation held sway, as theaters catered to black or white audiences based on the neighborhood in which they were located. Often theaters in black neighborhoods received films in their final run, up to a year after their initial release (Gomery, 1992). Therefore preferences of African American audiences were not of central concern to filmmakers.

Subject matter and casting of early mainstream films illustrates this indifference toward minority audiences. The widespread casting of white actors in blackface and the early success of racist films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) are indicative of filmmakers' focus on pleasing white audiences at the expense of their minority counterparts. Due to mainstream film companies' disregard for these audiences, Asian Americans and African Americans responded by launching their own alternative cinemas. While Asian American cinema failed to gain a foothold, early African American cinema (now known as "race movies") flourished (Caddoo, 2014). During this early period, racial minorities were not valued as vital audience segments, and thus were forced to find targeted content and exhibition venues outside of mainstream cinema.

While filmmakers often ignored the diversity of their domestic markets, this period witnessed the first informal research on international (mostly European) film markets. As early as the 1910s, consuls were asked to write short reports on foreign film markets, and insights were published in the *Commerce Reports* (Bakker, 2003). During the First World War, European film industries were decimated, creating a vacuum that

was quickly filled by American film products. With the end of the war and an increasing European appetite for diversion, foreign markets came to comprise a significant audience segment for American film companies. By 1919, therefore, overseas box office revenues were factored into film budgets, and local language versions of films and publicity materials were being produced for key foreign markets (Miller et al., 2005). While still considered a marginal segment, this period thus marked the American film industry's first recognition of international audiences' importance and need for targeted filmic materials.

The Classical Studio System (1920s-1948)

The classical period of Hollywood cinema marked an era of profound change and expansion for film marketing practice. This era is characterized by industrial consolidation, intense competition, the establishment of the star system, the introduction of sound and color technologies, and the birth of modern market research practices. Frequently referred to as the "Golden Age of Hollywood," this period was profoundly lucrative, and pivotal in guiding the subsequent evolution of Hollywood cinema.

In the late 1920s, a wave of mergers created an American film landscape dominated by eight major studios: MGM, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros., RKO, Columbia, Universal, and United Artists. The first five of these majors were fully vertically integrated, controlling their own production, distribution, *and* exhibition through ownership of large theater chains. With an average of 10 to 17 movies released each week, and an average weekly movie attendance of 95 million people during this

period, the stakes were high to attract the largest possible audience to these theaters in a short timeframe. Due to this structural reorganization and intense competition, marketing became a central concern for newly formed Hollywood majors.

Prior to vertical integration, films were typically rented to independent exhibitors for a flat fee. This meant that studios did not see additional profits with the sale of additional tickets. By the late 1920s, however, rental deals with theaters (both studio-controlled and independently owned) shifted from a flat rate rental to a percentage of gross box office receipts (Staiger, 1990). As theaters consolidated into chains and were acquired by studios, it became much easier to audit these theaters and command payment on a percentage basis. With this change in theater ownership and fee structure, studios' profits were now directly linked to ticket sales, prompting them to create films that would appeal to the largest possible audience and market them with strategic, national, film-specific campaigns.

With their acquisition of theater chains, studios could time nationwide marketing campaigns to coincide with first-run release dates (Staiger, 1990). They also gained increased control and oversight over the implementation of these campaigns at the level of exhibition. As a result, studios invested an increasing amount of time and money in the planning of these standardized, film-specific campaigns. As described by Robert H. Cochrane (Vice President of Universal Pictures) in 1926, marketing labor was divided and organized into groups responsible for "advertising," "publicity," and "exploitation." As he explains, "advertising" was concerned with "selling through the printed word—by

paid advertising space, direct-by-mail printed matter, lithographic posters and so on."

"Publicity" was concerned with "the dissemination of interesting reading matter."

Looking beyond printed materials, "exploitation" comprised all other activities aimed "to

create in advance the things that will eventually sell tickets for the theatre owner," such

as stunts and contests (Cochrane, 1927, p. 237-241).

Housed in these advertising, publicity, and exploitation departments, full-time

writers and illustrators were hired to devise campaigns for the steady stream of movie

products entering the theater circuit. Press books (also referred to as "plan books," "sales

books," or "campaign books") assumed heightened importance and depth during this

period (Hamel, 2012). Starting out as a single-page document, they grew to roughly 12

pages in length by the 1920s. By the 1930s and 1940s, dedicated press book editors and

art staffs were disseminating 100-page books filled with ideas for stunts, ready-made

newspaper ads, pre-written feature articles (of differing lengths and foci), pre-written

movie reviews, lithographs, colored photos for lobby displays, cards for use in store

windows, circulars called "heralds," and a wide range of movie poster designs (Hamel,

2012; Allen & Rebello, 1989).

The scale of campaigns increased dramatically during this period. In the late

1920s, Paramount claimed to print as many as 20,000 one-sheet posters for its largest

releases (Allen & Rebello, 1989). As Allen and Rebello describe, "Movie posters

bombarded the eye from every available vantage point: brilliantly lighted theater lobbies,

billboards, brick walls, roofs, fences, buses, even taxicab wheel covers. Competition

among studios and exhibitors was to the death" (1989, p. 14). As a result, marketing budgets rose drastically during this period. In 1940, Paramount added $500,000 to its overall marketing budget, while MGM added $250,000. Meanwhile, 20th Century Fox allocated $2.7 million for promoting its film lineup—an unprecedented amount at the time (Hamel, 2012).

Trailer production during this period became more prevalent, sophisticated, and studio-controlled. From 1922 to 1928, National Screen Service (NSS) held exclusive contracts with all the major studios to create their trailers. In 1928, however, Warner Bros. broke away from this model to create its own in-house trailer department. MGM followed suit in 1934, providing its own trailers to its 3,000 theaters (Hamel, 2012; Kernan, 2004). Despite the defection of Warner Bros. and MGM, NSS remained the dominant player in the trailer business during the classical era, supplying trailers to over 10,000 theaters one to three times per week (Hamel, 2012).

To bolster NSS's position in the face of defecting studios, the company changed its business model in 1928 to maximize studios' benefits and retain their patronage. Under the new model, theater owners would pay NSS an annual license fee to show their trailers, and studios would get a portion of these proceeds. In exchange, studios were asked to house NSS employees (a producer, copywriter, and editorial supervisor) on the studio lot to supervise filming and select expressive scenes to use in the trailer. They would also work with studio editors to cut the final trailer (Hamel, 2012; Kernan, 2004).

Thus, while the majority of trailer production was conducted by the third party NSS, studios became increasingly involved in the production of these promotional texts.[16]

Due to NSS's monopoly on trailer production, trailers during this period adopted a standard format and style. NSS trailers tended to highlight three to eight scenes from the film and run for 1.5 minutes (Hamel, 2012). They tended to emphasize genre, studio stars (and their past successes), exotic settings, and hyperbolic titles and narrations.[17] Stylistically, these trailers featured an abundance of wipes, superimposed graphics, and dynamic titles that moved and interacted with the image. With the advent of sound, (mostly male) voice-over narrations were introduced to convey key storyline information (Kernan, 2004). By 1938, sound technology had improved to the point where trailers featured their own scores, often composed specifically for marketing purposes (Thomas, 1966). While audiovisual marketing platforms would not supplant print advertising as the most valued marketing format until the advent of television, this period witnessed profound development in this arena. Trailers became an important means of disseminating information about upcoming attractions and luring audiences to the theater.

Development of systematic market research practices. Newly incentivized to maximize ticket sales, studios during the classical period demonstrated increased interest in market research activities. Rising production costs and box office revenues bolstered

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[16] As studios assumed greater control of trailer production, these texts gained legitimacy within the public eye. This informed exhibitors' choice to screen trailers prior to the feature presentation rather than after the film ended (Hamel, 2012).

[17] For instance, the trailer for *The Sea Hawk* (1940) promised "The greatest adventure in all history" and "The greatest spectacle of all time!" (Sella, 2002).

the need for research, as the financial risks and rewards involved in filmmaking swelled dramatically over time (Bakker, 2003). With an increasingly segmented division of labor under the studio system, market research activities were no longer the domain of production personnel or individual exhibitors. Instead, these responsibilities fell to sales departments and the managers of studios' theater chains (Maltby, 1999a). With large theater chains under their control, studios now had reliable box office data that could be analyzed to predict future audiences' genre, star, and marketing preferences. This data became an invaluable resource in making production and marketing decisions.[18]

Box office data analysis was also the primary means of gaining insight into international audience preferences. As international (particularly European) audiences became more important in the post-World War I era, some Hollywood majors set up distribution subsidiaries in key foreign markets rather than work through local third party distribution companies. This structure simplified lines of communication between film producers and international audiences, allowed for more accurate accounting of international box office take, and incentivized studios and marketers to be increasingly responsive to international audience preferences. These preferences, however, were gauged solely via box office numbers, as logistical challenges and small market sizes prevented more in-depth market research initiatives (Bakker, 2003).

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[18] Box office data was taken very seriously when adjusting studios' star portfolios. In 1939, Samuel Goldwyn canceled Merle Oberon's contract after studying the box office returns of her films (Bakker, 2003).

Domestically, surveys were a common method of studio market research during the classical period. In 1922, Universal began running a weekly ad in *The Saturday Evening Post* asking readers to answer questions about their favorite stars and stories. A 1928 ad, for example, asked readers whether they liked happy endings and if Universal should replace unhappy endings with happy ones when adapting books or plays. While this method suffered from profound response bias, Universal gained useful audience insights and compiled an impressive mailing list of fans that could be contacted about upcoming releases (Bakker, 2003).

As the star system solidified, studios also established fan mail departments to keep track of mail and analyze it to deduce stars' popularity. During the 1930s, each piece of mail (approximately 18,000 to 45,000 letters per month) was examined to record the star recipient's name, and the estimated age, gender, and location of the fan (Bakker, 2003). This information was subsequently used by studios to make casting, contract, and marketing decisions.

Preview and test screenings were also adopted as a means to gauge audience interest during this period. Prior to the 1920s, pre-screenings were infrequent and haphazard. Warner Bros. producer Harry Rapf, for example, would show films to a panel comprised of his driver, carpenter, electricians, studio barber, hospital intern, the gate keeper, his masseur, and their wives and children. By the 1920s, however, these previews became more structured, and attention was paid to location, audience composition, and in-theater audience reactions (Bakker, 2003).

The 1930s witnessed the introduction of social science-based research that would set the stage for later market research practices. In 1935, George Gallup set up the American Institute of Public Opinion. While his polls generally dealt with political topics, he included some film-related questions as well, perhaps to entice film executives to hire him. When Gallup first approached Darryl Zanuck and Louis B. Mayer in 1939, however, they declined his services, claiming that the movie business was an art rather than a science (Ohmer, 1999).

That same year, however, a non-commissioned Gallup poll indicated that the potential audience for David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939) was 55 million viewers—the largest ever. Armed with this polling data, Selznick convinced MGM to charge higher than average ticket prices for the film to maximize revenue (Bakker, 2003; Ohmer, 1999). He also argued, based on this data, that people already knew about the film, so extensive advertising was not necessary. Seeing the success of this approach and eager to make lucrative movies for less money, a recently bankrupted RKO signed a contract with Gallup's newly formed Audience Research Institute (ARI) in 1940 (Ohmer, 1999).

ARI touted its "scientific" methods as superior to earlier forms of market research due to their systematic sampling and questionnaire methods (Ohmer, 1999, p. 61). Rather than look at films in their totality, they treated them as a bundle of various ingredients (including title, cast, stories, and marketing) that could be manipulated individually in order to maximize appeal. According to ARI, a quarter of viewers bought movie tickets

based primarily on the film's title. As a result, up to 40 titles were tested for each film in question, often with key audience segments in mind. For instance, Disney's *Uncle Remus* was renamed *Song of the South* (1946) after title testing indicated that the latter was less likely to offend African American audiences and appealed more to an adult audience that was not automatically attracted by animation (Ohmer, 1999).

ARI ran similar tests for storylines, offering sample groups several 60-word synopses from which they were asked to select their favorite. These findings were not only used to select storylines for films, but also to inform how the film would be marketed to key audience groups. For instance, initial testing indicated that nineteen-year-olds (considered an important age bracket at the time) were not interested in Columbia's *The Jolson Story* (1946). When the synopsis was revised to emphasize the film's music, however, teen appeal was achieved. As a result, marketing materials were designed to highlight the film's music (Ohmer, 1999) (See Figure 2.1).
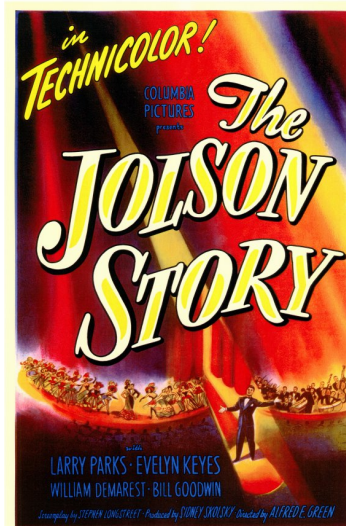
Figure 2.1: **Movie poster for *The Jolson Story* (1946)**

Surveys were also conducted to aid in casting decisions. This practice served to perpetuate typecasting, however, as audiences generally indicated a preference for the familiar. For instance, despite her desire to break into dramatic roles, audiences continuously indicated their preference for Ginger Rogers in musicals. She thus continued to be cast for this genre, and her image in marketing materials soon became shorthand for communicating the film's status as a musical (Ohmer, 1999). As ARI's list of studio clients grew through the 1940s, they established a regular publication entitled *Continuing Audit of Marquee Values* to which studio executives could subscribe. As a predecessor to today's Q Scores, this publication tracked the general popularity of various stars by measuring audiences' espoused likeliness to attend a film based on the star's name on the marquee. ARI also released a "dark horse" report predicting up-and-coming stars based on survey research (Bakker, 2003; Ohmer, 1999).

In addition to title, story, and casting, the burgeoning field of audience research influenced the size of film advertising budgets and the strategies studios employed. Based on their research, ARI recommended that studios start marketing six months before the film's release in order to maximize awareness. They then tested the effectiveness of campaigns by asking survey participants a) if they had heard of the film, and b) if they could identify a cast or story element from the film. These "publicity penetration" surveys (precursors to modern tracking reports) could be repeated after new campaign elements were rolled out in order to gauge the effectiveness of the effort (Ohmer, 1999, p. 74). Armed with this data, ARI claimed that it was "now in a position to draw

conclusions which will enable you to increase the net effectiveness of your paid advertising by *at least one hundred percent*" (Bakker, 2003, p. 120). Ultimately, the research group created an all-inclusive formula which claimed to estimate the overall box office return of a film. This formula was based on the marquee value of the cast, the level of publicity penetration, and the level of "want-to-see" (tracked by asking respondents whether they had a desire to see the film) (Ohmer, 1999, p. 74).

In addition to survey research, ARI introduced a more systematic research method for preview screenings termed the "Preview Jury System." These screenings introduced rigorous audience sampling methods and employed the Hopkins Electric Televoting Machine as a measuring tool. While watching the film, audience members were asked to move the machine's dial in accordance with their opinion at any given time. The dial could be pulled to five positions that indicated: "like very much," "like," "neutral," "dull," or "very dull." The dials connected to a central "seismograph" that plotted a line on paper. Lined up with the film's sequence, researchers claimed to identify scenes that should be cut from the film, and favorite scenes that should be used in marketing materials (Bakker, 2003, p. 115; Ohmer, 1999, p. 74).[19] According to industry accounts, David O. Selznick would often lay a ruler on the resultant graph and order his editors to systematically cut every scene below the line (Bakker, 2003). Market research thus became a powerful tool during the classical Hollywood era, leveraged to make important

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[19] ARI's competitor, Leo Handel's Motion Picture Research Bureau (MPRB) that worked exclusively for MGM, employed a similar technique using the Cirlin Reactograph and the Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program Analyzer (Bakker, 2003).

production and marketing choices. With increased industrialization of filmmaking and heightened financial stakes, scientific research techniques became a means for understanding audiences in new ways and attempting to predict their preferences.

Shifting perceptions of audience. While the classical Hollywood era is often viewed as a period of "mass culture," studios were keenly aware of the various segments that comprised their audience. They espoused the ideal of entertainment for the masses, but, as Richard Maltby explains, "The undifferentiated audience was a rhetorical trope vital to the industry's claims to practice a form of cultural democracy." In actuality, "audience tastes were categorized by income and class as well as explicitly by gender and age" (1999a, p. 4). Movies were subsequently assembled to include elements presumed to appeal to a wide variety of "taste publics" in order to maximize audience appeal and box office take. As the industry grew and audience research became more sophisticated, new audience segments were constructed and identified, and new target marketing techniques were adopted to appeal to these various groups.

The earliest means of audience segmentation were along the lines of class and geography. Studio and trade press rhetoric from the 1920s and 1930s illuminates a series of binaries when the industry discussed audience segments, differentiating between: "metropolitan" versus "hinterlands," "Broadway" versus "Main Street," and the "upper strata" versus "commonality" (Maltby, 1999b, p. 32). By classifying individual theaters into these categories, studios could select movies for exhibition in different locales. More racy films, for instance, were reserved for theaters serving urban audiences deemed more

sophisticated than their easily-offended rural counterparts. With the introduction of sound, this perceived divide between rural and urban audiences became more concrete, as rural theaters often lacked the sound technology required to screen sound films. Rural audiences were thus offered a different slate of movies than urban viewers (Maltby, 1999b).

Audience segmentation along geographic and class lines was primarily used to determine distribution patterns, but these categorizations were also used to guide marketing practices. Differentiated formats of marketing materials were increasingly employed in order to appeal to different segments. For instance, one format might stress romance or "swank" in order to appeal to urban audiences and women. Another format might adopt a folksier approach geared to rural family audiences, while another might adopt a "schmeer" approach characterized by an emphasis on action and intended for a low-brow audience (Allen & Rebello, 1989, p. 41).

During this period, studios and their market research arms largely ignored race in their discussions of target audience groups, instead conflating race with class and geography. Witnessing the success of "race movies" targeted specifically to African American audiences, however, studios took slightly more care to avoid overtly offensive cinematic material. Due to studios' monopolistic theater ownership and block booking practices, independent "race movies" were largely squeezed out of the marketplace during this era, and Hollywood studios were tasked with filling this void. While they experimented with a few films featuring all-black casts (notably Fox's *Hearts in Dixie*

and MGM's *Hallelujah* in 1929), studios primarily aimed to appease black audiences by eliminating blackface and casting African American actors in stereotypical bit parts within their mainstream films (Caddoo, 2014).[20] African American audiences for these films were rarely viewed as a group warranting specialized marketing treatment.

Gender, however, became a key mode of audience differentiation in early Hollywood. Following from presumptions established during the earliest days of cinema, women continued to be viewed as the primary audience for Hollywood films through the 1920s and early 1930s. A 1924 article in *Photoplay* estimated that a full 75% of the moviegoing public was comprised of women (Smith, 1924). This belief stemmed from results of early target marketing to women (in order to boost the moral standing of cinema), surveys of exhibitors noting high volumes of female attendees, as well as a common assumption that women made viewing choices for the whole family (Maltby, 1999a).[21]

Female viewers were assumed to invest more heavily in star images and participate more fully in early fan culture (Maltby, 1999a). As a result, the star system

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[20] African American star Lena Horne and Latina star Margarita Carmen Cansino were offered studio contracts during this period, but their ethnicity was downplayed or concealed. Lena Horne was only cast in parts that could be cut for screenings in the South, and Margarita Cansino was compelled to change her name to Rita Hayworth, undergo electrolysis to broaden her forehead, lose weight, and dye her hair red to meet the "all-American girl" standards of the classical era. It is telling that Rita Hayworth's first major success came from her role in a film called *The Strawberry Blond* (1941) (Rodriguez, 2004).

[21] Belief in the dominance of the female audience also led to the employment of female screenwriters, a focus on female-centered stories, and the introduction of the "women's film" as a genre (Maltby, 1999a, p. 5).

became a key component of classical era filmmaking and marketing. Under the studio system, promising actors were signed exclusively to a studio. Their star persona was carefully cultivated by studio personnel, and this persona was used as a key marketing tool to communicate genre and lure target audiences to the theater. Press books stipulated how stars should be promoted for each film, provided studio-sanctioned interviews, and suggested promotional tie-ins for exhibitors involving star images (Kernan, 2004). As Kernan explains, trailers during this period often looked more like a "star-studded variety show" rather than a unified story due to the overwhelming emphasis on these personas (2004, p. 82).

Gender and class categories were often combined during this era to create more complete profiles of the ideal audience. In the 1920s, this ideal took the form of the "flapper." Characterized as a metropolitan working woman, the flapper was an avid reader of fan magazines, and was drawn to the theater by content considered to be "smut" by more conservative "Main Street" audiences (Maltby, 1999b, p. 34). By the mid-1930s, the "flapper" ideal was replaced by that of (the similarly urban, employed female) "Tillie-the-Toiler." This ideal cinemagoer was characterized as "the busy, yearning little girl who supports the box office...Tillie...does not want to go home from the show with any more problems than she had when she started out for the evening. Tillie wants action and satisfaction. She wants to feel, not to think and worry and reason" (Ramsaye, 1932). Overall, during this period, men, minorities, and rural populations were undervalued audience segments and were rarely courted by film producers or marketers.

This focus on female audiences was undermined when Gallup and his Audience

Research Institute (ARI) entered the Hollywood fray in the late 1930s. Surveys

conducted for RKO from 1937 to 1939 indicated that women made up only 51% of the

filmgoing audience (Stokes, 1999). Results also suggested, contrary to popular belief,

that the majority of filmgoers were poor and young (with 65% of attendees under the age

of thirty, and 19-year-olds representing the most avid moviegoing age group). In response

to these findings, Gallup urged studios to actively lure older and wealthier viewers, while

continuing to make big budget movies for the less affluent 19 to 25 age group (Bakker,

2003).

While young adults became a key target market during this era, children and

family audiences retained their value in the eyes of Hollywood producers, marketers, and

exhibitors. In the 1920s, the popularity of animated short films alerted theater managers

to the importance of young viewers. Through the subsequent establishment of the

Saturday matinee, theater owners attempted to cement children's place within the

audience and establish moviegoing as a ritual early in life. By attracting children, theater

owners could also effectively establish their venue as an upstanding and suitable space

for family entertainment (Kline, 1993; Maltby, 1999a).

With the advent of sound, children's attendance became less of a priority. In the

silent era, children ages twelve and under constituted six to eight percent of the audience,

primarily frequenting second-run neighborhood theaters. As sound developed, however,

focus shifted to first-run urban theaters that could afford the new technology (causing the

shuttering of many small neighborhood theaters). Sound films became more centered on dialogue, emotion, and human problems, rather than on the physical comedy and action of silent films that appealed to young filmgoers. These developments caused a 40% decline in children's cinema attendance by the end of 1930 (Maltby, 1999b).

With the decline of the child audience, filmmakers and exhibitors reformulated their image of young filmgoers by rolling them into a newly reimagined "family" audience. As part of Hollywood's ongoing efforts to establish cinema as an uplifting, upstanding, prestigious form of entertainment, filmmakers and marketers highlighted the educational potential of cinema, particularly by releasing literary adaptations, costume dramas, and biopics. In a particularly concerted effort, MGM sent booklets to 35,000 teachers touting the educational benefits of their 1935-1936 lineup (Maltby, 1999b).

As part of the industry-wide campaign toward a "cinema of uplift," censorship efforts were heightened during this period, impacting both filmmaking and marketing practices. Changes were adopted in response to mounting public criticism of the film industry, and were made possible via the new vertically integrated studios that could more effectively enforce industry standards. As a result, the Production Code (or Hays Code) which established morality guidelines for filmmakers, was adopted in March of 1930. A few months later, 19 major production companies adopted a 12-point Advertising Code as well. Adherence to this code was enforced by the International Motion Picture Advertising Association (IMPAA), and a $5,000 fine could be levied for any instance of non-adherence. Beginning in November 1933, it was stipulated that all

film advertising copy had to be reviewed and approved by this institutional body in advance of distribution (Staiger, 1990).

The Advertising Code was not as specific as the strict Production Code, and existed more as a general call for good taste and honest representation of films. As Hamel describes, "From 1934-1945, a total of 8,879 trailers were submitted for review and only sixty-five were rejected or forced to revise, a proportion of less than one percent" (2012, p. 275). Haralovich (1984) argues that trailers were subject to less stringent scrutiny than films themselves because the industry recognized the importance of sensationalism in advertising.

Despite weak enforcement, however, censorship efforts did influence strategies and practices of film marketers. As Haralovich (1984) observes, for example, Warner Bros. shifted from an advertising approach that emphasized sexuality to a more wholesome approach during this period. The implementation of the Advertising Code also served to bring marketing under centralized control of the studios. Prior to the Code, independent exhibitors could elect to use studio-provided marketing materials or create their own. Now, with central approval needed from the IMPAA, independent exhibitors were stripped of this creative freedom and studios established full control of their marketing materials' design and implementation (Haralovich, 1984).

Challenges of the Postwar Era (1948-1975)

A series of cultural, technological, and industrial changes took place in the late 1940s and 1950s that rocked Hollywood and greatly impacted its marketing strategies. In

the post-World War II period, returning soldiers started families, moved to the suburbs (further from theaters), and purchased televisions for their new homes. Within ten years of television's introduction, it had made its way into 80% of U.S. households and filled almost two hours of people's leisure time each day (Kline, 1993). By 1970, a full 95% of households had a television set (Pecora, 1998). These profound social and technological shifts led to a steep decline in cinema attendance. Between 1946 and 1960, average weekly movie attendance fell from 82 million to only 30 million (Sklar, 1999).

As a result, Hollywood studios treated television as direct competition, and were slow to embrace it as an exhibition platform for their own cinematic products. Facing pressure from theater owners, demands from stars for residual compensation for television releases, filmmaker concerns over undesirable sponsorship associations, and a fledgling television network system unable to provide acceptable compensation, studios were reticent to adopt television as a viable tool (Decherney, 2012). It was not until the late 1960s that Hollywood fully realized television's promise as a valuable exhibition window for studios' otherwise untapped libraries of old films.

In addition to the challenge of declining box office revenue, Hollywood faced profound structural upheaval during this period. In 1948, the Supreme Court decision in the antitrust case *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* forced all of the major film studios to divest themselves of their theater chains. In an already suffering cinema marketplace, the loss of guaranteed distribution outlets for their product dealt a severe blow to the studios. It also meant the loss of direct marketing control inside theaters, but

contractual agreements allowed distribution departments to retain marketing oversight (Staiger, 1990).

Structural upheaval continued throughout the 1960s, as floundering studios became prime targets for corporate acquisition. The 1960s, therefore, witnessed a first wave of conglomeration whereby studios merged with large diversified corporations. During this period, Gulf + Western assumed ownership of Paramount, Transamerica acquired United Artists, Kinney Services acquired Warner Bros., and MCA merged with Universal.

As studios struggled to cut costs and new corporate owners introduced their own business philosophies and practices, marketing departments were subject to reorganization and disintegration. In the 1950s, a large percentage of film trailers were produced by National Screen Service (NSS) in partnership with studio creatives and editors, or by in-house studio trailer departments. By the 1960s, however, many in-house trailer departments were dissolved and work was outsourced to newly formed boutique trailer production companies (many started by former studio "trailer men") (Kernan, 2004, p. 29). Studio marketing departments thus assumed the shape and function they retain today—as internal teams that manage and organize the work of myriad external marketing vendors.

Market research and new audience segments. Declining box office revenue, the end of block booking practices via fully owned theater chains, and the introduction of new corporate ownership models led to an increased demand for box office predictability

during this period. With more accurate predictive models, studios hoped to make wise investment choices in the risky film marketplace, and establish advantageous rental percentage deals with exhibitors. During this period, banks also became more prominent film backers, and demanded convincing evidence of the soundness of their investments (Staiger, 1990).

Resulting from these pressures, studios demonstrated heightened interest in scientific audience research. Having incorrectly predicted the 1948 presidential election results, Gallup's reputation was tarnished in Hollywood, and his Audience Research Institute (and its prime competitor, Handel's Motion Picture Research Bureau) closed in the 1950s (Ohmer, 1999). But the techniques he used were assimilated by the industry, and most studios established their own market research departments by the 1960s (Bakker, 2003). These departments continued to host preview screenings and measure audience responses to titles, stories, casts, and advertisements.

The intensification of market research activities, in conjunction with the perceived loss of the "mass" audience to television, led to more fine-grained audience segmentation during this period. While classical Hollywood maintained the myth of a mass audience despite their implicit division along the lines of gender, class, age and geography, this myth was shattered in the postwar period. As Kernan describes, "There no longer seems to be an imaginary universal, raceless (but white by omission), classless (but middle- to working-class) assumed mass of folks with basically similar (and basically conservative) values that went to the movies" (2004, p. 159). Television

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assumed the role of appealing to this "universal" audience, so Hollywood responded by targeting specific audience segments (Bakker, 2003; Kernan, 2004; Staiger, 1990).

As Hollywood producers came to see their audience as a collection of segments, marketers focused on tailoring their appeals accordingly. As Staiger describes, studios strove to attract the *right type* of customers by addressing different demographic and lifestyle segments with targeted appeals (Staiger, 1990). Class served as an important audience marker, with marketers showing heightened interest in targeting higher socioeconomic brackets (Maltby, 1999a). To attract this desirable niche, marketers frequently referenced prestige signifiers such as directors' names, film festival awards, and critics' quotations in marketing materials (Kernan, 2004).[22] By making these references, studios hoped to elevate certain films to the realm of art and compete with a burgeoning independent film movement.

Gender, too, remained a vital tool in defining audience segments. Unlike earlier periods, men became the target gender during this time. This shift was due to assumptions that women now preferred television to the cinema, and that men, as breadwinners, made movie selections for the whole family ("Old 4-hanky…," 1972). The 1968 abandonment of the Production Code both reflected and precipitated this shift to a male-centered Hollywood. Studios during this period were desperate to compete with television for audiences, and the abandonment of the Production Code allowed studios to

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[22] Famous directors such as Woody Allen, Alfred Hitchcock, and Stanley Kubrick often made appearances in their films' trailers (Kehe & Palmer, 2013a).

differentiate their content by including violence and sex deemed unacceptable for television. As a result, however, the cinema became a less inviting place for women and children (Maltby, 1999b).

This shift in orientation toward male viewership impacted the types of films that were made during this period. Studios acted under the assumptions that men comprised the primary theater-going audience, and that they preferred violent stories about men and starring men. Thus, while female actresses had consistently been among the top three stars for many years running, they fell from this position in 1969 and thereafter rarely made it into the top ten (Krämer, 1999). This male orientation would remain the norm well into the contemporary cinematic era, with only brief interludes when the industry would recognize the power of women at the box office.

During this period of social upheaval, civil rights, and financial hardship for Hollywood, race became an increasingly meaningful audience marker. Desperate to draw any audience to the theater, studios turned to urban African Americans as a potential revenue source. The successful independent release of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) alerted studios to the potential profitability of this audience segment, prompting MGM to release *Shaft* (1971) later that year. Encouraged by *Shaft*'s success, Hollywood studios increased production of black-themed films from six in 1969 to eighteen in 1972. By the end of the 1970s, over 200 of these low-budget "Blaxploitation" films had been made (Guerrero, 1993). While Hollywood came to recognize the value of African American audiences during this period, they were relegated to separate, low-

budget, formulaic, sensationalistic fare. African American and other minority audiences still rarely factored into marketing strategies for big budget mainstream Hollywood films.

Another significant new audience segment that came to the fore during the 1950s and 1960s was the teen audience. As early as 1941, an ARI poll indicated that nearly a third of movie tickets were purchased by people under the age of 20, with teenagers representing the core group of buyers (Ohmer, 1999). In response to these findings, RKO successfully shifted to a youth-focused approach, hiring younger stars and tackling youth-oriented topics. This focus on teens became increasingly pronounced and widespread during the 1950s and 1960s due to the expanding postwar economy, the rise of television, and the baby boom. While adults and children tended to remain at home with the television set, teenagers flush with expendable income used the movie theater as a social outlet. By 1965, therefore, 53% of movie tickets were purchased by teenagers (Shaffer, 1965).

Researchers also began to recognize the power of young people as opinion leaders in the realm of popular culture. While in most domains adults led the way for the youth, a 1952 study by Riesman and Riesman indicated that the opposite was true for movies. In fact, young people were influencing their parents' choices in movies. Likewise, Robin Bean and David Austen (1968) identified what they called the "Peter Pan Syndrome," whereby younger children wanted to watch what older children watched, and girls would watch what boys watched (but not vice versa). As a result, Bean and Austen concluded, "To catch your greatest audience you zero in on the 19-year-old male" (1968, p. 21-22).

Due to the power of this philosophy, Thomas Doherty (1988) observes that Hollywood cinema underwent a process of "juvenilization" starting in the 1950s that arguably continues today.

This process of juvenilization was further fueled by a growing cultural discussion about a widening "generation gap" in the 1960s, whereby younger people's outlook, lifestyle, tastes, and values were assumed to be diverging from those of their parents (Wojcik-Andrews, 2000). As a result, the growing teen market was viewed as increasingly distinct from the mainstream adult audience. Hollywood courted these young people by appealing to the counterculture movement, producing films such as *The Graduate* (1967), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and *Easy Rider* (1969), and emphasizing these films' novelty, artistic sensibility, and anti-establishment themes in their marketing materials (Kernan, 2004).

Another viewing segment that gained increased recognition during this period was the international audience. With the postwar decline of the domestic box office, international markets assumed heightened importance. Studio marketers (and their new corporate owners) thus invested more time and attention in marketing their fare abroad. The Nation Screen Service (NSS) opened a London office as early as 1928 in order to create trailers and posters for British films. But, by the 1950s, it was also working to "Anglicize" American film marketing materials to appeal to British audiences. This tailoring process often involved substituting a trailer's voice-over with one featuring a British accent, making sure the trailer conformed to British censorship standards (which

often meant cutting violent scenes), and highlighting particular plot elements or stars thought to appeal to British audiences (Street, 2009). While still focused primarily on a few key European markets, this era paved the way for the future courtship of international audiences as distinct audience segments in need of tailored appeals.

New marketing formats, styles and tactics. With the introduction of television and increased segmentation of the cinema audience, marketers adopted new tactics to advertise their fare. One of the most important of these new modes was the television spot, which today commands the largest share of a major marketing campaign's budget. Early television spots featured a variety of strategies, as marketers learned to work around the restrictions imposed by the small black and white screen and take advantage of the medium's strengths. Many early television spots borrowed extensively from other commercial formats, assuming the form of filmed press advertisements featuring still images with voiceovers, celebrity endorsements, basic animation, and unedited scenes from the film (Johnston, 2009).

By 1956, Johnston (2009) notes, certain styles and tactics began to solidify as norms for television spots as the early period of experimentation waned. Among these common traits were a reliance on audio and voiceover (largely due to the poor quality of television screens), the adoption of a standard time length (20 to 60 seconds in the U.S.), use of close shots to fill the small screen, a reliance on images to indicate genre, and specific references to the cinema as the medium (Johnston, 2009; Kehe & Pamer, 2013a). Often, television spots acted to highlight the inferiority of the small black and white

screen in comparison to the spectacle and immersive, realistic environment the big screen could offer. For example, Johnston (2009) describes 3D technology's centrality as a sales pitch in the television spot for *Wings of the Hawk* (1953). In contrast, the small, flat, black and white screen demonstrated its inferiority to the theatrical experience the voiceover promised verbally. Paradoxically, therefore, these television spots were designed to demonstrate the inferiority of the medium on which they were displayed.

Television spots also served as powerful tools for targeting newly realized audience segments. By the late 1950s, marketers understood that television schedules divided audiences into target segments, and that advertising messages could be tailored accordingly. Johnston's (2009) examination of television spot scripts for *Spartacus* (1960) illustrates this targeted approach. The titles of the scripts alone clearly identify the target market, ranging from "Women appeal spot for daytime use" to "Teenage appeal" to "Action." The "Action" spot features battle scenes and a voiceover touting "the fierce excitement of men in battle," while the spot targeting women features love scenes and discusses "the rebel who worshipped her… the general who desired her—even more than he wanted to possess Rome." Meanwhile, the "Teenage appeal" spot focuses on dramatic battle scenes and describes Spartacus as "the dynamic young rebel… young in spirit, young in desire…young in revolt" who is "rebelling against authority…smashing the baton, the symbol of the Sen-ate" (Johnston, 2009, p. 85). The widespread adoption of television and concomitant audience segmentation across day parts thus allowed for

novel new methods of target marketing that experimented with diverse appeals and portrayed films in a variety of ways.

While a single theatrical trailer was typically crafted to contain various appeals (in contrast to multiple television spots highlighting specific sub-plots and characters), these trailers became increasingly targeted to specific audience segments as well. American International Pictures, for instance, used trailers directly targeted to teens and drive-in audiences rather than taking the more standard, mass-appeal approach (Johnston, 2009). Since cinemas were no longer thought to attract the "mass" audiences they enjoyed during the classical period, studios focused their appeals on audience segments considered to be most valuable at the box office.

The steep decline in box office revenue during this period also led to widespread experimentation with new technological and promotional gimmicks in filmmaking and marketing. Studios adopted color wholeheartedly during this period in order to differentiate films from black and white television. They also experimented with widescreen formats such as Cinemascope and Cinerama, 3D technology, new sound systems, special effects, and enhanced realism through location shooting as means of luring audiences away from their television sets and into the theater (Johnston, 2009; Kernan, 2004; King, 2003).

This increased reliance on high-tech special effects and big screen spectacle influenced the types of movies that studios made in the 1950s and 1960s. The science fiction genre in particular saw a huge boost in production during this period, as these

films became ideal vehicles to attract the coveted teen audience and showcase high-tech

special effects unavailable on television (Kline, 1993). The archetypes of this genre

include *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Creature*

from the Black Lagoon (1954), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

(1956), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Barbarella* (1968), and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

This period also saw an uptick in the number of big-budget musical adaptations, as the

larger-than-life, colorful, immersive spectacle they provided was considered optimal for

the cinema screen (Wojcik-Andrews, 2000). As a result, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed

the success of movies such as *Show Boat* (1951), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *White*

Christmas (1954), *South Pacific* (1958), *West Side Story* (1961), *Mary Poppins* (1964),

and *The Sound of Music* (1965), among others. These genre films provided marketers an

easy means of differentiating their product from the entertainment available on television,

and provided ample fodder for eye-catching posters, trailers, and television spots.

Traditional marketing methods, such as trailers, underwent a period of

experimentation and change during this period as well, breaking away from classical era

formulae and exhibiting new formats and tones (Kernan, 2004). In an effort to

differentiate film and television, trailers from this era tend to emphasize the spectacular

or gritty elements of films that could not be experienced on television. They also began to

veer away from traditional hard-sell, plot-centered advertising toward more evocative,

subtle pitches. For instance, Stephen O. Frankfurt's 1968 trailer for *Rosemary's Baby*

ignored plot completely, instead showing only an image of a silhouetted baby carriage

with the sound of a baby crying. The trailer's tagline "Pray for Rosemary's baby" delivered the trailer's message in a subtle approach that fostered buzz and became an industry benchmark for years to come (Sella, 2002).

The new widescreen and 3D formats also served to alter trailer conventions and styles, even after the technology was abandoned. As Johnston notes:

> Star, genre and narrative may have reclaimed their place at the heart of trailer structure by the mid-1950s, but the concepts of travelogue, screen-filling spectacular imagery, titles and voiceover that focus on scale, panorama and grandeur, the attempt to immerse the viewer through technological virtuosity—these aesthetic choices echo through trailers as diverse as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Star Wars* (1977), *Titanic* (1997), and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003) (2009, p. 59).

This period of technological experimentation and competition with television also prompted the use of finished film footage in trailers rather than B-roll material, as quality, spectacle, grandeur, and special effects became key selling points of theatrical films (Johnston, 2009).

Finally, creative promotional experimentation became prevalent during this period of cinematic decline. In the 1950s, William Castle pioneered outlandish tactics to enhance the theatrical experience and promote his B films. For instance, he offered bogus life insurance policies to patrons who might die of fright during his films, wired theater seats to vibrate at certain points in the film, and introduced alternative endings for which audiences could vote. For his film *13 Frightened Girls* (1963), he held a worldwide casting hunt for the prettiest girls from 13 countries. He then filmed 13 slightly different versions of the film to highlight a local girl for the film's release in her country (Kernan, 2004; Schwarz, 2007*)*. These tactics introduced novel possibilities for film marketers that

would become more widespread with the rise of the blockbuster and the internet in the coming years.

Blockbusters, High Concept, and the Home Video Boom (1975-2000)

Continuing to struggle with declining box office revenues, Hollywood studios experienced profound structural and technological upheaval throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Often termed "New Hollywood," this era is characterized by vertical *and* horizontal integration. With eased anti-trust restrictions during this period, large multinational conglomerates moved to acquire multiple media companies and exhibition platforms. By the 1980s, all the major Hollywood studios had been subsumed by these large multinational media conglomerates. The only exception was Disney, but it became a major global media conglomerate in its own right. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 further encouraged this move toward industry consolidation, as it allowed for increased media cross-ownership and integration (Schatz, 2009). As studios came under the ownership of these conglomerates, their business models for production, distribution, and marketing shifted profoundly.

While conglomeration brought various media entities together under a single corporate umbrella, studios internally became less centralized. New corporate owners sought to reduce overhead costs and increase efficiency by outsourcing many of their tasks to external, specialized firms under contract with the studio. While this process began in the 1960s, it became increasingly pronounced throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This trend spawned a large number of small, flexibly-specialized firms that serviced

studios in the areas of marketing, international distribution, special effects, prop sourcing, set production, market research, and various other services (Christopherson & Storper, 1989; Scott, 2005). Studio marketing departments thus became the central organizational hub for commanding a small army of external contractors and subcontractors who contributed to large, multi-faceted, multi-platform campaigns.

While Hollywood dealt with the structural shifts wrought by conglomeration, it also grappled with a rapidly expanding technological landscape. The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed the spread of cable and pay television (such as HBO and Showtime), the rise of video games as an alternative and complementary media form, and the rapid expansion of the home entertainment market with the introduction of Betamax and VHS. While only three million pre-recorded VHS tapes were sold in 1980, this number skyrocketed to 57.7 million in 1985 and 161.4 million by 1988 (Wyatt, 1994). The sale of VCRs mirrored this rapid expansion. In 1983, only 8.3 million households owned a VCR. By 1987, however, 45.8 million households (slightly over half the American population) owned the device. By the end of 1997, nearly 90% of households had a VCR (Allen, 1999).

Studios initially fought the introduction of these home video technologies on copyright grounds, fearing that consumers would record movies from television rather than pay for tickets at a theater (Decherney, 2012). After fighting a losing legal battle against home video, however, studios came to realize that this new market opened novel opportunities for them. Similar to television, the initially threatening video rental and

sell-through markets ultimately provided fresh revenue centers, expanded the shelf-life of films, offered a new source of revenue for studios' libraries of older films, and renewed interest in movies in general (Wasko, 1994).

By 1986, the number of video rental stores in the U.S. surpassed the number of theatrical screens, and renting videos became the primary mode of movie consumption between 1987 and 1990. Home entertainment revenues surpassed domestic box office revenues by 1989, making Buena Vista Home Video the most profitable film entity in Hollywood (accounting for three-quarters of Disney's profits) (Allen, 1999). Thus, while the home video explosion did threaten box office receipts, studios slowly evolved to view theatrical releases as merely the first of several important exhibition "windows." Theatrical releases were henceforth treated as an important mechanism for introducing a film brand into a wider marketplace, marketing this brand and establishing its value, and gauging future profitability (Acland, 2003; Allen, 1999; Craig et al., 2005; Grainge, 2008; Haralovich, 1984; Elberse and Eliashberg, 2003; Scott, 2004).

While marketing efforts were previously designed solely for theatrical releases, buzz now had to be sustained from before theatrical release, through video rental and sales periods, pay-per-view runs, cable runs, broadcast airings, and into syndication. Each of these windows represented a unique marketing and revenue center wherein audiences with different valuations of the film could be targeted. Therefore, as Robert Allen explains, "Production and marketing logic behind a substantial fraction of Hollywood

films shifted from reaching audiences in movie theatres to exploiting as many markets as possible for as long as possible" (1999, p. 116).

In this environment, taking advantage of synergistic ties across conglomerates' diverse holdings and across the expanding array of available media platforms became essential. "Synergy" was the buzzword of the era, promising to minimize risk by establishing multiple profit centers ("ancillary markets") for film brands (Austin, 2002). As Nicholas Garnham explains, the film became "only one ingredient in a multi-media package in which each element is not only profit-earning in its own right, but serves as publicity for every other part of the package" (1990, p. 202). In response to this shift, Robert Allen laments that studios were "no longer in the film business or the television business or, arguably, even the entertainment business, but in the business of 'synergistic brand extension'" (1999, p. 121). The film became a marketing tool rather than a final product in and of itself.

In order to enhance film's power as a marketing tool and take advantage of the expanded array of revenue windows and media platforms at conglomerates' disposal, a distinct filmmaking and marketing style took hold during this era: the "high concept" blockbuster (Wyatt, 1994). The term "high concept" came into use in the 1970s and describes a style whereby the film is integrated with its marketing. This strategy centers on simply packaged and familiar storylines, saturation releases, extensive merchandizing and cross-promotion, and an eye toward marketing films as global brands with multiple brand extensions (Austin, 2002; Kernan, 2004; King 2003; Schatz, 2009; Wyatt, 1994).

No longer an afterthought, marketers became involved at the earliest stages of film development under this system, and were granted a voice in project selection, script development, and casting (Paul, 1994).

Stemming from these powerful marketing interests, high concept films have been characterized as "dispersible texts" or as films adhering to a "modular" aesthetic (Austin, 2002; Wyatt, 1994). These texts are open to multiple readings by various audience groups (in order to maximize appeal), and contain a variety of distinct elements (such as songs, images, sequences, and characters) that can be extracted for marketing purposes and positioned in various ways to appeal to multiple audience factions (Austin, 2002). These extractable elements can easily be leveraged for merchandising and for marketing the film across multiple release windows and film iterations. The logo for *Jurassic Park* (1993), for example, aptly served these purposes (see Figure 2.2). This memorable and easily reproducible image was stamped on t-shirts, lunchboxes, posters, CDs, books, and billboards, and quickly became a mental stand-in for the film (and later franchise) itself.

A key characteristic of a "high concept" film, therefore, is a simple narrative communicable in a single sentence or image (Wyatt, 1994). Steven Spielberg is credited as the quintessential "high concept" filmmaker in this regard, stating, "If a person can tell me the idea in 25 words or less, it's going to make a pretty good movie" (Hoberman, 1985, p. 36). Posters for Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Jaws* (1975), and *E.T.* (1982) clearly illustrate this strategy, as each presents a simple, iconic image that succinctly communicates the basic storylines: "dinosaurs come to life," "killer shark," and "boy

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befriends alien," respectively (see Figures 2.2 through 2.4). These simple narratives often

recombine and replicate previously successful plotlines in order to further reduce the risk

involved in creating and marketing a novel or unfamiliar product (Wyatt, 1994).
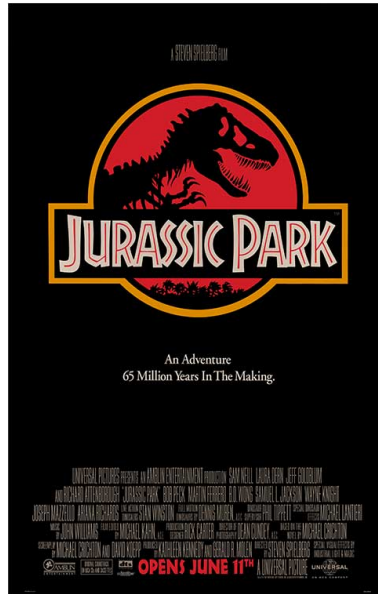
Figure 2.2: **Movie poster for *Jurassic Park* (1993)**
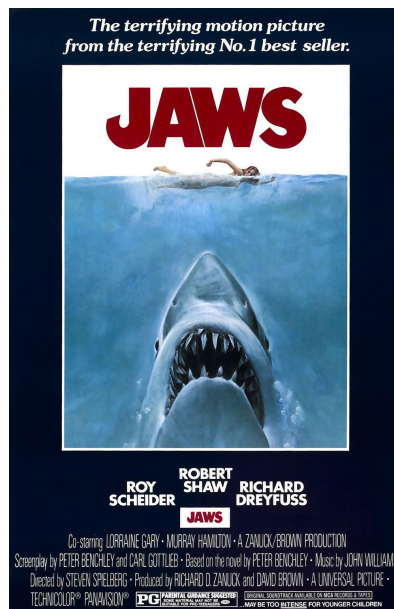
Figure 2.3: **Movie poster for *Jaws* (1975)**

Figure 2.4: **Movie poster for *E.T.* (1982)**

The 1975 release of Spielberg's *Jaws* is widely considered the first "high concept" blockbuster film. Bolstered by a saturation release (at over 2,000 theaters nationwide) and the most extensive pre-release marketing campaign of its time, the movie earned the number one spot at the box office for 14 consecutive weeks, becoming the first film to gross over $100 million. According to Schatz, *Jaws* marked the beginning of the "New Hollywood." As he describes, it ushered in "an era of high-cost, high-tech, high-speed thrillers" (1993, p. 17). *Jaws* became the model for the standard summer blockbuster featuring heart-pounding action, male heroes, star directors, stunts, and special effects, and drawing consumer attention via big budgets and record-breaking opening weekends (Krämer, 1999; Schatz, 1993). While the average production and marketing budget for a Hollywood film in 1975 was $3.1 million, this average rose precipitously to $14.4 million by 1984, and to $24.5 million by 2000 (Harrison, 2000;

Wyatt, 1994). As Bob Levin notes, *Jaws* also ushered in a shift in studios' foci from publicity to marketing. Instead of relying on fan magazines and reviews to get the word out, *Jaws* demonstrated the value of paid advertising (Levin, 2001).

