

Return of the cinema: 'Star Wars' a major coup for theaters

December 22 2015

Shattering box office records, the latest installment of "Star Wars" has stoked US film industry hopes that theaters can thrive in the face of a growing shift to online video streaming.

"Star Wars: The Force Awakens" surged above estimates to post an all-time industry-high \$248 million domestically plus \$281 million internationally for a record global debut of \$529 million since opening December 16, Disney said Monday.

The previous record holder was "Jurassic World," which had a global launch box office tally of \$524.9 million.

The stellar opening weekend was great news for North American cinemas, where box office revenues were down five percent to \$10.4 billion last year while increasing barely one percent globally, according to statistics from the Motion Picture Association of America.

"Movie theaters have a chance to reintroduce themselves to movie-goers who come for 'Star Wars' but may not have come for a few years," said National Association of Theatre Owners spokesman Patrick Corcoran.

In the past decade, [movie theaters](#) have remade themselves with more comfortable seats, improved sight lines, sophisticated projectors, immersive sound systems and amenities such as dinners or drinks delivered to seats during shows.

A powerhouse attraction such as "Star Wars" is a chance for upgraded theaters to show visitors what they are missing and, hopefully, win them back as regular customers.

"Star Wars" has a winning formula that includes legions of fans devoted to the franchise and marketing momentum ramped up by Hollywood entertainment titan Disney.

Many people who were children when they fell in love with early "Star Wars" films are now old enough to have offspring of their own and make enthusiastic family outings to the theater.

"It's a cultural event," said Erik Davis of online reservations service Fandango, which handled a large chunk of "Star Wars" tickets sold in the United States and Canada.

"It's bringing a lot of people together, especially different groups of families and friends, and people going multiple times with multiple people."

Films with that kind of drawing prowess are rare, but Davis saw the record-breaking opening of "Star Wars" as evidence that the shared experience of viewing a movie on the big screen remains important, despite the trend toward streaming entertainment on smaller screens.

He pointed out that in contrast to 2013, when only "Iron Man 3" topped a billion dollars in global box-office receipts, that threshold has already been broken this year by "Jurassic World," "Furious 7" and "Avengers: Age of Ultron."

Nostalgia versus technology

Big-budget offerings based on known commodities, whether they be

earlier films or hit books, more easily attract massive audiences to theaters.

"Nostalgia is making a lot of money at the [box office](#) right now," Davis said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if studios now look for other franchises from our past and try to resurrect them in different ways."

Recent cinematic successes rooted in the past include "Mad Max: Fury Road" and "Creed," which breathed new life into "Rocky."

Of course, the finished product must be entertaining enough to sit through, many times even.

Director J.J. Abrams has won praise for his achievement with the new "Star Wars."

The film rode a "predictable formula" that was a good, safe bet, according to Endpoint Technologies analyst Roger Kay.

"That doesn't say anything about the relentless progress of technology, which is definitely swinging toward streaming," Kay said.

He noted improved sound quality of headphones and the rise of ultra-high resolution screens and content in homes. Virtual reality headsets due to hit the market in the coming year promise to give people another kind of immersive viewing experience for video.

Still, theaters will attract audiences when people want to be with other humans as they enjoy a film.

"That's going to ultimately be the reason why theater survives," Kay said.

"It's because it's a social place where you go when you want to be with other people."

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Return of the cinema: 'Star Wars' a major coup for theaters (2015, December 22)
retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-cinema-star-wars-major-coup.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.