

Pacific rim (2013) summary and analysis



In selecting a film, and subsequently the company behind it for an interrogation of industry workings, a more recent film would be the obvious choice for a justification in the relevance of research. However with a production process spanning seven years and no precursor or existing franchise to support it, *Pacific Rim (2013)*, as a singular film with no preexisting fan base, would make a logical case study in analysing how corporate influence has affected the film's box office success. In addition, having already been released for over a year, the results and after effects of the film can be analysed thoroughly without the initial fan attraction or hype associated with newly released films.

The film itself is directed by Oscar nominee Guillermo del Toro. His summer blockbuster *Pacific Rim* is a movie of the science fiction Kaiju and fantasy action genre in which giant robots known as 'Jaegers' battle the invading monsters known as 'Kaiju' in a "go big or go extinct" fight for mankind's survival. Starting production in February 2006, *Pacific Rim* eventually began filming on the 14th November 2011 under Warner Bros Pictures in association with Legendary Pictures and was then distributed by Warner Bros Pictures, a subsidiary of Time Warner. These two studios are generally well known for their collaboration work as a result of films such as *Batman Begins* (2005) and *Inception* (2010).

To truly assess how a film is affected by the influence of a well known and financially sufficient company such as Time Warner, a consideration of the metric that measures the success of all, if not most films would be beneficial to the research question at hand. While it has been taken into consideration that some films, such as *Fight Club* (1999), can become cult hits even after

being deemed as a box office failure, the metric used in measuring the success of films are box office sales. In scrutinizing the film as a media text from an economic point of view, *Pacific Rim's* basic purpose is to create economic wealth from the creative and narrative elements within the media text.

Therefore by investigating box office sales and the consequences of a film's success, this research question will allow for a scholarly understanding of how organisations influence films to create economic wealth and whether this affects a corporate company's decision to create or add to the creative and artistic universe of a film through sequels, prequels or other narrative media texts.

In order to critically analyse and examine film industry structures, procedures and mechanisms, the appropriate methodology of media industry research must be employed. Therefore selecting a methodology that studies the development and delivery of the chosen media text; *Pacific Rim*, would be beneficial in understanding why procedures and practices are used within the company behind it; Time Warner. An organisational analysis of Time Warner and the roles and functions of each creative subsidiary company within Time Warner would be a suitable research methodology to employ, however organisational analysis' are generally limited to one organisation and the mapping the departments within, applying this to a conglomerate and viewing each company within it as a department may be using an organisational analysis on a larger scale than it should be used in.

None the less, the employment of an organisational analysis would be the logical research methodology to be applied to this research report. As stated by Long and Wall in *Media studies: texts, production, context*, the first subsection of an organisational analysis to be taken into consideration is the mapping of divisions or departments such as the production and marketing behind *Pacific Rim*. The second branch to be considered when making an organisational analysis is the working practices such as distribution and exhibition in cinemas.

In a primary analysis of the production procedures behind *Pacific Rim* through organisational analysis, it is suggested that the film is the result of a practice known as vertical integration; vertical integration is the process where a media conglomerate owns several companies from the different stages of production all the way to distribution. Fitzgerald (2012) details the growth of Time Warner and its subsidiaries and it can be seen that *Pacific Rim* is created and filmed by Warner Brothers Pictures with other supporting studios, Warner Brothers Pictures is a studio owned by Time Warner, which is a large multi-national media conglomerate. Upon further investigation into Fitzgerald's *Corporations and Cultural Industries: Time Warner (2006)*, the relationship and roles between the different divisions that compile Time Warner can be seen. Time Warner is also the parent company of WaterTower Music, which provided the OST (Original Soundtrack) for *Pacific Rim*. The films' behind the scenes content and interviews with the cast and director were then promoted on Cinemax, an American cable and satellite channel owned by HBO (Home Box Office), which is also a subsidiary of Time Warner.