While *Jaws* is credited as the *first* blockbuster film, George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) franchise is the quintessential example of this strategy. Like *Jaws*, *Star Wars* boasted a wide opening and extensive marketing campaign. But it serves as a prototype for the modern blockbuster due to its whole-hearted embrace of licensing and merchandizing as a key source of revenue. Before the rapid expansion of ancillary film markets (including cable, home video, sequels, and remakes), movies' shelf lives were considered too short to justify extensive merchandizing (Pecora, 1998). This changed with the proliferation of distribution windows and media conglomerates' diverse in-house holdings that could be leveraged to produce and market products of all types. Wielding this merchandizing power, $20 billion worth of *Star Wars* products were sold between 1977 and 2012.[23] Compared to the franchise's $4.4 billion in movie ticket sales and $3.8 billion in home entertainment sales, merchandise became the ideal profit center for the new blockbuster film (Block, 2012; Lukk, 1997).

Seeking all audiences. With new corporate owners and the increased budgets and risk involved in their "high concept" blockbuster strategy, studios faced heightened

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[23] Licensing and merchandising ultimately became the reason for George Lucas' tremendous success. When negotiating his deal to make *Star Wars* (1977), Lucas passed on an additional $500,000 in directorial fees in exchange for keeping licensing and merchandising rights for himself (Block, 2012).

pressure to attract large audiences to the theater. As Kernan (2004) describes, massive investments in a few tentpole films meant that marketers could no longer court a singular "mass" audience group— the undifferentiated least common denominator audience discursively constructed by marketers in the 1950s and 1960s. Nor were they tasked with targeting one or a few target segments as they were in the 1970s. Instead, marketers were expected to appeal to *all* audience segments. Due to media platform proliferation, marketers could more easily target niche groups. But, given the pressure to recoup massive investment money, blockbuster marketers were tasked with targeting all of these individual markets simultaneously. To achieve this goal, studios relied heavily on market research, measuring specific audience segments' responses to titles, proposed casts, rough cuts of the film, and marketing materials (Ohmer, 1999; Staiger, 1990). As Austin (2002) notes, making and selling movies during this period became, more than ever, a process of assembling film components in order to target various audience segments classified by demographic characteristics such as geography, race, age, and gender.

International audiences. In this era, the number of potentially exploitable audience segments grew exponentially due to the rapid expansion of the global film marketplace. While international film distribution had been occurring since the earliest days of cinema, international audiences did not become a vital factor in film distribution and marketing until the 1990s. International markets had previously been characterized as a bonus or safety net. In a marketplace run by global media conglomerates risking huge sums of money on blockbuster films, however, international audiences ceased to be a

supplemental source of revenue and became central to production and marketing decisions.

In 1984, the domestic box office accounted for $3.471 billion, while the international box office accounted for only $1.791 billion (34% of total box office returns). By 1991, the international box office take had ballooned to $6.286 billion. Compared to a domestic take of $7.132 billion, the foreign box office now accounted for a full 46.8% of total box office revenue (Acland, 2003; Wasko, 1994). By 1998, the international box office had achieved parity with the domestic box office, with the domestic market accruing $6.877 billion and the international market accounting for another $6.821 billion (Miller et al., 2005).

As a result of this monumental revenue shift, studios' new positions as subsidiaries of large multinational corporations, and the introduction of new media platforms (such as VCRs and satellite television) to penetrate these international markets, many studios opened foreign offices during this period and brought international distribution and marketing processes in-house and under greater centralized control (Sochay & Litman, 1992; Wasko, 1994). Marketers' main charge was now to avoid alienating any potential viewer segment and court an imagined global audience (Kernan, 2004).

This imagined global audience was dominated by Europe and Japan, as these markets were viewed as the most lucrative and culturally responsive to American film products (Wasko, 1994). As a result, these key territories were often treated as individual

national markets separate from the general "global" audience, requiring individualized marketing attention. As one Warner Bros. executive explains, "You can't just blanket Europe. It's a market-by-market approach" (Dawes, 1990, p. 7). This period thus witnessed the implementation of tailored marketing campaigns aimed at specific international audience segments. This strategy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Racial minorities. Having courted the African American audience vigorously during the 1970s with a slew of "Blaxploitation" films, the new era of corporate Hollywood and big budget blockbusters led to the demise of this genre by the end of the decade. As studios turned their attention to international audiences and attempted to achieve the widest possible appeal for their tentpoles, niche-oriented films featuring all-black casts and tackling issues of urban black America lost their luster. Studios instead reverted to "universal" (white by default) storylines featuring primarily white actors. In an effort to woo African American audiences as one segment among many, however, Hollywood embraced a handful of "cross-over" African American stars deemed capable of luring a broad audience. During this period, therefore, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Denzel Washington, Whoopi Goldberg, and Will Smith rose to stardom. In response to the dearth of movies produced for black audiences during this period, a new wave of independent black cinema emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Led by filmmakers such as Spike Lee and John Singleton, these independents achieved considerable success by filling the vacuum left by Hollywood as they retreated from minority-themed movies.

African American audiences historically comprised the largest racial minority in the United States, and were thus of greatest concern to Hollywood marketers. The 1990s, however, witnessed a wave of "Latinization" of American popular culture stemming from closer economic ties with Latin American (via NAFTA) and accelerated immigration (Montilla, 2013). Mirroring their treatment of African American audiences, Hollywood studios attempted to attract Latino viewers to their mainstream blockbuster fare by incorporating a few key Latin faces. This shift launched the careers of actors such as Jennifer López, Selma Hayek, Antonio Banderas, and Benicio del Toro. Again, however, these actors were incorporated into mainstream (white) Hollywood fare as a means to attract Latino audiences as one among many target segments.

Age segments. Stemming from studios' new imperative to appeal to as many target audience segments as possible, the "family film" came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s as the ideal film type. This genre aimed to capture both a youth *and* adult audience simultaneously. Studios were incentivized to make family films due to significant demographic, technological, and strategic shifts that took place during the 1980s.

Demographically, this period witnessed the "echo boom" (1977-1995), wherein 72 million American babies were born to their baby boomer parents. By the 1980s, therefore, children were thought to comprise a full 45% of the moviegoing audience (Pecora, 1998). This surge in the youth market heightened interest in producing kid-friendly films with cross-generational appeal (Allen, 1999). Children were unlikely to go to the theater by themselves during this period. Thus, by attracting a child and including

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enough adult-focused humor to entertain parents, studios could attract whole families to the theater and multiply ticket sales.[24]

The courting of youth audiences mirrored a more general shift in industry perspective during the time, as marketers and advertisers across product sectors moved to target the youth demographic as an important group with impressive buying power and specific tastes (Turow, 1997). While teens remained a market of interest during this period, the "baby bust" (beginning in 1964) meant that their relative numbers were low by the 1980s. Instead, marketers focused on a slightly younger age group and, by the 1990s, the "tween" was constructed as a new and promising audience segment (Pecora, 1998).

Rapid consumer adoption of the VCR (and later the DVD player) also prompted renewed focus on the youth and family demographic. As Pecora (1998) notes, children were an ideal market for the home entertainment sector. While adults are generally content to watch a movie once, children are apt to watch repeatedly. Therefore, youth-focused films were more likely to be purchased (at a higher profit margin) than rented. Also, grocery and convenience stores were more willing to carry these family-friendly

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[24] Studio courting of the baby boom and echo boom generations is evidenced by a wave of remakes of kid-friendly1960s films during the 1990s. Examples include *The Absent-Minded Professor/Flubber* (1961/1997), *The Parent Trap* (1961/1997), *The Incredible Journey/Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey* (1963/1993), *Flipper* (1964/1996), *That Darn Cat* (1965/1997), and *Doctor Dolittle* (1967/1998). By appealing to the nostalgia of baby boomer parents, studios hoped to lure whole families to the theater.

titles, since moms would not be offended by the fare, and sales could be generated via the pester power of children in check-out lines (Allen, 1999).

Media conglomerates' new focus on licensing and merchandizing also played a powerful role in promoting the production and marketing of family films. By 1996, products featuring licensed characters accounted for $16.7 billion in retail sales annually (Lukk, 1997). Due to their vast purchasing and pester power, children were responsible for a large portion of these sales. By 1999, children's products constituted 65% to 75% of the licensed product market (Allen, 1999). In this environment, merchandizing potential became an important factor in determining studios' film slates (Lukk, 1997). Youth-oriented animated and fantasy films, for instance, became increasingly prevalent during this period. These genres allowed studios to copyright and license character images without having to share profits with an actor in exchange for their likeness (Allen, 1999). This merchandizing incentive, along with improved computer animation and special effects technology, thus led to a surge in family-targeted animated and fantasy films.

Disney was the first studio to recognize the potential of the children's merchandise market, and the company remains the master of this business model today.[25] Disney first recognized the opportunity that character licensing offered with the introduction of Mickey Mouse in 1928. By 1933, Disney was selling over $10 million in merchandise, ranging from character figurines to handkerchiefs (Kline, 1993). Disney

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[25] Illustrating the company's current merchandizing savvy, Disney purchased LucasFilms (the *Star Wars* licensing and merchandising powerhouse) in 2012 for $4 billion.

opened its first studio store at Disneyland in 1955 to create a direct-to-consumer market for its expanding array of products (Lukk, 1997). But merchandising became the true core of the studio's business model during the 1980s and 1990s. By 1988, Disney was making $3.44 billion annually from character licensing (Kline, 1993). Successful films such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)*, Aladdin* (1992), and *The Lion King* (1994) each garnered retail sales of over $1 billion (Natale, 1995). By 1995, 21% of Disney's revenue was attributed to consumer products, and its successful chain of over 530 Disney Stores was enjoying its heyday (Lukk, 1997). By this time, Disney had branched out beyond the children's market to create adult clothing and product lines as well. Emulating the success of Disney in this arena, Warner Bros. opened its own chain of studio stores in 1991. The film *Space Jam* (1996) was designed specifically to revive the Looney Toons brand and fuel merchandise sales in these retail venues (Lukk, 1997).

Due to shifting age demographics of the American public, the rise of home video markets, and the growing importance of merchandizing in the corporate media marketplace, "family" audiences were thus constructed as a useful new market segment. The efforts of media conglomerates to lure these audiences demonstrate a pronounced campaign to foster synergistic ties across company holdings and maximize revenue at multiple touchpoints. They also illuminate studios' imperative to identify multiple audience segments (in this case, kids and parents), appeal to their desires simultaneously, and offend the least number of potential viewers as possible.

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Gender segments. As described previously, teen boys came to dominate Hollywood's collective psyche during the 1960s. This trend continued throughout the 1990s and persists today, despite periodic industry recognition of the power of the female moviegoer. With the growth and success of the "romantic comedy" during the 1990s, female-centered films like *Ghost* and *Pretty Woman* topping the charts in 1990, and *Titanic* breaking box office records in 1997, it seemed that Hollywood was recognizing the power of the female viewer. However, as Krämer (1999) notes, studios continued to spend much more money on the production and marketing of male-targeted films. In 1995, for example, female-targeted films (such as romantic comedies, musicals, melodramas, and costume dramas) were made for budgets typically ranging from $15 to $25 million. While several of these were hits (grossing between $50 and $80 million), studios allotted most of their budgets to fund male-targeted films (such as action-adventure and science fiction films) that cost anywhere from $60 million to $180 million.

In response to this trend, *Variety* reporter Anne Thompson asked studio executives, "Why does Hollywood continue to resist movies with strong female appeal that are cheaper to make and more profitable when they are successful?" (1991, p. 109). In response, executives expressed a variety of assumptions about the gender dynamics of moviegoing that reflect the entrenched gender mythologies at play in Hollywood. For instance, they explained that strong female leads could not carry a film because young men (the key target audience segment) were looking for strong male figures with whom to identify. They believed that mature female audiences were too small in number to

carry a movie on their own, and men were unwilling to be dragged to a female-centric movie by their partners. In contrast, it was assumed that women could be persuaded to attend male-oriented films with their partners, as men drove the moviegoing decisions of the family (Krämer, 1999). As a result of these beliefs, studios continued to make and market films primarily for male audiences, and then cited their success as confirmation of those beliefs. This trend continued throughout this period and into the 21st century, as teenage boys remain the central focus of studio production and marketing practices.

Evolving marketing strategies and aesthetics. The rapidly shifting structural and technological landscape of Hollywood, along with changing perceptions of the audience, greatly impacted film marketers' practices and products. Marketers during this period embraced simplistic, sleek imagery in their designs, foregrounded stars in their materials, and adopted saturation marketing campaigns that emphasized television spots and high-impact trailers as a means of targeting a wide array of audience segments. As Justin Wyatt (1994) explains, sleek, simplistic, iconic imagery became the backbone of "high concept" films during this period. These films were designed to convey their plots via a single sentence or image. Marketing materials were thus designed to communicate this simple message in a visually-appealing, easily-digestible format. This reliance on simplistic and sleek imagery can be attributed to the proliferation of media platforms, the rise of merchandizing, and the growth of the international film market during this period.

With an expanding array of media platforms and increased investment in a few blockbuster tentpole films per year, these iconic images were tasked with creating and

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maintaining audience recognition and "want-to-see" throughout the prolonged lifecycle of the film across multiple exhibition windows. As studios came to rely on film franchises, these marketing images were also tasked with tying the various films in a franchise together in a single brand universe. With an increased emphasis on merchandizing, a sleek, simple, scalable marketing image that could be easily stamped on a variety of consumer products was also deemed imperative (Wyatt, 1994). This type of imagery could create a cohesive visual identity for the film, aid audience recall, and carry its brand across time, space, and platforms to garner necessary revenue.[26]

The rapid growth of the international audience also precipitated film marketers' embrace of simple, iconic images as the basis for campaigns. Films and their marketing materials needed to be readily understood by an increasingly global audience, and they needed to be easily translatable across languages and cultures. In this context, simplicity and visuality became key strategies. While movie posters from previous eras tended to contain extensive copy and complex graphics, simple images were now employed to serve as a universal shorthand language (Wyatt, 1994).

This reliance on sleek, simplistic imagery is aptly illustrated through an examination of film posters for remakes from this period. While the original film and its remake were released at different historical moments, their basic storyline remains

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[26] Marketing elements such as movie posters thus lost their stand-alone quality during this period, and became subsumed under an overarching brand campaign coordinated by studio marketing departments (King, 2003).

constant. But, as Figures 2.5 through 2.10 illustrate, the manner in which they were marketed differs dramatically across periods. While these films hail from different studios and genres, poster art for *Dr. Dolittle* (1967/1998), *Psycho* (1960/1998), and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968/1999) all demonstrate the shift to "high concept" marketing that took place between the 1960s and the 1990s. In each case, the poster for the 1960s film version features multiple images and design elements, often with explanatory text, a fractured layout, and a variety of colors. In contrast, the 1990s posters feature one simple central image, a unified color palette, and an abundance of negative space. The latter posters' design elements thus reflect the general marketing philosophy of this period, as film marketers strove to create an easily-digestible and transferable filmic image that could be employed globally throughout a film's extended product life cycle.
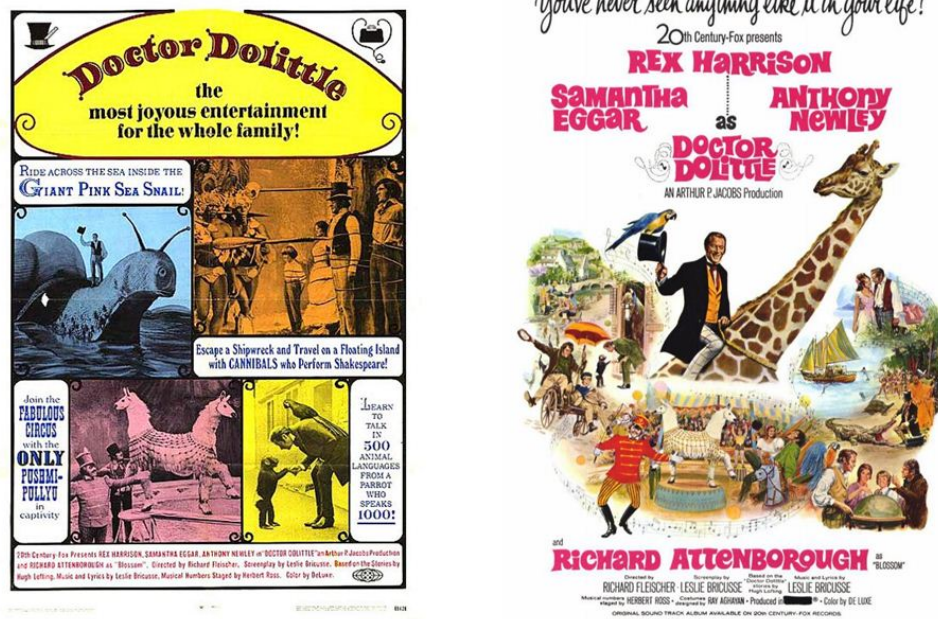
Figure 2.5: **Movie posters for *Doctor Dolittle* (1967*)*
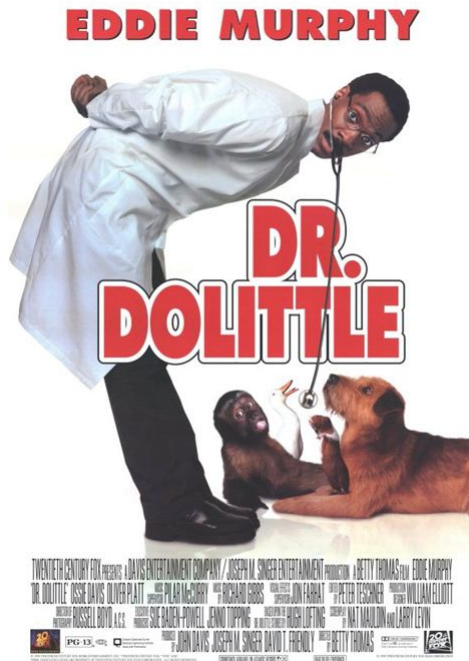
Figure 2.6: **Movie poster for *Dr. Dolittle* (1998*)***

Figure 2.7: **Movie poster for *Psycho* (1960)**

Figure 2.8: **Movie poster for *Psycho* (1998*)***

Figure 2.9: **Movie posters for *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968)**
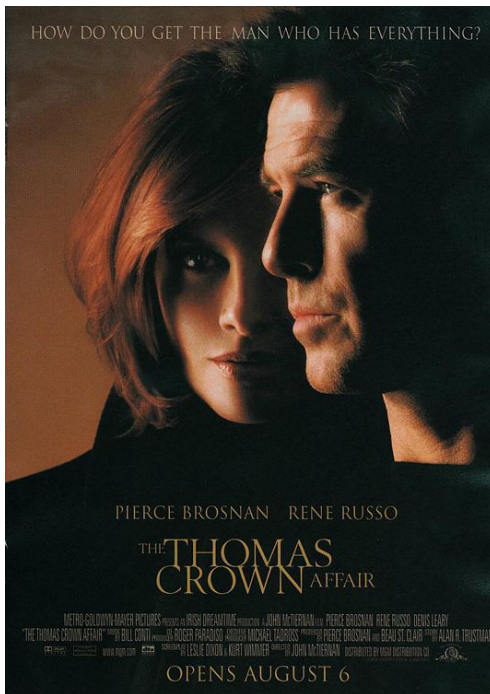
Figure 2.10: **Movie poster for *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999)**

Stars also featured centrally in these sleek new marketing materials designed to appeal to global audiences. As Kernan (2004) and Wyatt (1994) explain, stars assumed narrow personas during this period and often became shorthand for genres and franchises themselves. For instance, Steven Segal and Jean-Claude Van Damme came to symbolize violent martial arts action flicks, and Arnold Schwarzenegger's image could easily and universally communicate a film's status as part of the *Terminator* (1984) franchise. The American and Italian movie posters for *Terminator 2* (1991) aptly demonstrate this strategy (see Figure 2.11). After the success of the first *Terminator* movie, no excess backstory was deemed necessary to market the sequel. Schwarzenegger's prominent name and image were considered sufficient to sell the movie to both domestic and international audiences.

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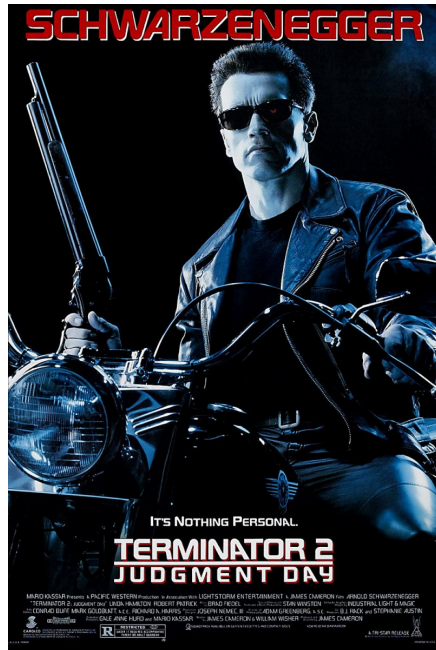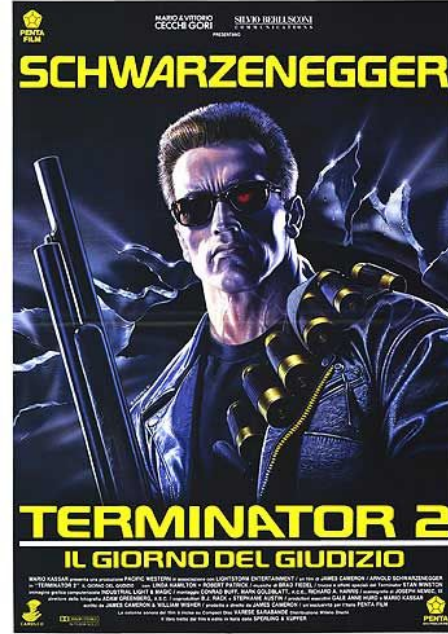
Figure 2.11: **U.S. (A) and Italian (B) movie posters for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*** **(1991)**

In addition to marketing aesthetics, overall marketing strategies evolved during

this period. With increased pressure from new corporate owners to turn huge profits from

a few tentpole films, the rise of multiplexes, and the concomitant adoption of saturation

release patterns, studio marketers were compelled to adopt a strategy of saturation

marketing (Wyatt, 1994). In the past, slow roll-outs allowed studios to rely heavily on

word of mouth to spread awareness about a film. Now, with wide national (and later

international) releases and increased pressure to achieve a lucrative opening weekend,

marketers were tasked with front-loading the audience in order to ensure wide public

awareness in time for the film's opening weekend (Austin, 2002). To achieve this goal,

marketers bombarded audiences with as many brand impressions as possible leading up

to the film's release. Describing the saturation campaign for *The Deep* (1977), for instance, Staiger explains that potential customers should have "read, seen or heard about 'The Deep' at least fifteen times" prior to its opening (1990, p. 19).

With increased pressure to draw large crowds on opening weekend, marketers opted for the hard-and-fast sell rather than the slow build. In the past, trailer makers may have chosen to save punch lines and key scenes for the main event, but this was no longer a viable strategy. Thus, much to viewers' chagrin, many trailers delivered the most memorable, funny, or spectacular shots in the trailer in order to attract audiences (Street, 2009). As an *Entertainment Weekly* article entitled "Movie Marketers' Ten Tricky Commandments of Trailer Production" suggests, "Use all the Best Jokes…A few honest laughs are all a film needs to make a nice dishonest trailer…" (Hruska, 1993). After-the-fact consumer disappointment was thus considered preferable to initial audience disinterest in this high-pressure saturation release environment.

In previous eras wherein films were slowly rolled out across various localities, print and outdoor campaigns were ideal due to their ability to target specific local audiences. With the adoption of wide saturation releases, however, television became the most efficient platform to reach the economies of scale necessary for a successful blockbuster release (Wyatt, 1994). With the proliferation of television channels via cable and satellite services, film marketers could reach increasingly targeted audience segments through this medium, but on a national scale.

While television spots assumed the central role in film marketing campaigns, theatrical trailers formed the backbone of these various iterations. As Kernan (2004) describes, the job of the trailer was to lay out all of the campaign's main elements, which could be extrapolated and emphasized differently in more targeted marketing materials like television spots. Trailers were therefore designed to attract the attention of many audience segments, while television spots could focus on one or a few at a time.

Trailers under this system assumed a highly formulaic character (Kernan, 2004; Kehe & Palmer, 2013a). Due to extensive audience testing and the imperative to draw the widest possible appeal, studios forwent experimentation and focused on established methods. Illustrative of this conservative tendency is the successful career of voiceover actor Don LaFontaine, whose signature voice and catchphrase "In a world…" served as the prelude to thousands of trailers during this period. Extensive audience testing also spawned the obligatory crowd-pleasing "button"—a quick shot right after the final title card that is designed to convey the tone of the film and elicit a shock or laugh from the audience (Kehe & Palmer, 2013a).

The primary characteristic of trailers from this period, however, is their emphasis on spectacle. Theatrical films in the 1950s and 1960s were competing primarily with network television, and thus emphasized grittier, sexier elements in marketing materials in order to differentiate these films from television's tame content. Films in the 1980s and 1990s, in contrast, were competing primarily with home video that contained the same content found in theaters. As a result, large-scale spectacle became the key selling point

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and differentiating factor for theatrical releases. Trailers during this period thus adopted a greater number of shots, heavy use of grids, attention-grabbing sound effects, and some evidence suggests that trailers even became louder in volume (Kernan, 2004). As Robert Allen explains, "Studios have turned increasingly to selling theatrical film-viewing in terms of physical size, sensory intensity and phenomenal scale" (1999, p. 123). To illustrate this tendency, he examines the campaign for *Godzilla* (1998). Across the campaign's marketing elements, Godzilla is only shown in small parts, suggesting that the monster cannot be contained by a mere television screen or billboard, but can only be viewed in its full scale on the theater's big screen.

The growth of the international audience also encouraged this emphasis on spectacle, as visual and aural excess was assumed to transcend geographic, linguistic and cultural borders. Science fiction and fantasy settings were embraced as suitable non-places, equally unfamiliar across the globe. Likewise, explosions, gunfights, and stars' physical gestures and reactions to these stimuli did not require explanation or translation. As a result, storylines in blockbusters of this era and their trailers tend to be subsumed by loud spectacle and star appeals (Kernan, 2004). As *Entertainment Weekly*'s list of common trailer-making practices explains, trailers should "Cut to the chase. Who needs a story line when you've got killer visuals?" (Hruska, 1993).

This emphasis on visual spectacle was made possible by significant technological advances in special effects, computer animation, and editing systems during this period. As Johnston (2009) argues, these technological advances were often presented as the star

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of the film, and were spotlighted in marketing materials ranging from the trailer to television spots, posters, and making-of featurettes. Production schedules were often altered to ensure that key special effects sequences were completed in time to include them in early promotional materials. When Roland Emmerich first pitched his vision for *Independence Day* (1996), he convinced Fox to greenlight the film based on his idea for the marketing campaign. He explained that audiences wanted to see iconic American landmarks being blown up, and technology now allowed this to be realistically portrayed (Kehe & Palmer, 2013a). Mind-blowing special effects sequences thus became the backbone, not only of trailers and marketing campaigns, but of films themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the evolution of film marketing practices from the introduction of cinema through the end of the 20th century. It charted the structural and institutional changes witnessed by the industry, as marketing evolved from a diffuse task undertaken by individual exhibitors, toward centralized control in the classical period, followed by a move toward tempered decentralization in the "New Hollywood" era, as studios with new corporate owners farmed marketing tasks out to various third party vendors while retaining central oversight.

This chapter also mapped Hollywood marketers' shifting perceptions and valuations of their audience base throughout history. While cinema's earliest audiences were divided along the lines of geography and later class, race, age, and gender, new audience categories were identified and reified over time. By the 1970s, increasing

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reliance on market research practices and a proliferation of media channels allowed Hollywood studios to refine and target audience segments to an unprecedented degree via specialized films, distribution platforms, and marketing pitches. With the rise of the "high concept" blockbuster in the 1980s, this practice of increased audience segmentation continued. However, new corporate mandates meant that studios and marketers were tasked with targeting *all* of these audience segments (including global audiences) for any given blockbuster release.

Finally, this chapter examined the effects of new technologies on Hollywood marketing practices. Faced with intense competition from the new technology of television, studios sought to differentiate their product by emphasizing size, spectacle, grittiness, and gimmicks. Hollywood's perception of its target audience also shifted under these pressures, as they fought to attract specific audience segments that frequented theaters (such as teens), leaving the previously constructed "mass" audience to be served by television. Likewise, Hollywood studios first resisted the introduction of home entertainment formats due to intellectual property concerns, but soon realized the potential of these new exhibition windows to prolong the shelf life of their cinematic products and open new and lucrative revenue streams. This shift again profoundly impacted studios' marketing tactics and their approaches to audiences, as they were now tasked with crafting a memorable film *brand* that could travel easily across multiple media platforms and engage audiences across multiple brand touch points.

The following chapters extend this discussion, examining the structural, social, and technological changes faced by Hollywood marketers in the early 21st century. In many ways, the contemporary era is an extension of the blockbuster era before it, as many of the same pressures, structures, and practices shape the film marketing industry today. However, the contemporary era has witnessed a profound expansion of the global audience, as well as dramatic technological changes. These pressures have altered the film marketing landscape in significant ways that will be explored in the following chapters. The next chapter, therefore, explores the contemporary structure of film marketing practice and examines the industrial processes at work in creating large-scale Hollywood campaigns. Chapter 4 subsequently maps the industry's changing notion of its increasingly international audience, as it grapples with evolving economic and cultural pressures. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the ways in which the film marketing industry is once again dealing with technological upheaval. Much like its earlier struggles to fight (and later embrace) television and home entertainment technologies, studios and their marketers are once again in a period of transition wherein marketing tactics and marketers' perceptions of their audience are in a profound state of flux.

CHAPTER 3: MAPPING THE FILM MARKETING LANDSCAPE

Film marketing materials are designed with great care and planning, incorporating a myriad of creative and corporate voices. They are often assumed to be solely products of large, monolithic Hollywood studios, purely reflecting these institutions' strategies, values, ideologies, and perceptions of the audience. The reality, however, is more complicated. Cultural products are not created in a vacuum, but are produced by complex organizational and environmental systems. These organizations are characterized by distinctive social dynamics (including struggles for power and influence, internal conflicts, and cooperative partnerships), unique corporate cultures, and situated physical geographies. In order to understand the products these organizational systems create, why they appear as they do, and how they function culturally, an understanding of these systems, the players that constitute them, the relationships between them, and the environment in which they function is imperative (Caldwell, 2008, 2013; Deuze, 2007; Ettema and Whitney, 1982). Final marketing campaigns that reach the marketplace are negotiated texts, containing a range of voices, ideas, and opinions. This chapter identifies these players, explores the power dynamics at work within this negotiation process, and highlights the spatial factors that impact the complex functioning of this cultural industry.

Players and Processes

As Caldwell (2008) argues, Hollywood does not exist as a monolith, but functions as a messy and diverse network of individual players. Figure 3.1 provides a visualization of the various participants that influence the film marketing process. Studio marketing

departments serve as the central node in this system. They absorb and mediate between a number of inputs from stakeholders within and outside the studio. These stakeholders include film producers, directors, stars, legal and studio market research departments, and promotional partners. In turn, studio marketing departments partner with entertainment marketing agencies and international distributors to form domestic and international campaigns. Studio marketers turn to these partners not only for their creative and cultural input, but also as a source of external marketing labor. The relationships studio marketers form and maintain with these various players is thus extremely important in shaping campaigns and forming the identity of films in the public marketplace.

Figure 3.1: **Internal and external inputs to the creation of theatrical studio marketing campaigns.**

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As discussed in Chapter 2 (and will be further discussed in the following chapters), studio marketing personnel are now involved in filmmaking from the earliest stages of development. Due to their role in defining the audience and its desires, domestic and international marketing executives are key players in the ever-expanding committee of decision-makers who determine whether or not a film gets made. Prior to the era of global media conglomeration, a potential movie project's fate rested on the intuition and taste of a few key film executives and studio heads. Movie ideas were pitched in-person to development executives by writers and attached producers. If these executives were attracted to the idea and could effectively communicate their vision to studio heads, deals would be made and the movie would become a reality.

Today, greenlighting happens by committee, and marketers have an increasingly prominent seat at this decision-making table. As Peter Bart (2001) describes, greenlight meetings when he started his career at Paramount in the late 1960s consisted of three or four people. These people would discuss their gut reaction to the story and say things like "I kind of like this movie" or "I look forward to seeing this movie." As he describes:

> The green-light decision process today consists of maybe of 30 or 40 people. There's one group there to discuss the marketing tie-ins. How much will McDonald's or Burger King put up? There's somebody else there to discuss merchandising by toy companies and so forth. Someone else is there to discuss what the foreign co-financiers might be willing to put up. So everyone is discussing the business aspects of this film. And it's sometimes unusual for someone actually to circle back and talk about the script, the cast, the package whether the whole damn thing makes any sense to begin with (Bart, 2001).

Similarly, Lang and Shaw (2013b) explain:

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Representatives from marketing, production, international, distribution and other divisions huddle with studio chiefs to decide which movies have the best shot of connecting with audiences. Executives pore over business plans with projections for home entertainment and international markets. Some studios even monitor which executives have the best track record with those projections. Relationships and story matter, but numbers trump all.

Movies are rarely conceived as cohesive wholes in this high-stakes environment. Instead, they are assembled as "composite goods targeted at diverse audiences" (Austin, 2002, p. 28). For instance, a film might be designed to combine big special effects sequences for non-English speaking international audiences, a romantic subplot to attract women, a sidekick that performs physical comedy to appeal to kids, or a Chinese actor to appeal to Chinese audiences. Marketers' conceptions of audience segments, their value, and their tastes feature prominently in this assemblage process. Referencing past comparative titles and scenarios, distribution and marketing personnel make projections as to a proposed film's profitability across key segments. Based on these predictions, greenlight committees decide the fate of film projects and subsequently shape the cinematic landscape.

Once a film has been greenlit and key production decisions have been made with the input of marketers, the studio marketing machine begins forming the campaign—often two to three years before the scheduled release date. While each studio differs in its structure and practice, most large Hollywood studios follow a common overarching pattern in developing marketing materials. The first stage of this process is the creation of key art for the domestic U.S. campaign. "Key art" refers to the main image(s) that serves as the backbone for the campaign. As discussed in Chapter 2, the modern cinematic era is

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characterized by "high concept" films and marketing campaigns (Wyatt, 1994). These films are distinct in their ability to be reduced to a single evocative image or sentence. Key art is this all-important image or series of images that embody the film. It creates a cohesive "look" for the film brand that ties together all aspects of the marketing campaign (including materials such as posters, online banner ads, games, merchandise, and DVD covers). Through repetition in various mediums, these images are designed to become cognitive shorthand for the film itself.

While studio marketing departments direct these activities, designs for key art and other marketing materials usually originate at smaller third party entertainment marketing agencies. Some studios (most notably Disney) produce marketing materials in-house, but the vast majority of design work for high-profile films is farmed out to these specialty firms in order to lower studios' overhead costs and provide fresh, creative design perspectives (Marich, 2009). While the term "entertainment marketing agency" will be used here, a variety of other labels are employed interchangeably to describe these companies. Through an examination of key agency websites, and interviews with members of these firms, the labels "vendor," "boutique," "shop," "agency," "advertising agency," "creative agency," "visual solutions provider," "entertainment marketing group," and "marketing and content agency" are all used to describe these companies. Some entertainment marketing agencies specialize solely in poster or print design, while larger firms also provide A/V materials such as trailers, TV spots, and DVD featurettes, home video services such as cover art and main menu design, and interactive services

such as website design, "living one-sheets" (also known as "motion posters"), banner ads, electronic press kits, and mobile applications. These agencies often serve clients from across the entertainment field, creating marketing materials for theatrical and home entertainment film releases, cable and network television campaigns, and video game launches.

As one interviewee explained, "You can find tons of agencies listed, but really any guy working out of his garage calls himself an agency. So really there's only 15 or 20 people maybe that really work on all these campaigns" (N. Bajaria, personal communication, March 21, 2012). Table 3.1 lists these 21 top-producing entertainment marketing agencies working with major film studios to design key art and other central campaign elements.[27] Because agencies are hired based on past working relationships and reputations, this is an extremely difficult field to enter. Existing, established firms have a distinct advantage, and agencies that can provide multiple services (i.e. poster *and* trailer creation) have a competitive edge.

While some of these agencies have clients outside of the entertainment space as well, members of these firms emphasize their difference from traditional advertising agencies. As Luke Melin, executive director of agency Cold Open, explains:

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[27] This list of design firms is provided by the Internet Movie Poster Awards website (www.impawards.com). Firms were sorted by "design count," and the top-producing companies (producing more than 100 posters) were selected for examination. Companies that are no longer in business, are in-house studio divisions, or specialize in independent (non-studio) film marketing were excluded from the sample.

The creative industry for movie and TV advertising for that matter is really very niche comparatively when you look at other packaged goods or selling cars, or food, or travel, or anything else. It really is its own beast with its own set of rules and its own set of things that apply to it that only apply here... Part of what makes us different than other advertising groups around the country, especially when you think of more Madison Avenue style companies, is that so much of what we do is just the creative. We don't handle marketing, we don't handle print buying, we don't handle a lot of the background research and other things that, when you look at larger ad agencies, they may also do. Studios themselves, be it TV networks or film studios, really do a lot of that recon work. We're just doing creative exploration on things (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012).

The close working partnership between entertainment marketing agencies and studio marketing departments thus creates a distinct division of labor that separates creative from strategic processes. This allows agencies to self-identify as creative artists, apart from the exigencies of corporate film studio culture.

and company	Iconisus L&Y
The Ant Farm	Ignition Creative
Arsonal	InSync + BemisBalkind
Art Machine	Intralink Film
BLT Communications	New Wave Entertainment
Cardinal Communications	Proof Creative Group
The Cimarron Group	Pulse Advertising
Cold Open	The Refinery
Concept Arts	Vox + Associates
Empire Design	Works Advertising
Gravillis Inc.	

Table 3.1: **Top-producing entertainment marketing agencies. (Source: impawards.com).**

Members of entertainment marketing agencies also emphasize the distinct characteristics of film as a unique, fast-run, experiential product. While traditional ad agencies tasked with marketing consumer packaged goods can take a long-term view and

build a brand's reputation over time and through positive consumer experiences and repeated purchases, film marketers are tasked with selling their fare extremely quickly within a narrow release window. Even if a film does well over the long term, entertainment marketers' success (or failure) is judged primarily by pre-release tracking numbers and the opening weekend box office take. Because opening weekend is viewed as a vitally important indicator of the long-term success of the film, and because of the huge sums of money invested in film products, entertainment marketers are incentivized to achieve the "biggest bang for our buck up front" by luring people to the theater on opening weekend (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). Film marketers therefore have only one opportunity to perfect their pitch, draw audiences, and prove their skill.

The typical big-budget Hollywood film warrants the involvement of entertainment marketing agencies from very early stages of planning and production. While circumstances vary from film to film, agencies are typically hired two to three years before the release date of a major blockbuster. The studio's marketing department generally distributes a script treatment or creative brief to various contending agencies, or invites these firms' representatives to read a "sequestered script" at the studio to avoid its public disclosure (Sella, 2002). Sometimes sketches, animatics, or rough cuts of scenes are provided, along with creative direction from the studio or filmmakers (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). To maximize creative input and options, studios generally distribute these materials to three to six competing marketing agencies.

The internal creative processes of marketing agencies vary, but a few key strategies are commonplace. Firms first undertake a process of informal market research and collaborative brainstorming. Agencies look to campaigns of comparable past films and create "comp boards" with elements from these campaigns. These might include successful films of the same genre, films that target a similar audience demographic, films that feature a similar aesthetic sensibility, films by the same producer or director, or films released at the same time in previous years. From here, some firms assemble a creative deck (PowerPoint presentation) wherein they present their current thought processes and relay their general aesthetic trajectory in terms of the mood, lighting, coloration, and theme (often using past campaign examples from their comp boards as reference). By sending this deck to studio clients and receiving feedback, agencies can ensure they are adopting an acceptable strategy before moving ahead and investing more valuable time and resources. While some firms choose to share these early creative visions with studios, others retain their comp boards as merely one part of their internal brainstorming process.

Many firms next hold collaborative internal brainstorming sessions wherein employees work together to create and develop ideas and strategies for campaigns. As one creative executive describes:

> We have a big conference room with open white walls and we throw all our ideas up there on the wall to see what we respond to individually. We're consumers too, so if we're not responding to what we have up there, we have to come up with new ideas. So the first thing that comes out of my head might be a stick figure or a thumbnail, but we throw that up and keep going from there (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012).

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This brainstorming wall ends up being a collage of pieces from past film campaigns, clippings from fashion magazines, advertisements for non-film goods, and sketches. As Shields goes on to explain, "Basically what we do is sit and play with all our ideas… We try to think of ideas that are not just limited, say to a movie poster or a DVD cover, but an idea that can help promote the film in a way that makes the consumer feel like, 'Hey, I need to go see that!'" (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). These brainstorming sessions thus take into account the entirety of the campaign, even if the agency will not be creating all of these assets. As the creators of the key art that will form the backbone for all of these elements, agencies must consider these iterations at early stages in order to convince the studio of their overall concept's viability and versatility.

International audiences, too, are taken into consideration at this early brainstorming stage. As ideas are narrowed and developed, marketing agencies think carefully about how these ideas might play in different markets. They know international audiences will be a concern for their clients, and thus must develop concepts that anticipate the needs of these diverse groups. While marketing agencies do not normally have resources (or the inclination) to conduct their own market research, they hold various conceptions of audience groups (both domestic and international) that inform their decisions and guide their creative process. These conceptions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Once ideas are enumerated and narrowed, marketing agencies hire freelance sketch artists to develop their conceptual ideas into more polished works for presentation.

If the agency has an established working relationship with the hiring studio, rougher

sketches might be sufficient. When establishing new relationships and competing for

work, however, more polished, fully colorized sketches might be deemed necessary to

impress the client. If agencies are brought in at a later stage of production, unit

photography might be available for the creative team to use. In these instances, sketches

can be replaced by digital mock-ups using PhotoShop. Designers "Frankenstein it" by

splicing together elements from the provided photography in order to create the scene

they envision (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). If there will not

be a subsequent opportunity for new unit photography to be shot, marketing agencies

need to see the available materials to judge the technical feasibility of their designs. With

a finite cache of available imagery, designers must be familiar with the range of raw

materials before proposing designs.

Regardless of whether they are presenting sketches or digital mock-ups, the next

step in the process is to present 20 to 50 of these ideas to the studio client. This pitch

might take the form of an in-person presentation at the studio, or agencies might send a

digital file of the designs without the benefit of face-to-face contact.[28] From the sketches

[28] Some agency representatives express their preference for an in-person presentation, as
this allows them to explain their overall strategy, express their vision, and read the
reaction of the clients through body language and comments (N. Bajaria, personal
communication, March 2, 2012; C. Zaldivar, personal communication, September 5,
2012). But others express their belief that the work should speak for itself since the
marketing materials must stand on their own in the marketplace. As one creative
executive explains, "Because you're not standing at the bus stop saying, 'Look, this is
what we're trying to accomplish.' Great ideas, when you see them, hopefully you just say

and comprehensive designs submitted, an agency (or multiple agencies depending on the

size and budget of the film) is hired and artwork is refined and edited through multiple

rounds of revisions and approvals (Marich, 2009). The studio's domestic theatrical

marketing department is agencies' direct point of contact, and thus represents the first

line of defense in the extensive revision and feedback process that ensues. As one agency

executive describes:

> We may be presenting to a Coordinator, then the Coordinator is presenting to the Manager, then the Manager is presenting to a VP, then the VP is presenting to the Executive VP. And after they go through the creative process, then they start over with the Marketing Manager, the Marketing VP, etc. (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Once the chosen designs have met the standards of the necessary studio marketing

executives, designs are sent to the studio's legal team as well as the film's producers,

directors, and talent for their approvals. This can be a long and fraught process. As

former Dreamworks SKG marketer Terry Press explains, "The most common comment

you hear from filmmakers after we've done our work is 'This is not my movie.' I'd

always say, 'You're right—this is the movie America wants to see'" (Friend, 2009). This

disconnect can form a rift between marketers and filmmakers, making filmmaker

approvals on marketing materials difficult to obtain.

'Oh my God, that's great!'" (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). If a studio has a particularly strong relationship with a marketing agency, this competitive bidding process can be avoided. In this case, the pre-selected firm will begin by presenting a wide variety of design possibilities from which studio marketers can select and refine.

Filmmakers' and talent's contractual agreements (either negotiated individually or stipulated by labor unions) can also be particularly rigid in relation to marketing materials, necessitating further rounds of revisions. For instance, the Director's Guild of America (DGA) has established a standard agreement for its member directors. If an outdoor advertisement only includes the film's title and key art, the name of the director can be excluded. If this is not the case, however, the basic agreement stipulates:

> The Director's credit must be included in a size of type no less than thirty-five percent (35%) the size of type used for the title or of any individual credit, whichever is larger. If the name of the Writer or Producer appears in a presentation credit in addition to his or her other credit, the Director's credit must be boxed. If the advertisement contains five (5) or more personal credits (or mentions) the Director's credit shall be boxed. If the advertisement contains six (6) or more personal credits (or mentions), the Director shall also be accorded an additional credit above the title in the form "A Film By" which shall be not smaller in size of type than the "Directed By" credit (DGA, 2011, p. 99).

Creative marketers are rarely cognizant of all the contractual obligations bearing on their work. Thus, alterations are often necessary after submitting designs to legal teams for their review.

Actors' agreements can be even more specific, stipulating, for example, that no other actor's name or image be larger than their name or image. They can also require personal approval of all images of themselves (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009; Marich, 2009). As one marketing agency executive describes:

> If you're working on a film with [major stars] in it, for example, most of the time they have a really tight reign on how their image is being used. So obviously you want the poster to show that they're in the movie, but they might have a very tight reign on how you can show them, what you can show them doing, etc., etc. So you go through your rounds of presentations. Then it goes to [the stars]. They look at it and are like, "Yeah, no, I don't really like that shot of me. Start over,

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bring me something else in a week" (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Any one of these steps and levels of approvals can thus delay or derail a marketing plan that has been in development for months, forcing agencies to restart from scratch or drastically revise their plans.

Due to the extensive number of stakeholders and inputs involved, approval processes can be long and arduous (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009; Marich, 2009). As one agency executive describes, the initial presentation phase of 20 to 50 ideas is considered Round A, "But then [studio marketers] narrow that down. They make their changes and tweaks they have internally. That's Round B. And then we do more revisions and they narrow that down. And sometimes we've gone around the alphabet a couple of times where we've made a lot of changes" (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). As another executive explains, this means that "at the end of a project, say if we're talking a big *Transformers*-type scenario, you can end up with thousands of concepts by the time you are done with the project. And you might be one of six or seven agencies that has worked on it. So they may have seen upwards of five to ten thousand concepts on something by the time it's done" (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012). The key art creation process is thus a long, complicated, tedious process for both designers and studio marketing departments, involving a myriad of opinions from throughout the studio's extensive industrial hierarchy.

A solid working relationship between studio marketers and their vendors is thus necessary, but often strained, in this process. While each individual player may have a

different creative vision for the campaign, the number of voices involved in revisions and

approvals necessitates collaboration and compromise. As an executive at Pulse

Advertising explains, "It's a compromise at the end of the day. It's a compromise

between what everyone wants and what everyone's comments are. That's what you end

up seeing" (N. Bajaria, personal communication, March 21, 2012). When asked if the

final artwork ends up as the agency initially envisioned, she answers, "No, it's generally

not. And that doesn't mean it's bad or it's not right. It just means that generally it's a

watered down version of what we pitch. Sometimes it's completely opposite" (N. Bajaria,

personal communication, March 21, 2012). Collaboration, flexibility, and compromise

(on the part of agencies) are thus key characteristics in this relationship. As an executive

at the agency Cold Open explains:

> We work in a service-based industry and, regardless of what we'd like to push for
> an agenda creatively, when it comes down to it, we are providing a service to
> them. So if they are happy, we are happy. It's a collaborative effort between us
> and the studio and any number of other people who may have a vested interest in
> the film or in the TV show. So when it comes down to it, we want to make sure
> that everyone that has a say feels like their voice has been heard (L. Melin,
> personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Studio marketing executives, legal teams, and filmmakers thus have the final word when

it comes to marketing designs, as they maintain control of marketing budgets and

intellectual property rights. While marketing agencies provide an integral service, are key

creative partners, and lend their voice and artistic vision to marketing campaigns,

ultimate control remains in studios' hands as marketing materials are shaped and

implemented.

Once this long collaborative process is complete and domestic key art is approved by all necessary parties involved, a similar process takes place for each of the various components of the marketing campaign—both domestic and international. Unless the same entertainment marketing agency is working on multiple aspects of the campaign, approved key art is shared with various vendors who will produce materials such as trailers, TV spots, websites, apps, and games based on these core ideas and designs. Key art is also shared with international distributors, who may accept the art or request tailoring. This process will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Due to its centrality within the campaign, trailer production involves a particularly arduous development process. Studios often hire two to five trailer production houses to work on a film's trailer simultaneously. These firms are in direct competition with one another to create a winning concept that will hit theaters. Similar to key art designers, these firms create a number of different trailer versions subject to multiple rounds of revisions and approvals. As Marshall Sella (2002) describes of the *Signs* (2002) teaser and theatrical trailers, one trailer production company "created four initial 'teasers,' some with more than 30 versions. Out of those 120-plus versions, 2 were shown in movie theaters… Add in the final full-blown trailer, which went through 34 incarnations, and you get a sense of how fanatical studios are about marketing." As he goes on to explain, trailer production "is a science of meticulous tinkering" to target the maximum number of target audience segments within a 150-second advertising spot. This tinkering process can thus be long, grueling, and fraught with interpersonal and interdepartmental tensions.

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For each campaign element, a similarly tedious revision and approval process

ensues, resulting in a full, multi-faceted marketing campaign. Even when marketing

materials gain all necessary approvals, however, they are subject to last-minute changes.

