

Media Relations

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PA Country's Culture Influences Whether a Movie Gets Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down

UNH Researcher Looks at the Marketing of Major Motion Pictures Worldwide



M. Billur Akdeniz, assistant professor of marketing at the UNH Paul College..

DURHAM, N.H. – When “The Blind Side” starring Sandra Bullock and Tim McGraw introduced moviegoers to the stirring story of Baltimore Ravens offensive tackle Michael Oher, Americans spent \$256 million at the box office. International audiences, on the other hand, generated only \$53 million in box office revenues.

Whether a major U.S. motion picture booms or busts internationally depends on a country's culture and how its population perceives the star power of the actors, production costs, critics' reviews, and sequels, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics.

“Consumers face uncertainty in evaluating the quality of a movie before they see it and have a short window of making informed decisions. Therefore, studios emit marketing signals about the quality of a movie to reduce prospective moviegoers' uncertainty and boost box office revenues,” says lead researcher M. Billur Akdeniz, assistant professor of marketing at the UNH Paul College.

“However, there can be substantial differences in the use and interpretation of the same movie signals by audiences from different cultures,” Akdeniz says. “Our results reveal that returns

on studios' efforts to successfully launch a movie across countries depend on cultural traits of a country.”

The research was conducted by Akdeniz and M. Berk Talay, assistant professor of marketing in the Manning School of Business at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The research is available online in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science in the article “Cultural variations in the use of marketing signals: a multilevel analysis of the motion picture industry.”

The researchers analyzed 1,116 movies produced or co-produced in the United States and released in 27 countries between 2007 and 2011. Movie genres in the sample included romance, thriller, action, drama, and comedy.

The researchers found that the impact of the star power of actors on box office performance is amplified in countries with cultures that are highly avoidant of uncertainty, such as South Korea, Uruguay, and Venezuela, as well as in countries with indulgent and open cultures such as Australia, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

However, the impact of star power is diminished in high power distance cultures – cultures that distrust authority such as Philippines. “In such cultures, greater distrust of authority seems to have a detrimental impact on the effect of star power, counterbalancing the stronger positive impact of the relationship between star presence in the cast of a movie and its performance,” Akdeniz says.

Researchers also found that sequels have stronger effects on box office performance in highly collectivist societies such as Taiwan and Chile, where consumers are in stronger need to strengthen their bond to a group. This positive relationship between sequels and box office performance wanes in individualist cultures such as Hungary and the United Kingdom.

Movies with high production budgets also perform better in culturally open countries, while critics' reviews are more instrumental in high uncertainty avoidance cultures.

"As the revenues from international markets have become exceedingly vital for the bottom lines of the studios, customizing signaling strategies across countries can be highly valuable for the box office performance of a U.S. movie. By carefully adjusting the marketing and communication strategy of movie signals with regard to the cultural fabric of the target country, producers and studios are likely to increase their success in international markets," Akdeniz says.

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PHOTO

M. Billur Akdeniz, assistant professor of marketing at the UNH Paul College.

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-30-

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