Further research also shows *Pacific Rim* to be the product of media synergy. Media synergy is the coming together of two or more elements in a media conglomerate to promote a product across several types of media. Similarly, media convergence, as suggested by Jenkins (2009), is the increase in connections between media platforms and technologies. The convergence of media can also be seen in the viral marketing produced prior to the launch of the film. Convergence took the form of virtual propaganda posters and robot blueprints [Appendix A] advertised across the internet, additionally, links to a “ build your own Jaeger” flash game on the official *Pacific Rim* website is another example of media convergence. Moreover, a console videogame and soundtrack were released alongside the movie on July 12th and June 18th respectively to help promote the movie, both of which were created by subsidiaries of Time Warner.

This media synergy and convergence created by Time Warner advertises the media text; *Pacific Rim* across all of its creative enterprises such as WaterTower Music and HBO. However it can also be said that *Pacific Rim* is not a product of vertical integration as the parent company, Time Warner, does not own or monopolise all the stages of distribution, even if it does have a large hand in the production of its movies. Cinema companies today such as Vue and Cineworld are owned independently of the studios that create the films. It is this reason that vertical integration no longer truly exists in the film industry as it did in the golden age of Hollywood where the then called Warner Brothers monopolised the industry along with the other studios of the “ Big Six” in an “ oligopoly” as argued by Thomson in *The whole equation: a history of Hollywood* (2006).

An initial study of how a film's production process is supported or undermined by corporate backing would suggest several advantageous points in publicity; including a worldwide scale of theatrical release, worldwide advertising and large financial support from the company that produced and distributed *Pacific Rim* : Time Warner. While specifically not distributed by Time Warner, but a subsidiary known as Warner Brother Pictures, *Pacific Rim* still benefited from Time Warner through its other subsidiaries as stated in Fitzgerald's *Corporations and Cultural Industries: Time Warner* (2006).

A more in depth investigation into box office figures via an online secondary source, Boxofficemojo. com [Appendix B] illustrates the box office sales for the weekend opening July 12th-14th. As seen on the webpage, it is reasonable to assume the large amount of theatres screening the movie contributed to the amount of gross profit made for that opening weekend. However, in applying a theoretical analysis of power, and more importantly economic power to the research question, it can be said that Time Warner, being an economic institution with commercial enterprises across all forms of media has the influence to have *Pacific Rim* screened in many cinemas. (Flew, 2007)

However this leads to the question of why other films, as listed on Box Office Mojo, such as Djúpið (*The Deep*), that released on the same opening weekend as *Pacific Rim* did not use or hire more cinemas and theatres to screen their film. Upon further research into the companies that produced *The Deep* on website IMDb [Appendix C], it can be seen that *The Deep* is

produced and distributed by media companies much smaller than Time Warner and Warner Brothers Pictures.

AGM Factory, BlueEye productions and Filmhuset Produksjoner are all minor and independent companies that have less power in persuading mainstream cinema companies into screening their product. However in consideration of their film itself, there is a strong likelihood that it may have been a conscious decision made by the film makers, producers and distributors of *The Deep* as their target audience may be smaller in size and are viewers of the niche genre, making it more logical to screen at a limited number of theatres. This notion of larger companies wielding more influence with cinemas is reinforced by the fact that the top three positions for weekend gross and amount of cinemas screening on the Box Office Mojo chart were held by three major studios: Disney, Universal Pictures and Warner Bros. [Appendix D]

These larger Hollywood studios are therefore able to screen their films in even more theatres as a result of their economic power i. e. influence and wealth (Flew, 2007). Theatres also have a higher likelihood to screen these Hollywood films as they generally have large budgets and run advertising campaigns that ensure the awareness of the general public, which would also result in an increased income for the cinemas and theatres that host these films.

The end result of *Pacific Rim* 's box office run was a success, however upon further analysis of the process as opposed to simply interpreting the results, *Pacific Rim* was actually deemed as a domestic flop in the western

hemisphere. Upon release on 12th July, *Pacific Rim* itself had a disappointing start in western markets and was dubbed by the Gaurdian Film Blog's Charles Gant as " the latest film that is struggling to engage audiences". However there was speculation in the industry about the high possibility of success in international markets for *Pacific Rim* , one account being made on website Variety by Michael Sullivan who stated that " *Pacific Rim* 's hopes for salvation now lie with international auds." Sullivan makes this suggestion as international audiences are more familiar with the Kaiju genre and are therefore more likely to go and see the movie.