Often, a release date will be moved, changing a summer blockbuster movie into an

awards-centric fall release. This type of change can alter the entire strategy, tone, target

audience, and design of a campaign (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Other times, current events can impact the course of a campaign. For instance, the attacks

of September 11th, 2001 prompted studios to remove all planes from film posters and cost

Sony nearly $2 million to digitally remove a shot of the twin towers from the trailer for

Spider-Man (2002) (Sella, 2002). Warner Bros. was compelled to rethink its campaigns

for the disaster films *San Andreas* (2015) and *Everest* (2015) in light of the devastating

2015 Nepal earthquake (Lang, 2015). Likewise, the film "Neighborhood Watch" was

retitled "The Watch" after the Trayvon Martin incident soured the public image of

neighborhood watch groups as humorously harmless. This change forced marketers to

alter the title treatment on all marketing materials and rethink their overall campaign

strategy (Stampler, 2012).

Market research and tracking are other factors that can greatly alter the direction

of marketing campaigns at any point leading up to or during a movie's release. Studios

contract with media research firms such as Nielsen's National Research Group (NRG),

MarketCast, and Worldwide Motion Picture Group (MPG) in order to conduct this

research. Early in the planning and production process, studios may use focus groups

and/or surveys to refine story ideas, identify target audience groups, and inform overall marketing approaches and messages. Insights from these studies guide the revision and approval process of proposed artwork, leading marketing teams to choose one design over another or suggest specific design alterations. Changes can take place late in the game too, however, as pre-release tracking, social listening, and test screenings can precipitate last minute alterations to marketing strategies.

Six weeks before release, studio executives receive "tracking data" about their upcoming films. Based on landline phone surveys, this data measures audience awareness of an upcoming film title and various demographic segments' desire to see it ("want-to-see"). In recent years, "social listening platforms" have been adopted as a supplement to this traditional survey-based approach to understanding audiences. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, studios contract with these platforms (such as Fizzioloy, PreAct, and Aspect Ratio) to monitor social media buzz around new releases and provide information about audience awareness and sentiment toward the film and its marketing campaign (Carlson, 2013; McClintock, 2012; Robehmed, 2015). Tracking and social listening data can profoundly alter the trajectory of a campaign. For example, data might indicate that a movie previously assumed to appeal to a young male audience is actually appealing to an older female set. This type of research finding might prompt studio marketers to shift their entire marketing strategy in order to appeal to this newly valued audience segment.

Likewise, test screenings can precipitate last minute changes to a marketing campaign. As former MGM executive Bob Levin (2001) explains, "What you find out in test screenings for the marketing side of it is what segment of the audience likes it the best. ... Out of that information, you can start shaping the marketing materials for the film, because usually what the audience is telling you they like about it is the best thing to interest an unknown audience into coming to see it." In today's marketing-centric environment, however, campaigns are in development long before the film is ready for a test screening. Therefore, if the test audience does not react in the expected manner, or an unanticipated audience segment responds particularly well, last minute marketing revisions can result.

The creation of marketing materials is thus a complex, multi-faceted, lengthy process involving a range of industry voices and interests from inside and outside the studio setting. Myriad players are involved in the design process, but studios work most closely and collaboratively with entertainment marketing agencies to form these campaigns. In this key relationship, spatial factors play a vital role. Space serves to mold identities, cultural hierarchies, power dynamics, and working relationships in profound and complex ways. While some argue that geography has become irrelevant in the face of new media technology and globalization (Cowen, 2002), an examination of the spatial dynamics at work within the cultural industry of film marketing illustrates the continued importance of space and geography in shaping work worlds, creative processes, and cultural products. The remainder of this chapter thus examines the relationship between

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studios and entertainment marketing agencies, paying special attention to the spatial factors that mold their interactions.

The Spatial Identity of Entertainment Marketing Agencies

Entertainment marketing agencies occupy a complex, fraught position vis-à-vis the core Hollywood production system. They are a vital part of the film industry, but remain partial outsiders due to their independent ownership, generally small size, subordination as service providers, circumscribed role within the larger filmmaking process, and lack of public credit. Compounding this precarious position, they also struggle to straddle the ubiquitous art/commerce divide that generates a perennial identity crisis for members of the creative industries (Caldwell, 2008). While an imaginary boundary line is customarily drawn between production (as art) and marketing (as commerce), entertainment marketing agencies straddle this boundary by creating art specifically for commercial use by Hollywood marketing departments. Marshall Sella (2002) characterizes trailer-makers specifically as residing "in a country all their own, between the high art of *The Godfather* and a 1950's commercial for Lucky Strikes." Entertainment marketing agencies function within this professional borderland, continually negotiating the binaries of insider/outsider and commerce/art. This section examines the ways in which these companies manage their liminal status and relationship with Hollywood studios through strategic self-presentation and corporate identity construction.

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While marketing agencies use a variety of rhetorical, representational, and gatekeeping tactics to construct these preferred identities and manage their position vis-à-vis Hollywood studios, *space* functions centrally in these performances. Recognizing space as a rich and informative analytic category, this discussion appends Allen Scott's (2005) project of mapping the spatial dispersal of various film-related institutions (such as sound stages, set design and construction firms, prop houses, and digital effects houses). It adds entertainment marketing agencies to this milieu, but also supplements Scott's purely economic and geographic approach with a discussion of the role of *spatially-contingent social and cultural capital*.

By leveraging their spatial positioning to maximize their social and cultural capital, entertainment marketing agencies attempt to successfully navigate their liminal status and construct a preferred corporate identity. This spatially-negotiated identity highlights the firms' Hollywood insider status and *social capital* (connections), while simultaneously affirming their outsider *cultural capital* as authentic artists untainted by Hollywood commercialism. The following sections explore this dynamic further, mapping the ways in which agencies leverage their proximity to studios and comparable firms to gain economic and social capital, while also leveraging their proximity to hip, artistic neighborhoods and their non-traditional workspaces in order to garner cultural capital as artists distanced from corporate Hollywood.

Proximity to studios and comparable firms. Figure 3.2 displays the geographic location of the 21 top poster-producing entertainment marketing agencies introduced

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previously in this chapter. As evidenced by these maps, most firms are clustered along a

swathe of Los Angeles spanning from Venice Beach to Burbank. This clustering maps

neatly onto the distribution of major film studios, spanning from Culver City to

Burbank.[29] This mapping aligns with Allen Scott's (2005) geographic analysis of various

film-related industries and their tendency toward agglomeration.

According to the "agglomeration" or "clustering" thesis, "firms have a strong

incentive to come together in communities or ecologies within the city because mutual

proximity often greatly enhances the availability of agglomeration economies and

increasing-returns effects" (Scott, 2005, p. 6). These increasing-returns effects (or

positive externalities) include: a) reduced transaction costs between nodes in the

production chain, b) greater access to information flows, and c) access to specialized

labor pools (Flew, 2012; Scott, 2005). To these economic benefits I add the cultural

benefit of: d) legitimization and an air of professionalism that emerges from proximity to

production centers (in this case, studios and others within the film marketing industry).

These benefits are accrued through the accumulation of spatially-contingent social

capital. Bourdieu describes social capital as "made up of social obligations

('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital"

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[29] The few exceptions to this rule are The Refinery with offices in Sherman Oaks in
northwest Los Angeles (having recently consolidated their "campuses" previously
located in Burbank and Universal City), New Wave Entertainment (with an additional
office in Midtown Manhattan), Cardinal Communications located in Midtown
Manhattan, and Empire Design with an office in the Soho neighborhood of Manhattan
and an office in London. As media centers in their own right, locations in New York and
London are not inconsistent with the agglomeration thesis presented here.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). Due, in part, to geographic proximity, companies and laborers are able to forge personal and professional connections that enhance their efficiency, access to information, skills, and status, and, in turn, their economic success.
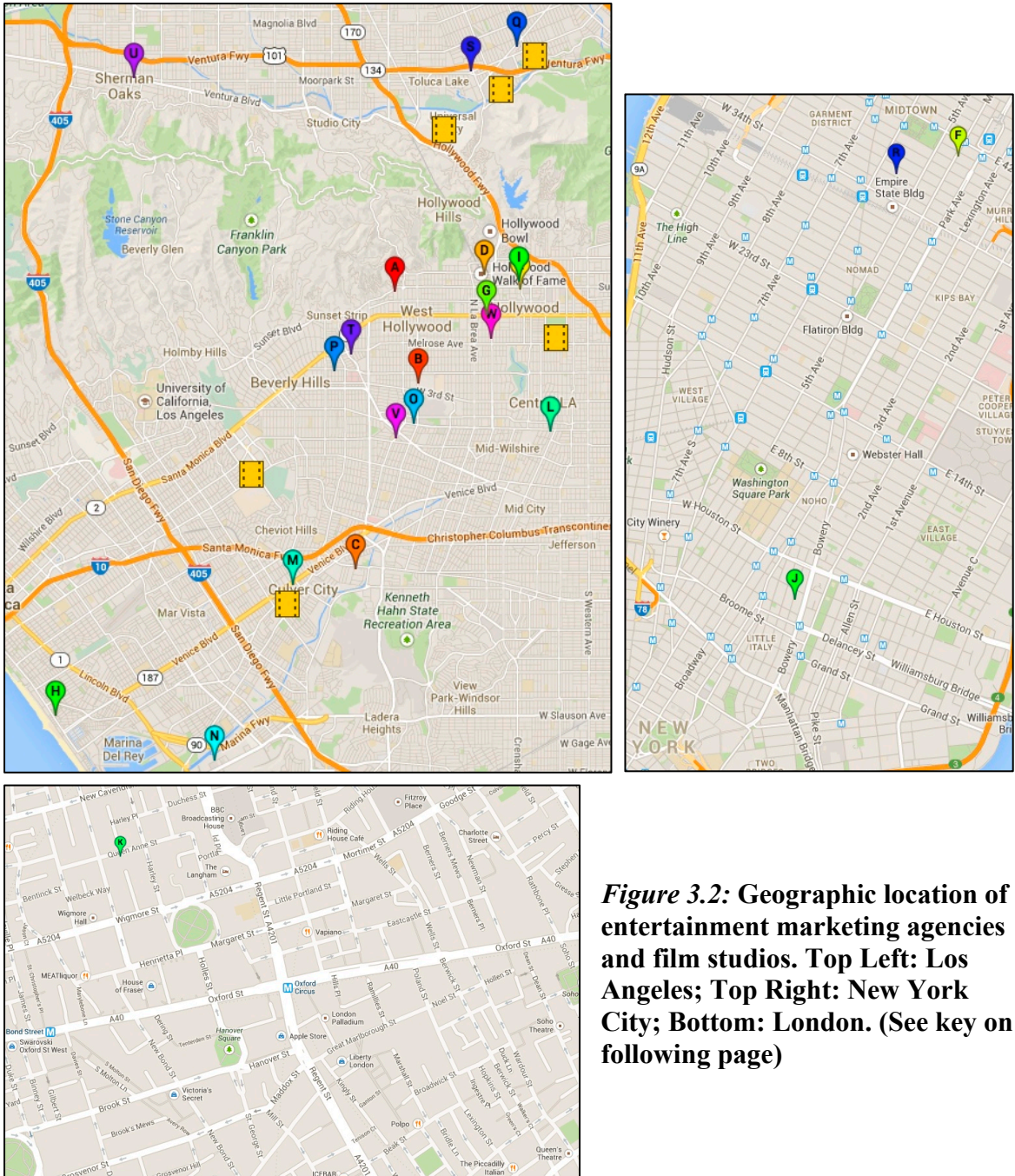
Figure 3.2: **Geographic location of entertainment marketing agencies and film studios. Top Left: Los Angeles; Top Right: New York City; Bottom: London. (See key on following page)**

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STUDIOS:		
ENTERTAINMENT MARKETING AGENCIES		
A) and company	I) Concept Arts Studios	Q) New Wave Entertainment (LA)
B) The Ant Farm	J) Empire Design (NYC)	R) New Wave Entertainment (NYC)
C) Arsonal	K) Empire Design (London)	S) Proof Creative Group
D) Art Machine	L) Gravillis Inc.	T) Pulse Advertising
E) BLT Communications	M) Iconisus L&Y	U) The Refinery
F) Cardinal Communications (NYC)	N) Ignition Creative	V) Vox + Associates
G) Cimarron Group	O) InSync + BemisBalkind	W) Works Advertising
H) Cold Open	P) Intralink Film	

Figure 3.2 Key

Reduced transaction costs. In the post-studio system era, the Hollywood film industry is largely comprised of a vertically disintegrated network of small to mid-size firms working flexibly together on a project-to-project basis (Christopherson & Storper, 1989). While studios remain central players controlled by a shrinking number of large media conglomerates, their primary function is to hire contractors and "provide central coordinating services to the vertically disintegrated networks proliferating around them" (Scott, 2005, p. 5). While new communication technology and the forces of globalization make possible more distant work relations and outsourcing, the reduced transaction costs involved with local partnerships act as powerful incentives to hire locally. As Michael Curtin explains, "Film producers today subcontract hundreds of tasks, but most contracts go to local companies because it is easier to oversee their work and suggest changes as the project progresses" (Curtin, 2009, p. 114).

As discussed previously, the creation of film marketing materials is a long and complex process, involving multiple rounds of revisions and approvals. By sharing a time zone and a common language, communication is eased and revisions are expedited. As interviewees for this study explained, office hours are often set around studio hours in order to ensure responsiveness and client satisfaction. The company FIVE33 (since purchased by Legendary Pictures in May 2013 to work exclusively on their film titles) organized its departments across three offices (in London, New York, and Los Angeles) in order to maximize this logistical benefit. While founded in London, this home office came to function largely as a strategic planning base, while day-to-day design operations were carried out in their Los Angeles offices in order to expedite and ease communication with studio clients (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012). Other interviewees, however, noted the benefits of having non-local marketing partners. As one former Manager from Paramount Pictures' Worldwide Interactive Marketing department explained, hiring marketing agencies in London sometimes worked to the studio's advantage because they could send feedback at the end of the business day (PST). The vendors in London could then get to work right away and potentially have revisions made by the time Paramount employees returned to work the next morning. If vendors had questions or needed clarification, however, this potential advantage could become a hindrance (N. Cagney, personal communication, November 12, 2013).

Proximity also allows for physical pitch and revision meetings. Lamenting that much of this work is now carried out electronically, the President of Pulse Advertising explains:

> There's a lot that we can't pick up on the phone or in an email; like body language or the eyes, the twisting of the mouth, the furrowing of the eyebrows. All of those indicators that, when you know your client, tell you what they're thinking or feeling. Things that they don't even realize that they're doing kind of guide developing the campaign (N. Bajaria, personal communication, March 21, 2012).

Entertainment marketing agencies thus practically benefit from their co-location with client studios, as direct social contact expedites the hiring and design process by helping designers foresee clients' concerns and quickly implement changes.

Marketing agencies located near studio lots and shooting locations also have the practical advantage of being able to conduct their own photo shoots on set. Rather than work with generic materials shot by studio staff photographers, agencies that are involved early enough can plan their own photo shoots to get design-specific poses and backgrounds. Interviewees described the significant benefit of this opportunity, as working with pre-shot materials drastically constricts the creative freedom of designers. Geographic proximity thus makes possible the kind of *insider* status and social connectedness that enhance artistic freedom and meaningful collaboration.

Relationship-building and diffusion of information. A related benefit of industry co-location is the opportunity for relationship-building with potential studio clients and other players within the industry. In a competitive environment, having face-to-face contact and the social capital inherent in strong business and personal relationships with

clients can be the determining factor in winning a job or being given one outright.

Upcoming poster projects are not publicized in any systematic or democratic way.

Instead, scripts or treatments are sent directly to known firms (usually ones with whom

the studio has worked before), or marketing firms learn about available jobs through

informal social networks and make an unsolicited bid. In this environment, personal

relationships with studio personnel, employees from competing firms, and people broadly

involved in the film industry become valuable sources of information and industry

gossip.

After winning a job, having strong personal relationships with clients can also

ease the tense and frustrating process of design revisions and approvals. As the Executive

Director of ColdOpen explains:

> There are those relationships with either clients, or studios, or specific directors,
> or specific producers that we've worked with on other projects, and we know
> what they like; we know their tastes. We know how to navigate some of those
> rougher waters that you may have had on other projects (L. Melin, personal
> communication, April 2, 2012).

While the client-vendor relationships can be fraught and tension-ridden, both sides strive

for an open, cordial working relationship that can be enhanced by proximity.

As Ignition Creative's website announces, they prefer the term "partners" to

"clients." As such, their statement of company beliefs reads, "As marketing becomes

increasingly rooted in technology, we believe the distinct lines between client and agency

should become blurred. Truly meaningful creative products cannot be created without

deep agency-client collaboration at every step of the process" (2014, "Our Beliefs").

Illustrating the spatial nature of this idealized partnership with clients, and aptly communicating their Hollywood insider status, the "Who We Are" section of their website lists employees' favorite hangouts as: "1) Ignition patio, 2) The beach, 3) Studio lobbies" (2014, "Who We Are"). While they're stuck in the lobby (and thus not full insiders), their declaration of familiarity and comfort "hanging out" within the studio environment aptly communicates their Hollywood insider status and rhetorically elevates them to the status of a "partner" and equal rather than a vendor and service-provider.

These localized, personal relationships with studio clients can facilitate the hiring, design, and approval processes. A job posting for Bemis Balkind illustrates the value of these established relationships, as it required the prospective job candidate to have "solid relationships and reputation with Movie Studios and Television Networks" (2012, "Careers"). The social capital of industry connections and *insider* status thus becomes a transferrable skill to be leveraged and monetized by both employees and companies. Through geographic co-location, the accumulation of this form of social capital becomes more easily attainable and maintainable.

Skilled labor. Another oft-cited benefit of agglomeration is the value of a large, specialized workforce from which companies can draw. By co-locating with similar companies, entertainment marketing agencies collectively draw talent to the area and collectively benefit. As Scott describes, "Capable and inspiring neophytes recognize that personal and professional fulfillment in their chosen line of work can best be attained by migrating to a center where that sort of work is well developed and highly valued" (2005,

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p. 7). With a large, skilled labor pool at their disposal, entertainment marketing agencies can reduce overhead costs by hiring some workers on a temporary or freelance basis. Freelancers can, in turn, offset risk by locating near multiple firms from which they can potentially find work and cobble together a living (Curtin, 2009).

Companies also benefit from the shared knowledge and innovation that emanates from a large community of creative laborers. As Curtin explains, "Artists are drawn to co-locate with their peers due to the mutual learning effects engendered by such proximity" (2009, p. 113). Through proximate art schools, design communities, art events, informal peer networking, and mentoring, the already skilled labor pool is able to improve, innovate, and share valuable skills and knowledge that benefit themselves and their employers.

One entertainment marketing agency executive explains, "Usually people will jump around about every 2 years. There's a lot of turnover in this industry… It's a small community" (N. Bajaria, personal communication, March 21, 2012). This insight is evidenced by employee LinkedIn resumes, as many employees have worked at various entertainment marketing agencies throughout their career, or have worked at the same few companies off and on for many years. These practices are characteristic of what McRobbie (2005) terms "portfolio careers," whereby individuals personally manage their own training and career trajectory across multiple employers rather than remain within one company throughout their career in an attempt to climb the corporate ladder.

This high-turnover job culture fosters further diffusion of knowledge and expertise, as close cross-company relationships are formed, and information and innovation is shared interpersonally. It also creates what Ursell (2000) terms an "economy of favors," wherein social capital is leveraged to reap the benefits of reciprocity and manage one's career successfully. Geographic proximity enables this career fluidity, as employees can more easily find new jobs through personal networks and transition between jobs without uprooting their lives and families. Thus, in the context of highly mobile and temporary employment, social capital in the form of cross-company relationships and peer training becomes a vital and convertible asset for both individuals and the companies they serve. It also fosters a sense of community within the world of entertainment marketing, helping to create a cohesive industrial identity.

Prestige and legitimacy. Skilled labor is not only drawn by the economic benefits of locating in Los Angeles, but also by the mystique of Hollywood and the social status that film industry work can confer. One job posting for Art Machine overtly leverages this geographic prestige, advertising its proximity to the "heart" of the Hollywood industry. By claiming a central position in Hollywood and leveraging this symbolic capital, agencies attempt to draw talented labor and offer this symbolic capital as a supplement or replacement for monetary payment. An internship competition advertised on one marketing firm's website aptly demonstrates this tactic. By offering a free trip to Los Angeles and a "paid" summer internship, the company solicits entries of movie

poster designs from undiscovered talent interested in breaking into the industry.[30] As explained in the fine print of their entry form, however, entrants must grant the firm full rights to use, modify and distribute their submitted designs. These companies are thus able to exploit cheap aspirant labor and capitalize on the eagerness of young designers to break into the glamorous "Hollywood" industry.

Proximity and connections to Hollywood studios and other entertainment marketing firms also confers legitimacy to these smaller companies as both part of an entertainment marketing industry in its own right, and as part of the larger studio system. In an environment where individual amateurs have the ability to create high-quality fan art, entertainment marketing firms must work to differentiate themselves and establish their corporate identity as professional, legitimate businesses that are part of the larger Hollywood milieu. As a part of these efforts, many companies locate in very close proximity to known industry landmarks. For instance, The Ant Farm is located across the street from CBS, while Art Machine is located along the Hollywood Walk of Fame across the street from the Dolby Theatre (where the Academy Awards are held). BLT Communications is housed a block from the historic Cinerama Dome theater as well as the Los Angeles Film School on Sunset Boulevard. Meanwhile, the firm And Company is located across Sunset Boulevard from the famous industry hangout Chateau Marmont and countless other industry-frequented bars and nightclubs, while Intralink Film is

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[30] College credit is required for the internship, however, suggesting that payment is less than the legal minimum wage.

located blocks from famed industry restaurant The Ivy and the chic boutiques of Robertson Boulevard.

In addition to the status conveyed via their physical proximity to Hollywood studios and famous landmarks, marketing agencies' websites feature extensive client lists advertising their relationships with major studios, networks, and video game companies. Company Facebook pages feature photos of completed work, often accompanied by a "personal" thank you note to the studio for being a great client, allowing the company to be a part of the project, or being such a valuable long-time partner. Facebook pages also occasionally feature photos of employees attending industry events such as premieres, actively demonstrating their insider status and concomitant social capital. At the same time, however, employees' obvious excitement in these photos exposes their peripheral status, as their presence at such events is an exciting luxury rather than part of the daily grind. Through these performed interactions and publicly touted relationships with studio clients, marketing agencies strive for status and legitimacy as connected Hollywood insiders and businesspeople. Geographic proximity to studios and industry landmarks enhances the possibilities for these status-conferring interactions and relationships.

Co-location with competing agencies also confers social capital and legitimacy via the possibility of industry associations. The only (now semi-defunct) association for these firms is the AEMA (Association of Entertainment Marketing Agencies). Through this organization, 29 companies could discuss industry problems, standards, and self-promotion in an effort to reap the benefits of professionalization and group cohesion. In

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order to gain membership, however, companies were required to have at least one major motion picture studio as a customer. Legitimacy and professionalism is thus conferred primarily by one's relationship to studios, and secondarily by peer recognition. Geographic and symbolic proximity to Hollywood studios thus remains central to these firms' performed identities and perceived legitimacy.

Geographic proximity to studios and comparable firms thus benefits entertainment marketing agencies by easing logistics, but also by conferring social capital upon these firms and their employees. Via their nearness to Hollywood studios and landmarks, entertainment marketing agencies ease job acquisition, navigate client relationships and expectations, attract skilled employees, and acquire valuable status and prestige. Through their proximity and relationship with co-located marketing firms, they can forge industry solidarity, bolster their professional legitimacy, and participate in shared knowledge networks and skilled labor pools. By leveraging this spatially-contingent social capital, companies are able to enact a preferred professional identity that asserts their Hollywood "insider" status. While these factors place entertainment marketers on the "insider" side of the insider/outsider binary and on the "commerce" side of the art/commerce binary, the following sections explore ways in which space is leveraged to garner *cultural capital* and balance these preferred images with a simultaneous display of outsider/artistic status.

Trendy, artistic, high-tech locations. While entertainment marketing agencies garner social and economic capital from their proximity to studios, they also acquire

cultural capital via their differentiation and distancing from these same institutions. In

perceived opposition to corporate, stodgy, profit-driven studios and studio employees,

most entertainment marketing agencies in this study present themselves and their

employees as balancing business savvy with valuable artistic talent, edginess and

creativity. As one executive at Cold Open describes:

> You can be creative; you can be an AD [Art Director]; you can be an owner of a
> design agency for entertainment and not have any kind of a business background;
> not know marketing; not know market research; not know any of that stuff
> because it is still art when it comes down to it. And all of that—the marketing
> side— is so heavily influenced at the studio, you kind of need that balance of just
> artists on the other end to help reach that fine line (L. Melin, personal
> communication, April 2, 2012).

In this formulation, the contribution of marketing agencies is their artistic vision and

talent that complements the business orientation of the studio marketing team. He goes on

to joke, without each other:

> Studios would be like, "What was the last film they were in? Ok, let's do exactly
> what that looked like. It made tons of money." We'd [the artists at the agency] be
> like, "F*** Brad Pitt! We don't need to show him on this poster. We'll just show
> a toothpick— that's it. That's all that's going to be on it. No title, nothing. Our
> audience isn't stupid; they can figure it out. They're going to come and see it."
> Yeah, I don't know. There's something to be said for both of those sides, but it's
> finding that meeting in the middle (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2,
> 2012).

This executive thus acknowledges the need for both an artistic vision and a grounding in

commercial reality. He implies that the partnership between marketing agencies and

studios provides this balance, as each side keeps the other in check. While designers at

agencies can provide new vision and artistic innovation to (sometimes jaded) studio

marketers, studio marketers have the market knowledge and business perspective to avoid unnecessary creative and financial risk.

While Melin sees his firm's role as primarily artistic in nature, other marketing agencies emphasize their position at the nexus of art and commerce, balancing the two impulses within the firm. Agency websites and online materials tout their professionalism, attention to detail, and punctuality, while also emphasizing their creativity, progressive vision, and artistic merit. As one firm claims, "We are equally at home with David Lynch and Merrill Lynch" (BemisBalkind, 2012, "Our Story"). This statement summarizes the firm's self-positioning as a professional, business-savvy entity that also maintains cultural and artistic caché. Job postings and employee bios further illustrate this fragile balance of art and commerce, stating that candidates "should have the ability to make exciting poster art that speaks to the audience, but answers the client's brief" (Empire Design, 2012, "Vacancies"), or touting, "Jen brings together a marketer's mind with an artist's eye...Alongside her commercial work, Jen also creates studio art that has been showcased at numerous Los Angeles galleries" (Cimarron Group, 2012, "People"). Entertainment marketers walk a fine line between the world of art and commerce, and thus must maintain and express their artistic legitimacy while providing a commercial service to large corporate studio clients.

This balancing act is evident through a geographic analysis of entertainment marketing firms. While generally positioned in close proximity to studios (as discussed previously), these firms also converge in cultural districts of Los Angeles (see Figure

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3.3).[31] As Figure 3.4 illustrates, Hollywood, West Hollywood, and the Miracle Mile neighborhoods house 81 art venues, and also 12 of the top 21 entertainment marketing agencies. Among these are Pulse Advertising, located on the hip, boutique-filled Melrose Avenue across from the Pacific Design Center, BLT Communications and Concept Arts Studios, located next to the indie Arclight Cinema along famously trendy Sunset Boulevard, and InSync + BemisBalkind, located on museum row across from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Culver City (see Figure 3.5), a young up-and-coming neighborhood housing Sony Pictures Entertainment, is also home to a thriving art scene. Hosting an annual art walk, Culver City is home to 30 art venues as well as a number of innovative restaurants and theaters. It is also the location of entertainment marketing agencies Iconisus L&Y and Arsonal.
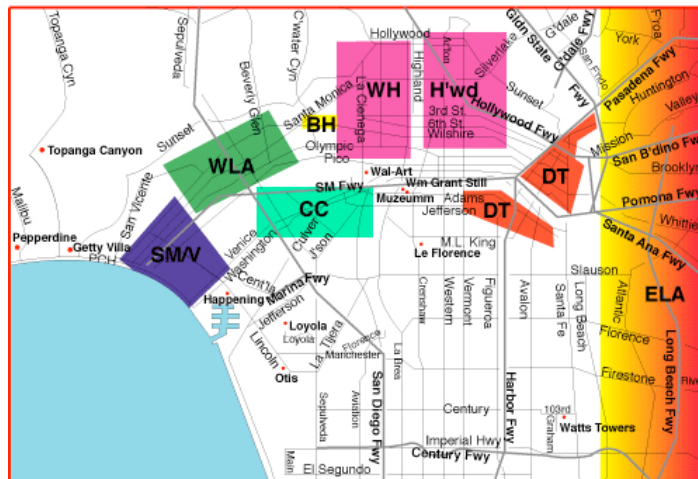
Figure 3.3: **Prominent art districts in the Los Angeles Metro area (Courtesy of ArtSceneCal.com)**

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[31] This tendency is clear in New York City as well, as entertainment marketing firms are located in Midtown Manhattan (near network and media offices) or in the artistic and trendy Soho neighborhood.
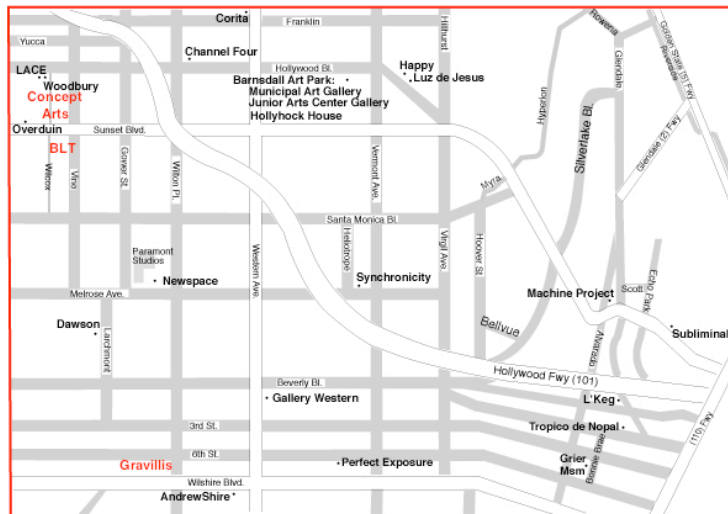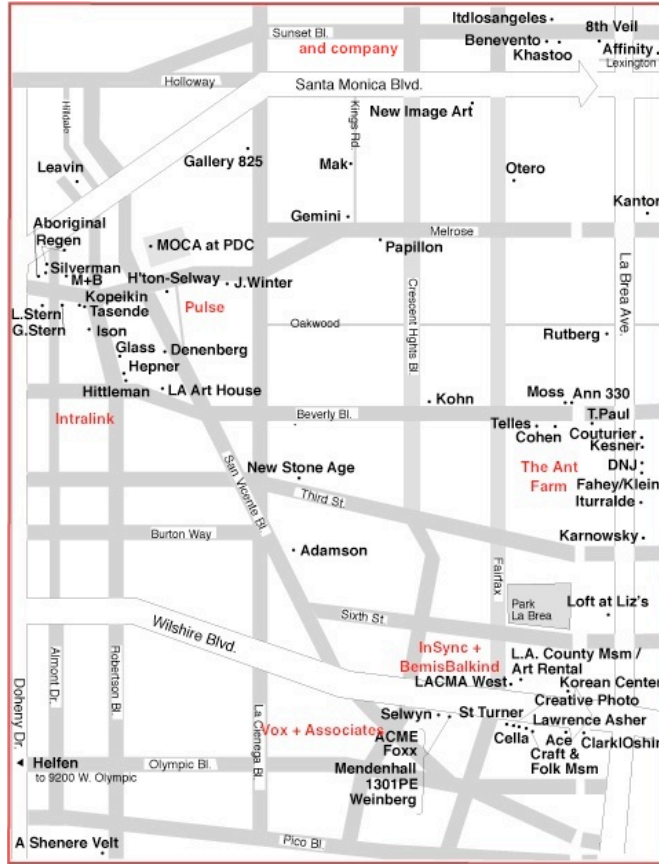
Figure 3.4: **West Hollywood/Miracle Mile (Top) and Hollywood (Bottom) art venues and marketing firms. Three additional entertainment marketing agencies reside in the narrow swathe between these two art hotspots. (Original maps courtesy of ArtSceneCal.com)**

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Figure 3.5: Culver City art venues and entertainment marketing agencies. (Original map courtesy of ArtSceneCal.com)

Venice Beach and Playa Vista on the west side of Los Angeles are home to a thriving artistic, high-tech beach culture. Formerly known as a bohemian mecca for skaters and surfers, in recent years this area has earned the moniker "Silicon Beach" due to an influx of high-tech start-ups. Boasting over 15 art galleries, the Venice Art Crawl, the trendy boutique-lined Abbot Kinney Boulevard, and the eclectic Venice Boardwalk where street artists and performers abound, Venice Beach is an artistic haven for creative workers. It's also home to entertainment marketing agency Cold Open and previously independent Five33 (now subsumed by Legendary Pictures).

Ignition Creative recently moved from an office near Bergamot Station Arts Center (a Santa Monica art venue housing 30 galleries) to a new office in "The Campus" office park in Playa Vista. Still in development, this area has become a hub for high-tech firms, housing companies such as Google, YouTube Space LA, Facebook, Yahoo!, Belkin, Konami, Rubicon Project, and Electronic Arts, among others. Ignition Creative's

move to this area is indicative of a larger strategic shift, as the agency repositions itself as both a creative design firm (highlighted by its previous office location) *and* as a high-tech firm. This repositioning is also conveyed by the company's recent website redesign. When first examined in 2012, Ignition's website simply presented the firm's work and did not state a defined mission or vision for the company. By 2014, the site clearly articulated the centrality of technology in their approach, the increasing obsolescence of traditional marketing tactics, and the need to embrace innovative storytelling techniques in order to sell branded entertainment. While the case of Ignition Creative provides a illustrative example of agencies' embrace of technology, this firm is not alone. Many other entertainment marketing agencies highlight the innovative, multi-media, cutting-edge nature of their work. Because studios are slow to embrace technological change and its concomitant risks, entertainment marketing agencies can position themselves as offering these clients much-needed fresh approaches and innovative tools.

The tendency to locate in young, hip and vibrant cultural sectors is characteristic of what Richard Florida calls the "Creative Class." According to him, creative workers "like indigenous street-level culture—a teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros" (2005, p. 134). He explains that they prefer an eclectic and vibrant street scene from which they can "sample" and draw inspiration for their creative work. This process is expressed by several entertainment marketing firms' websites, as they describe how their lives outside of work enrich their creativity.

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By living and working in a youthful, artistic, high-tech milieu, companies not only garner inspiration, but also cultural capital that imbues them with legitimacy as artists and innovators. This tendency is clearly illustrated via an examination of the entertainment marketing agency Cold Open. Located slightly outside the swathe of studios, Cold Open compensates with the unique cultural capital it gains from its hip, artsy location in Venice Beach. The "About" section of the company's website features a rotating set of photo collages that paint a clear picture of the company's preferred image. These photos highlight the company's location in Venice, featuring a photo of the neighborhood's landmark sign, its iconic graffiti park and the beach, coupled with an image of a hand sketching. Other collages feature the surf, skate, and bike culture of Venice, highlighting the beautiful weather and active, youthful, "experiential" lifestyle of the firm's employees (Florida, 2005). The agency's social media presence reinforces this image, as postings include photos of employees fueling their creativity while biking along the beach or taking in a stunning sunset over the water. Postings from this agency and others also highlight art or music that employees find noteworthy, or publicize area art or cultural events like the Los Angeles Art Show, LA Art Walk, the Venice Art Crawl, or the LA Art Book Fair.

By constructing this hip, countercultural image, Cold Open and similar firms also attempt to attract and retain talented members of the Creative Class who are strategically managing their portfolio careers (Florida, 2005; McRobbie, 2005). As Melin explains:

> We're a block off from the beach. A lot of people here are kind of west side Californians, either being raised that way or by choice or moving to California

and finding that sort of community and that sort of culture... We have a lot of people that are surfers, cyclists, skateboarders, and that's part of what makes the aesthetic that we have the aesthetic that we have. We hire people that have a certain flair to them that applies to their art (personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Geographic space can thus be effectively leveraged in order to attract employees with pre-established cultural capital and an edgy, artistic identity. These qualities are, in turn, grafted onto the company's identity and incorporated into its work, affecting their interactions and relationships with their studio clients.

By drawing on the reputation, cultural amenities, and environment of Venice, Cold Open is able to construct a cohesive company identity that is marketable to potential clients and employees alike. Comparing film studio marketing executives to employees at Cold Open, Melin jokes that, "*They're* going to be the guys wearing the ties. *We're* the cool guys that the guys with the ties want to hang out with" (personal communication, April 2, 2012). The laid-back, artistic, young, hip image that Cold Open gleans from its location helps to reinforce this dichotomy. As a result, the company is able to present itself as an alternative, artistically legitimate and tech-savvy entity that studios need in order to achieve innovation and artistry, and balance their more commercial, formulaic, market research-driven approach.

By attracting artistic employees and advertising their trendy, bohemian location, companies are able to differentiate themselves from their studio counterparts and add value and legitimacy (in the form of cultural capital) to their brand and product. In this way, entertainment marketing agencies leverage space to navigate their fraught

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relationship with Hollywood and forge their place within the industry milieu. While maintaining their proximity to Hollywood studios as industry *insiders*, they simultaneously enact their *outsider* status as innovators and artists.

Self-defining workspaces. While cultural capital is garnered via an agency's location within a particular cultural district, it is also conferred through the appearance and design of its physical office space. While having an office space at all is a marker of legitimacy, the office's architecture and design serves as an avenue through which firms can construct and publicize their preferred professional identity (and cultural capital) through the manipulation of physical space. As John Caldwell describes, "Production firms spend considerable resources custom designing buildings and workspaces that adequately 'express' the ostensible personality or the brand of a company" (2008, p. 75). This tendency is prevalent among entertainment marketing agencies, and their office spaces commonly convey a fusion of commercial professionalism and artistry.

Agency websites often tout their high-tech facilities, sometimes dedicating whole pages to describing and displaying their grounds and equipment. Through these descriptions and images, companies spatially establish their legitimacy as high-tech, professional businesses with equipment that meets studios' lofty standards. At the same time, however, these firms highlight the creative inspiration they draw from their workspaces that serve as unique, artistically-oriented environments. Distinctive architecture is valued and promoted as a reflection of the company's identity and artistic

sensibility, and building facades are often featured on companies' websites and social media pages.

The internal design of the office is emphasized as well, credited with creating a conducive environment for creative inspiration, collaboration, and productivity. As Cold Open's website describes:

> The space we work in matters. As designers, writers, photographers, illustrators and executives, our work environment affects us all. Cold Open occupies two buildings designed by local architects, both of which have been remodeled to provide the best use of space specific to our needs. With all that we do to foster creativity, we want our daily surroundings to only further inspire (2014, "Studio").

This description is accompanied by photos depicting a clean, modern, sleek work environment peppered with identity markers such as a mounted surfboard, wall art, and communal areas such as a kitchen and patio. Similarly, Concept Arts' website states, "Inside its landmark 1917 bow-and-truss warehouse is a community of bright, creative talent working together… Open and frequent interplay is encouraged by our design philosophy as well as our workplace layout: Concept is a design fortress with no internal office walls" (2014, "About Us"). By creating and advertising a spatial identity through architecture and layout, companies are able to bolster their position as part of a creative, flexible, modern industry. While their space is presented as professional, high-tech, and productive, it is also creative, inspiring, non-hierarchical and non-traditional.

The workspace is also portrayed as fun, humane, youthful, and quirky. Numerous Facebook posts and dedicated "culture" or "about" sections of company websites work to construct this laid-back image. Employees are pictured at various company functions

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(such as holiday parties, Halloween costume parties, golf tournaments, sports games, barbeques and ski trips), having after-hours drinks, and partaking in general silliness at the office. This documented playtime highlights employees' fun-loving nature, but also their artistic talent and imaginativeness. Many comical photos of employees are creatively altered and staged in a professional manner, drawing attention to the firm's design prowess while simultaneously revealing its lighthearted personality. Through this strategic image construction, clients are shown the fun, young, creative, and talented nature of these service providers. Prospective employees may also be lured by the image of this cheerful and relaxed work environment. Andrew Ross (2003) describes the alienation and exploitation that can result from such "humane workplaces," but this image is still widely favored by entertainment marketing agencies.

By invoking their workspace as a marker of identity and cultural capital, these firms effectively convey both their legitimacy as professionals and their status as fun, artistic, creative individuals. Through this spatially-informed identity construction, companies are able to present a preferred image to both their studio clients and prospective employees. This preferred identity highlights agencies' insider status and commercial viability via high-tech, well-equipped office space, but also reveals their outsider/artistic status through their distinct, non-traditional, laidback workspaces.

Navigating the Hollywood marketing milieu. As a vital, but often overlooked, component of the Hollywood film industry, entertainment marketing agencies face a difficult task of self-definition as they manage their relationship with Hollywood studios.

They maintain close ties with and provide a necessary service to studios, but they remain partial outsiders due to their independent ownership, small size, subordination as a service provider, and circumscribed role. While navigating this fraught borderland between Hollywood insider and outsider status, marketing agencies must simultaneously straddle the ever-present art/commerce divide ubiquitous in many cultural industries. Tasked with creating art that serves the commercial purpose of selling another artistic/commercial product (the film), they navigate complex terrain. As one interviewee expresses, "There is this balance between art and commerce that we battle with everyday… It's a very fine line between coming up with something that's edgy enough to spark interest, but mainstream enough to not alienate too many people from coming to the movies" (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012). To help accomplish this balance between artistry and commercial appeal, and to market their firms and products successfully, agencies seek to achieve a similar balance in their performed corporate identities.

As explored here, space is a key tool companies use to construct this complex para-industrial identity that fuses art with commerce, insider knowledge with outsider perspective, fun with professionalism, and creativity with productivity. While Scott (2005) previously explored Hollywood's *economic* geography, this study demonstrates that Hollywood's *cultural* geography is equally important, and is central to the identity-construction project of cultural industries such as entertainment marketing. By clustering around studios and similar firms, entertainment marketing agencies are able to garner

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social capital through reduced transaction costs and bolstered relationships, increased

access to information flows and labor pools, and legitimacy as a "Hollywood" business

and as part of a collective community of professionals. In this way, firms emphasize their

insider status and commercial legitimacy. By locating in hip, high-tech, artistic districts,

agencies benefit from the cultural capital of artistry and innovation imbued both by the

personnel they attract as a result, and by the reputation the neighborhood confers. This

use of space highlights agencies' difference and outsider status as artists in opposition to

their conservative, corporate studio clients. Finally, companies organize their immediate

office space in order to convey cultural capital, both as high-tech professionals and as fun

and creative artists. By utilizing space as a determinant and marker of identity,

entertainment marketing agencies are able to manage their fraught identity and precarious

position vis-à-vis the larger film and advertising industries.

While some critics claim that globalization and the proliferation of new media

technology has led individuals and industries to be "liberated from the tyranny of place,"

this case study suggests that geographic space still serves a vital economic and cultural

function (Cowen, 2002, p. 5). While Scott (2005) argues for the continued *economic*

importance of space, this study illuminates the continued *social* and *cultural* importance

of space via spatially-contingent social and cultural capital. By utilizing these strategies,

companies and employees can leverage their spatial geography to strategically manage

their identities, relationships, and work worlds in a complicated terrain of competing

interests and imperatives.

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Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex institutional processes involved in designing a major studio marketing campaign. It introduced the myriad players involved in these processes, and explored the complex relational and power dynamics that characterize their interplay. In today's high-stakes environment, marketing concerns have become central to the overall filmmaking process. Thus, players from across the industry (including studio executives, producers, directors, stars, legal teams, market researchers, and promotional partners) weigh in on key marketing decisions. Incorporating feedback from these sources, studio marketing departments work together with third party entertainment marketing agencies to create domestic campaigns that satisfy these various stakeholders and draw audiences to the theater.

After domestic artwork is finalized, studio marketers turn their attention to the international sphere. Working with international distributors, marketers must undergo a similarly complex process to mold campaigns in a manner deemed most suitable for various international markets. The next chapter documents this process, and explores the economic, institutional, cultural, spatial, and relational dynamics that shape the marketing materials that result.

As explored in this chapter, space is a powerful force in the film marketing landscape, shaping the relationships between various industrial stakeholders, impacting the institutional structure of the industry, and influencing the designs that emerge from this system. While this chapter explored the micro-level spatial factors at play in the

industry, the contemporary moment marks a period of profound spatial changes at the macro level due to the rapid internationalization of the market for Hollywood films. The following chapter thus explores how film marketers are grappling with these changing spatial dynamics, market realities, and resulting audience constructions.

CHAPTER 4: MEETING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

The rapid rise of the international audience is one of the most profound changes taking place in contemporary Hollywood. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hollywood has been a major exporter of film products since its inception, but only recently has the global audience had such a powerful impact on Hollywood's practices and profits. Today, international marketing considerations impact all stages of planning, production, distribution, and marketing at Hollywood studios. Marketers' constructions of their global audiences, and the institutional, social, economic, and spatial forces that inform their treatment of these viewers, thus profoundly impact today's media landscape. This chapter explores these issues in detail.

Ascent of the Global Film Marketplace

American film companies' interest in foreign markets began as early as 1897, when the first international screenings of American films took place (Miller et al., 2005). By 1919 overseas box office revenues were factored into American film budgets, and local language versions of silent films and their publicity materials were produced for key foreign markets. But the period between the World Wars marked Hollywood's true ascent to global film market dominance (Thompson, 1985). By the 1930s, an estimated 80% of films screened throughout the world hailed from the U.S. (Miller et al., 2005).

This rise to global dominance has been attributed to multiple factors, including the collapse of the European film industry during the war period (Miller et al., 2005;

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Thompson, 1985; Wasko, 2003), advantages associated with Hollywood's large and diverse domestic audience (Hoskins et al., 1997; Read, 1976; Wildman & Siwek, 1988), the inherent universal appeal and narrative transparency of Hollywood products (Olson, 1999), the United States' protectionist legal and trade policies (Miller at al, 2005; Wasko, 2003), and Hollywood's monopolistic labor and distribution mechanisms (Miller et al, 2005; Read, 1976; Wasko, 2003). Hollywood's marketing prowess is another key factor in explaining Hollywood's continued global dominance, as expensive marketing campaigns give these films a key competitive advantage and erect barriers to entry for local films with small marketing budgets (Hoskins et al., 1997).

Despite Hollywood films' prominence in the international sphere, studios and their marketing teams traditionally viewed the domestic U.S. marketplace as their main concern, treating international sales as a lucky strike extra (Wasser, 1995). This domestic marketing focus began to erode in the 1980s and 1990s, and shifted dramatically in the early 21st century, due to several converging factors. First, box office stagnation at home forced studios to look beyond U.S. borders for additional revenue. While domestic U.S. box office revenue increased by only 13% from 2008 to 2013 (from $9.6 to $10.9 billion), international box office revenue skyrocketed by 38% in the same period (from $18.1 billion in 2008 to $25 billion in 2013). By 2013, international markets accounted

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for a full 70% of all Hollywood box office receipts (MPAA, 2013).[32] As this ratio shifts, marketing to international audiences assumes critical importance.

The demise of the DVD rental and sales market, as well as increased competition from alternative media (such as cable TV, pay-per-view, streaming services, and file-sharing sites), have further incentivized studios to look abroad to recoup lost revenue. Together, these technological forces have decimated studios' most important revenue stream—home entertainment. As Michael Lynton, chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment explains, "We have to make up for the shortfall in DVD spending somehow, and the principal way we are doing it now is international" (Verrier et al., 2011).

Despite domestic box office stagnation and the decline of home entertainment, Hollywood production costs continue to escalate. In 1994, the average production budget for a Hollywood film was $50.4 million (with an additional $34.3 million prints and advertising budget) (Eller, 1995). Top-grossing films for that year included *Forrest Gump* (with a production budget of $55 million), *The Lion King* (with a budget of $45 million), and *True Lies* (with a budget of $115 million). In contrast, the top-grossing films of 2013 included *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (with a production budget of $130 million), *Iron Man 3* (with a budget of $200 million), and *Frozen* (with a budget of

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[32] The key reason domestic box office revenues have remained steady rather than declined is because the average ticket price has increased in the U.S., with significant increases in the sales of more expensive 3D and IMAX tickets (MPAA, 2013).

$150 million).[33] With such astronomical outlays of cash, domestic box office returns are rarely adequate to recoup production costs, making foreign box office success an increasingly critical requisite for profitability (Scott, 2002). As former president of the Walt Disney Company's Motion Pictures Group, Mark Zoradi, voices, "I can tell you that no studio head is going to make a big expensive movie that costs $150 million or $200 million unless it has worldwide appeal…You can't pay back that production cost on the domestic model alone" (Schuker, 2010). Thus, a sound international marketing plan is imperative for the success of these big budget Hollywood blockbusters.

Finally, increased concentration of studio ownership by a few transnational media conglomerates has facilitated studios' international operations. With corporate arms reaching across the globe, and with leadership that fully grasps the profit potential of foreign markets, studios have expanded their international horizons. Ownership by these large, publicly traded corporate entities has also increased the pressure on studios to maximize profitability and minimize risk. This corporate risk-aversion has led studios to produce fewer mid-budget movies in favor of investing the bulk of their time, effort and money in a few large blockbuster films each year that can support a wide array of ancillary content. As Lynda Obst observes, "studios have grown their slates into a diet of pure tentpoles, with almost nothing in between" (2013, p. 6). This strategy feeds the

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[33] The MPAA stopped releasing average production and marketing budget statistics in 2009.

ballooning production budgets of Hollywood films, compounding studios' need to recoup losses via international sales.

