

Can Amy Pascal's career survive Sony cyberattack?

December 12 2014, by Sandy Cohen



-In this Oct. 4, 2013 file photo, Amy Pascal, Sony Pictures Entertainment co-chairman, arrives at Variety's 5th Annual Power of Women event at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel on Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Beverly Hills, Calif. Pascal is under fire for racist remarks that surfaced in emails made public by the Sony cyberattack. Pascal apologized Thursday, Dec. 11, 2014, for the "insensitive and inappropriate" comments in her emails that she says are "not an accurate reflection of who I am." (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP, File)

Amy Pascal, one of the most powerful women in the man's world that is

Hollywood and the force behind such critical and commercial hits as "The Social Network" and "American Hustle," has had better days.

The co-chairman of the studio and chief of its film division is under fire for racist remarks about President Obama's presumed choice in movies that surfaced in emails made public by the Sony cyberattack.

Pascal also faces criticism for green-lighting the film that may have inspired the hacking to begin with: "The Interview," which stars Seth Rogen and James Franco as bumbling journalists tasked with killing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

North Korea has denied responsibility for the attack, but praised it as a "righteous deed." Earlier this year, the country's foreign ministry said the film's release would be an "act of war" and promised "merciless" retaliation.

"The Interview" is not the first film to target political leaders, or even North Korea. "Team America: World Police" famously took aim at Kim's father, Kim Jong Il. This also isn't the first time a powerful executive has been dogged by private comments made public. But can Pascal's career survive such a double whammy?

The 56-year-old thinks so.

"I'd be surprised if my entire legacy was based on the leak of the email exchange," Pascal told industry website The Wrap on Thursday.

Virtually unknown outside of Hollywood, her nearly 20-year tenure at Sony and Columbia Pictures has included some very well-known films, such as "Skyfall," "Superbad," "Salt," "Fury" and "The Equalizer."

Pascal was fourth on The Hollywood Reporter's annual ranking released this week of the most powerful women in entertainment.

She apologized Thursday for the "insensitive and inappropriate" comments in her emails that she says are "not an accurate reflection of who I am." Oscar-winning producer Scott Rudin, who participated in the racist exchange, apologized as well. Rudin, incidentally, was a producer of "Team America."

Pascal's decision to bring "The Interview" to theaters isn't as problematic as the unflattering image created by her own private emails, said branding expert Dorie Clark.

"She's on solid ground rhetorically when she talks about the fact that Sony Pictures Entertainment is never going to back down from releasing a film because of the threat of what hackers might do," Clark said.

Rogen thanked Pascal for having the courage to make the film at its premiere Thursday, where Sony took the unusual step of denying press interviews.

Clark said Pascal's professional network will determine the continued viability of her career.

"What's going to decide her future is how close she is with her boss and what kind of relationship she has with the board. This scandal is survivable," she said. "It depends on how many people there are in Hollywood who want to put a knife in her back."

Clark said the studio's financial success under Pascal is likely to play into her fate, noting the company's revenues are up 13 percent over the past fiscal year. The studio underwent a multi-million-dollar cost-cutting campaign the previous year after a few flops, including the Jamie Foxx-Channing Tatum action flick, "White House Down."

Crisis-management specialist Michael Levine said corporate leaders are

far more forgiving of those who are generating profits, especially since Pascal followed the "four golden rules of redemption" after the email leak: Contrition, humility, taking responsibility and responding quickly.

"If one is successful for an organization, they're given every benefit of the doubt," he said.

Pascal and Sony did not respond to requests for comment Friday.

The massive Sony hack not only revealed private emails sent by top executives, it also made thousands of employee Social Security numbers public and leaked five new Sony films, including "Annie," which opens next week.

The juiciest aspect, though, has been the emails, which offer an uncensored peek behind the curtain at how Hollywood does business. In one of the messages, Rudin called Angelina Jolie a "minimally talented spoiled brat." Pascal and Jolie crossed paths this week at an industry breakfast event, but no fireworks flew.

Ironically, the flap over the hack attack could boost box office returns for "The Interview," which opens on Christmas.

"The circumstances are nothing anyone would covet or want in their marketing plan... But now that it's happened, it may end up helping the movie," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for box-office tracker Rentrak. "It's raised the awareness of the film to an incredible level that it otherwise might not have enjoyed were it not for this situation."

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Citation: Can Amy Pascal's career survive Sony cyberattack? (2014, December 12) retrieved 25

April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-amy-pascal-career-survive-sony.html>

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