Del Toro's *Pacific Rim* can be seen as a western approach on the " Kaiju" genre, the Kaiju genre being native to the Japanese film industry. This similarity can be seen as it shares conventions such as " strange monsters" (the direct translation of " Kaiju") attacking major metropolitan cities as seen in Japanese classics such as *Godzilla (1954) (1954)*. Therefore it can be argued that *Pacific Rim* 's Iconography and structure may be recognisable and well established to audiences who are aware of Kaiju genre conventions, making it more appealing.

This is reinforced by the overseas box office release of *Pacific Rim* in Chinese and South Korean markets, proving Gant's guess of *Pacific Rim* 's " salvation" with international audiences. The international release boosted its income significantly, effectively saving it from box office failure. Appendix E, also from Box Office Mojo, details *Pacific Rim* 's worldwide success, with a total gross of four hundred million US dollars, also noteworthy is the fact that three quarters of that lifetime gross derives from " foreign" marketplaces. It

is then reasonable to argue that *Pacific Rim* 's box office success was saved by its release in international markets.

An investigation of how a large corporate company can be detrimental to a film's box office success is not obvious, however a case study analysed by Long and Wall (2012) on the film *Cowboys and Aliens* describes the film as playing out like something more akin to a "...business deal than a motion picture." Therefore in the context where corporate companies have too much of a heavy hand in the artistic and creative elements of film production, it can become "noisy, grotesque and unappealing", *Cowboys and Aliens* is summarised as the best movie "a posse of major Hollywood players could come up with." For that reason, it can be argued that the financial benefits provided by a conglomerate can have a positive effect on a film's box office success. However any infringement on the creative and narrative elements of a film would be detrimental.

Furthermore, *Pacific Rim*'s narrative and creative choices have had no regulatory issues, being approved and classified as a 12A film by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC); reasons for this were stated in the "BBFC insight" section of the website. The BBFC states that "moderate violence is allowed" in a 12A film but not in explicit detail and that there "should be no emphasis on injuries or blood". The Insight publication also reveals that *Pacific Rim* abides by these rules and that "we see some blood" however deaths are only implied as "neither the injuries nor deaths are shown with any detail." Overall, the film is "rated 12A for frequent moderate violence and one use of strong language." This makes it suitable for a much wider audience than films of a higher classification. To that end, narrative

decisions made during the script writing process therefore allowed *Pacific Rim* to maximise its box office success and profits by having a lower rating.

A flaw in the narrative and creative aspects of the film was its genre, the kaiju genre is not well known to western audiences and while the creative minds were allowed to flourish without restraint, the end result did hinder the overall box office success. On the other hand, another case study such as *Cowboys and Aliens* is at the other end of the spectrum in terms of heavy corporate and business influence, to the point where it was described as playing out “ like a business deal more than a motion picture.” (Long & Wall 2012) Therefore with case studies of major conglomerates having been studied at each end of the spectrum, the next step in continuing a study of how a multinational media conglomerate’s organisational structure effects box office would be to select a film to use as a case study that has a box office record that isn’t affected by external factors such as being part of a business deal or being hindered by an unfamiliar genre. A better selection of case study films to represent the effectiveness of conglomerates on box office successes would truly answer the research question at hand.

However to summarise based on current findings, it can be argued that not all corporately produced blockbusters are successful; this was demonstrated in the box office results for *Pacific Rim* found on BoxOfficeMojo. com, where the motion picture’s box office performance in domestic markets waned, only to be saved with its release in foreign markets such as China, Japan and South Korea where the ‘ Kaiju’ genre, typically associated with *Godzilla (1954)* (1954) , is well received. On this notion, it can be counter argued again from a theoretical perspective, that the wealth and influence wielded

by Time Warner allowed *Pacific Rim* to be released in international markets, effectively saving the film's box office run.

The research results from the organisational analysis show that corporate backing does not always create box office successes, however the benefits of being produced by such an organisation allows for a synergy, and convergence, of all companies within that conglomerate to provide all the necessary components for the media text to succeed. The roles and functions of each division cooperate effectively towards a common goal in the marketing and production aspects of creative commodities such as *Pacific Rim*. While this specific case study, *Pacific Rim*, does not fare particularly well at domestic box offices, it does prove that the object of study, Time Warner, has ability to create successes.