This approach leads studios to widen their international safety net in order to spread the risk of a big-budget gamble. A domestic box office flop can often be a huge success overseas, saving the studio from potentially significant losses. For instance, Will Smith's $130 million *After Earth* (2013) reaped a disappointing $60.5 million domestically, but recouped losses with an additional $183 million from international screens. Likewise, *The Tourist* (2010) (with a $100 million budget) only earned $68 million domestically, but was saved by an additional $211 million internationally. These international success stories are often attributed to savvy international marketing campaigns and stumping by internationally recognized stars, thus stressing the importance of these activities (Wasko, 1994).

Together, these factors have incentivized studios to treat the international market as Hollywood's promised land for the future. They are therefore keenly motivated to "know" their international audiences in order to produce movies with international appeal and market them effectively. As this chapter will discuss, however, Hollywood marketers' constructions of their international audiences, and their ability to cater to these viewers' presumed desires, can prove problematic.

Shifting Valuations of International Markets

Not only has the international market become increasingly valuable for Hollywood, but the shape of this market has shifted dramatically over time. These

changes have had a profound impact on the ways studios and their marketers view and value their global audiences. Historically, European territories were the primary export markets for Hollywood films. In the post-war era, however, Japan outpaced these markets to become the number one film export destination. This marked the beginning of a long-term shift in focus toward Asian markets—a trend that continues today. As illustrated in Table 4.1, six of the top ten Hollywood export markets in 1990 were European. By 2013, this number plummeted to three, as European markets were rapidly outpaced by those in Asia. Due to this shift (and Hollywood's resulting preoccupation with Asia), Asian markets are the primary geographic focus of this chapter.

Ranking	1990	2010	2013
1	Japan	Japan	China
2	Germany	UK/Ireland	Japan
3	France	France	UK
4	UK/Ireland	Germany	France
5	Italy	Russia	India
6	Spain	Italy	S. Korea
7	Australia	Australia	Russia
8	Brazil	S. Korea	Germany
9	Sweden	Spain	Australia
10	S. Korea	Brazil	Mexico

Table 4.1: **Top ten most valuable Hollywood export markets in the years 1990, 2010, and 2013 (Sources: MPAA, 2013; Sochay & Litman, 1992; Wiseman, 2011).**

China particularly has captured the imagination of Hollywood and its marketers in recent years. In 2012, China surpassed Japan as the number one foreign market by generating $2.7 billion in box office revenue. Continuing its dramatic upward trajectory, the Chinese box office reaped $3.6 billion in 2013 and $4.8 billion in 2014, and remains poised for even further growth in the future. This phenomenon is largely attributed to

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rapid economic growth in China that has created a moviegoing middle class, a flurry of

screen construction,[34] and a lessening of restrictions on Hollywood imports.[35] As China's

economic growth and openness continues, the importance of this market to Hollywood

studios is expected to increase. According to a 2012 study conducted by Ernst & Young,

Chinese box office revenues are set to exceed domestic U.S. box office figures by 2020.

As such, and as will be illustrated by examples in this chapter, studios are investing a

considerable amount of time and energy courting the Chinese market.

  While the rise of the Chinese audience has had the most profound impact on

Hollywood's international perspective in recent years, other markets are rising in

prominence as well. Due to rapid infrastructure building, rising ticket prices, a weak

domestic film industry, and a burgeoning middle class, Russia has been hyped as another

up-and-coming market for Hollywood films. In 2010, 160 million movie tickets were

sold, marking the first time in recent Russian history that ticket sales exceeded the

country's population ("Bigger abroad," 2011). Seeing this promise, Paramount elected to

hold the premiere of its tentpole *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011) at the Moscow

International Film Festival. As chairman of Paramount Brad Grey explained, "Ten years

ago Russia only had a few dozen screens, and now it is enjoying such enormous growth

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[34] According to Rance Pow, President of Artisan Gateway, China is building cinemas at a rate of 18 new screens per day (Makinen, 2014). Between 2011 and 2014, 11,995 screens were built in the country, creating a total of 18,195 screens that could potentially display Hollywood fare (Frater, 2014; Pierson, 2011).
[35] In February of 2012, the Chinese government increased the permitted number of U.S. film imports from 20 to 34 films per year. They stipulated that the additional 14 films must be released in more lucrative IMAX or 3D formats (Hennock, 2012).

that we think it's fitting to have the opening of one of the biggest franchises in the industry there" (Verrier et al., 2011). The film went on to earn an impressive $45 million in the territory.

Since that time, tensions between the U.S. and Russia have risen significantly, and studios and distributors are less optimistic about the future of Hollywood films in the region. At the Cannes Film Festival in 2014, for instance, Russian distributors expressed fear that U.S. films may be sanctioned or banned within the region. As a result, they offered 30 to 60 percent less for rights to Hollywood films (Shaw, 2014a). Talk of Russia becoming the "next China" has thus been tempered. But Russia remains an important market (ranked as the seventh largest international market for Hollywood films in 2013), and continues to influence the decisions and actions of Hollywood marketers (MPAA, 2013).

Studios are also turning their attention to new growth markets outside of traditional spheres of Hollywood influence. India, for instance, is a tempting but tricky market for Hollywood fare. Due to its robust local film industry and unique cinematic tradition, its 1.2 billion citizens remain an elusive target audience for Hollywood marketers. Studios have thus primarily attempted to woo Indian filmgoers via co-productions and by investing in local film projects, rather than by trying to tailor existing Hollywood fare and marketing materials for Indian audiences. But the Indian audience (as the fifth largest international market for Hollywood exports in 2013) still figures

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prominently in the minds of studio marketers as they attempt to situate their global

blockbusters via international campaigns (MPAA, 2013).

Small but emerging markets in Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa

are beginning to garner the attention of Hollywood studios as well. The market share of

countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya

remains small, but together these countries help to offset box office stagnation in the U.S.

and Europe. While China remains the primary focus, these developing markets are

viewed as additional sites for Hollywood's future global expansion due to their economic

development, infrastructure building, technology adoption, and apparent hunger for

American media products (Lang & Cunningham, 2014).

Despite this new attention to non-Western territories, existing studio infrastructure

and organizational dynamics strongly favor European markets. In order to distribute and

market their films across the globe, studios either utilize their own international branch

offices or they partner with local third party distribution companies by selling them film

rights.[36] Table 4.2 presents the locations of major studios' international branch offices.

These offices are responsible for distributing and marketing films within their local

country and often in the surrounding region as well. For instance, 20th Century Fox's

offices in Mexico and Brazil handle distribution for most of Central and South America.

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[36] Foreign distribution rights are most often sold at film markets, the largest of these
being Cannes International Film Festival and Market, Berlin International Film Festival,
Sundance Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, and the American Film
Market. At markets, studios' international sales agents meet with local acquisitions
executives from around the world to sell distribution rights in each territory.

Likewise, Sony's office in the UAE is responsible for the company's film presence throughout the Middle East.

	20th Century Fox	Paramount	Sony Pictures	Universal	Warner Bros.
Australia	X	X	X	X	X
Austria	X		X	X	
Belgium	X		X		X
Benelux				X	
Brazil	X	X			X
Canada			X		X
Denmark			X		X
Finland			X		X
France	X	X	X	X	X
Germany	X	X	X	X	X
Greece			X		
Hong Kong			X		
India				X	X
Ireland		X			
Italy	X		X	X	X
Japan	X	X	X		X
Kazakhstan			X		
Mexico	X	X		X	
Netherlands	X				X
New Zealand	X	X			
Norway	X				X
Portugal					X
Russia	X		X	X	
South Korea	X				
Spain	X	X	X	X	X
Sweden	X				X
Switzerland	X			X	X
Taiwan	X				
Turkey					X
UAE			X		
UK	X	X	X	X	X

Table 4.2: **Locations of major studios' international branch offices**

As discussed in Chapter 3, spatial analyses can be an informative means of exploring complex institutional dynamics. In this case, the location of regional offices both reflects and informs how Hollywood studios view the world and value various national and regional markets. Branch office locations are rooted in a particular industrial history wherein European countries were the key export markets for American films. As a result, Hollywood studios maintain a significant physical presence in this region.

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Companies such as Warner Bros. hold offices in such geographically proximate territories as Denmark, Finland, Norway, *and* Sweden. Meanwhile, they maintain only one office in all of South America (Brazil) and only two offices in Asia (India and Japan). Historical precedence thus plays an important role in these spatial formations.

In some cases, this regional spread of offices reflects studios' valuations of the market as well. For instance, Latin American box office in 2013 only accounted for 12% of Hollywood's total international box office take. Most of these audiences were concentrated in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina (MPAA, 2013). Due to the relatively small regional market share concentrated in a few countries, this vast and diverse region is often treated by the industry as an undifferentiated whole that can be represented by the needs of the largest national markets. Thus, holding one office in Brazil or Mexico is often deemed sufficient to service the entire region. However, this structure of regional distribution centers risks ignoring important cultural differences within and across regional and national borders.

In other cases, the preponderance or dearth of international offices in particular territories reflects not the value of the market, but the ease or difficulty with which studios can operate in those territories. In China, for instance, studios are forced to partner with one of two state-owned distribution companies authorized to distribute foreign films—China Film Group or Huaxia Film (Cunningham, 2013). In other territories, the barriers to entry are less formalized, but local third party distribution partners are perceived as more readily equipped to release films within their territory.

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This advantage is due to their established relationships with exhibitors, marketers, and promotional partners, and their familiarity with local cultural and taste particularities.

According to Hoskins and Mirus' (1988) theory of cultural discount, cultural products systematically lose value as they travel to increasingly culturally distant environments in which audiences lack the social background, language, and/or values necessary to understand or appreciate the product. Several scholars have applied this concept to analyses of Hollywood film products, suggesting that American films tend to be most successful in foreign markets that are culturally similar to the United States (Craig et al., 2005; Fu & Govindaraju, 2010). Others suggest that particular genres suffer from more or less cultural discount in specific foreign markets due to their varied levels of cultural specificity and linguistic complexity (Lee, 2006).

In the past, when Hollywood studios focused primarily on European markets for export, cultural discount was less of a concern. Due to shared Western cultural history, European audiences were generally conceived as having similar tastes and sensibilities to their American counterparts. Increasingly coveted non-Western (and particularly Asian) audiences, however, are viewed as requiring more specialized care on the part of Hollywood filmmakers and marketers due to their cultural uniqueness. Partnering with local distribution companies in these regions is therefore often seen as preferable due to their specialized knowledge of their region's culture and film marketplace.

Courting the International Filmgoer

Working through their network of international offices and/or distribution partners, studio marketers strive to keep a pulse on the global film marketplace and assess the tastes of its various audiences. The landscape's rapid growth and evolution make this a challenging task, however. In their attempt to make the diverse global audience knowable and predictable, film marketers rely heavily on past experiences, historical box office data, and cultural insights from their local partners. Through these inputs, they form ideas about what content and marketing appeals are likely to work or fail within a particular region. Armed with these insights, international marketers have become increasingly powerful at all levels of studio operations, and international marketing considerations are now taken into account at every step along the production, distribution, and marketing pipeline. The perceived tastes and preferences of international audiences (as filtered through international marketing personnel) thus profoundly impact what movies we see, how they are crafted, and how they are positioned to attract potential viewers. The following sections will address the power that international marketing considerations hold at each phase of greenlighting, casting, writing, production, distribution, and especially marketing.

Greenlighting. As discussed in Chapter 3, greenlight decisions were, in the past, based on the intuition of a handful of executive and studio heads. Today, when risk-averse multinational media conglomerates are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a few tentpole films per year, the gut feeling of a few American movie executives is

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not enough to quell fears and appease investors. Instead, a greenlight committee is formed to assess the financial viability of any proposed project. In these deliberations, marketing concerns—particularly *international* marketing concerns—take center stage.

First, studio executives must decide whether they can finance the film and distribute it widely enough to make a profit. This often means selling international distribution rights to another studio with foreign reach, or to individual distribution companies in various foreign territories. These distribution partners are responsible for booking exhibition venues for the film, orchestrating local marketing campaigns, procuring local promotional partners, and dispersing localized prints and advertisements to exhibitors and ad platforms.

Some international distributors also serve as co-producers of the film. This tactic has become increasingly common in the case of China. This is primarily because Hollywood films with a Chinese co-producer are almost always guaranteed a release in China, and can more easily navigate the bureaucratic web of censorship officials with the help of local players. In addition, studios typically receive a more favorable revenue split via these co-production deals. Without a local co-producer, foreign distributors typically reap roughly 15% (with a maximum of 25%) of box office earnings in the territory. With a co-producer, the team garners 40% of the box office revenue, to be split between the

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production companies as individual contracts stipulate (Daniel, 2013).[37] Chinese co-producers are also able to provide cultural insight into the tastes and practices of Chinese moviegoers, thus guiding the film through the production and marketing process with this valuable audience clearly in mind.[38]

Selling international distribution rights or finding an international co-producer for a film project is essentially a marketing challenge. By presenting scripts, film footage, and/or marketing materials like key art and trailers, producers and international sales reps must convince these partners that the film will attract audiences in their territory and turn a profit. Thus, as early as greenlight meetings, studio executives consider a film project's intra-industry marketability.

Greenlight committees must also consider a proposed film's marketability to valuable audience segments, both domestic and international. In greenlight meetings, therefore, marketing personnel identify key target audiences and offer their insights into the likelihood of attracting these segments given the film's component hooks. As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to attract the broadest possible international audience, studios today rely primarily on the "blockbuster" or "event movie" model, embodied by the philosophy: "Make them big; show them big; and sell them big" (King, 2003, p. 82).

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[37] For comparison, distributors in the U.S. usually receive 50-55% of box office receipts, with the rest going to exhibitors. In most foreign territories, the studio's cut is 40-45% ("Bigger abroad," 2011).

[38] Some of the most successful of these recent co-production partnerships include that of DMG and Disney's Marvel Studios for the release of *Iron Man 3* (2013), and the partnership of DiBonaventura Productions and Hasbro with CCTV'S China Movie Channel and Jiaflix Enterprises for the release of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014).

These films and their associated marketing campaigns are identifiable by their well-known stars, eye-catching special effects, extreme action scenes, simple narratives, and sparse dialogue, and are constructed to minimize "cultural discount" (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988; Jöckel & Döbler, 2006). As the BBC's Tom Brook (2014) describes, these movies are "crafted mainly to provoke a visceral—as opposed to intellectual—response," as the cultural nuances of complicated plotlines and thoughtful dialogue risk getting lost in translation as the film travels.

As a result, studios gravitate toward the genres of action/adventure, science fiction and fantasy at the expense of more culturally nuanced genres such as drama and comedy. Action films that consist of big, special effects-laden sequences tend to be universally understandable. These films tend to have simple plotlines and dialogue, thus minimizing cultural discount factors and maximizing appeal among non-English speaking audiences. Likewise, science fiction and fantasy films take place in universally unfamiliar settings, and thus can divorce themselves entirely from the geographic location of their production (Jöckel & Döbler, 2006). *Star Wars*' Tatooine and *Avatar*'s Pandora are unlike New York, London, or Shanghai, and thus are assumed to be equally appealing to audiences from any of these locales. As Keely Gillman, president of consumer insights at Worldwide Motion Picture Group explains, "The worlds of these movies don't look so American and the casts are more diverse…it also helps that these stories are about themes that resonate beyond a specific geographic location. They're about human stories of good versus evil" (Lang & Cunningham, 2014). In addition to

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these qualities, action, science fiction, and fantasy films lend themselves to IMAX and 3D formats, which garner higher ticket prices and have proven to be immensely popular in international markets where they are available.

Animated family films are another appealing genre when attempting to attract an international audience. Animated films can be easily and seamlessly dubbed (often to feature local talent in different territories), thus eliminating the impediments of subtitling or clumsy dubbing. Additionally, these child-targeted films bring ticket sales in bulk (since children are unlikely to attend films alone), and also lend themselves to merchandizing due to their cute and cuddly characters and the pester power of their youthful audience.

As studios gravitate toward these genres, others fall by the wayside. Comedy is often considered "the quintessentially culturally specific genre" and is thus particularly challenging for studios and their marketing departments to successfully translate overseas (Lee, 2008, p. 132). As a result, comedies have become increasingly difficult to make in the newly international-minded Hollywood (Obst, 2013). For instance, in 2010, Paramount passed on making a sequel to the hugely successful *Anchorman* (2004) movie. While the first installment of the Will Ferrell comedy grossed $90 million at the box office, only $5 million of this total came from international ticket sales. As a result, Paramount feared that the humor was too American and nixed the sequel project (Schuker, 2010). While the decision was later reversed and *Anchorman 2* was released in 2013, the studio's fears are telling. Drama, too, steeped in complex dialogue and

(potentially culturally specific) interpersonal issues, is losing favor in Hollywood greenlight sessions. Only if the drama has awards potential is it likely to overcome this stigma.

Hollywood studios also gravitate away from comedies and dramas due, seemingly paradoxically, to their low cost. As producer Lynda Obst explains, "You can make a $5 to $10 million romantic comedy in any country in the world, in the local idiom, with local stars. But because of our technical prowess and the enormous costs involved, you can only make *Avatar*, *Transformers*, *Inception* and *The Dark Knight* in America" (2013, p. 63). Hollywood's competitive advantage is in big-budget spectacles rather than more intimate genres, thus encouraging studios to play to their strengths.

Finally, and most troublingly, films aimed at niche audiences in the U.S. are becoming harder to make at the studio level. "Urban" films aimed at African American audiences are one of these casualties. As Codeblack Films' Jeff Clanagan laments, "Studios are focusing on global business and tentpole titles…If you are looking at urban movies, you are only looking at a domestic audience. It's harder to get a budget for it when you're only dealing with domestic revenues and not foreign" (Shaw, 2013). This is a problematic trend, as the voices of already marginalized groups in Hollywood are being further silenced due to the presumed universal appeal of the white voice and the white experience. In this environment, small production companies and independent producers are addressing the dearth of comedy, drama, and minority stories, and cobbling together

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small budgets for these films in hopes that studios will purchase distribution rights after the film is made and has proven itself on the festival circuit.

In addition to favoring particular film genres, greenlight committees in today's environment demonstrate a strong preference for movies with "pre-awareness." In order to minimize risk, Hollywood executives gravitate toward properties that already have a built-in fan base that can be relied upon to support the film. Rather than greenlight an original script by an unknown writer, greenlight committees look to best-selling books, comic books, and toys in order to create a popular franchise. These properties are already well-known, and thus marketing has already successfully begun before the film rights are even purchased by the studio. If the film is amenable to becoming a franchise, each installment in the series becomes marketing for the subsequent films. Thus, despite potential diminution in quality over time, many franchise films become increasingly successful with each iteration. For instance the first *Iron Man* (2008) movie earned $585 million worldwide, followed by *Iron Man 2* (2010) at $624 million, and *Iron Man 3* (2013) at an astronomical $1.2 billion.

The holy grail in today's internationally-focused, corporate Hollywood environment is thus the big-budget, star-driven, special effects-laden, action or animated blockbuster based on a well-known property that can spawn myriad sequels, spin-offs, and merchandise. By looking at the top ten movies of 2013 (Table 4.3), this pattern becomes clear. Of these top ten movies, all fall into the categories of action (3), science fiction (2), fantasy (2), or animation (3). Six of the ten movies are part of an existing film

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franchise, and half are derived from literary or comic book works that provide pre-awareness. Finally, eight of the top ten movies were screened in the IMAX format, and eight were screened in 3D, further capitalizing on the technical proficiency of Hollywood production.

Title	International Marketing Appeal	Domestic Box Office	International Box Office
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	Action, Literary Adaptation, Franchise, IMAX	$424,668,047 (49.1%)	$440,244,916 (50.9%)
Iron Man 3	Action, Comic Book Adaptation, Franchise, IMAX, 3D	$409,013,944 (33.7%)	$806,426,000 (66.3%)
Frozen	Animation (easily dubbed), Merchandise Potential, 3D	$400,738,009 (31.4%)	$873,481,000 (68.6%)
Despicable Me 2	Animation, Merchandise Potential, Franchise, IMAX, 3D	$368,061,265 (37.9%)	$602,700,620 (62.1%)
Man of Steel	Science Fiction, Comic Book Adaptation, Franchise, IMAX, 3D	$291,045,518 (43.6%)	$377,000,000 (56.4%)
Gravity	Science Fiction, IMAX, 3D	$274,092,705 (38.3%)	$442,300,000 (61.7%)
Monsters University	Animation, Merchandise Potential, Franchise, 3D	$268,492,764 (36.1%)	$475,066,843 (63.9%)
The Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug	Fantasy, Literary Adaptation, Franchise, IMAX, 3D	$258,366,855 (26.9%)	$702,000,000 (73.1%)
Fast & Furious 6	Action, Franchise, IMAX	$238,679,850 (30.3%)	$550,000,000 (69.7%)
Oz The Great and Powerful	Fantasy, Literary Adaptation, IMAX, 3D	$234,991,825 (47.6%)	$258,400,000 (52.4%)

Table 4.3: **Top-grossing Hollywood movies from the year 2013.**

The only slightly uncharacteristic film on this list is *Gravity*. While the film is science fiction, it is also a drama (presumed to be unappealing to international audiences) and is geared toward slightly older moviegoers. This anomaly elicits the question: Do international audiences really gravitate to the film types enumerated above? Or do studios

merely act on these presumptions and invest more in the production and marketing of films that fit these criteria, thus ensuring their success and perpetuating these myths? Either way, the end result is the same: diminished film diversity at the studio level. Increased concerns over international marketing at the greenlight stage of development, and studios' perceptions of international audience preferences, have thus profoundly shaped the global cinematic landscape by limiting the types of projects that are considered viable.

Casting. Another key process in which international marketers now have significant influence is casting. In the past, casting directors played a central role, as they knew the talent pool and worked with producers and directors to identify and hire the best actor for the part. As producer Lynda Obst (2013) explains, "chops"—industry lingo for talent—was the key factor in making these decisions. Today, she describes, casting directors have been relegated to making deals with actors after they've been selected by a larger decision-making committee. Even directors (with the exception of powerful ones such as Spielberg or Scorsese) have lost the authority to make casting decisions unilaterally. Instead, these key decisions are guided by domestic and international marketing teams based on data rather than gut instinct. To illustrate the new process, Obst weaves the following fictional casting conversation:

> **Studio Head:** Who have you got for the guy?
> **Director:** I've been talking with Ray Liotta. (*Everyone stares at him as if he were from Mars*.)
> **Producer:** He meant Robert Downey.
> **International Marketing:** He's worth thirty in Asia alone since *Iron Man*. (*Studio Head smiles, relieved. Emotionally joins the meeting*.)

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Guy Exec: He's booked for two years. How's that possible?
Studio Head: We'll wait. (*Director sinks in his chair, emotionally departs meeting.*)
International Marketing: We break even before we open. Not counting Russia and China.
Studio Head: Who does? He's great in Europe and Japan too. Let's wait. We don't need the picture this year. (*Producer emotionally departs meeting.*) (2013, p. 20).

Because of the high financial stakes and the importance of the international audience, casting a movie for optimal global appeal thus becomes an important part of the movie-making process, even if it is at the expense of filmmakers' artistic vision.

Casting also factors into aforementioned greenlight decisions, as proposed film projects often have stars attached. If the star is considered attractive enough on the global stage to sell tickets, their involvement can greatly enhance a film's chance of being made. Some actors are thought to be guaranteed global box office draws, and thus can command astronomical salaries and power. These global stars include Tom Cruise, Johnny Depp, Robert Downey, Jr., George Clooney, and Brad Pitt, among others.[39] These names have become increasingly sought after in the newly global-oriented Hollywood because of their value as international marketing assets. As Desai and Basuroy describe, stars are akin to "high-equity brands that enjoy name recognition, positive image, and an association with particular types of movies" (2005, p. 207). Thus, Tom Cruise's face on a poster is akin to an "LV" logo on a Louis Vuitton bag, assumed to deliver a more

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[39] Note that all of these are male actors, largely because the films that have earned them international recognition are male-oriented blockbuster action flicks.

effective marketing punch than any amount of creative advertising could muster on its own.

Actors from other countries are also being strategically cast in order to attract audiences from their respective home markets. As David Hancock, Head of Film and Cinema at IHS Screen Digest, describes, "You have Chinese actors coming to American films, you have Korean, Australian actors being slotted into a role for a film. That's largely because these markets are important" (Brook, 2014). One of the most successful examples of this casting/marketing strategy has been the smash hit *Iron Man 3* (2013). In its aggressive courting of the Chinese market, the studio and its Chinese co-producer cast famous Chinese actors Fan Bingbing and Wang Xueqi in small roles as a nurse and doctor. While their appearance is fleeting in the U.S. version of the film, extra scenes were written for these characters in the Chinese cut. Fan Bingbing was also cast as Blink in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* for similar reasons: attracting Chinese moviegoers with her familiar face. Similarly, Sony Pictures cast Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou as the Hornet's sidekick in the superhero comedy *The Green Hornet* (2011) (see Figure 4.1), and Paramount cast Chinese star Li Bingbing as a CEO in its wildly successful *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) (see Figure 4.2). In some instances and by certain measures, therefore, casting for international audiences has increased the diversity of Hollywood film casts.

Figure 4.1: **Chinese poster for *The Green Hornet* (2011), highlighting Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou (center) as sidekick Kato.**

Figure 4.2: **Chinese poster for *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) featuring Chinese star Li Bingbing.**

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The focus on international appeal in the casting process can also have problematic

ramifications, however, due to studios' reliance on huge movie stars and pre-established

perceptions of who international audiences want to see. As alluded to earlier, there are

significantly fewer established female international movie stars than male stars.

According to UCLA's Hollywood Diversity Report, only 25.6% of lead film actors in

2011 were female (Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, 2014). Even

fewer of these leads can be considered international stars. This phenomenon profoundly

diminishes the power of female actresses in contemporary Hollywood, as they lack the

bargaining power that comes with perceived foreign appeal. In the wake of the Sony

hacks, for example, it was revealed that Charlize Theron was paid $10 million less than

her co-star Chris Hemsworth for her role in *The Huntsman* (2016). Similarly, Christian

Bale, Bradley Cooper, and Jeremy Renner each received 9% of back-end profits for their

roles in *American Hustle* (2013), while female leads Amy Adams and Jennifer Lawrence

received only 7% (Covert, 2015). While myriad factors contribute to this pay

discrepancy, male actors' (especially action stars') perceived draw on the international

stage plays an important role.

Racial casting discrimination is another problem associated with international

marketing's foray into casting decisions. While studios move to cast token foreign actors

(particularly Asian actors) for bit parts and cameos, lead roles remain overwhelmingly

white. According to UCLA's Hollywood Diversity Report, only 10.5% of lead film

actors in 2011 were of a racial minority (Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American

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Studies, 2014). While attributable to numerous institutional, social, and historical factors, the rise of the international audience is an oft-cited cause of this discrepancy. As James Ulmer told the New York Times in 2007, the "international marketplace is still fairly racist" (Cieply, 2007). Likewise Reginald Hudlin, president of BET Networks, explains, "I always call international the new South…In the old days, they told you black films don't travel down South. Now they say it's not going to travel overseas" (Cieply, 2007). While no one wished to be quoted acknowledging these feelings, this sentiment was echoed by various marketing personnel interviewed for this study. Asian audiences currently seen as the most valuable are viewed as particularly reticent to embrace African American actors (with the key exceptions of Denzel Washington and Will Smith).

Despite the racial diversity of the global audience, studios have internalized this perception of a racist international moviegoing public. As Kraidy (2005) suggests, the global audience can thus be used as a convenient scapegoat for Hollywood's own entrenched racial biases, providing an external, commercial justification for exclusionary casting practices. Whether founded or not, the perception of international audiences as averse to black actors has profound implications for the types of movies we see, the way these movies are sold, the range of faces we see therein, and the power of African Americans in Hollywood more generally. As Hollywood seeks to become more inclusive in its target audience (embracing audiences from across the globe), it is in danger of becoming more exclusive in its onscreen representations. For fear of creating a marketing challenge in any particular international territory, white remains the de facto color of

global Hollywood. Thus, while the audience for Hollywood films becomes more diverse, onscreen representation is at risk of becoming increasingly homogeneous.

Writing and production decisions. After a project is greenlit, cast, and a script is written, it undergoes tedious rounds of revisions, planning, and approvals. If the movie is targeted toward a global audience (which almost all studio projects are today), international marketing personnel are now involved in these production discussions. Stories are revised and refined in order to appease international censors, appeal to the broadest possible audience, and avoid offending any key group. As *After Earth* (2013) producer Caleeb Pinkett explains, "You have to start taking in other cultures and things that they value and how they view the world and incorporate that into your storytelling" (Brook, 2014). Likewise, film critic Matt Singer explains, "Movies have to be made as sensitively as possible so as to not offend any particular country" (Brook, 2014).

Writers seek to maximize the universality of their films by minimizing U.S.-centric elements and incorporating as many internationally or locally resonant elements as possible. For example, while producing *Battleship* (2012), Universal executives expressed concern that the alien villains only threaten the U.S. After a re-write, the aliens were repositioned to threaten the entire globe—bringing the vast global audience together as an emotionally united force against the invading aliens (Schuker, 2010). This may have been a lifesaving strategic move, as the $200 million movie flopped domestically (with a box office take of only $65 million), but salvaged a profit via its impressive international box office take (of $237 million).

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While some producers opt to enhance their films' universal resonance by rendering them as location-less as possible, others leverage shooting location choices strategically to either maximize their global appeal or court a specific international audience. *The Fast and the Furious* franchise utilizes this technique notoriously well. While the first two films in the franchise were set in the U.S. (Los Angeles and Miami), later installments focused their sights internationally. The third film was set in Tokyo, while the fourth and fifth films turned to the Latin American audience with settings in Mexico, Panama City, and Rio de Janeiro. The sixth installment focused on Europe, with shooting locations in the UK and Spain, and a scene in Hong Kong as well. Finally, the seventh film returns to Los Angeles, with brief forays to the Caucasus Mountains and Abu Dhabi. Each new film introduces a new character from the shooting location that is carried over to the subsequent films in the series. Each film is thus designed to build loyalty from a new international market and carry it to the next location.[40]

While *The Fast and the Furious* is one of the most successful examples of strategic location shooting, it is by no means unique. Especially with the growth of the Chinese audience, the desire to appease Chinese officials, and the escalating number of co-productions with Chinese companies, a rash of recent Hollywood films have included scenes shot in China. For example, scenes from Shanghai, Hong Kong, and at landmarks such as the Great Wall were included in *Mission Impossible III* (2006), *The Dark Knight*

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[40] See Beltran (2005) for a discussion of *The Fast and the Furious* franchise's multiracial casting practices.

(2008), *Looper* (2012), *Iron Man 3* (2013), and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014). By including these familiar places, studios hope to foster identification and loyalty from valuable Chinese audiences.

While these story and location elements are usually featured in the version of the film distributed worldwide, studios sometimes invest extra time and money to insert local elements into tailored international versions of the film. *The Lego Movie* (2014), for example, used this strategy very effectively. As a comedy, it was at risk of being subject to significant cultural discount. But, as an animated (and therefore dubbed) film, it was unusually amenable to local adaptation. As President of International Distribution at Warner Bros., Veronika Kwan Vandenberg, explains, "The humor is a big part of 'Lego,' and we put great effort into localizing it around the world, including amending the dialogue to make it as witty and locally relatable as possible" (Cunningham, 2014a). Local stars were hired to do voice work, and jokes were altered to resonate with various publics. Todd Cunningham of *The Wrap* describes this process as it occurred in Hong Kong. As he explains, a famous Hong Kong blogger and YouTube star was hired to voice the character of Benny (renamed "Bun Bun" for the Cantonese version). The line "Oh, come on, you can't be this stupid" became "You are more stupid than a pig" in order to utilize local phraseology. Similarly, the line "unless your instincts are terrible!" became "Unless your instincts are a pot of porridge!" "I will text you" was changed to "I will Whatsapp you" in order to reflect local technology habits in Hong Kong. Finally, the very American phrase "See you later, alligator" was changed to a phrase from a popular local

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TV commercial: "See you next time and eat noodles together" (Cunningham, 2014a).

Despite these considerable efforts to localize the humor, *The Lego Movie* remained more popular in the U.S., garnering 55% of its impressive $468 million from domestic audiences.

While most films are not localized on such a grand scale as *The Lego Movie*, special consideration is often given to key markets where the price of offending audiences can be high and the rewards for appealing to their sensibilities are substantial. In today's film marketplace, China is the only territory that studios consistently view as warranting this kind of treatment. This is due to China's massive box office power, the perceived cultural dissimilarity between Chinese and American audiences, and the power of Chinese censors to block legal entrance of the film into the country. As Avi Lerner, producer of *The Expendables*, explains of China, "When I look at a movie now, I think first of how much can make it through the censors there, and then will the subject be of enough interest there?" (Lang & Cunningham, 2014).

Getting officials involved early in the scripting phase can help maximize appeal and bypass unexpected and costly re-edits or pulled releases later in the process. In 2012, for instance, *Skyfall* was pulled from the Chinese release schedule due to a few scenes deemed to portray the Chinese government as incompetent. These scenes included references to prostitution in Macau, the killing of a security guard in Shanghai, and references to torture by the Chinese security forces. Only after these scenes were cut was the film allowed to be released in early 2013 ("Censored Bond film," 2013). With

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rampant piracy in China, a delayed release can mean the loss of substantial box office revenue. A similar fate befell Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012). Initially, Chinese censors demanded only small changes—for instance, changes to the color and force of spurting blood. But, after being granted entry into the country, it was abruptly pulled from theaters on the day of its scheduled release due to excessively violent scenes that had to be re-edited before the film was allowed to be released (on a much smaller scale) a month later (Brody, 2013).

In order to avoid such devastating blows via last-minute censorship, Hollywood studios have learned to consult with Chinese officials early in the production process. When making *Iron Man 3* (2013) (a film with a huge budget that necessitated a large Chinese turnout), Disney and their Chinese co-producers invited Chinese officials to vet scripts, visit the set, and weigh in on creative decisions (Daniel, 2013). As a result, the Chinese version of the film is four minutes longer and includes extra scenes involving Chinese actors, locations, and product placement. The Chinese ethnicity of the comic book-based villain The Mandarin (played by British actor Ben Kingsley) was also obscured to avoid offending Chinese audiences. As President of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige explains, "From his samurai hair, to his royal robe, to his bin Laden-esque beard, and the AK-47 he keeps at his side, Kingsley's interpretation is a hodgepodge of various warrior motifs" (Daniel, 2013). Several critics slammed this practice as pandering and viewed it (especially the blatant product placement) as insulting to the intelligence and sophistication of the Chinese audience (Ford, 2013). But the box office numbers

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indicated otherwise. The film posted an $18 million opening day in China and went on to earn $121 million in the territory.

Taking similar steps to woo Chinese officials and audiences, the producers of *2012* (2009) inserted dialogue into the Chinese version of the movie praising the skill of Chinese scientists. The producers of *Looper* (2012) moved the film's setting from France to China in order to portray the Asian country as the world's great superpower in the future (Obst, 2013). Likewise, in an effort to avoid angering officials, Paramount executives advised the producers of *World War Z* (2013) to cut a scene wherein characters discuss the possibility of the zombie virus originating in China (Hiscock, 2013).

Failing to consider Chinese censorship criteria and audience sensibilities prior to production can be a costly mistake. This reality is starkly illustrated by MGM's remake of *Red Dawn* (2012). The 1984 original features Russian communist villains invading the U.S. Due to the fall of the U.S.S.R., however, the studio decided to write the villains as Chinese. Only after production was complete did the studio heed concerns of international distributors and marketers who warned against offending the valuable Chinese market. The studio consequently undertook the expensive and time-consuming task of re-writing dialogue to frame the villains as North Korean, and digitally altering the film to remove all Chinese flags and military symbols.[41] Even with these efforts to

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[41] Since North Korea is closed to foreign film imports, it is one of the few safe countries to depict as an enemy without fear of alienating a potential audience base.

appease Chinese officials, however, *Red Dawn* was not granted a Chinese theatrical release, and lost money overall. This case illustrates the danger of neglecting the sentiments of the increasingly vital Chinese audience. If the film had been released without recasting the villain, DMG Entertainment's Dan Mintz surmises, "there would have been a real backlash. It's like being invited to a dinner party and insulting the host all night long. There's no way to look good.... The film itself was not a smart move" (Fritz & Horn, 2011).

Due to the increased importance of international audiences, and particularly the Chinese audience, considering these markets in the early phases of planning and production is deemed essential. As Director Adam McKay observes, this is "a whole new way of looking at movies...Rather than trying to veer your audience toward the film, just tweak your film to the audience" (Schuker, 2010). This new system is the result of marketing's migration into production processes. In previous eras of filmmaking, marketing was siloed as a final step in a film's release, intended to position the pre-existing film in order to attract a target audience. Now that marketers (and especially international marketers) participate in greenlighting, casting, writing, and location decisions, production and marketing processes are more seamlessly integrated. Marketers' perception of their international target audience thus bears significantly on the final form of the film itself.

Distribution. International marketing considerations also weigh heavily on key distribution decisions. While past box office performance of comparable titles is the

primary factor in determining an international distribution lineup, marketers' voices are also instrumental in determining how a film might be rolled out in various markets. Armed with their insights and intuition about global audiences, international marketers inform studio decisions to internationally distribute films in-house or to sell rights to outside distributors. When studios elect to sell off distribution rights, international marketers play an important role in creating collateral to accompany the film. These marketing materials (especially trailers) can function centrally in the rights sales process, as they serve the dual purpose of marketing the film to rights buyers and convincing them that the film will be marketable to their local audiences. Booths at international film markets are therefore brimming with posters, merchandise, and tchotchkes aimed to convince potential distribution partners of films' commercial possibilities.

Distribution scheduling decisions are another area in which international marketers exert their considerable influence. In the past, Hollywood films were released in the U.S. first and hit international markets later. This distribution pattern allowed word to spread slowly to international markets. The success of a film in the U.S. would help to convince international distributors to purchase the film rights for their territory, and they could subsequently market the film to their audiences as "the #1 movie in America" (Elberse & Eliashberg, 2003; Shindler, 2013). As an additional benefit, local distributors could time releases around local competition, holidays, or climate cycles (Miller et al. 2005).

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Increasingly, however, studios opt for a global day-and-date release for their blockbuster titles. This is due primarily to the threat of piracy. Studios fear that if they delay release of the film in any given market, audiences in territories where it is not yet available will turn to pirated versions instead of waiting for the local theatrical release. Additionally, in the internet age, marketing messages can travel globally. Thus, by coordinating simultaneous international marketing efforts, studios can enhance a film's global event status.[42]

In some cases, the traditional release pattern (domestic first, international later) has been completely reversed (international first, domestic later). For instance, *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) was released in much of the world a week before its domestic U.S. release. As President of International Distribution at Warner Bros., Veronika Kwan Vendenberg, explains, "We're excited because we have a great movie, and we think that the word of how well it's received overseas will only help build momentum domestically" (Cunningham, 2014e). As the domestic market has become of secondary importance to the international market, it's not surprising that the traditional U.S.-centric release pattern would be reversed to reflect this shift.

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[42] This can be particularly grueling for the talent, as they are often shuttled around the world for several weeks leading up to the release, conducting press junkets and attending premieres in various key markets. For the release of *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), for instance, Tom Cruise promoted the film in Beijing (climbing the Great Wall), Tokyo, Taiwan, London, Dublin, Vienna, Moscow, Rio and Buenos Aires. He even attended three premieres in a single day—in London, Los Angeles, and Paris (Lew, 2014).

Whether studios opt for a global or staggered release, distributors and marketers work together to pick release dates that minimize direct competition with other films, events, or holidays in important markets. For instance, the release of *Maleficent* (2014) and *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) were both scheduled for late May releases in much of the world in order to maximize global viewership before the internationally popular World Cup began in mid-June and inevitably curtailed box office earnings. While family and blockbuster films such as these would traditionally be released more squarely in the summer holiday, the importance of the global market necessitated this move.

In other instances, individual markets may adopt an alternative release date for purely local reasons. As Julie Ryan, Director of New Media & Interactive Marketing at Warner Bros., explains, the Christmas season in Italy is flooded with releases of popular, locally-produced comedies aimed at a family audience. Knowing their film *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009) couldn't compete with this local fare, they opted for an October release date (months before most European territories saw the film) (J. Ryan, personal communication, October 29, 2009). While studios would love to similarly tailor release dates for the Chinese market, they are at the mercy of Chinese officials in these decisions. Much to Hollywood's chagrin, Chinese officials have been known to completely block foreign releases during popular moviegoing periods in order to maximize local film attendance.

In today's global film marketplace, therefore, distribution decisions are significantly influenced by international marketing imperatives. Where and when films

will be released are central factors in a film's marketing campaign, so these decisions cannot be made without the input of marketing personnel. In turn, these decisions profoundly shape the global film landscape and the exposure of international audiences to American popular culture.

Marketing. The inclusion of international marketing voices during the phases of film greenlighting, casting, writing, production and distribution is intended to minimize cultural discount and maximize global appeal of Hollywood films. When global considerations haven't been resolved during the development and production phases, however, it falls to marketers to position the film effectively for international markets. Due to cost, time, and technical constraints, films themselves are rarely altered for specific markets, with the exception of subtitling or dubbing. Only for big budget blockbusters (e.g. *Iron Man* 3) or more readily adapted animated films (e.g. *The Lego Movie*) in the most valuable markets (e.g. China) is this a viable option.

In most cases, tailoring for individual countries, if undertaken at all, is reserved for marketing materials. These elements can be designed to highlight certain subplots, frame the film as a particular genre, emphasize popular actors, or target a specific demographic.[43] In this way, international marketers serve as translators for the film abroad, tasked with creating translatory texts that make the film understandable,

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[43] Marketing materials must work within constraints of the film in order to avoid accusations of being misleading or untruthful. Tailored campaigns that deviate too much from the film are often viewed as a bait-and-switch that can fuel consumer resentment and harmful word-of-mouth (Kerrigan, 2010).

appealing, and relevant to local audiences. As Kraidy states, "The necessity of translation, of rendering meaning cross-culturally, raises the issue of who controls the means of translation. Communication is central in the formation of hybridities because it strengthens the agency of those with the means to translate and name the world, while weakening the agency of other participants" (2005, p. 152). While local audiences have the power to infuse Hollywood films with local meanings, this power is constrained, and Hollywood marketers (as translators) retain considerable power to inform these local readings. Tasked with translating a film cross-culturally and communicating its essence within a thirty-second trailer or a single image, the international film marketer thus stands as a vital and powerful cultural intermediary. S/he is tasked with identifying and characterizing key foreign audiences, and negotiating meaning and cultural melding in the cinematic realm. The following sections describe the processes through which marketing materials are designed and tailored for international territories, how marketers' perceptions of their international audiences shape these translatory texts, key challenges they face in positioning American films for international markets, and the institutional and spatial power dynamics at play throughout this process.

Forming international marketing materials. As discussed in Chapter 3, U.S. domestic marketing concepts are usually created prior to international iterations. While creating these concepts, however, marketing agencies keep international markets in mind. As Derek Shields of marketing agency Five33 explains of their brainstorming process, "We think about how that idea works not just domestically, but how that might work

internationally; how that might work in Europe; how that might work in Russia; how that might be very different in a country like Japan… These are all the types of things we keep in our head as we are thinking of ideas" (D. Shields, personal communication, September 5, 2012).

Once domestic U.S. key art is created and approved (as described in Chapter 3), these materials are presented to international marketing teams (usually six to nine months prior to release). As a Sony international marketing executive describes:

> They will give a presentation about what they're using domestically and we'll see that in the presentation and immediately a light bulb will go off and we'll say, 'Yeah, we can probably use this and we won't have to service anything else.' Or we might say 'We're in trouble and this isn't going to work for us' (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009).

To test their intuition, international marketers then present these domestic designs to their distribution offices (or partners) in key markets for review. The reactions of these distributors inform whether domestic U.S. materials will be adopted (and minimally adapted) for a "universal" campaign to be used worldwide, or if a more tailored, localized approach is required.

The choice of which distributors to consult in this initial phase varies by studio and movie, but is guided the market's box office share, perceptions of the market as a regional barometer or tastemaker, and perceptions of the market as requiring special consideration due to the local audience's aesthetic tastes or the movie's content. Of these considerations, box office share weighs most heavily. Table 4.4 presents the top twenty international markets for Hollywood films in the year 2013. Due to the financial

importance of these markets, these territories are often the ones that receive first

consideration when reviewing marketing materials. Distributors from these territories

rarely have a research budget with which to conduct formal market research. Their

recommendations, therefore, are generally based on their personal reactions to designs,

the reactions of people they know, their general cultural understandings and assumptions,

and their past experiences marketing films in their territory.[44]

2013 Top International Box Office Markets		
1	China	$3.6
2	Japan	$2.4
3	United Kingdom	$1.7
4	France	$1.6
5	India	$1.5
6	South Korea	$1.4
7	Russia	$1.4
8	Germany	$1.3
9	Australia	$1.1
10	Mexico	$0.9
11	Brazil	$0.9
12	Italy	$0.8
13	Spain	$0.7
14	Argentina	$0.4
15	Netherlands	$0.3
16	Turkey	$0.3
17	Taiwan	$0.3
18	Sweden	$0.2
19	Switzerland	$0.2
20	Malaysia	$0.2

Table 4.4: **2013 Top 20 International Box Office Markets (US$ Billions). Source: MPAA (2013).**

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[44] As one distributor from Hong Kong recounts, she sometimes posts two versions of posters or trailers on Facebook, and bases her decision of which to use for the final campaign based on reactions and comments received online (Y. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010).

If key distributors express minimal concern when presented with domestic (U.S.) key art, these existing materials become the basis for campaigns in all international markets. Layered PhotoShop files are shared with local distribution teams in order to allow for translation of copy, inclusion of the distribution company's logo, localization of the website address, and other minor copy and boilerplate changes. If, however, a significant number of the top distributors voice concern or opposition to the domestic artwork, the studio's international marketing department will choose to either create a new standard "universal" or "international" version of the key art to be used in all (or most) foreign territories, or they will address specific distributor concerns and tailor the existing marketing materials as deemed necessary for these important markets on a case by case basis.

Tailored versus standard appeals: Constructing international audiences. The decision to use minimally-altered domestic U.S. key art, standard "international" key art, tailored and market-specific key art, or some combination thereof is rooted in a long-standing debate over the merits of standard versus tailored (or localized) advertising appeals (Green et al., 1975; Harris & Attour, 2000; Levitt, 1983; Melewar & Claes, 2004; Mueller, 1991, 1992). Agarwal (1995) and Sinclair & Wilken (2009) map the history of this debate within the advertising industry, describing an evolution from an early preference for localized appeals in the 1950s to a high point for standardized approaches in the 1980s. This shift was fueled by a proliferation of transnational corporations and growing belief in a rapidly globalizing and homogenizing world culture. In the 1990s,

this belief in the erasure of cultural difference began to wane, and marketers and academics advocated for more nuanced middle ground approaches such as "glocalization" (standard global campaigns incorporating select local appeals), "regionalization" (adopting several regionally targeted campaigns), or "contingency" approaches (advocating case-by-case evaluations of the best strategy). While these more nuanced approaches dominate today's academic discourse, practitioners still actively debate these issues using the standardization/localization binary.

Supporters of tailored advertising cite as its strength its sensitivity to cultural nuance and local environmental dynamics, as this approach allows for the incorporation of local cultural symbols, languages, tastes, and lifestyles into advertising messages. It is also viewed as a means of avoiding cultural gaffes that can alienate or offend potential audiences (De Mooij, 2013; Green et al., 1975). Hoskins and Mirus' (1988) theory of "cultural discount" serves as an influential argument in favor of localization. According to this model, cultural products such as films systematically lose value as they travel to increasingly culturally distant environments in which audiences lack the social background, language, and/or values necessary to understand or appreciate the product. Thus, special effort must be taken by marketers to ensure acceptance of Hollywood films via tailored approaches.

The choice to employ standardized advertising appeals rests on a notion that audiences across the world are fundamentally similar. Due to globalization and the rise of new media technology, it is asserted that a single global marketplace for popular culture

has formed, eliminating the need for costly and time-consuming tailored appeals (Levitt, 1983; Okazaki & Taylor, 2006). In the cinematic realm, it has been argued that Hollywood films have inherently universal appeal due to their "narrative transparency" and already diverse American audience base (Olsen, 1999). According to this view, Hollywood films are truly global products of mass popularity, unhinged from their national roots. "High concept" filmmaking and marketing (discussed in Chapter 2) is rooted in this standardization philosophy. High concept films' reliance on simple plots and iconic visuals is designed to maximize worldwide appeal. By highlighting international movie star images and avoiding excessive text (which is subject to poor translation and problems stemming from audience illiteracy), cultural nuance, complex storylines, and vague messages (that may get lost in translation), high concept marketing aims to avoid the problems associated with "cultural discount" and provide a cost-effective mechanism for attracting global audiences with a singular message (Wyatt, 1994).

The rise of online marketing and day-and-date worldwide film releases further bolsters the argument for standardized marketing approaches. In an increasingly globalized world where information and images can travel rapidly across geographic boundaries, marketers are attracted to standardized campaigns in order to maintain global brand coherence for the film. In this environment, tailoring is seen as less necessary and effective, as many online marketing materials can be viewed and shared across national and cultural borders in real time.

While informed by these larger theoretical arguments, the decisions Hollywood international marketers make to use standard or tailored campaigns are based largely on budgetary realities, technical feasibility, and creative approvals (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009). As described in Chapter 3 in relation to the creation of domestic U.S. marketing materials, each new marketing design must go through a series of revisions and approvals by marketing teams, studio execs, legal teams, producers, directors, and stars. This arduous process, combined with condensed marketing timelines (tied to the shift toward simultaneous worldwide releases) and logistical and budgetary difficulties involved in creating extensively-tailored materials for each market, deters international marketing departments from creating tailored campaigns whenever possible (N. Cagney, personal communication, November 26, 2013; A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009).

Due to these constraints, the majority of international film marketing campaigns utilize either domestic U.S. key art or a standard "international" or "universal" design employed in all (or most) markets. While minor adjustments to color, copy, and title treatments are common practice, more substantial content-related alterations are rare—especially for less lucrative markets. Practices of international trailer creation follow a similar pattern. While certain large markets deemed to have very particular marketing needs may merit the creation of a tailored trailer, most markets utilize a standard "international" version of the trailer designed to require minimal translation and appeal to the maximum number of people (L. Pendse, personal communication, November 4,

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2009). This tendency stems from the complex, time-consuming, and expensive process of creating this piece of marketing collateral. While domestic marketers have years to refine a trailer, international distributors often only have a few months to organize an entire campaign. Thus, standardization becomes a logistical necessity.

Individual international distributors often request tailored materials for their market, as they understand the cultural nuances that may impact a campaign's local reception. Studios do not always oblige, however, due to the financial, logistical, and creative constraints enumerated above. For example, one studio marketer describes his experience working on the international campaign for the disaster film *2012* (2009). As he explains, many territories wanted artwork with local landmarks featured:

> We have a zillion requests from other territories. Like Italy wanted the Vatican collapsing because that's a big scene in the movie, and we tried to make that work but we just couldn't get that to work conceptually from a poster standpoint…Iceland wanted one of their government buildings being swept over by a wave. What an outlandish and crazy request! But we had to turn them down because you have to understand politically that the filmmakers don't mind stretching the truth, but they don't want to misrepresent the movie. If it wasn't in the movie, then they don't want this Icelandic government house being crushed by a wave because it's kind of random (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009).

In the end, they settled on a standard international campaign that featured four images designed to communicate the global scale of the natural disaster depicted in the film (despite the film taking place almost exclusively in Los Angeles). One of the images depicts crumbling freeways in Los Angeles, one depicts a monk watching waves wash

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over the Himalayas, one features a battleship washing over the White House, and another

shows the Christ the Redeemer statue falling onto a washed away Rio de Janeiro.[45]

In deciding which markets warrant tailored materials, studio marketers look to

their own past experiences marketing similar films in the region, past box office trends,

institutional mythologies, personal intuition, and, in rare cases, formal market research.

Thus, while local distributors can lobby for tailored marketing campaigns, their power is

constrained by studio bureaucracy. Final decisions and approvals remain in the hands of

studio executives and the marketing budgets they largely control. This is especially true

for smaller international markets deemed less vital to the studio's overall box office

goals. Each territory has its own marketing budget commensurate with its potential box

office pull. Therefore, larger and more robust cinema markets have more leverage in

lobbying for tailored materials.

The tendency to adopt minimally-altered domestic U.S. materials or standardized

international materials reflects Adorno's (1941) framework of "pseudo-

individualization." According to this framework, consumers are seduced by an illusion of

individualization and personalization that is, in reality, standardized and mass-produced.

By making surface-level design alterations (such as coloration or translation), an air of

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[45] The Christ the Redeemer poster was cited as being particularly successful in Latin
American territories. As Kostich describes, 60-70% of advertising space in these
territories was devoted to the Christ the Redeemer image (personal communication,
October 28, 2009). This exemplifies a form of strategically regionalized marketing.

individual attention to local contexts of exhibition is achieved while minimizing expenditures of time and money.

With notable exceptions, therefore, marketers construct their international audiences as similar to domestic U.S. audiences and other foreign audiences, bolstering the idea of a unified "global marketplace" of film tastes and cultures. This world view was echoed by interviewees for this study. As one marketer summed up, "While there are differences between people around the world, people are people…The world stage has much more in common with each other than they do with the U.S." (L. Pendse, personal communication, November 4, 2009). This conception serves as the basis for Hollywood marketers' construction and subsequent treatment of their international audiences.

While marketers tend to view global audiences as fundamentally homogeneous, they do construct particular audience profiles for individual market segments. Due to the complexity of the foreign market and a dearth of formalized market research in individual foreign territories, these constructions are largely grounded in marketers' and distributors' cultural assumptions based on past personal and professional experiences, as well as on industry lore and routinized practice. Many of these cultural assumptions become absorbed as self-evident truths that are adopted and perpetuated without further interrogation.

One of these common institutional tendencies is to lump Asian markets and Latin American markets together as singular taste publics. Marketers tend to make sweeping attributions that Asian markets have a penchant for horror, tragedy, destruction,

explosions, and "big metal things that clank," while Latin American audiences ostensibly prefer family-oriented films and romances, and are lured by religious themes (Cunningham, 2015; Field, 2000; A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009; J. Ryan, personal communication, October 29, 2009). Likewise, German and Italian markets are thought to be lured by comedic elements (Wasko, 1994; A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009). Japan, meanwhile, with its strong local animation tradition, is thought to have an aversion to American-style animation. As one international marketing executive explains:

> …it's really strange, but they're like another planet. For them, the character design is important. They want characters with giant big shiny eyes. They [Japanese distribution partners] are always saying that our characters' eyes are too small. They didn't like Shrek because he was green and that's sort of a revolting color to them and the idea of green skin is just off-putting; it's like a reptile or something. They have a particular taste as far as their characters are concerned, because they like cute, fuzzy animals—like Hello Kitty and Pokemon (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009).

In addition to assumptions regarding film preferences, marketers make design decisions based on supposed aesthetic predispositions of their target audiences. According to one executive, Asian audiences prefer "big, bold, in-your-face letters" and over-the-top, bright colors in marketing. Meanwhile, German markets are thought to prefer more sedate designs and are ostensibly particularly responsive to Facebook quizzes (L. Pendse, personal communication, November 4, 2009). Given France's historical aversion to American cultural incursions, marketers tend toward low-key campaigns within this country in order to avoid any backlash directed at American commercialism (Wasko, 1994).

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While these preferences and cultural attributions may or may not be true in any given market, they have become real and reified within the minds of marketers. By utilizing these audience conceptions to tailor marketing materials, Hollywood marketers and their distribution partners actively construct their various international audiences. As discussed in the introductory chapter, audiences and identities are not fixed, external realities according to the constructionist tradition. Instead, they are socially and institutionally constructed through discourse and social practice. As Grainge explains, "Advertisers do not simply identify and uncover sections of the markets but actively work to produce them" (2008, p. 27). Through repetition, widespread acceptance, and internalization of these labels and identities, these audience constructions become reified and perpetuated as real social categories. Thus, the ways that Hollywood marketers perceive, categorize, and signal particular international audience groups can have significant consequences for social life and cultural perceptions.

While studio marketers often act based on these broad generalizations about various audience swathes, the growing economic importance of individual international markets has, in some instances, led to a more nuanced conception of cultural difference. This is especially true in the case of Asian markets in recent years. Because of this region's (and especially China's) growing economic importance, marketers are compelled to look beyond the generalized assumptions of audience tastes enumerated above to develop a more nuanced outlook. As Sony's Alex Kostich explains:

> Initially, when I started, the rule of thumb was that in Asia they love things blowing up and explosions. Every single action movie we did we'd put in an

explosion or someone running away from a giant fireball. That's just what we did for Asia because Korea and Thailand and all those Asian countries just loved that. I think since then the marketplace has evolved and you can't make such a broad generalization (personal communication, October 28, 2009).

While the tastes of Asian filmgoers may have evolved over the years, Kostich's comments are more indicative of the shifting mindset of Hollywood marketers during this period. As international markets (and particularly Asian markets) have become more important to the overall profitability of a film, understanding these audience segments and appealing to their tastes has become a priority. With this increased attention, these audiences have become subject to further study and segmentation, revealing demographic and cultural sub-groups more specific than "Asian" or "Chinese."

While marketers increasingly acknowledge the cultural complexity of various markets, however, sweeping generalizations and stereotypes are still commonly employed. Due to logistical and budgetary constraints, it remains difficult to fully invest in studying each film market, truly grasping the nuance in each, and applying these insights to tailored campaigns. Thus, despite the growing importance of international markets, they remain largely amorphous to film marketers and are most commonly served with minimally modified domestic U.S. or generic "international" marketing materials. Only in key circumstances are tailored approaches considered justifiable.

Tailored Campaigns: Meeting the Challenges of the International Marketplace

The modus operandi of Hollywood studios is to tackle international market concerns early on in the filmmaking process in order to maximize global audience appeal, and then present these films to the world via standardized marketing campaigns. When

international marketing concerns are not resolved in the development and production phases of a film's lifecycle and the market of concern is highly valued, however, special considerations and/or a tailored marketing approach may be adopted. There are several key circumstances under which these actions may be justified. The following sections seek to illuminate a few of these challenges that take place at the intersection point of the global and the local, and unpack via case studies the tailoring strategies employed to negotiate these fragile spaces.

Marketing challenge 1: Unappealing genres. As discussed previously, genre is an important consideration when greenlighting studio film projects. With the rise of the international audience, action-adventure, fantasy, and science fiction genres are strongly favored over more culturally-specific comedy, romance, and dramatic genres. Sub-genres such as westerns, sports movies, and holiday movies are considered particularly unappealing in the international sphere. When these films make it through the development and production pipeline and require substantial international box office revenue to turn a profit, marketers are called upon to make these films attractive to foreign audiences.

Despite the international success of early Hollywood westerns, this genre is thought to be a difficult sell for foreign audiences. As producer Lynda Obst explains, "It was a rule of thumb that movies with what movie people call 'dust'—i.e., westerns, or movies in the dusty hinterlands—never worked abroad…In the modern movie business, the mere presence of 'dust' or cowboy hats—or horses, for that matter—is thought to

make a picture dead on arrival, even if it isn't a western" (2013, p. 53). Despite these

warnings, Obst produced *Hope Floats* (1998), a film about a jilted woman (Sandra

Bullock) who returns to her small Texas hometown and falls in love with an old

acquaintance (Harry Connick, Jr.). The domestic artwork (Figure 4.3) clearly conveys the

small town, country feel of the movie through its sepia tone, Bullock's conservative

flowered dress in Figure 4.3a, and the scenes of country living (including Harry Connick,

Jr. in a cowboy hat posing in front of a truck) in Figure 4.3b. While some territories

(including France and Italy) utilized these original designs, a whole new concept was

created for the general "international" campaign. As Obst describes, Fox "revamped the

campaign and repositioned it for the global audience, sans dust" (2013, p. 53). This

revised artwork (Figure 4.4) eliminates the markers of western small town life. The

colors are brightened to look modern and fresh, and the setting and costuming remain

neutral (with the exception of Connick, Jr.'s denim shirt). This strategy yielded moderate

success, with 26% of the film's $81 million box office take gleaned from overseas

markets.

Sports movies represent another genre that can pose challenges for international

marketers. American football, for instance, is an obvious non-starter for international

audiences due to its relative unfamiliarity outside the U.S. But, due to its domestic

popularity, these films continue to be made. In an attempt to make these films more

attractive to foreign audiences, international marketers attempt to downplay sports

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elements in their materials and highlight more universal themes such as teamwork,

relationships, and overcoming adversity.

<center>A   B</center>

Figure 4.3: **Two versions of the *Hope Floats* (1998) domestic U.S. poster. Note: Version A was also used in Italy, and Version B was used in France.**

Figure 4.4: **Spanish version of the *Hope Floats* (1998) poster. This poster features the "international" key art.**

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The film *Gridiron Gang* (2006), for instance, is the story of a coach (played by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson) who inspires his charges at a juvenile detention facility to form an American football team. The domestic U.S. artwork (Figure 4.5a) clearly marks the film as a football movie. While Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's image dominates the frame, scenes of the football team in uniform are superimposed on this central star image. As one digital marketer explains, "Internationally, what we had to do is re-do it as a buddy movie—an inspirational movie—and not really talk about the football angle that was the biggest selling point for the U.S…So we look for that broad angle when we're marketing it in places that don't have those sports" (L. Pendse, personal communication, November 4, 2009). This strategy is illustrated by the international artwork for the film (Figure 4.5b). The same star image of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is featured, but images of the football team are absent. To add visual interest, The Rock's portrait is surrounded, instead, by prison imagery. In contrast, the domestic U.S. artwork has a neutral white backdrop that could as easily depict a high school football field as a detention facility. The domestic artwork thus marks the film as a traditional football film, while the international artwork masks the football theme and instead presents it as a gritty and/or inspirational prison movie. Despite this concerted effort, *Gridiron Gang* failed in international markets, with only 7% of its $41 million box office take coming from overseas.

Figure 4.5: **Domestic U.S. poster (A) and French poster (B) for *Gridiron Gang* (2006). The French poster features the film's "international" key art.**

A similar strategy was used for Disney's *Remember the Titans* (2000), yielding slightly more international success. The domestic U.S. artwork clearly establishes the film's genre as a football movie (see Figure 4.6a). Denzel Washington's star image is the central focus, but the silhouette of a uniformed football player features prominently in the foreground. The international version of the film poster (see Figure 4.6b) strips the film of its football associations. It instead features a collage of images of six coaches and team members (looking authoritative and jovial, respectively). The characters are not pictured wearing uniforms, and the narrow slices of imagery do not allow for background information that might reveal the film's sports genre. Instead, the film is presented as an uplifting, male bonding film. Under this guise, the film garnered 15.4% of its revenue from overseas markets.

Figure 4.6: **Domestic U.S. poster (A) and German poster (B) for *Remember the Titans* (2000). The German poster features the film's "international" key art.**

Culturally specific holiday movies are yet another challenging genre for international marketers. Christmas movies are a traditional staple of Hollywood production slates because of the cyclical nature of their viewing. If a Christmas movie is a success, viewers will return to it year after year as part of their holiday traditions. But not all foreign territories celebrate Christmas, and this can pose a challenge. As a distributor from Israel explains, "People are not interested in watching films about Santa Claus or things like that. They know who he is, but it just doesn't resonate" (I. Biton, personal communication, November 2, 2009). While studios and distributors often choose not to release such films in non-Christian territories, others opt to take this chance and rely on marketing to maximize appeal.

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The holiday-themed *Rise of the Guardians* (2012) provides the quintessential example of such a challenge. This film features a myriad of Western holiday and fairy tale characters, including Santa Claus (named North in the film), Jack Frost, the Tooth Fairy, the Boogeyman, the Easter Bunny, and the Sandman. Despite the film's firm basis in Western legend and tradition, the film was released worldwide and relied heavily on international box office revenue to recoup costs. To appeal to domestic audiences during the Christmas season, the U.S. artwork highlighted the film's holiday themes (see Figure 4.7a). While Jack Frost is the main character of the film, Santa Claus features prominently on the poster and is clearly identifiable (despite his edgy appearance) by the "naughty" and "nice" tattoos on his crossed arms. The two small elves flanking the title treatment further mark the film as a holiday tale, along with the snowflake pattern bordering the poster. The international version of the poster (see Figure 4.7b) drops the Santa Claus character to the background and eliminates any references that clearly mark him as Santa Claus. Additionally, the snowflake border and elves have been removed from the design. Instead, an added headline reads "From the makers of *Shrek* and *Madagascar*." In this way, the film is marketed as more akin to other international Dreamworks Animation successes than to any seasonal holiday fare. The artwork positions it as an action-packed animated adventure rather than a feel-good seasonal flick. This strategy was highly successful. While the film had only moderate success in the U.S. (bringing in $103 million) in the crowded holiday market, it garnered an additional $203 million internationally (66.3% of the total box office).

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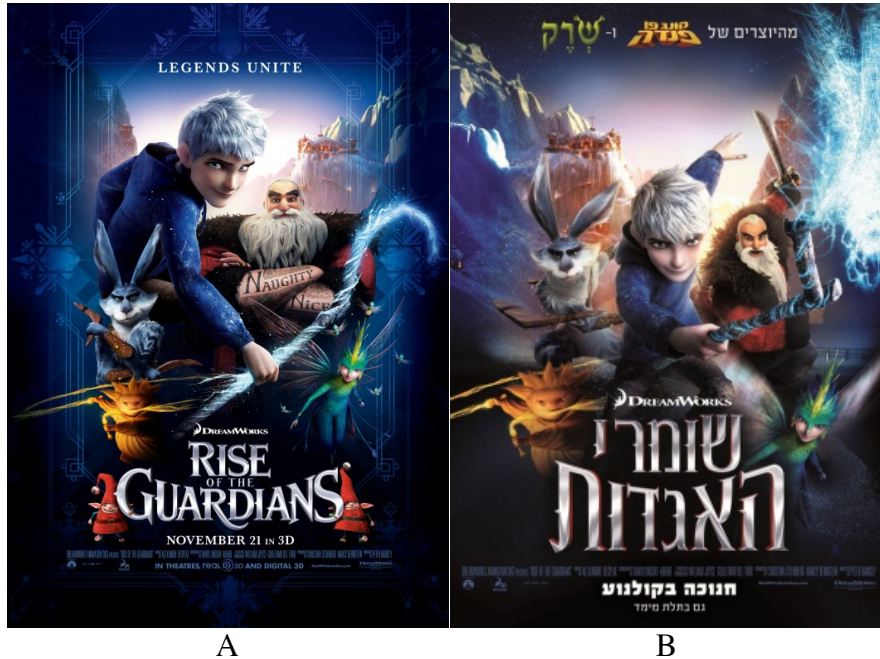
Figure 4.7: **Domestic U.S. poster (A) and Israeli poster (B) for *Rise of the Guardians* (2012). The Israeli poster features the film's "international" key art.**

Marketing challenge 2: Unfamiliar franchises and characters. In addition to culturally specific holiday characters such as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, marketers face challenges when tasked with marketing familiar U.S. cultural properties that are relatively unknown abroad. Movies based on well-known American books, television series, and fairy tales are attractive properties for studios due to the built-in audiences they can access. However, this built-in audience is often limited to the U.S., and studios require international audiences to make a hit in the contemporary film marketplace. While the film might "sell itself" on the domestic front, international marketers must work creatively and tirelessly to introduce foreign audiences to the property and position it as relevant and appealing.

A prime example of such a challenge is the *Star Trek* franchise. A widely successful television franchise that has garnered a cult following and has inspired a myriad of films, comic books, novels, and consumer goods, it is a well-known entity within the U.S. But, when Paramount attempted to reboot the film series in 2009, it garnered disappointing international results. While the film brought in $257 million domestically, it earned only $127 million internationally (33.2% of total earnings). Subsequent research suggested that foreign audiences who were unfamiliar with the complex universe and backstory of the film found it "too Trekkie and too sci-fi" (Barnes, 2013).

When Paramount began developing the next film in the series, *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013), they were careful to consider foreign markets in all aspects of planning, production, distribution, and marketing. As *The New York Times*' Brooks Barnes (2013) describes, "Paramount went out of its way to cast foreign actors, in particular adding the British star Benedict Cumberbatch as the villain." In crafting the story, writers worked to ensure the film could be read by new audiences as a self-contained entity, not requiring prior knowledge of the larger *Star Trek* mythos. While working to attract new audiences, they were also careful not to alienate their core audience who expected a coherent story embedded in the richly complex *Star Trek* universe (Barnes, 2013).

These production decisions alone could not ensure an international turnout, however. Paramount therefore increased the international marketing budget by 35% over that allotted for the 2009 film in an effort to lure global audiences to the theater. When

designing artwork, international marketers embraced a standardized "universal" approach

rather than tailoring the campaign for individual territories. This international key art (see

Figure 4.8) reflects the overall strategy of paying homage to hardcore Trekkies, but also

appealing to the mainstream audience unfamiliar with the *Star Trek* universe. The first

design (Figure 4.8a, used in over 25 markets) shows Captain Kirk looking out over the

wreckage of a futuristic London skyline through a *Star Trek* logo-shaped opening in the

debris. To the familiar viewer, the logo clearly communicates the film's place in the *Star*

Trek universe and warrants the visual emphasis on the subtitle "Into Darkness" (rather

than the "Star Trek" portion of the title treatment). Furthermore, while the London

skyline is recognizable due to the famous "Gherkin" building (formally 30 St Mary Axe),

the addition of futuristic fictional buildings minimizes the sense of place and presents a

universally relatable non-place as the setting for the film and the target of villain Khan's

wrath. Likewise, the second international design (Figure 4.8b) depicts a placeless

landscape of devastation, and features internationally recognizable American stars (Chris

Pine and Zachary Quinto) and British stars (Thandie Newton and Benedict

Cumberbatch).

While Paramount opted for standard "international" key art, they targeted

individual countries strategically with an impressive publicity campaign. The studio

opted for a staggered release schedule spanning four months so that talent could travel the

world promoting the film throughout the release. They staged red carpet premieres in

seven countries, and held numerous press events in cities across the globe. Chris Pine

(who plays Captain Kirk), for instance, was sent to Tokyo to introduce a nine-minute

trailer to the Japanese market. Similarly, producer Bryan Burk embarked on an 11-city

international tour to show a 35-minute clip of the film to journalists and exhibitors across

South America, Asia, and Europe (Barnes, 2013).

| A | B |
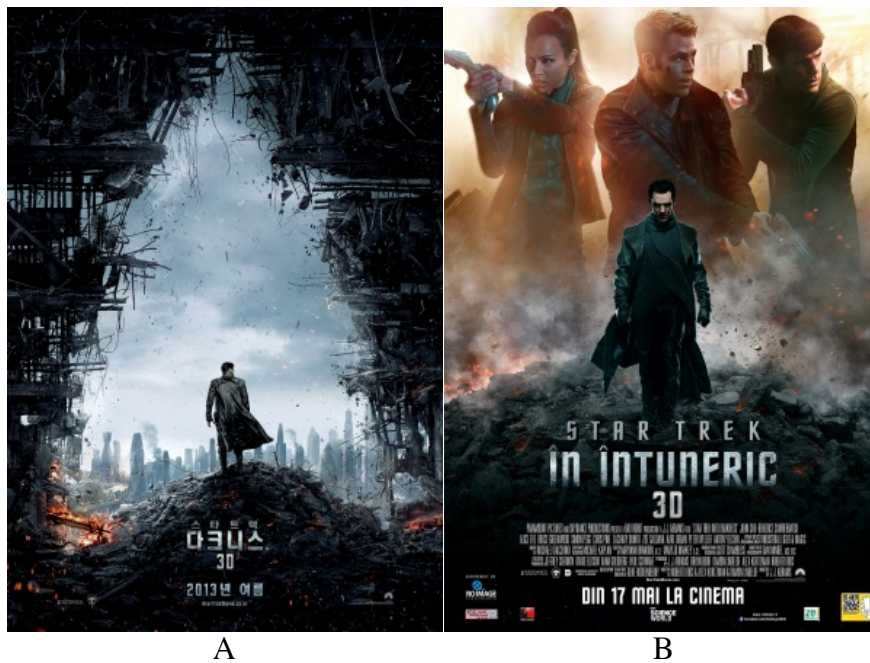
***Figure 4.8:* Korean (A) and Romanian (B) posters for *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013). These poster designs are representative of the "international" key art for the film.**

These extensive efforts to introduce the global audience to the *Star Trek* universe,

along with the general boost in franchise visibility wrought by the 2009 film, paid off for

Paramount. *Star Trek: Into Darkness* brought in slightly less domestically than the 2009

Star Trek film ($228 million versus $257 million). But the global box office take

skyrocketed from $127 million in 2009 to $238 million in 2013, earning the sequel an

additional $82 million in overall earnings. While unfamiliar franchises and characters can

thus pose a challenge in luring international audiences, marketers can strategically influence production and promotion tactics to maximize global appeal and overcome these obstacles.

Marketing challenge 3: Sexual content. Different territories have vastly different cultural and legal standards of acceptability regarding the display of sexual content. While most Hollywood films incorporate sex to some degree, marketers must use ingenuity and flexibility in presenting these films in the most palatable light—both at home and abroad. Despite the truism that "sex sells," marketers often must strategically conceal these themes in order to appease various officials and conservative publics.

While violence, drugs, and alcohol use are all fair marketing fodder in the U.S. context, marketers tend to use caution when portraying sexual content—and for good reason. In 2008, the poster for Kevin Smith's comedy *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* was banned in the U.S. by the MPAA. As Figure 4.9 shows, the poster is relatively tame by most standards, as the stars are both fully dressed. The only references to sex are the word "porno" in the title and the depiction of two heads at the bottom of the poster that insinuate that oral sex is being performed. Due to the American ban, this original poster was only displayed in Canada. In the U.S., the heads at the bottom of the poster were removed to create a tamer version of the original one-sheet, and a new tongue-in-cheek design was released in reaction to the ban. This artwork (see Figure 4.10) reads "Seth Rogen & Elizabeth Banks made a movie so titillating that we can only show you this drawing," and displays stick figures of the two stars in front of a camera. In most cases,

domestic U.S. artwork is created first and international campaigns are based on these

original materials and tailored afterward as needed. In this unusual case, however, the

original domestic campaign played internationally while the U.S. received a uniquely

tailored campaign due to cultural and institutional conservatism.

The U.S. is by no means the only market where portrayals of sexual content in

marketing materials can be problematic. When marketing *Sex and the City: The Movie*

(2008), outdoor posters were removed in Jerusalem and Petach Tikvah, Israel due to the

word 'sex' in the title. Concerned about potential vandalism, the billboard company

refused to display the advertisement and forced marketers to rethink their campaign to

eliminate the movie title altogether (Kalman, 2008). Similarly, an outdoor display

company forced Israeli distribution company AD Matalon to digitally lengthen Angelina

Jolie's skirt in key art for *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005) in order to prevent potential

vandalism (I. Biton, personal communication, November 2, 2009). Previously in Israel,

Disney was pressured to alter the one-sheet for *Tarzan* (1999) to replace the title

character's loincloth with pants in order to avoid accusations of indecency ("Middle East

Tarzan's," 1999). Sexual content can thus effectively be mobilized as a marketing tactic,

but can also be subject to highly variant standards of acceptability across the globe. This

content often necessitates particular care, sensitivity, flexibility, and an openness to

tailoring from marketers as they attempt to sell films abroad.

Figure 4.9: **Banned U.S. poster for** *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* **(2008). This design was only utilized in the Canadian marketplace.**

Figure 4.10: **Alternative U.S. poster design for** *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* **(2008). This poster was released as a tongue-in-cheek response to the MPAA's ban on the original poster.**

Marketing challenge 4: American patriotism. Hollywood's international marketers face a particularly daunting challenge when tasked with selling films that highlight American patriotism. While these films are easy to market at home, their themes risk alienating or angering important international markets that are not in political alignment with the U.S. Marketers, therefore, take particular care to position these films for international audiences.

The case of *Pearl Harbor* (2001) aptly demonstrates the challenges that political themes present for international marketers and illuminates common strategies used to mitigate these potential problems. *Pearl Harbor* is an epic American war romance, set on the island of Hawaii during the 1941 Japanese attack. As the most expensive movie ever to be greenlit at the time of its release (with a massive budget of $140 million), drawing both domestic and international audiences was vital for the film's profitability (Young, 2001). At the time, Japan was the largest foreign market for Hollywood films, and thus was a particularly crucial territory to capture. But a daunting challenge stood in the way of achieving these profit goals: selling a patriotic American film to a public whose countrymen were "portrayed as mostly faceless villains on the losing side of a war story" (French, 2001).

From the film's inception, a key concern of filmmakers and marketers was the portrayal of the Japanese as the enemy. As Buena Vista's Hideo Suzuki stated, "If the movie portrays Japan in too harsh a light, then it will not be a hit here," and this was a risk Disney could not afford to take ("Gambling in Pearl," 2001). Thus, as the Pentagon's

Pearl Harbor project officer, Lt. Melissa Schuermann, explained, "the filmmakers made a conscious decision to keep it very neutral." To ensure that potential Japanese profits were not sacrificed due to political controversy, film representatives periodically made "diplomatic overtures to Japan to make sure Tokyo did not interpret the project as Japan-bashing" (Scarborough, 2001).

As one reviewer asserts, Bruckheimer "tried to give the Japanese a human touch, with an admiral expressing ambivalence about the attack, soldiers following orders and families trying to maintain their honour" ("Gambling in Pearl," 2001). Before ordering the attack, Admiral Yamamoto states resignedly that "We have no choice but war," insinuating that the Japanese were not willing aggressors, but victims of circumstance (Amemiya, 2001). Some critics have since accused the filmmakers of "sanitizing history to make sure it did not offend the largest overseas market" (Amemiya, 2001). Others lament that, in their efforts to downplay the role of the Japanese in the tragedy, they are "depicted in a strange way, as kind of aliens from the outer space, like the creatures from the *Star Wars*. They don't speak much, and then suddenly attack the American people" (Adams & Weiner, 2001).

In further efforts to avoid alienating the Japanese audience during production stages, minor but strategic cuts to the film were made to soften the patriotic tone of the film and downplay the enemy status of the Japanese. It was decided that any negative portrayals of the Japanese that were not crucial to the story's progress and comprehensibility would be eliminated. Therefore, a line was cut from the script

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describing how the Japanese had executed American pilots as war criminals. In addition, the phrase "dirty Jap" (retained in the American version) was shortened to "Jap" in the Japanese version in order to cushion the derisive blow of the racial epithet (Beals, 2001). Finally, a soliloquy at the end of the film praising America's victory in World War II was edited to avoid painful references to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (French, 2001).

While filmmakers took great care to present the Japanese enemy sensitively, the American origin and patriotic sentiments that resonate throughout the film remained difficult to ignore. Indicative of the nationalistic themes and militaristic, patriotic goals of the film is the fact that the U.S. military was heavily involved in its production. The U.S. Department of Defense had final script approval and provided Disney with ships, airfields, and offices for use during filming (Johnson, 2001; Scarborough, 2001). As one military consultant revealed, the cooperation of the U.S. military was "conditional on the film portraying the US military in a positive, patriotic light" (Schembri, 2001). At the pre-9/11 moment of its release, military recruitment was considerably low, and an upbeat, nationalistic film was hoped to bolster military interest and instill a sense of patriotism within the American public. The choice to release the film in the U.S. on Memorial Day weekend serves as further evidence of the strong nationalistic, militaristic pride that the filmmakers aimed to elicit and from which they hoped to capitalize in the U.S. (Schembri, 2001). But, given the fierce nationalism and patriotism inherent in the text, how could marketers hope to sell the film abroad?

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To overcome these obstacles, Buena Vista International orchestrated one of the most expensive marketing campaigns in the company's history and released the film on more than 400 screens in Japan (approximately 15% of screens in the country) ("Gambling in Pearl," 2001). The marketing campaign was designed to sell *Pearl Harbor* as a typical big-budget Hollywood blockbuster (similar to previous hits *Armageddon* [1998] and *Titanic* [1997]), wherein the "love story and human drama were promoted first, while the visual spectacle and expensive special effects added strength to the pull on the heart strings" ("Gambling in Pearl," 2001). The campaign as a whole, and the one-sheet in particular, thus feature standard blockbuster elements of epic romance, dazzling special effects, and a star-studded cast, while consciously neutralizing the portrayal of the Japanese.

Romance. "You sell the romance," stated producer Jerry Bruckheimer when questioned about his strategy for promoting *Pearl Harbor* (Young, 2001). This was the primary marketing tactic adopted by Buena Vista International when approaching the Japanese audience. Due to the perceived universality of romantic relationships and the ostensibly low level of cultural discount inherent in the romance genre, promoting its centrality seemed a safe means of framing a potentially jingoistic, patriotic, U.S.-centric film. As Buena Vista's Hideo Suzuki explains, "We are marketing the movie without thinking of it as a war movie," but rather an epic tale of romance that just so happens to take place during an ambiguous time of war ("Gambling in Pearl", 2001).

The strategy of selling the film as a timeless romance is apparent when comparing the U.S. and Japanese one-sheets for the film. While the domestic U.S. one-sheet features the three characters involved in the central love triangle, the romantic tension between them is not readily apparent in their arrangement or expression (see Figure 4.11a). The characters appear to stand at military attention, unresponsive to each other's presence and focused on the horizon. In the Japanese one-sheet, however, Ben Affleck cradles Kate Beckinsale's head in a loving gesture, lightly kissing her on the forehead (see Figure 4.11b). The scene of naval destruction below them becomes secondary to this affectionate display, emphasizing the centrality of the love story within the film. A soft, sepia tone further highlights the feminine, light, romantic mood contained therein.

A   B

Figure 4.11: **Domestic U.S. poster (A) and Japanese poster (B) for *Pearl Harbor* (2001).**

It is commonly believed within marketing circles that Japanese audiences

"demand more than just one catchphrase to define a film" (King, 2003). Adhering to this

assumption, the Japanese one-sheet features additional copy that further frames the film

as a love story and de-emphasizes the military events as a mere contextual element upon

which the romance unfolds. The small text down the left side of the poster reads: "7

December 1941, Hawaii, 6am. On the day when the blue of the sky and sea turned

suddenly to crimson, love became the last paradise of the young." The adjacent larger

script displays the quote "Don't say goodbye because I'm definitely coming back." With

these words, the love story is established as the central plot element. Additionally, a

subtle reference to *Titanic* is incorporated, as the words are reminiscent of this film's

famous line "I'll never let go." Finally, down the right side of the poster, the words "The

drama of the century, dedicated to the hearts of the whole world" emphasize the universal

romantic appeal of the film and the broad audience it addresses. The resounding message

is that young love prevails despite any ambiguous tragedy that might arise.

Marketers' further use of the *Titanic* model is apparent when comparing the

Japanese *Pearl Harbor* one-sheet to that of *Titanic* (see Figure 4.12). In both, the scene of

destruction (in each case, a sinking ship) is displayed in dark colors at the bottom of the

poster where the title and film information detract from its prominence. The upper

portion of the posters are dominated by the embracing protagonists, positioned with their

eyes downcast, portending their imminent doom. In each, the romantic scene is marked

by lighter, softer colors that draw the eye away from the dark, historical elements.

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Borrowing these tested tactics from *Titanic*, marketers of *Pearl Harbor* aimed to garner similarly impressive box office revenues.
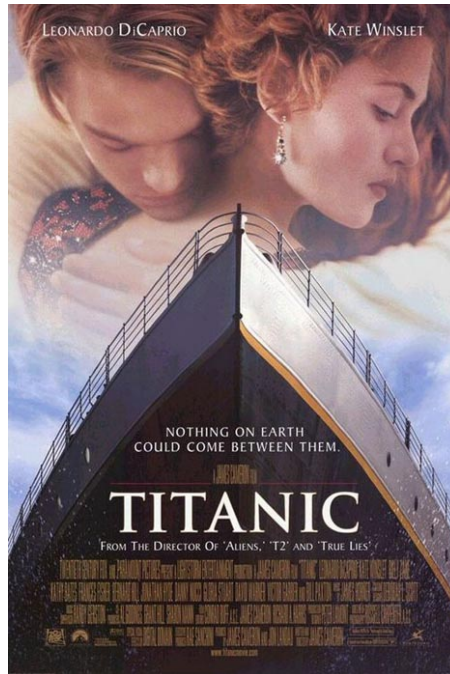
Figure 4.12: **Domestic U.S. poster for *Titanic* (1997)**

Beyond the key art, romantic themes were also emphasized in various other marketing materials used in the campaign. Publicity banners featured at the Tokyo premiere read "Pearl Harbor, Love in Tokyo," and an advertisement in the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* read "The world starts moving; the world is caught in a tide of history. With hope for the future and love in their hearts, young heroes battle against the opposition of the times" (French, 2001). The drama is thus presented as an epic, timeless struggle between the power of love and the evils of history rather than as a battle between the Americans and the Japanese. This framing is also apparent when contrasting the U.S. and Japanese trailers. While the U.S. trailer prominently features war imagery

and a patriotic voiceover, the Japanese trailer favors scenes of embracing couples and a voiceover likening the film to *Gone With the Wind* and omitting scenes of the Japanese attack (Maceda, 2001). As reporter Chisaki Watanabe (2001) noted, marketing materials in Japan "give few clues that anything occurred in Pearl Harbor but romance."

Special effects. A second strategy utilized by filmmakers and marketers to increase international appeal of *Pearl Harbor* was the use and promotion of eye-catching special effects. While the film has a runtime of over 3 hours, the actual bombing of Pearl Harbor is condensed into a 40-minute sequence of computer-generated effects that is reminiscent of popular military-themed video games (Johnson, 2001). While Disney's international chief Mark Zoradi stated that they were "not trying to hide the fact that the obvious centerpiece is the bombing," the choice to reduce the scene to a fraction of the film and present the tragedy as a special effects spectacle underscores the strategic maneuver to frame the film as a typical Hollywood blockbuster and attract a broad international audience (Frith, 2001).

While both the domestic and Japanese one-sheet designs prominently feature the relatively brief attack scene, their presentation of the action and their attribution of blame differ significantly. The domestic one-sheet features a clearly-marked Japanese fighter plane flying menacingly over the smoking battleships with its weapon armed (Figure 4.11a). The plane is slightly blurred, indicating the speed and excitement of the battle scene it promises the viewer. By displaying the machinery of warfare, the scene's historical setting in World War II is communicated and the Japanese are distinctly labeled

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as the enemy. The Japanese one-sheet offers a similar scene of naval destruction, but de-emphasizes the attacker and historical context by including only two indistinct planes in the distance above the silhouette of a battleship (Figure 4.11b). While the action and special effects are underscored by the grandiose scene of a smoking, sinking ship, no attribution of blame is made. The scene is thus reminiscent of a typical Hollywood destruction movie wherein aliens or a natural disaster could just as easily be to blame.

Star appeal. *Pearl Harbor*'s marketers also strove to capitalize on the international stardom of the cast and crew. *Armageddon* (1998) achieved considerable success within the Japanese market (grossing approximately $230 million), and consequently catapulted its producer Jerry Bruckheimer, its director Michael Bay, and its star Ben Affleck to considerable fame in the region. This star recognition was mobilized by featuring their names and past projects in marketing materials for *Pearl Harbor*. In addition, extensive Japanese press appearances were orchestrated, along with a highly publicized premiere at the Tokyo Dome in order to draw public attention (French, 2001).

Both the domestic and Japanese one-sheets for *Pearl Harbor* capitalize on the fame and previous successes of the filmmaking team. On both posters, Ben Affleck's name dominates the top line, designed to draw attention to this household name and attract female viewers through the actor's heartthrob appeal. Above the film's title, the U.S. poster touts "A Jerry Bruckheimer production, a Michael Bay film," while the Japanese poster states, "From the makers of *Armageddon*." While the name recognition of Bruckheimer and Bay may be weaker in Japan, a parallel message is conveyed by

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referring to their past hit project: *Armageddon*. By drawing on the audience's collective memory and "accumulated preference," marketers create anticipation for a similar big-budget blockbuster, replete with action, special effects, and romance of epic proportions (Miller et al., 2005).

  Neutralizing patriotism and the enemy. In their effort to avoid offending Japanese audiences, marketers (similar to the filmmakers) were careful to portray the Japanese villains sensitively, and downplay the American patriotism employed in the U.S. campaign. This strategy is evident through an examination of the divergent one-sheets for *Pearl Harbor*. The domestic U.S. poster features several clear patriotic cues and references (see Figure 4.11a). Notably, the backdrop of the upper portion of the poster is an American flag, foregrounded by Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett proudly donning their naval uniforms. Ben Affleck's collar prominently displays a "U.S." pin as he gazes triumphantly into the distance. Meanwhile, Kate Beckinsale stands beside him shielding her eyes in a position strikingly reminiscent of an American military salute. Finally, the dateline at the bottom does not feature the month and day of release (as it does in the Japanese one-sheet), but rather "Memorial Day," a distinctly American holiday designated for the remembrance of fallen war veterans. As noted previously, the enemy fighter plane featured prominently on the American art is clearly identifiable as Japanese due to the iconic rising sun on its side. With these subtextual cues, nationalistic identification and patriotic emotions are elicited with the aim of drawing American viewers into the theater. As reporter Jim Schembri (2001) writes, the marketing campaign

capitalizes on feelings of national pride, taunting, "If you call yourself an American, how could you dare not to see this film?"

The Japanese poster, in contrast, features none of these patriotic references or cues to the identity of the villain (see Figure 4.11b). Ben Affleck's uniform is obscured by the ship's smoke, the background is a nondescript copper tone, and Kate Beckinsale's posture is that of a demure woman in love. While the lengthy Japanese tagline describes the date, time, and location of the tragedy, and the artwork depicts a scene of destruction, the identity of the attacker remains concealed, avoiding any attribution of blame. In these ways, marketers effectively erased the nationalistic elements of the film from marketing materials in an effort to veil the cultural specificity of the product and appeal to local Japanese tastes and sentiments.

According to Hideo Suzuki, head of Buena Vista International's marketing in Japan, *Pearl Harbor* contained "all the elements to make it big in Japan—a compelling human drama, touching love story, big stars, big action and a pair of box-office champions in producer Bruckheimer and director Michael Bay" ("Gambling in Pearl," 2001). Thanks to these elements and the marketing strategies that promoted them, *Pearl Harbor* was indeed a success. By September 2001, the film had won that year's summer box office title by grossing over $431 million worldwide ($197 million domestically and $234 million internationally), and had taken its place behind *Armageddon* as Disney's third-highest grossing live-action feature ever. Notably, the top-grossing international market was Japan, accounting for $50.4 million, followed by Germany ($27 million), and

the UK ($18.7 million) (Mitchell, 2001). Due, in part, to the careful marketing considerations afforded axis powers portrayed in the film, these countries ironically became the film's two most profitable markets.

While *Pearl Harbor* provides a particularly poignant example of the tailored marketing tactics undertaken to maximize international appeal of a potentially offensive patriotic film, it is by no means the only case. More recently, Paramount faced a similar problem when marketing *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) abroad. During development and production, filmmakers were careful to temper the patriotic tone of the original comic book series and shape the film accordingly. As director Joe Johnston explains of the modified title character:

> He's not this sort of jingoistic American flag-waver…It'll be interesting and fun to put a different spin on the character and one that the fans are really going to appreciate…the idea that this is not about America so much as it is about the spirit of doing the right thing…It's an international cast and an international story. It's about what makes America great and what makes the rest of the world great too (Boucher, 2011).

Filmmakers thus tried to highlight perceived universal values and themes that could resonate beyond the domestic marketplace and overshadow the distinctly American nature of the story.

To bolster this strategy, Paramount gave their international distributors the option of omitting "Captain America" from the title altogether, instead naming the film simply *The First Avenger*. After conducting international market research, however, studios found that, in most regions, positive recognition and associations with the Captain

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America comic book series trumped any negative political associations stemming from the patriotic title. Therefore, only three territories opted to retitle the film *The Fist Avenger*: Russia, South Korea, and Ukraine (Boucher, 2011). Standardized, globally-employed artwork was adopted to market the film for most territories (including these three), featuring a solemn-looking Chris Evans holding his red, white, and blue shield amidst a grey cloud of ash and debris (see Figure 4.13). While distinctly American references are present, the somber context of the hero's image avoids framing the film as a patriotic celebration of American exceptionalism and might.

Figure 4.13: Ukrainian poster for *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011). This poster design was utilized worldwide.

While the film performed moderately well internationally ($193 million), foreign box office accounted for only 52% of the film's overall take. In a context where big-budget Hollywood blockbusters routinely glean 70% of their profits from overseas, this

represents a mildly disappointing showing. Despite concerted efforts to minimize patriotic overtones in both the film and marketing campaign, therefore, the content remained a significant challenge to overcome on the international front.

Marketing challenge 5: Assumed racial biases. As discussed previously, studios' increased concern with films' international marketability has significantly impacted casting decisions. With the exception of animated films, casts cannot be tailored to please markets individually. Therefore, international marketers are tasked with presenting films' casts in a manner deemed most appropriate for each market. This often means highlighting certain cast members and minimizing attention paid to others deemed unpopular or problematic. This practice risks eliciting dissatisfaction and controversy, however, as these tactics can misrepresent the film and systematically erase certain types of people from the public eye.

As discussed previously, marketers often contend that foreign audiences are averse to African American actors (with the key exceptions of Will Smith and Denzel Washington). When African Americans are cast, therefore, their faces are sometimes still eliminated from marketing materials in order to maximize international appeal. In the past, this practice tended to go relatively unnoticed, as residents in various markets could not easily access campaign materials from other markets for comparison. With the internet, however, marketing materials can circulate internationally, and these tailoring tactics have been exposed, causing outrage in several cases.

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In 2009, for example, Universal faced a backlash when it released an international version of its poster for *Couple's Retreat* that excluded African American actors. The film tells the story of four couples as they try to repair their relationships at a couple's resort. The domestic U.S. poster (see Figure 4.14a) features all four couples (three white and one African American) looking glum in a beautiful island setting. All of these actors' names are featured at the top of the poster design. The British version of the poster (see Figure 4.14b), also intended for use in other international markets, eliminates both the images and names of the two African American actors. A spokesman for Universal explained that the artwork had been edited to "simplify the poster to actors who are most recognizable in international markets" (Goslett, 2009). This tactic, while perhaps viable from a business standpoint, serves to further erase African American faces from the film marketplace and the global pop cultural milieu. In response to public outrage, Universal abandoned plans to use the revised poster and adopted a standardized universal campaign based on the domestic U.S. key art.

In a similar case, Italian distributor BIM Distribuzione released posters (designed in conjunction with marketing agency Fanatical About Cinema) for the Fox film *12 Years a Slave* (2013) featuring famous Caucasian actors Brad Pitt and Michael Fassbender despite their non-starring roles in the film (McNary, 2013). The Italian posters sparked immediate online outrage, as viewers condemned the foregrounding of white actors in marketing for a movie about black slavery starring black actor Chiwetel Ejiofor as morally repugnant, racist, and misleading. While this design decision was unsanctioned

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by the studio, it reflects a pervasive tendency to foreground the most well-known stars of

the film (usually white male actors) at the expense of less famous minority and female

actors. Both casting practices and marketing practices thus can serve to whitewash the

media landscape both onscreen and off in an effort to lure the largest possible

international audiences to the theater.

A   B

Figure 4.14: **Domestic U.S. poster (A) and original British poster (B) for** *Couples Retreat* **(2009). Version B was also intended for use widely in other international markets.**

While certain minority faces are often eliminated from marketing campaigns in

order to present a neutral (i.e. white) image of the film, minority faces are sometimes

highlighted in order to court a particular international audience. As discussed previously,

the rise of the Chinese market has prompted recent casting decisions that include token

Asian actors. Marketers often try to capitalize on these decisions and highlight these

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actors in tailored Asian marketing materials. For instance, Paramount marketers created a

dedicated Chinese version of the poster for *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014)

featuring Li Bingbing's character despite her small role in the film (see Figure 4.2).

While many of the Chinese marketing materials for the film were derived from the

domestic U.S. campaign, these designs were supplemented with a tailored approach

presenting a familiar (and therefore supposedly appealing) Chinese face for the film.

While studios try to head off cross-cultural conflict by considering international

marketing issues during the planning and production phases of filmmaking, these

concerns are sometimes not resolved early on. In these instances, international marketers

are relied upon to frame the film in the most palatable light possible. Due to budgetary

and logistical constraints, standard universal campaigns (designed to attract the widest

possible audience while offending the fewest number of people) remain the ideal

formula. However, in special circumstances such as those enumerated above, a tailored

campaign may be considered justified. In all of these instances, studio marketers and their

international distribution partners negotiate and work tirelessly together to create

appealing materials that translate the film's preferred meaning most effectively for the

international audiences they have constructed.

Power Dynamics Within Hollywood's International Marketing System

Hollywood's international marketing mechanism is comprised of a complex and

dynamic network of cultural, institutional, and spatial forces, all of which impact the final

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shape of the campaign and its iterations across the globe. While studio marketers manage the overall shape of campaigns, they rely heavily on international distribution partners to plan and implement the release of their films in local markets. Distributors are an invaluable source of local cultural and regulatory knowledge, and control vital relationships with local officials, promotional partners, vendors, advertising platforms, and exhibition venues.

Distributors' power is circumscribed, however, by the relatively small independent marketing budgets they control, and by complex legal contracts designed to protect studios' intellectual property rights. Under these contracts, in most cases, marketing materials must be approved by studios (or their licensors) and the film's producers. In an increasingly globalized environment where marketing materials can cross borders rapidly and unpredictably, studios have a vested interest in controlling the film's image and maintaining consistent brand imagery and messaging across international campaigns. The creativity individual distributors are allowed to exhibit is thus constrained by overall marketing imperatives.

While some distributors or individual exhibitors get away with exercising creative freedom, the stakes can be high when studios and intellectual property holders are not consulted. Take, for example, the previously discussed case of *12 Years a Slave* (2013) wherein Italian distribution company BIM Distribuzione created unsanctioned posters for the film featuring Brad Pitt and Michael Fassbender's images. In this instance, the Italian distributor was sharply reprimanded for allowing an unapproved (and, more importantly,

offensive) version of the poster to reach the market. Lionsgate's Summit Entertainment, who acted as sales agent for the licensors, quickly issued a statement identifying the posters as unsanctioned and pledged to recall the offending materials. Shortly thereafter, BIM Distribuzione issued a statement of their own, stating:

> We apologize for creating and releasing unauthorized posters for *12 Years a Slave* in Italy featuring Brad Pitt and Michael Fassbender in a manner inconsistent with approved advertising materials. All inappropriate materials have now been withdrawn. We are very proud of the film and regret any distraction this incident may have caused (McNary, 2013).

As this example illustrates, international distributors and exhibitors can act independently, but at their own risk. If done correctly, individual creative deviations can be overlooked or tacitly approved, but distributors can face punishment if these experiments in unsanctioned tailoring reflect poorly on the studio, filmmakers, or film.

While major campaign elements (like posters and trailers) are often minimally tailored due to tight budgets, short timelines and the strict oversight of studios, international distributors often have more opportunity to create localized materials for less expensive and prominent campaign elements such as online or mobile content. In China, these digital materials are relied upon extensively due to short campaign lead times. Studios can find out their film has been accepted by censors as little as two weeks in advance of its release (C. Tasto, personal communication, November 8, 2013). While this allows very little time for localization of a poster or trailer, online content can be quickly and easily created or adapted in this timeframe. Since these elements are often seen as less important by studios and filmmakers, they often receive less oversight as

well. Thus, local distributors have more freedom to utilize their creativity and cultural knowledge to create tailored digital campaign elements designed to resonate with their local audiences.

In general, however, studios maintain considerable financial and creative power in these relationships, forcing their distribution partners to work within narrow creative confines. The resulting power relationship mirrors what Straubhaar (1991) has termed (in reference to larger geopolitical dynamics) one of "asymmetrical interdependencies," wherein Hollywood marketers and local distributors are mutually reliant, but suffer from an inherent imbalance of power. This power dynamic is negotiated on a case-by-case basis, but is informed by larger social, economic and geopolitical realities. The size and affluence of the market, the character of the local cinematic landscape, the territory's status as a cultural tastemaker, and local regulatory regimes and intellectual property protections all serve to mold these power dynamics and working relationships. These power dynamics, in turn, influence the shape and implementation of the marketing campaign. The following situated case study explores these dynamics in more detail, examining the complex negotiation that occurs between studios, distributors, and local populations within a distinct spatial environment.

The case of Hong Kong: Global marketing in a local landscape. The Hong Kong film market serves as an apt case market through which to explore transnational film marketing dynamics and examine the complex power relationships that exist between Hollywood studios and their local counterparts. Due to Hong Kong's historically

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robust film and advertising industries, its colonial ties to the West, and its current

relationship with China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) governed by the motto

"one country, two systems," it serves as a dynamic site of investigation. As documented

by Michael Curtin (2007), Hong Kong serves as a key site for the agglomeration of media

capital. Positioned as a cinematic powerhouse attracting talent and investment capital

from around the world, Hong Kong has established itself as both a regional conduit for

Hollywood fare, and as a regional alternative to Hollywood. By creating high-quality

films designed to resonate with audiences from across the Chinese-speaking world

(including mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Chinese diaspora), Hong Kong

remains an important player in the cinematic marketplace. While small in size, Hong

Kong thus serves as the strategic link between Taiwan and China, as the center of

Western business interests in East Asia, and as a key media powerhouse and tastemaker

in the region (Martin & Shen, 2006).

This case study first outlines the complex cultural, economic, and geographic

context within which marketers face difficult campaign execution decisions (namely,

whether to adopt standardized or tailored campaigns). It then explores the ways in which

studio marketers and their distribution partners work together to navigate these choices

and execute campaigns within Hong Kong that strategically balance localized appeals

with more economically practical standardized approaches. It examines the multiple

factors and power dynamics at play within this negotiated balance, highlighting the

interplay of Hollywood marketers, international distributors, local audiences, and urban

space in shaping campaigns that are both intentionally and organically hybridized (Kraidy, 2005).

  The Hong Kong marketplace: The case for tailored or standardized campaigns. International distributors are tasked with marketing Hollywood films in their territory in order to maximize local appeal. In an ideal scenario, therefore, distributors would prefer complete freedom to design and implement marketing campaigns according to their own understanding of local audience tastes and preferences (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010; E. Siromascenko, personal communication, November 20, 2010). In practice, however, distributors are constrained by budgetary and legal realities that favor standard global campaigns controlled by centralized studio marketing departments. Due to Hong Kong's unique cultural and geo-political atmosphere, however, distributors could point to several compelling arguments to bolster their case for the localization of film marketing campaigns in the territory.

  Historically, Hong Kong's local film industry has been a formidable player and powerful cultural force. It was at one point the second-largest exporter of films in the world, and established a sphere of influence spanning Mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and beyond (Curtin, 2007; Lo, 2001; Moretti, 2001). It was not until the 1990s that Hong Kong films began to lose their position of local and regional dominance. Faced with a talent drain to Hollywood, problems of overproduction and piracy, the financial crisis of 1997, and increased competition from Korea, Japan, and Mainland China, the Hong Kong film industry suffered (Lo, 2001; Lee, 2006). While

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there were 134 local productions released in 1991, this number dropped to 77 by 2003 (Lee, 2006). Hollywood films quickly filled this void to assume the dominant position in this robust cinema-going marketplace, accounting for over 75% of film imports in 2010, including eight of the ten top-grossing films of that year (Chau, 2011).

Despite its recent decline, Hong Kong's prolific film industry presents marketers with compelling arguments to localize marketing materials. As Fu and Govindaraju suggest, audiences in regions with a robust cinematic history and culture of local production often "cultivate native tastes" that may not be satisfied by universal appeals (2010, p. 218). In his study of cultural discount factors and genre preferences in Hong Kong, Francis Lee (2006) suggests a similar phenomenon. Observing that Hollywood comedies suffered from high cultural discount relative to science fiction, he suggests that the novelty of science fiction in Hong Kong may increase the genre's appeal and acceptance, whereas comedies (a historical mainstay of Hong Kong production) suffered from comparisons with preferred local fare. Adhering to these observations, localized materials designed to appeal to established local tastes, genre preferences, and cinematic conventions may be considered warranted.

Competition serves as a related argument for localization. Faced with competition from Korean and Japanese films, local productions, co-productions with China, and other American films, Hollywood marketers face extreme challenges in luring viewers to the theater (Lee, 2006). Compounding this problem is the active advertising and technology culture of Hong Kong. As a highly commercial, densely populated, and extremely

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connected territory, advertisements are ubiquitous and can be visually overwhelming. In this atmosphere, marketers face what Gitlin describes as "an unavoidable consequence of all the flashes and shouts for attention…clutter and cacophony. As a result, when we pay attention to any particular signal, we must pay inattention elsewhere" (2002, p. 118). In this environment, marketers are faced with competition for box office revenue, but also competition for attention amidst the myriad of sales pitches being presented to audiences at any given time and in any given space. In this context, marketing strategies must be carefully constructed and designed to catch and hold the attention of local Hong Kong audiences.

Finally, Hong Kong's strategic geographic, cultural, and political role within the region positions it as an important tastemaker and a gateway to the coveted Mainland Chinese audience. Due to Hong Kong's affluence, openness, and historically robust cultural industries (including film, music, and fashion), it has profound influence as a regional tastemaker. Hong Kong's open film marketplace also serves as a key site and conduit for Mainland Chinese audiences' (as well as other Chinese-speaking audiences') exposure to Hollywood films. As Mazurkewich suggests, "Hong Kong offers a gateway into the tough Greater China market" (2000, p. 82), and with a box office valued at $4.8 billion in 2014, this is a significant opportunity. Through Hong Kong's increasingly porous border with China, Hollywood marketers can reach this market and cultivate an appetite for Hollywood fare that can translate into profits from licensed products or future box office returns if and when restrictions are loosened.

Due to its cinematic history, competitive marketplace, and strategic significance, therefore, Hollywood marketers face powerful incentives to work with local distributors to tailor marketing materials for Hong Kong (and by extension Mainland Chinese) consumers. Distributors can leverage these appeals when negotiating with their studio counterparts for more local control of marketing campaigns. Despite these arguments, however, notable constraints exist that limit studio marketers' ability and inclination to tailor marketing materials for Hong Kong.

The first of these constraints is Hong Kong's small market size and subsequently small marketing budgets allotted for the territory. While it may be culturally and economically influential, Hong Kong's population is a mere 7.1 million, and it garnered only $210 million USD at the box office in 2013 (Frater, 2014). While not an insignificant figure (especially for its size), it does not justify large marketing expenditures in the eyes of studio executives. Tailored campaigns require a significant amount of time and labor, and thus are often deemed an unnecessary expense unless substantial profits are at stake.

In addition to budgetary constraints, logistical and legal factors also hinder localization efforts. As discussed previously, marketing materials are subject to multiple rounds of revisions, requiring approvals at various levels of the studio, production, and talent hierarchy. Localizing marketing materials can thus consume a significant amount of time, communication, and creative labor. Even as global day-and-date releases become the norm, international distribution rights are often sold late in the filmmaking process.

Therefore distributors often have a very short timeframe in which to develop and implement the local marketing campaign. According to one Hong Kong distributor, they usually receive key art and initial marketing materials three to four months before the release date (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). With only a few months until release, spearheading a full tailoring project that requires approvals from studio executives, producers, talent, and legal departments becomes a logistical nightmare.

Additionally, studio marketers are apt to subscribe to the theory of global taste convergence, believing that a global youth culture has formed whose tastes and preferences are universal in scope. In Hong Kong, this sentiment is accentuated due to the territory's colonial past. Feeling that Hong Kong cinemagoers have adopted a "Western style urban consuming society" due to their ties with British culture, their relative affluence, and their open media landscape, marketers may deem tailored materials unnecessary or counterproductive in an environment where Western products are highly valued (Kwok & Wong, 1995).

Marketing Hollywood in Hong Kong. While Hong Kong distributors argue for enhanced freedom to tailor marketing materials in their territory, there are significant constraints on the extent to which tailoring is economically, logistically, and strategically feasible. In this environment, studio marketers and their distribution partners must negotiate and plan their campaigns to strategically balance localized appeals with more economically practical standardized approaches. The following discussion explores the ways in which campaigns are designed and implemented to achieve this balance in the

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context of Hong Kong. While Hollywood marketers and Hong Kong distributors are the central players in this negotiation, local audiences and the urban environment also serve as key forces in this localization process. This discussion thus dissects how studio marketers navigate these choices, and the ways in which distributors, audiences, and the local environment influence how these campaigns function on the local level.

To explore the power dynamics and negotiated localization process at play within the Hong Kong context, a textual analysis of outdoor marketing materials for Hollywood films was conducted in Hong Kong (and in Los Angeles for comparative purposes) during the summer of 2010. Analyzing marketing materials in isolation is not sufficient, however, as context plays a powerful role in communication. The same poster or design can mean very different things based on its contextual environment. In conducting this analysis, therefore, care was taken to consider both textual elements of campaigns as well as environmental, spatial, and temporal factors that influence reception. This textual analysis was supplemented by interviews with a marketing executive from Sony Pictures International in Culver City, California and his local Hong Kong distribution and marketing team from EDKO film. EDKO film is one of the major production and distribution companies in Hong Kong, responsible for the co-production of the wildly popular *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and serving as a regional distribution partner for Sony Pictures, Universal Pictures, and 20th Century Fox.

Four film campaigns were examined as case studies: two animated family films (*Shrek Forever After* and *Toy Story 3*) and two action films (*Salt* and *Knight and Day*).

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According to Lee's study of genre preference, "Hollywood action and family movies enjoy a relatively low degree of cultural discount in Hong Kong, but they do not exhibit higher or lower degree of cross-cultural predictability than other genres" (2006, p. 274). Thus, marketers of these films faced fewer inherent cultural barriers to entry, but had a powerful incentive to market these films effectively due to their unpredictability at the box office. While *Salt* and *Knight and Day* had equally moderate success in Hong Kong (with a box office take of roughly $1.5 million USD each), the success of *Shrek Forever After* and *Toy Story 3* varied widely. *Shrek Forever After* garnered only $3.5 million USD at the Hong Kong box office, while *Toy Story 3* quickly became the territory's highest-grossing animated feature film and Hong Kong's third-highest grossing film overall (behind *Avatar* and *Titanic*) with a take of $11.5 million USD (Chu, 2010). These case studies thus represent a range of strategies, target audiences, and success rates.

In all of these cases, studio marketers and their distribution partners adopted an overall strategy of standardized appeals. In most cases, generic "international" or translated domestic U.S. versions of key art were used, as illustrated in Figures 4.15 and 4.16. Attributed largely to Hong Kong's small market size, the relatively high cost of tailored campaigns, and a short marketing and release timeline, this strategy was deemed most efficient. At first glance, therefore, it would appear that studio marketers maintain absolute control over campaigns and execute standardized campaigns that exemplify a form of top-down cultural imperialism. However, with further examination, it becomes clear that local distributors, local audiences, and the spatial and temporal dynamics of

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Hong Kong's urban environment enable an informal, negotiated form of localization on the ground. Through strategic use of language, timing, placement, formatting, promotions and installations, campaigns encourage localized readings and resistance to standardization. Thus, while studio executives maintain control over marketing budgets and design approvals, local players and spatial environments hold the power to organically hybridize these intrinsically American texts to infuse them with local meanings and encourage local readings. The following sections will explore the ways in which these formal and informal localization processes occur, and the roles that Hollywood studio marketers, international distributors, local audiences, and local spatial environments play.

<div align="center">A   B</div>

Figure 4.15: **U.S. (A) and Hong Kong (B) posters for** *Shrek Forever After* **(2010).**

Figure 4.16: **U.S. (A) and Hong Kong (B) posters for** *Knight and Day* **(2010).**

Language. Language is a key component of marketing materials, and serves as one of the areas in which Hollywood executives and distributors consistently make an effort to tailor materials. Even when domestic U.S. or generic international key art is utilized, copy is invariably translated into local languages. English is one of the two official languages of Hong Kong, but film advertisements are generally translated into Chinese in order to reach a wider audience. While studio executives retain the power of final approvals, local distributors possess a great deal of power in this process, generally performing the translations themselves. Since translations are viewed as a necessary alteration, marketers often seize this opportunity to localize content without adding substantive labor, time, or cost to the marketing equation.

The studio generally favors a literal translation, especially of key elements like titles (A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). Sometimes this works; for instance, with titles like *Shrek* that can be translated phonetically without losing or gaining meaning. But often distributors make the case for more substantive title changes in order to convey the meaning behind the film's title rather than merely the words (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). Illustrating the process and importance of title translation, one studio executive describes the international titling of the film *Grown Ups* (2010) by explaining:

> So the title of the movie is "Grown Ups" which is a children's word for adults. When we talk about grown ups, we refer to them as adults. But when people say "grown ups" it's from a child's perspective. So we were trying to find similar titles in other languages because a movie entitled "The Adults" doesn't sound fun at all… So we sent out a strategy document asking territories to think of words or expressions that would be like that in their market and we got back responses like "The Big Ones" from Hungary. In France, for instance, there is no word for "grown ups;" it's just "adultes." So they suggested "Friends Forever," which doesn't really work. So we're asking them to re-think the title and come up with something a little different. In Lithuania, "Mature Guys" was sort of the translation. It's lost in translation, but in Lithuania there's an expression that means mature guys—sort of a playful expression—so we said "Ok, that probably works." Germany has an expression "Silly Billies," which we thought was a great title. These don't translate well into English, but they sound better in these languages (A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009).

While the studio has final title and copy approval, international distributors thus have substantial freedom to suggest translation strategies and alternatives. Due to distributors' cultural and linguistic knowledge, they have a great deal of power in this arena, as studio executives must ultimately trust the instincts of their local counterparts. While the executive quoted above was initially skeptical about the suggested French title "Copains

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Pour Toujours" ("Friends Forever"), for instance, this title was ultimately selected for the French market.

Seizing the opportunity for localization presented by the accepted need for copy translation, studio marketers and local distributors can situate the film within the public imaginary and label the film as belonging to a specific genre. Genre is one of the most important factors consumers consider in deciding to watch a film (Austin & Gordon, 1987; Desai & Basuroy, 2005; DeSilva, 1998), but genres are valued differently across cultures and audience segments. By framing releases as belonging to a particular genre, marketers can target desirable audience segments and highlight film elements thought to be more appealing to the local film-going public.

The case of *Knight and Day* in Hong Kong clearly demonstrates this practice (see Figure 4.16). While the English title remains ambiguous in regard to genre, the Hong Kong title is translated to read *Lian Zhan Te Wu Wang* (roughly "Love and War of the King of Spy"). The surrounding artwork (adopted from the domestic U.S. campaign) places this film largely within the action genre, but the title translation acts to simultaneously frame the film as a romance. According to Lee's (2006) study of cultural discount factors of various genres within Hong Kong, action films suffer from very little cultural discount when traveling across borders, while romance films suffer only moderately. Thus, by placing *Knight and Day* within these two genre categories, marketers aimed to appeal to a broad audience and avoid potential losses from cultural discount associated with more culturally specific genres (such as comedy).

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In a small market like Hong Kong, broad audience appeal is essential to garner significant box office revenue. Women are critical in this equation, and highlighting the romantic elements of the film via the title's reference to love serves to target this vital segment in addition to the male demographic targeted by the action-oriented imagery and references to "war" and "spy." This tactic therefore works to appeal to the various audience groups deemed necessary for box office success in the Hong Kong market. Creative use of language thus allows international distribution teams the freedom to tailor marketing materials for their market and various audience segments therein.

Direct translations of marketing copy are often ineffective due to the use of puns and wordplay that lose their meaning through the translation process. In these instances, wording must be altered to retain humor, but deliver the desired message clearly. This process is illustrated within the *Shrek Forever After* campaign. In the English title, "forever after" serves a dual purpose, referencing the "happily ever after" Western fairytale convention and also indicating that the film is the fourth movie in the series. This wordplay does not translate easily, however, so the Chinese title was translated to read "Long Live Shrek."

Use of slang is also employed as a means of localization, serving to target a distinct audience demographic. Gibbons (1979) coined the term "MIX" to describe a local variety of Cantonese that blends English words with Cantonese grammar and phrasing. In written form, these English words appear within otherwise Chinese sentences and phrases. As Lock notes, this form of slang is often used within Hong Kong

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advertisements to invoke a "street voice" and label the product being sold as hip and youth-oriented (2003, p. 200). The key art for *Knight and Day* (see Figure 4.16b) demonstrates use of this locally-resonant hybrid language to evoke edginess and youthful cosmopolitanism. While most of the art's text is in Chinese, the English title is present and the word "Hot" in the dateline reading "June 24, HOT explosion in the city" appears in English. In addition to invoking a youthful street sensibility, the English words subtly allude to the film's status as an American product, indicating its high production value.

The need for copy translation also allows for additional copy to be added, thus providing an opportunity for more background information and explanation to be given to local audiences. While domestic U.S. marketing materials may effectively convey information with subtlety or through shared cultural references, international marketers often use additional copy to ensure that the preferred message is being delivered cross-culturally. Adding lines of text over the pre-existing artwork is a relatively easy form of localization, and one that local distributors play an important role in conceiving and implementing.

The Hong Kong campaign for *Salt* employed this method of localization extensively, adding additional copy to an originally text-sparse domestic U.S. campaign. The U.S. campaign sought to capitalize on mystery and intrigue, extensively using the vague tagline "Who Is Salt?" to evoke curiosity amongst potential viewers (see Figure 4.17a). While the Hong Kong artwork utilized the same tagline (see top text in Figure 4.17b), it explicated the question further, offering suggestions of who she might, in fact,

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be. In small black text below the tagline, the poster reads, "Number one spy? Or a traitor? Double agent, enemy or friend? Before identified, a life-or-death battle, sky-rocking and earth-shaking!" While the domestic U.S. campaign relied on trailers and word of mouth to suggest potential answers to the "Who Is Salt?" query, the Hong Kong campaign condensed this information within the poster itself. In the competitive and media-saturated environment of Hong Kong, marketers with a small budget and a short lead time could not rely on potential viewers' exposure to multiple advertising texts to piece this information together. Thus, additional copy was utilized to provide this information upfront and maximize viewer understanding with a single advertising impression.

A   B
Figure 4.17: **U.S. (A) and Hong Kong (B) posters for** *Salt* **(2010).**

As discussed in more detail below, Hong Kong commuters are heavily reliant on public transportation. This form of transport allows for more lengthy encounters with

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advertisements. While U.S. audiences need to see and understand movie key art within the few seconds it takes to drive past a billboard at 50 miles per hour, Hong Kong commuters may have a whole train ride to read and study a poster. In this environment, adding copy can work to enhance audience want-to-see rather than unnecessarily clutter the design.

The campaign for *Toy Story 3* used a similar strategy of adding information through supplementary text. Many posters and installations for the film in the U.S. consisted of merely the number "3" surrounded by characters from the series (see Figure 4.18a). In the U.S. context, visual depictions of these well-known characters were sufficient to communicate the title of the film and reference its franchise. While the *Toy Story* franchise was historically very successful in Hong Kong as well, marketers opted to not rely solely on visual references and instead include the full translation of the title *Toy Story 3* (see the upper right hand corner of the poster in Figure 4.18b). With this simple addition of the full title treatment, local audiences unfamiliar with the franchise are granted full access to information about the film.

While Hollywood executives must approve these textually altered materials, their relative unfamiliarity with the local language allows international distributors a great deal of control in these processes. Hollywood executives generally trust that distributors know best when it comes to their territory's language, and thus defer to their expertise. Since translations of marketing materials are generally considered necessary, distributors do not have to fight for copy changes in the same way that they must lobby for changes to

artwork. They can therefore use this necessary process to tailor materials beyond simple word-for-word translation.

A   B
Figure 4.18: **U.S. (A) and Hong Kong (B) posters for *Toy Story 3* (2010).**

In the special case of animated film, language offers an additional avenue for increased localization. Animated films' young target audience make subtitling impractical, and animated characters allow for relatively seamless dubbing. Studios can embrace the dubbing process as a means to incorporate local stars that can subsequently be highlighted in marketing materials. The campaign for *Shrek Forever After* used this technique effectively, incorporating the voices of Hong Kong stars Jan Lamb, Chapman To, and Sammi, and adding their photos prominently to marketing materials (see Figure 4.19). The addition of these celebrities in the film and marketing campaign serves to localize the materials in a powerful manner, fostering familiarity and local ties.

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Figure 4.19: **Hong Kong advertisements for *Shrek Forever After* (2010) highlighting the role of local voice actors.**

Time. When tailored marketing materials are deemed unnecessary due to budgetary constraints or logistical hassles, strategically scheduling the film's release can be an effective alternative means of localization and a locus of distributor power. To maximize viewership, the prime release windows in Hong Kong are the summer vacation time (similar to the U.S. market) and Lunar New Year. By delaying holiday releases until Lunar New Year, studios and their distribution partners seek to capitalize on local rhythms and annual cycles.

Releases are also arranged around competition within the local Hong Kong film marketplace. Flooded with films from home and abroad, the market is subject to intense competition for audiences and release dates. In this atmosphere, distributors attempt to time releases to avoid other large openings that might poach audiences. While the fear of piracy and the spread of social media marketing have precipitated movement toward

global day-and-date releases, timing remains a complex dance in which local events (cultural and cinematic) and the cultural knowledge of international distributors play a prominent role.

While Hollywood executives and Hong Kong distributors determine release dates, the urban environment and its rhythms inform the speed and subsequent design of marketing campaigns. In the domestic U.S. marketplace, event movie campaigns often have long lead times. It is not unusual for film campaigns to start a year in advance with teaser trailers or artwork intended to spread awareness of a property that is still in production. Because the film is not complete, these teaser materials are often simple and straightforward. In comparison, campaigns in Hong Kong usually begin one month prior to the film's release. For example, the *Salt* campaign began on July 1st for a July 22nd release date in Hong Kong. This practice is attributed to small marketing budgets that cannot sustain a long campaign, delays in receiving marketing materials due to bureaucratic hassles and approvals, the high cost of advertising space in Hong Kong, and the fast-paced environment that Hong Kong fosters. Given these circumstances, marketers opt for a strategy of short-duration market saturation rather than drawn out campaigns (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010).

With this strategy in mind, marketers forgo teaser materials that play off of mystery and curiosity in favor of an explicit and information-rich sell. Given the speed of life in Hong Kong, marketers assume that passersby might only catch a glimpse of materials as they hurry past. Thus, densely populated areas are often peppered with

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advertisements for the same product or film in order to ensure repeated exposure.

Likewise, trailers display the film title and release date prominently above the letterbox

through the duration of the trailer (see Figure 4.20).[46] Assuming that passersby will not

take the time to watch the whole trailer to see this vital information at the end, this tactic

delivers pertinent product information with a glance. The speed and visual cacophony of

the urban environment thus informs modifications to marketing materials and their

implementation in Hong Kong, providing a means of localization informed by informal

and non-institutional forces.

Figure 4.20: **Hong Kong trailer for *Knight and Day* (2010), continuously featuring the title and release date.**

Format and placement. While limited budgets and bureaucratic hurdles constrain

design changes to marketing materials, the format and placement of these materials

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[46] This practice was recently adopted for television spots in the U.S. to combat fast-forwarding through ads with DVRs. By displaying title and release information continuously throughout the ad, viewers who fast-forward through television spots will still be able to read this pertinent information (Hampp, 2010b).

provide arenas for substantial localization. Given their extensive geographic and social knowledge, international distributors are granted a great deal of freedom from Hollywood oversight in this process. In turn, the media environment, the urban landscape, and the population's flows and routines inform these choices and mold the campaign in significant ways.

While Hong Kong distributors generally have a limited marketing budget with which to work, they have a great deal of freedom in allocating this budget and selecting marketing platforms according to local market realities. The choices they make are dictated by competition, pricing, local population routines and media consumption practices. Marketers from EDKO Films estimate that 40% of their marketing budget is allocated for television advertisements (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). This figure reflects wider advertising trends in the territory, as television accounted for 41.7% of all advertising expenditures in Hong Kong in 2002 (Chan, Chan, & Chan, 2006) and is generally considered a staple for any large advertising campaign in the area. This figure does not necessarily mean that marketing campaigns are most visible on television, however. While television ads account for a large portion of marketing budgets, television ad time is extremely expensive due to station monopolies and a subsequent scarcity of ad space. In Hong Kong, two Chinese channels (TVB and ATV) and two English channels (TVB Pearl and ATV World) dominate the television landscape (Chan, Chan & Chan, 2006). These channels can thus demand very high premiums for ad space, forcing marketers to spend large portions of their marketing

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budgets on relatively few commercial spots. In the U.S., much larger percentages (usually

70 to 75%) of film marketing budgets are allocated to television spots, placed across a

wider array of broadcast and cable channels (Hampp, 2010b).

An estimated 20% of marketing budgets for Hollywood films in Hong Kong are

allocated toward print, digital, and radio advertising (A. Lee, personal communication,

June 25, 2010). In the U.S. market, these percentages are significantly smaller, with

digital advertising accounting for roughly 3.8% and radio accounting for 0.79% of film

marketing budgets in 2009 (Hampp, 2010b). While newspaper readership is falling

precipitously in the U.S., it remains an important part of Hong Kong life and media plans.

The literacy rate in Hong Kong is 93%, and the territory boasts two English language

newspapers and over twelve Chinese language dailies (Chan et al., 2006; Martin & Shen,

2006). Commuting via public transportation is an important part of daily life in Hong

Kong, providing ample time for reading newspapers and magazines. Likewise, Hong

Kong has widespread internet connectivity (with 74.2% of its population considered to be

internet users as of 2013 [World Bank, 2014]), and online and mobile film advertising

have become increasingly viable strategies. While radio is not widely utilized for

traditional film advertising, it is seen as a useful publicity tool to foster discussion about

films (especially for more thought-provoking dramas and serious fare) (A. Lee, personal

communication, June 25, 2010).

Outdoor film marketing has recently seen an uptick within the U.S. market, but it

is still a marginal advertising platform in the U.S. In the first two quarters of 2010,

outdoor marketing accounted for only 3.4% of total domestic film marketing budgets ($59.8 million of $1.72 billion USD) (Hampp, 2010b). In contrast, an estimated 40% of film marketing budgets in Hong Kong are allocated to outdoor campaign materials (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). This reliance on outdoor advertising is a strategy informed by the unique urban environment of Hong Kong. The population density (a staggering 6,480 people per square kilometer [Hong Kong Informational Services Department, 2013]) and mobility of this population make outdoor advertising an effective means of reaching a large number of diverse consumers.

Placement of outdoor advertising in certain districts allows for targeted advertising and market segmentation. For instance, local marketing teams identify the business district of Central and the shopping areas of Causeway Bay and Tsim Sha Tsui as the best areas to target affluent and sophisticated audiences with expendable time and money. The shopping area of Mong Kok is identified as the best area in which to reach teen audiences (see Figure 4.21 for photos of Mong Kok's ample film advertisements) (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). Patterned flows of people and particular demographic groups thus profoundly inform the placement and content of marketing materials. In turn, the placement of ads targeting certain audience segments mark these spaces as the domain of these groups, thus shaping the physical landscape of the city.

While billboards and posters are prevalent in Hong Kong, the city's public transportation system lies at the heart of outdoor marketing campaigns in the territory.

The backbone of this system is the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) that carries an average of 4.34 million passengers per day (Hong Kong Information Services Department, 2013). According to Chan et al. (2006), 85% of the public use the MTR in an average month, 50% use the MTR in an average week, and 20% use it on an average day. Extending the MTR system into the more distant regions of the New Territories is the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR), used by 30% of the Hong Kong public in an average month, 15% in an average week, and 5% on an average day. In addition, buses, minibuses, taxis, and a cross-harbor ferry make public transportation in Hong Kong easy and efficient. All of these transportation modes also provide numerous unique platforms for advertising to a large portion of the densely populated and highly mobile population.

Figure 4.21: **Movie advertising in the Mong Kok district of Hong Kong.**

These public transportation platforms allow for (and sometimes necessitate) creative tailoring of marketing materials in order to meet challenges and seize opportunity in these dynamic spaces of routinized population flows. As Cronin (2010)

argues, subway stations are blank canvases free of geographic markers, and free to be branded at will. The station can thus become a globalized marketing non-space, adjacent to the city and populated by its people, but free from its cultural nuance and spatial dictates.

Within MTR stations, large posters line the walls and passageways, creating a stream of advertising messages as one walks to and from the train. Stations often feature multiple copies of the same ad, creating a repetitious message intended to break through crowd to deliver their message to busy and focused commuters traveling similar routes each day. Likewise, series of posters conveying a story or sequence of marketing messages are often placed in succession in order to follow commuters along their route. Figure 4.22 illustrates this strategy, as each successive *Shrek Forever After* poster along the corridor introduces a new character, but delivers a similar marketing message. Likewise, Figure 4.23 shows a series of mini-posters lining the wall beside an escalator. This strategy not only utilizes the linearity of one's trip up the escalator, but also capitalizes on what is termed "dwell time," "captive message time," or "an empty moment" (Cronin, 2010, p. 52, 59). These terms refer to downtime in which people are a captive audience for an advertising message and are actively seeking stimulation to fill these "empty moments." In the fast-paced urban atmosphere of Hong Kong, these moments are rare but valuable, as the hustle and bustle accentuates the emptiness of these moments and precipitates hunger for stimulation that is otherwise pervasive.

Figure 4.22: **Advertisements for *Shrek Forever After* (2010) line the walls of a Hong Kong MTR station.**

Figure 4.23: **Advertisements for *Shrek Forever After* (2010) line the wall next to an escalator in a Hong Kong MTR station.**

Film marketers further exploit these rare "empty moments" by placing locally-formatted materials strategically in waiting areas and vehicles. When waiting for a train, flat-screen televisions and light boxes opposite the platform show advertisements and movie trailers with amplified sound (see Figure 4.24). Once boarded, banner

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advertisements and digital displays along the top of the MTR compartment fill

commuters' "empty" commuting moments within crowded cars (see Figure 4.25).

Likewise, on buses and the KCR railway, small televisions stream news, advertisements,

and movie trailers to a captive audience. Bus shelters and bus facades are also used

extensively for film advertising, intended to reach waiting bus commuters and travelers

stuck in traffic.

Figure 4.24: **Hong Kong commuters watch a trailer for *Toy Story 3* (2010) as they wait for the train.**

While key art generally remains standardized, therefore, placement of these

materials in relation to the population's flows, rhythms, and routines offers means for

localization that melds campaigns into the fabric of commuters' everyday lives and

experiences of the urban landscape. Materials are further localized through their

formatting, as they must be manipulated and altered to accommodate the platforms

optimal for their display. International distributors play a central role in these decisions

and processes.

Figure 4.25: **Banner advertisements for *Shrek Forever After* (2010) line the top rail of the MTR in Hong Kong.**

Promotions and partnerships. While Hollywood marketing executives often resist explicit tailoring of marketing materials within a small market such as Hong Kong, promotions represent a significant opportunity for localization via distributor creativity, public participation, and environmental influence. Promotions generally take the form of events (such as premieres with local and international stars), product tie-ins, and public displays and installations. Because of Hong Kong's population density, promotions serve as a highly effective means of garnering widespread awareness of the film (A. Lee, personal communication, June 25, 2010). In contrast to a large and diffuse territory such

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as the U.S., a single event or public display is likely to reach a significant portion of the population.

Promotional efforts rely heavily on local press coverage and word-of-mouth for their success. Public participation is therefore integral in shaping and spreading these campaigns. Despite oversight and approvals by Hollywood executives, international distributors play a central role in designing and implementing these campaign elements, and the local population's actions play a vital and powerful role in their success.

During the summer of 2010, *Toy Story 3* broke records by becoming Hong Kong's highest-grossing animated feature film, and the territory's third-highest grossing film of all time (behind *Avatar* and *Titanic*) (Chu, 2010). This success can be attributed, in part, to extensive and successful local promotion efforts. *Toy Story 3*'s effective promotional campaign was multi-faceted, utilizing special events, product tie-ins, and a public installation.

In preparation for the film's summer release, the first two *Toy Story* films were shown in theaters in 3D throughout April and May to garner hype for the third film's release and ensure that young children were up-to-date with the franchise. In conjunction with the traditional marketing campaign for *Toy Story 3*, news broke that Hong Kong Disneyland would be opening Toy Story Land in 2011, featuring three new rides related to the franchise. By strategically timing the release of this information, Disney garnered additional press coverage for both the park and the film's impending release.

Like many blockbuster films (especially those targeting a family audience), *Toy Story 3*'s campaign capitalized on product tie-ins and corporate partnerships to increase the film's and its iconic characters' visibility and reach. While some partnerships reflected global deals between studios and other transnational corporations, many were brokered by local distributors with local or regional companies. The campaign for *Toy Story 3* featured a wide range of product tie-ins, including deals with the MTR, Fotomax, and Nuance-Watson, among others.

One of the most unique aspects of the *Toy Story 3* campaign in Hong Kong was a large-scale outdoor installation in Times Square, a busy shopping center in the Causeway Bay area. In addition to a replica of "Andy's room" within the mall, a giant replica of Buzz Lightyear and his army of green Martians occupied the plaza outside (see Figure 4.26). Along with its sheer magnitude, the display capitalized on the placeless cosmopolitanism of its location. As a high-end Hong Kong shopping center named Times Square, the facility advertises and sells products from around the world to eager consumers and tourists. The *Toy Story 3* display utilized and enhanced this fantastical placelessness, encouraging passersby to feel that they had entered the physical world of the (Western) film. In this way, the film was no longer merely an American export, but was an experiential product that filled a vacuum of placelessness left by this cosmopolitan consumer space. The film was inserted into the local urban space and became a physical part and transformative player in the Hong Kong consumer landscape.

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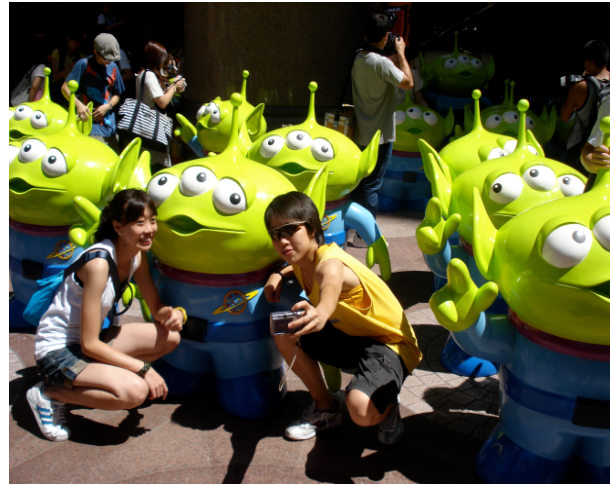
***Figure 4.26: Toy Story 3* (2010) promotional installation in the Times Square shopping district of Hong Kong.**

While this installation was created and implemented by Disney studios in partnership with their Hong Kong distribution team, these institutional players ceded some control over this promotion to the local press and public after constructing it. While many shoppers and passersby would see the installation in person, the true success of the display came from the word of mouth campaign that spread awareness to those who did not come in direct contact with it. The tactic thus relied heavily on press coverage from the local media and photo sharing by local people. Figure 4.26 shows the throngs of people posing for pictures with the character replicas. Through photo sharing, blogging, and social media posts, the local population thus became invaluable advertising vessels, localizing these transnational images by inserting their face and bodies into the scene of the film. By physically melding the world of the film with the urban landscape of Hong

Kong, the marketing campaign was effectively localized and personalized, helping to propel the film to box office success.

This analysis demonstrates that local players and forces in Hong Kong exert a degree of circumscribed power within the Hollywood film marketing system. Despite the economic and bureaucratic pressures to avoid formal tailoring of marketing materials, international distributors play a vital role as cultural intermediaries. By translating materials, making important decisions about campaign schedules and placement of materials, forming partnership deals, and organizing local promotions, distributors exert power within their constrained role, and are instrumental in the process of localizing marketing campaigns. Additionally, Hong Kong audiences deeply impact this localization process through their daily rhythms and routines, participation in promotions, and production of word of mouth advertising. Finally, the territory's physical space plays an important role in localizing otherwise standard materials. The unique urban environment acts to influence design, format, and placement of advertising materials, and provides physical spaces where the local world of Hong Kong and the Western world of the film's origin can meld.

This case study suggests that studio-driven, top-down, intentional forms of advertising localization are not the only means of addressing local audiences. Even when localization is not intended, organic forms of localization and hybridity emerge through the actions and influences of multiple players and factors. This case study thus reveals

room for local resistance, subversion, and transformation in the face of immense cultural and economic pressure to standardize.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of the international film marketplace in recent years is profoundly impacting the attitudes and practices of Hollywood filmmakers and marketers. Studios are now centrally concerned with the international appeal of their films, and actively mold films and their marketing campaigns around the perceived tastes of these audiences. International audiences today thus factor prominently in the greenlighting, casting, writing, production, distribution, and marketing of Hollywood films. This shift has elevated the voice of international marketers within all phases of the film production and release pipeline, significantly impacting the films we see and the ways in which they are framed and sold to the public.

Not all international markets are granted equal consideration, however. Lucrative markets (particularly China) are granted increasing recognition and specialized attention. Much of this special treatment and resultant tailoring is informed by cultural assumptions inherited from distributor feedback, past box office data, and reified personal and institutional myths. While the heightened importance of these lucrative markets have led studios to more carefully scrutinize and finely tune their constructions of these audiences, crude and sweeping cultural generalizations still function centrally when addressing much of the globe. Due to time, budgetary, legal, and logistical constraints, filmmakers and marketers attempt to appeal to the broadest possible audience while offending the

fewest number of people. Studio marketers therefore tend to employ standardized "universal" marketing campaigns, often based on domestic U.S. materials. Only in special cases and in particularly lucrative markets do marketing materials undergo extensive tailoring to enhance their local palatability.

While standardized global appeals are the norm and Hollywood studio executives have control over final approvals, this does not mean that they hold absolute power over the way films are framed, sold, or consumed on the global stage. International distributors manage the release of films at the local level, and thus hold power to create their own materials (sanctioned or unsanctioned), creatively translate existing materials, influence release dates and campaign rollouts, control media buys and formatting, and organize local promotions and publicity. In addition to distributors, local environments can shape the campaign in a profound manner, and local audiences retain power to read these marketing messages in diverse and resistant ways. Thus, while Hollywood studios hold significant power to shape the global film and popular culture landscape through their centralized control of filmmaking and film marketing, these materials remain cultural artifacts that can be assimilated by local audiences and shaped by local contexts.

International film marketers act as translators of the cinematic product. They guide filmmaking from start to finish by attempting to translate global audience preferences for filmmakers and studio executives. Next, they communicate to audiences (via the translatory texts they craft) what the film is about and why they should see it. Often this message is similar across the globe. At other times, the message changes based

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on perceived particularities in audience preference. But Hollywood marketers are not perfect translators. Despite their efforts and the insider knowledge they gain from international distributors, they do not speak the cultural language of their diverse audience base. To allow for effective translation, studios must cede control of the message to those who speak the cultural language—local distributors and audiences. But, as will be discussed in the following chapter, Hollywood studios thrive on centralized power and have a deeply held fear of losing control of their messaging.

CHAPTER 5: MEETING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Hollywood in the contemporary era is faced with a continuously changing landscape. Not only is the scale and scope of the international market ever increasing, but the media environment in which they work is perpetually in flux. As the satirical paper *The Onion* quips, "A major shift in the media landscape occurs approximately once every six seconds" ("Study: Major Shift in Media Landscape," 2013). While comical, there is a kernel of truth here with which we can all relate. We all (including myself as I write this) are in a constant struggle to keep pace with the ever-evolving media landscape, and Hollywood studios experience this struggle acutely. Faced with audiences' rapid adoption of new media platforms, studios are undergoing a period of profound instability as they struggle to keep up technologically, negotiate their relationship with these platforms and their users, and re-define their place within the new media ecosystem.

While Hollywood studios are compelled to adapt to the new environment, they are notoriously reticent to embrace change and slow to alter their entrenched practices. As discussed in Chapter 2, this aversion to adopting new media technologies has historical precedent. Only after fiercely and unsuccessfully fighting the rise of television did studios realize the opportunities it offered as an outlet for distributing their existing library content and marketing their theatrical fare. Studios similarly fought the adoption of the VCR and videocassette, only later coming to rely on home video as their most

lucrative revenue stream. We are witnessing a similar period of upheaval in the film industry today due to the rise of the internet and social media.

This chapter explores the ways in which one vital sector of the Hollywood film industry—marketing—is managing this upheaval while working within the institutional constraints of the studio system. As Bettina Sherick (2013), Senior Vice President of Digital Strategic Marketing for 20th Century Fox quips, "I adore my colleagues, but I always have to remind people that someone saved Hollywood with the 30 second TV spot because TV almost killed Hollywood. Someone has to save Hollywood from digital." This chapter documents the ways in which Hollywood marketers are attempting to "save Hollywood" while working within its institutional confines.

A New View of the Audience

As former film executive and editor of *Variety* Peter Bart explains, "The basic process of shooting a movie was exactly the same between 1920 and 1998. You know, nothing changed. Now, all of a sudden, everything has changed. That is, in many ways, the biggest story" (Bart, 2001). The introduction of new media technologies has transformed all aspects of filmmaking, distribution and exhibition. For film marketers, however, the most significant changes have been more psychological than physical. The rapid adoption of new media technology has fundamentally altered studios' perception of their viewers, leading to the perceived rise of a "participatory," "empowered" audience. Henry Jenkins (2006) proposes that, in today's "participatory culture," the line between producer and consumer is blurred. Instead of being separate entities, they are

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characterized as participants who interact with one another mutually. He acknowledges that they possess different levels of power in this interaction, but views media content creation as an increasingly fluid and collaborative process. This view is aligned with what other commentators have described as the rise of "prosumers" (Toffler, 1980) or "produsers" (Bruns, 2005) who have gained a creative voice via the dissemination of inexpensive and easy-to-use production technology and new, more democratic distribution platforms.

Rhetoric invoked by Hollywood marketers reflects this new construction of their audiences as powerful, active participants in their entertainment and marketing experience. In a panel discussion at the industry conference Digital Hollywood, Bettina Sherick (Senior VP of Digital Strategic Marketing at 20th Century Fox) and Xavier Kochhar (managing partner at Media Link, LLC) discussed a shift in Hollywood marketing from one-way communication to a two-way dialogue with consumers. As Kochhar (2013) explains, "It's no longer enough to say 'here's our message, take it or leave it' because they don't have to take it anymore." At this and other industry events, the overarching mantra is that "the fan" has become the most powerful force in Hollywood today, and marketers must cater to their desires accordingly (Miller, 2014).

Consumer involvement in film marketing is not a new phenomenon, but new media platforms have enabled a depth of engagement, breadth of audience reach, and level of visibility not attainable in previous eras. Since film's introduction as an entertainment format, it has been a socially consumed product. People went to the theater

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to have a collective entertainment experience, and they were encouraged to discuss their experiences interpersonally. The rise of home entertainment formats, big screen televisions, and high-definition streaming services have gravely threatened the social practice of theatergoing in recent years. In this environment, studios fight to maintain the legitimacy of the theatrical release, and foster social engagement around the film. An integral part of this strategy is to promote films as cultural events. Moviegoers are encouraged to go to the semi-public space of the theater to view together, share their laughter and emotions together, and later discuss films together as they would news or current events. As Television Bureau of Advertising chief research officer Stacey Lynn Schulman explains, in an era of virtual connections, "We can pretty much function without interacting with another person. Which means we need something to connect around — pop culture works pretty well for that" (Miller, 2014). Studios strive to position their films at the center of these cultural conversations and points of social connection.

Marketing tactics today referred to as "buzz marketing," "viral marketing" or "word of mouse marketing" have their roots in traditional word of mouth marketing, a tactic long recognized as a valuable tool for promoting Hollywood movies. In studies by Austin (1981) and Faber & O'Guinn (1984), word of mouth and experiential information (such as film trailers) were found to be significantly more useful and influential for consumers than non-experiential or non-social information (such as critics' reviews and static advertisements). With the proliferation of digital platforms in recent years, this

already powerful word of mouth marketing has morphed into a more wide-reaching and powerful form online. This shift is marked by an acceleration and proliferation of online reviews and discussions, the ability to track this conversation and gather data on those participating, as well as increased participation of consumers as creators and disseminators of creative film marketing materials (i.e. user-generated content).

As Karen Bible, box office analyst for Exhibitor Relations Co. explains, "Word-of-mouth has always been a very effective tool at either propelling or sinking movies. Now, with social media, it travels at the speed of light" (Luna, 2013). According to a study conducted by Penn, Schoen and Berland and *The Hollywood Reporter*, 72% of social media users immediately post opinions online after watching a film, and 8% post while they're still watching the film (Penn, Schoen and Berland, 2012). Due largely to the visibility and perceived impartiality of these opinions, these consumer reviews are rapidly supplanting professional critics' reviews as a key source of information for product selection (Hon, 2010). In this environment, social media and the word of mouth marketing it precipitates can propel a film to success and sustain it throughout its theatrical run and subsequent windows (Chang & Ki, 2005). This was the case for the sleeper hit *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014). While the film's source material was relatively unknown and buzz leading up to the film's release was limited, viewers' post-release social media activity propelled the film to resounding long-term success (yielding $774 million at the worldwide box office and plans for a sequel).

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Alternatively, this accelerated and amplified word of mouth marketing can have a profoundly negative impact. In 2009, this phenomenon came to be known briefly as "The Brüno Effect" due to the rapid decline of Sacha Baron Cohen's film *Brüno*—a crude comedy about a flamboyant Austrian television host. After generating $14.4 million on opening night, it suffered a staggering 39.2% drop in ticket sales the next day. By the following weekend, its box office take had declined by 30% from the previous weekend. While evidence is purely correlational, caustic Twitter reactions were largely blamed for audience defection (Dodes, 2012; Hampp, 2009). A small study conducted by market research firm 360i compared Twitter traffic for *Brüno* and three other summer films. *Brüno* was found to have the highest second-day box office decline and the highest proportion of negative tweets (21%) (Hampp, 2009). While the traditional pre-release marketing campaign was considered a success due to a satisfactory opening day, Twitter activity was blamed for quickly undermining marketers' efforts to generate "want-to-see." Within the first two weeks of the film's release, the percentage of people who reported they would *not* see the film doubled to 31% (Dodes, 2012).

Like word of mouth marketing, user-generated content (UGC) also has a long history within movie culture. Fans have been producing fan art, fan fiction, and homemade videos for decades. But processes of digitization, the democratization of production technology, and the creation of distribution platforms such as YouTube have greatly enhanced the level of sophistication and potential visibility of these fan-created materials (Jenkins, 1992, 2006). Fan creations now function as marketing materials for

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films (for better or worse), as they have the potential to reach a very large audience and elicit impressions of the film. These materials have particular appeal due to their organic feel and the status conferred to users by discovering and sharing obscure cultural nuggets. There is inherent risk associated with user-generated content, however. By sampling from studios' intellectual property and creating and disseminating their own materials, fan creators can challenge conventional portrayals of the film, subvert the intended brand image, and encourage divergent audience readings. Thus, as will be discussed in more detail, marketers have a fraught relationship with user-generated content, as it can enhance awareness of a film, but undermine marketers' ability to orchestrate a cohesive campaign.

With the rise of social media marketing and user-generated content, commentators and marketers have been quick to embrace an image of the internet as a democratic, utopian space wherein consumers are empowered and free (Zwick et al., 2008). As one prominent marketing expert asserts, "Marketing in an interactive world is a collaborative process with the marketer helping the consumer to buy and the consumer helping the marketer to sell" (Peppers, 1999). Some commentators thus promote the idea of "affective economics," attempting to capitalize on consumers' emotional ties and active engagement with products in order to establish loyalty and recruit "brand advocates" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 61), while others strive to create "brand communities" that provide a social structure around products and connect consumers and marketers (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). At industry events such as Digital Hollywood and the American

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Film Market, the terms "brand advocates," "brand evangelists," "communities," "voluntary army," and "conversations" were used repeatedly to describe ideal film fans and their relationship with the studio. This discourse revolves around the central thesis that the customer is now empowered in the new media environment, and marketers must appeal to their preferences, harness their energies, and amplify their voices.

These utopian claims of audience empowerment, however, conceal the economic mechanisms underlying these new marketing practices. In this participatory model, consumers provide "immaterial labor" (Lazzarato, 1996) or "free labor" (Terranova, 2000) for marketers. In Lazzarato's formulation, "immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work'—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 133). These activities contribute significant value for companies, but users are not compensated for their efforts. While not conceived as work in the traditional sense, fan activities such as posting a trailer on Facebook, following an actress on Twitter, or writing a movie review or fan fiction can add considerable value to a film. This free creative and social labor of ordinary people is increasingly recognized and harnessed by media companies, and is often used to replace work traditionally conducted by paid personnel.[47]

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[47] User-generated content is sometimes used as a means of recruiting marketing talent into the mainstream Hollywood marketing system. Michael McIntyre, head of marketing agency mOcean, explains that he looks to fan trailers when searching for new hires. He

When studio personnel speak of fan labor, they often discuss the harnessing of people's "passions" to mobilize them as film evangelists (Arrieta, 2013). According to this rhetoric, audiences are compensated for their labor with the chance to pursue their innate personal passions. In reality, however, marketers strive to induce consumers to spread *the studio's* preferred messages rather than their own impassioned thoughts and opinions. In today's media environment, everyone has access to their own distribution channels via social media. To a certain degree, therefore, amateur producers of content compete with studios for audience attention. Studios thus strive to co-opt these voices to spread their own marketing messages and drive attention back to studio-produced cinematic fare. While Hollywood marketers speak of a newly empowered audience, therefore, they actively seek to harness this power for their own purposes. Invoking audience passions is a convenient means of glossing over the ethical implications of exploiting fans' immaterial labor by framing their work as a voluntary labor of love.

In this "participatory" space, consumers are not only providing free creative and marketing labor, but are also subjecting themselves to extensive corporate surveillance. These activities provide a vast and valuable source of market research data for companies (Andrejevic, 2007; Turow, 2011). Traditionally, studios relied on "tracking" data (based on landline phone surveys) to gauge the popularity of their upcoming releases, make box office projections, and tweak marketing campaigns as needed. Recently, there has been a

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quips, "They're doing it almost for free out there…Let's bring them to Hollywood and ruin them, break their hearts" (Kehe & Palmer, 2013b).

dramatic shift to supplement this traditional form of survey-based market research with data gleaned from "social listening" and search data (Lang & Cunningham, 2013; McClintock, 2012; Robehmed, 2015; C. Tasto, personal communication, November 8, 2013).

Studios now hire third party market research firms such as Fizziology, PreAct and Aspect Ratio that specialize in "social listening"—a euphemism for corporate surveillance of social media platforms. These firms track social media chatter to provide data and insights about the scale of a film's social media presence, the tone of online conversation about the film (gleaned via sentiment analysis), and demographic and geographic information about the fan base (see Figure 5.1 for a sample report provided by Fizziology) (Carlson, 2013; McClintock, 2012; Robehmed, 2015). According to Ben Carlson, co-founder of Fizziology, the firm is working on 70% of the major releases of 2015, while also helping studios to identify popular film source material and talent for future development (Robehmed, 2015).

Recognizing the value of online surveillance, traditional Hollywood players United Talent Agency (UTA) and Rentrak teamed up to launch PreAct in 2014 as an add-on to traditional survey-based tracking services provided by Rentrak. PreAct monitors the social media presence of all major releases a year before release (versus traditional tracking's six-week lead time). This allows subscribers to view competitor data and adjust their marketing approach to be responsive to social media reactions. As Senior Vice President of business development at Rentrak, Steve Buck, explains, "Measuring

things a year out is a difference between course correction and bracing for impact"

(Robehmed, 2015). Unlike expensive and time-consuming surveys polling a small

audience sample, listening platforms allow for protracted audience surveillance on a mass

scale.
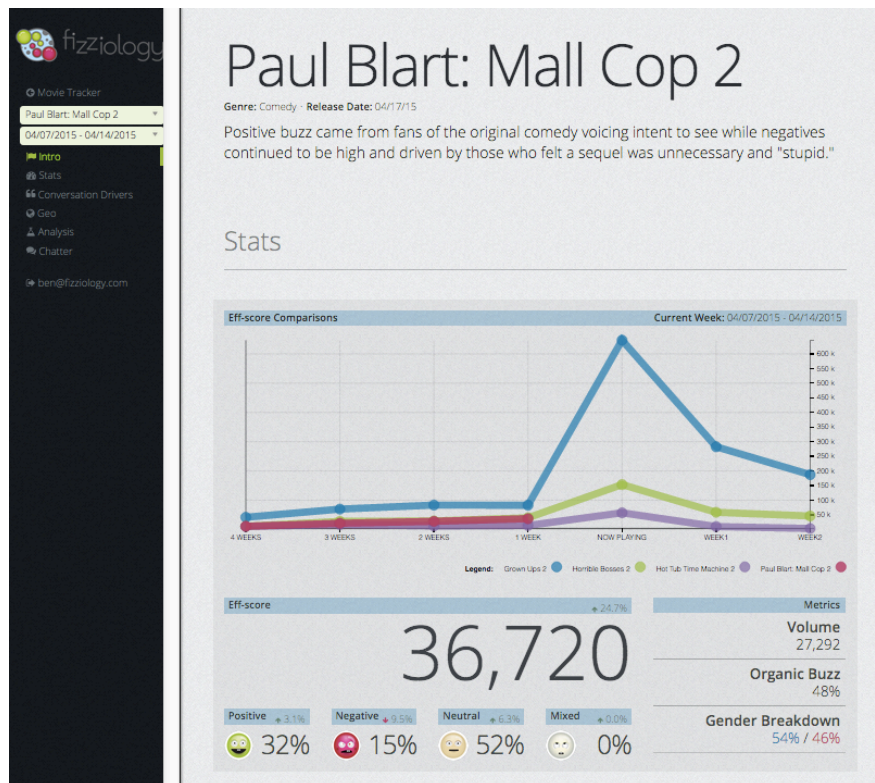
Figure 5.1: **Part of a Fizziology report on** *Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2* **(2015), showing 32% of online chatter about the film was positive (Image courtesy Fizziology via Robehmed, 2015).**

Demonstrating the increased attention paid to films' social media presence

leading up to release, industry trade publications now frequently report box office

projections by referencing social media metrics as well as traditional survey-based

tracking numbers. For example, when reporting on *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), *The*

Wrap reports, "'The Dark World' is burning it up on Twitter. On Monday, five days out from its opening, it was mentioned in 125,570 tweets, compared to 95,609 of 'Iron Man 3' at a comparable point. Its Facebook profile isn't as strong, but it has more than 8 million likes" (Cunningham, 2013). While these figures ignore the tone of these social media mentions (and thus cannot be used as a proxy for "want-to-see"), they are often invoked as a stand-in for general audience awareness.

Studios additionally utilize search data to track movies' popularity online. Google, for instance, claims that it can predict box office performance with 94% accuracy by looking at search volume for a film's title, combined with key release data (e.g. number of screens and release date) (Chen, 2013). As a result, industry trade publications have also begun reporting these metrics. For example, *Variety* reports: "*Winter Soldier* has 77.6 million trailer views to *Thor*'s 61 million with similar Buzz, and 527,000 searches to *Thor*'s 383,000, so Cap should be set for an opening above *Thor*'s $86 million…*Thor* does have the edge on Twitter with 980,000 tweets, but search volume is a better indicator of interest among a wider audience" (Bauckhage, 2014).

Consumers' everyday online activities thus become a valuable source of information (and free market research labor) that provides studios with marketing insights and helps them to shape their campaigns by identifying target audiences, potential selling points, and problem areas. While traditional survey-based tracking techniques require participants to opt into the research, these new forms of market research via social media and search data rely on surveillance tactics and are conducted

unbeknownst to research subjects. Market researchers defend these practices by explaining that data is collected anonymously and in the aggregate, that users are willingly making their thoughts and opinions about films public, and that these types of surveillance tactics ultimately work in the audience's best interest by helping studios create products that they will enjoy. Social media platforms are thus framed as empowering spaces wherein audiences can provide feedback to studios and voice their opinions. Despite this rhetoric, however, the fact remains that studios are actively tracking users' online activity and conversations without their permission or knowledge (thus endangering consumer privacy), are co-opting public speech for commercial purposes, and are utilizing audiences' free creative and social labor to maximize corporate profits.

Individuals who share marketing content on social media platforms, tout films within their social networks, and create user-generated fan materials provide additional free labor on top of the value they contribute via their surveilled everyday online activities. As studios come to value and harness this immaterial audience labor, these activities increasingly impact the greenlight, hiring, distribution, and marketing decisions studios make. The following sections explore how studios' changing perception and treatment of their audiences as participatory and empowered, but also as a source of immaterial labor, impacts each of these stages and the resultant media landscape.

Greenlight Decisions: Valuing the Niche

As studios come to view audiences as increasingly participatory and empowered via social media, these audiences are taken into consideration at earlier and earlier phases of planning and production, starting at greenlight decisions. As discussed in Chapter 2, market research tactics have been employed by filmmakers and exhibitors since cinema's early history in order to identify audience preferences and tailor films and marketing materials to these tastes. Because studios had a monopoly on distribution channels, however, audiences had a limited number of viewing choices. As a result, Hollywood studios often adopted the *Field of Dreams* "if you build it, they will come" approach. Under this model, marketers were tasked with creating or cobbling together an audience for their fare post-hoc and convincing them to attend their movie over the known and quantifiable competition. In today's media marketplace, studios face competition from all angles. Not only do they compete with new channels such as Amazon, Netflix and HBO, but almost every individual has access to production technology (e.g. a cell phone) and distribution channels (e.g. YouTube).[48] This proliferation of channels and content has made marketers' job of creating audiences from scratch extremely difficult. Instead, therefore, marketers attempt to lure pre-formed audience groups and recruit them as active fans and brand evangelists for their films.

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[48] These amateur producers are incredibly prolific. Approximately 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube, 2015, "Statistics").

As discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to international markets, filmmakers and marketers in today's environment must therefore identify the audience(s) for a movie before making it. This practice serves to reverse the traditional timeline whereby marketing departments entered the fray at the tail end of production to begin building an audience for the film. This shift amplifies the voice of marketers in early greenlight and production phases, and has significantly impacted the type of fare produced in modern Hollywood. As Chapter 4 suggests, marketing's move to the center of filmmaking practices, and heightened focus on audiences' perceived preferences, has led to a reliance on pre-established storylines and brands. In this atmosphere, movies based on film or television franchises, books, and brands with built-in fan bases have become the gold standard for greenlighting.

As built-in fan bases become increasingly important to studios, crowdfunding has emerged as an attractive experiment in raising funds, mobilizing fan bases, and exploiting their immaterial labor. The 2014 release of the film version of *Veronica Mars* was the first large-scale test of this tactic. The creator of the television show, Rob Thomas, launched a Kickstarter campaign for a feature-length movie based on the canceled series. Fans of the show mobilized in droves, with 91,585 supporters ultimately contributing a total of $5.7 million. As Ivan Askwith, lead strategist for the Kickstarter campaign explains, "For Warner Bros, the concern wasn't the money — what they were interested in was whether there was any meaningful audience for a *Mars* movie" (Miller, 2014). In this case, therefore, crowdfunding was viewed more as a marketing and market research

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mechanism than as a particularly important source of funding. By demonstrating their willingness to pay for a film upfront, fans convinced Warner Bros. that there was, indeed, a market for the film. They also demonstrated their willingness to be evangelists for the product. As producer Nicolas Gonda explains, studios assume that fans willing to pre-invest in a movie will also be eager to spread the word about the film in which they feel they have a financial and emotional stake. As he suggests, "No one is more capable of expanding your audience than your audience" (Gonda, 2013).

Veronica Mars fans therefore contributed to the film both financially and through their immaterial labor as market research subjects and grassroots marketers. Due to this contribution of free marketing labor, Warner Bros. spent less than $1 million on traditional marketing for the film, instead relying on the social media activity of their built-in fan base (Cunningham, 2014b). While lackluster box office performance of the *Veronica Mars* film ($3.5 million) tempered enthusiasm for the crowdfunding strategy at the studio level, it remains an important illustration of how shifting perceptions of the audience and its power are reconfiguring the filmmaking process and bringing marketing concerns (i.e. identification of a core and pre-existing audience) to the fore.

The identification of these core audience groups has been facilitated by surveillance techniques adopted by social listening platforms. Studios have traditionally utilized large-scale phone survey data that provides an overview of American audience awareness and sentiment. Because of their scope, these methods rarely detect small, but passionate, audience segments that can sometimes carry a smaller budget movie. Social

listening techniques are more amenable to identifying and monitoring these smaller, select, niche groups. Once identified and tracked via these platforms, social media marketing tactics enable studios to directly target these niche groups with advertising and mobilize them for further marketing activity.

The Fault in our Stars (2014), for instance, with a small production budget of $12 million, was initially projected to make a solid, but modest, profit with an estimated opening weekend box office take of $25 million (Cunningham, 2014c). While targeting the lucrative teen market, the film's heavy storyline (about two teens battling cancer) and the film's release date (putting it in direct competition with Tom Cruise's tentpole *Edge of Tomorrow*) did not portend a runaway hit. As the release date neared, however, Fox was pleasantly surprised by the tidal wave of social media attention the film received.

This online activity was driven by a passionate young female fan base for the novel and for various individuals tied to the project. Even before the film's release, there were 43 Tumblr blogs dedicated to the book. Meanwhile, the author, John Green, had 2.48 million Twitter followers, 1.55 million Facebook fans, and a YouTube network boasting over 2 million subscribers and 600 million views. He was on set throughout the filming, posting frequent updates for his fans and boosting awareness and anticipation for the film. Likewise, star Shailene Woodley (newly popular from her roles in the *Divergent* [2014] series and *The Spectacular Now* [2013]) had 650,000 Twitter followers and 170 million Facebook fans at the time of the film's release (Zakarin, 2014b). Fox was able to successfully mobilize this built-in fan base of young, passionate females (who

demographically tend to be heavy social media users) to spread the word about *The Fault in our Stars* to the wider social media universe. As producer Wyck Godfrey explains, "Our main strategy with 'Fault' has been to get it in front of core audience, people who have read and loved the book, hope they like it and then get the word out" (Cunningham, 2014d).

This strategy was wildly successful. The Facebook page for *The Fault in our Stars* had 3.7 million fans by the time of release, and Twitter mentions of the film in the week leading up to its release outstripped those for big-budget summer blockbusters *Godzilla*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, and *Maleficent*. The first trailer for the film was viewed 17 million times on YouTube and "liked" more than any film trailer in history up to that point (Cunningham, 2014c). Based on this social media success, Fox adjusted their box office projections upward, predicting an opening weekend of $35 to $40 million (Shaw, 2014b). This forecast still underestimated the power of social media as a predictive force and a persuasive marketing tool. The film opened at $48 million and went on to gross $125 million domestically and another $182 million internationally. To analysts' surprise, the small-budget, teen and female-centered drama beat its big-budget, Tom Cruise-helmed blockbuster competition *Edge of Tomorrow* on opening weekend. *Edge of Tomorrow* floundered with a $28 million opening weekend and an overall domestic box office take of $100 million. With a $178 million budget, *Edge of Tomorrow* only turned a profit due to its international release that garnered an additional $269 million.

As discussed in Chapter 4, studios still gravitate toward large blockbuster action flicks that appeal to the broadest possible audiences across the globe, but successes such as *The Fault in our Stars* present a powerful counter-balance to this impulse. Social media allows studios to find, target, mobilize, and measure passionate niche markets that would otherwise go unnoticed and underserved. While problematic in its use of surveillance tactics and reduction of unique audiences to measurable entities, social media marketing and market research nonetheless serve as the single greatest hope for the survival of small-budget, niche-targeted movies at the studio level.

As addressed in Chapter 4, the desire to attract foreign markets via big-budget action flicks has led to a scaling back of movies made for (and starring) women and racial minorities. But, as Lucas Shaw of *The Wrap* notes, women and African Americans tend to be heavy users of social media. Thus, it should not be a surprise when female and African American-targeted films repeatedly "over-perform" at the box office (Shaw, 2014b). As former studio executive and founder of the Black List, Franklin Leonard, quips, "I'm boggled whenever black films do well by the constant refrain that they've over-performed. How many black films have to 'overperform' before we change the model for expectations?" (Shaw, 2013).[49] Studios have been slow to recognize the power of social media as a market research and marketing tool, and thus still tend to underestimate their power to draw these social media-savvy audiences in droves. As

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[49] For example, *Best Man Holiday* (2013), *Lee Daniels' The Butler* (2013), and *The Heat* (2013) were all reported to have over-performed at the box office.

social listening and social media marketing become more ingrained parts of studio culture, however, greenlighting and marketing decisions may shift accordingly.

Interest-based niche groups have also gained recent recognition from studios via social media. Religious markets, for example, as socially-embedded institutions with active online and offline communities, have come to the fore as potentially lucrative markets. This recognition led to the recent slew of religious-themed theatrical releases including *Noah* (2014), *Son of God* (2014), *Heaven Is For Real* (2014) and *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014). Marketing campaigns for these movies relied on the grassroots involvement of churches and religious groups, micro-targeted online ad buys, and strategically-planned sneak screenings to generate positive social media chatter amongst Christian audiences (Lang, 2014; Zakarin, 2014a). Despite recent studio interest in these films, however, they face inherent difficulties when traveling abroad to non-Christian markets. This poses a powerful deterrent to investing too much in these and other niche-targeted movies, as there are perceived limits to the overall success these films can achieve in the globalized film marketplace. Nevertheless, new social media-based market research and marketing techniques have been instrumental in constructing these interest-based niche groups in the minds of studio marketers and framing them as viable target audience groups.

As fan groups and niche audiences gain increased institutional recognition via social media, they are factored into important greenlight and production decisions. It must be noted, however, that attracting a large international audience remains the primary

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objective for big-budget Hollywood fare in today's marketplace. Developing film franchises also remains a key strategy, as marketers can carry their fan base from one film to the next. Thus, despite modest gains in diversity within small budget and acquired projects, the push toward male-centered, white star-studded, special effects-laden action flicks based on pre-sold materials remains the gold standard. By targeting the young male "fanboy," studios attempt to mobilize a passionate, involved fan base for marketing purposes while also appealing to a broad international audience.

Hiring Decisions: Leveraging Social Media Savvy

The perception of a newly empowered audience via social media also impacts hiring decisions—from studio executive hires to individual film casting. At the executive level, recognition of a shifting media landscape and the need for corporate changes to meet the demands of this new environment have led to profound shifts in personnel strategy. The elevation of individuals with digital experience has become commonplace. As *Variety*'s Andrew Wallenstein (2013) describes:

> Now the digital realm that has been relegated to the backwaters of these businesses is becoming the breeding ground for the new kings and queens…Websites, social media, mobile devices– these things that occupied the fringes of a studio's strategic outlook have to be brought front and center, and it certainly isn't going to be the same old incestuous circle of executives playing musical chairs who can be counted on to make that happen.

Warner Bros.' 2013 promotion of Kevin Tsujihara to CEO, for instance, is indicative of this shifting mindset. He was promoted from his role as President of Home Entertainment, a role involving extensive work with new media platforms and gaming worlds. Shortly thereafter, Paramount's head of digital entertainment, Amy Powell, was

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placed at the helm of Paramount Television in an effort to infuse new life and innovation into the lapsed studio arm. Several months later, Sony replaced 22-year marketing veteran Marc Weinstock with digital marketing executive Dwight Caines as head of domestic theatrical marketing for the Columbia TriStar Motion Pictures Group. Tellingly, trade publication *The Wrap*'s headline announcing the promotion reads: "Sony Names Digital Native Dwight Caines President of Theatrical Marketing" (Lang & Shaw, 2013a). Despite Caines' extensive qualifications, his youthfulness and digital prowess are touted as the prime reasons for his promotion. In a rapidly evolving media landscape, these qualities are viewed as increasingly valuable.

By filling leadership roles with young, innovative, digitally-savvy thinkers, studios hope to infuse their aging businesses with new life and flexibility. These personnel shifts, while notable, are incremental. Executives from Hollywood's "old guard" still dominate the studio space, and helm huge corporate behemoths that are slow to adapt to new technological realities and audience formulations.

At the lower rungs of studio hierarchies, digital and social media marketing are also gaining recognition as important parts of studio business. As recently as 2010, studios' social media efforts were run largely by unpaid college interns (Woodward, 2013). As a new college graduate in 2009, one Warner Bros. interactive marketing coordinator assumed responsibility for the social media presence of Warner's entire slate of movies as a pet project. As she describes, she had extensive freedom in these early days, as executives and filmmakers cared very little about social media. Today, she has a

title (Social Media Manager), a staff, and is subject to much more oversight and input from various stakeholders (A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). As Jonathan Tavss (former digital marketing executive at Fox) explains, Warner Bros. is forward-thinking in this regard. As of 2013, Fox did not yet have a department dedicated to social media (Tavss, 2013). While studios are still slow to recognize the value of this platform, they are beginning to take notice and staff accordingly.

When assembling specific film projects, social media marketing considerations are also an increasingly important factor. Each individual involved with a film—writer, producer, director, actor—potentially has a built-in fan base on social media. As studios assess the benefits of hiring an artist, this increasingly factors into their decisions (Carlson, 2013; Dunlap, 2013). As casting director Mike Fenton explains, "If it came down to two professional actors, one of whom had great visibility in social media and one who was barely recognizable, we'd go with the one who could get the numbers" (Hod, 2015).[50] As a result, studios can now order casting reports from social listening platforms like Fizziology that evaluate actors' social media presence and the demographic breakdown of their online fan base (Carlson, 2013; Robehmed, 2015).

Talent with a powerful social media presence can be mobilized as an important conduit for delivering marketing messages and promoting virality. Beyoncé, for instance, was hired to perform a song for Focus Features' *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015). Her

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[50] Due to this tendency, a small cottage industry has emerged to help actors improve their casting viability by gaining social media visibility (Hod, 2015).

impressive social media presence was subsequently utilized as a powerful means of spreading marketing messages about the film. She posted a 15-second teaser trailer on Instagram that instantly reached her 30 million followers. As one movie marketing strategist explains, "You hire Beyoncé to do a song and have her tell people about a movie? It's the studios' attempt to remove the corporate onus. It's them saying, 'Let's let this be a groundswell from someone who's got cred'" (Lee, 2014). By recruiting talent, therefore, studios are hiring both a creative contributor to the film (e.g. an actor, musician, or director) *and* an opinion leader capable of convincing audiences to see a film.

Due to the value of their social media followings and role as opinion leaders, several stars have attempted to gain compensation for their social media activity. Kevin Hart, for instance, tried to negotiate payment from Sony for promoting his film to his 14 million Twitter followers. Sony executive Clint Culpepper's reaction (in a leaked email to Sony Pictures co-chair Amy Pascal) reads:

> It's not as if we paid him 3M and 4M respectively for his last 2 films thinking he might be nominated. We paid for his ability to open a film which included his social media savvy. I feel like this is something that should be negotiated going into the film as opposed to after the fact. It feels tantamount to buying a car and then upon picking it up being told that the engine will cost extra (Weisman, 2014).

By likening stars' social media activity to the "engine" of a car, Culpepper demonstrates the perceived importance of online fans, and social media's profound impact on casting and marketing activities.

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Using talent as vessels for marketing messages can be a risky venture, however. In an industry where marketers value message consistency and centralized control, using talent's voices to deliver marketing messages cedes tremendous power to these sometimes unpredictable figureheads. While stars are often contractually barred from revealing key plot points or releasing unauthorized shots from the set, they retain a great deal of freedom to discuss the film at will. In an effort to control and guide this discourse, studios often provide stars with marketing assets (e.g. photos, trailers, or artwork) to share via their social media feeds (A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). While this tactic fails to capitalize on the unique voices of the talent, it promotes consistent and safe messaging surrounding the film's release. In this way, marketers can capitalize on relationships forged between stars and their fans, harness the immaterial labor of audiences via their fan activities and interactions, and guide this energy toward studio-sanctioned activities and discourse.

Distribution Plans: Tailored Approaches

Hollywood's perception of a newly empowered audience, and its efforts to capitalize on this power for marketing gain, has also led to significant shifts in distribution practices. The proliferation of media channels and platforms, and the choice it offers audiences, poses an ongoing threat to traditional studio distribution models. Today, audiences can download films online (legally or illegally); stream films to their computer, television, tablet, phone, gaming system, or other device; view DVDs or BluRays at home; watch movies on broadcast or cable television; or visit the theater.

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While some studios are experimenting with releasing films via non-theatrical platforms, most are fighting to maintain the legitimacy of the traditional theatrical and windowed release system.[51] Hollywood studios are thus deeply invested in selling films as social events. Efforts to reassert the social nature of films and raise them to event status have sparked increased interest and investment in social media marketing as a means of amplifying the public conversation surrounding a film's release. As discussed in Chapter 4, these efforts (along with piracy concerns) have led to shortened release windows and increased reliance on worldwide day-and-date film releases. Since consumers can now share marketing materials and spread the word about films independently of a carefully planned release and marketing schedule, studios are abandoning meticulously constructed, staggered distribution plans. Instead, they often favor a worldwide theatrical release that can maximize buzz and position the film's release as a global cultural event.

The adoption of audience surveillance techniques via social listening platforms also impacts release schedules and distribution plans. Social listening platforms such as PreAct track social media chatter surrounding films and their competition for a year prior to release. If a film is faring poorly in the social sphere in relation to its competition, studios can adjust release schedules accordingly (Robehmed, 2015).

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[51] The day-and-date release of *The Interview* (2014) simultaneously on theatrical and online platforms, while originally unplanned, serves as an important experiment in alternative release strategies. Likewise, The Weinstein Company is planning a simultaneous release of the *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* sequel (2015) on Netflix and on IMAX screens (Cunningham, 2014g).

Efforts to mobilize audiences' immaterial labor and utilize their perceived power in the online sphere have also led to experiments in incorporating audience voices more directly into distribution plans. One of the most significant of these experiments involves the platform Eventful.com and its Demand It! service. Through this online feature, users are prompted to "demand" an event in their local area by providing their zip code, gender, and email address. They are then encouraged to spread the word about the "demand" either through Eventful.com's in-site social network, by posting a call to action or the Eventful widget on their Facebook and Twitter pages, or by creating custom event calendars and sharing them with friends (Eventful.com, "Demand It!"). The service was initially designed for musicians, intended to help them engage with fans and make informed decisions about where to take their tours. The site claims a unique advantage in reaching a young, engaged, entertainment-oriented, social media-savvy audience that is valuable for marketers, but thought to be cynical and resistant to traditional marketing pitches. By using rhetoric of rebellion and activism (i.e. "demand it!"), Eventful.com is designed to circumvent this cynicism and redirect this energy in support of marketers and performers.

While Eventful.com began as a site for music events, it has expanded to include political events, social causes, and film releases. Its first foray into film marketing was its partnership with Paramount Pictures for the 2007 *Paranormal Activity* campaign. Shot on a handheld camera for $11,000 by first-time director Oren Peli, the horror film chronicles the tribulations of a young couple as they use surveillance cameras to record the haunting

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of their suburban home. After traveling the film festival circuit for several years and gaining acclaim within independent film and horror fan communities, Paramount acquired the film with plans to remake it with a slick Hollywood look. Faced with financial obstacles, however, Paramount decided to distribute the film in its original form (Horn, 2009). In an effort to maintain brand consistency and protect the film's integrity as a low-budget independent production, the studio decided to eschew a more traditional marketing approach and design a campaign based almost solely on word of mouth.

The campaign for *Paranormal Activity* started with 13 midnight preview screenings on college campuses around the country. The goal of these screenings was twofold. First, marketers filmed audience reactions during the screenings for subsequent use in television spots. Second, marketers encouraged these college-aged viewers to tweet their responses en masse at two o'clock in the morning, flooding the Twitter-sphere with chatter about *Paranormal Activity* (Hampp, 2010a).

As buzz spread, Paramount decided to partner with Eventful.com to create a novel distribution/marketing campaign wherein users could "demand" where the film would be screened next. In this way, audiences' direct input shaped the film's distribution schedule. As the campaign gained momentum and venues sold out, Paramount announced that it would release the film nationwide if one million demands were posted via Eventful.com. In response, more than 1.3 million fans demanded the film in three weeks, making it the most successful campaign in Eventful.com's history. Fulfilling its promise, Paramount released *Paranormal Activity* nationwide, and the film quickly

became the studio's most profitable film to date. With only $11,000 in production costs and $20 million in marketing costs, *Paranormal Activity* garnered over $170 million domestically and an additional $85 million abroad (Hampp, 2010a). As a thank you (and as a form of compensation for their labor), Paramount gave the 1.3 million "demanders" a 24-hour window to reply with permission to include their name on the DVD credits. The studio received an unexpected 170,000 responses, but agreed to include all the names in the credits. As Paramount's Vice President of Interactive Marketing, Amy Powell, remarked, "We had to have 10 names go by every tenth of a second—but it was great they could feel included in the process" (Hampp, 2010a).

Since the success of the *Paranormal Activity* campaign, Eventful has partnered with studios on a variety of movie campaigns. While none have garnered the success that *Paranormal Activity* did, the tactic remains noteworthy in its reconfiguration of the traditionally meticulously planned distribution schedule. By mobilizing audience labor and invoking empowering language like "demand it," studios gained invaluable demographic and geographic data about their fan base, and tailored a unique release schedule to these granular audiences.

By encouraging this grassroots pseudo-activism and including audience voices in these distribution decisions, studios fostered emotional investment on the part of potential viewers. These invested viewers, in turn, were mobilized as powerful marketing assets as they evangelized for the film via the Demand It! campaign and beyond. As evidenced by experiments such as this, studios' perception of an empowered audience, and their efforts

to measure and harness this power for marketing purposes, increasingly impacts the distribution strategies employed in the digital age. While studios struggle to retain traditional operational systems, the evolving technological landscape necessitates these shifts toward procedural flexibility and audience engagement.

Marketing: Navigating Change and Inertia

As the previous sections illustrate, studios' perception of an audience increasingly knowable and empowered via technology has (among other things) significantly impacted the way in which development, personnel, and distribution decisions are approached. In all of these decisions, therefore, social media marketing (and market research) has become a central concern. Despite studios' acknowledgement of the power of social media tools, however, the engagement of audiences as participants in the marketing process remains a point of contention and unease. While studios strive to harness the perceived power of these audiences, they remain fearful that this power will threaten their own centralized control.

Henry Jenkins (2006) suggests that media industries tend to adopt one of two stances in response to increased consumer participation and the proliferation of user-generated content. He suggests that old media companies (like film and television) tend to adopt a "prohibitionist" stance, focused on regulation and criminalization of fan activities. New media companies (like internet and gaming companies), on the other hand, tend to adopt a more "collaborationist" approach focused on encouraging fan

involvement, content creation and sharing (2006).[52] Hollywood studios are "old" media institutions built on a "prohibitionist" logic. But, as part of huge multinational media conglomerates with various functional arms, different divisions have divergent attitudes and goals when it comes to audience involvement. This divide between "prohibitionist" and "collaborationist" logics is thus not only found *across* companies and industries, but *within* companies and individual departments.

Studio marketing departments, for instance, increasingly recognize the value of embracing the participation and immaterial labor of consumers via a "collaborationist" approach. They stand to benefit considerably from the dedication of their fan communities and the visibility that audience sharing, discussions, and creative work afford them. But embracing social media marketing and user-generated content whole-heartedly requires ceding some control over the marketing message and brand image. While positive buzz can greatly enhance awareness of a film and "want-to-see," negative buzz can be devastating (as illustrated by the *Brüno* [2009] case discussed previously). Encouraging the participation of consumers can thus be a risky bet that positive messages will prevail. In today's blockbuster-heavy environment, this is a bet with very high stakes. While marketing departments hesitantly embrace the idea of an active and participatory audience, the larger studio institution in which these departments are

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[52] In a similar vein, Caldwell characterizes this corporate tension as one between "transparency" and "propriety," whereby media producers are caught between two conflicting imperatives. One goal is to control use and adaptation of their creative products. The countervailing force is to be open, fluid, and adaptable so that consumers can play an active role in production (Caldwell, 2012).

embedded remains cautious. This wariness has led to a much-critiqued institutional inertia within Hollywood.

Caught between the conflicting imperatives associated with a conservative "prohibitionist" desire for centralized control, and a more open and progressive "collaborationist" stance, Hollywood marketers attempt to chart a middle course. They embrace the rhetoric of consumer empowerment and encourage audience engagement while simultaneously fighting to define the terms and boundaries of participation. Marketers thus strive to monitor, guide, and control public discourse around the film. As Zwick et al. explain, companies have recognized that "control over consumers and markets can best be achieved by providing managed and dynamic *platforms for consumer practice*, which on the one hand free the creativity and know-how of consumers, and on the other channel these consumer activities in ways desired by the marketers" (2008, p. 165). By invoking rhetoric of empowerment and offering constrained arenas for participation, studios are able to guide public discourse while maintaining the appearance of organic consumer activity. The following sections outline the nature of Hollywood's reticence to embrace change via audience involvement, followed by a discussion of how marketers navigate this inertial force to foster circumscribed opportunities for consumer participation.

Roots of institutional inertia. Hollywood is notoriously slow to adapt to new technology and modes of operation. As Peter Sealy, a former Columbia Pictures marketing chief, explains of Hollywood, "It's a clubby, inbred culture that still operates

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on instinct over research and an almost religious adherence to this-is-how-we-do-it tenets" (Barnes, 2012). Bettina Sherick (2013), Senior Vice President of Digital Strategic Marketing for 20th Century Fox, voices a similar sentiment, describing her twelve-year struggle to affect change in the studio marketing system, communicate the importance of innovative digital marketing strategies, and encourage executives to consider digital platforms early in the production process. Hollywood's delayed adaptation to new media imperatives is attributable to a variety of factors, including the industry's size and current dominance, its siloed institutional structure, confusion surrounding new measurement metrics, and its struggle to maintain centralized control of messaging and intellectual property. The following sections outline these factors and illustrate their impact on marketing strategies and practices.

Industry size and dominance. In part, Hollywood's institutional inertia stems from its size and dominance. While new media companies tend to be small, hungry, and nimble, studios are corporate behemoths (part of even larger media conglomerates) that are slow to adapt to the shifting technological tides. The sheer speed of innovation and technology adoption makes it difficult for large corporate studios to keep up. Their hierarchical structure and the layers of bureaucratic approvals required to make decisions run counter to the real-time speed of the online marketplace. As a Social Media Manager at Warner Bros. explains, it takes at least a week to obtain the necessary approvals to post an image on social media platforms (A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). With an online cultural zeitgeist that changes hourly, this turnaround time is far

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too slow. Due to institutional impediments such as these, marketers are unable to react to cultural events in real time and are thus continuously trailing behind the audience.

Despite this shortcoming, Hollywood studios still dominate the marketplace for film. Thus, while they face long-term institutional challenges, their day-to-day concerns lie with the success or failure of the next big blockbuster. Stepping back to make sweeping structural and philosophical changes within the institution as a whole remains a problem perpetually put off until another day. As long as traditional mechanisms are still functioning and garnering profits, studios are loath to make risky, but necessary, changes to the status quo (Arietta, 2013; Levine, 2013).

Siloed institutional structure. A related impediment to studios' embrace of social media marketing is their entrenched, siloed institutional structure. Studios' marketing and publicity arms tend to be divided into separate divisions such as domestic theatrical marketing, international marketing, home entertainment marketing, digital marketing, publicity, public relations, and market research. While digital marketing is often specifically tasked with managing films' social media presence, all of these various departments act in the social media space without necessarily consulting the other groups (De Leo, 2013; A. Leung, personal communication August 29, 2014; Tavss, 2013). Social media is (or should be) integral to the activities of all of these departments and more, but the siloed structure of the studio hinders the adoption of overarching, well-planned social media campaigns. Instead, turf wars between PR and marketing departments are commonplace, with each department releasing bits of content without

stepping back and working together to present a coherent, singular message (Woodward, 2013).

In turn, social media is often separated from the larger release plan and umbrella marketing campaign. For example, the market research department may contract with a listening platform to monitor social media buzz. But, in many cases, insights from this research may only reach as far as the executive nominally in charge of social media. The tendency here, as Fizziology's Ben Carlson (2013) explains, is to respond *within* the social media space, rather than allow the insights gleaned from social media to impact the larger filmmaking and marketing approach. Commenting on this tendency, Jon Vlassopulos (2013) of Trailerpop suggests that Hollywood must "make sure the [social media] data guy isn't on another floor in a dark closet and the creative guy is in a big corner office." Until social media is recognized as vital to all aspects of film marketing and ceases to be contested ground, its full potential as a marketing and research tool cannot be fully realized.

New metrics for success. Another key contributing factor to Hollywood's institutional inertia and continued reliance on traditional media platforms is the uncertainty that pervades issues of measurement. Marketers within large, hierarchical Hollywood studios are pressured to justify their actions and quantify their successes with easily-digestible data. It is a truism within industry circles that box office successes tend to be attributed to an array of factors (such as a great cast, a talented director, or a well-written script), while a failure is invariably attributed to poor marketing. As former

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President of Worldwide Marketing and Distribution at MGM, Bob Levin (2001), explains, "Someone told me the first week I came into the business, 'Understand one thing about your role as a person in marketing. If a movie is successful, it was a great movie. If a movie fails, you did a bad job marketing it.'" Similarly, former Fox marketing executive David Weitzner explains, "I always believed part of my salary was hazard pay…If the film works, it was a marvelous and brilliant production. If it didn't, it was bad marketing. It's a studio's mentality to never deal with the fact that it made a bad film" (Waxman, 2013). Marketers are thus continuously fighting to prove themselves.[53] Data is a key weapon in this fight, as it can be used as quantifiable justification for marketing decisions, and as a marker of success. In this environment, traditional tracking numbers (measured from telephone surveys as "awareness" and "want-to-see") and box office numbers reign supreme.

Today, a host of new metrics and data points have been introduced. These new metrics are unfamiliar, however, and are notoriously difficult to define and measure. At the 2013 Digital Hollywood conferences in Marina Del Rey, industry panelists argued at length about the merits of various metrics. In addition to the traditional metrics of "awareness" and "want-to-see," buzzwords such as "views," "engagement," "retention," "likes," "followers," "touch points," "shares," "sentiment," "attitude," "passion," and

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[53] The tenuous nature of film marketers' jobs fuels their hesitancy to take chances with campaigns and innovate (Arietta, 2013).

"fandom" were all thrown into the mix as potentially relevant, but fuzzily understood, metrics.

These new metrics do not neatly correlate with traditional ones. For instance, Facebook "likes" do not necessarily translate into "want-to-see" and box office dollars. As *The Wrap*'s Todd Cunningham explains:

> Through-the-roof social media buzz can signal a hit, as it did with "The Purge," a horror movie that broke out last June after its online buzz spiked significantly. Or it can produce something of a "false positive," as it did with last summer's "Pacific Rim." Guillermo del Toro's giant robot epic was trending mightily in the days before its domestic debut, but disappointed. It would be a mistake to read too much into the social media numbers at this point (Cunningham, 2014d).

Making the situation more difficult, these various metrics are not comparable with one another. A trailer view does not carry the same weight as a Twitter post, for instance, but a simple conversion rate does not exist. This lack of cohesion makes multi-platform marketing campaigns difficult to manage and monitor. With each platform providing different types of data, it is difficult to evaluate each and allocate marketing budgets and efforts accordingly.

The most striking manifestation of studio marketers' lack of understanding of new media platforms and the measurement metrics they provide is the practice of buying "likes" and "followers" (Swartz, 2013; Woodward, 2013). In an effort to make films appear popular (both to studio higher-ups and potential viewers), marketers have been known to invest in the growing marketplace for "likes." This practice reflects a tendency to see "likes" as possessing intrinsic value. Marketers in this case forget that a "like" only has value if it is attached to a real human who can purchase a movie ticket and whose

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opinion can influence others. The practice of buying likes thus reveals a fundamental lack of understanding that pervades Hollywood marketers' approach to new media platforms, casts doubt on the reliability of data gleaned from these sources, and impedes the effective use of these tools.

Battling for centralized control. Perhaps the most powerful contributing factor to Hollywood's conservative, "prohibitionist" approach to new media platforms and the ostensibly empowered audience they foster stems from the industry's deep-seated fear of losing centralized control of its intellectual property and marketing message. Stuart Till (2009) succinctly summarizes the fundamental concern of modern Hollywood when he asks, "How do you exploit the opportunities offered by the new digital world and equally ensure the pirates do not destroy your industry?" Within film studios, departmental imperatives dictate that marketers concern themselves with exploiting the opportunities new media provide, while legal teams are tasked with protecting the industry from piracy and misuse of intellectual property.

These conflicting imperatives underlie the divergent (and often conflicting) strategies these departments adopt, exposing intra-studio clashes over "collaborationist" and "prohibitionist" approaches. The use of immaterial labor via social media and user-generated content requires studios to cede some power and responsibility to consumers who will do this work. While still reticent of losing control of the marketing message, therefore, studio marketers are adopting an increasingly collaborationist stance as they attempt to harness the power of new media platforms to spread awareness.

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Meanwhile, legal teams maintain a largely prohibitionist stance and strictly police the use of studios' intellectual property. The MPAA claims that the U.S. film industry lost more than $6 billion in revenue due to film piracy in 2005 (MPAA & L.E.K., 2005). Studio executives thus view this issue as one requiring vigilant policing. While legal teams are centrally concerned with regulating the copying and distribution of films themselves, they are also concerned with protecting paratextual materials (such as artwork and trailers) that bolster the brand image of the film and can be licensed for profit.[54]

Working at cross-purposes, this intra-studio stalemate between marketing and legal teams often results in inconsistency, conservatism, and stagnation. The case of *Cloverfield* (2008) aptly illustrates this tendency. On July 3, 2007, audiences for the film *Transformers* witnessed an unusual teaser trailer before their show. Shot in a home movie style, the trailer begins with scenes from a house party. Forty seconds into the trailer, however, the conventional scene is interrupted by a mysterious attack on New York City. As the partygoers run outside in terror and confusion, the head of the Statue of Liberty

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[54] This goal is often accomplished via trademark law, but copyright law is also invoked as a means of policing the production and distribution of marketing materials. Lamb v. Starks (1996) and Video Pipeline v. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. (2003) established film trailers and clips as deserving of copyright protection due to their status as derivative works and viable commercial products in their own right. In these cases, the reproduction of marketing materials was found to be copyright infringement despite the potential marketing benefits of their redistribution. These cases thus serve as early illustrations of the disconnect between marketing and legal imperatives, as studios expended extensive resources in order to curb the distribution of marketing materials created for widespread public view and dissemination.

skids to a halt on the streets, apparently ripped from its body by a monstrous beast. The

only additional information the trailer provides is the producer's name (J.J. Abrams) and

the release date (1-18-08). Curious and excited filmgoers recorded the teaser trailer with

their cell phones and posted it on YouTube the following morning. But by that afternoon,

these videos had been removed and replaced with the message "This video is no longer

available due to a copyright claim by Paramount Pictures Corp."

The videos were later re-instated, and helped to facilitate widespread online

discussion, speculation, and anticipation for the film. As *Advertising Age*'s Jonah Bloom

(2007) recounts:

> From the moment the trailer hit YouTube, thousands of bloggers, vloggers and
> alternate-reality gamers started dissecting it, byte by byte. Some conducted
> spectral analyses of the audio in the trailer in order to spot clues in what the
> characters were saying and compare the roar of the monster to the roar of
> Godzilla. Others used picture filters and facial-analysis tools to find clues in the
> video that might hint at more detail on plotlines or websites where more clues
> could be uncovered.

This excitement was fueled by a carefully constructed viral marketing campaign

incorporating fake online newscasts documenting the destruction of an offshore oil rig,

websites for corporations and products featured in the film, MySpace pages for the

characters, and deliberately-timed releases of film information and misinformation.

Audiences were led on a series of online scavenger hunts and prompted to work in

concert to piece together clues from various media platforms and websites in order to

uncover information about the film. This technique successfully created a community

around the property and bestowed prestige upon those who were "in the know" about the

upcoming film.

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With the release of the theatrical trailer on November 15, 2007, the title

Cloverfield was officially announced. By this time, Paramount's marketing team was

keenly aware of the power of virality in spreading marketing materials for this film.

Learning from the takedown notices imposed in conjunction with the teaser trailer's

release, they were also aware of the roadblocks Paramount's legal team was likely to

impose. In an internal email in the days leading up to the theatrical trailer release,

therefore, Paramount's Amy Powell planned ahead by explicitly announcing:

> We will release the trailer exclusively in theaters (with Beowulf) on Thursday,
> Nov. 15th. We will assume audiences will tape the trailer on their own and post it
> on YouTube—we will NOT issue take-down notices. We will OFFICIALLY
> release the trailer on iTunes on Nov. 19-with an HD version. We will ship the
> poster to theaters with the BEOWULF trailer. We will assume audiences will
> steal the one-sheet and post it on YouTube we will NOT issue take-down notices"
> (Decl. of Michael Rubin, Exhibit 28).

Despite this explicit endorsement of fan-posted content and the marketing team's

active solicitation of online fan activity over the course of its campaign, *Cloverfield* still

became embroiled in Viacom's legal action against YouTube in *Viacom International*

Inc. v. YouTube Inc. (2010). *Cloverfield* was one of approximately 500 television and

film properties over which Viacom (Paramount's parent company) sued YouTube for

hosting 63,497 video clips that purportedly infringed their copyright (Memorandum,

2010). Over the course of the trial, however, evidence emerged that a number of the

allegedly infringing clips were actually posted by studio marketers or hired third-party

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"stealth" marketers. This disconnect between new media marketing strategies and legal

reactions is indicative of the institutional schism within Hollywood studios.[55]

With the proliferation of digital media platforms, marketing departments are

increasingly experimenting with social media marketing, adopting more nuanced means

of audience research, and harnessing fans' creative labor. Meanwhile, legal departments

are adopting increasingly firm and mechanistic means of copyright enforcement. The

Digital Millennium Copyright Act (1998) places the burden of policing online content

largely on copyright holders rather than on internet service providers (ISPs) (Darrow &

Ferrera, 2007). This creates the daunting job for studio legal teams of scouring sites like

YouTube for infringing materials. While media conglomerates have fought to place more

of this burden on ISPs, and ISPs have responded with increased safeguards (such as

YouTube's Content ID system), no comprehensive solution has emerged. Studio legal

teams thus resort to using automated filters and keyword searches to identify potentially

infringing material and issue large-scale infringement notifications to the hosting

websites.[56]

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[55] This incoherence was a major weakness in Viacom's case against YouTube. While the studio claimed $1 billion in damages, Paramount marketers continued to laud YouTube as a marketing platform (Decl. of Michael Rubin).

[56] From January 1, 2012 to December 10, 2012, NBC/Universal notified Google of 2,296,309 allegedly infringing URLs to be targeted for takedown notices. In the same time period, Warner Bros. Entertainment identified 303,915 URLs, and Fox Legal Group identified 1,627,799 URLs (Google Transparency Report). This spawned the verb "foxed," meaning to be sent a warning about copyright violations.

While this takedown request procedure results in the removal of many legitimately infringing materials and pirated films, it can lead to the removal of non-infringing (often marketing) content that happens to be associated with incriminating search terms. One infringement notification sent from Warner Bros. to Google identifying infringing materials related to the film *Wrath of the Titans* offers an illuminating example (see Video DMCA, 2012). While many of the URLs listed identify legitimately infringing materials (such as full downloadable copies of the film), others reveal the increasingly mechanistic and illogical means by which these lists are generated. Among the most surprising pages labeled as infringing are the film's IMDB page, its Apple trailer page, reviews of the film on the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *Charleston Post & Courier* websites, a BBC interview with the actors, and clips on Hulu.com (a video site where posted clips must be authorized). These materials serve clearly sanctioned marketing and publicity purposes. A Universal Pictures infringement notification sent to Google regarding *Snow White and the Huntsman* goes one step further, compromising legitimate channels of online distribution in the name of copyright protection. Among other URLs, requests for the removal of the film's Apple iTunes page, Blockbuster page, and Amazon page were submitted (see DMCA (Copyright) Complaint, 2012).

As these cases demonstrate, studio legal teams cast a wide net when issuing infringement notifications, thus seriously compromising the efforts of marketing, publicity, and even distribution departments. In the new media environment, the

distinction between producers and consumers, and between corporate marketing materials and user-generated content, can appear blurred. While these distinctions become more difficult to identify, studio legal departments utilize increasingly mechanistic, hard-line forms of copyright enforcement. As a result, incidents like the takedown (and subsequent re-posting) of the "pirated" *Cloverfield* trailer are commonplace occurrences. While the campaign was designed to harness audience labor, the current copyright enforcement system is not aligned with this emerging tactic.

Institutional efforts have been made to smooth this departmental divide, but the underlying philosophical incompatibility of these approaches remains constant. Studios have developed "whitelists" wherein marketing teams identify studio-approved YouTube accounts. These lists are subsequently shared with legal departments in order to avoid the takedown of approved content posted by "stealth" marketers using unofficial accounts (Decl. of Michael Rubin). In addition, studios have orchestrated partnerships with distribution platforms such as YouTube.[57] These agreements allow studios to post their own content or identify user-posted content as studio-owned in order to share ad revenue for the page (Decl. of Christopher Maxcy). While these efforts mark a step toward enhanced communication and collaboration across this departmental divide, bridging these philosophic and strategic divisions remains a key challenge for studios in the new media environment.

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[57] As of 2009, YouTube had established partnerships with CBS, NBC/Universal, MGM Worldwide Digital Media, Sony Pictures Television, Inc., and Lionsgate Entertainment (Decl. of Christopher Maxcy).

The intervention of legal teams in marketing affairs is not only restricted to post-hoc takedown notices. As discussed in Chapter 3, all marketing materials must be approved by legal departments before they are released to the public. Legal teams, in these cases, are tasked with ensuring these materials do not infringe on any other copyright or trademark claim, and comply with all contractual agreements surrounding the film's production and release. Because of the legal minefield studio lawyers navigate, they are notorious for censuring marketers. This is especially true when marketers approach them with innovative ideas that have not been tested (and proven litigation-proof). It is also a particularly common problem for campaigns involving user-generated content, as these techniques necessarily involve audience use of trademarked and copyrighted source materials.

As a result, marketing personnel dread sending their ideas and materials for legal approval, for fear that their hard work will be for naught. In this atmosphere, lawyers' conservatism is often viewed as the enemy of creativity. As the lead marketer at independent Lionsgate explains in regard to their famously innovative campaigns, "At another studio, legal or standards or both would have stopped us 10 steps before we got any of those ideas" (Barnes, 2014). Likewise, marketers consulted for this study recounted stories wherein their hard work on a campaign element was disappointingly nixed by the legal department, forcing them to revert to a more conventional or formulaic approach that was guaranteed to be approved (N. Cagney, personal communication, November 26, 2013; A. Kostich, personal communication, October 28, 2009; Meli, 2013;

Tavss, 2013). Legal teams' efforts to fight piracy, honor contractual agreements, and

protect the studio's intellectual property thus have a decelerating effect on marketing

innovation. While marketers attempt (in moderation) to embrace new media technology

and harness audience labor via these platforms, the countervailing forces imposed by

legal departments serve to impede these efforts.

Inertia in marketing practice. The size and dominance of the Hollywood

industry, its entrenched and siloed departmental structure, confusion over measurement

metrics, and the conservatism of studio legal teams has together led to profound

institutional inertia in Hollywood. Studio marketers function within this environment, and

thus are subject to its pressure to revert to the status quo. As *New York Times* writer

Brooks Barnes (2012) explains, "producers, directors, actors and agents often balk at

unusual approaches. They just want their film to be No. 1 at the box office on opening

weekend, and prefer that marketing experiments be carried out with somebody else's

career." Marketers therefore tend to revert to a formulaic approach based on traditional

and tested marketing methods.

The New Yorker's Tad Friend (2009) describes this formula as follows:

> Modern campaigns have three acts: a year or more before the film débuts, you
> introduce it with ninety-second teaser trailers and viral Internet 'leaks' of gossip
> or early footage, in preparation for the main trailer, which appears four months
> before the release; five weeks before the film opens, you start saturating with a
> 'flight' of thirty-second TV spots; and, at the end, you remind with fifteen-second
> spots, newspaper ads, and billboards.

Likewise, one marketing agency executive explains studios' formulaic approach this

way:

Especially for larger studios or networks, it's sort of like, "Our budget is $2 million for this. With that budget, we usually do a billboard here and billboard here and a bus wrap here and a website." And then they don't look at what the product really is and where to really break that. The billboard you usually put up in Times Square may not be the best place for it, and banner ads and splash ads might be fantastic for it because it might be a smaller budget sci fi with a nerd contingent you might want to reach, and you can reach them better with that (L. Melin, personal communication, April 2, 2012).

While these formulaic campaigns are multi-platform, the vast majority of

attention is still paid to traditional media—specifically television. In 2012, the film

industry spent $3.2 billion on ad buys, but an overwhelming 86.5% of this was allocated

to television. Online ad spending accounted for only 2% of the total ad spend, while

newspapers (an arguably dying medium) accounted for 6% and outdoor accounted for 3%

(Beltrone, 2014). Likewise, *The Hollywood Reporter* reports that, in an environment

where it is not unusual for studios to spend $200 million to market a movie, digital

marketing expenditures rarely exceed $10 million (McClintock, 2014). Digital

advertising does tend to be considerably cheaper than television spots and other

advertising formats, so these numbers do not necessarily translate to absolute numbers or

visibility of ads. But the implications are clear: marketing budgets remain heavily

allocated to the analog realm.[58] Film marketers fall far behind their traditional advertising

counterparts in this regard. Only 39% of total U.S. advertising spending (from all sectors)

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[58] Internet companies are keenly aware of film studios' aversion to digital ad spends. In response, many internet companies have made concerted efforts to partner with studios and encourage them to send ad dollars their way. For instance, Tumblr hired a "Director of Media" tasked with luring studio marketers to their platform. Likewise, Facebook hired a "Head of Entertainment Partnerships," and Google and Twitter have similar personnel on staff (Abbruzzese, 2014).

in 2012 was allocated to television (compared to 86.5% for film ads). Meanwhile, a much more substantial 22.3% of total ad spending was allocated to digital (compared to 2% for film) ("US total media ad spend," 2013).

Hollywood's continued reliance on traditional media platforms, and their general risk aversion, stifles innovation and fosters rote marketing tactics that do not fully capitalize on the possibilities of new media technology. The continued existence of official film webpages is illustrative of this formulaic mindset. Very few people visit a film's official webpage. Instead, they view trailers on YouTube and post clips, articles, or casting updates to their social media feeds. But studios continue to turn out a webpage for every new release. As one Social Media Manager at Warner Bros. recounts, her suggestion to display hashtags on trailers was at first dismissed, as executives claimed that a website URL was sufficient (A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). Only recently have hashtags been adopted as standard Hollywood marketing practice.

While working as a project manager at a small digital marketing agency from 2008 to 2009, I witnessed this formulaic and website-centric approach first-hand. We repeatedly pitched innovative marketing strategies designed to capture the nuances of the film and attract its target demographic, but studio clients seemed to work via a set mental checklist that dictated the shape of their campaigns. As the basis of their digital campaign, studio marketers wanted 1) a website, 2) a game or website featurette, and 3) banner ads. Websites were designed to have a splash page (featuring movie key art and a

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trailer) and individual pages dedicated for a synopsis, cast and crew information, film clips and trailers, movie stills (usually offered as downloadable desktop backgrounds), and the game or featurette. Games, too, were formulaic. While we regularly pitched original game concepts, studio clients invariably wanted re-skinned versions of classic, safe games such as Frogger, Donkey Kong, and Bejeweled.

Hollywood studios tend to design their social media presence via a similar standard checklist. Each new release is expected to have a presence on six key platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Google+ (Jones, 2013; A. Leung, personal communication, August 29, 2014). While this list has expanded rapidly (from only Facebook and Twitter as recently as 2013), it remains limiting and inflexible. A more strategic, tailored approach designed to play to the strengths of each platform and the characteristics of its user base would serve to bolster the effectiveness of these marketing tools. While Hollywood marketers are moving in this direction, the desire to be on *all* social media platforms (rather than focusing energy on a select few), the need for executive and legal approvals on all materials, the exorbitant cost of keeping talent for extra days to shoot tailored ancillary content, and the goal of unified messaging often precludes more innovative social media approaches (much as these factors hamper tailored international materials as discussed in Chapter 4). Instead, marketing on these platforms tends to assume standard forms.

These standard approaches often fail to capitalize on the unique possibilities offered by various social media platforms. For example, *Adweek*'s Brittany Darwell

(2013) argues that studios tend to run the wrong kind of Facebook campaigns at the wrong time. Early on in the campaign, she explains, studios often run "marketplace ads" that feature a small image, body copy, and a "Like" button. These ads that appear in the Facebook sidebar have some of the lowest click-through rates due to their peripheral placement. Additionally, the still image they feature does not lend itself to the audiovisual experience of film, and thus does not optimally represent the product they are trying to sell. Finally, it is odd to ask users to "like" a film before it's in theaters and they've had a chance to see it.[59] Thus, while studio marketers often express dissatisfaction with results on Facebook, Darwell (2013) argues, "That doesn't mean Facebook is an ineffective channel; it means Hollywood isn't using it in the best way for its business."

William Hurley (2013) of Chaotic Moon Studios makes a similar argument regarding Hollywood's use of mobile marketing, explaining that his studio clients tend to "see mobile as a checkbox to say, 'Ok, I'm in that space.'" But they don't necessarily value the platform's unique properties or use it effectively. As he suggests, the mobile phone is primarily a utility tool, while the television is primarily an entertainment device. Studios tend to ignore this difference, however, repurposing content from television for the mobile space without making it useful (and thus appropriate for a utility tool).

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[59] The exception to this rule is the franchise film. While a viewer may not have seen the next installment of the franchise, they can more accurately predict if they will like the film. This characteristic of social media marketing serves as additional incentive for studios to make franchise films.

This argument is applicable beyond the Facebook and mobile realms. Overall,

Hollywood marketers exhibit a tendency to try to fit old marketing models to new media

platforms. For instance, billboard key art is repurposed as an online banner ad, and a

trailer made for the theater is posted to YouTube in hopes that it will become a viral

video.[60] With small budgets allocated to digital marketing, these platforms tend to receive

the table scraps of traditional advertising platforms rather than benefitting from original

online material suited for the strengths of new media environments. As Don McNeill

(2013), President of marketing agency Digital Kitchen, explains, this tactic leads studio

marketers to make mass audience appeals on personalized media platforms. They

therefore tend to neglect the inherent strengths of new media outlets: their ability to

surveil users, deliver personalized content, and harness audiences' immaterial labor. This

reality is slowly changing as studios become aware of these platforms' marketing

potential and formulate materials accordingly, but a formulaic, analog mindset remains

the guiding force in today's Hollywood marketing milieu.[61]

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[60] As Adrienne LaFrance (2014) of *The Atlantic* notes, "the curious thing about the film trailer is that, while the Internet has certainly changed the way consumers view it, it's long had a format that seemed custom-built for Internet sensibilities." They are short, succinct, and must capture the audience's attention within the first few seconds. Trailers, therefore, have successfully made the transition from the big screen to the mobile screen.
[61] As Johnston (2009) documents in his study of the evolution of trailer aesthetics, movie trailers are now designed to encourage repeat viewing, sharing, and discussion. Using *Star Wars* trailers as a case study, Johnston notes that trailer editing has become more rapid and disjointed, and that trailers hint at storylines more subtly than they did in previous eras. This format encourages repeat and close viewing, giving fans the chance to piece the story together like a puzzle and actively engage with the trailer and discuss it with friends. Traditionally, trailers had to deliver their message clearly and succinctly,

Measured adaptation to a changing landscape. In this environment of institutional inertia, studio marketers face a host of impediments and disincentives to experiment with innovative marketing campaigns that fully embrace fans' participation and allow for genuine audience empowerment. Thus, while invoking rhetoric of empowerment, studios instead act to harness audience energies and labor, and divert them toward studio-sanctioned marketing efforts. As NBC Universal social media expert Karen Woodward (2013) explains, the common reference to a "conversation" between studios and audiences is a misnomer. Instead, studios seek to *steer* a conversation *between* audience members. They strive to be the silent puppet masters orchestrating a seemingly "organic" and "grassroots" campaign. While harnessing audiences' free marketing labor requires ceding some studio control by granting audiences a voice, marketers actively try to maintain centralized control of the messages these voices will spread.

There are two primary tactics marketers employ to maintain control of marketing messages while appearing to embrace audience participation and the nuances of the new media environment. First, studio marketers attempt to disguise studio-generated content

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given that an audience member was only likely to see it one or two times in the theater. Now fans are able to access trailers online and view them as many times as they wish, thus enabling a very different viewing practice and necessitating a revised trailer production strategy. Likewise, some filmmakers are considering online materials during production. This allows them to utilize casts and sets to produce high-quality, web-specific content that is suited for these platforms. *Anchorman 2* (2013) serves as an apt example of this tactic.

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as organic, user-generated content. Through this tactic, studio marketers attempt to imbue materials with cultural capital, increasing the likelihood that they will be shared. Second, studios encourage audience participation, but on controlled platforms that can be monitored and managed by studio personnel. Each of these tactics will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Strategy 1: Disguise studio-generated content. While consumers tend to view traditional advertisements with skepticism, buzz spread by non-commercial means tends to be viewed as more credible (Mohr, 2007). According to Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey (2012), 92% of consumers around the world say they trust product recommendations from within their social network, and 70% report they trust online consumer reviews. In comparison, only 47% claim to trust advertisements on television. For Millennials, user-generated content is also thought to be especially powerful. It is considered to be 35% more memorable, 20% more influential, and 50% more trusted than traditional media (Knoblauch, 2014). User-generated content and word-of-mouth marketing are thus seen as particularly valuable for studios often targeting young viewers in a competitive media marketplace. Because of the perceived effectiveness of these participatory marketing approaches, but the loss of centralized control these tactics entail, studios increasingly work to conceal their involvement in producing and disseminating their own "viral" marketing messages.

One way this is achieved is by mimicking the style and tone of user-generated and user-disseminated material. In this way, marketers attempt to infuse marketing materials

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with authenticity, grit, and/or humor that might speak to audiences (particularly

Millennials) who live in the digital realm and speak the language of UGC, memes, and

gifs. As John Shea, head of integrated marketing at MTV Networks, explains of Tim

Palen's groundbreaking strategy for Lionsgate's *Saw* campaign, "Tim recognized that

you want the core audience to feel, for a while, that the film is theirs…So he gives them

content that feels bloggy and street—like they're behind the curtain. Then they become

barkers for your film" (Friend, 2009). While Lionsgate was radical in employing this

strategy, mainstream studio marketers have attempted to follow suit.

What users share and post online reflects and projects their online identity. Thus,

users are more likely to share something that appears to be novel, funny, or play off the

current cultural zeitgeist. They are less likely to share a traditional advertisement that

overtly makes them a tool of corporate marketing. While the end result may be the same,

perception and style is considered key in recruiting willing audience laborers and

fostering a successful social media campaign.

Increasingly, therefore, studios are producing memes and gifs that do not contain

informational elements such as title and release date. Instead, they display humorous clips

that can reflect a fan's mood or feeling. In this way, marketing pieces can be employed

by users to express their emotional state, rather than being used solely to spread the word

about a film. For instance, Universal has successfully created a slew of gifs and memes

starring the minion characters from their *Despicable Me* franchise. One of these gifs,

showing a minion happily dancing and vacuuming in a French maid costume, was named

top Tumblr ad of the year by *Adweek* (Heine, 2013). Unlike most Tumblr movie ads that utilize animated key art or emphasize title treatments and release dates, this *Despicable Me* ad was simple, cute, and soft-sell. As Lee Brown, head of Tumblr's global brand partnerships, explains, "It's in a visual language that people can rip, remix, while representing how they are expressing themselves on a certain day" (Heine, 2013). By employing ad formats that are native to social media and adopting a user-generated style, therefore, studio marketers attempt to insert the film into the general cultural zeitgeist and fuse marketing messages seamlessly with everyday online communication and emotional expression.

In further efforts to enhance the organic feel of movie marketing, behind-the-scenes footage and trailers are often "leaked" on YouTube via non-corporate user accounts and without an official release. This tactic is designed to enhance the materials' caché as discovered, unofficial, sometimes illicit, content. An internal Paramount email illustrates this strategy well, stating:

> Please help in uploading different versions of our viral slug video [from the movie "Flushed Away"] to YouTube! Our positioning is that this was a pet project of a Dreamworks Animator and that it's hilarious that these slugs appear in Flushed Away…Please note we are staying away from the "studio" marketing so please stay away from words like "Paramount" and "Flushed Away"... THIS MUST BE VIRAL AND NOT DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO US! (Decl. of Michael Rubin, Exhibit 15).

By positioning this clip as an employee's hobby project and disassociating it from the studio, Paramount hoped to enhance the piece's appeal, credibility, and virality. By deliberately setting out to produce a "viral video," however, studio marketers

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demonstrate their desire to curb the natural fluidity and unpredictability of a genuinely participatory online space.

This strategy is also apparent in initiatives like the *Men in Black 3* "Bugeyes" campaign orchestrated by Sony Pictures' marketing team. For this campaign, a teenage "investigative blogger" with the handle Bugeyes126 posted a series of video blogs documenting his search for proof that Men in Black are real. While Bugeyes126 was a paid actor (who later had a cameo in the film), the campaign was designed to mimic genuine fan activity and recruit other "Believers" in the hunt for real-life aliens and their keepers.

A similar and increasingly prevalent (but controversial) technique is the recruitment of "word of mouth marketers" to discuss and increase "buzz" about upcoming films. Often this tactic involves paying or rewarding (usually with exclusive content) popular bloggers to write about films. A recruitment letter from Warner Bros. to one blogger reads:

> We are seeking bloggers that are passionate about entertainment to help us engage your readers with content that would be interesting to them. We would like to have you join our WB Word marketing team to let fans know about our latest releases and relevant content/products. As a member of the team, you will be asked to display photos, clips, and stories on your Blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts. The best part is you will get paid! Additionally, we may even debut event previews and new content so that fans like you get to enjoy it first (Singer, 2010).

This practice, often referred to as "blogger payola," has sparked public outcry as well as legislative action. In 2009, the FTC revised their "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising," stating that, "The post of a blogger who

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receives cash or in-kind payment to review a product is considered an endorsement.

Thus, bloggers who make an endorsement must disclose the material connections they

share with the seller of the product or service" (FTC, 2009). Bloggers who fail to disclose

their affiliation with the producer can be fined up to $11,000 under this guideline. Despite

the FTC's efforts, however, the rule remains difficult to enforce and blogger payoffs and

incentives remain a common practice within the film marketing industry and beyond.

This practice enables studios to maintain control of the marketing message while

funneling it through more credible, "grassroots" sources to reach audiences.

In addition to bloggers, studios' "word of mouth" marketing teams often target

members of the general public for recruitment as covert marketers. Fans that are

considered opinion leaders in their social networks are recruited and rewarded

(sometimes via payment) for spreading the word about upcoming films. Warner Bros.'

"Word" recruitment website reads:

> Do your friends call you a trendsetter? Are you always the one to discover and
> send popular online clips before they break? Is your Facebook friend list the
> largest of all your friends? Then this is an opportunity for you! Warner Bros. is
> seeking people (18 and up) that are passionate about entertainment to serve on an
> exclusive Word of Mouth Marketing Team. Each member of the team will be
> given weekly assignments to help us spread the word about a variety of properties
> from the Warner Bros studio ranging from a new online web series, a new blog, a
> new website to an a existing television show. Each member will be compensated
> for the completed project once all assignment reports are submitted. Sign up today
> to be part of an exclusive group that will receive a first look at all upcoming
> Warner Bros projects and have the opportunity to share it with others before
> anyone else! Be a part of the team - apply now! (Warner Bros. Word, "Apply").

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By appealing to individuals' sense of social leadership and cultural capital, studios seek to address the potential threats of online discourse by seeding and controlling conversations via covert marketers.

In these efforts, studios reveal their faith in word of mouth marketing, but also their fears about an empowered and vocal public. They thus chart a middle course. They acknowledge the appealing style of user-generated content, the power of social media as a means of message dissemination, and the need for opinion leaders in this dissemination process. But, due to deep-seated fear of losing control of the marketing message and the film's brand image, they eschew genuinely organic and spontaneous audience participation. Instead, they construct and promote "viral" campaigns that veil their status as carefully crafted corporate marketing initiatives. By disguising studio-produced content as user-generated, studio marketers undermine the possibility of the online sphere serving as an arena of trust, personal expression, and genuine human engagement. As personal interactions become indistinguishable from marketing messages, and public speech is co-opted for corporate gains, the possibility of the internet serving as a productive public sphere is compromised. Marketers' fear of genuine audience participation thus has troubling implications for the broader online community.

Strategy 2: Foster audience participation in controlled environments. Mimicking user-generated content is an effective means of promoting virality while maintaining centralized control of intellectual property and the core marketing message. This tactic effectively limits audiences' role to that of disseminator of information. But

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the sense of ownership and investment that comes with more involved modes of audience labor (as both creators *and* disseminators of marketing materials) is lacking with this approach. Studios thus benefit from promoting deeper user participation and investment of immaterial labor. Ceding complete control of the public conversation surrounding the film is a risky proposition, however, and one that would require loosening of intellectual property restrictions and creative controls in order to maximize effectiveness. Faced with this dilemma, and functioning within a fundamentally conservative institutional environment, marketers again tend to chart a middle course. This strategy results in the maintenance of controlled user environments. In this scenario, users can interact with film worlds, discuss the film, and create content, but within studio-sanctioned and studio-monitored spaces.

Henry Jenkins (2006) reveals this strategy in his exploration of LucasFilm's fraught relationship with the *Star Wars* fan community. In order to balance the imperatives of fan participation and control, LucasFilms created online spaces where user-generated content could be produced and displayed under the guidance and surveillance of the studio. LucasFilms provided approved video clips and audio tracks for fans to piece together in creative ways that would not foster deviant meanings or unfavorable messages. In this way, they policed the stories that could be constructed using their materials. While *Star Wars* fan fiction and other user-generated content abounds outside of this sanctioned space, the use of high-quality, studio-approved clips and materials was contingent on audience submission within this controlled environment.

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Other studios have adopted similar strategies. Paramount offered a "cut-your-own" trailer application on the *Sweeney Todd* (2007) website, whereby users could splice together various approved film clips to create and share a slightly personalized version of the trailer. Meanwhile, Disney offered *High School Musical* (2006) digital cards wherein users could upload photos of themselves to be featured in a pre-fab music video. This example illustrates studios' ideal scenario for audience participation. The studio and its vendors fully constructed the video and its messaging, but users could enter post-hoc, insert a picture of their face, and distribute it to their friends as a personalized message. Features such as this are thus employed to encourage the production and dissemination of controlled, non-threatening user-generated content and personalized marketing materials.

Studios also attempt to manage fan communities and steer social media conversation by setting up controlled forums for fan interaction. Creating official Facebook fan pages, Twitter pages, Tumblr sites, and sometimes property-specific communities (such as "Dumbledore's Army" for the *Harry Potter* franchise) has become standard Hollywood marketing practice. These spaces are designed to build "brand communities" that establish fan cohesion, foster group discussions, encourage brand loyalty and affection, and reinforce the notion of films as inherently social products (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). They also serve to harness unpaid fan labor in the processes of market research (via social listening) and audience recruitment, thus becoming an increasingly valuable tool for marketers in the digital age.

These platforms necessarily cede some control of the marketing message to users by allowing them to post feedback and discuss the film. But these posts are often heavily policed. As Dean Alms (2013) of digital agency Milyoni recounts, studio clients often provide lists of hundreds of words they want blocked from their films' social pages. Since deleting user posts can elicit backlash, however, studios try to avoid using overt censorship unless there are concerns about issues such as obscenity or unsanctioned product promotions. Instead, they work to offer conversation pieces (e.g. artwork, promos, and production details) to steer the conversation in an optimal manner and maintain control.

After long resisting YouTube as an official marketing outlet, studio marketers have come to embrace it as a powerful social media platform in its own right. Traditionally, marketers released official trailers and clips on Apple and Yahoo! web pages. As YouTube gained popularity, however, users invariably copied video from these other pages and posted them to YouTube. This practice led to the viewing of unsanctioned video and unfiltered comments, gave credit (and ad revenue when applicable) to non-studio entities who posted the content, and robbed studios of access to valuable data about videos' appeal and spread (Shaw, 2014c).

In response, studios were compelled to embrace YouTube as a marketing platform and harness the audience participation and discussion occurring therein. Studios built their own YouTube channels in order to acquire dedicated subscribers, control the release of official video content, collect viewer data, and glean additional ad revenue from views.

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This strategy has yielded middling success. While the Warner Bros. Pictures YouTube channel now boasts 1.5 million subscribers, Sony Pictures has only 660,000 subscribers, Universal only 450,000 subscribers, and Paramount a mere 119,000 subscribers. Additionally, studios often create dedicated YouTube channels for their individual film projects. Again, these channels rarely garner impressive subscriber numbers. The YouTube channel for the much-anticipated *Jurassic World* (2015), for instance, had only 7,400 subscribers the week of its release. Meanwhile, the official trailer had been viewed over 62 million times. While embracing audience participation and sharing via YouTube, studios again demonstrate their (often unsuccessful) efforts to corral their audience into a controlled arena of monitored participation.

A more innovative way in which film marketers attempt to harness the immaterial labor of audiences and promote virality within controlled environments is through complex, multi-platform campaigns that Reinhard (2011) characterizes as "gameplay marketing." Noting the success of video gaming in today's media economy, "gamification" has become an aspirational buzzword for Hollywood marketers. Borrowing their structure from this medium, these multi-platform campaigns are designed to engage consumers by involving them in goal-oriented action that blurs the boundaries between the narrative realm and the real world. Campaigns for *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *The Dark Knight* (2008) serve as exemplars of this strategy.

The innovative marketing campaign for *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was the first of this type, artfully blending the film's story world with the real world, and online participation with offline buzz. The micro-budget film (made for $20,000 to $25,000) shot on a handheld camera tells the story of three amateur filmmakers investigating an urban legend in Maryland (Young, 2009). Ostensibly, the footage was found in the forest after the filmmakers disappeared, and pieced together to make the movie.

Capitalizing on the "real life" quality of the film and the novelty of the internet in 1999, Haxan Films and Artisan Entertainment (who acquired the film at Sundance) decided to make the website the focal point of the marketing campaign. They used the site to broaden the story world of the film and orchestrate an elaborate investigation into the fictional disappearance of the filmmakers. They posted fake news reports confirming the disappearance of the filmmakers, listed filmmakers as "missing, presumed dead" on the film's IMDB site, posted additional "found" footage on the film's website, and seeded online message boards with fictional first-hand accounts and anecdotes. In this way, marketers for *The Blair Witch Project* adopted the strategy of disguising marketing materials as user-generated and authentic, while also encouraging audience participation via a game-like hunt for the truth. Whether the audience genuinely believed the film was a true story is open for debate, but the discussion and user participation the mystery fueled proved invaluable. The online scavenger hunt for information encouraged viewers to dive into the story world, invest their time, energy, and creative labor in the property, and participate in a large-scale public debate over the film's veracity. In the end, the

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website garnered 80 million hits and the film gleaned $248 million at the box office, remaining a pop cultural icon and marketing legend today.

The *Cloverfield* (2008) campaign (discussed previously) also serves as an apt example of this gamification strategy. By concealing the name of the film, key plot points, and character depictions, Paramount capitalized on consumers' curiosity and led them on an online scavenger hunt to discover more about the film. This tactic encouraged online discussion and the establishment of a robust fan community, as fans compared observations, shared clues, and worked collaboratively to solve puzzles and gain information about the film. Like the campaign for *The Blair Witch Project*, this campaign also obscured the distinction between reality and fiction. Fake news reports (some made for individual international markets) were disseminated in an effort to increase buzz about the film while maintaining an air of authenticity and discovery.

Through these tactics, marketers for *Cloverfield* were able to retain control of the campaign's message while also fostering audiences' investment of immaterial labor. They artfully masked their orchestration of it all, instead emphasizing the campaign's status as an organic, grassroots journey of user ingenuity and discovery. While this campaign is deemed a resounding success, Paramount was initially resistant to the strategy. Only because of the tenacity of production company Bad Robot, and the relatively inexpensive nature of the marketing tactic, did Paramount agree to such an unconventional approach (N. Cagney, personal communication, November 26, 2013).

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The campaign for *The Dark Knight* (spearheaded by agency 42 Entertainment in conjunction with Warner Bros. marketing) took this "gameplay marketing" technique one step further, combining online gameplay with offline action. This complex campaign lasted for fourteen months, and was centered around character Harvey Dent's election as Gotham City's District Attorney and The Joker's prankish responses. The campaign began with an election website for Harvey Dent (Ibelieveinharveydent.com), followed by a response from The Joker with his own vandalized version of the site (Ibelieveinharveydenttoo.com). By submitting their email address on this site, users unlocked the first image of Heath Ledger as The Joker. In Joker fashion, the image disappeared shortly thereafter. It was replaced by a black page that, when highlighted, revealed a series of "Hahas" punctuated by stray letters. When strung together, these letters revealed the secret message "see YOu In DECeMbER." This creative announcement, and the shocking image of Heath Ledger's character, spawned valuable early buzz about the upcoming film.

In conjunction with Comic-Con, the studio launched the site WhySoSerious.com and, with it, a scavenger hunt spanning online and offline spaces. At Comic-Con, a plane spelled a phone number in the sky which, when called, gave a message from The Joker giving "players" their first clue. Subsequent clues were scattered across the web and across U.S. cities, and fans were encouraged to take photos and share stories of their discoveries. Clues were planted in birthday cakes at various bakeries and in bowling alley lockers across the nation. When deciphered, these clues allowed fans to unlock a teaser

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trailer, photos, messages from The Joker, and another whole website. This site, RorysDeathKiss.com, encouraged fans to upload photos of themselves dressed like The Joker (thus inserting their image into the marketing message). As a culmination to the scavenger hunt, users were prompted to gather in New York City for a "Citizens for Batman" rally. At the event, the Batman signal was projected on a building, only to be defaced by the ubiquitous Joker.

A website for the fictional newspaper *The Gotham Times* was also created, providing articles and commentary on happenings around Gotham City. As a reward for those who posted photos on RorysDeathKiss.com, these fans received a hard copy of the fictional newspaper as well. Shortly thereafter, The Joker (ostensibly) created his own defaced version of the newspaper website (thehahahatimes.com).

In March, the Harvey Dent election campaign went into full swing. The fictional campaign website featured downloadable campaign materials and information about the Dentmobile's nationwide tour. It also provided opportunities for users to post pictures and video of themselves demonstrating their support for Harvey Dent. It suggested myriad ways that fans could creatively show their support and share it on the web. The site urged:

Show your support for Harvey Dent!

- Get your friends together and spell out Harvey Dent in human letters
- Get a video of your school's cheerleading team yelling out chants for Harvey Dent
- Try to cover every square inch of someone's cubicle area with Harvey Dent posters
- Write and perform a "Take Back Gotham" song

- Make up a "Dent Dance" routine
- See if you can get up a Harvey Dent sign in every single window of your dorm building
- Turn your own car into a "Dentmobile"
- Arrange a Dent parade down Main Street
- Make a human pyramid with other Harvey Dent supporters

Clad in "I Believe in Harvey Dent" t-shirts and buttons, fans in thirty-three cities across the country organized mock rallies and marches in support of the fictional character. By disguising the film marketing campaign as a fun faux election campaign for Harvey Dent, marketers successfully recruited fans to invest their time and energy participating in blatant advertising stunts on their behalf. In the end, a reported 10 million players participated in the gamified campaign and spawned significant word of mouth and viral marketing activity (Meslow, 2012). When *The Dark Knight* released in July, it opened to a record-breaking $158 million, and went on to garner over $1 billion at the worldwide box office.

By guiding user participation through a game-like series of tasks and experiences, users are prompted to work together to actively assemble information, discuss the film, disseminate marketing materials, and use their bodies and likeness as marketing assets. In this way, marketers can maintain control of the marketing message and effectively steer the course of the campaign, while also allowing for user participation, circumscribed creativity, and conversation. By investing time and energy in these game-like campaigns, viewers are encouraged to invest emotionally in the film and become its advocates in the marketplace and within their social networks. All the while, however, studio marketers

maintain a powerful position as designers of the game, creators of game content, and monitors of discussion platforms.

Studios frame these campaign strategies as empowering for the audience, but they simultaneously act to exploit this audience power for commercial gain. Thus, while audiences are granted a voice in these campaigns, these voices are led in an organized chorus whereby marketers act as the composers and conductors. In this way, genuine audience empowerment, engagement, and participation is undermined, as users' time, energy and labor is funneled to marketing ends. The campaign for *The Dark Knight* is particularly illustrative in this regard. While audience energies could have been more productively harnessed for genuine political engagement, this audience labor was diverted to support a fictional political candidate. By blurring reality and fiction, monitoring, guiding and constraining online interactions, and harnessing audience labor for commercial purposes, these "participatory" campaigns thus act to undermine consumer power and further commercialize the online public sphere.

Conclusion

New media—and particularly social media—has deeply altered the way in which studio marketers view and target their audience. No longer seen as passive receptors of marketing messages, they are now recruited as active participants and vital sources of immaterial labor in the arenas of market research and marketing. This new view of the audience has significantly impacted Hollywood practice, informing greenlight decisions, hiring practices, distribution strategies, and marketing tactics.

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As a whole, however, studios show deep ambivalence toward this ostensibly empowered audience. Studio marketers acknowledge the valuable role a participatory audience can play in today's media environment as both creators and disseminators of content. But the size and dominance of the Hollywood film industry, its entrenched institutional structure, confusion over the value and measurability of new media tools, and the need to control intellectual property and maintain consistent brand identities and marketing messages for film properties has bred deep institutional wariness toward a participatory audience. The traditional modus operandi of Hollywood studios relies on centralized control, a one-way flow of communication from studio to audience, and carefully orchestrated marketing campaigns favoring analog platforms. An audience viewed as increasingly participatory and powerful gravely threatens this entrenched system, and is thus approached with profound reticence.

In the face of these conflicting imperatives and institutional pressures, Hollywood marketers attempt to harness the immaterial labor of audiences, but on their own terms. To achieve this, they design marketing materials that mimic user-generated content in their form, tone, and platform. Via this strategy, they attempt to maintain centralized control of the creation of marketing content while capitalizing on user dissemination of these seemingly organic materials. Additionally, they attempt to corral audience activity within studio-controlled and studio-monitored environments. Through these tactics, studio marketers nominally embrace user participation, but demonstrate their

fundamental fear of its power. In response, they act to circumscribe this power and funnel

audience energies toward their own marketing purposes.

This institutional aversion to technological change and audience empowerment

has historical precedent. Hollywood deeply feared and resisted the introduction of

television and home video equipment largely because these technologies enabled

audiences to control their viewing experience. With the introduction of television,

audiences no longer had to trek to the theater to watch whichever new release was

showing at that time. They had options (although very limited at the time) beyond what

studios made available on the big screen. The introduction of home video via VHS and

BetaMax further expanded the power of audiences to control their viewing experience.

Now they could choose not only *what* they watched, but *when* they watched it.

Hollywood reacted by attempting to outlaw the new medium via copyright infringement

claims. With time, however, Hollywood learned to embrace these technologies and use

them to their advantage. Television became a valuable source of revenue for studios' old

film libraries, and home video became studios' most lucrative window from the 1980s

through the 2000s.

Hollywood is at a similar impasse in regard to digital media. Studios' primary

concern with digital media until this point has been piracy. They've waged a very public

war against file sharing, copyright infringement, and trademark violations. Due to this

deep-seated fear of losing control of their intellectual property, studios' initial reaction to

social media use and user-generated content was to monitor, censor, and limit online

audience activity. But, with market research and marketing departments leading the way, studios are slowly coming to realize the value that digital media and audience labor can provide.

As *The Wrap*'s Sharon Waxman (2014) explains:

> [Hollywood] can only survive by embracing change, encouraging innovation and being willing to blow up old business models to win in the brave new world of digital media in which we live…Change is coming anyway, Hollywood may as well drive it and maintain some sort of control over the pace and nature of that change... But shutting down change never works. If you block the front door it will just come in the side window.

By foregrounding marketing concerns and ceding some control of film assets and marketing messages to fans, studios are slowly fighting the drag of institutional inertia and coming to terms with the necessity for change. As marketing agency Milyoni's Dean Alms (2013) explains, however, "We're in the second inning of a nine-inning game." Whether Hollywood will be destroyed by digital media or assimilate and learn to profit from it (as it did television and home video) is yet to be seen.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Film marketing is a crucial component of the Hollywood film industry and a key source of its competitive advantage in the global film marketplace. Marketing creates and circulates meaning around a film, guides audience expectations and interactions with the film, and supports the film and its brand identity across an array of platforms and ancillary products. Due to this important role, marketing budgets for Hollywood films are estimated to average an impressive $40 million per project, with some reaching as high as $70 to $80 million (Eller, 2009; McClintock, 2014). These figures demonstrate the priority studios place on marketing activities. Academia, however, has been slow to follow suit, instead focusing largely on films and filmmaking as the primary objects of study. Due to the centrality and power of Hollywood's marketing machine, a systematic interrogation of its role, processes, pressures, and working dynamics is warranted. While further research is needed in this arena, this dissertation provides a first step in revealing and analyzing these issues as they play out in the shifting media landscape of the early 21st century.

Cultural products such as films and their marketing materials are created in embodied institutional environments. They are thus subject to myriad political, economic, organizational, social, and spatial pressures. Therefore, as Austin notes, "Understanding how cultural forms work within contemporary society also requires an investigation of institutional contexts and commercial strategies and practices, as media consumption clearly does not happen in isolation from these operations" (2002, p. 14). By examining

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the institutional context of the production of film marketing materials, I hope to have

illuminated the array of forces that shape the face of films in the marketplace and guide

audience engagement. Studio executives, marketing personnel, market researchers,

filmmakers, stars, legal teams, distribution partners, third party marketing agencies, and

audiences—all of these players and the complex interactions between them profoundly

impact the final look, feel, and function of the modern movie marketing campaign.

> As Haralovich explains:

> Rather than considering, for instance, the mogul as the focal point of decisions, the film industry can be characterized by the give and take among groups, each with a particular interest in the film industry's products and each a part of an integrated hierarchy. These interactions among interested parties and the effects they have on film industry products are more easily observed at times of major changes in the industry (1984, p. 10).

The contemporary moment of the early 21st century is just such a moment of major

upheaval within the industry. As recently as 1984, the international market for

Hollywood films accounted for only 34% of total box office revenue (Sochay & Litman,

1992). By the year 2000, this figure stood at roughly 50%. By 2013, a full 70% of

theatrical box office revenue was derived from the international sphere (MPAA, 2013).

This profound and rapid shift in audience demographics leaves Hollywood scrambling to

adjust to this new market reality and court their international audiences effectively. This

period of explosive international market growth has also witnessed the introduction and

proliferation of an array of new technologies that have transformed the entertainment

media landscape. These digital innovations have enabled a democratization of the means

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of production and distribution, leading to a proliferation of amateur and professional media content and marketing messages on an expanding array of channels.

In this fluid landscape wrought by the dual forces of globalization and digitization, film marketers have developed a new view of the audience: as increasingly global and empowered. This shifting view profoundly shapes filmmakers' and marketers' practices and the cultural products they create. Marketers are tasked with identifying an audience for a given product and bringing that audience and product together in the marketplace. While marketers often treat audiences as pre-formed groupings identifiable by their demographic, geographic, or behavioral characteristics, marketers are active participants in constructing these groups, defining their boundaries, and enumerating their preferences. Marketing messages and film products are subsequently designed to appeal to (and reify) these constructed audiences.

Hollywood marketers' role as audience constructors has become increasingly central with the internationalization of Hollywood's market and the rapidly shifting technological landscape. *The New Yorker*'s Tad Friend (2009) expresses the current industry sentiment, explaining "Films no longer have time to find their audience; that audience has to be identified and solicited well in advance." The timeline of filmmaking and marketing has thus reversed. Marketers are no longer an afterthought, called upon at the completion of film production to devise a sales pitch for the finished product (as an advertising agency might be for a new car or toothpaste). Film marketers are now crucial players from the concept development phase through production and release of the film.

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While Wyatt (1994) pinpoints the start of this trend in the 1980s, it has intensified in recent years due to the growing uncertainty born of globalization and digitization. As film audiences disperse across the globe and across an array of media platforms, they are perceived as increasingly amorphous and difficult to reach. Marketers thus assume a critical role in defining and organizing these audiences into "knowable" and targetable groups—serving to reduce the fear and uncertainty inherent in the contemporary era of media upheaval.

The increased power and centrality of marketers in the film planning and production process, and their shifting view of audiences as global and empowered, has deeply impacted the type of film content that reaches the market today. In order to maximize appeal across the broadest swathe of the global moviegoing public, studios increasingly rely on big budget, special effects-laden, white male star-driven, action-packed blockbusters based on pre-tested materials. Due to the large capital investments required to make and market these global blockbusters (and the tenuous nature of marketers' employment as the default scapegoat for box office failures), marketers favor formulaic approaches to both filmmaking and marketing.

The spread of new media technology acts, in part, to counteract these homogenizing forces. On one hand, digital technology allows studios to view and treat the global film audience as a singular, undifferentiated mass. Since everyone with an internet connection can ostensibly access the same marketing materials from various points across the globe in real time, Hollywood's audiences can be seen as merging into a

singular global film audience (a view supported by the shift to global day-and-date film releases). Simultaneously, however, digital technology precipitates the "discovery" (or, more accurately, construction) and targeting of increasingly distinct and diverse niche audiences. As individuals come together online to form fan communities and interest groups, filmmakers and marketers are learning to embrace these new audience segments. This recognition has resulted in film projects targeting females, diverse racial groups (especially African Americans and Latinos in the U.S.), and interest-based groups such as Christian audiences.

Despite these advances, however, these niche-targeted films are often acquired independent films or small-budget studio fare aimed primarily at a domestic U.S. audience. As Facebook's Christian Martinez (2013) explains, "It's hard to get studios to segment; they want a 'general audience.'" In an increasingly tenuous marketplace, studios and their media conglomerate owners strive to achieve the largest possible returns on their investments. Aiming to please the broadest swathe of the international film-going public (or "general audience") is viewed as the most effective means of achieving this goal. Financial pressures thus serve to stifle diverse and innovative big-budget studio fare, but leave ample opportunity for independents and smaller players to fill this void and provide tailored films to niche audience groupings identifiable and reachable via new media technology.

In their capacity as audience constructors, film marketers act as translators between studio executives and filmmakers, the filmic product, and target audiences.

Studio executives and filmmakers rely on marketers (and market researchers) to identify audiences and relay their perceived preferences and desires. This translation of audience preference informs greenlight, production, distribution, and marketing decisions. Marketers next take the completed film product and reduce it to a few key images or 30-second clips. These bite-size encapsulations of the film are designed specifically to speak to the target audience(s). In this way, marketers translate the film into the language (both cultural and linguistic) of their target audiences—whether these are young American gamers, urban Chinese office workers, or middle-aged Latino fans of Bruce Willis.

To craft these translatory texts, marketers rely on industry mythologies, past experiences, personal cultural assumptions and intuitions, box office data, market research, and cultural informants. In the international sphere, local distributors who live and work in the target region or country serve as these cultural informants. In this capacity, they give feedback on materials to studio marketers, suggesting targeted approaches that may more effectively lure local audiences to the theater. As discussed in Chapter 4, however, the voices of these cultural informants are often silenced. Due to risk aversion, strained budgets, logistical constraints, a lack of international market research, a desire for cohesive international brand messaging, and prevailing industry myths about international audiences, standardization of movies and marketing campaigns remains the norm. With the rapid expansion of social media, everyday (primarily American) people increasingly serve as cultural informants as well. Via surveillance practices termed "social listening," studios glean information about audiences' tastes, preferences,

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identifications, and sentiments from their everyday online activity and interactions. While marketers increasingly recognize the value of these voices as sources of cultural information (as unwitting participants in large-scale market research) and as disseminators of sanctioned marketing materials, they warily embrace more robust and active forms of audience participation (as discussed in Chapter 5).

In the contemporary film marketplace, globalization and digitization act as centrifugal forces, diffusing production and meaning-making capabilities. These forces thus threaten the traditionally centralized control held by Hollywood studios and their marketing teams. This dilemma is aptly illustrated by the case of an unsanctioned promotional poster for *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) displayed in Shanghai. In this instance, the Shanghai Bona Insun International Theater Complex accidently displayed a user-generated homoerotic poster design instead of the studio-sanctioned promotional poster. Instead of depicting Chris Hemsworth embracing Natalie Portman, the fan art showed him embracing fellow actor Tom Hiddleson (see Figure 6.1). A picture of the lobby poster quickly went viral, gleaning thousands of views on Reddit and Chinese social media platform Weibo (Kooser, 2013).

This misstep perfectly encapsulates the threat globalization and digitization pose to the centralized control of studio marketers. In today's environment, a fan had the technological tools and savvy to create his or her own sophisticated poster design and distribute it widely enough that Chinese exhibitors (far from the watchful eye of Hollywood marketers) could mistake it as legitimate. The poster's homoeroticism

undermines the film's mainstream appeal and creates a new and oppositional meaning and public image for the film. While, in this case, the mistake was laughed off as a humorous misstep by exhibitors, it is indicative of a larger and more threatening trend for studio marketers. As Miller (2013) suggests, "Hollywood likes a plan; it has trouble letting go." But faced with the dual forces of globalization and digitization, studio marketers are losing their power to orchestrate and control messaging surrounding the release of a new film. In response to these centrifugal forces, therefore, studios act to exert their own countervailing centripetal might. By reasserting their own centralized power and bringing outside players into the institutional (and thereby studio-controlled) fold, Hollywood marketers attempt to embrace change piecemeal and on their own terms.

Figure 6.1: **Homoerotic fan art for *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) displayed in a Shanghai movie theater. (Source: Kooser, 2013)**

As international audiences grow increasingly vital and the media landscape becomes more diffuse and interactive, marketers are compelled to delegate labor (and therefore cede some control) to outside marketing agencies, local distributors, and audiences in order to foster innovation and a necessary sense of organicity and cultural authenticity. Studio marketers are incentivized to incorporate the voices of third party marketing agencies because they promise innovative ideas stemming from their cultural capital and unique (partial) outsider perspective (Chapter 3). Likewise, ceding some creative control to international distributors and allowing local environmental forces to mold marketing materials can allow for increased localization and cultural resonance for diverse global audiences (Chapter 4). Finally, marketers increasingly recognize the benefit of utilizing audience labor via social media marketing and user-generated content as a means of cutting through media clutter and bolstering films' apparent grassroots appeal (Chapter 5). Marketers are thus incentivized to embrace these decentralizing forces and the cultural labor provided by these outside players. Counteracting these centrifugal forces, however, are profound centripetal ones fueled by Hollywood studios' institutional inertia, risk aversion, engrained bureaucratic processes, and desire to maintain centralized control of their marketing messages and intellectual property. Studio marketers are thus tasked with navigating these competing currents. Their resulting practices demonstrate their ambivalence.

While outsourcing design and high-tech work to third party marketing agencies has become the norm, these firms remain partial outsiders and subordinates in the

Hollywood milieu. In this relationship, marketing agencies have a powerful hand in determining the shape and tone of the campaign, but studios maintain ultimate control in their position as client. Along with legal teams, stars, and filmmakers, studio marketing personnel retain the power to veto or approve all marketing materials proposed by these vendors. This dynamic forces marketing agencies to undertake lengthy revision processes and, according to many agency personnel, stifles creativity and innovation that might stem from looser studio oversight. Thus, while studios invite input and creative labor from agency personnel, they act to limit the creative power of these outside players in favor of centralized control.

In the international realm, this ambivalence toward decentralization manifests in standardized "international" campaigns with piecemeal tailoring for particularly lucrative markets and/or for particularly problematic cinematic material. Marketers are keenly aware of the value of international audiences, and increasingly consider these markets when consulting on all stages of the filmmaking process. However, they continue to favor domestic U.S. audiences in their day-to-day practices by opting for standardized "international" campaigns often based on domestic U.S. materials. Studio marketers' reticence to tailor campaigns for various localities reflects institutionally-imposed financial and logistical constraints, entrenched cultural assumptions about the universal appeal of Hollywood fare, and an unwillingness to cede control of the marketing message to local players. In response, local distributors have learned to work creatively and cost-effectively to localize materials via copy translation, formatting, promotions, and digital

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content. Local audiences also retain power to define their own readings and interactions with films and their marketing messages. As Hedetoft asserts, films are caught in the middle between their "transnational forms of production, dissemination and (sometimes) contents, and routinely national modes of reception, decoding and interpretation, based on national identities, cultural history and aesthetic traditions" (2000, p. 278). Thus, while Hollywood marketers generally aim to communicate a standard global message, audiences retain the ultimate power to deconstruct these meanings and craft their own culturally grounded readings and interpretations.

Finally, marketers' deep ambivalence toward decentralization is demonstrated by their half-hearted and selective embrace of social media and user-generated content. Threatened by a perceived loss of control over messaging in the digital sphere, marketers respond by encouraging some forms of user interaction while simultaneously acting to fabricate and control it. By mimicking the form and tone of user-generated content and encouraging audience participation within controlled spheres of interaction, studio marketers aim to garner an aura of authenticity and organicity without risking the audience backlash and negative buzz inherent in free forms of audience interaction. They attempt to harness valuable audience labor, not as creators of content, but as market research subjects and as distributors of studio-produced and studio-sanctioned marketing content.

This ambivalence has historical precedent. In response to past shifts in audience constructions and technological innovations, film marketers have reacted with varying

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levels of resistance before accepting or assimilating the new factors. For instance, Hollywood at first viewed television as a profound threat, as it significantly expanded audiences' viewing options and reduced theatrical ticket sales. Marketers initially attempted to compete directly with television by trying to woo back their coveted "mass" audience with bigger, louder, more spectacular fare and state-of-the-art theaters. With time and experience, however, studios learned to embrace television as a complementary medium, differentiate their own product, and use the new technology to their own advantage. Television soon became the most valuable platform for advertising theatrical films, and was adopted as a lucrative exhibition window for studios' libraries of old films. Studios also learned to construct new niche audience segments that could be targeted by feature films, leaving television to cater to the "mass" audience.

Similarly, studios initially fought the introduction of home video technology. Due to its recording capabilities, home video was viewed as dangerously empowering to audiences, as it allowed them to control both the time and place of viewing. Citing violations of copyright law, Hollywood studios argued that home video would precipitate the downfall of the American film industry. Upon losing this legal battle, however, studios came to realize the monetary potential of home entertainment formats, and it soon became their primary source of revenue. This technological development also encouraged new approaches to the audience, as children's repeat home video viewing fueled Hollywood's love affair with the newly constructed "family" audience.

Hollywood studios are notoriously slow and reluctant to adapt to new developments in the media sphere. As large, corporate-owned behemoths with deeply entrenched practices and industry mythologies, and a vested interest in controlling their intellectual property, change and diffusion of power is a threatening proposition. Marketers, tasked with constructing and targeting audience groupings, represent a progressive arm in this larger institutional atmosphere of inertia. While they take steps forward in building and engaging international and participatory audiences in the contemporary era, these steps are tentative and measured. As in past periods of institutional upheaval, however, Hollywood marketers (and the studios of which they are a part) must learn to embrace these momentous changes and alter their perceptions and treatment of their audiences accordingly. Whether studios will adapt, however, remains an open question. With the democratization of the means of production and distribution, marketing remains their key stronghold in an environment otherwise ripe with competition from amateur and independent filmmakers, international film industries, and alternative entertainment media. If Hollywood fails to modernize their perceptions and practices, there are myriad players ready to fill the vacuum.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

- Neha Bajaria (President, Pulse)

- Inbal Biton (former Advertising & Marketing Manager, A.D. Matalon (distributor of Sony films in Israel))

- Nathan Cagney (former Manager, Worldwide Interactive Marketing, Paramount Pictures)

- Alex Kostich (VP, Creative Advertising and Marketing, Sony Pictures International)

- Yuk Ying (Ali) Lee (Senior Marketing Executive, EDKO Films (distributor of Sony, Universal, and Fox films in Hong Kong))

- Alicia Leung (Social Media Manager, Warner Bros. Pictures)

- Mei Lu (Social Media Producer, Ignition Interactive)

- Luke Melin (Executive Director, Cold Open)

- Lisa Pendse (former Digital Creative Executive, Sony Pictures Entertainment and former Senior Account Manager, Sony Pictures Interactive)

- Julie Ryan (Executive Director, Worldwide Digital Marketing, 20th Century Fox and former Director, Interactive Marketing, Warner Bros. Pictures)

- John Sampson (Creative Director, FIVE33)

- Derek Shields (MD & Creative Director, FIVE33)

- Ela Siromascenko (Marketing Specialist, Cinema City Romania)

- Christine Tasto (VP of Film Marketing, IMAX)

- Janet Weiss (Independent Entertainment Marketing Consultant)

- Carlos Zaldivar (Creative Director, FIVE33)

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